



Indigenous Language Wordlists

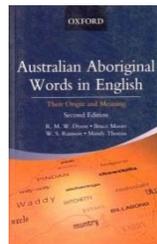
Aboriginal Words in English

all yours

Captain Cook's Journal Saturday 23 July, 1770 – *One of the Men saw an Animal something less than a greyhound; it was of a Mouse Colour, very slender made, and swift of Foot. On Saturday 4 August, Cook wrote in his journal that the animal was 'called by the Natives Kangooroo, or Kanguru'; thus becoming the first Aboriginal loanword into English!*



There have been numerous publications of Aboriginal words and their meanings; many of these items are in State Library collections. However, the majority of these lists do not identify the specific language or the location.



One exception is “Australian Aboriginal Words in English: their origin and meaning” compiled by Dixon, Moore, Ramson and Thomas. This reference book has proved so popular that a second edition was published in 2006. The authors have identified over 400 Aboriginal loanwords from 71 different languages across Australia.

Origins and sources for the loanwords have been researched in the text as well as a brief introduction to Aboriginal languages. As the authors highlight, many Aboriginal loanwords originate from early points of settlement; for example from the Sydney languages of Dharug and Gadigal we have everyday words such as *corroboree*, *boomerang*, *dingo* and *waratah* which later became universally used across Australia. This book provides a lot of the content for this research guide with several other sources listed in the further reading section.

The following lists of words relate to the main themes where Aboriginal loanwords are used in everyday use across Australia; these are not meant to be comprehensive but a representative selection. Research the State Library collections for other examples, particularly those related to your community, town or region.

Placenames

Placenames are obvious loanwords and have generated several publications – the general rule being if it ends in '-dah /-da' or '-bah /-ba', it is an Aboriginal word meaning 'place of'; examples include *Pinkenba* [Yugara] = 'place of long-necked turtle', *Elimbah* [Yugambah] = 'place of grey snake'. Other suffixes also have meaning such as '-dilla /-billa' which usually refers to water in Western Queensland; for example *Muckadilla* [Gunggari] means 'plenty of water'.

Other placenames may have significance to people, such as *Wamuran* [Kabi Kabi], *Obi Obi* [Kabi Kabi] and *Guthalungra* [Biri] which were named after local Aboriginal identities. *Yuranigh* a locality in Western Queensland was named after Yuranigh, an Aboriginal man from Molong, NSW who was one of Thomas Mitchell's guides.

There are also placenames that tell a story about the landscape – *Burgowan* [Butchulla] means 'flat where there are dogwood trees'; *Wandoan* [Barrungam] refers to a 'flat where grey possums are plentiful'; while *Goondiwindi* [Gawambaraay] is named after a point on the McIntyre River where waterbirds used to nest and refers to the bird droppings on the rocks.

Other Aboriginal placenames from across Queensland include:

- *Alcheringa* – means dream in the Yugambah language of South-East Queensland
- *Belyando* – means 'no go' in unknown language/dialect from Central Queensland; spoken by an Aboriginal man to Thomas Mitchell to stop him going further north.
- *Chinchilla* – believed to mean Cypress Pine in local Barrungam language of Darling Downs.
- *Dulbydilla* – means 'black waterhole' in Gunggari language of South-West Queensland; refers to the discolouration of water by eucalyptus leaves.
- *Eungella* – means 'land of cloud' in an unknown language, possibly Birri language of Central Queensland.
- *Giangurra* – believed to mean 'village of the wild rose thorn' but there is no further reference or identifying details or language.
- *Humpybong* – means 'dead or empty houses' in Kabi Kabi language or Redcliffe/Sunshine Coast.
- *Indooroopilly* – means 'gully of leeches' in Yugara language of Brisbane.
- *Jambin* – means 'echidna' in Gangulu language of Central Queensland.
- *Kirrama* – named after local Aboriginal group Girramay of Far North Queensland.
- *Minbun* – means 'possum'; language not recorded/unknown but possibly Dyirbal language of Far North Queensland.
- *Nunga Island* – means 'clam' in local Ngaro language of the Whitsundays.
- *Oolandilla* – means 'place of ooline timber' in Gunggari language of South-West Queensland.
- *Pyealy* – believed to be taken from the local clan or group Bayali in Central Queensland.
- *Quilpie* – means 'curlew' in Margany language of Western Queensland.
- *Sillago Island* – means 'whiting' in local Ngaro language of the Whitsundays.
- *Taromeo* – believed to be adapted from local Wakka Wakka word for 'wild limes'.
- *Ubobo* – refers to 'wild arrowroot or orchid' from local Gangulu language, Central Queensland.
- *Wyangapinni* – believed to mean 'mother mountain' in unknown/unrecorded language, possibly local Giabal language of Darling Downs.
- *Yungaburra* – means 'silver ash' in Yidinj language of Far North Queensland.

Flora and Fauna

Possibly, the most popular Aboriginal loanwords are plants and animals which are now in everyday use. This is understandable as early settlers, explorers and others would need to discover the names for animals and plants in this unknown Australian landscape.

