

Phillip and the Eora

Governing race relations in the colony of New South Wales

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In the Botanic Gardens stands a grand monument to Arthur Phillip, the first governor of New South Wales. Erected 1897 for the Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, the elaborate fountain encapsulates late nineteenth century ideas about society and race. Phillip stands majestically at the top, while the Aboriginal people, depicted in bas relief panels, are right at the bottom. But this is not how Phillip acted towards Aboriginal people. In his own lifetime, he approached on the same ground, unarmed and open handed. He invited them into Sydney, built a house for them, shared meals with them at his own table.¹

What was Governor Arthur Phillip's relationship with the Eora, and other Aboriginal people of the Sydney region?² Historians and anthropologists have been exploring this question for some decades now. It is, of course, a loaded question. Phillip's policies, actions and responses have tended to be seen as a proxy for the Europeans in Australia as whole, just as his friend, the Wangal warrior Woolarawarre Bennelong, has for so long personified the fate of Aboriginal people since 1788.³ The relationship between Phillip and Bennelong has been read as representing not only settler-Aboriginal relations in those first four years but as the template for the following two centuries of cross-cultural relations.

We are talking here about a grand narrative, driven in part by present-day moral conscience, and deep concerns about on-going issues of poverty, dysfunction and deprivation in many Aboriginal communities, about recognition of and restitution for past wrongs and about reconciliation between black and white Australians. But, like Emma Dortins in her fine essay on the 'many truths' of Bennelong, I feel uneasy with this. Dortins writes that if Bennelong's allegedly tragic life is taken to represent everything that went wrong for Aboriginal people 'how can we remain receptive to stories of Aboriginal survival, and regeneration across the following centuries?'⁴ How can we hear their *history*?

Similar caution is needed for Phillip's story. His actions and experience cannot simply be expanded to stand for what happened over the next 200 years, though I hope to demonstrate that some strands of what he established did set patterns for

the decades immediately following. But here I want to revisit the dynamics of race relations in those early years.

What have historians written about Phillip and the Aboriginal people? In the early accounts, such as Arthur Wilberforce Jose's 1915, *History of Australasia*, Phillip was kind but embattled, while Aboriginal people were inexplicably savage, just another obstacle in his way:

The natives, too, were hostile. Phillip did his best to treat them kindly, but few of the settlers followed his example; stragglers from the township were killed by the way of revenge, and the bush was set on fire whenever the white men turned their stock into it.⁵

At least Aboriginal people appear in Jose's account. Ernest Scott began his 1916 history thus: 'This Short History of Australia begins with a blank space on the map and ends with the record of a new name on the map, that of Anzac'. The blank space on the map was so blank that Aborigines were not even mentioned when the First Fleet arrived.⁶

In the first volume of his magisterial history of Australia, Manning Clark was acutely conscious of culture clash and the British agenda of dispossession. But his dominant theme was the instant disaster of contact for Aboriginal people – so the problem was inevitable; there was nothing Phillip could have done about it.⁷ This critical stance swelled in the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of Aboriginal history and the Aboriginal rights movement. Now the arrival of the First Fleet was not a peaceful colonisation, but an invasion; Phillip was no longer kind or wise; and the natives were no longer just restless and troublesome – they were resisting the invasion. The dominant model here is one of instant, inevitable conflict. As Dortins notes, Phillip's foot played a leading role in this process in Bruce Elder's 1988 book *Blood on the Wattle*:

The fatal moment when Phillip stepped ashore was the moment when the conflict began. There was no spear thrown; no musket fired. But the course of events was set upon its inexorable path. The two cultures were so different...there was no possibility of compromise...one side was basically peaceful and benign, the other was essentially sadistic and autocratic. One sought harmony; the other was driven by aggression and competitiveness.⁸

In 1977 the anthropologist, William Stanner, whose clarion call to end 'the great Australian silence' had such a powerful impact on history writing, published an essay 'The history of indifference thus begins'. Stanner painted Phillip as initially well-meaning but soon disillusioned and a fool for repeatedly making cultural blunders, for not knowing Eora protocols. After Phillip's departure, Stanner says, the settlers either found Aboriginal people repulsive or were indifferent to them.⁹

It was, ironically, Sydney's never-ceasing building development that sparked a different breakthrough in thinking about early race relations, specifically in Sydney. In 1982–83, the proposed development of the site of First Government House in Bridge Street triggered a major archaeological project which in turn shone a light on Phillip's Eora guests (or perhaps, the Eoras' guest, Phillip). Anthropologist Isabel McBryde's 1989 *Guests of the Governor* explored the *actual* relationships between Phillip and the Eora, and the then startling fact of the Eora presence inside Sydney, inside the yard and walls of the house that Phillip built.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Keith Vincent Smith was also pioneering the history of Aboriginal people in Sydney, writing first of the famous and charismatic leader Bungaree. Then in 2001, he produced a detailed biography of Bennelong that concludes with him sailing to the New World and England.¹¹ Later Smith, together with archaeologist James Kohen, challenged the mantra-like myth that Bennelong died a hopeless drunk, spurned by both races. Bennelong got his life back together, married, had children and regained the leadership of his people. When he died in 1813, a year before Phillip, he was deeply mourned by them.¹²

