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Place Name SUMMARY (PNS) 8/25

'TAPEROO'

(last edited: 14.5.2018)

NOTE AND DISCLAIMER:

This essay has not been peer-reviewed or culturally endorsed in detail.

The spellings and interpretations contained in it (linguistic, historical and geographical) are my own, and do not necessarily represent the views of KWP/KWK or its members or any other group.

I have studied history at tertiary level. Though not a linguist, for 30 years I have learned much about the Kurna, Ramindjeri-Ngarrindjeri and Narungga languages while working with KWP, Rob Amery, and other local culture-reclamation groups; and from primary documents I have learned much about the Aboriginal history of the Adelaide-Fleurieu region.

My explorations of 'language on the land' through the Southern Kurna Place Names Project are part of an ongoing effort to correct the record about Aboriginal place-names in this region (which has abounded in confusions and errors), and to add reliable new material into the public domain.

I hope upcoming generations will continue this work and improve it. My interpretations should be amplified, re-considered and if necessary modified by KWP or other linguists, and by others engaged in cultural mapping: Aboriginal people, archaeologists, geographers, ecologists and historians.

Chester Schultz, [date].

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Abstract

‘Taperoo’, the gazetted name of a suburb and railway station on Lefevre Peninsula in Adelaide, is not a Kurna word. In 1920 the SA government’s Nomenclature Committee took it from a 1912 newspaper citation of Aboriginal words which had been lifted from unknown wordlists for use by settlers in naming their properties. The Committee used it to re-name an existing railway siding which was then serving the new housing development of Silicate Beach – which in turn had been named after the Silicate Brick Company operating a few years earlier near the site of today’s Taperoo Railway Station.

In the newspaper article the word was said to mean “calm”. Its linguistic form could suggest that it was obtained around the Upper Murray or Monaro region.

In 1925 the Committee bestowed the same name on a new housing development immediately east of the siding. Much later the name was attached to a new railway station (the present one) located a short distance to the south of the old siding; and the suburb was extended to its present dimensions.

Although at first contact the Kurna-speaking women of the Adelaide Plains beat a possum-skin pad or ‘drum’ called *tapurro* (New Spelling *tapurru*) in their corroborees, and although this word could easily be spelled ‘taperoo’ by a linguistically untrained settler, there is no evidence to support the idea that this local word was ever used as a place-name, nor that it had any special association with the place now called Taperoo.

Coordinates	Lat, -34.806710, Long. 138.499840 [Taperoo suburb as on plb website]
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Language Information

Meaning	Said (by a newspaper article) to mean ‘calm’
Etymology	Unknown
Notes	There is no historical evidence to support the claim (made by Sheridah Melvin in her Lartelare Report 1991) that the word ‘Taperoo’ is derived from <i>tapurro</i> , the name of the possum-skin ‘drum’ used by women in corroborees at first contact in Adelaide.
Language Family	Unknown; possibly Upper Murray or Monaro region
KWP Former Spelling	
KWP New Spelling 2010	
Phonemic Spelling	
Syllabification	‘Ta-pe-roo’
Pronunciation tips	English pronunciation defined by common usage.



Main source evidence

Date	1840
Original source text	“tapurro, s. the skin of an opossum stuffed, and used at a play as a drum”
Reference	Teichelmann & Schürmann 1840, <i>An Outline of a Grammar...</i>
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Kadlitpinna, Mullawirraburka, Ityamaitpinna etc 1838-40

Date	1844 / 1926
Original source text	<p>- “A stuffed opossum-skin is used as a kind of bass or drum. This is named the taparoo. It is placed in the laps of the women singers, and on it they beat a strumming, dull noise, keeping time with their voices... In general a native begins singing some words, others join, and then the young women and girls are called to beat the tapurio [<i>sic</i>], and in this way a corroboree is commenced.”</p> <p>- “The play is introduced by a solemn tune or chant, one man being the leader and keeping time with two sticks (tantanakkoo) supported by two girls, who stand with a bundle of skins for a “tarpuro” in one hand, on which they beat time with the other.”</p>
Reference	WA Cawthorne 1844 / 1926, ‘Rough notes on the Manners and Customs of the Natives’, <i>Royal Geographical Society of SA, Proceedings</i> 27 (1925-6), Adelaide 1927: 57, 59.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Kaurna-speaking informants, Adelaide 1842-4, probably including Kadlitpinna.

