





# A DANCE OF BROLGAS? THE MEANING OF *TARALGA*

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Photo: Powerhouse Museum – Henry King Tyrell Collection  
View from Richlands Hotel balcony (now Taralga Hotel). c. 1900.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Taralga, a small village of about 300 residents in the Southern Tablelands south-east of Sydney, has been denoted by this placename with relatively consistent spelling since the late 1820s. This assessment is based largely on searches of the New South Wales component of the National Library's Trove digitised Australian newspaper collection.

'Taralga' was overwhelmingly the most common spelling used to denote the district and the emerging village from its first entry into early colonial newspapers in 1828. However, in the late nineteenth century a dispute arose as to its origins. The disputes were between two main theories:

1. *Taralga* was derived from the local Burra Burra band's Gundungurra language placename for the area – *Trialgang*.<sup>1</sup>
2. *Trial-Gang* was the original placename for the town and was a placename of settler origin related to the convict past. This convict origin placename evolved into *Taralga* through slurring of the original name by both local white settlers and Aboriginal people.

A third theory, that *Taralga* means 'brolga', emerged briefly in a couple of newspaper articles from far-off Queensland and Tasmania in the early 1930s but was not discussed in local newspapers and was not part of the debate. It remains the only current alternative explanation, but documentation as to why it might be preferred is difficult to find.

Some local historians were sceptical that any reliable meaning was ever recorded for 'Taralga' (Tazewell, 1975). Tazewell was clear that in his view it was an Aboriginal word but was completely silent on any potential meanings. Indeed, silence is generally the most likely outcome for research into the meaning of Aboriginal placenames (Koch, 2009).

An exploration of the newspaper record suggests a range of additional explanations, but no proposal at this stage can be said to be fully documented and established. Having said that, by far the most likely explanation is that *Taralga* is an Aboriginal word meaning 'brolga' or 'native companion'. That, however, still leaves the mystery of the meaning and origin of 'Trial-Gang'.

I will argue that *Taralga* did not gradually evolve from 'Trialgang', whether convict or Aboriginal in origin. *Taralga* was known as 'Tryalgang' among the very earliest residents and visitors of the district, and that was a transcription of an Aboriginal word of the local Burra Burra band of the Gundungurra tribe and not an English word. 'Taralga' was James and William Macarthur's preferred Aboriginal name for their station located primarily to

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<sup>1</sup> Within the Gundungurra people there were up to 50 smaller sub-groups or bands. The Burra Burra band is the best documented of the six known bands in the Goulburn plains region (Smith, 1992, pp. 3, 45).

Smith noted the following in his 2014 study of Gundungurra cave names:

The Burra Burra clan of the Gundungurra speaking people, according to one early account, ranged over the area 'from the Abercrombie to Taralga and Carrabungla' (Macalister, 1907, p. 82).

The Gundungurra land use agreement registered in 2014 includes Taralga and surrounding districts as being Gundungurra Country. See the map attached to the agreement noting the extent of Gundungurra claims.

the north of Woolshed Creek (Dixon et al., 1837). *Trialgang* was sporadically used as an alternative placename for the current location of the Taralga village for almost a century.

### 1.1 A note on spelling

Both placenames need to be altered to accommodate our modern understandings of the original Aboriginal language from which these were transcribed. With this in mind, it is likely that ‘Buralga’ rather than ‘Taralga’ provides the most accurate pre-colonial spelling for Taralga. Nonetheless, and in line with the Geographical Board of New South Wales (2019) placenaming policy of recognising the permanence of long-established customary practice, there is no attempt here to restore *Taralga* to its presumed ‘original’ spelling.

‘Tryalgang’ could be transcribed as ‘Durraiwalgang’, following the known pronunciation rules of the local language.<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, this paper suggests that ‘Burraiwalgang’ is also a reasonable reconstruction of the original Aboriginal word. But I have decided, in places where I am not referring to an original text, to use this ‘Tryalgang’ spelling as it best reflects the early pioneer’s pronunciation. The meaning of the reconstructed word ‘Tarywalgang’ (see Section 2.3.4 below) is unclear and there is no definitive spelling. All other spellings of placenames will be based on our contemporary usage.

## 2 THE ORIGINS OF TARALGA

The origins of Taralga’s name are shrouded in mystery and confusion.<sup>3</sup> The Upper Lachlan Shire Council’s web page ‘A Snapshot of Taralga’s History’ notes there is much doubt as to how Taralga got its name and ‘no definite or conclusive evidence on the original naming has ever been discovered’.<sup>4</sup> It is the purpose of this paper to pull apart the strands of the various intertwined arguments which underlie the confusion and see if a simple answer to the origin of the name can be found.<sup>5</sup>

It has long been noted in newspaper articles, found in the National Library’s Digital Newspaper Archive (hereafter, Trove), that *Taralga* is a ‘euphonic’ or melodious sounding placename (see also Haygarth, 1848). To outsiders visiting Taralga its euphonic sound clearly marks it out as an Aboriginal word. Yet as Taralga’s Wikipedia entry notes<sup>6</sup>:

The two most widely supported theories are that the village was originally known as ‘Trial Gang’ as within the early colonial boundaries of Argyle County, it was a location for the trials of convicts and bushrangers before the Crown. The second

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<sup>2</sup> This loosely follows advice received from Jim Barrett, but also follows what we know of the derivation of *Carrabungla* which originally was written down as ‘Curabungalong’. It should also be remembered that the transcription of Aboriginal languages does not generally distinguish between ‘t’ and ‘d’; hence ‘Durraiwalgang’.

<sup>3</sup> This paper builds independently on the historical research of Ian Raynor Ross (1928-2017), foundation president of the Taralga Historical Society who was of the firm view that *Taralga* meant ‘broлга’.

<sup>4</sup> See Upper Lachlan Shire Council’s web page ‘A Snapshot of Taralga’s History’, <http://www.upperlachlan.nsw.gov.au/snapshot-taralgas-history> (accessed 15 September 2021)

<sup>5</sup> While noting the confusion, Upper Lachlan Shire tourist brochures nonetheless sometimes give sole voice to the convict origin theory ‘Crookwell, Gunning, Taralga: So close but a world away’, Upper Lachlan Shire Tourist Association 2018.

<sup>6</sup> This repeats what is contained in the Upper Lachlan Shires brief history of Taralga (accessed 17 February 2017).



theory is that *Taralga* means ‘native companion’ in the language of the Burra Aboriginal people.

I will begin with a discussion of the first of these theories, since it has long been assumed locally that ‘Trial Gang’, with apparent convict origins, was the original name of the village (Cole, 2017; ‘Address on the history of the *Taralga* area’, 2018, May). A main focus of this paper is to investigate if this was in fact the case.

The second theory appears to derive from the slight similarity in sound of ‘*Taralga*’ to the Aboriginal name of the ‘brolga’ bird. This theory was reported in a number of Australian and New South Wales placename books from the late 1930’s onwards. However, none provided a citation that would enable us to determine what evidence there is to underpin the theory (See for example the often-unreliable Reed, 1969).

The newspaper record does, however, provide a number of reports that *Taralga* is derived from the local Aboriginal people. This idea commonly has two distinct elements. Firstly, that *Taralga* is an Aboriginal mispronunciation of the English phrase ‘Trial-Gang’. Secondly, that ‘Trialgang’, one word, is an Aboriginal placename of unknown meaning (e.g. Taylor, 1908). The common element is that it was this word, either an Aboriginal word or an Aboriginal version of a convict phrase, which gradually evolved into ‘*Taralga*’.

This complication is explored in some detail, as the exact relationship between ‘Trialgang’ and ‘*Taralga*’ was much contested in the newspaper and documentary record. Much of the discussion, as noted above, assumed they are the same word; that is, ‘*Taralga*’ is a ‘corruption’ of ‘Trialgang’. I will explore whether they are, on the contrary, unrelated Aboriginal words which have in the past been used to refer to the same place—the current location of *Taralga* village.

I will first show that the convict origin theory is undermined by the lack of contemporary reports or usage in the convict era of settlement. That ‘Trialgang’ is of Aboriginal origin is also supported by testimonies of two elderly *Taralga* residents in the early twentieth century. Two independent reports also provide a similar meaning for ‘Trialgang’.

A third alternative is that ‘*Taralga*’ is of Aboriginal origin, but it is not related to ‘Trialgang’ or ‘Trial-gang’. Its meaning is nowhere recorded and therefore its origins are unclear (Tazewell, 1975). This argument has some merit, but the records are very clear; when *Taralga* emerged in newspapers in the late 1820s it is likely recording some significant and defining characteristic of the Macarthur station.

This characteristic was striking enough for the Macarthur family to adopt and then retain it some three and a half decades later when establishing their private village of ‘*Taralga*’. It appears that James Macarthur specifically adopted an Aboriginal name for his original small landholding of 2500 acres encompassing the current location of the village (Census, 1828). The name is most probably linked to some characteristic at, or reasonably proximate to, the current village’s location. ‘*Taralga*’ soon became the preferred name for the totality of the rapidly expanding Macarthur family station (see the *Squatters’ Map*, Dixon et al., 1837). It also became the name for the early business centre of the station, the location of the current village.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The main business centre of the station shifted from *Taralga* to Richlands in 1839.

This use of an Aboriginal name contrasted to many of their contemporaries and the many small landholders that followed in the district from the 1850's onwards, who often transplanted English and Scots placenames, perhaps in an effort to ward off homesickness. The brothers' preferences for Aboriginal station names may have arisen because they were native-born and raised.

*Taralga's* exact meaning never seems to have been recorded in the crucial first years of colonial settlement. My research suggests that attempts to recover its meaning locally at the end of the nineteenth century were very likely no more than speculation. *Taralga's* meaning was, I will conclude, totally lost to its residents by the end of the nineteenth century. This suggests that the local feature that 'Taralga' refers to may have also long disappeared by then.

By the late nineteenth century almost all theories being discussed in the newspapers pointed to *Taralga* emerging from an earlier word or words—'Trialgang' or 'Trial-Gang'.

### 2.1 'Trial-Gang'

In March 1886, a review of the district and town ('Taralga', 1886, March 27) stated:

THE WORD TARALGA is a corruption of Trialgong<sup>8</sup> (aborigines), three stony hills, I believe, and not a corruption of trial gang (as some suppose), from the old Government men being tried and punished here.

This is a neat a statement of the problem faced by Taralga residents and visitors in the late nineteenth century when discussing the origins of Taralga's name. The 'Trialgong' form of the name referred to by the *Town and Country Journal's* correspondent, while occasionally reported in newspapers for the next 40 years, virtually disappeared from the newspaper record.

Frank Forrest Wheaton, a former resident of Taralga in the first decade of the twentieth century, provided the first scholarly attempt to determine the origins of Taralga's name. In June 1922 Wheaton, by then headmaster of Strathfield Grammar school in Sydney, gave a systematic historical review of Taralga's origins to a Sydney meeting of the Royal Australian Historical Society (Wheaton, 1923). In developing his paper, in March of the same year, he had placed a request for any information on early Taralga 'from the date of settlement to 1850' to the readers of *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* ('Taralga's beginnings', 1922, March 30).

The *Richmond River Herald*, reporting Wheaton's lecture in Sydney, described his collection of three main theories:

He (Wheaton) said that one version of the name was that it was a corruption of Trialgang, from the gangs of convicts employed. Another authority considered that it represented the attempts of the aborigines to pronounce the word 'Triangles', and yet another that it was their equivalent for Trafalgar. ('Local and General News', 1922, July 4)

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<sup>8</sup> A lone variant spelling of *Trialgang*.

A number of problems arise in relation to the local theories Wheaton collected. It is not at all clear why early settlers would have ever accepted, and then adopted into oral usage, an obvious mispronunciation or ‘slurring’ of common words such as ‘triangles’ from their native tongue. Nor would it be likely that early surveyors and newspaper editors, when referring to the Taralga district, would have almost always preferred the transcription of a mispronunciation of two common English words, ‘trial’ and ‘gang’.

Late nineteenth century residents of Taralga, apparently challenged by this unlikely transformation of two English words into the Aboriginal sounding ‘Taralga’, sought refuge in the idea that it was of Aboriginal origin—derived from the local Aboriginal people’s mispronunciation of ‘trial gang’. This local adoption by white settlers of an Aboriginal incorrect oral usage of common English words seems even more unlikely.

In addition, the phrase ‘trial gang’ does not even reflect common or unconventional English usage at the time for a location of a trial of a number of convicts before the Crown. There is no other English phrase or word in colonial newspapers or elsewhere that I could find for this type of event. There is no evidence in colonial newspapers of ‘Trial-Gang’ being used to refer to a group of convicts being tried, sentenced and punished.

There is certainly discussion of ‘Government Gangs’ and ‘clearing gangs’ of convicts particularly in the 1820s and 1830s. But not one record of a ‘Trial-Gang’ (two words), referring specifically to convicts, was found between 1820 and 1879 in colonial newspapers (See Table 2, page 28 below). ‘Trail-Gang’ would make more sense as a term to describe a group of convicts working on a road, but even this was not found to be in common use in the nineteenth century. ‘Iron-Gang’, however, is very common in early and mid-century colonial newspapers records and this probably explains why, in searching around for an explanation for ‘Trialgang’s’ meaning, residents postulated a similar sounding version.

Is there any other plausible explanation for a Trialgang-Taralga transformation? Could it really be that the early settlers adopted a more euphonic, Aboriginal-sounding alternative to the original harsh-sounding English word as a surprising stylistic preference? Alternatively, was this adoption of an Aboriginal mispronunciation preferred in order to suppress evidence of the harsh and unpleasant facts arising from the convict origins of the district? This theory of deliberate misrepresentation to suppress the shame of convict origins appears to be implied in late 19th and early 20th century discussions of Taralga’s placename origins. However, it would be very unlikely that this suppression would have occurred in the early colonial period where convicts and their harsh treatment were a normal, if unfortunate, part of life. Therefore, the absence of ‘trial gang’ as a phrase in colonial newspapers, and more specifically as an early placename for the village of Taralga, is strong evidence against these theories.

In the final paper published in the Society’s journal in January 1923, Wheaton is cautious in describing the origins of Taralga’s name (Wheaton, 1923, p. 17):

The origin of the name is doubtful; I can only give you the evidence I have collected and leave the matter there. Since the beginning of the town, in 1858, the name has been Taralga or Teralga. In a map of 1837, Macarthur’s grant is spelt Teralga, but in 1834 the creek is spelt Taralga, the first record I can find of the present spelling. In the same year Macalister is mentioned in N.S.W. Calendar and Directory as resident at Triedgoor. In 1833 his

station is called Trialgar - the one might easily be mistaken for the other when written. That is the earliest printed record of the name.<sup>9</sup>

Wheaton's paper is equally sceptical of the local tradition that *Taralga* has evolved from a reference to 'trial gangs of convicts'. Wheaton, however, goes on to argue 'that Trialgang was the native attempt to say "triangle" having reference to the remarkable hills near the town, forming a triangle', although as I remark below any such hills are hard to identify, even for long-term residents. His preferred explanation references the *Australian Town and Country Journal* correspondent's theory that *Taralga* is an aboriginal name referring to three hills, but he discounts its Aboriginal origins. This is, on the face of it, equally implausible, as settler origin placenames were unlikely to be ever 'Aboriginalised' by the adoption of Aboriginal pronunciations of English words.

The finding of transitional spellings is a relatively common feature of placenames of Aboriginal origin as various attempts are made to transcribe into English script very unfamiliar oral Aboriginal words. In colonial newspapers *Taralga's* spelling in the first decades of discovery and white settlement is unusually consistent. It was spelt then, more or less, the same way as we do today. Tellingly, during the same period there are no alternative uses of 'Trial-Gang' (two words), 'Trafalgar' or 'Triangle' in colonial newspapers, maps or the 1828 census that I could find to denote either the Taralga township, the nearby creek (now Woolshed) or the locality.

This lack of evidence in newspapers supporting Wheaton's theories strongly suggests that 'Trial-Gang' was being retrospectively interpreted by late nineteenth century Taralga residents. They were making sense of an unfamiliar Aboriginal placename which, when read from the page by an English speaker, could be transformed into a colonial term referring to convicts. But this word was in fact their own creation. It never actually existed in colonial times.

Wheaton's final words on the origins of Taralga's name are given to Thomas Taylor Junior in an extract from his 1908 memoir (Taylor, 1970). Here Taylor simply states that Taralga was originally called 'Trialgang', a name Taylor presumes is Aboriginal. Wheaton makes no further comment on Taylor's report but, as I will explore further below, it is by far the simplest and best explanation we have. 'Trialgang' is an Aboriginal word that local residents simply re-interpreted from the page, in a way that could make sense to an English speaker.

By far the most difficult problem faced by those who supported 'Trialgang' as being convict in origin was that some of the earliest colonial settlers in the Taralga district, Thomas Taylor Junior and Walter Bradbury, asserted that 'Trialgang' was in fact of Aboriginal origin. Henry Haygarth, in his memoir of his time in the Monaro, also provides a contemporary report from the 1840's that 'Taralga' (although derived from the English 'Trial-gang', according to some newspaper reports) was an Aboriginal word (Haygarth, 1848).

Many of the rivers, mountains, remarkable spots, and tracts of country, have been named by the overlanders; and though the local government sometimes disapproves of these titles, and orders them to be subsequently changed, yet they are frequently retained from the force of early habit; hence, from his choice of names, it is easy to conjecture the country to which the first explorer of a district has belonged. Some of the native names

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<sup>9</sup> Despite Wheaton's comment, *Taralga* first appeared in the newspaper record in 1828.

are very pretty, and their meaning is often poetical; others, again, are equally cacophonous; in general the plurality of o's is remarkable. Of those that I recollect, many, such as Bungonia, Taralga, Omio, Illawarra, Wolumlah, and Marulan, were sufficiently euphonious....

**Box 1: Early surveyors' and colonialists' views of Aboriginal placenames**

The early parish maps from around Taralga have Aboriginal placenames, some of which are no longer in use today. Why is this so? From his appointment in the late 1820s the Surveyor General, Major Sir Thomas Mitchell, encouraged the use of Aboriginal placenames. In a letter written in 1828 to Assistant Surveyor Elliot he required that 'You will be particular in noting the native names of as many places as you can on your map of that part. The natives can furnish you with the names for every flat and almost every hill, and the settlers select their grants by these names.' (Mitchell, 1828)

In particular Mitchell (1829) requested that these names be euphonic.

There was emerging, as early as the 1820's, a criticism of the lack of variety in the naming of places. The Rev. John Dunmore Lang particularly favoured Aboriginal placenames over meaningless and repetitive variations of colonial Governors and English statesmen. His comic poem 'Colonial Nomenclature' written in 1824 argued thus (Lang, 1873, pp. 115 - 117):

'Twas said of Greece two thousand years ago,  
That every stone i' the land had got a name.  
Of New South Wales too, men will soon say so too;  
But every stone there seems to get the same.

'Macquarie' for a name is all the go:  
The old Scotch Governor was fond of fame,  
Macquarie Street, Place, Port, Fort, Town, Lake, River:  
'Lachlan Macquarie, Esquire, Governor,' for ever!

I like the native names, as Parramatta,  
And Illawarra, and Woolloomoolloo;  
Nandowra, Woogarora, Bulkomatta,  
Tomah, Toongabbie, Mittagong, Meroo;  
Buckobble, Cumleroy, and Coolingatta,  
The Warragumby, Bargo, Burradoo;  
Cookbundoon, Carrabaiga, Wingecarribbee,  
The Wollondilly, Yurumbon, Bungarribbee.

