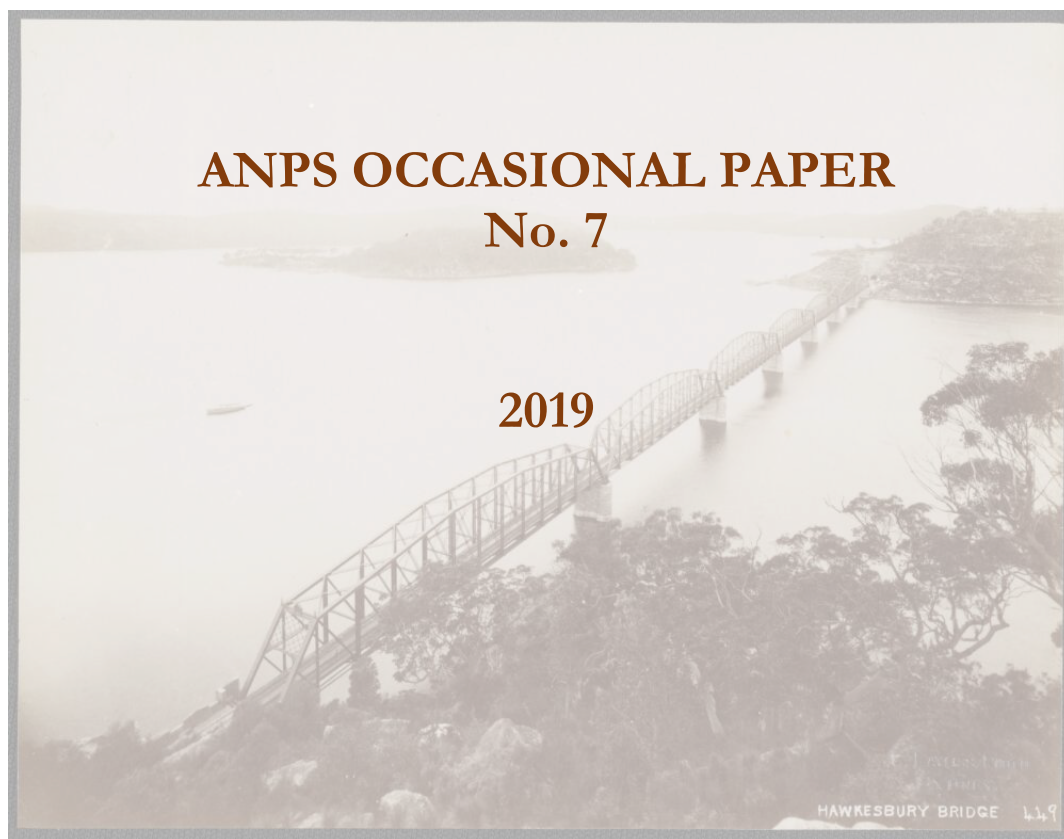


The uncertain origin of
Brooklyn
in the Antipodes



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BROOKLYN
IN THE ANTIPODES

Jan Tent

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The original Hawkesbury River Railway Bridge at Brooklyn, N.S.W., ca. 1885
(nla.gov.au/nla.obj-140668327)

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Introduction

There are countless examples of natural and civic features throughout Australia and New Zealand with duplicated name-forms. At first glance the more than five-dozen *Brooklyns* listed in the National Gazetteer of Australia seem to be typical; however, on closer inspection the majority of these are HOMESTEAD names and intriguingly very few are larger habitation features (such as town and suburbs). Individual property names are difficult to examine: the usual lack of documentary evidence generally makes it a fruitless endeavour. Instead, I shall concentrate on the origins of six particular locations with the name-form: (1) *Brooklyn* (and *Brooklyn Park*) in Adelaide; (2) *Brooklyn*, a Melbourne suburb; (3) *Brooklyn*, a suburb in Burnie (TAS); (4) *Brooklyn* (NSW) on the Hawkesbury River; and (5) two suburbs in New Zealand.

