

## 20.

# On revisiting Gundy:

a meeting of history and archaeology

Helen Brayshaw

The Oxford English Dictionary (OUP 1999) gives as the first definition of exchange, 'The action or an act, of reciprocal giving and receiving'. To this it adds a proverb, 'exchange is no robbery', from a 1665 quotation. In general comments about exchange in Australia as documented ethnographically, Isabel McBryde (1997: 590) observed that it was structured by social convention and characterised by its diversity, both in the context in which it took place, and in the range of items which were appropriate to be used. Exchange transactions could be formal and informal, and between groups or between individuals. They could involve goods of symbolic or economic utilitarian value. The diverse range of items exchanged included — as well as raw materials and artefacts — services, information, songs and dances, and marriage arrangements. Also, reciprocity could be delayed.

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This paper attempts to provide a form of reciprocity in that it gives information about a place near Gundy in the upper Hunter Valley of New South Wales, where the author grew up. A return visit to Gundy in 2001 stimulated the exploration of some implications of the content of the historical record relating to this area. This paper aims to show that the historical record has light to shed on the specifics of local, little known Aboriginal history such as place locations and the names and actions of individuals in the area, and that the convergence of the disciplines of archaeology and history, for many years exemplified and encouraged by Isabel McBryde, has the potential to facilitate the re-attachment of Aboriginal values to places.

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The European invasion of the upper Hunter Valley in the first part of the 19th century occurred very rapidly after the penal colony, which had been established in Newcastle in 1804, was closed in 1821 (when the convicts were taken to Port Macquarie). In 1822

Henry Dangar began detailed surveying on the lower Hunter, and until November 1826 he continued to survey most of the remainder of the valley. He surveyed land on the Page River near Gundy in this period (SRNSW: CGS 13859, [Map 3014]).

Settlement followed closely behind him. In October 1824 the northernmost settlement was that of Dr James Bowman at Ravensworth, and in April 1825 it was George Blaxland's at Wollun Hills near the Goulburn junction. Writing from Merton, an adjacent holding, in 1826, Peter Cunningham (1827: 154) wrote of the section of the valley between there and Muswellbrook, then known as Twickenham Meadows:

This rich and beautiful tract of country was but very lately discovered by Mr H. Dangar, our zealous surveyor on this river, and such was the eagerness to obtain locations here, that it was all granted away in a very few months after that gentleman's first visit.

Dangar (1828: 127–8) himself wrote of the speed of settlement in the Hunter Valley:

From March 1822 to November 1826, when I left the surveys of that district, the amazing extent of 372,141 acres were appropriated to settlers; 132,164 acres were allotted for church and school purposes; to which may be added 100,000 which were surveyed and not appropriated; making altogether 604,305 acres. In this division of country, occupying upwards of 150 miles along the river, which, in 1822, possessed little more than its aboriginal inhabitants, in 1826–27, more than half a million of acres were appropriated and in a forward state of improvement ... Here in 1827 were upwards of 25,000 head of horned cattle, and 80,000 fine and improved-wool sheep.

It can only be that the Aboriginal people living in this area suffered a violent dislocation from their land and their culture as these acres were 'appropriated'. Certainly there was physical violence. In February 1825 Lancelot Threlkeld wrote from his Aboriginal mission on Lake Macquarie that in some parts of the colony there was 'quite a hostile feeling against the Blacks. And those who ought to be their champions are silent on the subject' (1825 [1974]: 178). In September 1826 he wrote again voicing his concerns about the violence which was occurring in the upper Hunter and what was likely to befall the Aboriginal people: 'Many will be shot and if the English will be murdered in retaliation, their land is taken from them, their food destroyed, and they are left to perish or driven upon hostile tribes where death awaits them there'. He referred to the violence occurring in the upper Hunter at the time as 'this war' (1826 [1974]: 213–14).

Because this dislocation was so rapid and so extensive, as the invaders prevailed in the upper Hunter, so did their history. The history of the Aboriginal people, their perspectives and experiences, has gone relatively unremarked, James Miller's *Koori: a will to win* (1985) being one of few exceptions. There is yet very little sense of a 'shared history' in the upper Hunter.

As part of the rising awareness of the neglect of Aboriginal history and a failure to develop a shared history, this paper seeks to redress in a small way the balance in this exchange. For me, the impetus to do this has developed as a participant in the wider historical development and changing perspectives in cultural heritage management (Byrne et al. 2001), also as one whose family benefited from the unequal exchange. The opportunity has come with the synchronous discovery of information about the land once owned by my family, and a return visit to Gundy. Through my work as a consultant archaeologist I have encountered Aboriginal people whose heritage lies in the upper Hunter, but whose families were eventually forced by circumstance to leave the upper Hunter to live at what became the Aboriginal reserve at St Clair, near Singleton. Through my exposure to Isabel McBryde, I developed an interest in archaeology and 'ethnohistory', and it is this which has led me along this particular path.

I first came under Isabel McBryde's influence when I attended the University of New England in Armidale in 1962. The university was then mostly residential, and I was allocated to Mary White College. Isabel, who was at the time engaged in research for her doctorate and lecturing about prehistory and archaeology in the History Department (there being no department of prehistory, anthropology or archaeology), was also affiliated with Mary White College, and through the college system she became my 'moral tutor'. People in this position provided academic and personal advice and assistance to fresher students. I saw Isabel weekly throughout the year, usually for half an hour but often more. It is to be hoped that Isabel felt this enormous investment of time on her part was worthwhile. There was some return for her, since I noted in my diary at the time that by the end of my fourth visit I was pleased to have been invited to assist with her fieldwork at Grafton.

