

# Placenames Australia

Newsletter of the Australian National Placenames Survey

an initiative of the Australian Academy of Humanities



## Before *Brisbane*, there was *Edinglassie*

In this day and age it is not uncommon to encounter Orwellian ‘alternative facts’.<sup>1</sup> We quite often come across this phenomenon when we investigate the aetiologies of toponyms. One such case is that of *Edinglassie*.

I recently listened to an interview on the wireless with the author Melissa Lucashenko. A good part of it focussed on her recently published novel *Edenglassie* (2023). During the interview she stated the name (clearly a variant of *Edinglassie*) derives from a blending of ‘Edinburgh’ and ‘Glasgow’. This stated etymology is quite widespread, but how accurate is it?

It is a well-established fact (not an alternative one) that before Queensland’s capital was named *Brisbane*, it briefly had the moniker *Edinglassie*. A painting by artist John Allcot (Figure 1) depicting the foundation of the settlement proclaims this on its accompanying title plaque. The entry for November 1824 on the ‘Queensland Timeline Pre 1600s-1859’ webpage for 1824 echoes this, although it does so rather confusingly: ‘November 9, Chief Justice Sir Francis Forbes suggested Edinglassie but name Brisbane was adopted’, and ‘November 9, Governor Brisbane approved the name Edinglassie for the settlement’.

Many sources acknowledge Brisbane’s short-lived erstwhile name, and also claim that the name derives from a blend of the Scottish city names Edinburgh and Glasgow. For instance:



Figure 1. ‘The Founding of Queensland and Birth of Brisbane (then Edinglassie) - January 1825’ by John Allcot (1888-1973).

- The *Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias* entry: **Edinglassie**  
Edinburgh + Glasgow (early name of the Moreton Bay Settlement now called Brisbane) ([https://geo\\_names.en-academic.com/2966/Edinglassie](https://geo_names.en-academic.com/2966/Edinglassie))
- The *Rampant Scotland* website’s page ‘Scottish Place Names Around the World’:  
[...] For instance, the city of Brisbane in Queensland, Australia could so easily be known today by its original, briefly held, name ‘Edinglassie’ (a blend of Edinburgh and Glasgow) but was named, instead, for Scots-born Governor Sir Thomas Makdougall Brisbane.  
([www.rampantscotland.com/placenames/placename\\_overview.htm](http://www.rampantscotland.com/placenames/placename_overview.htm))

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## From the Editor



Did anybody else know that Brisbane was, for a brief time, *Edinglassie*? I certainly didn't, until Jan Tent's lead article arrived on the Editor's desk. It reminds me of that other shock—that *Dunedin* is really *Edinburgh* in disguise. (Ask a Kiwi...)

And then Jan follows up the Boer War connection with *Modder Creek* (p. 9), and our brains get another

workout with some toponymic theory ('Intensive toponymy', p.6). Time for light relief? Try his puzzle on the back page. A change of location? Paul Geraghty talks gastronomy, sort of, in Fiji (p.12).

As I write this, our President (Susan Birtles) is in Helsinki attending the [28th International Congress of Onomastic Sciences](#). I'll speak nicely to her when she returns, and hope she'll give us a *David Blair* rundown for the next issue of PA. [<editor@anps.org.au>](mailto:editor@anps.org.au)

## Who was Joe Rocks?

David McDonald (Wamboin, NSW) has drawn our attention to *Joe Rocks Road* in his area. David has written an [article](#) on this for the *Wamboin Whisperer*, canvassing various possibilities about its origin. It's possible that the road name goes back to a Joe Rocks Paddock; but was 'Joe Rocks' rhyming slang for something, or was it a reference to a popular touring comedian of last century? We'll get back to this, perhaps in the next issue; but in the meantime, we welcome any suggestions from discerning and historically-minded readers.

## Those silly placenames again

Our mention in the previous issue of a YouTube channel that listed the world's silliest-sounding placenames jogged a few memories here. Peter Phillips (Canberra) pointed to **Uncertain** in Texas. Was it so-called because a character who surrendered his property there while gambling, when asked where it was, declared *it's uncertain*? Chris Woods (West Hobart) has been to **Å** in Norway, **Y** in France, **Silly** in Belgium, **Scratchy Bottom** in Dorset, and **Dildo** in Newfoundland (not far from **Conception Bay**). Chris couldn't resist telling us that he'd been to **St Christophe du Bois** in France, which as you Francophones will know is a direct translation of his name. Both Peter and Chris sent priceless photos of themselves in such places but, to our great disappointment, we seem to have run out of room to show them to you. Perhaps next time...

## In the media

Some time ago, journalist Mandy McKeesick asked us about all those Australian 'Great' placenames—*Great Barrier Reef*, *Great Sandy Desert*, and so on. Our quick scan of the Database found more than 200 examples.

Mandy's research resulted in a fine [article](#) for *Australian Geographic* magazine (July, 2024) on 'our fascination for naming places *Great*'. Highly recommended for your reading!

### *Puzzle answers - (from page 14)*

- |                         |                     |                          |                       |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. St Valenites Peak    | 6. Cape St George   | 11. Peter and Paul Gully | 16. St Nicholas Inlet |
| 2. St Patricks Head     | 7. St James         | 12. Lammas Island        | 17. Christmas Island  |
| 3. St Josephs River     | 8. Ascension Park   | 13. Michaelmas Island    | 18. St Johns Creek    |
| 4. Good Friday Mountain | 9. Pentecost Island | 14. All Saints           | 19. Whitsunday Island |
| 5. Easter Monday Creek  | 10. Trinity Beach   | 15. St Andrews           | 20. St Judes          |

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Editor: David Blair  
PO Box 5160  
SOUTH TURRAMURRA NSW 2074