The zombie myth of Bennelong as the 'first Aboriginal drunk' and hopeless victim of culture loss staggers on nonetheless.¹³ But for Phillip the pendulum has swung back. Inga Clendinnen rehabilitated his character and actions in her powerful and engaging book, *Dancing with Strangers*. Phillip and the officers, Clendinnen argued, were not racist, brutal killers but men of the enlightenment who truly saw Aboriginal people as fellow human beings. Those early years of the colony were a blessed hiatus of cross-cultural discovery. Clendinnen concludes firmly that 'Racist terror would come soon enough, but not in Phillip's time'. For Clendinnen, the way that whites and blacks danced together on the shorelines is the foundational emblem of those early good relations.¹⁴

There are some important patterns in this historiography. One is that the debate moves like a pendulum between mutually exclusive conclusions: Phillip as a good guy or a bad guy; race relations in the early colony were peaceful or violent. Yet we know the past, like the present, is rarely so simple, so black and white. Conversely, what has also emerged since the 1980s is the power of *historical imagination* – mostly inspired by anthropology and ethnographic history. Historical imagination is not about inventing the past, it is about recreating, as fully as possible, the 'past's own present'; about re-imagining the human situations, the dilemmas and decisions; re-imagining what it's like *not* knowing what is going to happen, not being aware of the unfurling impacts of actions and events.¹⁵

But to fully imagine those early years in this way, we must see them through the twin lenses of British *and* Eora perspective and experience. We must practice double vision as best we can, turn telescope around on both sides of the beach – that liminal, edgy, unpredictable contact space; and both sides of the town, too. Looking

back and forth between these two lenses – British and Eora – allows us precious glimpses of what was really happening and why. It allows a multiplicity of stories and understandings, a nuanced and complex view, an escape from the flattening effect of the pendulum of historiography. And, the twin lenses banish once and for all the notion that there can be only one 'right' story.

Intentions and expectations

So I want to focus on some key aspects of Phillip's relationship with the Eora through those twin lenses. Let's start with intentions and expectations – how Phillip planned to treat the Eora, how Eora treated strangers in their country and how these played out during the first encounters. Phillip's official orders were to 'conciliate their affections', to 'live in amity and kindness with them', and to punish anyone who should 'wantonly destroy them, or give them any unnecessary interruption in the exercise of their several occupations'.¹⁶ Historian Kate Fullagar points out that these orders were not unique to Phillip or New South Wales but standard orders for the time – the aim being to cultivate Indigenous people so they could provide information and co-operation.¹⁷ But Phillip himself wrote that he hoped to 'give them a High Opinion of their New Guests' through kindness and gifts.¹⁸

I agree with Clendinnen and others that Phillip and the officers, as men of the Enlightenment, were genuinely committed to establishing and maintaining friendly and peaceful relations. Phillip initially thought there would be no problem avoiding disputes with Aboriginal people. In fact, he and the officers hungered for friendship. Friendliness, curiosity, gift exchange and giving and dancing together on the beaches often marked the early meetings in Botany Bay and Port Jackson. This is so entirely different from earlier violent and murderous encounters between Europeans and Indigenous people. It is also very different from the frontier violence that dominated pastoral expansion in Australia well into the twentieth century. In that sense it *was* enlightened and humane.

The perspective of the broader Aboriginal world adds something useful here: after all, the arrival of the First Fleet and the setting up of the small camp in Sydney Cove was in reality momentous only in retrospect. At the time it was just a tiny pinprick on the edge of a vast and ancient Aboriginal continent – it made barely a ripple at first. From this perspective, the idea that Phillip's first footfall on the beach in Botany Bay brought instant death and corruption across the entire continent is Eurocentric nonsense. Aboriginal people did not drop dead or lose their culture the moment they saw a white person.¹⁹

But the Eora of the Sydney region did have to cope with this sudden influx of around 1,000 strangers descending on their waterways and lands. There were no doubt oral traditions and songs about those earlier strangers and the *muri nowie*, Cook's big canoe, which had stayed a few days and then gone away again. This time

the number of *muri nowie*, and the number of these strangers in their coloured skins, was probably alarming. But surely, they too would leave again, like the last lot?²⁰

The Eora already had a name for strangers – *Berewalgal* – and they had protocols for them too. Women and children stayed well away while the warriors stood on beaches or clifftops and shouted unmistakable warnings to the newcomers. At Kai'yamay, later Manly Cove, in north harbour, they waded out to meet the longboat, strong, proud, purposeful and curious.²¹ At those initial meetings, the first Eora priority appears to have been to establish the strangers' sex – men dealt with men. The *Berewalgal* had no beards and they did not appear to have male sex organs. Once he grasped the question, Phillip instructed a sailor to drop his pants at one meeting – in response a great shout went up from the Eora warriors. The next priority was to discover their intentions. What did the strangers want? Food? Water? Access to hunting grounds? Or, given they didn't appear to have any women with them, and continually asked to meet Eora women, perhaps they wanted wives? This last would take some serious negotiation, since women were the food providers, they bound clans together, and they would bind the strangers into local families through reciprocal rights and obligations.²²

Meanwhile, back on the British side, those intentions of amity and peace were also contingent on some cultural expectations. Phillip and the officers only had Cook and Banks' accounts to go on and they had portrayed the Eora as very few, weak, incurious and cowardly – in other words, a rather pathetic, simple, childlike people whom it would be easy to treat kindly. But Cook and Banks were wrong – they had forgotten or downplayed the show of strength and daring they themselves encountered from Eora warriors in 1770.²³ The Eora were nothing like their description – theirs was, in Clendinnen's words, a 'tough warrior culture'.²⁴ They were strong, their spears accurate and deadly and their Law centred on righting wrongs through payback. No wonder Phillip was taken aback to see so many armed men shouting belligerently from the cliff tops, to see those twenty warriors of impressive physique wading out to meet the boat at Kai'yamay. This is the real meaning of his name, Manly, for the Cove there: an expression of what the British admired as 'manly' qualities, but also an acknowledgment that their information had been wrong. I believe that a key reason Phillip chose Sydney Cove for the settlement was not only the bright stream of freshwater there, but the fact that it was the one place in Port Jackson where there were no warriors, shouting and waving spears.²⁵

