



In its premiere season as part of Sydney Festival 2006, audience members were driven by bus from Parramatta to the performance venue in Blacktown. Urban Theatre Projects is privileged to have shared the advice and knowledge of local elders and community members who, in consultation with community advisor Lily Shearer, developed the bus route and compiled the following information, which they feel is important for visitors to Darug land. Local elders and community members participated as tour guides, sharing this information and personal stories during the bus trip. It provides a valuable insight into an area that has a dynamic, rich and powerful history.

### **Travelling Back – Welcome to Darug Land**

*Mittigar gurrume burruk* (Happy to see you friend)

Darug land stretches from Botany Bay to the Blue Mountains in the west, and from Appin in the south to Wiseman's Ferry in the north. There are 32 Clans in the Darug Nation. Archaeological evidence suggests that Aborigines have inhabited the continent of Australia for over 50,000 years, while occupation of the area in and around Blacktown is believed to have been as long as 40,000 years.

In this area, the Aborigines camped along the major waterways, made spears from local trees and a stone called red silcrete, and ate plant foods, including berries, yams and fern root, the flowers of different banksias, and honey. The women and children gathered yams, roots, fruits and small game, while the men hunted possums, birds, rats, bandicoots and wallabies. The creeks provided a lot of food: fish such as mullet and eels, yabbies, tortoise and freshwater mussels. Emus, ducks, swans, and other water birds and their eggs were hunted and collected. Snakes and lizards also formed part of the Aborigines diet.

Since the waterways gave the Aborigines so much of their food, most of their campsites were within a few hundred metres of a creek or river. Once Europeans arrived, there was competition for land and Europeans wanted their farms to be close to water for the crops they grew. This not only brought them into conflict with Aborigines, but also drove away animals from traditional hunting areas. There was some armed conflict between the Aborigines and Europeans, but guns were much more powerful than spears, and the Europeans prevailed.

The Europeans also brought diseases with them that had not been in the country before, so Aborigines had no immunity to illnesses like measles, mumps and smallpox. Within three years of European settlement, it is believed that between 50% and 90% of the Aboriginal population in the vicinity of Sydney had died of smallpox.

Parramatta was named after the local Clan group of the area, Burra-matta-gal (*burra*=eel; *matta*=creek; *gal*=people) – the Eel Creek People. Parramatta Council interpret it as 'Place where Eels Laid Down' but the Darug people believe that this is more associated with the breeding of eels in the Parramatta River, which was one of the main sources of food that sustained the Burra-matta-gal. They would use a conical woven basket, place bait inside, drop it over the edge of the bank into the Parramatta River and in a matter of seconds pull up the basket with a good number of eels for tucker. It's also been told that over 70 years ago it rained eels in Parramatta,

and it is believed that this was due to the drought of the time and eels were reciprocated like rain. So, now you know why the League team is called the Parramatta Eels!

Parramatta Park was significant to a large number of Darug Clans as a meeting place for Corroborees, celebrating the richness of food sources in and around the surrounding areas of the Burra-matta-gal Clan. The last archaeological dig in Parramatta Park unveiled in the top left hand corner at George Street & beside Parramatta River, artefacts that dated back over 30,000 years. Various middens were also unearthed along the Parramatta River. Middens were formed by the discarding of bones and food particles that were not and/or could not be eaten, and they are found throughout Australia.

Burra-matta-gal was significant to Darug Clans and their neighbours, including the Wiradjuri, Kuringai and Thurawal, as this was where the first Native Institute was established in 1814 by Governor Macquarie. This was the beginning of the 'Stolen Generation'. One of the first Darug girls to be taken to Parramatta Native Institute was Maria Lock, daughter of Yellamundi, Chief of the Boorooberongal Clan. Maria was the first educated Aborigine in Australia, topping her English counterparts in literacy and numeracy. Maria married illiterate convict carpenter Robert Lock in Parramatta's St Johns Cathedral on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1824. It was the first recognised inter-cultural marriage since invasion.