I hate your Goulburn Downs and Goulburn Plains,  
And Goulburn River and the Goulburn Range,  
And Mount Goulburn and Goulburn Vale! One's brains  
Are turned with Goulburns! Vile scorbutic mangle  
For immortality! Had I the reins  
Of Government a fortnight, I would change  
These Downing Street appellatives, and give  
The country names that should deserve to live.

In his history of New South Wales (Lang, 1837, p. 88), where this poem was first published, he argued strongly for use of Aboriginal placenames and in support of Mitchell's preference for them. We know that Mitchell encouraged the use of Aboriginal placenames and tried to regularise their transcription in a way that would appear to favour their euphonic character. Practically Mitchell thought them useful as Aboriginal people could confirm the location of places surveyed. Landowners perhaps had an economic motive when staking out their claims to land as the proliferation of non-descript English derived placenames, such as 'Reedy Creek', and 'Woolshed Creek', could lead to confusion around property boundaries.

In the early 1930s one of Australia's most famous writers, Mary Gilmore, came up with a totally different explanation of Taralga's origins that made no mention of 'Tarialgang' and its controversies.

### 2.2 'Taralga'

There was no gradual evolution of the placename *Taralga*. The town's name appears to have been born in the newspapers and maps of the colony as 'Taralga' from the late 1820's. The most common variant in this period was actually 'Teralga', though this was not the sole form by any means (see Table 1, page 25 below). Stephen Tazewell<sup>10</sup>, President of the Goulburn and District Historical Society, in his brief history of Taralga noted:

The name Taralga is noted to have a number of origins but it is certain to come from the native name of the area 'Teralga' (Tazewell, 1975).

Tazewell would have been well aware of the theory that *Taralga* had convict origins but is so dismissive he makes no attempt to describe it (see Harris, 1967). Neither does Tazewell report on the potential meanings of 'Teralga' as an Aboriginal word.

Without the powerful Trove search engine Tazewell could not have known that the earliest spellings in colonial newspapers support 'Taralga' as the original Aboriginal name for the area. In fact, until 1840 there are no 'Teralga' spellings. Up until 1839, when the Macarthur brothers put in multiple advertisements over a few months relating to sale of sheep on their Taralga estate, references in the newspapers are fairly evenly divided between 'Taralga' and 'Taralga Creek'. 'Taralga Creek' is mentioned exclusively in relation to landed property matters and is solely referenced in the context of a boundary for the sale or leasing of properties.

He also notes that as late as 1848, in an authoritative geographical reference book *Geographical Dictionary of the Australian Colonies*, Taralga village was deemed not worthy of an entry. The only relevant entry referred to Teralga Creek: 'Teralga a creek of N.S.W. situated near Burra Burra Lake in the County of Argyle' (Wells, 1848, p. 394; see also map at p. 14). This creek was later renamed Woolshed Creek; this was the naming practice of locals as the creek ran past the big woolshed belonging to 'Richlands' station (see Williamson, 2004, p. 1). As late as 1883, in what appears to be lazy journalism, we have 'Taralga Creek' as the 'postal town' name for Taralga ('Alphabetical list', 1883).

This raises the question of whether Taralga's original location was near the creek (the closest part of the creek is some miles away from the village itself), or whether the placename originally referred to the creek itself and not the location of the current village. That is, whether the village is named after the creek.

The earliest map that references Taralga is Mitchell's 1834 map of the nineteen counties (Mitchell, 1834). It has 'Taralga Creek', the current Woolshed Creek, and spells it as we do today. The Dixon 'Squatters map' from 1837 has 'Taralga Creek' but also has 'Teralga' placed somewhere near modern-day Richlands. This 'Teralga' was the newly-minted

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<sup>10</sup> Tazewell was raised and schooled in Taralga (Blay & Williamson, 2007, p. 111)



station name for the combined holdings of the Macarthurs, of around 18,000 acres as detailed on the map.<sup>11</sup>

The earliest printed use of ‘Taralga’ is found in *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* (‘Government notice’, 1828, July 18). This was only four years after the very earliest settlers had formally selected land in the immediate area (see Tazewell, 1975). No other similar placename was found before 1828 to denote the Taralga district or early location of a settlement. The 1828 notice read as follows:

*Argyle*—William Edwards, Constable, to be Pound keeper, at Taralga, near the Cookbundoon Range, in the Room of Constable William Way, who is ordered to Goulburn Plains.

### Box 2: Rules for recovering placenames from the historical record

If we use as our guide a few reasonable rules the possibility that our guesses are closer to the truth increases. Harold Koch in his paper on reconstructing Aboriginal placenames argues:

‘...greatest reliance should be placed on those historical sources that reflect knowledge dating from the 1820s until around 1860. In general, earlier documents can be assumed to better reflect the knowledge of the first Europeans who acquired placename information first-hand from members of the traditional cultural community. Furthermore, placename have often undergone changes over time: *they sometimes shifted in their local reference and came to be used to refer to slightly different places. They have also sometimes undergone changes to their pronunciation, some of which may be due to pronunciations based on spellings rather than on imitation of the Aboriginal pronunciation.*’ (My italics) (Koch, 2009)

In respect to the area around Taralga we could probably make the end date for our historical sources even earlier than 1860. As early as the late 1840s there was a significant decline in the local Aboriginal population (Smith, 1992).

Edwards had arrived in Australia ten years earlier on the *Batavia*; in 1828, at 47 years of age; he was replacing William Way who had been sent out to Cookbundoon River<sup>12</sup> in October 1826 (‘Government notice’, 1826, October 18)<sup>13</sup>. At some point after this Way would have set up his ‘room’ in Taralga; the ‘Taralga’ where the pound-keeper resides could have been somewhere on the Station.<sup>14</sup> An early advertisement from July 1834 in the *Sydney Monitor* (‘Five pounds reward’, 1834, July 9) clearly states that James Macarthur’s Station is called ‘Taralga’. This notice, for the return of an allegedly stolen horse, is ‘signed *Thomas Taylor. Dated Taralga, 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1834.*’ This, based on the memoirs of his son Thomas Taylor Junior, would locate this geographical reference to Taralga’s current location (Taylor, 1908).

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Macarthur is listed on the Squatters Map as the owner of Taralga Station. Edward, who lived most of his life overseas, inherited the Taralga holdings on his father’s death in 1834. This began an uneasy relationship with his brothers James and William Macarthur who managed the estate day to day.

<sup>12</sup> Modern-day Tarlo River.

<sup>13</sup> Edwards is listed in the 1828 Census as residing at Veralga, Cookbundoon in November 1828.

<sup>14</sup> Probably where modern day Taralga is now located—see further below.

'Taralga' in the notice is used in two contexts. Firstly, in reference to the name of James Macarthur's Estate; secondly, as the place of residence of the pound-keeper. Thomas Taylor senior's 1870 memoir, dictated just before his death, has him residing at 'Taralga' in 1827.<sup>15</sup> This memoir, which is otherwise very specific about locations, seems to confirm that he resided in the location of the modern village. On this basis it would appear very likely that Edwards's residence was in the current location of the modern village. Interestingly, therefore, the very earliest references appear to relate to a business location and not to 'Taralga creek' itself.

No meanings of 'Taralga'/'Teralga' are reported directly (from Trove searches of New South Wales newspapers); the only instances are those that refer to its supposed root word 'Trialgang'.

### 2.2.1 Dame Mary Gilmore and Taralga

Dame Mary Gilmore was born at Cotta Wolla (near current day Crookwell) and spent her first few years in the district before moving away with her family (Tracey, c.2009, p. 205). It is this underlying connection that led Gilmore to have more than a passing interest in the district and in the origin of the *Taralga* name. Gilmore's father's family, the Camerons, were brought over from Scotland by the Macarthurs to build roads in the emerging colony of New South Wales (Hunt, 1990, p. 7). George Cameron, Gilmore's great uncle, was a manager employed by the Macarthurs in the 1830s and 1840s. After the contract was finished, they settled near Taralga.

Her father had an unusual and sensitive interest in the folklore and welfare of the various Aboriginal peoples that he came in contact with. Gilmore was also involved in activism around the rights of Aboriginals in the 1920s and 1930s (Victoria Haskins, pers. comm.) so may have had connections with the Blue Mountains Gundungurra Aboriginal community. Gilmore's connection to the district was celebrated, and her poem 'The Pioneers' was read aloud and distributed at the 1922 pioneers gathering in Taralga (see below).<sup>16</sup>

In February 1931 Mary White<sup>17</sup> aged 13, of 'Koronubu', Yalbraith Road, Taralga, wrote to Gilmore, who was then editor of the *Australian Worker* newspaper children's letters page. White noted that her grandmother knew Gilmore when she was a little girl and had sought a pen-pal her own age. Gilmore in response asked for her grandmother's name so she could write to her. Gilmore then added:

...Do you know how Taralga got its name? I have an idea that there is a place in the Highlands called Taralga, but I am not sure. Perhaps the word is a corruption of an Aboriginal word. Some of the old residents may know. Taralga is one of the old 'free settlements' as well as a convict place. - MG

Not long after this, probably, Gilmore wrote the poem 'Taralga', as it was included in her 1932 collection of poems 'Under the Wilgas' (Gilmore, 1932, p. 29):

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<sup>15</sup> However, Thomas Mitchell's 'field, note and sketch book' has Taylor Snr at Burra Burra Lagoon in June 1828, which may mean Taylor is referring to the Estate and not the current town location. (Mitchell, 1830).

<sup>16</sup> Gilmore lived briefly in Goulburn in the early 1920's for health reasons ('Taralga pioneers', 1922, May 4, p. 4).

<sup>17</sup> Mary Maloney.



TARALGA

He came not back who fled,  
Thinking in flight to leave  
Behind him, as though dead,  
The memory of an eve,  
When, in the twilight low,  
As lord of love he walked  
The hills where, long ago,  
Baralga stalked.

Now if his heart afford  
One memory of that night,  
Where love itself outpoured,  
And of its own delight  
Took the full chalice and  
Drank deep, how there would wake  
To longing, passion-fanned,  
Love's golden ache!

Gilmore wrote in a footnote to the poem:

Taralga is a corruption of Baralga, the brolga. My father often told how there was a certain place, or sanctuary 'where the birds were thick like sheep' and where there were 'nests every few yards'. Settlement ate the birds, forgot the place, and changed its very name.



**Figure 1.** The Australian Crane, or Native Companion. (Gould's *Birds of Australia*, Volume VI)

Gilmore's observation is interesting in a number of ways. Firstly, she makes a very firm claim that 'Taralga' is Aboriginal in origin. This time there is no mention of the highlands. Secondly, she is adamant that 'Taralga' is a lost place and that the current village adopted a name which originally referred to another location. Thirdly, she conflates the original location of Taralga with the local Aboriginal people's sanctuary or conservation area for brolgas. Finally, while there is no specific reference to where she has found the meaning of Taralga, she recalls a strong memory of her father who 'often told' of a particular place in the district that was 'thick' with brolgas (Gilmore, 1932, p. 29)<sup>18</sup>. Gilmore has most probably made the interpretive jump from her father's recollections to conclude that Taralga meant 'brolga'. While Gilmore's recollection is evidence that brolgas were common around Taralga, the direct connection she makes between Taralga and a meaning of 'brolga' is less convincing.

The appendix to *Under the Wilgas* has a detailed discussion of Aboriginal land management practices which included the establishment of conservation areas to ensure preserved stocks of key animals in case of drought. The observation that sanctuaries were a part of traditional Aboriginal land management practices was controversial at the time but has been confirmed by contemporary writers (Gammage, 2011). In the appendix Gilmore (1932, p. 169) explicitly says that Baralga (Taralga) referred to a brolga sanctuary:

The sanctuaries, one after another, were taken possession of by the invading new-comers, and the only witness to them now lies in the names—Maneroo, the breeding sanctuary of the black duck;<sup>19</sup> Taralga (Baralga), the breeding place of baralga (the brolga) ... Other similar names lie dormant in memory.

'Taralga' was the name given to the private village, formally established by the Macarthurs in the late 1850s but in existence in some form for over three decades or more before then. It had been used in the very earliest days of white settlement to refer to the large Macarthur landholdings held primarily to the north of the current Woolshed Creek but also including the current location of Taralga village. If we are to believe Gilmore's view that the name had been adopted from another place, Taralga's name derived from a location somewhere within, or near, the Macarthurs' large landholdings, but definitely not the location of the village of Taralga.

An excellent site for a brolga sanctuary would have been Burra Burra Lake, about eight kilometres north of Taralga. However, we have very good provenience for the original meaning of *Burra Burra* from the recollections of William Russell, a Gundungurra elder from the Burraborang Valley.<sup>20</sup> The English meaning is 'Kangaroo Lake', with the reduplication of the 'burra' element probably being a plural marker, denoting the many kangaroos that would gather around a large expanse of water (See Russell, 1914, p. 14).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This is important in the sense that her father gives evidence of brolgas being in abundance locally. This was a surprise to me and perhaps many other locals!

<sup>19</sup> A Trove search does retrieve one report in 1922 of *Monaro* meaning 'black duck'; but all other contemporary reports suggest it meant 'high plain'.

<sup>20</sup> This is an unusual correction to the earliest records of the spelling, which give it as 'Burrah Burrah'. But Russell's mother's connection to the Richlands area strengthens his authority for this spelling; and in any case it is not clear that the spelling variants were intended to vary the pronunciation.

<sup>21</sup> Barrett (2016, pp. 66, 98) notes that word reduplication can also create entirely new meanings. The meaning of *burra burra* is also recorded (pp. 73, 117) as 'anything dark', with *buurraa* or *burrai* meaning 'black'.

We have a spelling *buurraa buurraa* proposed by Barrett (2016, p. 73) that is very close to the first, and as a result likely more accurate, transcription by Charles Throsby in his contemporaneous diary in 1819: 'Burrah Burrah'. *Buurraa Buurraa* is listed as one of the many variants of the word for 'black' by Barrett (2016, pp. 73, 116-117). 'Black' in the Gundungurra language had a range of uses in naming distinctively black animals. Using this insight, it could even mean 'rock wallaby' (with its black chest). Whatever its specific meaning, it clearly referred to the Burra Burra band. Therefore, when described to Throsby at the time of its discovery by members of the Burra Burra tribe, it might have meant nothing more than 'our lake'. Burra Burra Lake was also renowned as being full of bird life in the nineteenth century and likely had many brolgas at that time.

Throsby, who led the first white settler exploration of the district in 1819, gave an account of his journey north from near the current day village of Taralga. Throsby was guided into the Taralga district by Coocoogong<sup>22</sup>, who was accompanied by Duall and Bian acting as translators (Cambage, 1921, p. 239)<sup>23</sup>. Throsby, after breaking camp somewhere near the current village location, describes the lake as follows (See Wheaton, 1923):

'...set out at 8 o'clock through a beautiful forest country, very thin of timber, over several small runs into the Western River. This country is admirably adapted either for grazing or agriculture. At 2 o'clock a continuation of some good and level country, but grass partially injured by caterpillars. About this time the runs of water began to run to the northward and westward, and before 3 o'clock we came to a very extensive lake, or lagoon, several miles in circumference, with great quantities of duck of various sorts, swans, and some geese.'

Half a century later, an 1872 map of Argyle notes the lake as 'a small sheet of fine fresh water' which 'abounds in fish and waterfowl of all kinds' (*County of Argyle*, 1872).

Dr George Bennett, a naturalist who travelled through the district in 1832, was more specific in his observations of bird life on the Wollondilly near Goulburn:

At a beautiful spot on the Wollondilly, not far distant from the plains, and at a part of the river forming even at this, the summer season, a fine sheet of water, called 'Karoa' by the natives, the 'Burriol,' or musk ducks, with their young, the 'Gunarung,' or wood-ducks, as well as other kinds of waterfowl, were seen in great numbers; and occasionally, about the marshes, the native companion, or Curaduck of the aborigines (Bennett, 1834).

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<sup>22</sup> 'Appointed' in 1820 by Governor Lachlan Macquarie as Chief of the Burra Burra.

<sup>23</sup> What little is known of Duall, Coocoogong and Bian is reported in Lamb (2020). Duall is a significant, if shadowy, figure in understanding patterns of resistance to white settlement in early colonial Australia. He was exiled to Tasmania in 1816 for 'committing various atrocious Acts of Robbery, Depredation, and Barbarity, on the Property and Persons of His Majesty's loyal Subjects residing in the Interior of this Settlement' (*Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 3 August 1816)



**Figure 2.** Atkinson (1826).<sup>24</sup>

### 2.2.2 *The Macarthurs and Taralga*

John Macarthur, his wife Elizabeth and their sons James and William were central to the early establishment, consolidation and eventual domination of the wool industry in nineteenth century Australia. A significant portion of their landed interests in the early colony was held in the Taralga district.

William and James were both involved in the early exploration of Argyle. An account of one of these journeys was recorded by James, and described an excursion into lands near the current site of Goulburn (James Macarthur, 1821). The journey appears to have been in pursuit of selecting land promised to the Macarthurs by Governor Macquarie. The record sheds little light on our current quest apart from recording James's extremely poor opinion of the land he surveyed. This opinion later led him to continue exploring Argyle lands to the north of Goulburn.

A later journey, again led by James, took place in November 1822. The expedition appears to have skirted the Taralga district in their journey northwards to Bathurst from their initial campsite near the current day bridge across the Tarlo River. Nonetheless it signaled the beginning of the long association that the Macarthurs and their employees John Hillas and Lachlan Macalister had with Taralga and its surrounds (Taylor, 1870). It is important to note that neither expedition employed Aboriginal guides or interpreters.

Stephen Horn, the current owner of the Macarthurs' Richlands residence, provides this account of the legal and managerial relationships of their land around Taralga in the early nineteenth century:

‘...they chose land to the north of the Taralga settlement, including a site of a village (the present site) with a small stream (Corroboree Ck) passing below. This was consolidated over time into a family holding that became the Richlands estate of upwards of 19,000 acres with title all in John

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<sup>24</sup> While this engraving records an un-named exploring party, in terms of numbers of participants, it is very close to Throsby's party which, in addition to Coocoogong, Duall and Bian of the Burra Burra tribe, consisted of Throsby, John Rowley, Joseph Wild and John Wait.

Senior's name. We know that James sent cattle through probably as early as 1823 from Sutton Forest and continued in an active role for some years after. John's death in 1834 saw all Macarthur Argyle holdings passing to Edward, but a previous arrangement with James and William (increasingly William) jointly managing the estate on behalf of their brother was not formalised until the brothers returned to England to try and convince Edward of a land swap to give them more control of the estate. Edward did not agree to this, and instead left the estate to be managed from Camden Park on his behalf. This set the pattern from 1839 onwards. It was in this year that Macarthur headquarters were moved from the settlement on Corroboree creek 10km north.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1828 Census, James's residence is listed as being at 'Viralga' while William's is at 'Burra Burra'. Each landholding is listed as 6500 acres in size. James and William's first blocks, taken up formally in 1824, were each 2500 acres. The latter's block was to the north of Woolshed Creek while James's original block encloses the modern-day Taralga to the south of the creek (Tazewell, 1975). Woolshed Creek formed a natural border between the two blocks. William and James each purchased a block of 4,000 acres at 5 shillings per acre in 1825 adjoining their original blocks to the north-west and east respectively (Ward, 1981 p. 41; Wheaton, 1923). Stephen Horn's records show that the initial 1824 selections had resulted from an award by Governor Macquarie of 2000 acres of land each for their exploratory activity in the colony.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly both James and William adopted Aboriginal names for their respective stations in the first years of settlement. Unlike early surveyors of this period (see Box 1 above), station owners were not under any pressure to use an Aboriginal name. Nonetheless it wasn't such an unusual practice. The Hillas's used an Aboriginal name for their nearby 'Bannaby' and 'Tirrel Tirrel' stations, as did James Hassal for 'Bolong' station; Haygarth's memoir (1848) also noted the overlanders' use of Aboriginal names. This naming practice differed from earlier Macarthur placenaming practice which referred to close family (Elizabeth Farm) or powerful benefactors back in England (Camden Park).<sup>27</sup>

A study of Victorian squatters' use of Aboriginal names for their sheep stations found that the reason for a particular choice could not, in most instances, be established, as very few station owners left records of their reasons (Cahir, 2014). The use of such names could be simply because the Macarthurs or their employees had good relations with the local Aboriginal people. This is backed up by some early reports in the newspapers, but also from Russell in his recollections of William Macarthur (Russell, 1914, p. 20; and Smith, 1992, p. 29, for a description of Charlie Tarra and his relationship with the Macarthurs and Lachlan Macalister of 'Taralga'). Tarra, an Aboriginal member of the Macarthur expedition to Gippsland, is remembered in the name of Tarra Valley.