This realisation on Phillip's part also reinforces something that Clendinnen tended to de-emphasise in her version of the first encounters: guns. Phillip and the officers began their relationship with the Eora through gift-giving, hilarity and dancing but also by showing them what their guns could do. There is no getting around this – Watkin Tench wrote bluntly: 'Our first object was to win their affections, and our

next was to convince them of the superiority we possessed: for without the latter, the former we knew would be of little importance'. So they fired the muskets over the heads of the Eora and shot musket balls right through their wooden shields.²⁶

Eora communications were lightning fast, so word spread quickly about the strangers' dangerous weapons, their *geerubber* or fire sticks. They even called the strangers Geerubber: guns were clearly their most defining characteristic. The muskets were associated with the soldiers' red coats – the sight of which would instantly make the Eora melt away into the bush. Guns made the first meetings possible but they also stopped the process of communication and friendship in its tracks, and the officers knew it.²⁷

Phillip did forbid anyone from shooting or otherwise harming Eora. But by anyone he meant convicts. He had them severely punished for doing so and for stealing from Eora too. But this did not mean that officers and the lower military ranks did not shoot at Aboriginal people – they did, usually with small shot, usually because warriors were throwing spears and stones at them. The people from the *Sirius* shot Aborigines on Garden Island in February 1788; Hunter, Johnson and Bradley all shot at them on the harbour when the warning spears whistled around them. A party of soldiers led by Phillips himself was ordered to shoot into bushes where Eora were hiding in October 1788. The first fatality may have occurred in September 1789 when Henry Hacking shot into a group while out hunting on the North Shore.²⁸

After the early meetings, dancing and musket demonstrations, the Eora for the main part avoided the Camp in Warrane, Sydney Cove, for at least the first year.²⁹ Perhaps they expected the strangers to pack up, go away and leave them in peace, as Cook had done. When this hope faded, they tried to keep the Berewalgal quarantined in their country, Warrane. They warned, and then attacked, unarmed convicts and fishermen and occasionally even armed officers and soldiers, whenever they trespassed on their lands away from Warrane.³⁰ Phillip eventually realised what they were doing. In response, he sent two armed parties out to Botany Bay and other places in October 1788 to show them, as Collins wrote, 'that their late acts of violence would neither intimidate nor prevent us from moving beyond the settlement whenever occasion required'.³¹ From Phillip's perspective this was essential: the whole territory had been officially claimed and was now British. The town depended on the food and building resources of the wider region and so he was demonstrating that they would go where they wished.

Part of Phillip's early plan for peaceful co-habitation had been to persuade some Eora – preferably a family – to come and live in the town with the British. Not only could the British then learn about the Eora, their language, beliefs and customs – the Eora might be convinced of the newcomers' friendly and peaceful intentions. They could also be introduced to the wonders and comforts of the British way of life and

then act as envoys, spreading the message of goodwill and civilisation among their own people.³²

Again, this plan was underpinned by some deep cultural assumptions. While they were very interested in the Eora, Phillip and the officers seem to have had little inkling that they already had their own complex social and cultural systems and were in no need of British ones. The idea that the Eora would or could abruptly drop their entire culture and way of life for a British one seems bizarre to us. But that is what the British expected would happen. When it didn't, they were confused. How could anyone not want to be British?

The Eora were also theoretically already British subjects because they were not considered to be the sovereign occupants or owners of the land. Thus they were subject to British justice – also considered a great gift.³³ But the Eora had their own legal system and were often repelled by what they saw of British justice. When forced to watch floggings, for example, they were horrified. In their own system of justice, the guilty were not bound and helpless but could defend themselves against the spears by parrying with shields.³⁴

Kidnapping and payback

By the end of that first year, Phillip still had not persuaded anyone to 'come in' and the situation was getting increasingly urgent. He still had no idea of Eora numbers or their intentions towards the settlers and the warriors had attacked and killed a number of convicts. Phillip decided on a more ruthless strategy: kidnapping. The kidnapping was violent and distressing and the man they took from Manly Cove was the gentle, homesick Arabanoo. After he died of smallpox, caught during the smallpox epidemic that decimated the Eora from April 1789, the violent skirmishes again escalated. Phillip sent the boats out once more to Manly Cove: two more warriors were taken – Coleby and Woollarwarree Bennelong. They were held prisoner in chains and under guard at Government House. Coleby soon escaped but the extroverted, charismatic Bennelong remained. He seemed to be the breakthrough Phillip and the officers were hoping for. Eventually Bennelong and Phillip developed a kind of friendship, walking out together companionably. Bennelong called Phillip *Beanna*, father or elder, and Phillip called Bennelong *Doorooow*, or son. Phillip seems to have thought of these names in father-son terms: he was the wise father, teaching and guiding the son.

