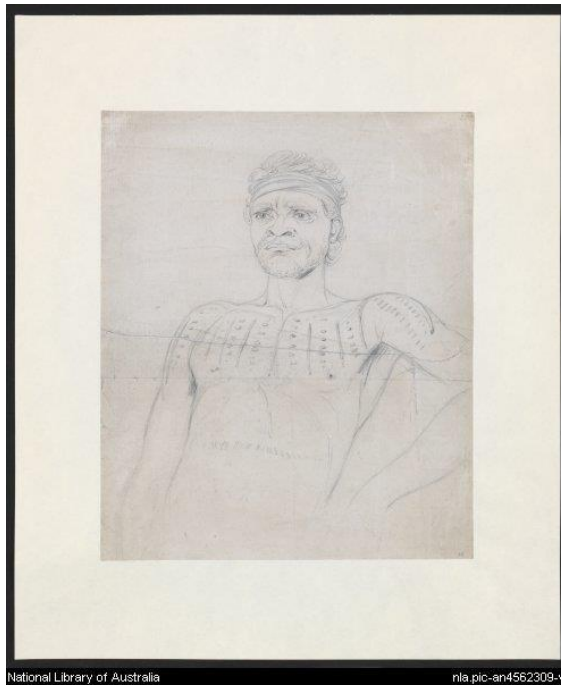


Ryde Heritage Advisory Committee
Bennelong's grave site.

Dr P.B. Mitchell OAM, 10 November 2010



Figures 1 and 2. Left: Sketch by William Westall 1802 'Port Jackson, a native'. Thought to be a portrait of Bennelong (Smith 2005a). nla.pic-an4562309-v

Right: 'Benelong; a native of New Holland'. S.J. Neale 1795. nla9353133-v

In November 1789, on the orders of Governor Arthur Phillip, two Aboriginal men were kidnapped from Manly Cove. One of these was a Wongal man from the south side of the Parramatta River, Woollarawarre Bennelong (Figures 1 and 2). He was about 25 or 26 years old and stayed with Phillip until May 1790. In September he returned and Phillip built a brick hut for him on Bennelong Point (Opera House site). In December 1792 he sailed to England with Phillip and returned in 1795 (for a full account see; Brook 2009).

In his later years, Bennelong was fond of alcohol. After his death some authors emphasised his addiction and an image of the drunken Aboriginal has coloured all accounts of his life until very recently. Strong cases have now been made, that Bennelong should be seen as an important negotiator between the Aboriginal people and the white invaders, and that he was an important tribal elder in his own right (Smith 2001, 2005a and b, 2009 and 2010, Dortins 2009, and Fullager 2009).

One contemporary European who treated Bennelong and other Aboriginal people differently was James Squire (or Squires, aka Phillip Morris), the brewer of Kissing

Point. It seems that this was not simply because Bennelong may have been a good customer or perhaps an employee of the brewery, but Squire was more in tune with Aboriginal people than others. His first encounters having been with Lt Ralph Clark on the Lane Cove River (Feughelman 1997), and Squire may have buried Nanbaree's parents, both of whom died of smallpox in 1789 (see below).

After Squire had completed his sentence as a convict he was granted 33 acres of land at Kissing Point in July 1795. Over the next few years he rapidly expanded his holdings and commercial enterprises (Figures 3 and 4) and he shared occupation of some of his land with a band of Aboriginal people known as the 'Kissing Point tribe'. The size of this band is not known although 'blanket musters' at Parramatta record 7 to 10 people residing at Kissing Point in the mid-1830s, and we might expect that it was 12 to 20 people (or more) in Squire's time. Smith (2009) has shown that many of these people were related and they included two important individuals, Bennelong and Bidjee Bidjee (declared to be the chief of the tribe by Governor Macquarie in 1816).



Figure 3. 'Squire's brewery, Kissing Point.' Artist unknown. State Library of NSW. V1A/Ryde/5. The style and the view are very similar to that in Figure 4 and this may be a Lycett original.