William's 'Burra Burra Lagoon' is an obvious choice of station name. It provides a strikingly beautiful and practical locational referent for William's holdings from 1825. It also refers to the name of the local Aboriginal tribal group, a station naming practice followed by some nineteenth-century Victorian squatters (Cahir, 2014).

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<sup>25</sup> pers. comm, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2019. Horn's ancestors, the Twynhams, purchased the household block and surrounding farmland from the Macarthurs after its subdivision for closer settlement at the beginning of the twentieth century. See also <https://camdenhistorynotes.com/2017/04/20/richlands-nsw-southern-tablelands>

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> At Camden Park, however, Aboriginal names were used to distinguish different parts of the Estate. These names were the Aboriginal names for the ponds located in those sections (Atkinson, 1988, p. 11).

‘Taralga’, the name for James’s holding south of Woolshed Creek presumably would have followed a similar topographical approach.<sup>28</sup> It was assumed by the early pioneers that *Taralga* was a similar striking visual referent—‘three hills’.<sup>29</sup> A topographical reference like this would have the practical impact of being able to guide the very earliest traveler or prospective employee, letting them know that they were near their final destination (Wheaton, 1923).



**Figure 3.** 1846 map identifying Tarralga Estate (Macarthur family papers 1789-1930 [First collection]: Vol. 95)<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Horn (private communication) argues that in the correspondence and documents of the time James and William made little reference to ‘Taralga’ as a station name, preferring to use the name ‘Argyle Lands’. Locally, however, ‘Taralga’ was widely used as a name referring to their estate in the 1830s. and 1840s. It was this practice that was recorded on Dixon’s map and in newspapers of the period.

<sup>29</sup> Although I was raised in Taralga I have no idea where these three hills might be. Others are prepared to speculate, though. Hunt (1990) was happy to accede to the description; and a former president of Taralga Historical Society remarked laconically that there were ‘plenty of hills around Taralga to choose from...’

<sup>30</sup> Taken from a short-lived seven-year agreement signed by Lachlan Macalister in May 1846 which leased ‘Strathaird’ to James and William Macarthur. It was revoked two years later.



James Macarthur, without identifying specifically why, had a clearly stated preference for the use of Aboriginal placenames for naming topographical features (Macarthur, 1837, p. 182) and ‘Taralga’ was the Aboriginal name he bestowed on his portion of the family’s earliest holdings in the district.

Indigenous names for topographical features were not only useful to early explorers and workers. As noted above, the Surveyor-General Thomas Mitchell found them useful in ensuring clear locational references for the process of subdividing the colony’s lands for grant and purchase by settlers. Jervis makes this point in his description of the issuance of tickets of occupation to settlers around Bathurst and the Nepean in the early 1820s (Jervis, 1937, p. 377):

With the spread of settlement consequent on the discovery of the country west of the Blue Mountains and south of the Nepean, individuals were permitted to occupy grazing lands with their stock, and, to regularize the occupation, ‘tickets of occupation’ were issued between 1821 and 1824. In many of these tickets, the native name of the locality was given as a means of identifying the country occupied. It is clear that the settlers, in their applications, were required to describe the location of the one they sought, and the use of the native name simplified the question of the position of the country applied for.

In this sense Aboriginal placenames allowed for the more effective commodification of land in an unfamiliar continent. Local Indigenous knowledge was being used in pursuit of their own dispossession: the recording of placenames was likely to reflect the settlers’ priorities for land acquisition. For example, the Aboriginal names being appropriated would have assisted clear identification of land boundaries between stations. So it would not be a surprise to see, for instance, creeks and rivers used as station names as well as other large bodies of water, such as lakes. And in fact, many of the early station names appear to be clearly linked to water sources, predominantly creeks—‘Bolong’ (Hassal), ‘Bunnaby’ (Hillas), ‘Taralga’ (James Macarthur) and ‘Burra Burra Lagoon’ (William Macarthur).



**Figure 4.** *County of Argyle, N.S.W. (1872).* [detail]<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> This map has a few glaring misspellings – including *Taraco* which was, by the 1870s, the flourishing township of Taralga.

In the rush to confirm land ownership the actual meanings of the Aboriginal place or locality names were superfluous to the immediate task at hand. This may help explain why so few records exist of their meanings. On the other hand, as noted by the *The Colonist* in October 1835, their meanings could have been of clear assistance in locating boundaries as these ‘names...are always highly descriptive of the physical characteristics of these places, and (are) of course highly appropriate.’ So it is possible that the meanings at the time of the placename’s initial recording were obvious and self-evident and only later, with the loss of habitat and wildlife, did they become more of a mystery.

‘Burra Burra Lagoon’ is listed as the name of John Macarthur’s Station in a Government Notice dated 1 June 1829. This notice provided a table listing stations in the colony and their distances from Sydney (*Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 1829). This suggests that in the very earliest period of settlement *Burra Burra Lagoon* was briefly an alternative name to *Taralga* for the combined Macarthur holdings. From the 1834 Nineteen Counties map we can see that there were buildings identified near ‘Burra Burra Lagoon’ but none were marked at ‘Taralga’. But it was ‘Taralga’ that prevailed over ‘Burra Burra Lagoon’ as an early station name for their combined holdings.

The Squatters Map from 1837 gives ‘Taralga’ as the station name for the combined holdings of Edward Macarthur (Dixon et al, 1837). Nonetheless, with the acquiring of Thomas Howe’s small Richland’s Estate in 1837, and the relocation of their overseer’s residence to that location in 1839, ‘Richlands’ became the preferred name of the Macarthur brothers for their Argyle holdings.

James Macarthur’s reputation as a dispassionate, practical businessman and conservative politician may suggest that his reason for adoption of an Aboriginal name verged towards the practical than the sentimental. Why replace the local with an alien term with potentially jarring implications? Henry Haygarth (1848, p. 145), in discussing the overlanders’ adoption of Aboriginal names, argues for this practice in the following way:

Upon the whole it appears far better taste to adopt the native names, wherever they exist. It is wearisome to hear of Windsor, Richmond, and other such familiar nominations at the antipodes; and perhaps not a little tantalizing when they are given to places which, as the York coachman is said to have remarked of New York, could only be recognised by being so totally *unlike* their namesakes in England. As for such names as ‘Jerry’s Plains,’ ‘Patrick’s Plains,’ ‘Paddy’s River,’ and many others not more dignified, it seems a cruelty to inflict them on a new country.

Macarthur would have been uniquely placed to be aware of this unsettling juxtaposition of the old with the new, having been raised *first* as a child in Australia and *then* in England as a teenager before his return to live permanently Australia as an adult in 1817. Henry Parkes described him as an ‘Australian born Englishman’ (Ward, 1981, p. 3). He was a man whose accent and mannerisms marked him out as an immigrant; they hid, however, a deep (and at the time a possibly unusual) appreciation of his native country (op.cit., p. 27).

We do therefore have strong evidence from contemporary debates about the use of Aboriginal placenames as James Macarthur’s possible motivation in adopting *Taralga* as his station name. More broadly, James was a great admirer of nature (Bonyhady, 2000, p. 85).



In his *New South Wales: its present state and future prospects* (1837, p. 186) he observed that, while settlers often choose their estates based on their natural beauty, the act of developing the property destroys the very reason for that choice:

The first steps towards forming a home amidst the wilds are not only toilsome, but in some way disheartening. Even those natural beauties, which may have influenced the settler in his selection of a site, are converted into deformity. The forest must be hewn down: and, in its immediate effects, nothing can be more desolating than this operation.

Where the land was relatively free of timber (such as he would have found in and around Taralga) he noted ‘even in such situations, the first step [sic] towards a settlement are destructive of natural beauties...’. But he went on to make the point that this destruction is temporary and soon to be replaced by ‘the charms of culture and civilization’.

By the mid to late 1830s the almost middle-aged James Macarthur appears to be struggling against a distinct, perhaps more youthful, characteristic of his personality, as observed by his biographer John Manning Ward (1981, p. 27):

There was a dreamy, imaginative side to James Macarthur, which he would indulge when riding alone. He loved the Australian trees, the majestic mountain ranges, the ‘vast sublimities of nature’ and *the quiet streams* [my italics]. He loved them most when nobody, unless it were William, shared them with him.

It is this characteristic that provides a poignancy to the observed internal conflict of the younger settler identified in the passage above. A reflection in his journal on the final day of his excursion into Argyle in 1821 describes well the emotional salve of the Australian landscape for the young Macarthur:

...I accordingly set out and reached home in good time, and in much better health than when I set out bushranging. This sort of life is to me an efficacious, and at the same time agreeable restorative. Roaming in lonely independence through almost tractless wilds, and contemplating without interruption the vast sublimity of nature we lose the recollection of those unpleasant circumstances, which within the influence of Sydney's pollutions continually occur to harrass the mind.<sup>32</sup>

Paul Carter has termed Macarthur’s internalised conflict between his romantic vision of non-commodified ‘tractless’ nature and that of the land hungry pastoralist as *the pioneer’s paradox*—‘what is gained occurs at the price of irremediable loss’ (1988, p. 171).<sup>33</sup> In modern terms James held within himself the very common public political struggle between the environmentalist and the developer. His 1837 account neatly resolves the conflict in favour of the developer but his hidden passion for nature, contained in the unpublished poem ‘Taralga!’ and in his private journals, suggests a more complex and difficult engagement with the overlander’s paradox than he cared to admit publicly.

The retention of ‘Taralga’ by James as the station name would have inscribed this conflict permanently into his own internal mental map—that of the lost beauty of Taralga (Woolshed) Creek. It is possible that, to avoid this internal conflict, ‘Richlands’ was

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<sup>32</sup> A quote taken from James Macarthur’s journal by his mother (see Macarthur, 1821). Her extract differs significantly from the original manuscript text held in the Mitchell Library, suggesting his journal may have been rewritten for public consumption. The full context is found in Elizabeth Macarthur’s letter dated February 1821 in Macarthur Onslow (1914).

<sup>33</sup> Macarthur is of his time and completely ignores the shaping of the land by first nations people. Whether deliberate or not he ignores the role of the Aboriginal people entirely in his journal.

adopted as the name for the combined estate. Only later, in the late 1850s, with the proclamation of the Macarthurs' private village Taralga did we have the very clear emergence of the distinct 'charms of civilisation', as Macarthur would have understood the concept. Ironically this marker of 'civilisation' was to be designated through a contradictory placename which referenced the presence of an ancient culture and civilisation. Late nineteenth century residents' anglicisation of *Taralga* through *Trial-Gang* was an attempt to manage this uncomfortable contradiction by supressing the face-value evidence of prior Aboriginal ownership of the surrounding lands.

It is impossible to determine what specific parts of the Macarthur's large New South Wales holdings he is referring to as having their 'natural beauties' deformed by 1837. In my own memory Woolshed (Taralga) Creek was, and is, a rather unremarkable local waterway with very little native flora to speak of (at least easily observable from the nearby roads). Its current name *Woolshed Creek* is suggestive of the transition Macarthur speaks of.

As noted earlier, the 'Woolshed' element of the name refers to the Macarthurs' main wool industry infrastructure located there (Williamson, 2004, p. 1). The land around the creek was amongst the first areas sub-divided for closer settlement by small landholders (revealed, for instance in the 1862 *County of Argyll* map). The creek banks were dominated by the European willow in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the willows, now recognised as a weed, have recently been removed.

If we are to assume that *Taralga* means 'broлга' there is an interesting connection between James Macarthur and this iconic bird. James Macarthur first surveyed the Taralga district in a successful search for agricultural land in 1822, and we know that he had a specific interest in brolgas. He held a domesticated pair at his residence at Camden in the 1830s (Gould, 1846). Macarthur provided a vivid description of their antics to John Gould and this anecdote was included in Gould's entry for the broлга in his *Birds of Australia*:

...Mr James Macarthur informed me of a pair which he had kept in the immediate neighbourhood of his house at Camden, and which had become perfectly domesticated, so far attracted the notice of a pair of wild birds so as to induce them to settle and feed near the house, make acquaintance with himself and other members of the establishment, and become still tamer, to approach the yard, feed from his hand, and even to follow the domesticated birds into the kitchen, until unfortunately a servant imprudently seizing at one of the wild birds and tearing a handful of feathers from its back, the wildness of its disposition was roused, and darting forth followed by its companions it mounted in the air soaring higher and higher at every circle, at the same time uttering its hoarse call which was responded to by the tame birds below; for several days they did return and perform the same evolutions without alighting, until the dormant impulses of the tame birds being aroused they also mounted high in the air, winged their way to some far distant part of the country, and never returned to the home they had for so long been fostered.

A young James Macarthur took to writing romantic poetry from 1827,<sup>34</sup> and one of his untitled poems, whose first line begins 'Taralga! Thy limpid stream...' (printed in full in Appendix 3), may give us an indication of an additional reason as to why he might have

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<sup>34</sup> The following account comes from Alan Atkinson (1988): '...in spring 1827 James Macarthur took a little time off from his sheep and blue-rigged servants and turned his own mind to poetry...a rough artefact, this is the earliest sign from that part of the world of a white man feeling awe and affection for earth, shadow, water sunshine...' p. 25.

specifically named his original selection ‘Taralga’. The opening verse of the untitled poem is as follows:

Taralga! Thy limpid stream  
Ripples on with sparkling gleam  
Beneath the summer’s fervid beam  
Dispensing coolness far around  
And bright luxuriance in the ground  
Where Ipomeas sweet abound  
And melaleuca loves to lave  
Her Myrtle tresses in thy wave  
Seeming the silvery gems to crave<sup>35</sup>

There is a question as to whether the opening exclamation ‘Taralga!’ refers to his station or the creek. Whilst the poem is clearly an ode to the rivulet that marks the boundary between James and William’s selections it is reasonable to interpret *Taralga* as referring to James’s station and not the creek itself. Thus, the poem would read ‘Taralga (Station)! Thy limpid stream...’, the ‘limpid stream’ being Taralga station’s then-stunning water course and its associated habitat. ‘Taralga!’ is a general evocation of locality rather than of a specific feature such as the creek; the wider focus is shown by the fact that the poem also references Corroboree Hill.

In this reading we have no evidence of a name for the creek from the poem. *Trialgang* is the name for the creek as recorded by Mitchell and ‘Taralga!’ refers to some other unnamed characteristic of Macarthur’s station. In a few years, on the Nineteen Counties map, *Trialgang*, which clearly offends Mitchell’s stated placenaming principles, is replaced by the adjacent station name *Taralga*.

It is difficult to get a definitive answer to the question of what ‘Taralga!’ refers to in James Macarthur’s poem. James had written at least one other ‘river poem’, an ode to the mighty Nepean. This was dated September 1827 and was the ‘rough artefact’ identified by Atkinson. It begins ‘Gentle River! Calmly flowing/Midst thy bed of silvery sand...’. (Macarthur family papers, 1789-1930, vol. 24, pp, 366-367). The Taralga poem is clearly derivative, written after his musings on the Nepean. It is however more complex in its use of metaphor, suggesting a later date of authorship. Drawing on this earlier poem to assist our interpretation, we get the clumsily repetitive ‘Taralga (Creek)! Thy limpid stream...’.

‘Taralga!’ is very much a reference to the natural beauty of Woolshed Creek as he would have experienced it in his first exploratory visits into the district as a young man in 1822-1823. Unfortunately, there is no other contemporaneous record of his first impressions of the land he took up around Taralga apart from this evocative poem. (For the full text, see Appendix 3.). In the first years of settlement, he was more actively involved in the

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<sup>35</sup> ‘The “Taralga” poem, obviously later according to the watermarked paper, is one of many scribbles in a folder at Camden Park... the one I sent you is the only one devoted to Taralga.’ A. Macarthur Onslow, personal communication to Stephen Horn, owner of Richland’s Estate, dated 15.11.2000.

## A dance of brolgas?

management of the Taralga estate.<sup>36</sup> No imported name could have done justice to the uniquely Australian beauty he witnessed.

Did Macarthur really have a naming strategy of using Aboriginal names to reflect his station's distinct natural heritage? It is difficult to say: the evidence is very mixed. *Burra Burra* and *Taralga* may mean 'kangaroos' or 'black wallabies', and the 'broлга', respectively. But it is even more likely that *Burra Burra* simply refers to the local Gundungurra band.

If there was a specific naming intent behind the adoption of an Aboriginal name you would expect it might be recorded somewhere in the Macarthur family papers which provide some of the best documentation ever for an early Australian land estate. Although I did not undertake the necessary painstaking comprehensive review of the Macarthur papers in the Mitchell Library, the possibility always remains of an answer being found there. Nonetheless, nothing has emerged so far and researchers have had access to these papers for many years.

We need to be careful as we document these colonial arguments about placenaming to avoid applying a false logic to the observed haphazard and expedient naming practices used at the time. It is certainly true that use of local Indigenous placenames by other early settlers suggest a distinct lack of care in Aboriginal placename choice. Murrang Creek (Cowper's Creek) when translated becomes the tautological 'Creek Creek' (Barrett, 2016, p. 118; Blay & Williamson, 2007, p. 33). Tarlo River appears to be another tautology, 'River River' (Barrett, 2016, p. 97). It appears likely that Tarlo village's name was given to the river and not the other way round. The Aboriginal name for that part of the river is probably *Wooroondooroonbidgee* (Baker, 1843-1846a)

We also know that James Macarthur, when undertaking his two exploratory journeys into Argyle, searching for high value land for wool and meat production, was not accompanied by any Aboriginal interpreters or guides. James Macarthur's 'Taralga!' poem would have provided the perfect opportunity for an explanation of the Aboriginal origins of the name, yet none was provided.

Closer to home at Camden, where relationships with the local Gundungurra tribe were more extensive, James Macarthur found the Indigenous ways inscrutable. Whether it was because of reticence on behalf of the Aboriginal people in sharing their cultural knowledge, or a lack of curiosity and empathy on the Macarthur family's part, nothing much was ever recorded about their way of life at Camden (Atkinson, 1988, p. 8). This lack of documentation was even more pronounced with respect to their Argyle land, despite some evidence of close relationships with at least one local elder, Charlie Tarra (Smith, 1992, p. 29).