But what did Bennelong make of all this? As a warrior enmeshed in the complex, post-smallpox, inter-tribal politics of the region, he seemed to be learning all he could about the Berewalgal, their allegiances, their fighting power; and he was doing all he could to please them and make them his allies. A month after the fetter was struck from his leg, he stripped off his clothes and escaped. Phillip and the officers were bereft. Yet another cross-cultural experiment seemed to have failed.³⁵

In Aboriginal Law, justice must be done, and the world righted, through payback. If the perpetrator could not stand trial, then someone of his or her family or clan would have to stand for them. Guilt was transferrable to family and clan. Several historians, including William Stanner, Inga Clendinnen and Keith Vincent Smith, believe that before any further relations could occur, Phillip had to stand trial and be punished according to Law for his crimes and the crimes of his people. One day, four months after Bennelong left Sydney, Phillip was invited to a great whale feast at Manly Cove and hurried over in a boat. Bennelong greeted him there and relations were friendly and jovial, just like old times. But Phillip suddenly found himself surrounded by warriors and was then swiftly speared in the shoulder. There was panic as the officers and men rushed him into the boat and back to Sydney. But the spear was not a death spear and the wound was not fatal. Phillip soon recovered. Most importantly, he refused to retaliate, suggesting that he sensed the purpose of the spearing.³⁶

Phillip's spearing *was* indeed followed by a breakthrough. Not long after, friendly meetings, always initiated by the Eora, were again re-established, with dancing, feasting and fun on the shorelines. And, finally, after much negotiation, Bennelong was persuaded to 'come in' to Sydney, along with his family and friends. Bennelong was like a returning king: everyone in the town came out to see him as he and his people marched up from the wharf to Government House. He asked for a British style gunyah to be built for him on Tubowgully (Bennelong Point) and Phillip obliged. For Bennelong and his people this move was very likely seen as taking possession of this country at Warrane.³⁷

This was one of the happiest days for many of the early officer chroniclers – they were genuinely delighted and relieved that the violence was now at an end and that the two groups were now friends, who would live in amity.³⁸ It is deeply poignant to read those words now, knowing what happened in the decades that followed.

Law

Phillip and the officers expected the Eora would now obey British Law, not only in town but throughout the colony. They were seemingly still unaware that payback was Aboriginal Law. From the Eora perspective, the Law had to be upheld, but because they extended it to white colonists, conflict was inevitable.³⁹ In December 1790, the warrior Pemulwuy fatally speared Phillip's own gamekeeper, John McIntyre. McIntyre had earlier wounded a warrior and probably his spearing was payback but many believed he had committed other serious crimes as well.⁴⁰ Learning that McIntyre had been unarmed and that he had been approaching Pemulwuy in a friendly manner, Phillip reached the end of his forbearance. He decided the Eora needed to be taught a terrifying lesson, once and for all. He ordered a party of 50 soldiers, led by Watkin Tench, to march to the head of Botany Bay, capture two Eora men, and march them back to Sydney for public execution.

As well, he wanted ten more men beheaded and their heads brought back to town. Friendly relations of any kind were suspended: 'all communication, even with those natives with whom we were in the habit of intercourse, is to be avoided'.⁴¹ Tench suggested that the number of intended victims be reduced to six: they would be arrested and brought back to Sydney where some would be forced to witness the execution of their countrymen, then set free. Phillip agreed but insisted that those not executed would be sent to Norfolk Island. He added that if warriors could not be taken, they were to be summarily shot. The party was provided with hatchets for the chopping and bags to carry the heads, so presumably the beheading order was still in force.⁴²

The party duly marched out from Sydney towards the southwest of Botany Bay – probably the area around present day Lansdown and up to the tidal limits of the Georges River around Liverpool. Despite marching around the area all day, Tench wrote that they failed to find anyone and headed east towards the 'south west arm' of Botany Bay – Georges River. But their guides lost their way and they found themselves on the 'sea shore...about midway between the two arms' (that is, the Georges and Cooks Rivers) where they saw and tried to surround five Aboriginal people. But these people escaped, disappearing into the bush. Tench then marched the party to a known 'village' of huts on the 'nearest point of the north arm' – most likely on the south shore of Cooks River near its mouth. But here again the Aboriginal people swiftly paddled to safety to 'the opposite shore'. The mosquito-bitten party returned to Sydney, exhausted and frustrated.⁴³

But Phillip was determined. He sent Tench and the soldiers out again. The second expedition, on December 22, left Sydney at sunset, so the party might surprise, arrest or kill people while asleep in their camps (by now the British knew that the Eora were heavy sleepers). The party forded two 'arms of the sea' before almost drowning in quicksand in a creek. When they arrived back at the village on Cook's River, it was deserted and had been for some days. A final attempt to locate, arrest or shoot warriors was made at 1.30 in the morning – again without success – and four hours later, Tench says he gave up and marched the soldiers back to Sydney.⁴⁴ Oddly, he failed to specify where this last attempt was made but John Easty, one of the privates on the expedition, noted it in his journal:

[we] Started again at 3 o'clock and went to Botany Bay and halted on the North Shore until 2 on the Morning of the 24 when we went Down the Beach for about 3 miles where we saw several of the natives by their fires and then ~~and~~ ~~Marched~~ Back to the Place from whence we Started and halted till 7 o'clock when we returned to Sydney by 9 that morning after a most tedious march as ever men went in the time [my emphasis]⁴⁵

Tench's party thus appears to have combed the whole area from Cooks River to Prospect Creek and the Georges River. Contrary to Tench's account, they finally

found a group of Aboriginal people on the beach at Botany Bay – but then returned to Sydney.⁴⁶