When I went to the university my family was living near Gundy, then and still a small village with a population of about 200 people, some 12 miles or about 20 km east of Scone, in the upper Hunter Valley. Our property, Miranee, was very steep and lent itself to little other than the grazing of sheep and cattle. My sister, brother, and I spent a lot of our childhood riding ponies, playing cowboys and Indians, and helping with the mustering. For a year and a half I rode a horse to school at Gundy, a distance of about eight kilometres through the neighbouring property, Elmswood. My biggest cultural

adjustment when I went to Grafton to participate in Isabel's archaeological survey was having to walk through the bush when I was used to riding.

Isabel and I shared an interest in horses. Isabel learnt dressage with Kay Irving at Waverley in Victoria. Waverley was famous not only for the Irving sisters' vital role in the Pony Club movement in Victoria, but also for their promotion of dressage schooling and combined training. In 1954 they provided the venue for the selection of Australia's first full Olympic three-day event team to compete in the Melbourne Games. Those who worked with the Irvings, including Isabel, had the exciting opportunity of being able to assist in this. Her experience there was a little different from mine at the Gundy Bushmen's Carnival.

Isabel visited Miranee once, in 1966. She gave me a lift down from the University of New England in Armidale to Scone and then out through Gundy. The trip was in Isabel's Land Rover, named Telemachus, accompanied by her dog Bunyan. It was an unhurried trip of six and a half hours, with lunch at Bendemeer and comfort stops for Bunyan.

In March 2001 I attended a 'Back to Gundy' weekend. This was arranged by members of the community, the first such event held since the early 1970s, and many former Gundy-ites made a great effort to return from considerable distances, one coming from as far away as Perth. Various events were held, including a dance. The first event was a film night in which *The Shiralee* (starring Peter Finch) was shown in the Gundy Hall. This film had been shown in the hall soon after its Australian premiere in August 1957, since it had been partly filmed in and around Gundy in the spring of 1956. Seeing it more than 40 years later it seemed to all present that surprisingly few of the Gundy scenes had been included. Phillip Adams, journalist and ABC commentator, and local resident, introduced the film. The old projector broke down several times, which many felt was overdoing veracity in recreating the past, but the interruptions did give people a chance to chat.

Our family association with Gundy extends back to the early 1900s. My sister Susan, brother Robert, and I lived at Miranee and attended Gundy Public School, as did our father Bruce Brayshaw and other members of his family. They were then living in the large house at Elmswood, built in 1891 and situated at the junction of the Page and the Isis Rivers with Lagoon Mountain providing an imposing backdrop. Their parents, William Brayshaw and Clara (née Emblen) had moved there from Hanging Rock, near Nundle, by 1907. A highlight of our trip back to Gundy was being invited to visit Elmswood, our father's old family home, by the present owners, Phillip Adams and Patrice Newell, author of *The olive grove* (2000), an account of her efforts to establish olive trees at Elmswood. We had not been in the house for more than 30 years.