In any event, before the end of the first two decades of settlement in the Taralga district the Macarthur brothers (James, William and the estate owner Edward) opted to re-name their combined 'Taralga' district estate as the rather unimaginative, more commercially inspired and plainly descriptive 'Richlands'<sup>37</sup>. This was not a name they originated themselves but was adopted from Thomas and Leah Howe's small station which they had acquired in 1837 (Horn, 2008, p. 8). Some opinion, reported in *The Colonist* around this

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Horn, pers. comm., 19<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

<sup>37</sup> A view shared by Thomas Mitchell in his survey in 1828.

time, would have clearly viewed this decision with some derision given that *Taralga* and *Burra Burra* were:

...places that have already been known for centuries to the black natives, by names, which, independently altogether of their beauty, are always highly descriptive of the physical characteristics of these places, and of course highly appropriate... (The recent expedition of discovery, 1835)

The Macarthur use of placenames for their Argyle holdings demonstrates several contradictory relationships to their new lands, as identified by Philippa Gemmell-Smith (2018, p.133) who notes: 'Naming can be a practical tool for orientation, an act of possession and commodification, the beginning of a deep emotional connection, and a magical evocation.'

It was this last concept of 'magical evocation' that we see James Macarthur encountering in his '*Taralga*' poem.



**Figure 5.** Oxley (1822) *Chart* (detail). The unnamed *Taralga* and *Guinecor* Creeks appear just below *Burrah Burrah* Lake.



### 2.2.3 1828 Census

The 1828 Census was conducted vigorously in the Districts of Goulburn Plains and Cookbundoon (the area around Taralga) from late 1828 to early 1829. Local magistrates in a letter dated 28<sup>th</sup> January 1829 assured the Colonial Secretary that ‘no trouble on our part has been spared to ensure (the census’s) accuracy’.<sup>38</sup>

Each household that participated in the Census was required to list the names of all people living at their residence on the census form (known as the ‘Household Return’), the residences’ location, as well as various other demographic and agricultural data.<sup>39</sup>

The information on the Household Return was either recorded by the visiting constable, in this case Constable William Edwards, or the clerk who brought the forms, or was filled out by the head of the household. The information contained in the Household Returns was then transcribed into the ‘Alphabetical Return’ now available online.<sup>40</sup>

An examination of the Alphabetical Return throws up the interesting fact that all fifteen entries for employees at John and James Macarthur’s Station ‘Taralga’ begin, not with a *T* but with a *V* (see Appendix 2). Apart from that, the Alphabetical Return shows a variety of spellings. This suggests that many of the original household returns were completed by each individual household and not the constable or clerk. Given the aforementioned commitment to accuracy, this then would reflect a relatively consistent local pronunciation at that time. It is of course possible that some minor errors may have crept in when the Household Returns were transcribed into the Alphabetical Return.<sup>41</sup> But the fact that all ‘Taralga’ entries begin with a *V* is a significant pattern.

The overall lack of a consistent spelling is not a surprise given that the householders filling out the form would have been working entirely from an oral and unfamiliar language. They would likely have had poor literacy as well. As a result, any discernable recorded pattern of spelling may have also been influenced by the constable and/or clerk being responsible for the overall accuracy of the Cookbundoon District’s Household Returns.

No complete record exists, as the original Household Returns were lost. Nonetheless, as Table 1 shows, while there was some variety in spelling *Taralga* in November 1828, when the census was undertaken, certain sounds are very consistent. The initial consonant is always a *V*, the vowel in the second syllable is consistently an *a*. The *-lg-* transcription is unclear in some entries in regard to the recording of the *g*. Some transcriptions contained in the 1980 publication record the *g* as a *y* (See Appendix 2). As this particular spelling has never been recorded elsewhere it is likely an error.

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<sup>38</sup> Letter no 29/977 with 29/6184 in 4/2041 contained in NSW State Archives. See Gail Davis, (2019?) Webinar: Records of the 1828 Census, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qeZ\\_bisSOM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qeZ_bisSOM) at 24’ 42”.

<sup>39</sup> *op. cit.*; refer 8’ 50” for a full list of the data collected.

<sup>40</sup> ancestry.com contains both the UK and Australian held 1828 Census volume manuscripts and has the advantage of being searchable electronically. I rely on the Australian version held by the New South Wales Archives which is freely available in digital format. The Australian version is regarded as more accurate than the UK volume which is a transcription of the Australian version.

<sup>41</sup> All of the original household returns have been lost. For an example of how transcription errors can occur, see the entry for William Bee, hut keeper, who is listed as from ‘Taralga’ in the 1980 publication of the 1828 census. When checking the original Alphabetical Return manuscript online I found that the original entry is in fact ‘Veralga’.

Chronological record	Tryalgang	Taralga
[Taralga] (1828)	[Burraiwalagang]	[Buralagalang]
Veralga (1828)		[Vuralagalang /Vuralgalang] † Veralga Viralga Varalga Veralgo (1828 Census)
Tryalgang / Trialgang / Trail-Gang (1832, 1857, 1886)	Trialgang Trial-Gang Tryalgang	[Teralagalang /Taralgalang]†
Trialgar <sup>o</sup> / Trialgor (1833, 1838)	Trialgar Trialgor	
Tarralga / Taralgo / Teralga (1835, 1837, 1840)		Teralga Taralga*

**Table 1.** *Taralga* and *Tryalgang*: possible development

\*Taralga was recorded in July 1828 newspaper pre-dating the 1828 census by a few months. But the census provides the best documentation of the oral use of the word between first settlement and the late 1820's.

<sup>o</sup> Taken from the New South Wales General Post Office Directory 1833 as Macalister's station name.

† This usage is not recorded anywhere but I deduce that it follows a similar pattern where the plural or intensifier *-y/g/-ang* is dropped. This closely follows the pattern of 'Teralalong', Alexander Turner's station near Grabben Gullen.

The main variation in spelling was in respect of the first unstressed syllable 'Tar-'. The lack of a stress on this syllable would have made it very hard for the householder to determine the exact sound; hence the variation. We also know that an unstressed first syllable was often omitted in the transcription of Aboriginal words, for example 'brolga'. It could be interpreted as an *a*, *i* or *e* as transcribed in the census, or omitted entirely as in 'brolga'. There is however no mistake about the second syllable *a* in the 1828 census records. All versions of *Veralga* make the second syllable *-a-*. Whatever the differences in spelling the sound is basically similar in all the variants, with the most common of the residence entries being 'Veralga'.

The Gundungurra language has no *v* consonant (or voiced fricative generally) so this would suggest early settlers may have misheard an original *b* (a voiced stop or plosive) (Barrett, 2016, p. 24). Thus 'Baralga' or 'Buralga' is very likely the root word for *Taralga* based on our modern understanding of the Burra Burra band's language.

The form *Taralga*, based on the spelling contained in his poem, appears to be James Macarthur's preferred transcription from an original Aboriginal word. It should be noted that while James's residence was listed in the 1828 Census as being spelt 'Viralga' (see Appendix 2) this recording was not linked to Macarthur himself. Ward (1981, p. 41) records James as arriving in England on the 11 September 1828. By the time the Census collectors arrived at Taralga he would have been long gone. As one of the earliest explorers

and the first white settler in the district, his transcription has historically been preferred. Is there anything in the Census transcription that could overturn this preference?

One important factor would be if we could find some evidence of sustained interactions between Macarthur's locally engaged convicts, employees and overseers and the local Aboriginal people. If there was evidence of cross-cultural engagement on a semi-regular basis with local Aborigines, this could suggest that the 1828 Census transcription might have been a case of intercultural transmission (rather than mere random variation resulting from the employees and convicts mispronouncing a wholly unfamiliar Aboriginal word).

We do have evidence from Thomas Taylor Junior's 1908 memoir. The young Taylor lived in the present location of modern-day Taralga from just after his birth in 1827 until he was about 8 years old. His first memories were of the period just after early settlement until his family moved away to nearby Bannaby in 1836. Of this early period in Taralga he recalls vividly the consequences of punishment to the backs of the convicts who were tended to by his mother. He then notes:

I being the only white child in this part of the country I had no playmates except little black boys, there were plenty of blacks here at that time. It was about this time that a famous gathering of blacks called a Coroberee (sic) was held at or on Coroberee Hill which gave it that name. I did not witness it. I was too young to be allowed to go but I heard it much talked about at the time and afterwards. (Golspie Progress and Landcare Association, 2005, p. 40).

Taylor's recollection is significant in confirming early ongoing cross-cultural relations between the Taylors, their neighbours and the local Aboriginal people. This is evidenced both through the memorable last corroboree which some local settlers attended and also through young Thomas Taylor's memories of regular play with Aboriginal children.

The fact that Taylor played regularly with the other Aboriginal children his own age says something significant about the level of trust and cross-cultural interactions between the two communities. This in turn suggests we may be able to rely more heavily on the 'Verlga' transcription rather than 'Taralga' as a clue to the sound of the original Aboriginal name.

### 2.2.4 Assessment of Gilmore's theory

Placename books published in the 1920s and 1930s, when reviewed, did not reveal an entry for *Taralga*. A few later publications record *Taralga* with the meaning 'native companion' (as Reed, 1969); none, however, provided a source. The earliest entry I could find in a placename book was in Martin (1943). The Geographical Names Board of New South Wales search page of its register also gives no information on the origins of *Taralga*'s name.<sup>42</sup> Although it might seem that Gilmore's 1932 book of poems is thus the earliest written record of the 'native companion' theory for *Taralga*'s origins, it is in fact not so. A Mrs. W. K. Symonds supplied a placename list for *The Lone Hand* (1914) that offered this meaning for the Aboriginal *Taralga*:

TARALGA - Another form of 'bralgah,' the native companion (T and B are inter-changeable in the aboriginal language).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> <https://proposals.gnb.nsw.gov.au/public/geonames/search>

<sup>43</sup> This 'interchangeable t and b' argument would appear to draw on an observation contained in R. H. Matthew's *The Gundungurra Language* (1900). This is not consistent with our modern understandings and the



Gilmore's and Symonds' explanations are different enough to suggest they may have come from independent sources. Neither Gilmore nor Symonds provides a written source that could further confirm the link proposed here. For Gilmore this was not unusual as she had a controversial tendency of adopting stories told by others as her own. It is easy to conclude that her source for the origin of Taralga's name is her father. But in her correspondence with Mary White, she is apparently completely unaware of these stories (Gilmore, 1931). A careful reading of Gilmore's argument suggests only that she is using her father's knowledge of a particular location around Taralga as being a place with many brolgas. Gilmore herself makes the speculative leap that this place was called *Taralga* and connects it to the village name.

Gilmore also makes no mention of James Macarthur's connection to brolgas. This connection, as far as I can determine, appears to be an entirely original observation. It may, however, also be the origin of the broлга theory.

But in terms of the rules for recovering placenames from the historical record outlined by Harold Koch (Box 2, above), we should perhaps be sceptical. No other report in Australian newspapers and magazines, or anywhere else, apart from Gilmore and Symonds, discusses this theory. This includes all the articles which reported the views of the early pioneers on Taralga's name origin. Nor was there, in the early period of colonial settlement, any other early recording of Taralga's meaning that I could find.

On the other hand, it was well understood at the time that *broлга* was derived from the Gamilaraay word 'buralga' or 'buralgha', from *bural* 'great, high' and *gha* 'head' (Ridley, 1875, p. 21). It would take only a modestly creative reading of *Taralga* to link it to 'Buralga'. My work here adds some circumstantial and linguistic credence to Gilmore's assertion, at least in relation to its form if not to its meaning; but only by an intensive search in the Mitchell Library archives would further light on the origin of her theory be likely.

Gilmore's proposal for the origin of *Taralga* was not the only placename etymology that referenced 'broлга': the surveyor J. F. Mann suggested *Kurkerducbidgee* for 'a small plain or river flat on the Shoalhaven River, about 12 miles on the Goulburn side of Braidwood' (MacPherson, 1886, p. 27). Mann claimed to be directly reporting the advice of an Aboriginal informant that *kurkerduc* meant 'broлга and *bidgee* 'river flat'. George Bennett, in his journey through the district, recorded the Aboriginal name of the brolgas that he sighted along the Wollondilly as *curaduck* (noted above; Bennett, 1834). His informant was most likely a Gundungurra man or woman, given the other names he recorded were Gundungurra words. Our current understanding of Aboriginal language phonology would suggest the transcription *gurragurradukbidgee* (drawing on Barrett, 2016, p. 32).

What we can say with good authority is that *Taralga* is an Aboriginal placename transcribed from the language of the local Aboriginal people. Consistency in spelling was gradually imposed by map makers, newspaper editors and residents. But, comparatively speaking, Taralga's path to consistent spelling in colonial newspapers was remarkably quick (See Table 2 below; for other examples see Koch, 2009).

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't' would normally signify a 'd' as the unvoiced 't' does not normally occur at the beginning or middle of words in Aboriginal languages.

For some time, until the early 1860s, there was evidence of use of both *Teralga* and *Taralga* to describe the incipient township, the creek and the district more generally. From the 1850s *Taralga* increasingly becomes the preferred spelling (see also Harris, 1967). As Table 2 shows, *Taralga* dominates as a placename from the very beginning of its being written in 1828; *Teralga* never entirely disappeared, though, despite the fact that *Taralga* was apparently James Macarthur’s preferred spelling.

Gilmore’s assertion that *Taralga* refers to another location is confirmed by James Macarthur’s ‘Taralga Creek’ poem from around 1827. Macarthur’s poem provides some evidence that the village was named after the creek and not the other way around.

Decade	Taralga/ Tarralga/ Taralgo	Taralga Creek	Teralga/ Teralga Creek	Tryalgang	Trialgang/ Trialgor/ Trialga	Trial-Gang/ Trial Gang
1820-29	2	0	0	0	0	0
1830-39	15*	4	0	3	2°	0
1840-49	211	0	10	0	0	0
1850-59	302	5	22 (10)	1	2	0
1860-69	1505	4	48	0	0	0
1870-79	2743	1	26 (4)	0	1	0

**Table 2.** Number of newspaper articles or advertisements containing *Taralga*, *Teralga*, *Trialgang*, *Trial Gang* (search period 1820 – 1879)

\* Nine identical advertisements referencing Taralga were published in newspapers in 1839 in response to a ‘Taralga Estate’ sheep sale.

° ‘Trialgor’ was in an advertisement published twice in the SMH in 1838 which appears to be a shortening of ‘Trialgang’.

#### 2.2.4 Billy Russell and ‘Burru Burru’ Station

All this speculation could be avoided if there was a recording from a native Gundungurra speaker on the meaning of the Macarthurs’ station name. Such a record does exist in the recollections of William Russell the ‘Chief man’ of the Gundungurra people of the Burratorang Valley. His recollections, and a Gundungurra wordlist, were published in a slim volume at Camden in 1914.

Russell was born in 1830 on Werribee Creek and passed away just after the publication of his recollections in 1914. In them he notes that his mother was born at Richlands at a place called Wonduck; that was her name, since it was the Gundungurra custom to give personal names from the location of birth. The slim volume records his memories of early settlers around Camden and the Burratorang Valley, including brief personal observations of James and William Macarthur (Russell, 1914, pp. 16, 20).

In his recollection of James Macarthur, Russell recalls seeing him taking 1000 sheep from his station at Richlands down to his property at Camden. He records the name of the station as being called ‘Burru Burru’ and gives the meaning of *burru* as ‘kangaroo’. Under the heading ‘The Word “Burru” – Kangaroo’, he describes the various uses of *burru* and lists the following relevant entries (p. 14):

Burru-Burru—Burra-Burra, a lake and run near Richlands, owned by Mr. James Macarthur.

Burru—A lake or water-hole near Cawdor. At places where good feeding ground and water was to be found, here generally mobs of kangaroos also, i.e. Burru.

As noted above, Burra Burra Lake was the name used very early on to refer to William's station north of Woolshed Creek and, in at least one early press report from 1829, to the Macarthurs' combined holdings in the district. Very soon after formally taking up their first selections 'Taralga' replaced 'Burra Burra' and became the preferred station name for their holdings both north and south of Woolshed Creek. Russell's spelling of 'Burru' in reference to the lake was never recorded anywhere else. However, *burra/burrai* also means 'rock wallaby'<sup>44</sup> (Barrett, 2016, p. 73), so it is possible that Russell's recollections have become slightly confused with the passage of time. This interpretation would enable us to honour both Russell's recollection and the written record.

Russell makes particular mention of William's kind and helpful attitude towards his people. It is perhaps this warm memory that may explain why he is mistaken in his reference to James's run as being 'Burra Burra Station'. He was recalling William's station name. Given that there is no suggestion that he ever visited the Taralga district his memories could either be a mistaken inference from his mother's connection to the district or alternatively may record the Aboriginal name of Richland's station.

Russell's recollections come tantalisingly close to providing us with an explanation for Taralga's origins. Ultimately, they miss the mark. What they do definitively provide, however, is the meaning for William Macarthur's short-lived station name to the north of Woolshed Creek. William most likely adopted the local name of the lake denoting the presence of many kangaroos. *Burrah Burrah Lake* made an appearance in many of the early colonial maps that otherwise provided only a few other nearby placenames. It would seem likely that James Macarthur followed a similar approach with the name for his station south of the creek. James was clearly fascinated by brolgas, and Russell's recollections in the Gundungurra word list he provided give a spelling of broлга (or, native companion) as *Buralga*, very close to *Taralga* (Russell, 1914, p. 25).

However, the Macarthur-Onslow Camden Estate's records may have provided a clear locational referent for Taralga via Macarthur's poem. The earliest maps, including the Nineteen Counties map of 1834, have Woolshed Creek as *Taralga Creek*. Macarthur's poem provides evidence that the early business centre, James Macarthur's first selection and later the village were named after the creek and not the other way around.

This is a clear challenge to the long-conjectured link between brolgas and *Taralga*. If, as I argue, Macarthur was fascinated with brolgas, and given that Taralga Creek would have been a good habitat for them, why aren't they recorded in some way in his poem? The poem vividly describes the fauna of the creek and the striking rockfall at Corroboree Hill which abuts it (Macarthur has a unique spelling for the hill - *Corromborro*), but makes no mention of brolgas.<sup>45 46</sup> The best excuse we have is that James Macarthur adopted the local name for the creek according to his practical preference for use of local Aboriginal

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<sup>44</sup> And presumably the *Buurraa Buurraa* spelling that Barrett also records as meaning 'anything black' at p. 73.

<sup>45</sup> The following account comes from Atkinson (1988): '...in spring 1827 James Macarthur took a little time off from his sheep and blue-rigged servants and turned his own mind to poetry...a rough artefact, this is the earliest sign from that part of the world of a white man feeling awe and affection for earth, shadow, water sunshine...'

<sup>46</sup> 'The "Taralga" poem, obviously later according to the watermarked paper, is one of many scribbles in a folder at Camden Park... the one I sent you is the only one devoted to Taralga.' A. Macarthur Onslow, personal communication to Stephen Horn, owner of Richland's Estate, dated 15.11.2000.

placenames and was not overly concerned with the actual meaning of the word. More likely is that, given this was a private poem which he never intended to be published, reporting a meaning was seen by him as unnecessary, since it was written primarily for Macarthur's own edification.

During the period up to 1860, newspapers intermittently recorded another name—*Tryalgang* or *Trialgang*, similar but not identical to *Taralga*. What can we say about this?

### 2.3 'Trialgang'

Of the relatively few articles found which contain 'Trial Gang' or 'Trialgang', most comment on the origins of the name *Taralga* as part of a brief historical survey. Some simply report what was probably common knowledge of some 'old hands'. No further explanation of its meaning or origin is provided. This was most likely because its origins were not commonly known amongst late nineteenth and early twentieth century residents. An important point, not understood by most late nineteenth century writers, is that *Trialgang* is pronounced with three syllables: 'tri-al-gang'. As noted earlier, 'Trialgang', when read from the page and enunciated by a native English speaker becomes a two-syllable word 'Trial-Gang', sounding very much like the common convict term 'iron-gang'. *Tri-al-gang*(ng), once the -ng sound is dropped, more closely resembles *Taralga*.