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- The *Scottish Place Names Around the World* website: **Brisbane** (Brisbane Mains in North Ayrshire) and East Brisbane, Port of Brisbane and South Brisbane by association. The city took its name from the Brisbane River on which it stands. The river was named in honour of Sir Thomas Makdougall Brisbane who succeeded Macquarie (a fellow Scotsman) as Governor of New South Wales in 1821. Sir Thomas was born in Largs, Ayrshire. The site of the early settlement of Brisbane was originally called Edinglassie, which name was apparently created as a blend of Edinburgh and Glasgow. ([www.rampantscotland.com/placenames/placename\\_brisbane.htm](http://www.rampantscotland.com/placenames/placename_brisbane.htm))

Each of these, especially the last, imply the name falls into the 'Innovative' category (Blair & Tent, 2020, p.13) specifically created for the occasion, cf. *Kurmond*, *Lidcombe*, *Ashbury*, and *Australind*.<sup>2</sup> This derivation looks suspiciously like one of convenience, like all post hoc folk etymologies or aetiologies.<sup>3</sup>

Various other sources give a more credible origin of the name. For example, Currey (2006) in his entry for NSW Chief Justice Francis William Forbes<sup>4</sup> (1784 –1841) *Australian Dictionary of Biography*:

[...] In November Forbes went with Brisbane to Moreton Bay and was invited to name the site selected for a settlement on the Brisbane River; he named it Edinglassie, after an ancestral estate near Aberdeen, but his choice was soon forgotten. [...]

Carroll (2016) and Budde (2023) also declare *Edinglassie* was chosen by Forbes to commemorate his ancestral estate, and explain that the name derives from old Scottish *Eudan-glasaich* 'hill face of the pasture' or 'leyland (fallow land)'. Furthermore, the *Glass Community Association* website's page for *Edinglassie* (2016), claims the name derives from Old Scots *Eudan-glasaich*, but provides a slightly different sense viz. 'steep grazing'.

These senses correspond with those of Macdonald (1899):

EDINGLASSIE – Eudan glasaich 'hill-face of the pasture or ley-land'.

and Dwelly (1918), who provides the following individual senses for the name's lexical components:

## ...*Brisbane* and *Edinglassie*

p.397: **eudan(n)** see aodann; and p.377: **eadan(n)** see aodann.

p.38: **aodann**, -ainn, *n.pl.* -annean, *s[substantive]*. *f[eminine]*. Face, fore-head, 1. Visage. 2 Surface.

p.500: **glas**, -aise, *a[adjective]*. Grey, pale, wan, ashy. fallow. 2 Poor. 3 Green, as grass, unripe corn, &c.

**glas**, -aise, -an, *s.f.* Lock to fasten doors. 2 Fetter. 3 Green surface. 4 Green.

**glasach**, -aich, -aicnean, *s.m[masculine]*. Lea or fallow land. 2 Green field.

**glasanach**, -arch, *s.m.* Grassy plain.

The listed senses may not be defined identically in each dictionary, but it is clear that they are substantially the same in their signification.

Before we look into other places bearing the name *Edinglassie*, it is worth noting that the former Forbes estate in Aberdeenshire is still extant, viz. *Edinglassie House*, and in the associated names *Burn of Edinglassie* and *Edinglassie Mains* (Figure 2).<sup>5</sup>



Figure 2. *Edinglassie Mains*. (Source: Peter Barr, NJ4238. Geograph. [www.geograph.org.uk/more.php?id=2615834](http://www.geograph.org.uk/more.php?id=2615834))

Although Forbes' suggested name for the new settlement on the Brisbane River was rejected early on, he nevertheless was able to honour his ancestral estate elsewhere. In 1826, he and his brother obtained land at the southern end of Emu Plains (NSW), south of Jamison Creek, where a rural retreat was built and named *Edinglassie*. Later, the brothers owned land in the Upper Hunter Valley at Muswellbrook (NSW), where *Edinglassie* was also used along with *Skellater*, after another of the Forbes' family estates in Scotland.<sup>6</sup> The naming of the Forbes' two NSW rural properties after ancestral estates adds

*continued next page*



substantial support for the rejection of the *Edinburgh-Glasgow* etymology and aetiology. It also helps explain why *Edinglassie* was rejected: although it was not uncommon to name new settlements in Australia after places in the homeland, naming an important settlement after an obscure personal ancestral estate was perhaps seen as a tad narcissistic.

There is also an Edinglassie (a railway siding) in South Africa. Raper et al. (2014) provide an intriguing third etymology for the toponym: *edin* ‘hill, slope’ from Brittonic *eiddyn*, Brittonic *glas* ‘stream’. As we have seen, the ‘hill’ sense is the same, the sense for *glas* is also correct (as it is another sense of the word), but it is not the sense of the original *Edinglassie*. In order to determine whether Raper et al. are correct in their etymology, we would need to uncover the aetiology of the railway siding’s name. Was it named after the Aberdeenshire estate, or for some other reason? Is the siding at or near a stream? (It is hard to see on Google maps). If it is, its etymology would be understandable.

The initial name elements of *Edinburgh* and *Glasgow* may well coincide etymologically and semantically with *Edinglassie*’s two elements, but that does not mean *Edinglassie* is a part-blend of the other two. This would be like claiming *Melbourne* (named for William Lamb, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Melbourne, meaning ‘mill stream’) is a part-blend of *Melford* (Suffolk) and *Bournemouth* (Hampshire).

Given the evidence, the answer to my initial question—How accurate is the Edinburgh-Glasgow etymology/aetiology?—is clear: we must conclude that it is fanciful, and that it falls within the classic category of *post-hoc* folk etymologies.

Jan Tent

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps more accurately expressed as ‘factoids’: that is, ‘an item of information accepted or presented as a fact, although not (or not necessarily) true; spec. an assumption or speculation reported and repeated so often as to be popularly considered true; a simulated or imagined fact’ (OED).

<sup>2</sup> *Kurmond* < *Kurrajong* + *Richmond*; *Lidcombe* < *Lidbury* + *Larcombe*; *Ashbury* < *Ashfield* + *Canterbury*; *Australind* < *Australia* + *India*.