Date	8 July 1912
Original source text	<p>“MISCELLANEOUS... ‘Native Name.’— The Public Library officers courteously forward the following list of native names and their meanings: — Turna; happy; Tu-tu-la. peace; Wanerooka, a spring; Taperoo, calm; Burburja, inno-cence; Tiola, strong; Emeego, hope; Ko-wola, kind; Nupa, love; Wottawootha, sweet; Purrrumba, a flower; Yanna, light.”</p>
Reference	<i>The Register</i> (Adelaide) Monday 8 July 1912 p8f, http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/59226360/4511746 .
Informants credited	SA Public Library officers
Informants uncredited	Unidentified Aboriginal wordlists



Date	1916
Original source text	- [p.8/25] " Taperoo - native word for 'calm'. " - [p.27] "HCT 22/9/16" [<i>hand-written, alongside newspaper cutting as above:</i>] "'Native Name': - The public Library officers courteously forward the following list of native names and their meanings: - Turna, happy; Tu-tu-la, peace; Wanerooka, a spring; Taperoo, calm ; Burburja, innocence;..." [<i>arrow to pencil note</i>] " Taperoo (Used) ".
Reference	HC Talbot MS scrapbook [n.d., c.1900-1924], 'The Talbot Book', SA Geographical Names Unit.
Informants credited	Newspaper cutting
Informants uncredited	

Date	30 April 1920
Original source text	"NEW NAME DESIRED FOR SILICATE. A memorial was received from 27 ratepayers residing at Silicate, requesting the name of the district should be changed to Koolena. They stated that the name chosen was a native one, meaning a sandy place. The present name was derived from a local brickyard, onw [<i>sic</i>] dismantled and out of business. Cr. Lowen moved that the request be granted... The resolution was then adopted."
Reference	<i>Port Adelaide News</i> 30/4/1920: 5e, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/213609278/23859836 .
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	

Date	27 Nov 1920
Original source text	"The railway siding put in some years ago opposite the works of the now defunct Silicate Brick Company, between Outer Harbour and Glanville, has been renamed Taperoo ."
Reference	<i>The Journal</i> (Adelaide 1912-1923) 27/11/1920: 20d, http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/200892346/22481361 .
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	

Date	1923
Original source text	"NATIVE HOUSE NAMES. 'K. P.'- I am indebted to Mr. Rodney Cockburn for the following comprehensive reply to your enquiry:-Amonginda, house; ... weeroona, resting place; wahroonga, our house; ngoreeka, wattle blossom (Adelaide tribe); torre, sunbeams; taperoo, calm, placidity ; ..."
Reference	<i>Observer</i> 10/2/1923: 46a, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/165703915/19339959 .
Informants credited	Rodney Cockburn
Informants uncredited	Unidentified Aboriginal wordlists



Date	5 March 1925
Original source text	"5/3/1925 EM Smith (chairman). TE Day, R Cockburn. Private subdivisions approved: ... Taperoo ..."
Reference	SA Nomenclature Committee Minutes Book (in SA Geographical Names Unit): 1.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	

Date	n.d. [c.1930]
Original source text	[p.277] "The [Nomenclature] Committee enjoys the close cooperation of the Railways Commissioner, the Postal Authorities, and the Government Town Planner..." [p.278] "Our own Nomenclature Community [<i>sic for 'Committee'</i>] is not free from criticism in respect of this habit of transplanting Aboriginal words out of their true geographical setting... The late Mr A. B. Moncrieff, Railways Commissioner, had a passion for the blackfellow's language, & he would accept none but Aboriginal names for new sidings. He said to me on one occasion, 'Give me a short nigger names that will trip easily off the tongue of a guard, and may be readily chalked on the side of a truck'. In such circumstances what course is open to the Committee except he adoption of native words from other domains? Better, I suggest, to sanction this disturbance or re-shuffling of Aboriginal philology than to preserve personal names which have no real claim up to perpetuity." [<i>i.e. personal names of Europeans such as 'Gawler' etc.</i>]
Reference	Rodney Cockburn, 'The Aboriginal Element in South Australia's Geographical Nomenclature', in Stewart Cockburn (ed.) 1984, <i>What's in a Name? Nomenclature of South Australia: Authoritative derivations of some 4000 historically significant place names</i> , Revised and enlarged edition 1984 (Adelaide: Ferguson Publications): 277-8.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	

Date	1991
Original source text	"The other Kurna names still extant in the region are Taperoo and Midlunga which are both expressions of Kurna cultural activity linked to camping and large game hunting. Taperoo is from the Kurna tapurro which is the skin of a stuffed opossum used at a play (corroboree) as a drum by women and girls. ... Taperoo's name today reflects early colonial knowledge of the Kurna name. It was sometimes the colonists of the contact period (1836-1855 approx) who found the Aboriginal names beautiful and expressive of the spirit of a particular place and retained

	them... Cockburn records this secondary meaning of tapurro which derives from <i>the effect of the drum beat...</i> "
Reference	Sheridah Melvin 1991, 'Kudlyo the Black Swan Dreaming: Veronica Brodie and the continuity of Kurna history at Glanville, and Le Fevre Peninsula', research Report prepared for the Lartelare Homeland Association: 15, 16.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	

Date	2005
Original source text	" Taperoo Station 1910: Originally located a little north of its present site, this node on the rail route was first named SA Silicate Brick Co. Siding because it serviced a firm of that cumbersome name established on the western edge of the line. The Company built 3 or 4 workers' cottages nearby in Gedville Road and the locality developed into something of a population nucleus. It was really the origin of Taperoo although known for a short time as Silicate Beach. Silicate Avenue is a reminder of this era. In 1920 local residents requested the name be changed to Koolena, but when this proved unacceptable to the Postmaster General's Department, Taperoo was adopted."
Reference	Heather Hartshorne 2005, <i>Taperoo: a Mine of Grit</i> , Port Adelaide Historical Society: 47.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	

'SILICATE', 'TAPEROO', TAPURRU, AND THE OFFICIAL NAMING PROCESS

Discussion:

A vast number of old place-names use Aboriginal words. But which of them were already imprinted on that part of the land by Aboriginal people before the white man came? and which were put there by white people from books and through decisions by committees?