'Trialgang' (as one word and with an 'i' not a 'y') can be found in newspapers from 1857 onwards. Significantly, in the first century of settlement *Trialgang* was used only once as the sole reference to the placename, in a January 1857 advertisement in the *Goulburn Herald and County of Argyle Advertiser*. It simply states (Stolen or Strayed, 1857) that a horse lost near Tuena was 'bred at Cherrygorang near Trialgang'. This advertisement was repeated once more a week later. 'Cherrygorang' (now 'Cherragorang') is now a property name near Taralga. No other article has been found with *Trialgang* being used to denote the district or town without an accompanying reference to *Taralga*.

The first descriptive report in which *Trialgang* was used to describe Taralga came in 1873 (H.D.T.O.R., 1873). This was an article in the *Goulburn Herald* about a visit to Wombeyan Caves in which an early tourist reported a brief stopover at the village for supplies and extra horses. The article contains both *Taralga* and *Trialgang* but offers no explanation of the origins of the name *Taralga*. Rather, it provides evidence that some locals were using *Trialgang* as an alternative place or locality name for *Taralga*. Its use in the article is suggestive of it being an Aboriginal word for Taralga and not a convict term: the 'Old Jack' who fails to help the tourist find a horse and a guide for his onward journey from Taralga to the caves is sarcastically referred to as 'King of Trialgang'.

This appears to be a reference to the early colonial administrators' practice of naming key Aboriginal chiefs as 'Kings'. The term was then used on brass neck plates or 'King plates' worn by Aboriginal chiefs in the early days of white settlement. Charles Macalister's letter to the *Goulburn Post* demonstrates a Taralgarian 'old hands' understanding of the term 'King' in describing the background of the discovery of Mulwaree Tommy's breast or King plate (Macalister, 1902).

**Box 3: Lists of Aboriginal placenames and early ‘expert’ views**

In the late 1800s several public and private attempts were made to collect information about Aboriginal placenames. These were a response to the idea that ‘the Aboriginal race was dying out’ and their lore and knowledge needed to be written down. The most ambitious of these collections was a survey carried out by the Royal Anthropological Society of Australasia (RASA). The RASA sent surveys to numerous towns and locations throughout New South Wales. These surveys solicited the help mainly of local police officers but also of mining registrars, to collect information about Aboriginal placenames (See Windsor, 2009). Interestingly, Taralga’s submission to the RASA’s survey in 1899, which was signed by Taralga’s mining registrar G. T. Goodhew, contained only five names and not *Taralga* itself. Goodhew was completely silent on the origins of Taralga’s name, simply noting that ‘There are a number of other native names in this district but have been unable to get the meanings of them.’ By 1900 the origins of *Taralga* were in dispute and it is possible that Goodhew did not view *Taralga* as being of Aboriginal origin.

In a couple of private lists reported on in Trove from 1896 and 1900 ‘Trialgang’ is listed as an incorrect anglicised version of *Taralga*. A Mr Squire, in an introduction to his list published in the *Maitland Weekly Mercury* in 1896, notes that:

The following list of Aboriginal names of some of the New South Wales and Queensland towns, rivers, etc., with their meaning, I have compiled from various sources. It may prove of interest to some readers of this journal. The aboriginal nomenclature is remarkably euphonious, and it is to be regretted that imported names of little beauty, and in most instances devoid of sense in their application, should have been adopted as disfigurements to our maps and gazetteers.

‘Trialgang’ is listed along with commonly known Australian placenames. The list contains the common placename, be it of Aboriginal or settler origin, for an Australian town or place followed by Squire’s preferred Aboriginal placename or his preferred spelling of the listed Aboriginal placename. For example, ‘Coogee-Kugee’. The ‘Trialgang’-‘Taralga’ pairing stands out since ‘Taralga’, his preferred placename, is in fact the already commonly-agreed name for the village. *Trialgang*, in the second half of the nineteenth century, rarely appears in Trove searches as a placename for Taralga. For Squire, euphonics were of primary importance and ‘Taralga’ sounds much sweeter than ‘Trialgang’.

John Frederick Mann provided a similar but even more authoritative list for our purpose in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1900. Mann was a former explorer and surveyor for the New South Wales Government between 1848 and 1880, working across a range of counties including Argyle (ADB, 1974). He was also married to the daughter of Thomas Mitchell, the New South Wales Surveyor General, from the late 1820’s. In his list, he also states that the correct form of ‘Trialgang’ is ‘Taralga (Mann, 1900).

From the context of both Mann and Squires’ lists, and ‘Trialgang’s’ spelling as one word not two, it would be possible to assume that, in their view, ‘Trialgang’ and ‘Taralga’ were different versions of the same Aboriginal placename. Based on the broader construction of their lists it is also plausible that they both considered ‘Trialgang’ represented an anglicised mispronunciation of the preferred Aboriginal word ‘Taralga’. In other words, ‘Trialgang’ was a corruption of ‘Taralga’. We know in fact that Mann, in a review of a book on the Aboriginal names of Australian rivers, thought ‘Trialgang’ was an English word derived from the Aboriginal ‘Taralga’ (MacPherson, 1886 p. 26) and not the other way around, as asserted by Taralga’s old hands.

## A dance of brolgas?

In addition, we have early ‘misspellings’ of Taralga from the 1828 census and they are not at all similar to ‘Trialgang’. There are no listings of *Trialgang* or *Trialga* in the 1828 census that I could find. On this basis, it seems unlikely that *Taralga* is a corruption of ‘Trialgang’ as was proposed by the early settler Walter Bradbury, even though this might seem to be a logical derivation.

What we can also clearly conclude is that whatever Aboriginal word *Trialgang* is derived from, the original transcription was poor, and the outcome ‘Tryalgang’ or ‘Trialgang’ is most probably very unlike the original spoken Aboriginal word. It is in this sense that the early experts were right to be wary of ‘Trialgang’ (Box 3). What they got wrong was to assume that *Trialgang* and *Taralga* were linguistically related and that *Taralga* is the more accurate transcription.

English to Aboriginal-sounding English word (Local tradition)	Aboriginal variant of same word (Walter Bradbury 1922)	Aboriginal to English word (J.F. Mann & W. A. Squire)	This paper
Trial-gang → Taralga	Trialgang → Taralga	Taralga → Trialgang	Teralagalang → Taralga

**Table 3.** *Trialgang* and *Taralga* transformations\*

\* Note that Taylor (1908) and Bradbury (1925) implicitly suggest that *Trialgang* and *Taralga* are different words.

### 2.3.1 *Walter Bradbury and Thomas Taylor Jnr*

In 1922 a large gathering of district pioneers was held in Taralga. Walter Bradbury, an elderly former resident of Taralga, attended. (He reached his centenary in 1935 in good health but passed away just before his 101st birthday in 1936.) At the gathering, he recounted his early experiences in the Taralga district to the *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* (Taralga’s early days, Pioneers honoured. A remarkable gathering, 1922):

Walter Bradbury (87), of the Paling Yards<sup>47</sup>, came to Taralga in '47 in Oct. Grass was four feet high. The town-ship was then called Trialgang, and later Trialga and Taralga. It got its name from the three round hills near the township.

‘The first races were on Humbug Flat. There was a large tribe of blacks in the district, Miranda was the king. He was buried at the Paling Yards, and I was at his wake,’ says Mr. Bradbury. ‘There was a large ring made, and the body of the king was placed in it, and fires were lighted all round to keep the ‘Debil Debil’ away.’

<sup>47</sup> Paling Yards is about 33 kilometres from Taralga across the Abercrombie River on the road to Oberon.



Walter Bradbury's story of Miranda's<sup>48</sup> burial ceremony at Paling Yards in 1852 as a 17-year-old (Macalister, 1907, pp. 84-85)<sup>49</sup> demonstrates a youthful familiarity with the local Burra Burra tribe.

Bradbury's evolution theory possibly suggests an original pronunciation of 'Tri-al-gang' i.e. three hills. Bradbury, however, does not explicitly give 'Trialgang' either an Aboriginal or a settler origin. We can deduce a number of facts from this brief report. Firstly, he is probably not suggesting something similar to Wheaton's 'Triangle to Taralga' argument (section 2.1 above), as he does not begin his preferred transformation sequence with the word 'Triangle'. This would imply that his view is similar to the *Australian Town and Country Journal* correspondent's report from 36 years earlier (Taralga, 1886). Another clue is that the spelling is recorded as 'Trialgang' – one word. There is also no explicit mention of a convict connection. The report also discusses Bradbury's direct connection with the early Aboriginal people in the district, which I take to imply that 'Trialgang' is of Aboriginal and not convict origin.<sup>50</sup> These facts together suggest that Bradbury supported the Aboriginal origins of 'Trialgang'.

This would help confirm 'Trialgang' and its Aboriginal origins. However, Bradbury's proposed evolution is partially contradicted by the fact that, even by the early 1850s, 'Taralga' had been in common usage in newspapers and maps for over 20 years. To help unravel Bradbury's confused recollection it might be useful to reflect on how the use of *Taralga* as a placename developed in the early years of colonial settlement. Initially 'Taralga' was an Aboriginal placename adopted by James Macarthur for his station to the south of Woolshed Creek. Between the mid to late 1820s (when this naming was confirmed) and 1858 (when the private village was established), 'Taralga' briefly came to refer to the whole of the Macarthur's station. A station as large as 'Taralga' would have needed a business centre, where many employees would have lived and key services, such as pound keeper, cobbler and overseer, would have been co-located. It is this business centre which was subdivided and proclaimed a village in 1858. An advertisement on 14 February 1840 in the *Sydney Herald* for sale of sheep from Macarthurs' estates revealed a clear statement of *Taralga* as a specific location rather than as a station name:

The undermentioned valuable Flocks of Sheep the Property of Messrs. James and William Macarthur, which will be delivered either at their Station *at Taralga* in Argyle, or upon their Estate at Camden....<sup>51</sup>

Lachlan Ross, a long-term resident of the district who lived at Rossville near Myrtleville<sup>52</sup>, reported to Wheaton that when he first arrived at Taralga in 1843 it consisted of only two

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<sup>48</sup> Smith (c.1992) notes 'In the 1830s the leader of this (Burra Burra) clan was Murrandah (c.1788–1852). His breastplate, with the words "Murrandah, Chief of the Burra Burra tribe" is in the Camden Museum. His name was anglicised to Miranda or Maranda.'

<sup>49</sup> For date of Miranda's death see Leighwood, 1890. Macalister (1907) gives a detailed and authentic first-person account of Miranda's burial ceremony at Paling Yards. Yet he doesn't explicitly claim he witnessed the burial nor state his source. In developing his book, he wrote to friends seeking information on particular matters of interest. This description may have drawn on his good friend Walter Bradbury's recollections.

<sup>50</sup> Given his father's reason for emigration in 1836 was as a military guard for convicts it is reasonable to assume he may have been familiar with convict terminology and slang (Hundredth birthday yesterday, 1935).

<sup>51</sup> By 1840 the combined estate was already renamed 'Richlands'.

<sup>52</sup> Myrtleville, the village, was proclaimed in 1859 one year after Taralga. This was the initiative of the nearby landowner Sir Charles Cowper (Address on the history of the Taralga area, 2018). Unlike Taralga,

houses and a mature orchard planted, on his estimation, some six or seven years earlier (Wheaton, 1923, p 17). The two houses were occupied respectively by the public pound-keeper, Duncan Rankin, and by the Macarthur's sheep overseer, Thomas Denning. Two houses, however, do not constitute a township or village.

The first signs of a village being established emerged in the early 1850s according to Thomas Taylor Jnr's memoir. Almost a quarter of a century after Ross's first impressions, in 1866 the village was prospering with a population of 110 (Wheaton, 1923). In 1847 Bradbury may have observed that the southern business centre of the Macarthur estate, as it was then, had a variant name. The station and business centre was 'Taralga',<sup>53</sup> while the broader district was referred to as *Trialga* or *Tryalgang*. The trick of memory some 75 years later led Bradbury to merge *Trialgang* with *Taralga*.

In 1925 in the *Taralga Echo*, we have Bradbury appearing to correct his 1922 statement:

Mr. Walter Bradbury, an old resident of Taralga and Crookwell, who will pass the 90th mile-post in November, next, is on a visit to the district for the purpose of having a ride in the first passenger train running between Taralga and Goulburn. Mr. Bradbury arrived in the Taralga district with his father in the 'forties. In those days they had to travel to Goulburn for their mail, and there was not a tree removed from the track where the main road from Taralga to Goulburn now exists. Mr. Bradbury recalls the convicts who worked on Macarthur's estate, Taralga, in those days. The locality was then known as 'Trial Gang'.<sup>54</sup> Although bordering on 90 years of age, Mr. Bradbury is hale and hearty and his faculties are keen.

The use of the two-word form in this report, unfortunately for our inquiry, reflects the settler-origin spelling. It does, however, provide the only confirmation from an early settler for a distinctive use of *Tryalgang* as a locality name and not as an alternative placename for the Taralga village.

In the listing for Lachlan Macalister in the New South Wales General Post Office Directory for 1833 we have his residence reported as *Trialgar*. Lachlan Macalister was both a resident landowner and overseer for the Macarthurs in the mid-to-late 1820s and early 1830s. When appointed as head of the Argyle mounted police in 1829 he began to roam more widely across the southern tablelands before permanently relocating to the Camden district in the mid 1830's. Many of the places recorded in the Directory only refer to stations, since there were in this early period few regional 'centres' to speak of.

This 'Trialgar' reference is therefore mysterious. *Taralga*, and by local tradition its origin word 'Trialgang' or its shortened version 'Trialgar', has always been associated with the Macarthurs' land. In the 1828 census Macalister's residence is given as 'Strathaird', the historically well-known and established name of his station. In Macalister's 1834 listing we

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and probably because of its close neighbour's earlier emergence as a village from around 1850, it was swept away by the onslaught of centralisation and today is no more than a few houses. Locally the Aboriginal name for Myrtleville is recorded as *Mucki Win Nombin* – meaning 'ghost' (Blay & Williamson, 2007, pp. 8, 33).

<sup>53</sup> With the purchase of Thomas Howes holdings at 'Richlands' in 1837, the main house used by the Macarthurs and their head overseer was located at 'Richlands' from 1839 near Burra Burra Lake. 'Taralga' nonetheless continued to be a location of business activity such as the poundkeeper and sheep overseer.

<sup>54</sup> Another singular locality name recorded in 1839 by a traveller passing through the Taralga district is *Bunowbunow*. See *The Sydney Herald*, 'Original Correspondence', Wednesday 17 April 1839, p. 2 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/12857693>.



also have the most unusual spelling, nowhere else found, of ‘Triedgoor’. This only makes sense if we assume a typesetting error that, if corrected, might read ‘Trielgoor’.<sup>55</sup>

However, we have very strong evidence that Lachlan Macalister himself was the first source of ‘Trialgang’ being transferred into the historical record and that the transition/evolution theories put forward by Bradbury and others are misplaced.

One of Sir Thomas Mitchell’s early field note and sketch books records a ‘Trialgang Creek’. Mitchell’s first major survey expedition, during which he was appointed New South Wales Surveyor General in May 1828, was through the southern highland and tableland areas.<sup>56</sup> By June 1828 he had crossed the Cookbundoon River near Tarlo on his way to camp on Lachlan Macalister’s Station near Myrtle Creek. Settling in for a brief period of surveying, Mitchell was accompanied by Macalister on the 24<sup>th</sup> June to his next camp near Burra Burra Lagoon:

Tuesday 24th June, Mr. Macalister kindly sent his team of bullocks, to bring forward our carts, while we moved to Burraburra Lagoon... This morning Mr Macalister rode with me to Bura Lagoon, and shewed me some of the finest land I have ever seen in the colony, to the SW. of the Lagoon, adjoining Mr McArthur's land. It consists of extensive open alluvial flats, and hills of the richest soil, all on basaltic rock.

It is during this journey that he would have crossed the major creek between Macalister’s residence and Burra Burra Lagoon. He makes no reference in this entry to this creek, but in the entry of the following day he notes:

Commenced a trace ~~Not~~ Eastward for the boundary of Argyle, and after about a mile due East, we found the head of a small rivulet (most likely Guinecor Creek), which keeping an Easterly direction joins the Trialgang creek - At the place where these waters pop through the Cockbundoon range - These united from a river called the Guinyecor - which follows the very direction in which a natural boundary was wanted.

This record of ‘Trialgang’ on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1828 is the earliest that I have found, pre-dating by four years the 1832 newspaper report in the *Sydney Gazette* (M.W.H., 1832, p. 3). ‘Trialgang Creek’ is without doubt a reference here to Taralga/Woolshed Creek.

The location of Macalister’s residence in 1828 may have been closer to modern day Taralga than might be assumed given that his first land grant, occupied as early as 1822, was adjacent to Myrtle Creek some 9km south of Taralga. Contemporaneous critical reports from 1829 enviously noted that Macalister’s close links to the Macarthurs afforded him both paid employment, as the Macarthurs’ sheep overseer on their Argyle station, and a generous land grant (‘The Governor has been pleased to appoint...’, 1829).

Hence his residence, reported here by Mitchell, may have been on or close to the Macarthurs’ Taralga Estate, so as to allow him to discharge both his salaried responsibilities as sheep overseer *and* to oversee his own property ‘Strathaird’. It is not impossible, given the Directory lists him as located at Trialgar, that his permanent residence in this early period was in fact located at Taralga itself. The 1834 *Nineteen Counties* map, however has recorded a residence at the headwaters of Kerrawary Creek towards the southern end of

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<sup>55</sup> This mistake was, however, repeated in the next three editions.

<sup>56</sup> The transcript of these Field notes can be found at <https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/9arp7NGn>  
See C 42: Sir T. L. Mitchell’s field, note and sketchbook, 1828-1830.

his 4000 acre selection. That selection appears to have been leased from as early as 13<sup>th</sup> June 1828 before final purchase in 1834.

The use of ‘Trialgar’ in the Directory suggests that its source is Macalister himself or one of his employees. But equally this purported lineage is contradicted by the obvious error. Macalister’s station name is, by 1833, well established as ‘Strathaird’. Two possible explanations are therefore available to us.

Firstly, we might posit that the Directory is relying on out-of-date information, and Macalister’s location listing as *Trialgar* refers to an earlier period when he was employed as a sheep overseer at Taralga on the Macarthur estate. The replication of *Triedgoor* over three editions is at least evidence of a lack of attention to detail by the Post Office Directory’s editors. Alternatively, it could be argued that *Trialgar* records a briefly emerging locality name for the territory north of Myrtle Creek and south of the Abercrombie River. It is this locality name that is mistakenly ascribed to Macalister’s Station. Despite being in error, the Directory is good evidence in that the spelling ‘Trialgar’ is distinctively Lachlan Macalister’s.

While it is not unusual for the names of Australian waterways to have multiple Indigenous names that can refer to various places along the river’s path, Woolshed Creek, at just under 20km long, is perhaps too short to attract multiple names. Alternatively, we could also surmise, based on the haphazard way Aboriginal names were adopted by the new settlers in the district, that they are different placenames resulting from being acquired from different Aboriginal informants.