<sup>3</sup> I include the term ‘aetiology’ here because we are also dealing with the assignment of the toponym or the reason for the bestowal of the name (see Koch, 2009).

## ...Brisbane and Edinglassie



Figure 3. View of Edinglassie, 1835, by Conrad Martens 1835 (Source: Dixson Library, State Library of NSW. Call Number: DL Pf 138; Record Identifier: YzOgZ6B9. <https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/YzOgZ6B9>)

<sup>4</sup> Forbes was the first Chief Justice of NSW. The town of Forbes in central New South Wales is named after him.

<sup>5</sup> Mains: ‘A farm attached to a mansion house, formerly cultivated by or for the proprietor; a home farm; demesne [domain] lands (obsolete). Now chiefly in the names of farms, esp. in Scotland, and in place names derived from them.’ OED.

<sup>6</sup> Patsy Moppett (2021) provides an interesting biography of Francis Forbes which includes details of his two NSW rural properties.

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references continued next page

# Burnt Yards

Some years ago now—in 2017, in fact—Malcolm McGregor asked us what we knew about a locality near Blayney (NSW) called *Burnt Yards*. It was a gold mining area, and his great-grandfather had managed a mine there in the 1890s. His grandparents had been married in the Post Office at Burnt Yards, and his mother had been born there, and there was still a family property nearby. Malcolm said that a recent visit had revealed that very little was left of the settlement: a couple of empty houses and a hall in disrepair—the post office and house were gone completely. His only clue to the name was his grandmother's recollection that a big fire had destroyed the local horse yards, although she thought that had happened much later than the start of gold mining.

Our checks (in February 2017) uncovered a parish map from 1884 that showed a section 'generally for mining purposes', named *Burnt Yards*. The field completion notes in the file said that 'Burnt Yards' was the name of a homestead as well as the locality and creek. And that's as far as we got... until David McDonald (Wamboin, NSW) recently came across the name of Burnt Yards and posed the obvious question once more.

This time, after more digging, we were able to say that the name went back to at least 1867. Thanks to the National Library's magnificent **Trove** digital repository, we found a report in the *Mining Record and Grenfell General Advertiser* (5 October 1867) of a new gold field 'called the Burnt Yards' where 'from 120 to 160 diggers have been at work... getting half an ounce of gold each per day'. David McDonald himself then took up the challenge, and confirmed that references to Burnt Yards (certainly the locality and probably the homestead) from 1867 onwards were not uncommon in newspapers,

Gazette notices and maps. His masterstroke, though, was to ask Rhonda Jones of the Blayney Shire Local & Family History Group.

Rhonda found a contact from the Green family who were amongst the early settlers in the district, and who still own land there. (The National Library of Australia has an archival photograph, below, undated but labelled 'Mr and Mrs Green, Burnt Yards'.) Family and friends confirmed that originally there was a set of wooden horse yards built there. They would use this as a camp to round up the sheep and cattle from the hills and gullies. The extra horses would be left in these yards while they went out looking.

Unfortunately a massive bushfire came through and went across to the Neville district, burning out many miles of scrub along the way. The yards were in the way and they went too. It seems that after the fire they were used as a reference point: 'we can meet you at the burnt yards...'



<https://nla.gov.au/443harkind/nla.obj-139851947>

The usual process of placenaming saw 'the burnt yards' become *Burnt Yards*; and we can see from the old records that this had happened some time before the miners turned up in 1867.

So, seven years after Malcolm first asked the question, we can finally say the origin of *Burnt Yards* is sorted!

**David Blair**

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# Intensive toponymy...

## Introduction

Some years ago now, *Placenames Australia* published an article<sup>1</sup> in which I identified two methods of conducting toponymic research: ‘intensive’ and ‘extensive’. The former involves writing a placename’s ‘biography’ (Blair, 2017, p.5), which essentially involves answering the following *Wh-* questions:

- *Who* named the place?
- *When* was the place named?
- *Why* was it given this particular name?
- *What* does the name mean? *What* kind of geographic or civic feature is it?
- *Where* does the name come from? (referring to either the language or region of origin); *Where* is the place located?

**Intensive toponymy** is grassroots research, and usually provides the basis for **extensive toponymy**. Ideally, therefore, it precedes extensive toponymy (although the latter can be conducted without the full process of intensive toponymy having been completed).

Extensive toponymy, on the other hand, embraces broader, more wide-ranging research, and is based on datasets or corpora of toponyms, gazetteers, maps, atlases, etc. In extensive toponymy, placenames function as independent variables which can be tested against dependent variables such as region, toponym type, or feature type. Such research may reveal patterns of settlement or conquest, as well as types of naming, etc.

This time I’d like to examine in more depth what an intensive examination of a toponym may involve in addition to simply answering the *Wh-* questions.

Koch (2009, pp.117–118) formulated a three-pronged approach to the determination of the so-called ‘meaning’ of a placename. He believes it should be seen more as an enquiry into one or, ideally, all of the following ‘properties’, or ‘substances’, of a toponym:

- its **locational referent**—the specific place to which the toponym refers, its geographical extent and its precise location in terms of its coordinates. (Such data is important because there is often more than one place that bears the same name-form).<sup>2</sup>
- its **etymology**—the facts relating to the origin of a particular word or words that constitute the toponym;

the historical development of its form and meaning. In other words, what the non-proper name meaning is or was.

- its **aetiology**—the assignment of the cause, or the provision of the reason for the placename. In other words, the story behind the name, or how the place came to be named thus. This is achieved by answering the *Wh-* questions above.