This 'headhunt' has become contentious in recent years. Those who admire Phillip find it difficult to accept that the enlightened, fair-minded and humane governor gave such gruesome orders and intended the arrest and execution of innocent people rather than just the guilty man. Inga Clendinnen, taking cues from Tench's perhaps unintentionally comic account, interprets the whole incident as an elaborate piece of farcical theatre, performed for the benefit of the unruly and resentful convicts. Wise Phillip knew the party would not find anyone, let alone behead them. He never intended anyone to get hurt, and just to make sure, he put the sympathetic Watkin Tench in charge.⁴⁷

Was the 'head hunt' simply a grand show with no serious intent to harm? As we have seen, guns and the threat of violence were fundamental to the settlement project from the start. Once Bennelong and his people agreed to 'come in' to Sydney in late 1790, Phillip believed he had an agreement that the attacks and killings of unarmed convicts would stop because he thought he had finally brokered peaceful relations via Bennelong and Coleby. When McIntyre – at the time unarmed – was nevertheless speared and killed, it was not only a final betrayal of all Phillip's kindness and patience, but a breaking of the 'agreement' for peaceful relations as he saw it.

The fact that Phillip sent out two expeditions, rather than just one, is significant. Had this been a piece of theatre for the benefit of the convicts and others, one would surely have sufficed. Two – the second starting out at dusk to catch people while they slept – signifies the seriousness of Phillip's intent. So does the fact that Tench scoured the country from the head of Botany Bay to the coast – thus while the intended targets may originally been Pemulwuy's Bidjigal clan, other groups were soon hunted as well. Lieutenant William Dawes, who was also sympathetic to the Eora, at first refused to take part but was then persuaded to go. Afterwards he was disgusted with the whole expedition and would not retract this opinion. He was forced to leave the colony as a result, even though he wanted to stay.⁴⁸ It is unlikely Dawes would have felt so strongly if the expeditions were make-believe.

It is also possible that someone was wounded. Tench was not entirely truthful in his account – Collins reported that the soldiers on the expedition did in fact shoot at Aboriginal people, though he insisted that they failed to hit anyone.⁴⁹ Tench also omitted the fact that the second expedition did locate Aboriginal people lying by their fires on the shores of Botany Bay in the early morning darkness of December 24 – after which they began the return journey to Sydney. There are no more details on what happened that night.

Two related paintings by the Port Jackson Painter appear to offer some suggestive evidence – the first is a portrait of Bennelong 'As painted when angry after Botany

Bay Colbee was wounded',⁵⁰ while the second shows three surgeons, accompanied by a party of soldiers 'visiting Botany Bay Colebee at that place when wounded near Botany Bay'.⁵¹ Cadigal Coleby, shown sitting on a log nearby, was a friend of Surgeon White and may have asked him to attend to his kinsman and namesake Botany Bay Coleby (Warrungin Wabgubile). Art historian Bernard Smith thought the pictures could have been related to the 'headhunt' of December 1790 – certainly Bennelong, who may have been related to Botany Bay Coleby by marriage, was very angry shortly afterwards, though Tench and Collins attribute his fury to the shooting of his friend Bangai by soldiers in Sydney.⁵² However, as historian Michael Flynn points out, the picture's title includes Surgeon Laing, an obscure figure who did not arrive in the colony until February 1792 and left again in December 1794. Flynn reasonably suggests that the painting depicts some later, lesser-known incident. On the other hand, the Port Jackson Painter's pictures of cross-cultural relations, like those of William Bradley, depict not obscure events, but moments which the colonists considered significant – the first meeting with the Eora woman, the kidnapping of Bennelong and Coleby, the spearing of Governor Phillip, the first reconciliation. The 'headhunt' was another of these key events. It is possible that the title was added later and the writer was mistaken about which surgeons were being depicted – close inspection reveals that a number of different hands have added various words to this picture. The different spelling of Coleby's name on the two paintings may indicate the titles were written at different times. Further research may throw more light on the dates and meanings of these intriguing paintings.⁵³

To return to the key question: was Phillip serious in giving these orders to arrest, shoot and behead warriors? As an eighteenth century naval officer, his actions were not out of character – though grandiose play-acting would have been. Nor did his orders constitute unusual conduct, any more than for succeeding governors, including Macquarie, who despatched even larger, and fatal, military reprisals against Aboriginal people.⁵⁴ Phillip's harsh orders were given to demonstrate his own authority in this precarious colony, to send the unmistakable message to the Eora that 'good', 'friendly' and 'lawful' behaviour would be rewarded with kindness, friendship and indulgence, but violence and killing would result in terror.

Botany Bay Project

Meanwhile the larger Botany Bay Project was already unfolding up the Parramatta River on the clusters of small, carefully planned farms Phillip had set out there. Here it is important to note that we cannot separate Phillip's relations with Eora and the inland Aboriginal people from his role as the founder of this colony. New South Wales was, after all, never intended as a gaol, or a dumping ground for convicts, but a *colony* – a rather astonishing penal experiment in making a new society from transported felons. Convicts who were pardoned or had done their time were to be given land and everything they needed to become farmers. They would thus 'cease

to be enemies of society... and became proprietors and cultivators of the land'.⁵⁵ Phillip himself regarded his most important roles in the founding of this colony as 'serving my country and serving the cause of humanity'.⁵⁶ All his efforts to implement the plan centred on soil, water, crops, carving those little farms out of the bush. But the lynchpin of the whole Botany Bay Project, the path to redemption for the convicts, was land, taken from Aboriginal people. And so it was on those early farms that the first signs of frontier conflict were breaking out in the latter months of 1790.

