

Captain Cook's landing site, Kurnell

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The site of Captain Cook's first landing on the Australian continent lies at the far end of the Kurnell peninsula. The site is fairly unassuming considering the events that took place there have been "subsequently ascribed the status of a foundational moment in Australia's history" (Nugent 2008, p. 198). There are no signs that guide you to the destination as would normally be expected of a site of this magnitude. There is a sense that this is a forgotten place, that the now occupants of this land have tried to bury their arrival here. It is because of that sense that I chose to visit the site and explore why it has been treated in such a way.

Within the site itself the sense of transience and disconnection continues, a flagpole here, a memorial and plaque there with no link between the two. Throughout history, the story of that mythical first landing has been changed, reimagined and contested. There is a confusion and uncertainty that lies over those first days of white settlement that echoes in the site today and hints at the fragility of the colonisation project in Australia.

Information about the displacement and destruction of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples has been included in the site. But this is presented in a half-hearted manner on faded plaques on a nearby jetty. It is understandable that the site does not outwardly celebrate the colonisation of Australia but neither does it fully serve to commemorate the loss of Indigenous life, culture and tradition as a direct result of that process. It seems, as argued by Morris (1992), that colonial power in Australia has never been secure, thus the complete acknowledgement of the atrocities committed by white settlers in the context of this site could potentially undermine the entire colonisation project.

I believe that this site is a good illustration of the way in which the vast majority of Australian society relates to Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders today. There is a sense of the past being the past, that it is better to hide the pain and suffering in the past and focus on a positive future. But that pain, like this site, continues to exist despite continual attempts to minimise and hide it. In order to move forward as a unified nation, we need to return to sites such as this one and consider their role in shaping our shared history, working to acknowledge and atone the consequences of events such as the first landing that continue to be felt in the present day.



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References

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