To answer these questions in any particular case – if they can be answered – we must pause at every step in the historical chain of events and ask, 'Who said it; when; to whom; how reliable was their knowledge; and how good were they at understanding and recording what they heard?'

EARLY RECORDS:

When Lefevre Peninsula was first mapped in detail (after 1836), no Aboriginal names were included. During the brief period of first contact (up to about 1850) a few place-names did emerge:



“Mood-lun-gah” (*Mudlhangga*, ‘nose place’) for “land between the port and sea at Port Adelaide” (in which the writer probably meant the peninsula as a whole);¹ “Yertabulti” (*Yarta-puulti*, “the land of the dead” or “land of sleep”)² for “Port Adelaide”³ (referring to an undetermined wetland area around the estuary at Port Adelaide); to which the survivor Ivaritji in old age added “Nganpu” for “Port Adelaide”, and “Pu:lti” for “country towards the Semaphore”.⁴ Of these, only *Mudlhangga* probably included in its reference the area which is now the suburb of Taperoo.

The accidents of history resulted in none of these names appearing on colonial maps. Other genuine place-names of Aboriginal SA happened to be obtained from knowledgeable Aboriginal informants at moments and places which gave them enough colonial importance to be recognized and preserved by gazetting (in English adaptations with various degrees of accuracy): ‘Yankalilla’, ‘Aldinga’, ‘Patawalonga’, ‘Willunga’... During his brief rule Governor Gawler actively promoted the collection of Aboriginal place-names by the first wave of surveyors, but after he was recalled in 1841 his successors did not. Consequently many other names were not so lucky, and joined ‘Moodlunga’ and ‘Yertabulti’ in obscurity until unearthed by scholars and cultural revivals. It is certain that the total number of all those which have been preserved was far exceeded by the number which disappeared forever.

The time in which the process could happen was largely over by 1845 in the Adelaide area. After that, a few more place-names might turn up in the late memories of colonists who were there before 1845. But on Lefevre Peninsula no other genuine place-names were recorded from Aboriginal sources during the rest of the 19th century.⁵

THE TAPURRO:

At first contact, several observers recorded the name of the possum-skin ‘drum’ used by women and girls in corroborees to beat time while they sang. By the linguists it was spelled *tapurro* (*tapurru* in KWP’s *New Spelling* 2010); while the amateur William Cawthorne wrote it inconsistently

¹ William Williams 1839, *A Vocabulary of the Language of the Aborigines of the Adelaide District...*, Adelaide: the author. *Mudlha* and other words for ‘nose’ are used in many Aboriginal languages to refer to any peninsula (Amery 2002, ‘Weeding out spurious toponyms’, Simpson & Hercus (ed) 2002, *The Land Is a Map*: 176).

² Teichelmann MS Dictionary 1857; JP Gell [1841] / 1904, ‘SA Aborigines...’, *Royal Geographical Society of SA* 7: 97.

³ Teichelmann & Schürmann 1840.

⁴ JM Black 1920, ‘Vocabularies of Four South Australian Languages...’, *Transactions & Proceedings of Royal Society of SA* 44: 83-4.

⁵ A settler Milne owned a block of land at today’s Snowden Beach on the Port River, and called it “*Milunga*” in about 1850. It seems he named it after himself, adding the familiar Kurna Locative suffix *ngga* to Australianize it (see Manning 2010, *Place Names of Our Land*: 539). This place and name are probably unrelated to today’s Midlunga railway station, which was named by a government committee in 1937.

as “taparoo”, “tapurio”, and “tarpuro”.⁶ All of these observations without exception were made in the vicinity of the Adelaide CBD, in the Parklands near the native Location.

In the word *tapurro* the second vowel is unstressed and therefore untrained listeners can easily mistake it for the default vowel *a*, or the neutral vowel which is sometimes spelled ‘er’ in English.⁷ It is obvious that the word, recorded in four different known spellings, could easily have been spelled by other settlers in yet other ways – such as ‘taperoo’.

In theory some of these hypothetical settlers could have lived around Port Adelaide and Lefevre Peninsula. Up to the 1880s the local ‘tribe’ was certainly holding corroborees at known sites in the area, notably two in the Port Centre and two more in what is now Ethelton; and the nearby Lartelare site at Glanville is known to have been a centre for the manufacture of various artefacts from possum skins.⁸ Certainly the women doing this work would have made *tapurru* for the local corroborees, and would have been familiar with the name of the instrument.