So, what's with all those *Brooklyns*? Homage to the famous New York borough perhaps? Let's examine each in turn.

1 Brooklyn (SA)

This is a subdivision of the City of Port Adelaide, Enfield. Manning (1990: 51) claims: 'Alfred Jones applied this name to the subdivision of section 207, Hundred of Port Adelaide in 1878, while in 1881 James Gartrell and William Osborne followed suit when they cut up sections 751 and 754, Hundred of Port Adelaide. They are now included in Wingfield and Osborne respectively.' *Brooklyn Park* is an adjacent suburb and was created by Oscar Gorger and Edward Lipsett in 1881. Manning speculates that this name 'was probably imported from the United States of America.' He provides no supporting evidence for this claim, so we are none the wiser.

2 Brooklyn (VIC)

This is an industrial and residential suburb of Melbourne, some 10 km west of the CBD. The *Altona North—Brooklyn Neighbourhood Profile* and the *Victorian Places* website declare the suburb's name derives from the name of William Cherry's home 'Brooklyn Lodge'. He migrated from Belfast in 1841 and by 1861 owned 2500 acres of land extending from Brooklyn to Altona. I have not been able to establish whence Cherry got the name for his home. However, in an article on the suburb on the website *eMelbourne – the city past and present* (the online version of the *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*), academic historian John Lack maintains *Brooklyn* was known until the 1920s as *Brooklea* '(possibly named after a local home or farm), with its own post office. Brooklea became corrupted to Brooklyn, [...]' No documentary evidence is provided for this, but credence must be given to the claim given the website is produced and published by the School of Historical & Philosophical Studies, at the University of Melbourne. So this *Brooklyn* name-form could be an example of 'form confusion' (see Tent & Blair 2009, 2014).

Interestingly, like the *Brooklyns* of New York and Hornsby (see section 4 below), this one also has a well-known bridge associated with it. It spans Kororoit Creek which runs through the suburb. It is a bluestone bridge built in 1889, and is variously known as the 'Guiding Star Bridge', the 'Old Geelong Road Bridge', or the 'Brooklyn Bluestone Bridge' (Figure 1).



Figure 1
Melbourne's Brooklyn Bluestone Bridge
(Source: williewonker Flickr 5612800971_84840674bd_b)

3 Brooklyn (TAS)

This is a suburb of Burnie (on the north-west coast) to the south-east of the main town centre. I have not been able to establish with certainty the motivation for the naming of this suburb, but a real estate advertisement in *The Advocate* (Burnie) of 5 April 1921, page 4, announces the sale of the property 'Brooklyn' (Figure 2). This suggests the suburb derives its name from that property, which was well-known in the town. It is not unusual for a suburb or town to be named after a local property (cf. *Lakemba* in Sydney).

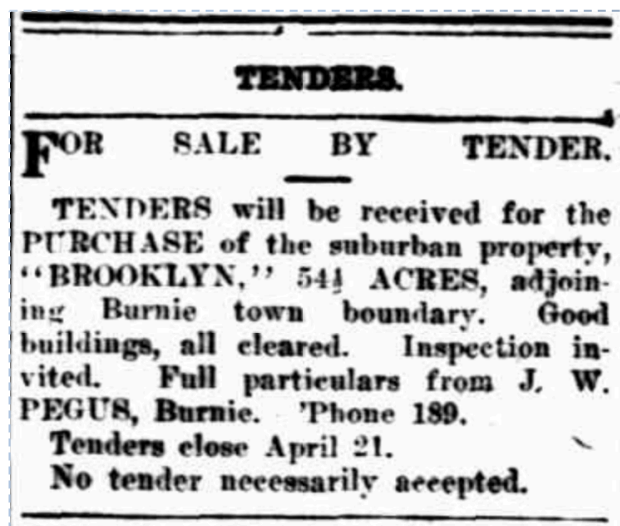


Figure 2
Real estate advertisement in *The Advocate* for 'Brooklyn', Burnie.
(Source: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/66642756>)

4 Brooklyn (NSW)

The NSW Geographic Names Board gazetteer designates this *Brooklyn* as suburb in the LGA of Hornsby, and describes it as '[a] town about 2 km SSE of Spectacle Island and about 2 km W by N of Croppy Point.'