Phillip's actions at Parramatta and the vicinity stand in striking contrast to his relations with the Eora on the coast. At Parramatta there were no meetings, or dancing, no gift exchange or high hopes of 'living in amity'. This is the untold story of Phillip and the Aboriginal people: the settlement of Parramatta was an invasion, with well-organised military defences. The new public farm there took a large swathe of land right on the river, land the Burramategal relied upon for food and water.⁵⁷

In October 1790, about the same time as Bennelong's triumphant entry into Sydney, one of the Burramategal elders, Maugaron, came down to protest to Phillip. This was the first recorded formal Aboriginal protest in Australia. Maugaron told Phillip that the people at Parramatta were very angry at the invasion of their country. Phillip noted it all down, observing bluntly that 'wherever our colonists fix themselves, the natives are obliged to leave that country'. But instead of attempts at compromise or amelioration one might expect from a governor so committed to peaceful relations, Phillip simply reinforced the detachment at Parramatta with more soldiers.⁵⁸

And when his first ex-convict settlers were placed on the small farms from August 1790 he armed them with muskets. In October a navy settler at Prospect began indiscriminately shooting into a group of Aboriginal people, who responded by burning down his hut. After that, Phillip posted soldiers on every farm until all the land was clear of trees. Without trees, Aboriginal people would have nowhere to hide.⁵⁹

In subsequent years some Aboriginal people and settlers befriended one another and worked out ways to co-exist. But from the start the Australian frontier was also an edgy place, and guns were the backbone of colonisation. Maize raids, constant attacks on unarmed settlers on the lonely roads, bloody military reprisals, corpses strung up in trees, terrible paybacks on both sides, and massacres were still in the future. But before all that, an ailing Phillip had decided to leave. He never returned.

Phillip's legacy

How do we interpret Phillip in the light of his actions towards Aboriginal people? Was he a hero or a villain, a good guy or a bad guy? Do we keep him on his

pedestal or knock him off? Or, do the twin lenses reveal something else: a pragmatic man in a real and difficult situation? At least two scenarios are possible: one is that Phillip considered the good relations he had established with the Eora of Sydney could and should stand for his good relations with all Aboriginal people. He had conciliated them, as instructed, and he had done his job. This may sound strange to us, but Governor Macquarie thought in the same way. When frontier violence broke out around Appin in the south in 1814, Macquarie's response was to give the Sydney Tribe a farm at Georges Head and to open a school for Aboriginal children at Parramatta.⁶⁰ Neither of these attempts at conciliation had anything to do with the people or conflict down at Appin.

The second scenario is this: by the time the farms were being carved out of the bush, Phillip well knew the fighting power and determination of the Eora warriors, particularly towards unarmed convicts trespassing in Country. He knew that they were not cowardly, weak people who could simply be moved on, as Cook and Banks had described them. Although plenty of Sydney people now had Eora friends, Phillip's earlier policy of kindness and gifts could not completely stop Eora violence any more than he could stop settler transgressions. The farms were spread over a much greater area than Sydney, much further away, and they would disrupt many different Aboriginal groups. How would it even be possible to use the policy of patient kindness with all of them? Phillip knew that farms meant dispossession and dispossession meant violence. But his mission was to found an agricultural colony and he followed his orders to the letter. He armed the convict farmers because he knew that otherwise they probably would not stand a chance out there, either through their own wrongdoing, or because of Aboriginal anger, payback and resistance to the invasion of their lands. Phillip did not want any disasters. Thus, the two aspects of Phillip's humane policies we most celebrate in fact contradicted one another: his greatest service to 'the cause of humanity', this extraordinary convict colony, had at its heart not amity, but the inhumanity of dispossession.

But the outcomes of policies and actions can be unexpected. Phillip sailed away in December 1792. One of his legacies was that Sydney was and remained a town of both settlers and Aboriginal people. They shared urban spaces, harbour places, houses, conversations, hunting trips and popular culture. Aboriginal Law continued to be imposed among Aboriginal people in Sydney well in the 1820s. The presence of Eora and other Aboriginal people in Sydney town was normal and accepted. This is not a story of instant culture loss and degradation either, for Aboriginal people combined their own dynamic culture with the strands and rhythms of pre-industrial Sydney. Later, visitors unfamiliar with the place, found the Sydney Tribe confronting, but locals were used to them and knew them by name. Perhaps this explains why Sydney's history of early race relations is so different to Melbourne's, where the local Aboriginal people *were* evidently subjected to harsh regulation, forced out and banished. Governor Macquarie tried hard to persuade 'the Sydney

Tribe' to leave, but they never did. Phillip had invited them in to Sydney, and they were here to stay.⁶¹

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¹ This article is based on a paper delivered at 'The First Governor: A symposium in Honour of Arthur Phillip', Museum of Sydney, 5 September 2014.

² I use the word 'Eora' in its first recorded sense, meaning 'people', that is, the people of the coastal region around Sydney.