And theoretically – as a second essential step in our investigation – some settler around the Port might have taken the trouble to inquire about this, and noted or remembered the name under the spelling ‘taperoo’. This is conceivable; but unfortunately there is not a shred of recorded evidence for it. Nor is there any record anywhere that this word was used by Aborigines as a place-name, or in referring to any particular place.

Nevertheless we must continue to trace the whole history, asking ‘How did the names of our modern Peninsula suburb and railway station come about? Is there any indirect connection with the old drum from the period of early contact?’

HOW OTHER ABORIGINAL WORDS WERE ADDED ONTO THE MAP LATER: aspects of the history of official nomenclature:

The attractive ‘drum’ hypothesis becomes extremely unlikely in view of what we know about the actual history of the naming of the suburb. I shall therefore use this essay as a chance to expound some of the ways in which Aboriginal words found their way onto official maps in the post-colonial

⁶ Teichelmann & Schürmann 1840; Teichelmann MS Dictionary 1857. The last three spellings are as transcribed from the MS and published in 1926 (WA Cawthorne 1844 / 1926, ‘Rough notes on the Manners and Customs of the Natives’, *Royal Geographical Society of SA, Proceedings* 27 (1925-6), Adelaide: 57, 59).

⁷ Cawthorne’s three Anglicized spellings (above) show that he understood the second vowel in this way, and represented it either by ‘u’ (as in ‘but’) or by ‘a’ (as in ‘hopalong’), which he regarded here as equivalents. But the spelling of the German linguists is phonetic, and their *u* unambiguously means the sound in ‘put’.

⁸ Sheridan Melvin 1991, ‘Kudlyo the Black Swan Dreaming: Veronica Brodie and the continuity of Kurna history at Glanville, and Le Fevre Peninsula’, unpublished research Report prepared for the Lartelare Homeland Association [Port Adelaide]: 14, 19, 20-21, 30.

decades – after most of the surviving Kurna speakers of Adelaide and Port Adelaide, and even their southern visitors from Encounter Bay, had been dispersed.

For many decades frontier settlement and its associated social Darwinism largely obliterated the early curiosity about the local Aboriginal culture. But in the 1890s, with Aboriginal people mostly well out of sight and mind in Adelaide, an appetite for Aboriginal names in the abstract became fashionable and even insatiable among landholders old and new who wanted to Australianize their properties, houses and possessions. Aboriginal words and place-names became a subject of correspondence in the local newspapers by readers of old SA literature, armchair enthusiasts such as ex-surveyors Charles Harris and Horace Talbot, and journalist Rodney Cockburn, and sometimes old colonists. This movement mostly used old books as sources; it had nothing to do with any living relationship with Aboriginal people, and (apart from the old settler memories) very little to do with any Aboriginal perception of the pieces of land which the owners were naming. The prevailing sentiment was that Aboriginal words were Australian and sounded ‘liquid’ or ‘sweet’.

During the First World War this appetite became a long-term driving force in the public naming process, after the government decided to purge all ‘enemy names’ from the map of SA. It ordered them to be replaced either with heroic names from the war in Europe, or with ‘native names’. It set up a committee to carry out this purge, and kept it on as the Nomenclature Committee, official regulator of all future naming. Its most famous member was Rodney Cockburn,⁹ who in 1908 had published a large compilation of SA place-names, including many settler memories (varying in accuracy) of real Aboriginal place-names from long ago.¹⁰

Cockburn’s own account of this process (in an address to the Royal Geographical Society of SA) is worth noting as background to our history of the name ‘Taperoo’. It gives a flavour of the ethos of official naming in those times, how it was directed almost entirely ‘from the top downward’, and altogether bypassed both direct Aboriginal input and all attempts at scholarly critique:¹¹

“Since 1916, the Committee... has been retained by successive Governments to exercise a general control over South Australia’s nomenclature... The Committee enjoys the close cooperation of the Railways Commissioner, the Postal Authorities, and the Government Town Planner... I am sure you will be glad to hear that the Nomenclature Committee rarely goes

⁹ Rodney Cockburn was also the author of the much-quoted historical series *Pastoral Pioneers of South Australia*.

¹⁰ Rodney Cockburn (ed.) 1908, *Nomenclature of South Australia*, Adelaide, WK Thomas.

¹¹ Rodney Cockburn [c.1930], ‘The Aboriginal Element in South Australia’s Geographical Nomenclature’, in Stewart Cockburn (ed.) 1984, *What’s in a Name? Nomenclature of South Australia: Authoritative derivations of some 4000 historically significant place names*, Revised and enlarged edition 1984 (Adelaide: Ferguson Publications): 276-9.



outside the native vocabularies for its choice of new names. We are gradually overhauling the personal element which dominated the business for so many years¹² ...