The motivation for it being named *Brooklyn* is not all that straightforward, with various theories having been put forward. The NSW GNB presents two slightly different origins for the name: '[...] named after the Brooklyn Bridge Company who built the first railway bridge here. BROOKLYN- Named after the Union Bridge company of New York U.S.A. (Brooklyn) in 1888. (Information from Shire of Hornsby-Diamond Jubilee 1966).'



Figure 3

The original Hawkesbury River Railway Bridge at Brooklyn ca. 1885.

(Source: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-140668327>)



Figure 4

The two Brooklyn Railway Bridges before the first (on the right) was dismantled after the completion of the second in 1946.

(Source: Photographic Collection from Australia - Bridges over the Hawkesbury River Uploaded by Oxyman, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=22351888>)

However, Powell (1994) and Rowland (2008) maintain *Brooklyn* was in use before tenders were even called for the construction of the railway bridge in September 1884. Even so, the Union Bridge Company of New York that built the Brooklyn Bridge in New York, and which won the contract to build the railway bridge across the Hawkesbury, did not do so until April 1886 (NSW Office of Environment and Heritage). Rowland states: ‘In 1883, 108 allotments of land in Brooklyn were being advertised for sale ‘destined to become a thriving and important commercial township’, within a few yards of the site of the proposed bridge [*Sydney Morning Herald* 1883, see Figure 5]. In 1885 Agnes Fagan, wife of Samuel Fagan, a landowner in the Galston and Arcadia districts, described her visit to the area, mentioning that she stayed at the Brooklyn Hotel. And the name Brooklyn first appears in an official document in 1884, when Daniel Murphy was asked to carry out a survey for the town of Brooklyn [Johnson 1993, p. 9].’

HAWKESBURY RIVER RAILWAY BRIDGE.

BROOKLYN, on the HAWKESBURY.

SITUATE IMMEDIATELY FACING and WITHIN a FEW YARDS OF THE SITE WHERE THE RAILWAY BRIDGE IS TO CROSS THE HAWKESBURY RIVER.

BROOKLYN is destined to become a thriving and important commercial township.

BROOKLYN is on the SYDNEY SIDE OF THE RIVER, and offers the only available BUILDING LAND in the district.

BROOKLYN,
A most eligible and highly improving
FREEHOLD BUILDING ESTATE,
 comprising in all about
103 WELL SELECTED ALLOTMENTS,
POSSESSING EXCELLENT PRONTAGES TO THE RAILWAY
LINE, at the BRIDGE SITE,
HAWKESBURY RIVER.

Immediately available for BUILDING PURPOSES,
 and in every way suitable for the erection of
BUSINESS PREMISES, PRETTY VILLA RESIDENCES, and
ARTISANS' DWELLINGS.
All the Streets are One Chain Wide.

Figure 5

Extract from *Sydney Morning Herald* 15 September, 1883, page 16.
 (Source: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/13544732>)

In addition, the *New South Wales Government Gazette* of Friday 29 August 1884 [Issue No.441 (SUPPLEMENT)] page 5899 (see Figure 6), notifying the granting of publicans licences, shows that the hotel at Peat's Ferry was named the *Brooklyn Hotel*, two years before the construction of the railway bridge had begun.