If we are to apply Occam’s Razor to the problem, it would be judicious to assume that ‘Trialgang’ and ‘Taralga Creek’ are synonymous rival transcriptions of an earlier Aboriginal root word. The problem, however, is that if we are trying to retrieve the original Aboriginal word using these rival transcriptions as a base for the transformation, we will get quite different outcomes (see Table 1, above, and discussion below).

It is difficult, based on the evidence collected here, to choose the more ‘authentic’ version. Mitchell, when he recorded ‘Trialgang’ may have last heard the original some 24 hours previously, and may be transforming what he heard into a word more familiar to him and therefore more English-sounding.

While this is possible, the fact that his record of the form is the same as the later records suggests he is probably being relatively faithful to what he was told by Macalister. Nonetheless, a few months later when the Census is taken there is no recording of ‘Trialgang’ and the multiple independent records of variations of *Taralga* are really not that similar to ‘Trialgang’. (See further discussion on the Gundungurra language, below).

It is important to note that while the spelling that Mitchell records of ‘Trialgang’ invites the reader to enunciate an anglicised sequence ‘Trial – gang’, it is very likely that the sound Mitchell heard was considerably less English-sounding than that. It may in fact have had a stressed second syllable and sounded more like ‘Try-al-gang’. On this basis we should be wary of automatically rejecting ‘Trialgang’ as an authentic transcription for *Taralga*. If then the two spellings might be equally acceptable as a basis for recovering an original word, we are left with two rather different base forms, and we wonder whether they do in fact represent the same word.

‘Trialgang’ and ‘Taralga’ appear to have emerged contemporaneously in the late 1820s as rival transcriptions of the original Aboriginal name for Woolshed Creek. Mitchell’s field note is significant in that it is the only local report of a name for Trialgang/Taralga/Woolshed Creek in the crucial first years of settlement. However, Mitchell, or members of his team, thought better of including ‘Trialgang’ in the map record, perhaps concluding that it was too English-looking to passably represent the original Aboriginal word. The famous 1834 *Nineteen Counties* map includes Woolshed Creek prominently in the County of Argyle but spells it ‘Taralga’ as we do today, suggesting that ‘Trialgang’ was not viewed as an accurate transcription of the Aboriginal word.

‘Trialgang’ may not have pleased Mitchell, who had a stated preference for euphonic Aboriginal words, not a characteristic that the rather clumsy-sounding word holds. Many years later in 1887 Mitchell’s son-in-law, also a land surveyor, John Frederick Mann, saw ‘Trialgang’ in these terms (MacPherson, 1886, p. 26):

.... the distortion which all the native names have been subjected to, it is a matter of difficulty to obtain a reliable word. ‘Anyway will do to spell a native name, I have heard said on more than one occasion. One of our most reliable and accomplished surveyors confused the name ‘Cape Howe’ so as to represent the name Gabo and when such euphonious names as ‘Eurobodalla’, ‘Taralga’, ‘Larella,’and others are converted into ‘Boat Alley’, ‘Trialgang’, ‘Larry’s Lake’, &c., it behoves a philologist to proceed with caution.

Although *Trialgang*, unlike *Boat Alley* and *Larry’s Lake*, is not a genuine English word, Mann’s point still stands. Whether *Trialgang* arrives as a competing transcription of *Taralga*, or (less likely) from an entirely different Aboriginal word, it is nevertheless an effort to anglicise a foreign word.

### 2.3.2 Other early uses of ‘Trialgang’

In 1838 in the *Sydney Herald* (Notice. Whereas my horse was stolen..., 22 February), we have a notice for the return of a stolen horse left with William Macarthur’s overseer at ‘Trialgor’. This would appear to be a very clear reference to ‘Taralga’, since we know that Macarthur’s sheep overseer’s residence was at ‘Taralga’ in the early 1840s (Wheaton, 1923).<sup>57</sup> This confirms that the shortened ‘Tryalgang’ was also used to refer to either ‘Taralga’ or the broader district, thereby confirming the memory of Bradbury and Taylor that ‘Taralga’ and ‘Trialga’ were used, at least by 1838, to refer to the same general place. In 1851 we have ‘Trialgar’ in an advertisement for a horse lost near Richlands Abercrombie, in the *Goulburn Herald and County of Argyle Advertiser* (Fifty shillings reward, 21 June).

One similarity between these spellings is that they all involve people reporting at some distance from the district—Sydney, Berrima and Yass. There is also some question as to what these rare reports actually signify. A reasonable interpretation is that ‘Taralga’ was fast becoming the accepted spelling of the station and its emergent village and these isolated recordings are simply early and rare variant spellings of the same word.

There are two perceived problems with this interpretation that need to be addressed. One is that the ‘Tryalgang/Trialga/Trialgor/Trialgar’ variants might appear to represent rather

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<sup>57</sup> To complicate matters a little, there was a small 640-acre block of the large Macarthur estate located at ‘Tryalgang’. This was wedged between T.M. Moore and Macalister’s original grants from the early 1820s. See the 1862 *Map of the County of Argyle*, (New South Wales. Surveyor-General, 1862).

different-sounding words from ‘Taralga’. The second is based on a belief that the historical record indicates that ‘Taralga’ and the other variants refer to different features.

The first problem is based on two assumptions, both of which are unsafe. The first assumption is that while ‘Taralga’ has primary stress on its second syllable, the other variants are stressed on the first. It is, however, perfectly possible to give the second syllable in the variant set primary stress, so that (for example) ‘Trialga’ would be pronounced /tri-**al**-guh/. The coincidence of the English word *trial* would have been a strong and distorting influence on our intuition of what the pronunciation should be. The second assumption is that the sequence of sounds in the first syllable (that is, the *tri-* of the variant set and the *tar-* of ‘Taralga’) are too different to permit the thought that all the transcriptions are of the same original word. However, the two sequences display what linguists refer to as *metathesis*, the reversal of a sound sequence: here, that of a vowel and its following consonant. And this process is well-known and common in language development. (One example often given is the transforming of *prescription* to *perscription*.)

As for the problem of the historical record, it does provide some apparent support the ‘two separate words’ thesis. The 1828 census meticulously records a range of spellings for Taralga (see Appendix 2), and not one is similar to ‘Tryalgang/Trialgang’.<sup>58</sup> It has been suggested that this reflected a distinction between ‘Taralga’—the station and business centre name, and ‘Trialgang’—a location name that was used occasionally by some people to refer to the whole district. If ‘Trialgang’ and ‘Taralga’ were really variant forms of the same word, it is not clear why this was not somehow reflected in the Census records; so perhaps it could be argued that in 1828 they did refer to different things—a creek and a station, for instance—as had always been the case. Unfortunately for this argument, whether or not the variant forms were applied in 1828 to different features is irrelevant to the question of origin. Either way, such a difference in meaning could have developed whether the variants originated in the same word or not.

The obituary of Thomas Taylor Jnr, published in July 1914 in the *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*, also notes that ‘Trialgang’ was Taralga's early Aboriginal name in July 1827 when Taylor's father returned to the district. Taylor's memoir (Golspie Progress and Landcare Association, 2005, Book1, p. 40) clearly states that in 1827 his father ‘came to live at Taralga or Trialgang as it was then called’ and ‘it was a black’s name’.<sup>59</sup> We now know from Mitchell’s Field Notes and from the 1828 Census that Taralga Station was clearly not known as ‘Trialgang’ in 1828; rather, it was denoted by variants of ‘Veralga’. Taylor does not suggest that the placenames ‘Taralga’ and ‘Trialgang’ are related. He likely thought they were different names commonly used for the same place but his recollections are significant in providing evidence for the Aboriginal origins of Taralga’s name.<sup>60</sup>

Based on the fact that a number of local Aboriginal placenames had the suffix *-gang* – ‘Curroobungolang’ (*Currabungla*), ‘Cutty Gutty Gang’ (*Golspie*), it would seem likely that *Taralga* also originally had a suffix.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The fact that their initial consonant is a V is another oddity, noted in Section 3.2.2 below.

<sup>59</sup> One edition of his memoir, contained in the *Goulburn Historical Society Journal*, is less definitive. In this version he states only that he assumes it was of Aboriginal origin (Taylor, 1908).

<sup>60</sup> Stephen Tazewell, a well-respected local historian and former Taralga resident, thought this obvious.

<sup>61</sup> I recognise this is a big speculative leap, given no record of a ‘Taralgang’ apart from ‘Trialgang’ actually exists.

A synthesis of Taylor and Bradbury's recollections and the evidence from Mitchell's field notes would suggest that Bradbury's transition theory is roughly right—not from 'Trialgang', but rather from the much more straightforward 'Taralgang'. Time and the vagaries of memory have unnecessarily complicated Bradbury's transformation theory from his 1922 recollection. He would have been better to have followed the simpler transformation—'Taralgang' to 'Taralga'.<sup>62</sup>

### 2.3.3 *Early journeys*

Further evidence of the original location of 'Trialgang' and its later use as a locality name can be found in two reports from 1832 and 1850.

The first reference to a 'Trialgang' in the colonial newspaper archive occurs in the first decade of settlement. A report in the *Sydney Gazette* by an early traveller (M. W. H., 1832) of a trip from Bathurst to Bong Bong (Moss Vale) notes that after crossing the Abercrombie from Bingham and staying at Mr. J. Hassall's property at Bolong he stops at a Mr. J. J. Moore's property at 'Tryalgang'.

This is most likely a reference to the prominent early New South Wales settler Joshua John Moore. Moore took up property and later residence at Baw Baw, on the Wollondilly, near Goulburn in the 1830s. However, his name is not to be found near Taralga on any of the early Argyle cadastral maps.<sup>63</sup> The editor of the *Sydney Monitor* in 1837 remembered a station owned by a J. J. Moore in the very earliest years of the settlement of the southern tablelands as being somewhere to the north of Goulburn 'beyond Cookbundoon' (Major Mitchell and the blacks, 1837). This would also put the location of 'Tryalgang' in the Taralga district.<sup>64</sup> The record of this journey, possibly relevant to Taralga, is extracted here:

Bolong is the next place on this route, and is in the occupation of Mr. J. Hassall, affording good pasturage for numerous flocks. At Tryalgang, Mr. J. J. Moore has a farm, which is the traveller's last halt before reaching Goalhara (sic)<sup>65</sup>. The aspect of the country now improves; its appearance gradually becomes exhilarating, and indications of contiguity to the abodes of agricultural industry begin to present themselves.

The record of M.W.H.'s journey is not specific enough to locate his path exactly.<sup>66</sup>

Tazewell and Wheaton both record a T. M. Moore as having a very early 1823 land grant in the locality near current day Myrtleville (Tazewell, 1975; Wheaton, 1923), but there is no mention of a J. J. Moore (See also: Grants of land, 1837). The reference to J. J. Moore is likely a mistake: evidence to the contrary is quite tenuous, relying only on the assumption that our traveler, or the newspaper editor, mistook T. M. Moore's property for J. J. Moore's. The confusion between T. M. Moore and J. J. Moore as one of the district's original landowners occurs sporadically through the newspaper record.

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<sup>62</sup> For further elaboration of the original pronunciation of 'Taralgang', see discussion below.

<sup>63</sup> The best map for understanding the early settlers' ownership of land in the Taralga district is the *Map of the County of Argyle* (New South Wales. Surveyor-General, 1862).

<sup>64</sup> Today J. J. Moore is more prominently remembered as an absentee landholder at modern day Acton in Canberra from the 1820's where he settled for some time before formally applying for land (Brown, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> This appears to be a typesetting error. In the other reports, all of which appear to be based on this original report, it is clearly stated as Goulburn.

<sup>66</sup> George Bennett undertook a very similar journey, also in 1832, stopping at Charles Cowper's Estate at Chatsbury (which he calls 'Mingablah'), a few kilometres on from Myrtleville (Bennett, 1834).



It is necessary then, to identify the ‘Trialga’ of Lachlan Macalister, listed in the 1833 New South Wales Directory, as being linked in some way to T. M. Moore’s property. The transfer of Moore’s property to Macalister was recorded in 1837 (Grants of land, 1837). Macalister’s first land grant of 2000 acres was near current day Myrtleville (Wheaton, 1923). As discussed earlier, Mitchell’s field notes do not allow us to be sure of the exact location of Macalister’s station residence.

Macalister’s residence, at this time, may have been much closer to Taralga than I had imagined, at a location that would have allowed him to discharge his responsibilities to the Macarthurs as their sheep overseer and be close enough to Myrtle Creek where his own station was located. ‘Trialgang’ (or ‘Trialga’) appears to have been a usage favoured by Macalister for the district but, at least according to the 1828 Census, by no other locals.

Moore’s station was dominated by Macalister’s large station to the northwest and this may have resulted in the traveller being given ‘Tryalgang’ as a station name. The *Tryalgang* spelling appears to be a signature of Macalister when naming the Macarthur Estate south of the creek which divided their property. *Tryalgang*, therefore, probably represents a district locality name used by Macalister and his convicts and employees in distinction to *Taralga* as preferred by Macarthur and his employees. This locality name was most likely given to our traveller and was confused by him as being Moore’s station name.

Macalister had however named his station, which dominated Moore’s small station, ‘Strathaird’ after his ancestral home on the Isle of Skye. This had been in use for several years by 1832. Most other references, both in the early period of settlement and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, appear to locate Tryalgang at or near the location of modern day Taralga.

The last recorded use of ‘Tryalgang’ appears in a *Goulburn Herald* report of the pursuit of Flash Dan the bushranger:

CAPTURE OF A NOTORIOUS HORSE-STEALER. Through the untiring exertions of the Mounted Police the notorious Daniel Bell, alias Flash Dan, is once more in custody. It will be recollected that this worthy escaped some time ago from Berrima Gaol. As soon as he was at liberty he made his way towards the Murrumbidgee, picking up while he was there a couple of good horses, one a bay and the other a gray. The police at Wagga Wagga having obtained information of his whereabouts, two constables followed him to the Fish River but unfortunately missed him. He was heard of again at Tryalgang, and intelligence of his temporary location there was communicated to the Mounted Police stationed at Goulburn. Bagwell and Hewitt, two of the troopers, immediately started in pursuit, and after travelling on the track of their game for more than one hundred miles, across the Abercrombie and Barragarang mountains, succeeded in making a capture. (Domestic intelligence. 1850, 21 September)

It is perhaps significant that this is a police report. Lachlan Macalister led the Argyle mounted police force into the 1830s and it may be that his influence has resulted in the unusual use of ‘Tryalgang’ for a location that had been for many years denoted as ‘Taralga’.

This also provides some evidence that there was no gradual evolution from ‘Trialgang’ to ‘Taralga’. It is likely that ‘Trialgang/Tryalgang’ and ‘Taralga’ were rival transcriptions from the local Aboriginal language. While there is only sporadic early evidence for ‘Trialgang’ being a placename for the town, it became an alternative name for Taralga which remained in local, and fairly limited, use by ‘old hands’. By the 1920s, although recorded in local newspapers, this usage was probably extinct in oral exchanges in the town and was a



memory of only the very oldest pioneers. This may have led to the subsequent confusion over its origins.

There was however one report by the Rev. A. J. Webb in his travelogue on Goulburn and surrounds that, in the late 1880s, locals pronounced Taralga as ‘Trialga’ (Webb, 1889). This again appears to be a shortening of ‘Tryalgang’, a standard practice of settlers in the area when anglicising Aboriginal placenames, and not a slurring of ‘Taralga’. Webb could be in error if we are to believe Walter Bradbury’s recollection in 1925, and in fact this usage was for the district name and not for the village.

#### 2.3.4 *Three stony hills*

From 1857 ‘Tryalgang’ is either written as ‘Trialgang’ or ‘Trial Gang’. But what is its meaning? As noted above, the reported Aboriginal meaning of *Trialgang* was ‘three hills’ or ‘three stony hills’. Is it possible that the reported meanings from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries accurately reference its original meaning? This would appear possible given that the names *Taralga* and *Trialgang* both refer to Woolshed Creek; so the late 19<sup>th</sup> century reported meaning of ‘three stony hills’ is feasible.

The *Tri-* prefix seems a likely stimulus for a translation that required *three* round or stony hills. In the two reports ‘three’ and ‘hill’ are the common concepts. However, even if there are three hills in the valley (see the earlier discussion) the spelling confusingly reads an English meaning into what is an Aboriginal word. Therefore, it is most likely that this was an translation based on guesswork and false etymology.

A ‘best bet’ translation would rely on our *Town and Country* correspondent's attempt shorn of this anglicised interpretation of *tri-*. In this way, we would arrive at a meaning for *Trialgang* as ‘stony hills’ or possibly ‘hill of many stones’. ‘Stony hills’ is an accurate description of the geological and topographical character of Taralga and its surrounding district. ‘Hill of many stones’ is a good description of Corroboree Hill, a few miles from Taralga's present location.<sup>67</sup> There is a detailed description of a visit to Corroboree Hill in an 1887 article in the *Sydney Mail and Advertiser* (3 September, p. 3):

There are two singular instances of Nature's eccentric handiwork in the district— to one I have made reference, viz., the Wombian Caves; the other is situated about two miles N.N.E. from the town, and is called Corroboree. Having reached the vicinity of Corroboree, you ascend a ridge of the range some two to three hundred feet above the beautiful neighbouring gullies. Traversing this ridge, all but denuded — and naturally so, apparently — of timber, though deep in splendid grass, you reach its abrupt termination to find, that at that termination, Nature has at some time or other apparently taken a contract for stone-breaking, there being myriads upon myriads of stones, from a small pebble size to many tons, but all having various faces, and sharp corners and edges. Just before reaching the end of the ridge, you come upon what I cannot conceive to be other than the double crater of an old volcano. Lining the sides and down into the depths of these strange huge pits, are hundreds of thousands of these stones as sharp as though only broken last year.

This description would have supported Corroboree Hill as a potential location for ‘Trialgang’ or ‘Hill of many stones’, and indeed Corroboree Hill lies above Woolshed (Taralga) Creek. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the sound of ‘Trialgang’ that

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<sup>67</sup> Interestingly Corroboree Hill's name on the old maps is *Corobora Hill*. This old placename was formally changed to *Corroboree Hill* in 1966.

corresponds to any Gundungurra word relating to stones, as far as we know. (See the discussion in section 2.3.5 below.)

It is interesting to speculate, even if you had no knowledge of the meaning of ‘Trialgang’, how you might deduce its meaning from other placenames from the surrounding area. Significantly, three other mountains not far from Taralga have the suffix *-gang*. Mittagong was spelt ‘Mittagang’ in an early 19<sup>th</sup> century report from *The Australian* (Mr. Cunningham. 1827, September 12). Morton (2015) reports that it meant ‘little mountain’ in the local Aboriginal language. In another early report of a tourist visit in 1896 to Wombeyan caves using the little-taken route from Mittagong (A trip. From Bowral to the Wombeyan Caves & back. 1896), we hear of difficulties negotiating the 2000-foot plus ‘Mount Tellegang’. This landmark is now spelt ‘Tallygang’ and is presumably an Aboriginal placename which describes something about the relevant hill or mountain. Jim Smith notes that Mount Colong’s Gundungurra name is ‘Gillingang’ or ‘Dyilligang’ (Smith, 2014, p. 89). A reasonable conclusion might be that these similarities in placename structure could have led Walter Bradbury and the 1886 correspondent to infer that ‘Trialgang’ relates to hills/mountains in some way. However, our current understanding of Gundungurra grammar reveals that this correlation is meaningless. The *-gang* suffix does not denote hills.

Then what might be the *actual* meaning of ‘Tryalgang’? The various views as to its meaning are all linked to Taralga’s current location and to a supposed distinctive ‘three hills’ formation near the town. None of these hypotheses appear credible based on our understanding of the local Aboriginal language, Gundungurra. All we have left is very imperfect guesswork.

