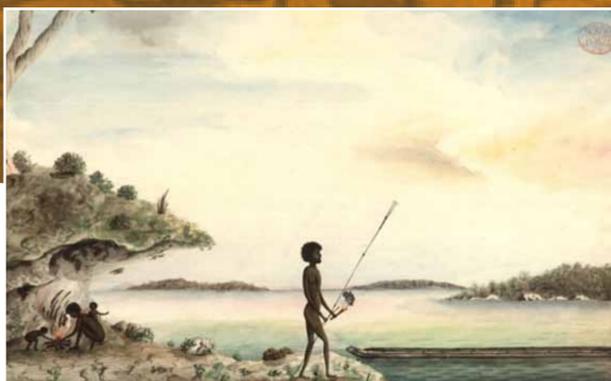


Traditional owners

The traditional owners of the land around the Wollie Creek Valley were the Bidjigal people (River Flat Clan) of the Eora Nation. Evidence suggests that the Bidjigal country spread west from Botany Bay to Salt Pan Creek. The Bidjigal were part of a rich saltwater culture united by a common language and strong ties of kinship. The natural bushland provided food and materials to make shelters, canoes, rugs, baskets, weapons and tools. Altogether, the environment would have been a pleasant one. All that changed with the arrival of the First Fleet.



Today knowledge of the traditional Aboriginal owners is very sketchy as there are few material remains. Piecing together evidence from early paintings, diaries, reports, oral histories and letters provides insights into the place and people following the arrival of the 'Beerewagal' (People of the clouds) in their tall ships. Some are from official records, others are of a more personal nature such as Thomas Watling's observation *'The natives are extremely fond of painting and often sit hours by me while I work'* in *Letters from Exile* in Botany Bay, to his aunt in Dumfries, 1794.

In 1788, Governor Phillip estimated *'The natives are far more numerous than they were supposed to be. I think they cannot be less than fifteen hundred in Botany Bay, Port Jackson, and Broken Bay, including the intermediate coast'*.

Their numbers rapidly declined due to introduced diseases, hunger and loss of their land to the new arrivals.

Rock shelters

A significant reminder of Aboriginal occupation is a cave in the Undercliffe area with white foot and hand paintings. It is now listed on the NSW State Heritage Register. To preserve this important site, its exact location is kept from public knowledge.

In 1986, Tranby College students identified twenty-four rock shelters and two middens along the Wollie Creek Valley.

There are reminders of our Aboriginal past in the names of places throughout the valley...
Wolli – 'camping place'
Girrahween (Park) – 'place of flowers'
Minnamorra (Avenue) – 'plenty of fish'
Turrella (Reserve) – 'reeds growing in water'.



Pemulwuy – the leader

The Bidjigal clan is inseparable from its leader Pemulwuy (a name derived from 'bimul' meaning 'earth') who, in December 1790, ambushed and fatally speared Governor Phillip's game hunter, John McEntire.

Samuel John Neeles' engraving of 'Pimbloy' is the only known image of Pemulwuy. *'The resemblance is thought to be striking by those who have seen him,'* wrote James Grant, captain of the sloop Lady Nelson.

Pemulwuy became a formidable resistance leader. In 1797, following a battle in Parramatta, he escaped after having been filled with buckshot and was described as one that *'No gun or pistol can kill'*. Governor King outlawed Pemulwuy in 1801, offering spirits and other rewards for his capture 'dead or alive'. Pemulwuy was shot dead on 2 June 1802. He was decapitated and his head, preserved in spirits, was sent to Sir Joseph Banks. Its whereabouts are unknown.

Aboriginal Bark Hut, Aboriginal fishing and Pemulwuy
Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales

Dragonfly
Illustration J. Martin

Rock shelter with foot and hand paintings, Wollie Creek Valley
Photo P. Fitzgerald