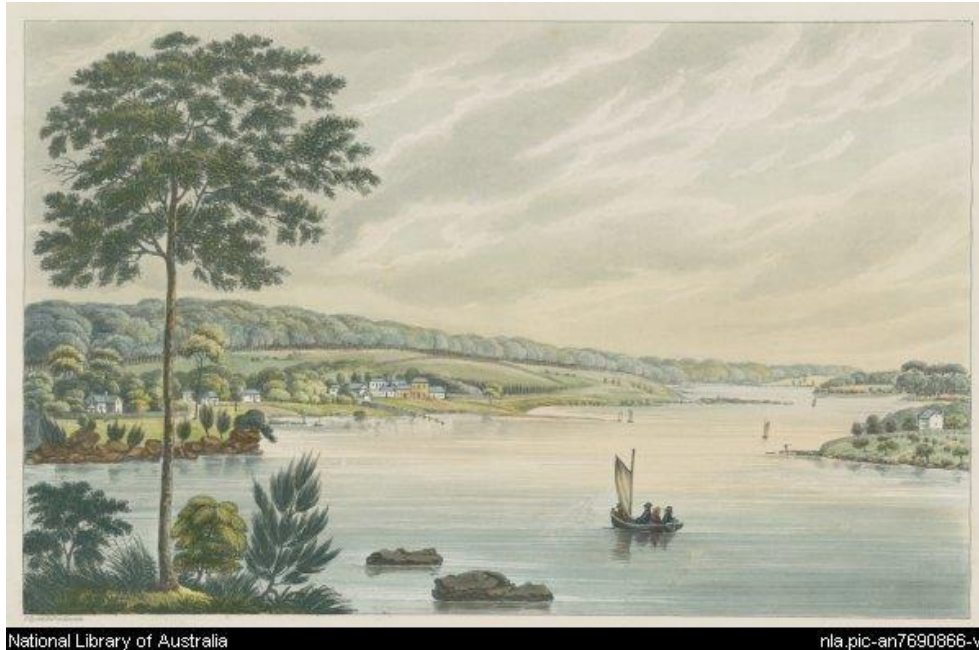


Figure 4. Coloured etching after Joseph Lycett. ‘Kissing Point, New South Wales, the property of the late Mr James Squires’. Published by J. Souter, London 1825. nla.pic-an7690866

Bennelong died at Kissing Point in January 1813. There is some confusion about the date. Different accounts say either January 2 or 3 but as the *Sydney Gazette* says that he ‘died on Sunday morning last’ it must have been January 3. He was buried in the grounds of Squire’s brewery and the key question that this report seeks to answer is ‘Where is the grave site?’

There is no contemporary record that can be used to accurately locate it.

General accounts of the history of Ryde do not help as only one author (Levy 1947) has presented any evidence for the location of the grave and others have been satisfied with general statements to the effect that Bennelong was buried:

- 1 in Squire’s garden,
- 2 in Squire’s orchard,
- 3 amidst the orange trees of the garden,
- 4 under the tennis court (Levy 1947),
- 5 at a site marked ‘by the whirling arms of a clothes line’ (Earnshaw 1968, but clearly a poetic expression rather than a fact),
- 6 under the road on the northeast corner of Watson St and Horden Ave. This intersection has only two corners and one is east and one is north!

Then there are the unsubstantiated stories and rumours:

- A former miner found the grave using some form of remote sensing and identified the presence of two males and one female. No technology exists that could make that distinction.

- A Sydney Water trench ‘recently’ found three burials in one grave. Maybe, but it is very surprising that this could have occurred without the media or Sydney Water reporting it. If this did occur it would be an illegal act regardless of identity of the bodies.

We also need to ask how many people are buried in this grave or graves?