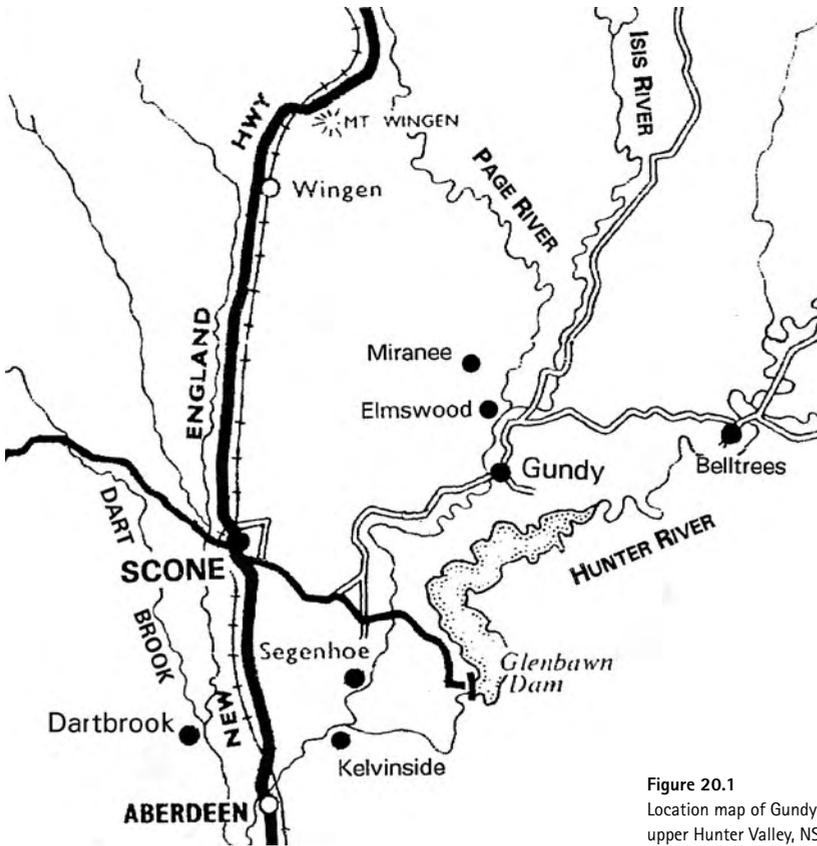


Figure 20.1  
Location map of Gundy in the  
upper Hunter Valley, NSW

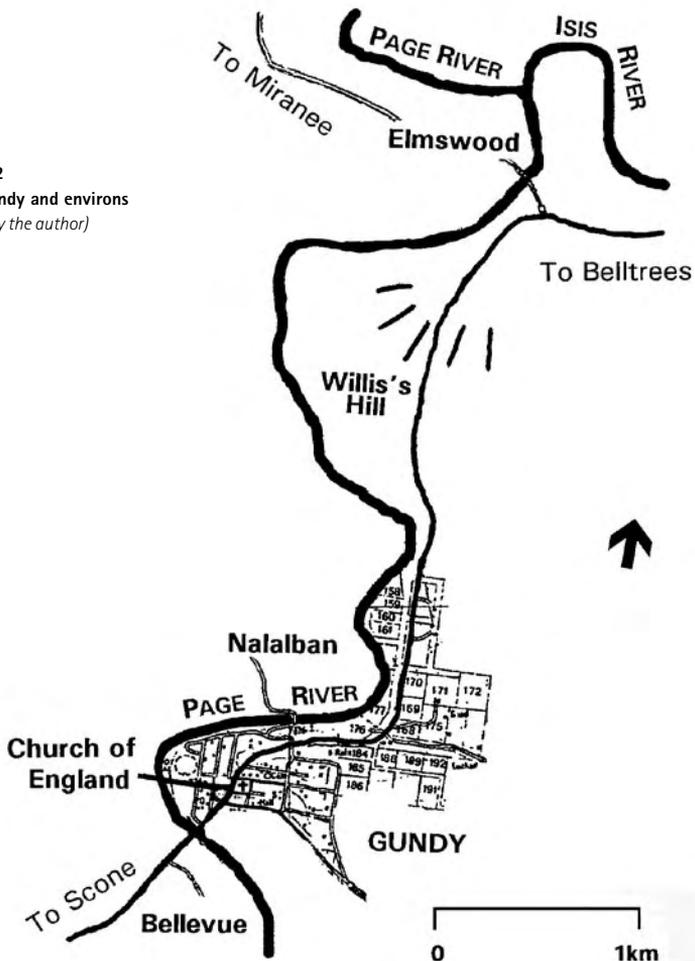
## The village of Gundy

The village of Gundy was established in 1872 on the Page River (or Pages River, known locally as 'the Page'). A village reserve was indicated on a map of Brisbane County drawn in 1857. It is suggested that a public house probably existed there by the 1860s if not earlier, and there was certainly one there by 1872. The first large house in the area, just south of the river, on Bellevue, was built soon after 1861 of pise construction on a stone foundation. In 1868 the foundation stone of St Matthew's Church of England was laid on a suitable site on the village reserve (Gray 1978: 11).

It seems that Aboriginal people were already living at Gundy, actually on the site chosen for the church. A former resident of Gundy, Wilfred Green (1890–1976), whose grandfather came to Gundy in 1873 as teacher at the government school which had been established the previous year, was told that the Aboriginal people refused to vacate the

village camp when the site was selected in 1867 for the church (Gray 1978: 68). According to Wilfred Green, the church people made use of their knowledge of Aboriginal customs and arranged to have the body of a recently deceased Aboriginal person brought into the camp from higher up the river. The Gundy tribe left at once, forming a new camp near the foot of Willis's Hill, on the Belltrees road, 2 km to the north (see fig 20.2). Stone artefacts have been found at this and other nearby locations along the Page (Brayshaw 1966: 113, 1983: 5; White 1981: 34). Francis Little, who had taken up a grant in the Dart Brook area near Scone, which he called Invermein, reported on 5 June 1828 that the 'tribe' or 'family' residing on the Pages River were the Murr\_win, at that time consisting of 16 men, eight women and five children (Little 1828).

Figure 20.2  
Map of Gundy and environs  
*(compiled by the author)*



Another place where Aboriginal people are recorded as having lived after Europeans came to Gundy was at Nectarbank, now known as Nalalban (and part of the Elmswood holding), just over the river, north of the main part of the village. It was described as ‘one of the tribal meeting places’, from where people periodically visited Dartbrook and the Page and the Isis Rivers (Mitchell 1969: 28). Mitchell suggested that those who lived there over the years included ‘King Jacky and Queen Biddy’. She mentions other Aboriginal people who were trusted servants and good stockmen, including Boodle, Jimmy Crimp, Teddy Adams, Walter Sergeant, and Tom and Walter Clarke. Several of these individuals worked in the first years of the 20th century on Glenrock station, which was first taken up in 1850 (Simpson 1972: 20). The large property is located in the rugged eastern catchment of the Barrington Tops, some 70 km north-east of Gundy. The ‘good, capable staff’ employed by the station to manage this rough terrain included Aboriginal people, ‘some mission reared and some reared in the bush around there’. Some Aboriginal women were employed for household duties and older men carried out light duties. Jimmy Crimp, who was of full Aboriginal descent, grew up on the station. He spent seven years of his later life living with the Simpson family of Glenrock ‘as a friend, not a servant’ (Simpson 1972: 2). Some early settlers discouraged Aboriginal people from coming onto their own tribal lands (Wood 1972: 113). The Ogilvies at Merton, near Denman, had been something of an exception in their strong support of the local Aboriginal people, a fact which had a significant bearing on the outcome of a potentially dangerous situation at Merton during the violence of 1826 (McBryde 1993: 40–41; Threlkeld 1826 [1974]: 213–14). Properties where they were welcome came to be havens for displaced Aboriginal people.

One of the largest estates in the area was Segenhoe, on the eastern side of the lower Page River (at 20,000 acres it was ten times the prevailing maximum size of the day). It had been granted in 1824 to Thomas Potter Macqueen, an Anglo-Scottish MP of influence (Millis 1992: 49–50) whose career included being charged with corruption and serving a jail sentence for debt (Gray 1975: 31). An Aboriginal man called Cambo had reluctantly posed to be sketched at Segenhoe when Sir Thomas Mitchell was there in December 1831 (Mitchell 1838). Later, Aboriginal people were part of a welcoming party arranged by Potter Macqueen at Segenhoe on the occasion of a visit by Sir Richard Bourke, Governor of New South Wales. The welcoming party included the then native chief of *Segenhoe*, who stood

with forty followers, painted in a most grotesque manner, carrying spears twelve and fourteen feet long and other instruments of war, and eight black boys, each holding a leash of kangaroo dogs ... The evening ended with a corroboree (Abbott 1959: 161–162, citing *Sydney Morning Herald* 24 November 1834).

The blanket returns<sup>1</sup> from Segenhoe for 1828 and 1829 list King Tom as Chief of the tribe and his wife as Queen Maria (McIntyre 1829).