³ Emma Dortins, 'The Many Truths of Bennelong's Tragedy,' *Aboriginal History*, 33 (2009): 53–75

⁴ *Ibid*, 64

⁵ Arthur W Jose, *History of Australasia from the Earliest Times to the Present Day with a Chapter on Australian Literature* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Ltd, 1914), 23

⁶ Ernest Scott, *A Short History of Australia* (Melbourne, Vic: Humphrey Milford/Oxford University Press, 1916), v

⁷ CMH Clark, *A History of Australia Volume I: From the Earliest Times to the Age of Macquarie* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1962), 110

⁸ Bruce Elder, *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal People since 1788* (Sydney: Child and Associates, 1988), 11, cited in Dortins, 'The Many Truths of Bennelong's Tragedy,' 64

⁹ William Stanner, 'The History of Indifference Thus Begins', *Aboriginal History*, 1, no 1 (1977): 2–26

¹⁰ Isabel McBryde, *Guests of the Governor: Aboriginal Residents of the First Government House* (Sydney: Friends of First Government House Site, 1989)

¹¹ Keith Vincent Smith, *King Bungaree: A Sydney Aborigine Meets the Great South Pacific Explorers, 1799–1830* (Sydney: Kangaroo Press, 1992); Keith Vincent Smith, *Bennelong: The Coming In of the Eora Sydney Cove 1788–1792* (Sydney: Kangaroo Press, 2001)

¹² Keith Vincent Smith, *Wallumedegal: An Aboriginal History of Ryde* (Sydney: Ryde City Council, 2005) 12–13, 25–7; James L Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours: The Traditional Aboriginal Owners of the Sydney Region* (Sydney: Darug Link and Blacktown and District Historical Society, 1993) 55; Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2009), 422–23

¹³ See Dortins, 'The Many Truths of Bennelong's Tragedy.' When the site of Bennelong's grave was allegedly rediscovered in 2010/11, most print and television media repeated the story that Bennelong died a lonely alcoholic shunned by both races, see *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 and 27 March 2011; *Daily News* (Sri Lanka) 21 March 2011; 'Bennelong's Burial Site Still a Mystery', *SBS World News*, 3 January 2013, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/video/13570627749/Bennelongs-burial-site-still-a-mystery>

¹⁴ Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2003), 5, 286 and 'Bennelong's Burial Site Still a Mystery', *SBS World News*, 3 January 2013

¹⁵ Greg Denning, *Readings/Writings* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998) 48, 205–18

¹⁶ Governor Phillip's Instructions, 17 April 1787, *Historical Records of Australia: Governors' Despatches to and from England*, edited by Frederick Watson (Sydney: The Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1914), 1:13–14

¹⁷ Kate Fullagar, 'Bennelong in Britain', *Aboriginal History*, 33 (2009): 32

¹⁸ Arthur Phillip, Memorandum, October 1786, *Historical Records of Australia: Governors' Despatches to and from England*, edited by Frederick Watson (Sydney: The Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1914), 1:52

¹⁹ See Tiffany Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe: Negotiating the Aboriginal World at King George's Sound* (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2009); Stephen J Kunitz cited in Tom Griffiths, 'Empire and Ecology: Towards an Australian History of the World', in Tom

Griffiths and Libby Robin (eds), *Empire and Ecology: Environmental History of Settler Societies* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1997), 3; Paul Irish's research reveals that Aboriginal people occupied the coastal parts of Sydney continuously throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Paul Irish 'Hidden in Plain View: Nineteenth Century Aboriginal People and Places in Coastal Sydney' (PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2014)

²⁰ Karskens, *The Colony*, 48; Maria Nugent, *Botany Bay: Where Histories Meet*, Sydney (Allen & Unwin: 2005), 10–15

²¹ David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, Volume 1*, printed by T Cadell and W Davies, London, 1798, facsimile edition (Adelaide, Libraries Board of South Australia: London, 1971) 3; John Hunter, *An Historical Journal of Events at Sydney and at Sea 1787–1792* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1968), 37, 38; George Bouchier Worgan, letter written to his brother Richard Worgan, 12–18 June 1788, includes journal fragment kept by George on a voyage to New South Wales with the First Fleet on board HMS Sirius, 20 January 1788–11, July 1788, Mitchell Library manuscript collection, State Library of New South Wales, Safe 1/114, 10; Pauline Curby, *Seven Miles from Sydney: A History of Manly* (Manly: Headland Press/Manly Council, 2001), 9–10; William Dawes, *Vocabulary of the Language of N.S. Wales, in the Neighbourhood of Sydney, (Native and English)*, 1790–9, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Marsden Manuscript Collection, 41645A, 41645b, FM4/343

²² Philip Gidley King, *Private Journal, Volume 1, 24 October 1786–12 January 1789*, entry for 20 January 1788, Mitchell Library manuscript collection, State Library of New South Wales, Safe 1/16, transcript online at http://image.sl.nsw.gov.au/Ebind/safe1_16/a1296/a1296242.html; William Bradley, *Journal: A Voyage to New South Wales, December 1786–May 1792*, compiled 1803, Mitchell Library manuscript collection, State Library of New South Wales, Safe 1/14, 60; Val Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past: Investigation the Archaeological and Historical Records* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010), 57–60, 29.