I should like to add a subcategory to a toponym’s aetiology: namely, its **genealogy**. This involves providing an account of the descent of a toponym from an ancestor toponym or toponyms, in other words, a toponym’s pedigree. Many toponyms will have a very shallow genealogy; however, others may have quite an extensive or deep one. The genealogy must also necessarily encompass former name-forms and spellings conferred upon a geographic or civic feature. An excellent example of a toponym with a variety of former forms is Sydney’s *Botany Bay* < *Sting Ray’s Harbour*, *Sting ray’s Harbour*, *Stingray Bay*, *Sting-Ray Harbour*, *Sting ray Harbour*, *Sting Ray Harbour*, *Botanist Bay*, *Bottany Bay*, *Botany Harbour*, and *Bottany Harbour* (see Blair, 2014, pp. 8–10). Each of these orthographical renditions and forms will ultimately constitute part of the toponym’s aetiology and ultimate ‘biography’.

It must also be borne in mind that Sydney’s *Botany Bay* is the current name-form of both a suburb and its adjacent bay, the former being named after the bay; each is a distinct toponym. In addition, there is also a *Botany Bay* (a bay, US Virgin Islands), a *Botany Bay* (a polder, Suriname), a *Botany Bay* (a cove, Antarctica), a *Botany Bay* (a populated place, UK), a *Botany Bay* (a cove, UK) and a *Botany Bay* (a bay, Canada)—all distinct toponyms, not the same name occurring in different places (Blair, 2017, p. 2), each with its own aetiology.

The genealogy of a toponym will incorporate other locations bearing the name-form from which the toponym of interest will have been derived or be associated. In other words it may have ‘ancestor’ and current ‘cousin’ and ‘sibling’ name-forms.

To exemplify what I mean by the genealogy of a toponym (in the context of Koch’s three properties) let’s explore that of **Norfolk Beach**, on Coochiemudlo Island (formerly *Innis Island*) in Moreton Bay (QLD).



...further thoughts



**Figure 1.** *Replica of the (Colonial Sloop) Norfolk in the Bass and Flinders Maritime Museum, George Town, Tasmania.*  
(Source: R. Roth, <https://simplylettinggo.blogspot.com/2014/03/bay-of-fires-to-boat-harbour-beach.html>)

Norfolk Beach <sup>3</sup>

**Locational referent:** 27°34'13"S / 153°20'19"E.

**Etymology of Norfolk** /'nɔ:fək/:

Ekwall (1951, p. 327):  
**Norfolk** [*Norfolk* 1043-5 Wills, *Norðfolc* 1075 ASC (E), *Nordfolc* DB]<sup>4</sup> ‘The northern people’, in contradistinction to **SUFFOLK**, the southern part of East Anglia. In the OE Bede *Norþfolc* is used to denote the people north of the Humber.

Mills (2003, p. 348):  
**Norfolk** (the county). *Nordfolc* 1086 (DB). (Territory of) the northern people (of the East Angles). OE *north* + *folc*, see **SUFFOLK**.

*Oxford English Dictionary*:  
**Norfolk** < the name of a county on the east coast of England.

**Old English** *Norðfolc*, lit. ‘the northern people’, the northern part of East Anglia (in contradistinction to *Sudfolc*: see **Suffolk** n.) is attested from the mid 11th cent.; the word is also used in the **Old English** translation of Bede *Eccl. Hist.* to denote the people north of the Humber.

Middle English	<b>Northfolk</b>
Middle English–1500s	<b>Northfolke</b>
1500s–1600s	<b>Norfolke</b>
1600s–	<b>Norfolk</b>

**Nor** (Chiefly in compounds)

Middle English	<b>norre</b>
Middle English–	<b>nor</b>
1500s–1700s	<b>nore</b>
1800s–	<b>nor'</b>

*Online Etymology Dictionary* (<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=norfolk>):

**Norfolk** county in East Anglia, England, late 14c., earlier *Norþfolc*, *Nordfolc*, 1066, literally ‘(Territory of the) Northern People (of the East Angles);’ see **north** + **folk** (n.). The *Norfolk pine* (1778), used as an ornamental tree, is from *Norfolk* Island in the South Pacific, northwest of New Zealand, where it is native.

**Aetiology:**

Named by Governor in Council on 25 October 1986, noted as the eastern shore of Coochiemudlo Island. Named after HM Colonial Sloop *Norfolk*, which was commanded by Lieutenant Matthew Flinders RN (1774-1814), navigator and hydrographer, on his visit to Moreton Bay in 1799 (Queensland Government, Environment, Land and Water, 2023. [www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/title/place-names/](http://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/title/place-names/)).

The beach on the eastern side of the island is the site of explorer Matthew Flinders’ landing in 1799. Flinders did not name the island, merely referring to it as ‘the sixth island’. It was known to the local Indigenous peoples as *Kyuchi Mudlo*, from which its current name derives.

**Genealogy** (see Figure 2, next page):

- *Norfolk*, a county in East Anglia (UK)
- On 10 October 1774, James Cook, on board the HMS *Resolution*, sighted an island some 1,412 kilometres east of Australia, midway between New Caledonia and New Zealand. He named it after the Duchess of Norfolk, Mary Howard, wife of Edward Howard, the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of Norfolk, who inherited the toponymous name from Ralph the Staller in 1066, with the title ‘Earl of Norfolk.’ Then, in 1397, Richard II conferred the title ‘Duke of Norfolk’ to Thomas de Mowbray, thereby becoming the First Duke of Norfolk. Therefore, ‘Norfolk Island’ is not a copied

*continued next page*

# Intensive toponymy -- further thoughts

toponym (category 5.1 in Blair & Tent, 2020), but an eponymous one (category 6.1.2 in Blair & Tent, 2020).

- In 1798, a sloop was built on Norfolk Island, using the endemic island pine, and was named (Colonial Sloop) *Norfolk*. It was intended as a small service vessel between Port Jackson and Norfolk Island. However, Governor John Hunter quickly requisitioned her and put Matthew Flinders in its command. She was employed as a survey vessel, and was used by Flinders and George Bass to circumnavigate Van Diemens Land, thereby demonstrating the existence of a strait between it and New Holland. The sloop then ventured north to survey Moreton Bay and Hervey's Bay, previously charted by Cook.