In the early to mid-1800s the main Aboriginal group lived at Dartbrook and at times at Aberdeen and at Segenhoe. According to the 1828 blanket return from Invermein, the group who resided chiefly in the neighbourhood of Dart Brook were the Tullong, and at that time the group consisted of 19 men, 11 women and nine children (Little 1828). They frequently shifted camp, but rarely moved far afield,

for the reason that they were befriended by many of the landed gentry. The late Messrs. Matthew, Thomas and Ebenezer Hall of the Dartbrook area were largely their protectors in these parts and saw to their wants in many directions (Bridges 1927: 130).

Bridges referred to an old man believed to be over 100 years old in the 1860s, and known as 'Old General'. 'General' was listed in the 1829 blanket return from Segenhoe. Later a man by the name of Davey wore the familiar crescent-shaped plate suspended from his neck, and then it was worn by Larry, a cripple who was taken to Sydney by the land reformer Sir John Robertson. Robertson provided him with a wooden leg and took him to visit Government House before returning him to Dartbrook (Bridges 1927: 131). Bridges also described other individuals, such as Natty, whose employer Stephen Coxon took him on a trip to England and who, on his return, took up a small selection on the Hunter. Then there were Sandy and Mary Ann, both of full descent, who had twins known as Adam and Eve. Adam died at the head of the Hunter River, but Eve married and eventually moved to the city. Other individuals were Jimmy Booridi, Monday and Bungery. Bungery later found work in the headwaters of the Hunter River with Simpson and Campbell, who operated Glenrock Station, and became a widely admired horseman.

Yellow Bob was another old time stockman, of mixed descent, hence the 'yellow'. His memory is perpetuated in the name of a small Travelling Stock Reserve midway between Scone and Gundy in a bend of the Pages River. He lived there alone with his dogs for many years after he became too old 'for saddle and stockwhip' (Wilfred Green in Gray 1978: 37–38). The reserve is officially known as Bob's Camp (RLPB – NSW Ag 2001: map 37, reserve no 164).

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<sup>1</sup> Blankets were first distributed to Aboriginal people by Governor Macquarie at Parramatta in December 1814 as a goodwill gesture. The practice continued in NSW until 1844. Records of the blanket returns provide one of the more reliable bases for estimating Aboriginal population and its distribution in the wake of European settlement.

The last king of the Hunter Aboriginal people according to Bridges (1927: 132–3) was Billy Murphy, whose king plate, an inscribed brass breast plate, bore the words ‘Yellow Billy’, and who was also of mixed descent. His king plate is not listed amongst those traced by Troy (1993). Billy Murphy died in 1899 (Miller 1985: 245). His wife Anne (SRNSW 10/18739, see fig 20.7), also known as Annie and Nannie, was of full descent, ‘always very neat and clean and highly respected’ (Gray 1978: 8). There is a photograph of King Billy, ‘a former well-known identity of the Upper Hunter’, wearing a gorget or king plate, in the *Scone and Upper Hunter Historical Society Journal* (1959, see also Brayshaw 1966), from a photo supplied by the *Singleton Argus* (fig 20.3). This is Billy Murphy (Gray 1978: 8–9).

Bridges says that there were all-told about 50 Aboriginal people who eventually shifted to government land on the Page River near Gundy, and did a little farm work.

The last Hunter River camp was near Singleton, ‘whither all the Dartbrook and Page aborigines migrated’ (Bridges 1927: 133). They lived at St Clair on the property of a Dr James White who was a Presbyterian minister (Mitchell 1992: 3). Aboriginal people had been camping at St Clair since at least the 1850s and the area was notified as an Aboriginal reserve in 1890. Before that they had cleared and fenced 20 acres and harvested several crops of maize, tobacco and potatoes (Goodall 1996: 83). They donated part of their produce to the Red Cross and other organisations during the 1914–18 war (Mitchell 1992: 4). The mission was closed and the land leased to non-Aboriginal farmers in 1923 (Miller 1985: 143).



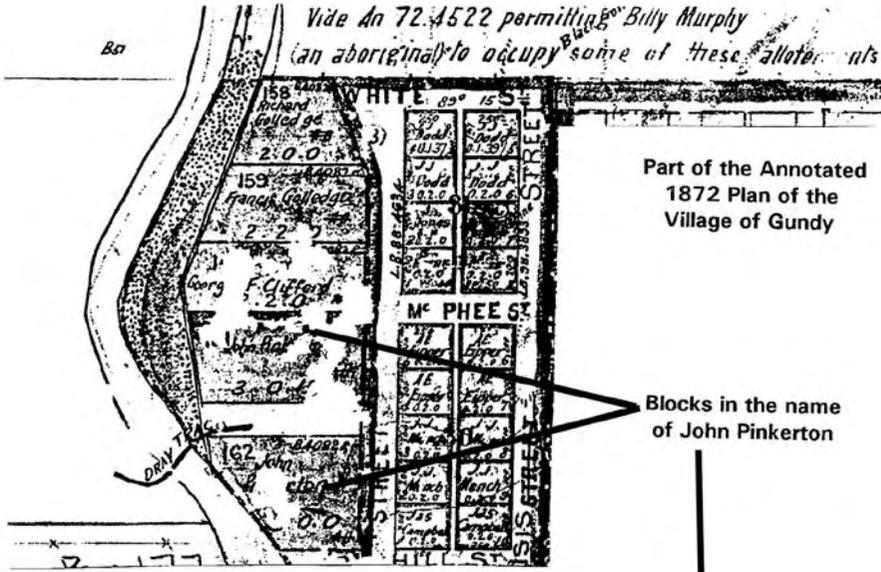
**Figure 20.3**  
Billy Murphy, who grew up at Segenhoe and lived part of his life at Gundy (*Scone and Upper Hunter Historical Society Journal* 1, 1959)

The place on the Page near Gundy where the Aboriginal people had camped came to be known as 'Yellow Billy's Farm', and was later held by Mr John Pinkerton (Bridges 1927: 132). A Lands Department annotation (An 72.4522) on the 1872 plan of the newly surveyed village of Gundy is to the effect that permission to occupy some of the allotments to the north of the village was granted to 'Billy Murphy, an aborigine'. Just below this annotation are two blocks in the name of John Pinkerton (fig 20.4).