Parramatta Gaol, built by convicts and Aborigine people, is believed to be the first gaol built in Australia. It opened officially in 1813 but parts were used prior to this for convicts, thieves, thugs and highwaymen, including Aborigine people and Pemulwuy.

Pemulwuy, The Rainbow Warrior of the Bidjigal Clan, was significant to all Australian Aborigines, as he was our first resistance fighter. He would organise and lead raids by burning out crops in the area around Parramatta, Toongabbie and Castle Hill. Pemulwuy defeated the first three Rum Corps Armies, under the command of Captain Watkin Tench. Pemulwuy was shot during one of these raids at Parramatta, gaoled and placed in leg irons, but still escaped the invaders. This happened several times during his twelve years of leadership from 1788 to 1802, when he was betrayed by Bennelong, captured and beheaded for fear he may escape again. His head remains preserved in a jar in Edinburgh.

Kiraban, an Awabakal man from the Newcastle area, also fought the English alongside Pemulwuy. In his book *Pemulwuy The Raibow Warrior*, Eric Wilmot writes: "Kiraban had observed that the aliens seemed to have a society that was divided into two kinds of people: one group wore clothes of stunning colours, the other wore drab coverings and were often tied together with metal links. This group was made to work for the colourful people and, if they refused, they were scolded or beaten. This was certainly strange behaviour, but most of the Eora put it down to some primitive part of the culture of their strange visitors. The concept of prison or incarceration was incredible to Eora people. Older Eora said that the constant practise of such physical violence must be some sort of cure or initiation rite."

The inland Darug were known as the woods land people and the possum was one of their main food sources, from which clothing was made from the pelts. Also the skin was stretched over the legs of the women when sitting down and played like drums for ceremony. The music was clap sticks, possum skin and slapping of thighs.

Carrying fire sticks, the most agile of the warrior/hunter woods land Darug men would form a circle 1 to 2 kilometres in radius, set fire to the grass, yelling and making as much noise as they could, as they moved to enclose the circle and trap animals such as kangaroos, wallabies, emus and other land animals. They would spear as many as they needed. Uncle Ally recalls seeing men on the Nullarbor using the same method to trap rabbits. They would then belt the animals with a

*nulla-nulla* or *boondi*, and place it straight onto the fire. This method also cared to the land as, during the following spring, the new growth attracted land animals to return for feeding, and could clearly be seen by hunters.

Many of the first roads followed the Darug people's walking tracks and today they have varied in their course because of development. The Great Western Highway was one of these walking tracks and was used by various Darug Clans to attend ceremonies in the Blue Mountains, at a place known as Muru Murrack.

Darug Clans lived on either side of the Great Western Highway. Heading west, on the right Toongabbie was named after the Toogagal Clan of the Darug and means 'meeting place'. To the left lived two Clans: what we know today as Prospect was the Cannemegal Clan, while Greystanes was the Weymali Clan. Over towards Eastern Creek Raceway and as far up as Wallgrove Rd, which we know today as Eastern Creek, was the Warrawarry Clan of the Darug.

On the other side of Greystanes Road is Prospect Hill, known locally as Pemulwuy's Lookout. It is the highest point in Blacktown Local Government Area, where you can see the City of Sydney to the east and Richmond Hill to the west. It is said that Pemulwuy at Prospect Hill and Yellamundi at Richmond Hill could see one another on a clear day and communicated with each other using smoke signals. The new suburb currently being developed on this site will be called Pemulwuy. While the intention may be to pay tribute to Pemulwuy, the Darug and Aborigine people, the majority feel it is an insult to not only us but to Pemulwuy himself, as he fought to resist the destruction and desecration of his people's land.

As Parramatta grew, some people complained about the Aborigines living near them, so the Native Institute was moved further west, to the corner of Richmond Road and Rooty Hill Road North. Due to the large number of Darug Clans in and around the surrounding area, the area around the school and the land granted to Aborigines became known as the Black's Town, and it is from this that the City of Blacktown got its name.

