

'If you want to make enemies, try to change something'
-Woodrow Wilson

Part 1

Placenames are so ubiquitous in our day-to-day lives that we rarely stop to consider the important role they play in society and the smooth running of that society. Most notably they are important to: navigation; delivery of post and goods; search and rescue operations; communications (including news media and weather reporting); disaster relief; cartography; national statistics (e.g. census taking); genealogy; tourism; security (including policing), intelligence gathering¹ and peace-keeping; property rights; business and trade; urban and regional planning; cadastre... the list goes on.

One of the first questions one is asked when meeting someone new is 'Where are you from?' The answer, your place of origin or residence, forms an integral part of your personal identity. But placenames are also fundamental to a nation's identity as well as its cultural and linguistic heritage, because they often encapsulate details about the geographic nature of a named feature, when it was named, and who bestowed it. They also offer insights into the belief and value systems of the name-givers, as well as the political and social circumstances at the time of naming (Tent & Slatyer, 2008a & b). And in many regions of the world, they reveal the chronology of exploration and settlement—Australia being an excellent example. In short, placenames and the history, geography, politics, economics and the linguistics of a region are all interconnected. So, therefore, with the current escalating tensions in the South China Sea, I thought it pertinent to consider the role placenames play in politics.

Firstly, naming a place is an ancillary to the appropriation of territory. For example, most names bestowed by the Dutch and the French between the 17th and early 19th centuries along the coast of Australia have been replaced by ones English explorers and colonists bestowed. But far more significantly, most indigenous Australian names have been ignored and/or replaced by introduced ones. Note, less than one third of the placenames found on maps of Australia have an indigenous element, and even fewer are fully and genuinely indigenous (Tent 2011).

There are many motivations for renaming a place. One present-day incentive is to reinstate indigenous names on significant sights and places by initially dual naming.

These have included *Uluru / Ayers Rock* and *Kata Tjuta / Mount Olga*. The background and history to dual naming in NSW is described by Greg Windsor (2009), who explains the policy was established in 2001, and that the first gazetted dual names were *Dawes Point / Tar-ra* in 2002 and *South Creek / Wianamatta* in 2003. Hodges (2007: 395) explains that these namings were followed in 2005 by a group of 20 more names on Sydney Harbour, based on the research of Attenbrow (2009).² And in 2012, there were calls for the renaming of Lake Eyre back to its indigenous name *Kati Thanda*, implemented last year.³

Other motives for renaming include the rezoning or merging of suburbs and shires etc., or the confederation or separation of states etc. Some places have been renamed because the original name was considered no longer socially appropriate.⁴ For example, the recent move to rename Mount Niggerhead in Victoria.⁵ Or the controversy surrounding the renaming of the E.S. 'Nigger' Brown Stand at Toowoomba Sports Ground.⁶ Another nice example, from Spain, is the village of Asquerosa (literally 'disgusting, repulsive, revolting') which was renamed *Valderrubio* in 1943.

Sometimes, places get renamed for a publicity stunt or for sponsorship. The Victorian town of Speed was renamed for a short time to *SpeedKills*; and then there was the renaming of the North Queensland Cowboys rugby league team's home ground to *1300smiles Stadium*.⁷ The town of Ismay (Montana, USA) unofficially took the name of *Joe, Montana*, after the NFL quarterback Joe Montana, as part of a 1993 publicity stunt. Not to be beaten, the town of Halfway (Oregon, USA) changed its name to *Half.com*, accepting money from a dot-com to change its name to match the web site 'Half.com'.⁸

Sometimes a place is renamed by mistake. Recently Google Maps accidentally revived the name *Adolf-Hitler-Platz* in Berlin for the correct name *Theodor-Heuss-Platz*.⁹

However, the most common motivation for renaming is political—and we'll have to leave this aspect of placename-power until our next issue!

Jan Tent

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Endnotes

- ¹ See for example: 'How the phone maps our real lives' <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bydesign/how-the-phone-maps-our-real-lives/3192118>>
- ² See also: Troy, Jakelin & Michael Walsh (2009). 'Reinstating Aboriginal placenames around Port Jackson and Botany Bay'. In Harold Koch & Luise Hercus (eds) *Aboriginal Placenames: Naming and re-naming the Australian landscape*. Aboriginal History Monograph 19. Canberra: ANU e-Press. pp. 55-70.
- ³ See *Placenames Australia* September 2012, p. 10.
- ⁴ See: 'Mapping wars' <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/mapping-wars/3319462>>
- ⁵ See for example the following articles: 'Aboriginal group outraged over naming of mountain' <http://www.theage.com.au/national/aboriginal-group-outraged-over-naming-of-mountain-20081117_68gq.html>; 'Leave Mount Niggerhead and other names alone' <<http://www.bordermail.com.au/story/42027/leave-mt-niggerhead-and-other-names-alone/>>; 'Aborigines oppose name change of Mt Niggerhead' <<http://in.reuters.com/article/2008/11/17/idINIndia-36534020081117>>
- ⁵ See: 'Nigger Brown gone Coon Cheese next' <<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/news/queensland/nigger-brown-gone-coon-cheese-next/2008/09/26/1222217491581.html>> 'Mapping wars' <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/latenightlive/mapping-wars/3319462>>
- ⁷ See *Placenames Australia* September 2011, p. 11; 'North Queensland Cowboys' home ground to be renamed 1300SMILES Stadium' <<http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/north-queensland-cowboys-home-ground-to-be-renamed-1300smiles-stadium/story-e6freoof1226581922831>>
- ⁸ See: 'City Changes Name to Half.com' <<http://geography.about.com/library/weekly/aa012400a.htm>>
- ⁹ See: 'Google apologises over reviving Adolf-Hitler-Platz in Berlin' <<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jan/10/google-apologises-hitler-platz-berlin>>; 'Google Maps lists Berlin square as Adolf-Hitler-Platz' <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/world/1.568075>>;

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'Berlin Blunder: Google Maps Brings Back Adolf Hitler Square' <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/google-maps-mistakenly-identifies-berlin-square-as-adolf-hitler-platz-a-942774.html>>; 'Google Maps Editor Lists Berlin Square as Adolf-Hitler-Platz' <<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2429422,00.asp>>

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We thought you'd never ask!

*Have you noticed how we often take some of Australia's most well-known placenames for granted? We assume they must be of Aboriginal origin; but we don't stop to think further about how they came to be. **Jeremy Steele** again takes up the challenge, to tell us more about these placenames.*

Bondi

Tyrell and McCarthy are two of a number of people who compiled and published lists of Aboriginal placenames together with their meanings, and both give 'Water breaking over rocks' as the meaning for *Bondi*. Most such lists gave no indication of language, precise area, or source for the meaning. Tyrell and McCarthy both give the identical interpretation. Perhaps they are right. But is there anything in the records to suggest otherwise?

The first issue is that *Bondi* has the letters *-nd-* together. William Dawes, the greatest student of the Sydney

language at the time it was first encountered by Europeans, specifically stated that the somewhat similar consonantal combination *-nb-* was not permitted in the language, and that it was replaced by *-nm-*. He also indicated that *-nd-* was not used in Sydney either, although the same words did use the combination further inland.

However, in spite of Dawes' prescriptions, other *-nd-* words do occur in various Sydney and Dharug lists, which might give hints to as to the meaning of *Bondi*. A few examples follow. (Note that /o/ is not used in transcriptions for most Aboriginal languages, nor is /e/).

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