Pursuit of the documentation in the NSW Department of Lands Alienation Branch Letter Register at State Records NSW relating to Alienation no 72.4522, revealed that this permission was granted to Billy Murphy from Segenhoe, in response to his request to the Lands Department for a grant of 200 acres. This was thought to be 'too much land', but it was decided that as he had a hut on the village reserve he might be allowed to occupy some of the allotments. If he showed profitable use of the land, the question of a larger grant would be taken into consideration. In February 1873 Billy Murphy and his wife Annie thanked 'Her Majesty's Government for granting us land' and requested tools, seed, bullocks and horses 'to start us'. As there was no relevant fund, these items were not supplied. These two requests were written in the seemingly frail hand of John McLeod, who wrote at the bottom of each page of correspondence in the file 'God Bless Queen Victoria' (SRNSW 10/18739).

No map has yet been found to show the land Billy Murphy claimed, or where his hut was located. A notation by the Land Board (which dealt with Crown Lands and is now part of the Department of Lands NSW) elsewhere on the 1872 plan of the village of Gundy (LB99/6691) refers to an Aboriginal Reserve, citing sections 6, 32, 33 and 34 of the village, on the east side of the Page (fig 20.4). The blocks in the name of John Pinkerton are in section 33, while section 6 is currently a recreation reserve. No other Land Board documentation or register of reserves has been found which relates to an Aboriginal reserve at Gundy. On 23 July 1872 District Surveyor Thomas Evans had written that there was 'no land in the neighbourhood suitable as a reserve for aborigines' (SRNSW Item 10/18739).

John McLeod also wrote an application for land adjoining Billy Murphy's on behalf of Billy Musclebrook and his wife Maria Freeman, their son and daughter, brother, uncles and 'other Blacks', also of the Segenhoe tribe, in December 1872. This met with no response and in April of the next year McLeod wrote again, asking for an answer 'on receipt'. Soon after this he died, and the official recommendation was that no further action be taken (SRNSW Item 10/18739).



Part of the Annotated 1872 Plan of the Village of Gundy

Blocks in the name of John Pinkerton



Town Plan of the Village of Gundy 1872

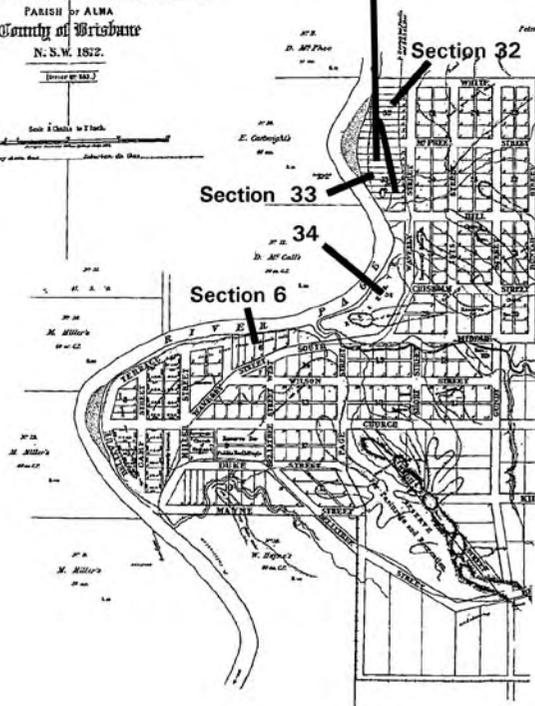


Figure 20.4 1872 Plans of the village of Gundy

Above: Extract from Plan of the Village of Gundy (MD01-10861801, NSW Department of Lands).

Right: Town Map Gundy 1872 (Copy of Lands Department Map held by Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW), showing land referred to as an Aboriginal Reserve, some of which Billy Murphy was given permission to occupy.

## Back to Ghunda Ghundah

The very name Gundy is locally understood to have been taken from an Aboriginal word meaning camp, and the village, initially in the Parish of Alma, is now in the Parish of Gundy Gundy. This is based on information from Wilfred Green, who also said that repetition of the word indicated a big camp (Gray 1978: 8). Wilfred Green was a well educated and well read man who, by the time he was six ‘was reading Dickens and Burns, but was also absorbing the tales of the aboriginal people of the area told by Black Sal, his mother’s laundress’ (Gray 1978: 24).

The name Gundy Gundy is associated in historical documentation with the area where the Elmswood homestead is now situated, near the junction of the Page and the Isis Rivers, several kilometres upstream of the village. The NSW Government Land and Property Information web site ([www.lpi.nsw.gov.au](http://www.lpi.nsw.gov.au)) includes many old parish maps. The earliest maps there of the Parish of Gundy Gundy, 1906 and 1915, have the name ‘Elmswood’, and also ‘Gundy Gundy’, similarly enshrined in quotation marks. The name on the 600 acre block was John Stewart (fig 20.5).

