

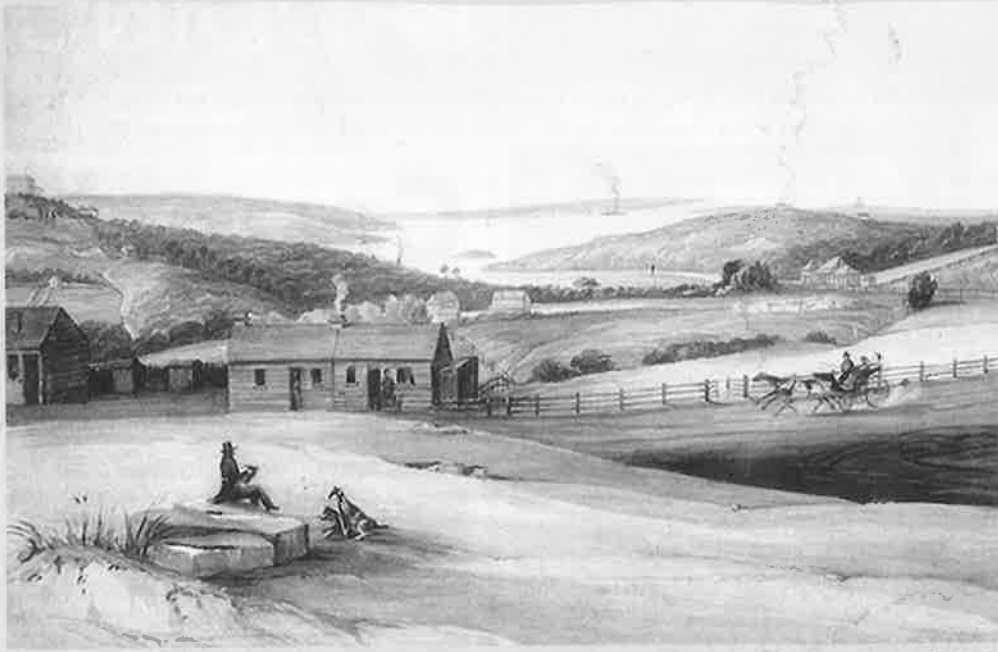
Early Paddington

For many thousands of years the Paddington area was occupied by the Cadigal people. The area was known as Cadi, the name our indigenous people gave to the south shore of Sydney Harbour, an area stretching from Watsons Bay to Sydney Cove. There were some 30 separate groups from the coastal Eora clans living here, each made up of between 30 and 50 people related to one another.

The area was a sandstone landscape of heath on long narrow ridges and taller woodland in deep rocky gullies with shallow sandy soils. Travelling east from what is now Hyde Park along Oxford Street, built to follow an Aboriginal track along the ridge, was Turpentine and Iron Bark forest. At about Taylor Square this became woodland of Angophora, mahogany, forest Red Gum, Bangalay and Scribbly Gum spreading across most of north Paddington except for a swampy area at Rushcutters Bay. Along the ridge from about Juniper Hall and stretching to Rose Bay, Bondi and Coogee were banksia, Angophora, Casuarina, Hakea and sedges. Further to the south, Paddington overlooked banksia scrub and grass trees and the freshwater sedge swamp that today forms Centennial Park.

The Cadigal were saltwater people eating fish & shellfish. Being coastal dwellers they were adept at fishing, swimming, diving, canoeing, even in surf. Plentiful supplies of seafood were supplemented with fruits, nectar, roots and tubers, as well as birds and small animals. Plants provided everyday items with leaves and native grasses used to weave baskets. Grass tree flower spikes provided shafts for hunting & fishing spears. Indeed, the clan name, Cadi, was also the name given to the grass trees, indicating the significance of this plant to the people.

When the First Fleet sailed into Sydney Harbour in 1788 the British considered the land unoccupied and unowned and gradually dispossessed the Cadigal peoples. Settlers changed the face of the



1842 Sketch by Frederick Garling from Old South Head Road (now Oxford Street) to Rushcutters Bay showing topography

country with their farms, orchards, plants and animals, quarrying, timber-getting and fires. Some Aboriginal food plants, fish and shellfish were soon exhausted leading to starvation for both colonists and the Eora people in the early years of the colony. A smallpox epidemic in 1789 may have killed

up to 80% of the Sydney clans, followed by lesser epidemics through the 19th century.

The 1830s saw a rising concern with respectability, and a hunger for land, that almost banished the Aborigines from the town and the new harbourside suburbs moving them south to Botany Bay, Sydney's



The Terraces 1886, villa estate of H B Bradley, now part of the Scottish Hospital, 2 Cooper Street. Source: ML



nd scattered settlement. Source: Mitchell Library

unwanted 'backyard'. Despite this the Aboriginal people never disappeared from Paddington they just became more invisible and increasingly marginalised. There are accounts of continuing occupation, for example, in his memoirs Obed West recalls that his Barcom Glen estate, centred on Boundary Street and stretching to Rushcutters Bay, was heavily forested in the 1810s and a great camping place for 'blacks'. It has been recorded that Aboriginal people continued to gather here for decades and on Queen Victoria's birthday each year were presented with a gift of blankets. West also recalled troupes of people carrying canoes over their heads heading down to Bondi, Coogee and Maroubra to fish in the 1830s.

Elizabeth Macquarie established a settlement of 'bark huts for the natives' at Elizabeth Bay in the 1820s, and when Alexander Macleay started to build Elizabeth Bay House and garden in the early 1830s, Aborigines probably still lived on the property using the sandstone overhangs as shelter. Surveyor Govett observed in the 1830s

that settlers often encouraged families of Aborigines to stay on their estates 'to keep away strange blacks who might otherwise make dangerous incursions'.

Bungaree, a celebrated Aboriginal elder, camped at the Domain and Elizabeth Bay. He died on Garden Island in 1830, and was buried at Rose Bay. Warrah Warrah, his son, set up camp on South Head Road at Rose Bay and travellers threw sixpences when they passed his gnyah until he died in 1863.

It is difficult to recognise the early Paddington landscape today, with trees felled, creeks filled in, stone quarried, land densely subdivided and built upon. Still traces remain - pockets of remnant plants, roads tracing ridges (Oxford Street) or streams (Boundary Street) or accessible routes (Glenmore Road), terraces hugging the topography, occasional sandstone outcrops and a few street names such as Cascade and Glenview are reminders of earlier times.

Grace Karskens in her history of the area states that Paddington and the Sydney Harbour region were shared landscapes in the colonial period with ongoing Aboriginal history and cross-cultural stories. The stately homes and heavy buildings of British authority stood alongside the lighter signatures of Aboriginal camps, fighting rings, middens, rock shelters, tracks, scarred trees and grooved images.

References:

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