²³ Joseph Banks, *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks 1768–1771*, 2 volumes, edited by JC Beaglehole (Sydney: Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales and Angus and Robertson, 1962), 54–5; Glyndwr Williams, 'Far Happier Than We Europeans: Reactions to the Australian Aborigines on Cooks Voyage', *Australian Historical Studies*, 19, no 77 (1981): 511; Nugent, *Botany Bay*, 11–13

²⁴ Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, 165

²⁵ Karskens, *The Colony*, 55–60

²⁶ *Ibid*, 49–52; Watkin Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years: Being a Reprint of A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay and A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson*, with an introduction and annotations by LF Fitzhardinge (Sydney: Library of Australian History in association with the Royal Australian Historical Society, 1979), 37

²⁷ Karskens, *The Colony*, 51

²⁸ Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*, 17; Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 15, 17, 45, 81; Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 55; Bradley, *Journal: A Voyage to New South Wales*, 119–120, 177

²⁹ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 16

³⁰ *Ibid*, 23–5

³¹ *Ibid*, 58

³² Phillip cited in Stanner, 'The History of Indifference Thus Begins', 29–30, 36

³³ Their actual legal status remained ambiguous for decades, since they could not give evidence in British courts because they were considered incapable of taking the Christian oath and of understanding the proceedings. See Bruce Kercher, *An Unruly Child: A History of Law in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 4–5

³⁴ Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 145; Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 189, 222

³⁵ Karskens, *The Colony*, 371–83; Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, 94–109; Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*, 31–7, 39–51

³⁶ Stanner, 'The History of Indifference Thus Begins', 20; Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*, 57–9; Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, 110–32; Hunter, *An Historical Journal of Events at Sydney and At Sea*, 139, 141;

Arthur Phillip in Hunter, *An Historical Journal of Events at Sydney and At Sea*, 305–8; Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 176–80; Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 229

³⁷ Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, 133–39; Vincent Smith, chapter 9, *Bennelong*; Karskens, *The Colony*, 386–89; re Bennelong's gunya see Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 200; Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 137

³⁸ Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 183, 200; Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 133, 135

³⁹ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 329, 587; Karskens, *The Colony*, 358. See also Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous people in America and Australia 1788–1836* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 43–44

⁴⁰ Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 205–6

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 207–8

⁴² *Ibid.*, 209. As Keith Vincent Smith points out, Phillip also appears to have been under pressure to provide Aboriginal skulls for Sir Joseph Banks, who had promised them to medical professor Johann Fredrich Blumenbach at the University of Göttingen. This may explain the 'headhunt'. Blumenbach did in fact acquire two skulls of initiated men from the Sydney region in the 1790s, but their identities are unknown. Certainly later outlawed warriors were beheaded, including Pemulwuy himself in 1802 and two warriors and a woman killed during the Appin massacre of 1816. See Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*, 156–57; Karskens, 474, 513–14

⁴³ Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 209–11

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 212–15

⁴⁵ John Easty, *Memorandum of Transactions of a Voyage from England to Botany Bay, 1787–1791: A First Fleet Journal* (Sydney: Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales, 1965) ML Q991.1/16A1 and CY 914, frames 99–203, p 122; compare with Phillip, 'they did not see a single inhabitant during the two days which they remained out' in Hunter, *An Historical Journal of Events at Sydney and At Sea*, 329

⁴⁶ Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*, 90

⁴⁷ Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, 172–81

⁴⁸ Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*, 86–87; Phyllis Mander-Jones, 'Dawes, William (1762–1836)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 1 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966) 297–98

⁴⁹ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 144; Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*, 89

⁵⁰ Port Jackson Painter, 'Mr White, Harris and Laing with a party of Soldiers visiting Botany Bay Colebee at that place, when wounded', c1790–1797, Watling Collection, Natural History Museum London, Watling Drawing No 25

⁵¹ Port Jackson Painter, 'Native name Ben-nel-long, as painted when angry after Botany Bay Colebee was wounded', Watling Collection, Natural History Museum London, Watling Drawing No 41;

⁵² Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*, 90; Bernard Smith, 'The Artwork' in Bernard Smith and Alwyne Wheeler (eds), *Art of the First Fleet and Other Early Australian Drawings* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1988), 228

⁵³ I am grateful to Michael Flynn for his insights and information. Michael Flynn, email to the author, 24 September 2014 and 6 October 2014

⁵⁴ Karskens, *The Colony*, 466, 507–14; John Connor, *The Australian Frontier Wars 1788–1838* (Sydney, UNSW Press, 2000), 38ff

⁵⁵ Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia: A History, Volume One The Beginning* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), 64–72; quote from Johan Reinhold Forster, page 68

⁵⁶ Phillip to Lord Sydney, 10 July 1788, cited in Michael Pembroke, *Arthur Phillip: Sailor, Mercenary, Governor, Spy* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2013), 156

⁵⁷ John Connor, *The Australian Frontier Wars 1788–1838* (Sydney, UNSW Press, 2000), 26; compare Arthur Phillip in Hunter, *An Historical Journal of Events at Sydney and At Sea*, 299; James L Kohen, A Knight and Keith Vincent Smith, *Uninvited Guests: An Aboriginal Perspective on Government House and Parramatta Park* (Sydney: National Trust of Australia, NSW, August 1999), 16

⁵⁸ Arthur Phillip in Hunter, *An Historical Journal of Events at Sydney and At Sea*, 312; Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 181

⁵⁹ Arthur Phillip in Hunter, *An Historical Journal of Events at Sydney and At Sea*, 299, 355–56; Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 450; Governor John Hunter to Portland, 3 Mar 1796, *Historical Records of Australia: Governors' Despatches to and from England*, edited by Frederick Watson (Sydney: The Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1914) 1:55

⁶⁰ *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 4 Feb, 1815; 4 May, 1816; 11 May, 1816; and Lachlan Macquarie, 'Proclamation', *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 4 May 1816, 1; Jack Brook and James L Kohen, *The Parramatta Native Institution and the Black Town: A History* (Sydney, UNSW Press, 1991), 252; Vincent Smith, *King Bungaree*, 77–78; Karskens, *The Colony*, 499–503

⁶¹ Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th Century Pacific Rim Cities* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010); Karskens, *The Colony*, chapters 12, 14; Irish 'Hidden in Plain View'