- In 1986, a beach on the eastern side of Coochiemudlo Island, was named *Norfolk Beach* after Flinders' sloop, in commemoration of his landing there in 1799. The toponym is, again, not a copied name from another location, but an eponymous name (category 6.3.3 in Blair & Tent, 2020).

## Associated toponyms:

- The most recent application of the name-form was in 2000 when reclaimed land in the Manly Boat Harbour in Moreton Bay was named *Norfolk Point* (27°27'03"S / 153°11'29"E, named by the Minister for Natural Resources) also in honour of Flinders' visit in 1799, and that of the 1999 visit of the sloop's replica (Figure 1, previous page). Norfolk Creek (27°01'38"S / 153°10'46"E) is also named in honour of the sloop to commemorate Flinders' visit to Moreton Bay.
- Another branch of the 'Norfolk' name-form's genealogy in Australia is the result of Flinders' circumnavigation of Van Diemens Land with George Bass in 1798. During this voyage he named Mount Norfolk (41°26'46"S / 144°57'41"E) and Norfolk Bay (42°58'12"S / 147°46'48"E) in honour of his 'little vessel'. Little Norfolk Bay (43°2'33"S / 147°51'37"E), a small inlet within Norfolk Bay, was named subsequently.

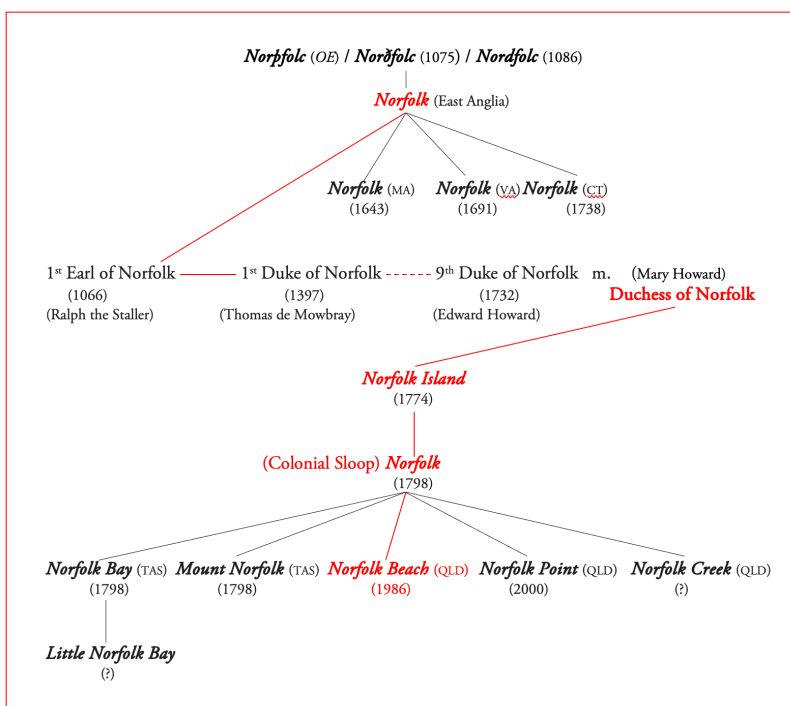


Figure 2. Ancestry chart of Norfolk Beach (QLD)

## Non-associated toponyms:

- The US Norfolks in Massachusetts, Virginia and Connecticut, are each direct copied toponyms (category 5.1 in Blair & Tent, 2020) from the East Anglia Norfolk County.

When researching the origin of a toponym, I believe we should not only ask the standard *Wh-* questions, and where necessary the name's etymology, but also delve into its genealogy as part of its aetiology. Uncovering a toponym's genealogy will disclose a more precise and comprehensive 'biography' overall.

As the above shows, a systematic assembling of both a toponym's genealogy and its aetiology are necessary steps in determining a toponym's type.

Jan Tent

## Endnotes

- Two ways to do it. *Placenames Australia*. March, 2015 (pp. 3-5).
- I use the term 'name-form' rather than 'placename' or 'toponym' because I am using Blair's (2017, p. 2) definition of toponym which counts each use of a name-form (or toponym-form) as a distinct toponym with its own history.
- Of interest here is of course the toponym's specific element, Norfolk.
- We need not concern ourselves with the specific references, except for perhaps DB 'Domesday Book' and OE 'Old English'.

References next page



# Modder Creek's muddy aetiology

In our previous issue (June, 2024) I discussed two toponyms that were copied from South Africa as a result of the Australian involvement in the Boer War: *Zeerust* and *Spion Kop*. Since writing that piece, I have come across three other toponyms that may have a similar origin. Two of them, *Modder Rivers*, are definitely copied from South Africa. The origin of the third, a *Modder Creek*, is somewhat uncertain. I came across it when consulting a map of the Elliott Way (between Tumbarumba and Cabramurra, NSW). It is a remote watercourse about 12 km long, rising about 9 km north-east of Moodys Hill and flowing generally south into Maragle Creek (Figure 1).

It is located in the Maragle State Forest which borders the western margin of Kosciuszko National Park (Figure 2, overleaf; see also NSW Department of Lands, 1966, for the official map). It was previously known as *Sparkes Creek* and *Modder River*, but was officially named *Modder Creek* in 1977 (*Government Gazette of NSW*, No. 164, 1977). The specific element of the toponym is unusual (and intriguing) for Australia, given that *modder* is Dutch for 'mud'.

Two other toponyms with the specific 'Modder' are found in Tasmania. The first is on the west coast and empties into Varna Bay to the south of Macquarie Harbour; the second is on the west coast of Cape Barren Island, east of Cape Sir John. *Placenames Tasmania* (Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania, <https://www.placenames.tas.gov.au/>) claims the former was named for the 'Battle on the River' by this name near Kimberley on 28/11/1899, South



Figure 1. The very appropriately named (non-signposted) *Modder Creek*. (Photo: the author)

African War. Name mentioned in "Tasmanian Tram" [n.d.] Number 14, page 75). (The Battle of Modder River was an engagement in the Boer War, fought on 28 November 1899. The British, under Lord Methuen, attempted to relieve the besieged town of Kimberley).