PARHAMATTA LICENSING DISTRICT.					
Bishop John	Peat's Ferry Road	Half-way Hotel	9 Oct.,	1884	8 Oct., 1885
Bloomfield Matthew	Onions Point	Woolwich Pier Hotel.....	22 July,	"	21 July, "
Goddard Ellen	Granville	Royal Hotel	2 June,	"	1 June, "
Howard James	Peat's Ferry	All Nations Hotel	18 Sept.,	"	17 Sept., "
Palmer Richard	Peat's Ferry	Brooklyn Hotel	23 Aug.,	"	22 Aug., "
Radbourn Nelens	Prospect	Commercial Hotel	10 July,	"	9 July, "

Figure 6

Extract from *New South Wales Government Gazette* of Friday 29 August 1884 [Issue No.441 (SUPPLEMENT)] page 5899.
 (Source: NLA <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article225588521>)

The latter sources show quite convincingly that the location was known by the name of *Brooklyn* as early as September 1883, and therefore could not have acquired its name from the bridge construction company or crew.

Another slightly different motivation for the name is provided by Schofield (1988, p. 80), who argues that because the railway bridge ‘spanned the Hawkesbury River between Long Island and Cogra Point, and because of the coincidence of the names Long Island on the Hawkesbury, and Long Island on the Hudson River in New York, the American bridge crew named the new structure Brooklyn Bridge—after its American counterpart.’ The Hornsby Shire Council’s webpage ‘History of Brooklyn’, also suggests this could be the motivation for the name: ‘The name was possibly inspired by the nearby Long Island.’¹ No evidence is provided to support this notion, nor have I been able to discover any.

5 New Zealand’s Brooklyn

New Zealand has two places with the name-form *Brooklyn*. The first is classified as a SUBURB 2 km south and uphill from Wellington’s CBD. The New Zealand History website explains it was originally known as *Fitchett (Town)*, after John Fitchett, who had a dairy farm there. In the 1888 it was subdivided and named *Brooklyn* after the New York borough, and the streets were named after a number of US Republican presidents. The suburb is well known for its wind turbine visible from many parts of the Wellington. Why it was specifically named *Brooklyn* is not explained. However, the fact that streets were named after Republican presidents hints at a US connection for the suburb’s name.

The second *Brooklyn* is a LOCALITY in Motueka near Nelson on the north-west tip of the South Island. I have not been able to establish why it was so named.

6 New York’s Brooklyn

The origin of this toponym is well attested. Room (2006, p. 69) provides the following explanation:³

Dutch farmers arrived in the region of the present New York City borough in 1636 and founded a number of settlements, one of which, in 1646, was named for the Dutch village of *Breukelen*, near Amsterdam. (Its own name ultimately derives from Old High German *brouch*, ‘moor,’ ‘marshland.’). The name was later anglicized to *Brooklyn*, as if for a *brook*.

The name first appeared in print in 1663 (Carroll 1971, p. 29) and experienced quite a number of spelling variations including *Breucklyn*, *Breukland*, *Brucklyn*, *Broucklyn*, *Brookland*, *Brocklin*, and *Brookline/Brook-line*. These spelling variations naturally led to some confusion as to its meaning, with Ellis (2011 [1966], p. 42) claiming *breuckelen* meant ‘broken land.’ This etymology is echoed by Manning (1990, p. 51), who under the entry for *Brooklyn Park* (in Adelaide) claims it derives from ‘*breukelyn* meaning “broken ground” or “a marsh”’. This etymology does not hold water. The *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (the Dutch dictionary on historical principles) states *breuk* derives from *broec* / *broek* ‘low-lying, poorly drained, mostly swampy or submerged grassland’, not from Modern Dutch *breuk* (or the earlier forms of *broeke* / *brueke* / *broecke* / *bruecke* / *bruk*) meaning ‘a break, fracture, rupture’.⁴ In support of this, the Dutch toponym dictionary of van Berkel

& Samplonius (2006) provides the following details (my translation) on the etymology of *Breukelen*:

Breukelen < *Broeckelen* (1573) < *Brukelede* (1420) < *Broiclede* (1307) < *Broclede* (1139), which derive from the toponymic elements *lede* ‘excavated watercourse’ + *broek* ‘a low-lying, poorly drained, mostly swampy or submerged grassland’.