"I would like to emphasise... the fact that the distribution of Aboriginal words on the map of South Australia is an utterly unreliable guide for fixing the geographical bounds of the native tribes... Yet some of these designations... are as sweet as a bar of good music...

"Our own Nomenclature Community [*sic for 'Committee'*] is not free from criticism in respect of this habit of transplanting Aboriginal words out of their true geographical setting... The late Mr A. B. Moncrieff, Railways Commissioner, had a passion for the blackfellow's language, and he would accept none but Aboriginal names for new sidings. He said to me on one occasion, 'Give me a short nigger names that will trip easily off the tongue of a guard, and may be readily chalked on the side of a truck'. In such circumstances what course is open to the Committee except the adoption of native words from other domains?¹³ Better, I suggest, to sanction this disturbance or re-shuffling of Aboriginal philology than to preserve personal names which have no real claim up to perpetuity...

"I am quite unprepared to submit to a catechism of your members, as suggested in a letter I received from the Secretary, concerning many of the prefixes and suffixes of our native words. I am not an authority on Aboriginal philology, and I have never posed as one. If there is such an authority in South Australia I should be delighted to meet him, but I know there is none. We must resign ourselves to the undeniable fact that the meaning of a vast number of our native words will never be discovered. I do not know that we should really worry over the position... I have found the natives of today too beastly civilized to render much help in this subject."

FROM NAMED RAILWAY SIDING TO RE-NAMED SUBURB:

In the light of such an ethos, I shall outline two histories chronologically in parallel: on one hand, the history of public place-names around the Lefevre location now called 'Taperoo'; and on the other, the tale of certain researches done by the men entrusted with the government's naming process.

In the first decade of the 20th century, planned industrial development began to accelerate on Lefevre Peninsula. There was already a railway line to Largs Bay, but now (1901-8) Outer Harbour was built and the railway line was extended to serve it. Naturally the line became the centre of building development, and sidings or stations were needed to serve the new industries and new subdivisions for the worker cottages.

¹² In 'personal element' he is referring to names such as 'Pennington', 'Wingfield', 'Laura', 'Edithburgh', 'Blanchetown', 'Millicent', which commemorate minor officials or wives; but he was equally scornful of the overuse of famous names such as 'Gawler', 'Robe', 'Light'.

¹³ i.e. from old published wordlists, often in huge compilations covering much of the continent: e.g. EM Curr 1886-7, *The Australian Race* (4 volumes), and E Brough Smyth 1876-8, *The Aborigines of Victoria* (2 volumes); or local ones such as JD Woods 1879, *Native Tribes of South Australia*, and G Taplin 1879, *The Folklore, Manners, Customs, and languages of the South Australian Aborigines*.

In 1910 the South Australian Silicate Brick Company set up their business immediately west of the railway line north of what is now Gedville St. The Silicate Siding (a short distance north of today's Taperoo station) came into existence at that time to serve it and some nearby cottages.

In 1912 the following answer to correspondence appeared in an Adelaide newspaper. Among them is our targeted spelling:¹⁴

“Native Name.’— The Public Library officers courteously forward the following list of native names and their meanings: — Turna, happy; Tu-tu-la, peace; Wanerooka, a spring; Taperoo, calm; Burburja, inno-cence; Tiola, strong; Emeego, hope; Ko-wola, kind; Nupa, love; Wottawootha, sweet; Purrrumba, a flower; Yanna, light.”

Where did these ‘officers’ find these words? We don’t know, and to find out would require a massive hunt of the Aboriginal language literature throughout Australia up to 1912, focused on the exact spelling ‘Taperoo’ accompanied by its exact gloss ‘calm’ – with no guarantee of a result; the more so since we have no assurance that the ‘officer’ copied either the word or the gloss accurately, nor that the newspaper printed them correctly.

Horace Talbot, a retired surveyor, was a place-name enthusiast who had been one of the main collaborators in assembling Rodney Cockburn’s 1908 book. For years he had also been compiling a scrapbook of miscellaneous place-name information. Only one copy exists, held previously by the SA Geographical Names Unit, now in the SA Land Services Group.¹⁵ In 1916 Talbot and Cockburn joined forces again as members of the new Committee on Enemy Place Names, and they stayed with it until their deaths in 1924 and 1932 respectively.¹⁶ Under the new necessity of finding Aboriginal words which they could use as replacements for the enemy names to be axed, Talbot began to scour the published wordlists and note choice words in his scrapbook.¹⁷ On 22 September 1916 he pasted in the above article, and on the left noted the date in pencil. From the printed words “Taperoo, calm”, an arrow leads to another undated pencil note on the right: “Taperoo (Used)”.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Register* 8/7/1912: 8f, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/59226360/4511746>. It was re-published word-for-word in the *Observer* a month later.

¹⁵ HC Talbot n.d. [c.1890s?-1924], ‘The Talbot Book’, SA Geographical names Unit, Land Services Group.

¹⁶ See Nomenclature Committee Minutes Book, SA Geographical names Unit, Land Services Group: 5/3/1925 and p.[48] (1932).