*Placenames Tasmania* does not provide a source for the toponym on Cape Barren Island, but I suppose it can be fairly safely assumed it was also copied from the place of the Boer War battle. I have not been able to discover who bestowed or suggested either of these two toponyms, but some connection of the namers with the Battle of Modder River seems likely.

The Modder River in South Africa is a tributary of the Riet River ('Reedy River') which forms part of the border between the Northern Cape and the Free State provinces. There is also a settlement named *Modder*

*continued next page*

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## Intensive toponymy...

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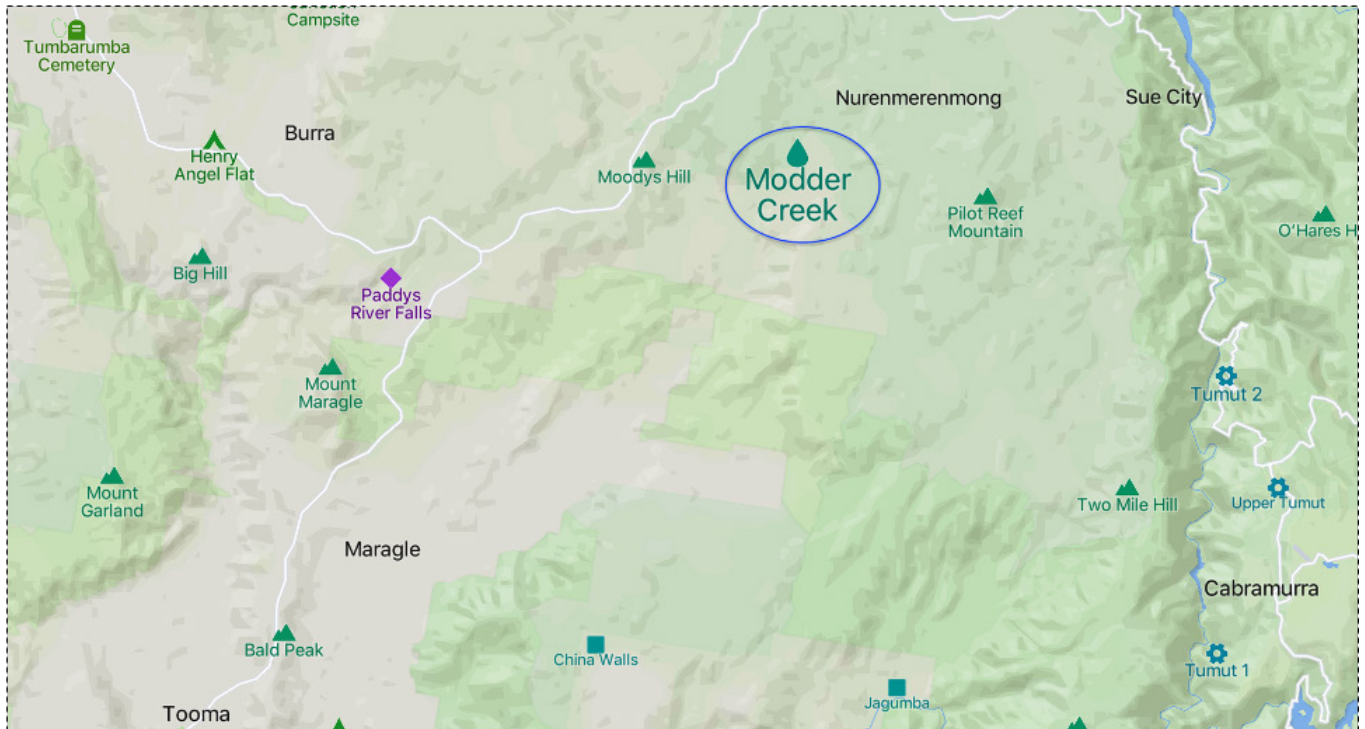


Figure 2. Source: Mapcarta. <https://mapcarta.com/35448212/Map>

River just north of the confluence of the two rivers. The toponym comes from Afrikaans *modder*, 'mud'; its meaning is clearly sourced from the Khoekhoe name for the feature, *Maap* or *Gmaap*, 'brown river' (Raper, 1987).

As yet, I haven't been able to source the origin of the NSW *Modder Creek*. (It's often very difficult to discover the source of names of small, remote features). So, we are left to speculate. The most obvious is of course that it is a copy of the South African river name, given the creek was originally known as Modder River. Until documentary evidence as to *who* named the feature, and *why*, comes to light, we shall never know for certain.

However, a possible alternative aetiology for the name is perhaps to be found in the geomorphology of the region in which it rises, viz. the north-eastern segment of the Hume Catchment area in NSW (see circled segment in Figure 2, above). Morland (1949, p. 54) notes that the nearby Paddys River and Sparkes Creek (i.e. *Modder Creek*) both 'rise in undulating, swampy uplands,' and includes a sketch map of the area (Figure 3, overleaf). In his 1958 paper, Morland notes that '[t]he main creeks [of the area] are generally on gentle gradients, meandering through boggy flats. Some flow through

flats of fen swamp, such as Sparkes Creek, Maragle Creek and O'Gilvie's Creek.' (p. 309). On the following page, he comments on the area's catchment efficiency, noting that it contains 'a considerable area of water-storing bogs and swamps.' The toponym therefore seems well suited to the area. Indeed, we find in its vicinity the similarly named *Yellow Bog Creek*, *Boggy Gully*, *Boggy Creek*, and *Burra Creek* (*burra* < Dharawal language *\*boora* / *boro* 'shaking bog').<sup>1</sup>

This theory, obviously, has two major hurdles to overcome before it could become a good candidate for the aetiology. The first is why anyone would choose a Dutch word as the specific for the toponym, unless they had a knowledge of Dutch (and we have no knowledge of any such person in the area). And secondly, why not choose any of the several suitable English (or even Dharawal) words that were available?