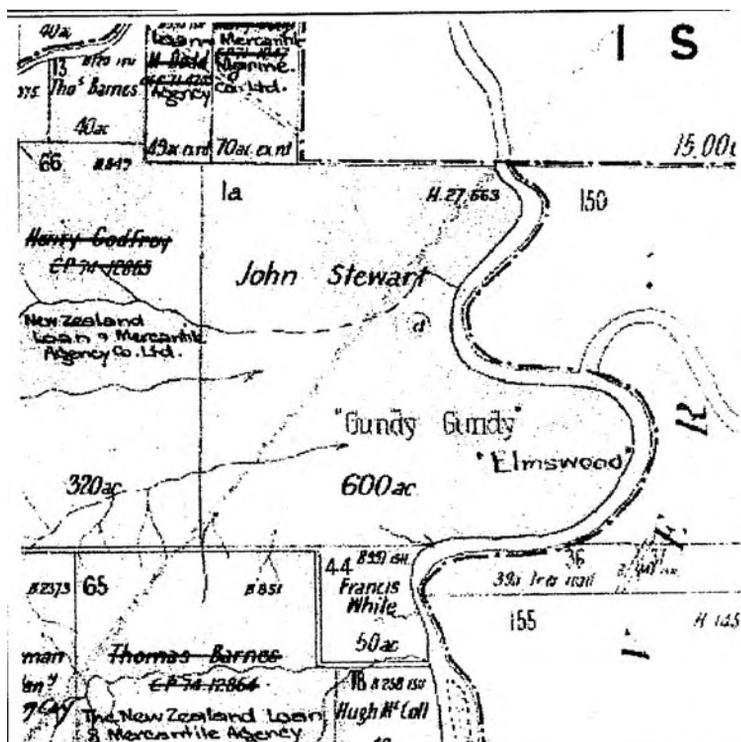
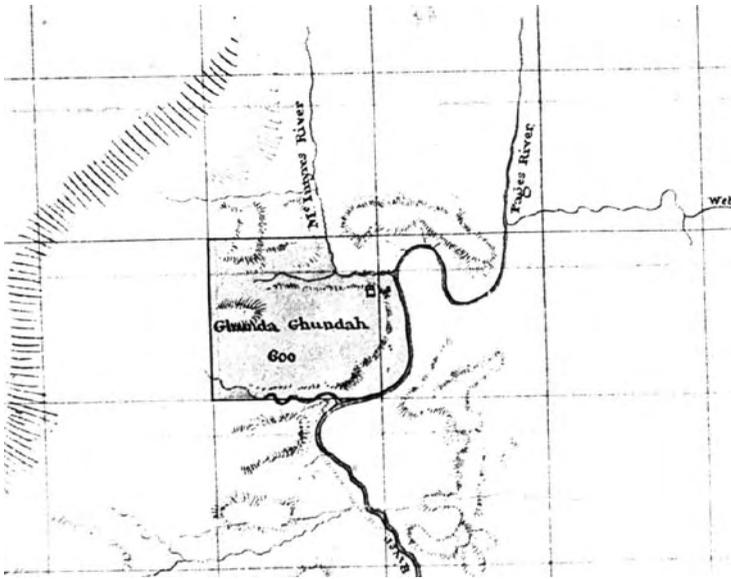


Figure 20.5

Extract from Parish Map, Gundy Gundy 1906, showing ‘Gundy Gundy’ at the junction of the Page and the Isis Rivers (MD02-10936501, Copy of Lands Department Map held by Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)



**Figure 20.6**  
 Extract from J Stewart's map  
 of 1828 showing the location  
 of 'Ghunda Ghundah' at the  
 junction of the Page and the  
 Isis Rivers  
 (SRNSW: CGS 13859,  
 [map 3015])

Before going to the 'Back to Gundy' weekend, I looked out a photocopy of a map I had come across while working on an unrelated project in the head office of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This map is entitled 'Sketch of parts of Hunters and Pages Rivers Commencing at the South side of the Property of TP McQueen taken by J Stewart 1828' (SRNSW: CGS, 13859, 3015). This map clearly shows the bend in the Page River where Elmswood is situated, although the Page River is shown as 'Mr McIntyre's River', and what he calls the Pages River is actually the Isis River (fig 20.6). The land, indicated to be 600 acres, is called 'Ghunda Ghundah'.

John Stewart, after whom Stewarts Brook is named, worked at Thomas McQueen's Segenhoe property in this period. This block of land was granted to him, while another at the junction of the Hunter River and Stewarts Brook, just upstream from Belltrees, which he intended to purchase (Gray 1978: 8), was referred to on his map as 'Goodan Goodan'. Nothing is known about this name, and little more has been discovered as to why the land at the junction of the Page and the Isis Rivers was called Ghunda Ghundah on Stewart's map. I know that Henry Dangar surveyed along the Page River to the junction with the Isis between 1824 and 1826, and his map refers to the place as 'Stewart's' (SRNSW: CGS, 13859, 3014), but I could find nothing more about the place from his notes or on the original portion plan. On 4 February 1832 Government surveyor R Dixon surveyed 600 acres of 'Stewart's Grant' at 'Gundy Gundy' (SRNSW Reel 3036: 128). His monthly

report to the Surveyor General was on a form which, at the bottom, stated 'Native Names of Places to be in all cases inserted where they can be ascertained'. This was probably a directive of Sir Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor General from 1828 until his death in 1855, but according to Arthur Wakeman, Historical Officer, Department of Land and Water Conservation, no records were kept of any place names submitted by surveyors, or their meanings (pers. comm. 4 February 2002). Nevertheless the directive may suggest that the name applied to that place, or some characteristic of it.

Attempts to confirm Wilfred Green's interpretation of 'Gundy Gundy' have met with limited success, as relatively little work has been done on the reconstruction of Aboriginal languages in the Hunter (Jakelin Troy pers. comm.. 10 April 2002). According to Jim Wafer of the School of Social Studies at the University of Newcastle (pers. correspondence 11 April 2002), on the basis of research in progress with Wonnaruah informants, that language had at least a couple of dialects, one being Geawegal which the Tindale map (1974) and AIATSIS map (Horton 1994) locate around Scone with another dialect being Gringai, centred on the Allynbrook River. Existing information on Geawegal is confined to two words. The four pages of published Wonnaruah language in existence include *wataka* for camp, possibly a verb rather than a noun (see Curr 1887: 357). Wafer suggests that Gundy may have been a synonym, or a dialect variation, or just a local place name that cannot be etymologised. Wilfred Green had said the Aboriginal people he knew at Gundy as a child pronounced it *Chundah* not *Gundah* (Gray 1978: 8). With regard to this pronunciation, Wafer indicated that words beginning with /tj/ are relatively rare, though the consonant /ng/, mostly misheard by local language recorders, was recognised by Threlkeld in his recording of Awabakal, to which Wonnaruah is related. Wafer was unaware of any Aboriginal organization that was currently claiming Geawegal as their language. This suggested to him either that the Wonnaruah assertion that Geawegal was a dialect was correct, or that there are no Geawegal descendants left to contest it.