If we replace the initial ‘t’ with a ‘b’, assuming a similar pattern as with *Taralga*, and then expand the word based on the rules of Gundungerra (Jim Barrett, pers. com.), we might get *barywalagang* or *burraivalagang*. This might be seen as very similar to *burraival*, ‘musk duck’ (see Barrett, 2016, pp. 66, 73).<sup>68</sup> This connects with Woolshed Creek as a known habitat for the musk duck. Musk ducks, however, prefer deep water and, according to some accounts, are primarily solitary birds and not commonly seen together. This makes the shallow Taralga Creek an unlikely location for a ‘place of many musk ducks’.

Based again on Barrett’s work, it may be possible to identify the original form with *burraimarlagang* ‘a place of many black rock crystals’.<sup>69</sup> Near Woolshed Creek on Corroboree Hill there is a large rockfall (see the first-hand account of a picnic on the hill, above) which may have quartz crystals present.

A key problem with this analysis is that to get a reliably sounding Aboriginal word from *Tryalgang* we must engage in considerable linguistic guesswork. And in order to infer a meaning based on Jim Barrett’s work, we must make a change in the first consonant of ‘t’ to ‘b’. This step, unlike *Taralga*, has no basis in the documentary record.

In addition, our final hypothesised transcription *burraivalagang* is quite different from *Taralga*. This calls into question our assumption that *Trialgang* and *Taralga* are derived from the same Aboriginal root word. If they are not, the hypothetical ‘t’ > ‘b’ step becomes even

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<sup>68</sup> Barrett records two possible meanings and spellings: *burrai-wal* – ‘musk duck’ and *burrai-wuuluu* – ‘night time’; *wuuluu* means ‘always’, so the compound would refer to night and the musk duck being always dark.

<sup>69</sup> See Barrett pp. 25, 96.

more unjustifiable. As a result *burrainwarlagang* or *burrainwalagang* become very unreliable starting points for a *Taralga* etymology.

Reporter	Recorded meaning of Tryalgang/Tarywalagang	Other possible meanings Tryalgang/Tarywalagang
Walter Bradbury	Three round hills	Many hills
<i>Town and Country</i> correspondent	Three stony hills	Stony hill

**Table 4.** Speculative meanings of ‘Tryalgang’ in newspaper references

Placename	Meaning	Uses	Theories of origin and meaning
Taralga Teralga Tarralga	No clear report of a meaning in Trove search of NSW newspapers.	From 1828	Local newspapers report it either as a corruption of an Aboriginal word or as a convict term. ‘Taralga’ used commonly as a placename for the station and later the village from 1828. Teralga (Creek) much less used. For an Aboriginal placename, an uncommonly consistent spelling emerges in colonial newspapers very early.
Tryalgang Trialgar Trialgor Trialgang	Three stony hills, three round hills.	1832 1838 1850 1851 1857 1873  1886 1889 1896 1900 1914 1922 1925	Aboriginal. Rarely used as a placename. First used in 1832 as ‘Tryalgang’ in a report of a journey from Bathurst district to Bateman's Bay. Next in a report of the pursuit of the Bushranger ‘Flash Dan’. Then in a stray stock advertisement in 1857 we have the first use of a new spelling ‘Trialgang’. Used next as an implied Aboriginal placename in 1873.  Reports from 1886 largely relate to discussions of Taralga's name origins. As a distinctly Aboriginal word it largely disappears from the record from the early 1920s.
Trial Gang Trial-Gang	Gang of convicts to be trialed, sentenced, and punished.	1886 1887 1914 1917 1922 1925 1938	Convict. <i>Taralga</i> emerges from an Aboriginal or settler mispronunciation of convict term ‘Trial-Gang’. From 1920s on no reference to it as a placename of potential Aboriginal origin. Becomes the dominant explanation of Taralga's name.
Triangle	Three hills	1917 1922	<i>Taralga</i> resulted from Aboriginal mispronunciation of ‘Triangle’ which evolved to ‘Trialga’ and finally ‘Taralga’.
Baralga	Aboriginal	1914 1932	<i>Baralga</i> is the local Aboriginal word for ‘brolga’. Found in newspaper reviews of Gilmore’s ‘Under the Wilgas’ in the <i>Brisbane Courier</i> and <i>Tasmanian Voice</i> . Also in placename list from the <i>Lone Hand</i> in 1914.

**Table 5.** Dates and meanings for *Taralga* placename forms in newspaper references

### 2.3.5 Insights from Gundungurra names

In trying to understand the origins of Taralga's name it is useful to look at nearby placenames for which we already have a slightly better understanding of their meaning. I will use insights from the Gundungurra language provided by Jim Barrett's book.

Language analysis is problematic if there are no remaining native speakers left. In the case of Taralga, the problem is that our knowledge is of a dialect different from that spoken in the area in the first half of the 19th century. The great majority of the surviving Gundungurra grammar and vocabulary is based on the Burraborang Valley dialect of the language collected from various primary sources by Jim Barrett (Barrett, 2016). What follows draws heavily on his book and on subsequent personal communications.

Trying to peer back in time to analyse the newspaper record in terms of how it relates to modern understandings of the Gundungurra language is a fraught exercise. It is probably best left for experts, but nonetheless a few cautious observations follow.

As far as Taralga district placenames are concerned, we do, broadly speaking, have a basic guide for the general type of meanings we are looking for. Smith (2009, p. 105) has outlined some Gundungurra placenaming principles as follows:

Most of the placenames are words in everyday use for trees, plants and animals. 'Joolundoo', 'Gurrabulla' and 'Mullindi' appear to be placenames that describe common topographic features: rivers, river confluences and deep water. That is, there is a 'generic' quality to Gundungurra placenames. In theory, any area *with an abundance of a plant or animal or with some particular geographic feature* [my italics] could have been named with the word for that species or feature.

So, the memories of both Bradbury and the anonymous *Town and Country Journal* correspondent are broadly consistent with these principles. Three round hills and/or three stony hills would correspond well to Gundungurra's generic placenaming practices.

Taking the early pioneers' theories at face value, as far as the meaning of 'Tryalgang' is concerned, we have a choice. 'Three hills' is consistent across the two reports. 'Stoney' is only recorded in the early 1886 article. But we do have some circumstantial topographical support for 'stone', as it is a distinctive feature of Corroboree Hill, an important ceremonial site next to Taralga (now Woolshed) Creek.

The *-lang* suffix works as an intensifier or pluraliser in Gundungurra (Barrett 2016, p. 71), in a similar fashion to the Greek-based *poly-* prefix in English (as in *Polynesia* and *polyglot*). The suffix *-lang* can make a noun plural (that is, more than two, several or many). Another function of the suffix is to make the root word increase in some way. This intensifier effect does not always simply increase the number of the root word. For example, if as speculated in our reports *Taralga* means 'hill', *Taralgang* could mean 'mountain'.

A key element in 'Tryalgang' is the *-gang* sequence. Barrett argues that the two suffixes, while slightly different in form, each rely on the *-ng* as the operative part—that is, the determinative intensifier. However the placenames described in this paper (at least, those with reliable meanings given) which end in *-ng* are essentially plurals. Many Gundungurra words have suffixes beginning with *ga*, *ya*, *ma* etc. but these are inserted simply to allow for good euphonics with the first part the word (Barrett, p. 72). Barrett argues that the variations in the suffix do not convey any different meaning. He also notes that, although

these types of endings are so common it is impossible to determine all their meanings, many may act as intensifiers similar to *-lang*.

So the meaning of *Cutty-Gutty Yang* (Golspie's Aboriginal placename)<sup>70</sup> is recorded as a place where 'plenty of parrots sit down' (Linguistic information, 1900). This appears to be a verbatim recording from Aboriginal English where 'sit down' means 'to exist' (Haygarth, 1848) or 'to be' (Barrett, 2016, p. 50). So *Cutty Gutty Gang*, from its Aboriginal English translation, means 'plenty of parrots there'.

According to Barrett (2016), the Gundungurra did not have any specific names for numbers above two.<sup>71</sup> 'Three' has been recorded as *bulaa midung* 'two plus one'. As such *Tryalgang* is unlikely to mean three of anything. (It's a fair assumption that the 'try-' transcription may have improperly suggested such a meaning, based on the common prefix from Latin and Grfeek.) What may have been misremembered is the plural or multiplier effect of *-gang*. In light of the unique geological formations on Corroboree Hill, 'stone' is a good candidate for the true meaning.

The *Taralga* locality is also noted for the many stones that are found in the soil, so the name would still make sense without tying it to the formations on Corroboree Hill. But the problem here is that the Gundungurra word for 'stone' was recorded by Jim Barrett as *gurrubung* (Barrett, 2016).

A locality near *Taralga*, *Currabungla*<sup>72</sup>, a variant of *gurrubung*, was recorded by RASA's collection as meaning 'stone' and/or 'lump'. Charles Macalister, who lived at 'Currabungla' between 1845 and 1851, gave the meaning as 'big stone in water' (Macalister, 1905). This placename could describe the large granite-bouldered canyon through which *Currabungla* Creek flows on its way down to the *Bolong* at *Tryl Tyrl*, or the rock formations on the ridge near the *Laggan/Tyrl Tyrl* crossroads.

A property taken up by Matthew Macalister at the headwaters of *Currabungla* Creek in 1837 was called 'Curroobungolang', which would mean 'place of many stones'. Other spellings from early maps include 'Currabungalang' (and see Williamson, 2004, p. 1). According to Charles Macalister (1902) local Aboriginal people sourced their axe stones from a ridge in this area:

Mention of *Currabungla* reminds me that on a ridge near the old homestead of *Currabungla* (where the writer's family lived from 1845 to '51), the darkies used to find the stone from which they fashioned their 'tomahawks.' The stone is a kind of serpentine and flint, and I daresay a few stoneheads as sharpened by the aborigines would still be found thereabouts if anyone cared to look.

The name therefore could be a practical reference to a place where there was a good source of stone for axe heads.

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<sup>70</sup> Trove's most common spelling in the mid-to late nineteenth century is *Cutty Gutty Yang*. The earliest I could find was *Cutty Gutty Gang* from the NSW Government Gazette, 1838. One local history, however, records *Gidda-Gidda-ang*, a likely more accurate representation of the Aboriginal name (Williamson, 1985, p.1).

<sup>71</sup> The idea that Aboriginal peoples generally did not count beyond three is contested by some writers. See Spencer (2016, p. 13). For a more linguistic rebuttal, see Harris (1987).

<sup>72</sup> The Geographical Names Board of New South Wales records 'Currabungla Creek' as the preferred spelling but gives 'Carrabungla' as a variant. The earliest spelling in Trove is 'Curroobungolang' (NSW Government Gazette, 21 February 1838, p. 148).



*Buralga* is first recorded as coming from the Gamilaraay language in northern New South Wales. Wiradjuri uses *burralgang* for ‘broлга’.<sup>73</sup> The word for the broлга bird (or ‘native companion’) in Gundungurra is *buralaga* (Barrett, 2016) or *buralga* (Russell, 1914, p. 25). Russell’s word list is from a native speaker but has a spelling without the extra ‘a’ syllable, as in the Gamilaraay word. It is tempting to prefer this spelling, since *buralga* and *Taralga* are very similar. And it may well be the case that such variation from the norm in spoken forms was not unusual.<sup>74</sup> However, it is more likely that Russell’s recorded form is an artefact of an English-speaker’s transcription.

The rules of Gundungurra mandate that when two consonants appear together, they must be broken by a vowel (Barrett, 2016, p. 27). Hence with *Taralga* (and with *Trialgang*), to retrieve the spoken form we need to include an ‘a’ or similar vowel between ‘l’ and ‘g’ (Jim Barrett, private communication). Following that rule produces the word ‘Taralaga’. We know from *Carrabungla* that the dropping of the ‘a’ and the ‘ng’ sound by the early settlers shortened the placename from the original ‘Carrabungalong’.

There is also an archaic placename near Grabben Gullen which follows this rule exactly. An early map of the county of King from the 1840s has a ‘Terralaconc’ spelling of ‘Terralagong’ as a location and/or station name for Alexander Turner’s property in that area (Baker, 1843-46b, plate 12). In a distinct variation from other placenames discussed here, later maps have a longer and possibly more accurate spelling of ‘Teralagolong’. This however simply reflects the earliest recording of this placename in the New South Wales *Government Gazette* of the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1837. Current spelling conventions for Gundungurra would give ‘Turalagang’ or ‘Turalagalang’, forms which look very like an original version of *Taralga*.

The documentary record has several variant spellings of ‘Terralagolong’ in its early use (see Table 6). The *Government Gazette* reference to ‘Teralgalong’ on 30 April 1864 clearly indicates this placename’s close connection with *Taralga*. If we accept Smith’s understanding of Gundungurra placenaming practices, this repetition of placenames some 50km apart would not be unexpected (Smith, 2009, p. 105). This provides evidence that *Taralga* is a generic name in line with most other known Aboriginal placenames in and around the district. It is also important to note that while there are many variants of this placename none come close to the form ‘Tryalgang’.

Placename form	Year	Source
Terralagolong	1837	NSW Government Gazette
Terragalong	1841	Dixon, Squatters Map, 2nd Edition
Terralaconc	1843 - 1846	Baker, Map of County of King
Teralgalong	1864	NSW Government Gazette
Teralagolong	1899	Department of Lands mapping

**Table 6.** Variants of ‘Terralagolong’

According to Barrett, of the more than 2000 words recorded for Gundungurra, none begin with what an English speaker would hear as the voiceless /t/ sound (Barrett, 2016). In

<sup>73</sup> <https://wiradjuri.wccpl.com.au/> - wordlist accessed 26th May 2020

<sup>74</sup> Evidence is scant, but there is a crime report from the *Tamworth Examiner* in December 1868 of a place about 40 miles from Moree, presumably Taralga, referred to as ‘Taralaga’. The report later was copied in a number of newspapers (including the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Atrocious crime. 1869).



English, /t/ and its voiced counterpart /d/ are contrastive—that is, substituting one for the other will change the meaning of a word (as ‘tin’ v ‘din’). In Aboriginal languages generally, the difference between those voiceless and voiced consonants does not affect meaning; they operate within the language as one unit of sound (called by linguists a ‘phoneme’) which we might record as either ‘t’ or ‘d’. As a result, the voiceless and voiced variants of this phoneme tend to be distributed within words on an altogether different basis. For instance, the unvoiced [t] occurs at the end of words and its voiced variant [d] elsewhere (Troy, 1994); and where [t] does occur at the beginning of a word it is unlikely to be the obviously aspirated [t] that we find in English—it would sound to English-speaking ears more like a [d].

Most often, people who have recorded and translated Aboriginal words adopt the voiced form /d/ in their transcriptions. But not always: around Taralga we have ‘Tryl-Tryl’, ‘Turallo’ and ‘Tarlo’, all placenames spelt with a ‘t’ at the beginning. One imagines that they could have been transcribed just as easily as ‘Dryl-Dryl’, and given that the distinction between vowels like ‘e’, ‘a’ and ‘o’ is not always clear, ‘Duralla’ and ‘Darla’. Similarly, ‘Terralagolong’ might well have been written ‘Durralagalang’.

Another complication is that some of these Gundungurra consonants may not all have been the same as the English /t/ and /d/, which are *alveolar* stops, produced by the tip of the tongue touching the alveolar ridge just behind the upper teeth. Gundungurra also has /dh/ (a *dental* stop, with the blade of the tongue touching the front teeth) as well as the alveolar /d/. In addition, /dy/ (a *palatal* stop, with the tongue pressed against the hard palate) was part of the sound system.

If early settlers hearing Gundungurra experienced difficulty in distinguishing these different sounds from one another, it would not be surprising if they had written ‘t’ or ‘d’ instead. With better knowledge, perhaps those placenames near Taralga might have been written as ‘Dhryl-Dhryl’ and ‘Dyuralla’ and ‘Dyurralagalang’.

In fact, we know from the documentary record that confusion of consonants was even more extreme than this. The early explorer’s guide Charlie Tarra was from Taralga (Smith, c.1992) and greatly assisted explorers in their discovery of the Gippsland. We might suspect that his name could have been spelt as ‘Darra’, given what we know about ‘t’/‘d’ variation. But we know from the record of that expedition (Excursion to Corner Inlet, 1841) that he took his last name from the name of his tribe. And his tribe? The Burra Burra.

### 2.3.6 *Alternative spellings support an Aboriginal origin*

There is no doubt that ‘Trialgang’ is a poor transcription of the original Aboriginal word. Its misinterpretation as being of convict origin comes from the word’s awkward pronunciation by speakers of English: it certainly sounds like two English words mashed together incongruously. And, because of that, the story recounted in the Wikipedia entry for *Taralga*—‘a location for the trials of convicts and bushrangers before the Crown’—might at first seem conceivably true. The story loses any sense of veracity, however, when

the gap between the Aboriginal pronunciation of the word and the early settlers' perception of it is established.

There is one final nail in the coffin of the convict-origin theory, and it comes from the very existence of alternative spellings. As we have already noted, there were several variant spellings of 'Trialgang'. One in particular, 'Tryalgang', appeared in newspapers in a number of articles in 1832 and again in to do with 'hills', clearly had no relation to convict matters.

In general terms, the fact that alternative spellings existed for 'Trialgang' is itself evidence of the Aboriginal origin of the word. (See more broadly Koch, 2009). If it had been an English word, there would have been a clear and reliable spelling.

### 3 CONCLUSION

Some things are clear. Firstly, *Taralga* is a word of Aboriginal origin. Secondly, so is *Tryalgang*, for which there is no evidence of any connection to convicts or to trials. It is most likely, in fact, that the two words are variants of each other. Third, *Taralga* most probably had the meaning of 'brolga'.

#### 3.1 Unreliable voices

Before discussing the evidence gathered and reported here it is worth noting that nothing collected suggests a direct report, either from an Aboriginal or colonial source, confirming a meaning for *Taralga*. All suggested meanings from local sources (who had at least some possible connection to the Macarthurs, or evidence of contact with local Aboriginal people) are implausible. Billy Russell's recollections come very close to providing an answer from a Gundungurra man, but ultimately fall short as he identifies the Macarthurs' holdings as 'Burra Burra', a name rarely used to denote their entire estate.

More specifically, the sources that give 'brolga' as the original meaning of *Taralga* have no local links that go far enough back in time to be authoritative. Mary Gilmore's testimony, while rich in Aboriginal cultural context, appears to be nothing more than speculation based on the received spelling of *Taralga* (Gilmore, 1932). And although there is one earlier report (Symonds, 1914) of the *Taralga* – 'brolga' connection, it similarly provides no source to identify its origin.

#### 3.2 Competing forms

Our ability to establish a reliable meaning for *Taralga* hinges on two issues. The first relates to the opening consonant. The 'brolga' theory would appear to depend on the success of our research which has tried to displace the time-honoured spelling of the word with an initial 't'. Unless we can construct a defensible argument for replacing 't' with 'b' we are left with a core origin word of *deralga*, a spelling which has no obvious identification in Gundungurra.

The second issue relates to the stated aim of our paper—understanding the nature of the relationship between *Trialgang* and *Taralga*. This relationship is linguistically, geographically, and historically difficult to unravel, given the poor historical sources at our disposal.

The best received wisdom from the past was that *Taralga* evolved out of *Trialgang*. I have tried to explore, as far as I can, the counternarrative that *Trialgang* is linguistically and geographically separate from *Taralga*. That is, *Trialgang* was the original name for Taralga/Woolshed Creek and *Taralga* was an unrelated word denoting James MacArthur's southern part of Richland's Estate. This station name replaced, within a decade of first settlement, *Trialgang* as the name of the creek dividing the Macarthurs' Richland's Estate.