So this potential explanation is perhaps rather too far-fetched, and for now at least we must leave the issue unresolved. The best I can offer is that we may add at least two (possibly three) new Boer War heritage toponyms to our list.

Jan Tent

## ...muddy aetiology

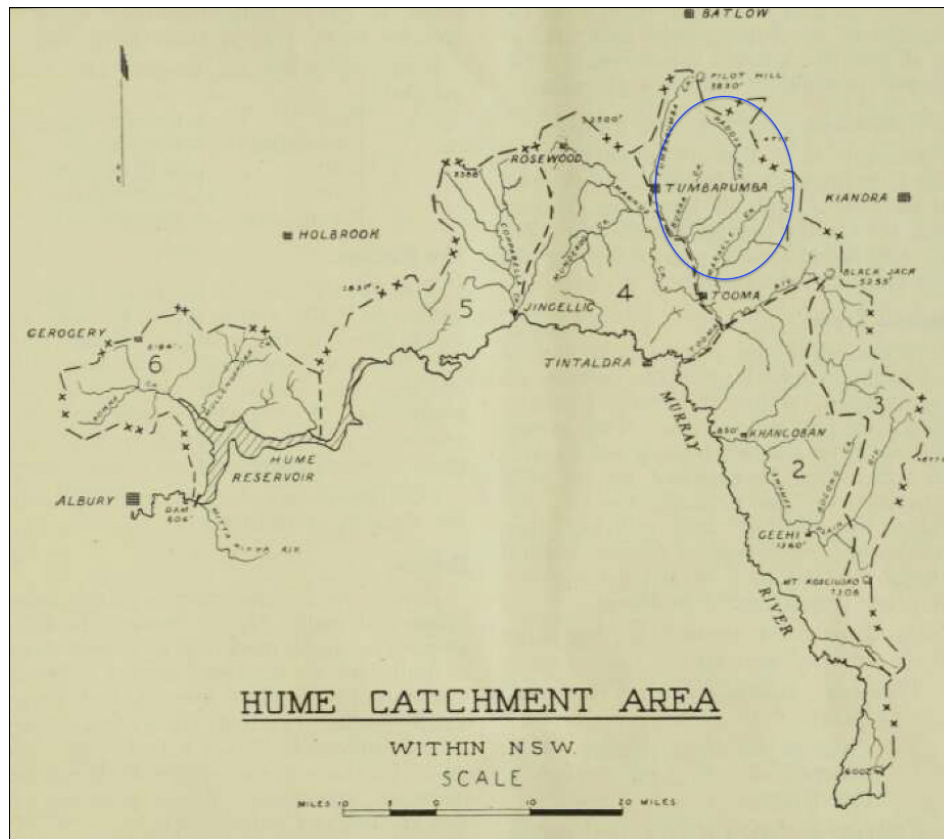


Figure 3. Hume Catchment Area within NSW (Morland, 1949). The region where Modder Creek, Boggy Creek, and Burra Creek lie is circled.

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> \* indicates a reconstructed or hypothesised form.

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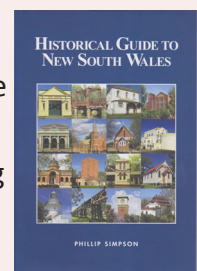
## Free, to a good home...

Our NSW readers in particular will remember our earlier recommendation of Phillip Simpson's *Historical Guide to NSW*, and the interview with Phillip in our June 2021 issue. Our editorial team has found the *Guide* an invaluable resource as we prepare our articles on NSW places.

Phillip has let us know that he's now having to downsize from his long-standing residence on Sydney's North Shore—and that means reducing the size of his vast library of resources. In particular, Phillip has a collection of NSW **topographic maps** which may be the best private collection in the state.

The collection consists of hundreds of flat and folded sheets at all different scales, both imperial and metric, dating back to the War. The maps are available to a good home, at no cost. The only condition is that the collection is picked up from Phillip's home in Killara, as a bulk item. No cherry-picking, says Phillip!

If you are interested, email Phillip on <[guidetonsw@gmail.com](mailto:guidetonsw@gmail.com)>.





## Cicia, land of gastropods...

In this series of articles, we have explored etymologies of the names of the seven larger islands of Fiji. Now we turn to those of the next rank: islands under 100 square kilometres. We have already looked at Rabe (67 km<sup>2</sup>), Muala (65 km<sup>2</sup>), Lakeba (60 km<sup>2</sup>), Vanuabalavu (57 km<sup>2</sup>), Beqa (37.5 km<sup>2</sup>), and Naviti (35.03 km<sup>2</sup>) in the Yasawa Group of far western Fiji; so for the next in line we soar over the group to the Lau islands in the far east, where we find **Cicia**, at 34.6 km<sup>2</sup> only slightly smaller than Naviti.

Perhaps at this point I should remind readers who are not familiar with Fijian spelling that ‘c’ is a voiced interdental fricative—that is, pronounced like English ‘th’ in ‘this’ or ‘bathe’.

Cicia is an almost circular island in northern Lau, approximately equidistant from the larger islands of Vanuabalavu to the northeast and Lakeba to the southeast. It is a mixed limestone and volcanic island, and moderately high (about 165 metres) in the centre. There are five villages on Cicia, divided into two communalects (dialects): Mabulā and Tarukua in the west, and Lomaji (sometimes standardised as *Lomati*), Natokalau and Naceva in the east. It is relatively fertile and has many coconut plantations, and in 2013 became the only island in Fiji to have acquired the official status of an ‘organic island’.

Cicia is one of only three islands in Fiji where the Australian magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) is found. It was introduced around 1900 in an effort to control pests of coconuts, in particular stick insects. The other islands where it was introduced are Taveuni and Qamea, both quite close to Cicia. Also remarkable is the fact that the wattled honeyeater (*kīkau*, *Foulehaio carunculata*), a common bird in most of Fiji, is not found in Cicia, because there are too many snakes! This honeyeater and snakes are natural enemies and where one is found in abundance on a particular island in Fiji, the other will be absent.