¹⁷ e.g. Talbot Book: 18, 21.

¹⁸ Talbot Book: 27, cp. p.8/5.

Meanwhile on the Peninsula, “By 1919 the trucking out of bricks had waned so much, boxthorn bushes were over-running the siding: its industrial function was terminated although it seems that a step-down platform remained for passengers”.¹⁹

In 1919-1920 another syndicate started a housing development of 55 allotments west of this all the way to the coast, and named it “Silicate Beach”.²⁰ The whole area now became known as “Silicate” for short.

In April 1920 the local residents – workers who had moved into the area with the industries, not necessarily pioneer settlers of the area – were unhappy with this name ‘Silicate’. Perhaps they objected to being identified so completely as functional objects in their employers’ economy. They lobbied to have it changed.²¹

“NEW NAME DESIRED FOR SILICATE. A memorial was received from 27 ratepayers residing at Silicate, requesting the name of the district should be changed to Koolena. They stated that the name chosen was a native one, meaning a sandy place. The present name was derived from a local brickyard, onw [sic] dismantled and out of business. Cr. Lowen moved that the request be granted, but on Ald. Lewis pointing out that the Railways Commissioner should be consulted to see if there was any other station of that name on the South Australian railways [sic], he amended his resolution in that direction, and that the matter be referred to committee. The resolution was then adopted.”

Most likely it was the Nomenclature Committee who were suggesting ‘Koolena: a sandy place’; and no doubt this was because the residents had already approached them for ideas, and perhaps also because of the big sand dunes which still remained in the Silicate area.²² The spelling ‘Koolena’ does not occur in the sources for any local language, and the local words for ‘sandy’ are quite different. Again we don’t know the source; the word could come from anywhere in Australia, and it would require another massive piece of work to search the literature.²³

¹⁹ Heather Hartshorne 2005, *Taperoo: a Mine of Grit*, Port Adelaide: Hourglass Books (Port Adelaide Historical Society): 47.

²⁰ Area ‘E’ on the map in Hartshorne: 19, cp. 20.

²¹ *Port Adelaide News* 30/4/1920: 5e, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/213609278/23859836>.

²² The remnant of one big dune remains today next to the Fort Largs Police Academy.

²³ For a few years 1947-53 there was a homestead called ‘Koolena’ in the desert of WA (<http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p71991/pdf/book.pdf?referer=1077> [25/4/18]); and there is now a Koolena Nature Reserve in Queensland (<http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/tableOffice/TabledPapers/2014/5414T5406.pdf> [25/4/18]). It is extremely likely that both of these also took the name from a wordlist. The entry “Koolena – Sandy plain” was one of the *Women’s Weekly’s* ‘Aboriginal House Names’ listed in 1966, without naming any sources (‘Aboriginal House Names’, *Australian Women’s Weekly* 27/4/1966: 31-2, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/4939790>). But I have not been able to find any combination of the spelling with the gloss.



For reasons unknown, 'Koolena' "proved unacceptable to the Postmaster General's Department".²⁴ The controversy continued for another six months. According to Manning two other words were suggested, and again we may assume that it was the authorities rather than the residents who found the words: "Kooraka" (a Kurna word, mistakenly said to mean 'near'), and "Yombo" (Kurna for 'porpoise' = dolphin).²⁵ But presumably neither of these was acceptable, perhaps to the residents, or (more likely) to the Nomenclature Committee's bosses in the Railways and Postal departments.²⁶ For in November of the same year the Committee finally resolved the matter with a fourth word:

"The railway siding put in some years ago opposite the works of the now defunct Silicate Brick Company, between Outer Harbour and Glanville, has been renamed Taperoo."²⁷

At first this new name applied only to the *siding*, though it was the *district* name which the long-suffering residents had wanted to change. But it seems they changed it themselves anyway, by popular usage. In 1921 public meetings organized by the Australian Labour Party were held "at Taperoo (late Silicate siding)", or sometimes just "at Taperoo". On 28 February "There were from 50 to 60 electors present, which is the biggest meeting ever held in this sparsely populated area".²⁸

By now Cockburn – being a journalist and a much more public figure than Talbot – had become the authority of choice for the newspapers when inquiries were made for Aboriginal names. In 1923 he was still using the word 'taperoo' from his files:

"NATIVE HOUSE NAMES. "K. P."- I am indebted to Mr. Rodney Cockburn for the following comprehensive reply to your enquiry: – Amonginda, house; arngoo, house; karodor, dwelling; boonia, camp; koondi, camp; carinya, happy, peaceful Home; yallambee, to dwell or stay; yellaloo, together; goongee, to love; moonya, house; allawah, rest here; jannanie, ours; chilpieundroo, to tie knot; piyawola, the nest; nyowee, sun- rise; mamburdi, the Southern Cross; ellimeek, my house; lurnea, here I rest; weeroona, resting place; wahroonga, our house;

²⁴ Hartshorne : 47. Probably they worried that there were already too many names in SA beginning with 'Kool-', causing confusion too often in the delivery of mail. Manning 2010 lists 8 other Kools.