In the final analysis, however, I find my attempt at articulating this counter-narrative not persuasive enough to overturn the general intent of the original theory.

### 3.2.1 Trialgang/Taralga as parallel variants

*Taralga* and *Trialgang* are likely derived from the same Aboriginal word as they both denote Woolshed Creek. What would also appear likely, based on several other local placenames, is that the word would probably have had a *-(l)(g)(y)ang* suffix to denote the presence of many brolgas. The memories of Taylor, Bradbury and others are imperfect but are suggestive of something like 'Taralgang' being the earliest settler name for Taralga. It is this unrecorded oral word that is most similar to *Trialgang*.

*Trialgang*, however, was not the origin word. How do we know this?

We have a recording of the no-longer-in-use locality name 'Teralagolong'<sup>75</sup> near Grabben Gullen, which is the same placename as *Taralga* (Map of the county of King, 1899). Based on this and the derivation of *Currabungla* from 'Currabungalang'<sup>76</sup> above, we posit that in oral use amongst the very earliest settlers the original name for *Taralga* might have been 'Taralagalang' or the shortened (and slightly easier to pronounce) 'Varalgalang'.

'Trialgang' was first recorded by the Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell in his field notes as he conducted his first survey of Argyle County in the winter of 1828. Lachlan Macalister provided significant resources and support to Mitchell and his party when they reached the Taralga district. Macalister personally led Mitchell on a tour to Burra Burra Lagoon, crossing 'Woolshed Creek' on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> June 1828 from his residence which lay to the south-west of the current village.

'Tryalgang' first appeared in the public record in 1832, as a placename for a location near the current-day Myrtleville area (M.W.H., 1832). In 1857 'Trialgang' first appeared in newspapers, and it was this spelling that began the confusion over the origin and meanings of *Taralga*. The convict 'Trial-gang' that we first see in the 1880s is derived from the Aboriginal word recorded in 1857 as 'Trialgang' which is, in turn, derived from the more clearly Aboriginal 'Tryalgang' recorded in 1832 and 1850. The variety of transcriptions for this placename is strong evidence that its origin is Aboriginal word and not English (see Koch, 2009).

'Taralga' was the original station name for James MacArthur's land holdings to the south of 'Taralga creek', now Woolshed Creek (see 1828 Census, Australian edition). MacArthur's 'Taralga!' poem places the original location of Taralga as being Woolshed Creek. The

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<sup>75</sup> The current place name is *Waterhole Flats*; see

<https://proposals.gnb.nsw.gov.au/public/geonames/f86f61b5-4508-43a8-829d-82d351409f99>

<sup>76</sup> The NSW Geographical Names Board has recorded the variants *Corrabungla Creek* and *Curroobungolan Creek* for Currabungla Creek

station taken up by William Macarthur to the north of Woolshed (Taralga) Creek was originally called ‘Burra Burra Station’ (1828 Census, Australian ed<sup>n</sup>). Later ‘Taralga’ was the name for the Macarthur’s land both north and south of Taralga Creek (Dixon et al., 1837).

Despite Mitchell’s close relationship with Macalister, Macalister’s spelling for Trialgang/Woolshed Creek did not appear in Mitchell’s Nineteen Counties map of 1834. The map used the current day spelling of *Taralga*. This suggests that Mitchell and/or his team was sceptical of the provenance of ‘Trialgang’. Alternatively, as the 1828 Census showed, it was simply not in regular use by any other locals to denote the Macarthurs’ station and/or Woolshed Creek.

When the Macarthur’s private village of Taralga was formally laid out in 1858 it appeared to permanently replace ‘Tryalgang’ as the district’s locality name in the newspaper record, though not in the memories of some pioneers. ‘Tryalgang’ had a long half-life in the memories of some who persistently viewed it as the ‘original’ name of the village. Yet this practice was not confirmed by the historical record with ‘Tryalgang’ and ‘Taralga’ emerging simultaneously in 1828, suggesting that they were competing transcriptions of an earlier oral Aboriginal word. With the later passing of those settlers, ‘Tryalgang’ was lost to the written record, and only lived on in error as the erroneous convict term ‘Trial Gang’.

### 3.2.2 *Reconstruction of the original form of Taralga*

As a guide we have three transcriptions from an original Aboriginal word, all first recorded within a few months of each other in 1828. Two appear to come from single sources: firstly, James MacArthur’s preferred transcription ‘Taralga’; and secondly, Lachlan Macalister’s ‘Trialgang’. But then there’s the fifteen Macarthur employees’ pronunciation ‘Verlaga’ (with various spellings, but all beginning with a V) collected sometime towards the end of 1828. We can add to these three versions an apparently related form almost ten years later: the 1837 transcription of ‘Teralagolong’ (no longer in use) from Alexander Turner’s station near Grabben Gullen.

Keeping in mind J. F. Mann’s warning of the carelessness of first transcribers in recording Aboriginal speech, we must draw on these combined sources to try and divine the text of the original Aboriginal word. To do this I have incorporated our modern understanding of Gundungurra spellings, drawn directly on the way spellings of nearby names changed in the earliest years of settlement and have followed the principle of trying to minimise the changes of an original transcription as much as possible.

Transcription	Source	Reconstruction
Taralga	James Macarthur (1828)	Daralaga
Trialgang	Lachlan Macalister (1828)	Duraiwalagang
Verlaga	Census 1828 (Multiple sources)	Buralaga
Teralagolong	Alexander Turner (1837)	Duralagalang

**Table 7** *Taralga*: reconstructing the Aboriginal source word

Three of the four transcriptions in the table above begin with T. Replacing these with the required voiced initial consonant (D), we get a word that unfortunately has no equivalent in Jim Barrett's or Billy Russell's Gundungurra word lists.

However, if we take seriously the 'Veralga' form and replace its initial labial fricative with its labial stop counterpart, (that is, /b/ instead of /v/), the resulting 'Beralga' is the equivalent of the Gundungurra word *buralga*, 'native companion'. To confirm a meaning from this substitution we need to use the local 'Veralga' usage from the 1828 Census. But how justifiable is this? There is some evidence from Thomas Taylor Junior in his memoir of ongoing interactions between settlers and local Aboriginal people in the early 1830s. So this usage might be an reasonably accurate transcription of the original Aboriginal word. We have already noted that both Macalister and Macarthur had previously misheard the labial consonant /b/ as an alveolar /t/ when they recorded Charlie Tarra's name that way instead of 'Burra'.

Alternatively, Macarthur and possibly Turner may have been influenced by the Sydney language word for 'brolga, or native companion', *dyuralya* (see Troy, 2019).<sup>77</sup> The Dharug occupied the land to the north of the Macarthurs' Camden estate and encompassed Elizabeth Farm where James Macarthur and his siblings spent their early childhood. On this basis, regardless of whether we begin with a T or B, each of the forms *Taralga* and *Baralga* could well be a transcription of the Gundungurra word for 'brolga'.

### 3.3 The meaning of 'Buralagalang'

Our inquiry has unequivocally lifted some of the fog by identifying a clear explanation of the general origin of Taralga's name. *Taralga/Tryalgang*, the Aboriginal name for Woolshed Creek, was adopted by James Macarthur because, in his initial commercial survey of the district for high value grazing land, he also found a place of intense natural beauty. This was a beauty he evocatively memorialised a short time later in his poem 'Taralga!'. Even if we are unsure of the specifics of Taralga's actual meaning, we can be certain that it emerges from some aspect of the landscape and environment.

*Taralga* is unarguably very close to the sound of the Aboriginal word *buralga*, meaning 'brolga' or 'native companion' (Russell, 1914, p. 25).<sup>78</sup> The link found here between James Macarthur and his fascination with the behaviour of his pet brolgas on his Camden estate explains why he might have originally wanted his portion of the station to be named after the brolga. This would be particularly the case if Taralga Creek abounded with brolgas when he first explored it in the early 1820s.<sup>79</sup>

If one of the Gundungurra people had been asked of its meaning in the early years of white settlement, they most likely would have responded in Aboriginal English that it was 'a place where many brolgas sit down'. If we were to use a collective noun to describe these iconic inhabitants of this lost habitat now, we might call it 'a dance of brolgas'.

<sup>77</sup> See for instance John Hunter's illustration 'Brolga (*Grus rubicundus*)' dated between 1788 and 1790: <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-138541041>; and reproduced below on page 67. Hunter's title for the watercolour was *Duralia*.

<sup>78</sup> An alternative argument is that there was a transition from B to V to T. See above.

<sup>79</sup> There is evidence that the 1820s was the wettest period in south-eastern Australia since 1783 to the present day, and as a result was probably good for brolgas (Gergis, 2018, p. 205).

## A dance of brolgas?

In conclusion, I am proposing that ‘Buralga’, or its plural form ‘Buralagalang’, is the most likely original settlement name for Taralga. This was adopted from the local Aboriginal name for Woolshed Creek, a couple of kilometres north of the current village, by James MacArthur in the mid 1820s to refer to his newly established station. In addition, the main contributor to the mystery and confusion in relation to the origins of Taralga’s name, that strange ‘English’ placename ‘Trialgang’, is most likely to have been a competing transcription of ‘Buralagalang’ in the first years of settlement. Early surveyors made a decision to use *Taralga* instead of *Tryalgang* in their maps. *Tryalgang*, however, did not disappear completely and was used orally in and around the village until the end of the nineteenth century.



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## APPENDIX 1: Method

I have attempted to work through the question based mostly on a series of Trove searches of the digitised newspaper archive from 1820. Local newspapers such as the *Goulburn Evening Post* and the *Crookwell Gazette* have been digitised only up to 1954, so this is not a comprehensive study. A review of the Goulburn Historical Society *Journal* found no significant alternative views on the origins of Taralga's name in the 1960s and 1970s. Harris (1967), for instance, repeats Wheaton's (1923) theories. More recent reviews tend to repeat old stories without offering new information.

Jim Barrett's *Gundungurra: the language of the mountain people—and beyond* (2016) was invaluable. He also assisted by providing advice on early drafts of this report. Without his book and Trove's search engine this paper would have not been possible.

The initial search was a response to the core theory contained in the Wikipedia entry for Taralga; that is, the name was convict-related, a corruption of 'Trial Gang' or 'Triangle'. These were convict terms reputedly for a group of convicts being tried and sentenced. This initial search led to the creation of the Trove list of relevant newspaper articles (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/list?id=97445>).

The initial list was extended as a result of a search for 'Trial Gang / Triangle' references. Successful searches were made for *Trial Gang*, *Trialgang*, *Trialgong*, *Trialgor*, *Trialgar*, *Teralga*, *Tarralga* and *Taralga*.

A search for possible misspellings of *Taralga* in Trove such as *Trialga*, *Terulga*, *Taralgang*, *Taralgong* came up with nothing significant. *Trialga* was however found in the original Wheaton article, reporting an early colonial directory entry for McAlister, and this led to a number of new spellings in Trove. Searches for 'Triangle' used in any contemporaneous report as a placename for Taralga were also not successful. A further search for 'Trail Gang' and 'Trailgang' came up with nothing of significance in the early period of settlement. Finally, a search for 'Carrabalga', as a potential combination of *Carrabungla* and *Tarralga* was undertaken. This produced a number of hits, but all appeared to be a misspelling of *Carrabaiga* (see Lang, 1837, p. 88).

Searching for 'Triangle' was more difficult as it produced many irrelevant hits. It did often refer to the method of convict punishment undertaken in the early colony; however, I could not find any example of 'triangle' being used as a placename or part of a placename.




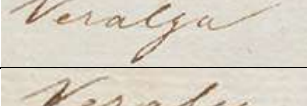
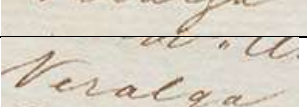
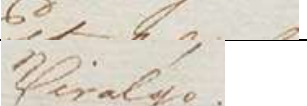






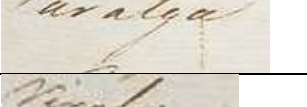


Searches were also undertaken of the nearby localities such as Bolong, Currabungla, Tyrl-Tryl and Wowagin, to see if early alternative spellings of *Taralga* could be captured. These resulted in a 'Tryalgang' being found in an article from 1832. Initial searches in New South Wales newspapers for 'brolga' and 'Taralga' were undertaken, with no results.

Significant extra context was provided by the Golspie Progress and Landcare Association (2005) publication, a pictorial, manuscript and oral history of the Golspie ('Cutty Gutty Yang') locality; it naturally includes much information on the placenames of Taralga and its surrounding district, much of it drawn from the Taralga Historical Society's records. Wheaton's 1923 article was a valuable source providing important early context on the land grants and the difficulties in determining the origins of Taralga's name.

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Significant gaps in the research arise from the lack of a detailed review of land sale records or of the Macarthur papers. It can be assumed that a close (and, most probably, very time-consuming search) would be helpful in resolving any remaining uncertainty over ‘Tryalgang’ and ‘Taralga’.

**APPENDIX 2:** Settlers resident at Taralga, Cookbundoon (Census alphabetical return, 1828)

No.	Settler	Residence	Script
1	Patrick Ryan	Viralga	
2	George Stewart	Veralga	
3	James Sedfield	Veralga	
4	John Quirk	Veralga	
5	John Quinn	Veralga	
6	Sampson Prothey	Veralga	
7	Alexander and Ellen Morgan	Viralgo	
8	James Macarthur	Viralga	
9	William Marmont	Viralga	
10	John Mallaby	Viralga	
11	William Bee	Veralga	
12	William Edwards, Constable (Census collector)	Veralga	
13	William Innes	Varalga	
14	Patrick Mallady	Viralga	
15	John Webb	James M <sup>c</sup> arthur (Veralga)	

**APPENDIX 3:** James Macarthur's 'Taralga!'

Taralga!

Taralga! Thy limpid stream  
Ripples on with sparkling gleam  
Beneath the summer's fervid beam  
Dispensing coolness far around  
And bright luxuriance in the ground  
Where Ipomeas sweet abound  
And melaleuca loves to lave  
Her Myrtle tresses in thy wave  
Seeming the silvery gems to crave

Which for a moment glisten there  
With the lustre wild and rare  
Of pearls adorning maiden's hair,  
Such their dewy chastened Ray  
Then onward urge their giddy way  
Like youth impatient of delay  
Thy flowery meads are quickly pass'd  
And Corromborro wild and vast,  
Whose giant form defies the blast

Now glancing down with lofty pride  
That seems thy headlong course to chide  
Repels thee from his rugged side  
Ah! Thus how oft do friends assume  
An air of cold forbidding gloom  
That serves but to ensure our doom  
Rendering friendly counsel vain  
And severing sympathy's bright chain  
Which severed once ne'er links again

*James Macarthur, c.1827*



## APPENDIX 4: Placenames of likely Indigenous origin in the Taralga district

Placename	Proposed original	Suggested meaning	Earliest source	Quality of evidence
Abercrombie	waab-a-ga-ra(m)-bii <sup>80</sup>	Named after Sir Ralf Abercrombie, Scottish general, from Gaelic 'place on a river'  'crested pigeon' (waabagang)	<i>Goulburn Herald</i> , 27 April 1872.  Barrett (2016)	Extremely poor for Aboriginal origin
Bannaby/Bunnaby	bunabi	'Water source' - very similar word from the Sydney language.	National Museum of Australia: Gamay transcript (Botany Bay)	Extremely poor
Cutty-Gutty-Yang <sup>81</sup>	giddigang <sup>82</sup> gidda-gidda-ang <sup>83</sup> gunny-gunny-ang guddy-guddy-gang guty gutty gang (RASA) guty-guty-yang Cuttycuttygang (School name) gunny gunny ang (Golspie, 2005, p. 87 - Church records) guny guny yang gidda-giddang (Hillas, 1839)	'Plenty of parrots sit down'. <sup>84</sup> 'Plenty of parrots there'. Possibly 'plenty of gang gang parrots'?	Royal Anthropological Society of Australia, Survey, 1900	Good
Corroboree Hill	Corromborro Hill Gurrumburru Corroborree	-	James Macarthur, 1820s?	-

<sup>80</sup> See Barrett (2016, p. 97,) for his discussion on the meaning of *Abercrombie*.

<sup>81</sup> Local placenames often have initial and medial unvoiced consonants /k/ and /t/. However, it is well known that in Australian languages only final consonants are unvoiced (Troy, 1993). In the second column I have changed all initial and medial unvoiced consonants in the data to their voiced forms /g/ and /d/.

<sup>82</sup> See wordlist in Barrett (2016, p. 125): Len Bennett's *cuttagang* – 'skull'.

<sup>83</sup> Williamson (1985, p. 1).

<sup>84</sup> Possibly from Jamina or her son Rheuben Baker; see Golspie (2005, Vol. 2, p. 276).

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Carrabungla	gurrabungalang <sup>85</sup> gurobungee <sup>86</sup>	‘plenty of stones there’	Jim Barrett, Charles Macalister	Good
Tarlo	dharla <sup>87</sup>	‘river’	Jim Barrett	Poor
Tryalgang (1832)	duryalagang (unattested) durrai-wal burrai-wal burraiwarlagang	‘plenty of musk ducks are there’  ‘place of many black rock crystals’	Peter McInnes  see Barrett (2016, p. 73)	Extremely poor
Turallo	duralla	‘reeds growing in water’	Martin (1943)	Poor
Murrang Creek (Cowpers Creek)	murrang	‘creek’	Barrett <sup>88</sup>	Good
Burra Burra (1829)	burrah burrah <sup>89</sup> (1819) (buurraa buurraa)	Possibly denotes rock wallabies or, equally plausibly, kangaroos. <sup>90</sup>	Barrett (2016) lists <i>buurraa</i> as a variant of <i>burrai</i> , presumably with the same meanings attached <sup>91</sup>	Poor
Taralga (1828)	daralga duralga  dhy-ar-al-ga  dhy-ar-al-ya  dyuralya	‘broлга’	Gilmore (1931) Symonds (1914)    Troy (1993, 2019)	Poor
Tyrl Tyrl (1849)	dyrl dyrl Tyrell Tyrell (1835) Tyrrel Tyrrel (1835) Tirrel Tirrel (1839) Tyreel Tyreel	‘deep and/or wide valley’	Golspie (2005, Vol. 1, p. 46)	Poor
Wombeyan	whambeyan wambian whombeyan wombeian wam-bee-ang wambiang wambeen	‘tunnel’	Smith (2014, p. 87)	Good

**Table 8:** Taralga district Aboriginal placenames and their suggested meanings

<sup>85</sup> Faithfull Family Collection of Map and Plans (NLA, Bib ID 57315) has *Currabungalong*.

<sup>86</sup> Golspie (2005, p. 61).

<sup>87</sup> See Barrett (2016, p. 97).

<sup>88</sup> His wordlist, p. 118

<sup>89</sup> This spelling is from Charles Throsby’s journal, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1819. This spelling can be assumed to be the earliest and most accurate given that Throsby was accompanied by trusted members of the Burra Burra tribe.

<sup>90</sup> See p. 22 for his discussion of the word *burrangorag* and links to ‘kangaroo’.

<sup>91</sup> See p. 73 and wordlist p. 118.



Brolga (*Grus rubicundus*) picture / John Hunter, 1737-1821  
*Birds & flowers of New South Wales drawn on the spot in 1788, '89 & '90*

Image: National Library of Australia  
Call Number: PIC MSR 12/1/4 #T1161 NK2039/5