- Bennelong certainly.
- Andrew Sneap Hamond Douglass White, more appropriately known as Nanbaree (Nanbarry, nephew of Colebee a Cadigal elder) was also buried with him, or near him, at his own request, on 12 August 1821 (Sydney Gazette 8 September 1821).
- According to Levy (1947), repeated by Geeves (1970), and McAndrew (2003) Nanbaree’s mother and sister were buried there but this conflicts with reliable evidence from Tench (1793) concerning their death in 1789. Squire was still a convict and did not own the land at that time. This claim seems to be an erroneous interpretation of the Sydney Gazette (8 September 1821) story that Mr Squire buried Nanbaree’s mother and sister. He may have been involved in some of the burials of this family as Tench (1793) reports that ‘a convict’ dug the grave for Nanbaree’s father and the same convict may have accompanied Tench and Captain Bell ‘across the harbour’ to bury Nanbaree’s mother later that same day. Tench is clear that it was Arabanoo who buried Nanbaree’s sister in an emotive ceremony on that occasion.
- Several authors make the claim that Bennelong’s last wife, believed to be Boorong, the sister of Bidgee Bidgee, is buried with Bennelong. I have found no primary evidence for this other than a story reported from another Aboriginal man ‘Old Philip’ that was first recorded in 1815.
- It is known that Bidgee Bidgee expressed a wish to be buried with Bennelong (Wilton 1828). But I have found no record of his death or his burial place. His death must have occurred after 1836 as his name appears in the Parramatta muster of that year. Smith (2005) suggested that he may have been buried on the south side of the river at Abbotsford.

In total, the grave or graves certainly contain two males, possibly one female, and there may be others. Given Squire’s acceptance of the Kissing Point tribe, and the expressed wishes of both Nanbaree and Bidgee Bidgee to be buried in the same place, we may be dealing with the burial of a larger number of people on Squire’s land. Squire occupied/owned it for 27 years and if we assume that the Kissing Point tribe was in residence for most or all of that period then there could have been quite a large number of burials, few of which we would expect to find recorded. Therefore we may not be searching for one or two graves but are perhaps dealing with an Aboriginal burial place.

But where are they? The following paper trail points the way. In the absence of any maps that locate the grave there are two key pieces of information. One is a letter (Figure 5)

written by Charles Cobham Watson to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald published on July 8 1927. Watson was a great grandson of James Squire. The second is a small and rather poor quality photograph (Figure 6) that allegedly shows the grave. A print of this is in the Mitchell Library and a copy is held in the Local Studies file at Ryde Library.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD.

Sir,—I was very much interested in Mr. Weirter's account of the aborigine Bennelong, which appeared in last Saturday's "Herald." I am the owner of a portion of the late Mr. Squire's old brewery property at Kissing Point, and in that property there is a black-fellow's grave. A very old resident of Kissing Point told me that the man had worked at the brewery, and had died and was buried there. Seeing that history tells us that Bennelong was buried at Kissing Point in Squire's grounds, and this grave being the only one known on the property, it seems to me that there can be no doubt that the grave is that of Bennelong.

I am, etc.,

C. C. WATSON,
Ryedale-road,
West Ryde

July 7

RELATIONS IN ABORIGINAL

Figure 5. Letter to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald published July 8 1927. This is the most reliable primary source that places 'the black-fellows grave' on Watson's property.

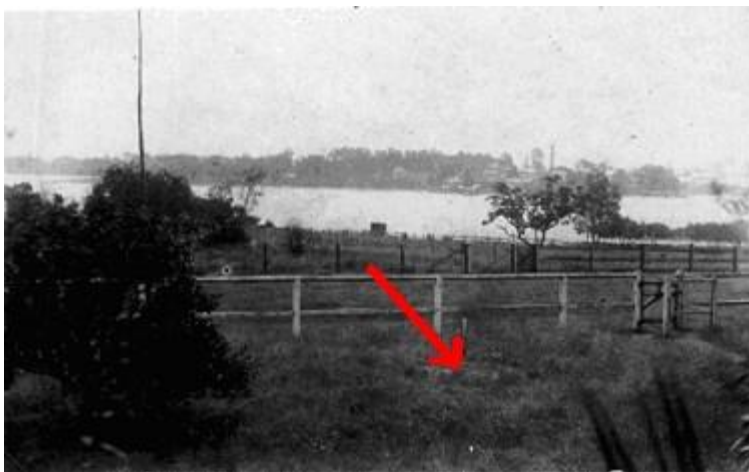


Figure 6. The 'black-mans' grave circa 1900. Photograph held in the Mitchell Library Small Pictures File under Sydney-suburbs-Ryde. A digital image is available in the local photographs on the Ryde Council library web catalogue.