²⁵ Manning 2010: 454, 959. Both spellings come from Wyatt, likewise the gloss 'porpoise' (Wyatt 1879: 171, 178). But 'near' is quite inaccurate for 'kooraka'. This attributed meaning comes from a Talbot list taken from "*Native Tribes of SA (JD Woods)*" (which contains Wyatt's wordlist); some entries in it are pencil-marked as "*used*", including "*Kooraka Near*" (Talbot Book: 18). But this item is a careless error in reading Wyatt's original, which says "*Koora, near. Koorāka, white gum tree*" (Wyatt: 171). Manning gives no source for his entries about 'Kooraka; and 'Yombo', but probably found the information in documents of the Railways Department.

²⁶ Probably the Railways Commissioner was worried about the similarity of 'Kooraka' to 'Koora', at that time a railway station near Paringa (Manning 2010: 454). Perhaps 'Yombo' sounded insufficiently 'musical' to one of them.

²⁷ *The Journal* (Adelaide) 27/11/1920: 20d, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/200892346/22481361>. The controversy and final decision are not recorded in the extant Minutes Book of the Nomenclature Committee (held by the GNU), which begins only in 1925.

²⁸ *Daily Herald* (Adelaide) 19/2/1921: 6a, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/107253122/10586285>; 28/2/1921: 6e, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/107254365/10586343>.

ngoreeka, wattle blossom (Adelaide tribe); torre, sunbeams; taperoo, calm, placidity; tallala, my home, here we sit down; terridla, shall stand.”²⁹

In 1925, with more private subdivisions springing up, the Nomenclature Committee finally used ‘Taperoo’ as the name of a district as well. Noting also that a Committee vacancy from the death of HC Talbot would be filled by RO Segerlind, their Minutes Book tells us in one of the first entries that EM Smith (chairman), TE Day and R Cockburn approved the name for a “Private subdivision” of “Taperoo”.³⁰ This new development was on Sections 733 and 740, a limited area immediately east of the siding, from the railway line to Victoria Rd.³¹

Much later (1945-51), the suburb was extended to its present boundaries at the coast in the west (swallowing ‘Silicate’ forever) and the Port River in the east.

A RE-INSTATED LOCAL NAME?

What then of the *tapurro* drum?

Sheridah Melvin’s report to the Lartelare Homeland Association in 1994 contains much valuable primary research into the rare contact history which traces the traditional woman Lartelare through to her descendants living today, who have historical associations with both the same Lartelare site at Glanville (in the south of Lefevre Peninsula), and with the place Taperoo (further north), especially after World War 2. But in the light of the other history I have laid out above, we must regretfully deny Melvin’s cultural claims for the name ‘Taperoo’, which are as follows:³²

“The other Kurna names still extant in the region are Taperoo and Midlunga which are both expressions of Kurna cultural activity linked to camping and large game hunting. Taperoo is from the Kurna tapurro which is the skin of a stuffed opossum used at a play (corroboree) as a drum by women and girls... Taperoo’s name today reflects early colonial knowledge of the Kurna name. It was sometimes the colonists of the contact period (1836-1855 approx) who

²⁹ *Observer* 10/2/1923: 46a, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/165703915/19339959>. Readers may recognize here some names which have been applied more than once both in SA and interstate, as a quick Google search will show. Some of these applications may have proceeded from Cockburn’s, others from his sources.

³⁰ Minutes of 5 March 1925, Nomenclature Committee Minutes Book: 1.

³¹ See area ‘G’ on the map in Hartshorne: 19, cp. 21; Manning 2010: 824.

³² Melvin 1991: 15-16. Though it should scarcely be necessary, I must add a warning: My denial of the *origin of the name of a suburb* does not in any way affect the validity of Melvin’s account of the continuity of Aboriginal history from the woman Lartelare at Glanville in the period of first contact, through to Veronica Brodie’s family when I first knew them at Taperoo in the 1970s, and to the Brodie and Wilson descendants who are my old friends still living in the Port area today. All this is well established on other historical grounds (both written and oral) which have nothing to do with either the drum or the name of that suburb.



found the Aboriginal names beautiful and expressive of the spirit of a particular place and retained them.³³ ... Praise and Tolley's *Place Names of South Australia* says: "Taperoo: Native word meaning calm"³⁴ ... Cockburn³⁵ records this secondary meaning of tapurro which derives from *the effect of the drum beat* and it is this meaning which Praise and Tolley have assumed."³⁶

Melvin's story is attractive; but if any of her interview subjects had mentioned the *tapurro* we may be sure that she would have quoted them. Credibility is stretched to breaking point when we scrutinize the argument in the detail now required by our other knowledge. Did one of those appreciative old colonists not only see corroborees in the 1840s-1880s, but obtain the possum-skin drum's name and the impression that the word meant not 'drum' but 'calm' – coincidentally, the same gloss which first went public in the *Register* article thirty to sixty years later in 1912? Did this person turn up at the last minute in 1920 to give the Committee the same published spelling 'taperoo' and the same gloss 'calm' which Talbot had coincidentally pasted into his scrapbook in 1916? Was it the old settler's information which caused Talbot then to label the pasted word as "Used" (just as he had also marked 'Kooraka', presumably earlier in the negotiations)? Did the entire Committee at every stage – even Talbot in his scrapbook which often mentions personal communications – forget to mention this old settler or his tale?