Children at the Native Institute were only allowed visitors from family once a year. It truly reinforced the start of the 'Stolen Generation', which still continues today in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Although the Government says it stopped in 1974 and most Missions in New South Wales closed in the early 1930s, Aunty Edna and Uncle Allan say, "They (*FACS now DoCS*) were still bringing us children long after this time".

Maori children were also taken and placed at the Blacks Town Native Institute and worked alongside the Aborigine children. The Maori children were seen to be the hard workers digging up the land. It wasn't understood by the missionaries that it was against the spirituality of the Aborigine children to dig and/or turn soil of the land that provided all they needed: food, shelter and clothing to sustain them in a healthy environment. The missionaries thought all the children were the same – after all, they were all coloured people. Blacks Town Native Institute closed in 1833.

Blacktown remains home to the largest population of Aborigine people, not just in New South Wales, but Australia. It is home to seventy-four different Aborigine language groups.

In the late 1800s Blacktown Central Business District was originally given to the Darug Clans of the area to teach them how to cultivate and harvest land, but the Darug people did not want to learn this technique of farming as it meant that they had to dig up large portions of land and scar it, a practice at odds with our beliefs and spirituality. To harm the land is to harm one's spirit. With over 5,000 species or heads of native plants, food was always plentiful anyway. The soil

there was also poor quality and those who were forced to learn couldn't grow anything and were set up to fail.

**Written by** Lily Shearer in consultation with Darug Elder Aunty Edna Watson, her husband, Uncle Allan Watson, Community Elders and consultants Uncles Wes Marne & Greg Simms, Cultural Worker Teddy Hart and community consultant Pesa Tualai.

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## **Blacktown**

Blacktown City Council is celebrating 100 years since the establishment of Local Government in Blacktown this year. Blacktown became a Shire in 1906 with 1,507 voters spread across 104 square miles. The area was rural and most people travelled on horse and buggy. Blacktown had a reputation as being the wild, wild west, and was often referred to as 'Dodge City'. It is now bounded by the Local Government Areas (LGA's ) of Penrith, Parramatta, Holroyd, Hawkesbury and Baulkham Hills, occupying an area of 246.9 sq kilometres.

Situated approximately 35km from Sydney on the Cumberland Plain in the heart of Western Sydney, the City of Blacktown's growth in recent decades has been sustained and rapid, contributing to its present status as the most populous City in New South Wales, the third largest in Australia behind Brisbane City & the Gold Coast, and the eighth fastest growing City in Australia. In addition to being large, Blacktown's population is culturally and linguistically diverse with over 50 countries and 63 languages represented within the community. Over half the population is under 30 years of age.

## **Western Sydney**

Western Sydney is home to nearly 2 million people, almost half of Sydney's population. Some areas such as Liverpool, Campbelltown and Camden are the fastest growing areas in Australia. It is also the most culturally diverse area in Australia. Over half a million people (32.1%) have migrated from over 100 countries and there are nearly 23,300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in the region. Australia's largest Aboriginal urban communities live in Western Sydney, mainly in Blacktown, Campbelltown and Penrith. The population of Western Sydney is among the youngest of any region, where nearly 38% of the population (653,630) is under 25 years of age.

Often seen as a vast suburban wasteland, it is also the site of growing economic and cultural hubs, with the Sydney CBD no longer able to provide services to the whole of the city. Western Sydney has also been a significant site for manufacturing industries, and is increasingly recognised for its fast growing high technology and related business parks, its growing business sector services and its strong export-oriented industries.

The region is now characterised by suburban development. No longer clustered around the main train lines, the increased mobility provided by increased car ownership has encouraged development across the region. Important urban centres have developed at Bankstown, Blacktown, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Liverpool, and Penrith, in addition to Parramatta, which is now classified as Sydney's second CBD. Each of these cities provides retail, recreational and

commercial services that were previously concentrated in the Sydney CBD. They are increasingly providing the cultural services that used to be located only in the Sydney CBD.

Western Sydney generates \$58 billion of goods and services each year, making it the third largest regional economy in Australia outside of Sydney and Melbourne.