The Ryde Library catalogue entry for this photograph says that it is annotated on the back in pencil: "Photographed about 1900. Remains of J Squires' orchard at Kissing Point, then in possession of Mr C C Watson and family. The fruit-tree in the background (probably a pear-tree) was from the original orchard. Other trees - pears, apples, quinces and orange trees, from the old orchard were in existence in 1900 - none remain in 1946. Very near the right-hand lower corner was the 'black-man's grave', a slightly raised mound covered with old bricks made in Squire's time in which were the bodies of White, Bennelong and his wife. M. Levy 24.1.46". There is less information on the Mitchell Library copy.

The red arrow on Figure 6 indicates the mound of bricks. The photo was taken from inside Watson's property looking across a boundary fence with a kissing gate, to a road or lane-way, into the remains of Squire's orchard and down the hill to the river. It is difficult to identify anything in the background by which the photo might be aligned.

In 1946 Levy was writing a history of Ryde and he probably obtained copies of the photograph from Watson.

The 1924 Valuation Roll shows that Watson owned a block of land at the east end of Watson St., RPA9208, on which was a 4-roomed weatherboard house called 'Congevoi'. The dimensions of the block were 377' 3" x 373' 7" x 269' 1.25" x 425' (Figure 7). He also had a right of way 16' x 300' that seems to have been along the Watson St alignment. This is probably the lane-way seen in the photo.



Figure 7. Part of the plan of subdivision for Cleves Estate 1922. DP11471. The right-of-way is not shown.

In 1947 Levy stated that Bennelong's grave was located under a tennis court on Watson's property. A tennis court is evident on the 1943 air photograph (Figure 8) and it is located at the point where Squire's orchard would have intersected Watson's property boundary (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Air photograph taken in 1943 showing the boundary of Watson's property 9208 in red and the tennis court in blue.

Working back in time 9208 is shown on Figure 9 on a corner of the original land grant known as Bazely's (Beasly) farm.

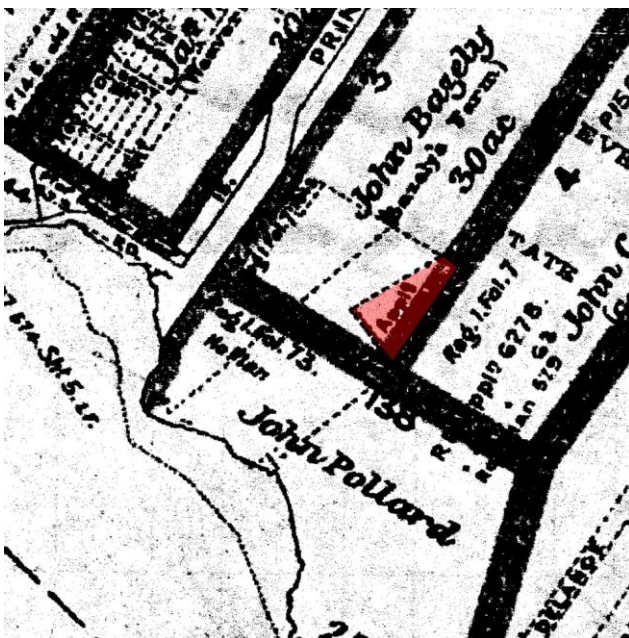


Figure 9. Part of the 1907 Parish Plan (Hunters Hill 14039901) which puts 9208 into context with the first land grants.

Appn. 9208 can be linked to Squire's orchard and garden (two different parcels of land) in the undated map in Figure 10. There is no survey data on Squires land on this map and the boundary of the orchard and garden appears to have been added to the map on the basis of 'a best fit'. The same shaped blocks for an orchard and garden are depicted on an 1842 plan of Squire's estate but that plan also lacks any survey data.