It is commonplace for a word in one language to be phonetically similar or even identical with another in a different language with a quite different meaning. Even in German – a language quite close to English – *rot* means 'red', a *teller* is a 'plate', a *span* is a 'splinter', and *speck* is 'bacon'. The Kurna word *wirri* means 'mallee-root club'; but in an identical spelling recorded near Wagga (NSW), "wirri" was glossed as "no".³⁷

³³ This is true of some other names, but not of 'Taperoo'.

³⁴ R Praise & JC Tolley 1970, *Place Names of South Australia*, Adelaide, Rigby Ltd: 178. In this case they were probably quoting from the State Library copy of Rodney Cockburn's revised edition of his old *Nomenclature of SA*, at that time unpublished (see their 'Sources' list). If so, then Cockburn was certainly quoting the same old newspaper article which he and Talbot had found.

³⁵ Melvin must mean one of Stewart Cockburn's publications of his father's revised edition (though neither of these appears among her references), since of course 'Taperoo' did not exist for Cockburn's original publication in 1908 (e.g. Stewart Cockburn [ed] 1990, *South Australia: What's In a Name? Nomenclature of South Australia* (Adelaide, Axiom Publishing): 213. The etymological sentence is identical except that Cockburn 1990 has updated 'native' (in Praise & Tolley) to 'Aboriginal'.

³⁶ For any 'secondary meaning' of *tapurro* (let alone a connotation so lateral) there is no evidence at all, and Melvin does not try to produce it. Nor does she interrogate any of the place-name publications. Her sentence must be counted as a speculation which simply ignores questions of historical process and the nature of names. Also, descriptions and sketches of Adelaide corroborees (e.g. those in Cawthorne's notebooks), and their high excitement including women on the *tapurro*, certainly do not encourage us to believe that 'the effect of the drum beat' was 'calm'.

³⁷ Brough Smyth Vol.2: 219.

In 2002, lacking the historical evidence I have given above, Amery and Williams found it “unclear whether Taperoo is a reinstated original Kaurna name, or even if it is Kaurna at all”.³⁸ But the answer now seems fairly clear, even though I cannot take the final step and produce the primary record of the exact spelling and gloss.

A quick search of readily-available wordlists does suggest that ‘taperoo-calm’ may have originated somewhere between the upper Murray River and the highlands of Monaro in New South Wales. In that region there was even a word recorded identically with one of Cawthorne’s spellings: “Taparoo” in the “Maroura” (Maraura) language at Yelta near the Darling River junction, as published in a volume by R Brough Smyth which was well-known to the purveyors of ‘names for houses’; but at Yelta “taparoo” meant “Air”.³⁹ Among the neighbouring and related languages around the Upper Murray, it is quite possible that there was a word which some collectors understood to mean ‘calm’ (perhaps in the meteorological sense)⁴⁰ while for the same word others, perhaps inquiring from speakers of a different dialect, might have understood a different explanation as ‘air’. It seems very likely that one of these words was recorded somewhere in the spelling ‘taperoo’.⁴¹

Yet after all this has been said, we can still enjoy the serendipitous pun handed to us by history. The ancestral mothers who sang and beat the *tapurro* at Glanville can rejoice with their daughters and sons who came back to live at ‘Taperoo’.

.....

End of Summary

³⁸ Rob Amery & Georgina Williams 2002, ‘Reclaiming through naming: The Reinstatement of Kaurna Toponyms in Adelaide and the Adelaide Plains’, in L. Hercus, F. Hodges & J. Simpson (eds), *The Land is a Map: Placenames of Indigenous origin in Australia*, Canberra: Pacific Linguistics: 256.

³⁹ R Brough Smyth 1878, *The Aborigines of Victoria...* Vol.2 (London: John Ferres, Government Printer): 74-6.

⁴⁰ The extra gloss ‘placidity’ in Cockburn’s 1923 newspaper reply suggests that ‘taperoo’ did not mean ‘calm’ in the sense of weather. But we don’t know where he got this; he may have extrapolated this home-friendly interpretation himself, in the process of preparing it to be a ‘house name’.

⁴¹ The end-spelling ‘-eroo’ is fairly common in the same book in the languages of the Gippsland and “Moneroo’ (Monaro) regions; e.g. “Two – *Benjeroo*” (Brough Smyth Vol.2 p.98, 134; cp. Curr Vol.3: 429, 530).