Van Winter (1998, p. 765) provides various other spellings the Dutch village name underwent over time: *Brocola*, *Broccke*, *Brocckede*, *Brocklandia*, *Broeckelen*, *Broikelen*, and *Breuckelen* (unfortunately, she does not provide dates for these spellings). In any case, before the first steps at the standardisation of Dutch spelling were undertaken in 1804 with the adoption of Matthijs Siegenbeek’s *Verhandeling over de Nederduitsche spelling ter bevordering van de eenparigheid in dezelve* (Treatise on Lower Dutch spelling to promote uniformity herein), such spelling variation was not uncommon for toponyms and indeed for any other word in the language.

Excursus

One must not fall into the trap of pronouncing these early spelling versions of *Breukelen* with a Modern Dutch pronunciation. Dutch pronunciation changed radically over the centuries (as did of course that of English—just compare the pronunciation of Chaucer’s and Shakespeare’s Englishes to that of Modern English). There was also much synchronic variation in Dutch pronunciation (both socially and regionally) between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries, as there was in spelling. On the surface, the sixteenth century spelling of the toponym, *Broeckelen*, suggests a pronunciation of [ˈbrukələŋ] (the first vowel being similar to that in the English *brook*) if seen through the eyes of a Modern Dutch speaker. This could potentially be seen to have brought about the ultimate pronunciation of the vowel as short [u] in the anglicisation of the name. Donaldson (1983, p. 141) and van der Wal (1992, p. 129) remind us that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries long *o* [o:] (and long *a* [a:]) were often graphologically indicated by the addition of *e* (or *i*) after the vowel (as we see in *Broeckelen* and *Broiclede*). However, the *oe* spelling could also indicate a pronunciation of a short [u], and not [o:]. It just depends on the speaker, writer or the era. So, there is no sure way of knowing whether *Broeckelen* was pronounced with a [u] or [o:], and thus we cannot say that the vowel in the anglicisation of the name is a result of a Dutch [u].

Incidentally, New York has a village closely associated with the name *Brooklyn*, namely, *Lynbrook* (in Nassau County), which was formerly known as *Pearsalls*. In 1892 it was suggested *Pearsalls* be given a ‘more euphonious cognomen’. This set off two years of veritable verbal warfare, after which on May 1, 1894 the name was officially changed to *Lynbrook*, and the village was incorporated in 1911. The new name was derived by transposing the two syllables of *Brooklyn* in tribute to the original home of many of the town’s turn-of-the-century residents (Mattson, 1998). Further evidence for the link between these two communities is that both have the same motto: *Een Draght Macket Maght* ‘In Unity there is Strength’.

And by sheer coincidence, *Breukelen* in the Netherlands also has a well-known bridge associated with it (see Figure 8).



Figure 7

Brooklyn (NY) and its famous eponymous bridge

(Source: <https://citiquiet.com/new-york-borough-buzz-dumbo-soundproofed/>)



Figure 8

The lift-bridge over the Vecht at *Breukelen*, near Utrecht, The Netherlands

(Source: Daramulan at the English Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=18010480>)

Conclusion

So, where does all this leave us? Firstly, I have not been able to unearth any convincing evidence for the motivation of bestowing the name-form *Brooklyn* to any location in Australia or New Zealand. Without conclusive documentary proof as to the *raison d'être* of the antipodean *Brooklyns* we cannot declare that any were the result of copying the New York toponym. It is easy and very tempting to speculate that they do derive from the New York borough (or some other *Brooklyn* in the US) because the only other *Brooklyns* (excluding derivative toponyms such as *Brooklyn Basin*, *Brooklyn Bay*, *Brooklyn Mine*, *Brooklyn Heights* etc.) in the world (apart from those in our region) are 31 inhabited places in the US (Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names Online), four in Canada (Geographical Names Board of Canada), one in Puerto Rico, one in Jamaica (GeoNames), and four in South Africa (Places in the world). No origins for any of these are indicated. However, Raper et al. (2014, p. 52) claim the *Brooklyn* in Pretoria was named after the surveyor James Brooks, who subsequently lived in Brook House, Brook Street, Brooklyn.⁵ With the exception of the latter (and the one in Melbourne), whence these *Brooklyns* derive is a matter of speculation. One point that may be relevant, though, is the fact that all *Brooklyns* appear in the New World (I'm including South Africa and the Antipodes in this concept), which may indicate that the vast majority derive from the first location to have that name-form, the one in New York. However, in the words of Isaac Newton: 'I shall not mingle conjectures with certainties.'