Plants

- *Amulla* – based on *ngamula* from Dharumbal language of Rockhampton region
- *Bindi-eye* – Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay languages of North-West NSW/South-West Queensland [based on *bindayaa*]
- *Bumble Tree* – Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay languages of North-West NSW/South-West Queensland [also used in neighbouring languages, e.g. Gunggari] – based on *bambul*.
- *Bunya* – from Yugara language of Brisbane region – [also used in neighbouring languages, e.g. Kabi Kabi, Wakka Wakka] – based on *bonye / bonyi*
- *Conkerberry* – from Mayi-Yapi / Mayi-Kulan languages of Cloncurry region
- *Coolabah* – from Yuwaalayaay language of North-West NSW/ South-West Queensland
- *Midyim* – from Yugara language of Brisbane region
- *Millaa* – from Ngadjon language of Atherton Tablelands – also known as Millaa Millaa
- *Nardoo* – from several languages in Western Queensland, Western NSW and South Australia; e.g. Yandruwandha and Gamilaraay – based on *nhaadu*
- *Wallum* – from Kabi Kabi language of the Sunshine Coast – based on *walum / walam*

Animals

- *Barramundi* – from Gangulu language of Central Queensland
- *Bilby* – from Yuwaalaraay language of North-West NSW/South-West Queensland – based on *bilbi*
- *Brolga* – from Gamilaraay language of North-West NSW/South-West Queensland – based on *burruga*
- *Chowchilla* – from Dyrbal language of Tully region, Far North Queensland [also used in neighbouring language of Dyrbal] – based on *jawujala*
- *Currawong* – from Yugara language of Brisbane region – based on *gurrawang*
- *Galah* – from Gamilaraay language of North-West NSW/ South-West Queensland – based on *gilaa*
- *Kangaroo* – from Guugu Yimidhirr language of Cooktown region, Far North Queensland
- *Quoll* – from Guugu Yimidhirr language of Cooktown region, Far North Queensland
- *Taipan* – from Wik Mungkan language of Western Cape York [also used in neighbouring languages on Cape York] – based on *dhayban / thaypan*
- *Yowie* – from Yuwaalaraay language of North-West NSW/ South-West Queensland – based on *yuwi*

Artefacts

Many of the terms for Aboriginal artefacts derive from the Sydney region, such as *woomera*, *waddy*, *nulla-nulla* and *boomerang*; however there is one example from Queensland. Dilly as in dilly bag originates from Brisbane – the Yugara people called it *dili* or *dilli*. *Dhilla* also referred to the long grass used in weaving dilly bags – the scientific name is *Lomandra longifolia* aka longleaf mat rush.

Other Words

A well-known word from the Yugara language of Brisbane is the word *yakka* which means 'work'; it is based on the word *yaga* and was first formally recorded in the 1840's.

"Didjeridu/didgeridoo" is a word associated internationally with Aboriginal culture; the instrument originates from the Yolngu people of the Northern Territory who called it *Yidaki*. Historically, the term 'didgeridoo' came into being in the early 1900's and is onomatopoeic referring to the musical drone produced by the instrument.

Sources and Further Reading

The following references from the State Library Collections provide further details on Aboriginal loanwords.

Aird, M. (1996) *I know a few words: Talking about Aboriginal Languages*. **G 499.15 1996**

Clark, I., Hercus, L. and Kostanski, L. (Eds) (2014) *Indigenous and minority placenames: Australian and international perspectives*. **919.4003 2014**

Cook, J. and Wharton, W.J. L. (1968) *Captain Cook's journal during his first voyage round the world, made in H.M. Bark Endeavour, 1768-71: a literal transcription of the original mss. / With notes and introduction edited by Captain W.J.L. Wharton*. **Q 910.4 COO**

Cooper, H. M. (1949) *Australian Aboriginal words and their meanings*. **J 499.15 COO**

Dixon, R. M. W. (1991) *Words of our country: stories, place names and vocabulary in Yidiny, the Aboriginal language of the Cairns-Yarrabah region*. **G 499.15 1991**

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Hercus, L. and Koch, H. (2009) *Aboriginal Placenames: Naming and re-naming the Australian landscape*. **Online access via OneSearch**.

Kerwin, D. (2011) "Language and Landscape: European words in Aboriginal spaces". *Out of the Port* session. Available online as a webcast via SLQ Website:
<http://enc.slq.qld.gov.au/audio/slq/pp/mp3/OP/LanguageLandscape.mp3>

Queensland Place Names Board (1963) *Interim Gazetteer of Queensland Place Names*. **REF 919.43 1963**

Queensland Place Names Cutting Book [Microform] **MFL 919.43**

Ramson, W. (1964) *The currency of aboriginal words in Australian English*. **P 499.15 ram**

Thieberger, N. and McGregor, W. (Eds) (1994) *Macquarie Aboriginal Words: a dictionary of words from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages*. **J 499.15 M'QU**

Further Details

For further information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages at the State Library of Queensland, please contact:

Queensland Memory, State Library of Queensland

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PO Box 3488, South Brisbane Qld. 4101.

Telephone: (07) 3840 7666

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SLQ Indigenous Languages Webpages: www.slq.qld.gov.au/resources/atsi/languages

SLQ Indigenous Languages Blog: <http://blogs.slq.qld.gov.au/ilq/>

This initiative, as part of State Library of Queensland's Indigenous Language Project, is supported by funding from the Indigenous Languages Support Program (ILS) from the Australian Government's Attorney-General's Department, Ministry for the Arts.



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