Wafer made no reference to the implication of the repeated word, but Jakelin Troy (pers. comm. 11 April 2002) said that it was not uncommon in some areas for repeated words to mean increasing the number, although repeated words were sometimes based on bird calls. Brother Joseph Giacom, of St Andrews School in Walgett, currently researching the Kamilaroi language, said that the repetition of a word was not common in Kamilaroi. However he noted that there was a Kamilaroi word *gundbi* which today means house, although its meaning in the early 1800s is not known. The Rev Charles Greenway listed the word *gundi* = house as part of the Kamilaroi language (1878).

This would fit in with other Kamilaroi cultural affinities noted in early records relating to the upper Hunter Valley (Rusden 1880: 279, 86–88; Howitt 1904: 216; Brayshaw 1986:

80.

108. 12  
25. 1

Wm. Stephen, Secretary, and Chief Commissioner,  
of Crown Lands Department of Lands,  
Lands Office, Bridge Street, &c. &c. &c.  
Sydney.

4522

Wm. Stephen

The humble Petition of Billy Murphy, Chief of Aborigines,  
and King of the tribes of the Upper Hunter,  
claiming 200 acres of land, two hundred acres,  
Praying to Grant the land,  
That Peter Worn 40 years ago at Segonhoa, Mr. Macjones Estate  
and Brought up among Europeans, all my days, and earning  
my Bread by the Sweat of my brow, and my wife, Anne, Zwoon,  
earning her Bread, by needle work & washing,  
That I have set down, and taken possession of the land of  
my ancestors, my Birth right, on east side Pajo's River,  
Joining Belvue, & Willag Reserve, to support my family,  
and others of my tribe, the Noble Lamle Roy, tribe, upper Hunter  
a Church of England, & Provisional School, Built beside me,  
our children will get learning, & hear the word every Sunday  
of preached, to bring them as Christians, & good members of Society,  
I claim the land, named, on the bank of the River where my house  
That you be pleased to apply to the Governor, and  
write me in answer, on receipt.  
And Petitioner shall ever Pray,

Belvue, Leone,  
13<sup>th</sup> April 1842.

Sig<sup>d</sup>, Billy <sup>his</sup> Murphy  
<sup>husband</sup>  
Chief of Aborigines.

x Care of Duncan MacJannet,  
Belvue, Leone.

Witness J. MacLeod.

God Bless Queen Victoria

73-528

Figure 20.7  
Petition by Billy Murphy for a land grant at Gundy  
(SRNSW: CGS 8103, Correspondence Files,  
No 99/26316 [10/18739])

38–40). McLellan (1970: 5) noted that the Aboriginal people living on the upper Page River, where the township of Murrurundi is located, ‘had affinities with the Kamilaroi tribe’. Little (1828), writing from the Dart Brook area, noted that besides the Tullong of Dart Brook and the Murrwin of the Pages River, there was ‘a very strong tribe which we sometimes see belonging to the Liverpool Plains ... about 50 men with a number of women and children’. Travelling through the Dart Brook area in July 1854, Edward Ogilvie of Merton met an Aboriginal man by the name of Coolan, who told him how the once numerous tribes of the ‘Cámilarrai’ had ‘camped in the valleys of this wide district’ (Ogilvie 1856: 46–7).

Most telling is the text of Billy Murphy’s petition for a grant of land at Gundy (fig 20.7), which includes the following:

That I have sat down, and taken possession of the land of my ancestors, my birthright, on east side Pages River joining Belvue, and village reserve, to support my family, and others of my tribe, the noble Comleroy tribe, upper Hunter.

This signed statement adds to a growing body of evidence that Aboriginal people of the upper Hunter Valley were Kamilaroi, or at least affiliated to the Kamilaroi.

## Confluences

*Gret confluence of peple cam ther to*  
(OED 1999: Bokenham Seyntys, 1447).

While at the University of New England I completed an Arts degree majoring in history, and then did a Diploma of Education, by which time Isabel had completed her PhD (see McBryde 1974) and was offering an honours course component in archaeology. Encouraged by Isabel, I started on one of the many regional studies which she initiated over the years, and wrote a thesis about the material culture of Aboriginal people who were living in the Hunter Valley at the time of first white settlement (Brayshaw 1966). During the course of researching historical documents for this thesis, I came across a reference to a bora ground near the junction of the Page and the Isis Rivers (McDonald 1878). A similar site also existed on Kelvinside, near the junction of the Page with the Hunter River.

On ‘Kelvinside’, where large cattle-yards are now in position, a circle resembling a circus-ring, and about 100 yards in circumference, was to be seen. Many box trees in the vicinity bore beautiful carvings, and it was undoubtedly a work of art. It was in all probability a ‘bora’ ground, but it was out of use half a century ago when the writer last saw it (Bridges 1927: 133).

I was particularly interested in the site near the Page and the Isis because of my family association with the area. According to the description of it in the 1870s:

The spot where the blacks held their boras ... was in a pleasant glen at the foot of one of the highest hills in the neighbourhood. On the ground is the rude figure of a man, formed by laying down sticks of wood and covering them with earth, so as to raise it from 4 to 7 inches above the level of the ground. It is 22 feet long, 12 feet wide from hand to hand (McDonald 1878:255).

There was a circle built up at the edges, about 150 yards in circumference with a fire in the centre. Surrounding the place 'for some considerable distance are about 120 trees marked with tomahawks ... on some the marks reach about 15 feet above the ground'. The article contained a sketch of the designs on several of the trees, reproduced below.