The December 2005 issue of *Placenames Australia* included an article of mine entitled 'The dangers of taking placenames at face value: Orange & Camperdown'. In this article I noted that there were a number of Dutch and Dutch-linked toponyms in Australia that were not transparently Dutch. *These included: Crocodile Islands* (NT) < 'Crocodils Eylanden', *Red Bluff* (WA) < 'Roode Houck', *Steep Point* (WA) < 'Steijle Houck', *Turtle Dove Shoal* (WA) < 'Tortelduiff', *Swan River* (WA) < 'Swarte [Black] Swaane Rivier', *Storm Bay* (TAS) < 'Stormbajj', and of course *Orange* (NSW) < 'Oranje' and *Camperdown* (NSW) < 'Camperduin'. All these names are calqued (i.e. literally translated) from the original Dutch names bestowed by the seventeenth century Dutch explorers and (in the case of the last two) by Maj. Thos. Mitchell and William Bligh respectively. If any, or all, of the *Brooklyns* in our part of the world can be shown to have definitively originated from New York's *Brooklyn*, we will have found another Dutch-linked toponym.

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Endnotes

- ¹ The question arises as to when Long Island was named: at the same time as Brooklyn? And does its naming have anything to do with Brooklyn? The answer is 'No' because it was named in 1829 by the surveyor W.R. Govett for its topography (Joffe 1987: 214; Ollif 1973), it being long and narrow at 1.2 miles by 980 feet. It was also mentioned in the press in 1863 (*The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*) and 1880 (*Australian Town and Country Journal*).
- ² One can be forgiven for assuming that Brooklyn is a compound of *brook* < Old English (OE) 'small stream, rivulet; orig. a torrent, a strong flowing stream' (OED) + *lyn* 'OE river name' < hlynn 'torrent' (OED; Ekwall 1960; Mills 2003). However, this is not the case. For one, there is no such recorded toponym in Great Britain; and secondly, the Dutch origin of the toponym is well documented (though see f.n. 5). If Brooklyn were a compound of *brook* + *lyn*, we would be dealing with a 'monolingual duplex toponym' (cf. Tent and Blair 2018).
- ³ See also Dexter (1885, p. 438) and Powell (1899 216).
- ⁴ However, the *OED* provides the following etymology for *brook* which does hint at a connection with the sense 'a break': Old English *bróc* (masculine), corresponding in form to Middle Dutch *broek* (masculine), modern Dutch *broek* (neuter), Low German *brók* 'marsh, bog', Old High German *bruoh*, Middle High German *bruoch* (neuter and masculine) 'marshy ground, morass', German *bruch* (masculine and neuter) 'moor, marsh, bog, fen'. A similar range of meaning appears in Middle High German *ouwe* 'water, stream, watery land, island'; and compare *bache* n. The derivation of the West Germanic **brōka-* is uncertain; it has been doubtfully referred to *brekan* 'to break' *v.*, as 'that which breaks or bursts forth'; compare *spring*, 'that which springs forth'.
Ellis and Manning could also have been confused by the Dutch word *brokkelen* 'to crumble' (or *brok* 'chunk, lump, piece'). However, this term has a completely different etymology to *breuk* 'a low-lying, poorly drained, mostly swampy or submerged grassland' which forms the first element of the Dutch toponym.
- ⁵ Pretoria's *Brooklyn* may well be a linguistic innovation through the combining of the family name *Brook* with *lyn* 'OE river name' (see f.n. 2).