This paper trail has narrowed the possible location of Bennelong's grave to that small part of 9208 that overlaps or adjoins Squire's orchard. This is only the western corner of 9208 and it is the same area where the tennis court was later constructed.

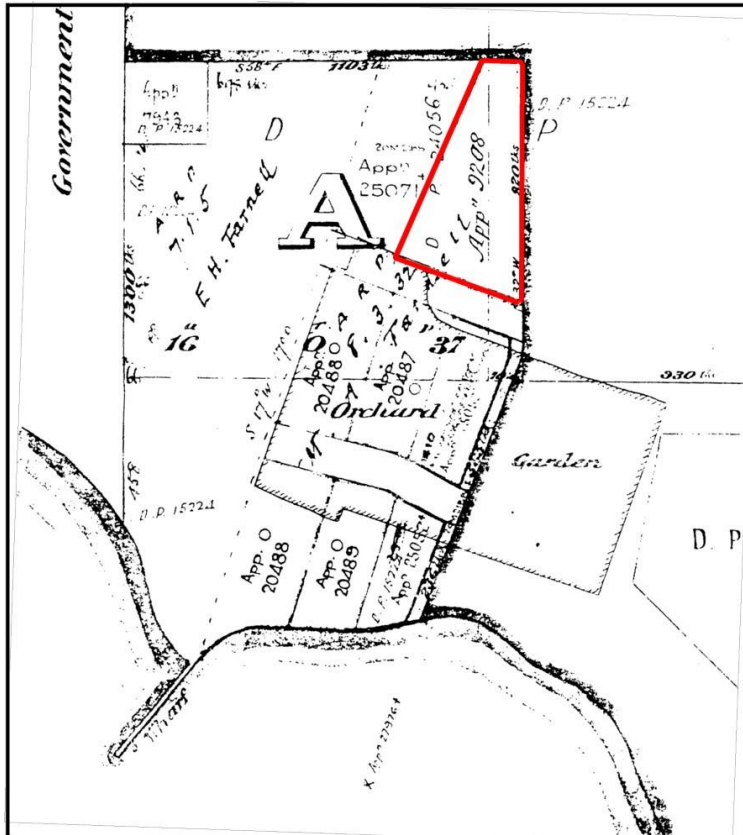


Figure 10. Part of Roll Plan 579 FP192080. Date unknown

Thus we have answered part of the question. The grave was located in the orchard and under the tennis court. But where is this in today's landscape?

Moving toward the present the search becomes more complex because many of the Cleves Estate lot boundaries were changed and Horden Ave was constructed off Watson St at a later date (Figure 11). Construction of Horden Ave involved removal of the tennis court and a lowering of the ground surface to construct the road and install services. There is a possibility that the grave or graves were disturbed at that time. Transferring this data to a 2007 Google image (Figure 12) it is apparent that the former location of the tennis court is in public land on the roads and verges and a nominal length of 50m of both Watson St and Horden Ave are recommended for local heritage listing and for consideration for State Heritage listing.



Figure 11. Part of MWSDB services plan Detail Sheet 6439 Ryde. The date is unreadable but the boundary of 9208 lies under Horden Ave. The approximate location of the tennis court visible on the 1943 air photograph is shown by the blue rectangle.



Figure 12. Google image of Watson St and Horden Ave. The location of the tennis court is outlined in blue and the area recommended for heritage listing in yellow.

Conclusions

No one has left a record of having seen the grave(s) of Bennelong and Nanbaree since it was last reliably described in 1927.

However the grave location can be fixed with some certainty through analysis of the maps and documents reviewed here.

If they have not been disturbed or destroyed by urban development, it seems that the remains of Bennelong and Nanbaree lie under the southwestern end of Horden Ave close to its junction with Watson St in Putney.

There may be more than one grave in this vicinity and although there were certainly two males buried here it is possible that the total number of burials in this area could be higher.

It is recommended that Council ask their survey team to verify the boundaries described in this report and to take steps to have the public lands identified as a local heritage item. The same area should be considered for State heritage listing.

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Acknowledgments

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