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**Figure 20.8**  
Sketch of carved trees  
near the junction of the  
Page and the Isis Rivers  
(from McDonald 1878: 256)

Before going up to the Gundy weekend I looked at something my late uncle Colin Brayshaw had written about Elmswood when he knew it, that is until towards the end of the 1930s, when the property was sold after Bill Brayshaw's death. Colin referred to the carved trees which I had described in my thesis:

Two very old trees with aboriginal carvings were on the river bank immediately in front of the homestead not far above the present crossing. The bark had been stripped off and the markings were plain to see. We used to climb these trees as kids. Both trees had disappeared one morning after a very high flood in the early 1920s.  
(Brayshaw 1991)

Elmswood homestead is situated on a knoll above the river flat, which is 250–300 metres wide. Colin's description would place the trees on the flat south-east of the house and north of the access road, now called Miranee Road.

Carved trees marked burial sites as well as initiation grounds. In his analysis of carved trees in south-eastern Australia, Bell (1982: 6–7) found that at burials there were usually two but up to seven trees, while at initiation sites the number varied considerably, but was generally much higher. The number of 120 at the junction of the Page and the Isis Rivers was the highest recorded at an initiation site (Etheridge 1918: 65). Etheridge (1918: 86) comments that this site would have been in the territory of either the Geawegal or the Gringai, citing Howitt (1904: 570) to the effect that amongst the Geawegal earth figures, an earth circle and trees with 'sinuous parallel lines' were to be found, while at Gringai sites trees near both circles were carved. According to Mathews (1896: 322) it was a Kamilaroi custom to construct figures of men and animals by heaping up loose earth. The land Billy Murphy claimed at Gundy as his birthright was less than three kilometres from this site at the junction of the Page and the Isis Rivers. As Billy was Kamilaroi, perhaps it is to the Kamilaroi rather than the Geawegal or the Gringai that we should look for cultural parallels.

In her analysis of ceremonial ('bora') sites as potential world heritage sites in forested areas, Bowdler found that bora grounds occurred only in south-eastern Queensland and NSW, and that of an estimated 426 sites less than a quarter were still perceptible.

The earthen rings known as 'Bora' are usually part of a complex of two or three rings linked by a path or paths. They were used in ... male initiation ceremonies. In the literature we find that that the large ring in the complex was usually part of a relatively public ceremony, with women looking on; the smaller ring was the site of the major initiation rites, for initiated men and initiates only. The purpose of the third ring is not well documented in the literature. It has been suggested that these are women's rings, but it is not clear to me that this was always the case. Bora sites were often (always?) associated with carved trees (Bowdler 1999).

Within a wide range of variation the average size of a large ring was about 25–30 m across and a small ring about 10–12 m. Some bora rings occurred on sloping hills or spurs of ridges, others were found in low-lying areas often close to swamps. An Aboriginal informant indicated to Bowdler that the Lennox Head bora ring was near a swamp, as that provided food during ceremonies. She also noted variation in the relationship of such sites with defined social units, having been told that the Tucki Tucki ring was one

where people came from far and wide, while other rings in the Lismore area were for more localised social groups. The daily performances at the camps associated with initiation ceremonies, the rituals and dancing, where they took place, and the participation of women in these procedures, are described in detail by Mathews (1896, 1897) in relation to the lower Hunter and coastal areas to the north and south.

Carved trees at initiation sites were used in the education of novices, and the motifs may have referred to totemic events. The arrangement of the trees varied, but they were usually located along the path joining the initiation rings and/or around one of the rings. Bell found that they were most frequently located in secluded scrubs or forests adjacent to watercourses, but sometimes occurred on the tops of hills or spurs (Bell 1982: 6–7).

Bell's analysis did not indicate river junctions to be common locations for initiation grounds, but they appear to have been key locations for such sites in this area of the upper Hunter Valley, perhaps the equivalent of swamps in providing food for groups, perhaps the location is socially significant, a place where people as well as rivers join together. The sites at the junction of the Page and the Hunter and the Page and the Isis are about 20 kilometres apart as the crow flies. The former is only 5 kilometres from the area known as Dartbrook, which Aboriginal people from Gundy were visiting, as well as the Page and the Isis, after white people had settled in the Gundy area (Mitchell 1969: 28).

It is not known whether these sites originally conformed to the pattern of having more than one ring, or indeed of their relative status in terms of the existing social units. The dimensions of the ring at the junction of the Page and the Isis suggest it to have been a large ring. The number of trees – about 120, more than at any other recorded site – may suggest this to have been a place that people visited from far and wide, hence the name 'Ghunda Ghunda', the big camp.

With its rituals, the dancing, and social intercourse amongst people who have come together from far and wide, the 'Back to Gundy' weekend bears many modern day resemblances to the ceremonies which would have been held at Ghunda Ghundah.

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This revisiting of the history of Gundy and its environs has been richly rewarding. The historical record has been shown to contain information about some of the places which were important to Aboriginal people at Gundy, and in the process it has also revealed something about the people themselves. It is clear that in some instances it may be possible to find physical manifestations of past use of these places in the archaeological record.

It is to be hoped that to those who have not had the opportunity to know the area at all, but to whom it is nevertheless an important part of their heritage, this information will prove to be of value. As stated by Isabel McBryde, 'reciprocity could be delayed, or take the form not of tangible goods but of obligation, services or knowledge' (McBryde 1997: 590). This attempt to achieve some degree of reciprocity is late and inadequate. Nevertheless the approach has the potential to be repeated elsewhere, and is a testament to the pervasive influence of Isabel and her work.

Eliciting this kind of information from the historical record can only be done slowly, with patience and a willingness to be diverted. Progress is like water in a shallow stream finding its way amongst the rocks and pebbles, sometimes eddying into a backwater, sometimes seemingly still, and then rushing to join with other flows, any one of which could become the main stream. These meanders are all essential to the process, and the major reward is in the confluences.



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