Like many islands in the Lau group, Cicia was first made known to Europeans by Tongans, and as a result the earliest references to it are under its then-Tongan name, *Jijia*. The sound represented by ‘j’ is similar to English ‘ch’ but without the aspiration, that puff of breath following the consonant. Tongan doesn’t have the voiced

interdental fricative represented as ‘c’ in Fijian, and so it substituted ‘t’ for this sound, which became ‘ch’ before the high front vowel /i/, before changing in the latter part of the nineteenth century to ‘s’.

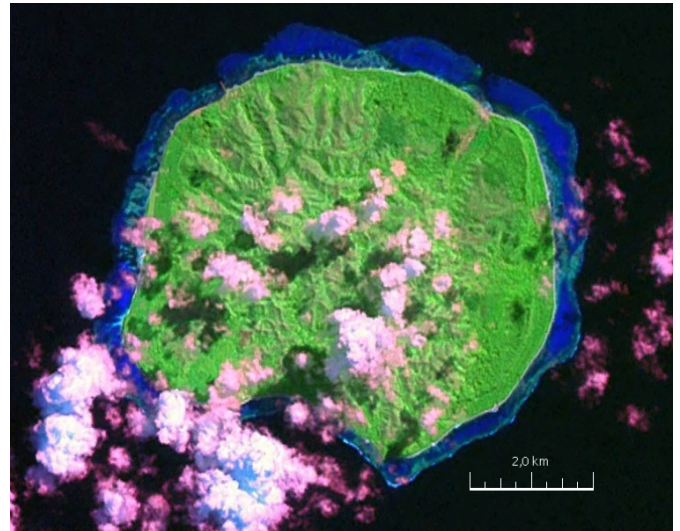


Fig 1: The island of Cicia (Geocover 2000, NASA World Wind)

Cicia was not in Anderson’s 1777 list of islands known to the Tongans; it appeared for the first time (in about 1807) on a list of Fijian islands prepared by Captain Brumley and published under the name of his employer, Edmund Fanning of Connecticut and New York. Indeed, it appears twice in the list, once as ‘Chucheeah’ and again as ‘Dedea’. The list also mentions ‘Dabuctah’, which probably refers to Tābuta, a part of Cicia which is now a freehold estate. Some later explorers continued using the Tonganised pronunciation, for instance *Chichia* (Wilkes, 1840), but when Methodist missionaries arrived they took the trouble to determine the local name, and their first published dictionary and gazetteer, Hazlewood’s of 1872, recorded the name correctly as *Cicia*.

Now to etymology, to understand which we must return to our 19<sup>th</sup> largest island, Muala. If you’ve been following this column for a while, you’ll recall that the language of the Lapita people, the first settlers of Fiji and Polynesia, had a regular process of forming nouns from verbs (or other nouns) by adding a suffix *-a*, often preceded by one of a small number of consonants. Such nouns often became placenames. So, for example, *tavo* meant ‘to haul a boat over land’ and gave rise to *tavola* meaning ‘the place where boats are hauled over land’, i.e. ‘intertidal flat’; *tavu* meant ‘burn’, so *tavua* meant ‘burning place’

## ...Placenames of Fiji 24

or ‘volcano’, and the name was given to a number of places in Fiji (as well as *Tafua* in Samoa and *Tofua* in Tonga), because they were active volcanoes, or volcanic in appearance. Similarly, *namu* meant ‘mosquito’; so places that abounded in mosquitoes were named *Namuka* in Fiji, *Nomuka* in Tonga and *Namu’a* in Samoa.

What, then, might *Cicia* have abounded in? Well, simply put, it abounded in *cici*. If you were to ask a native of *Cicia*, or indeed of any part of eastern Fiji, what a *cici* is, they would be perplexed, since there is no such word with an appropriate meaning. However, if you pose the same question to someone from western Fiji, they will recognise it instantly as the word for ‘gastropod’ or, more specifically, shellfish of the families Turbinidae (turban snails), Neritidae (nerites), Cerithidae (ceriths) and Trochidae (top shells). What happened was that, after *Cicia* was named, there was a general historical sound change in eastern Fiji by which the initial ‘c’ of common nouns changed to ‘s’, so that, for example, *cucu* ‘breast’ became *sucu*, and *cici* ‘gastropod’ became *sici*. However, *Cicia* was not a common noun—it had become a proper noun—so was not subject to this sound change.

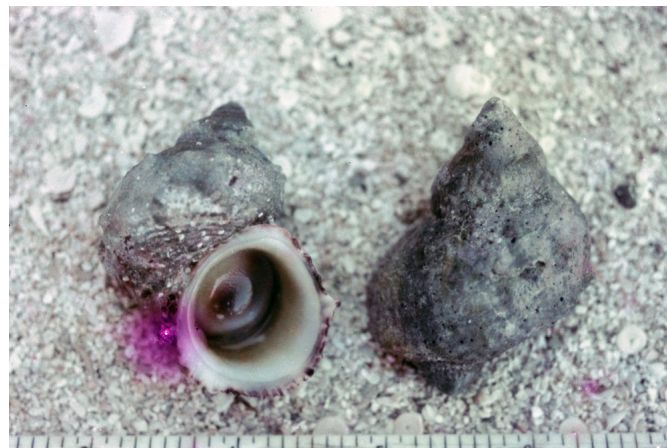


Fig 2: *Lāsawa* (*Turbo chrysostomus*) from *Mabulā* village, *Cicia*. (photo: the author)

As someone who has done linguistic fieldwork in *Cicia*, I can vouch for the fact that such shells are not only abundant there, but larger and tastier than those in other parts of Fiji!

Next time we move northeast, to the island off the eastern end of Taveuni that is famous for jungle fowl - Qamea.

**Paul Geraghty**

*University of the South Pacific*

## Cutting them down to size, again

In our previous issue (June '24), we gave three cheers for our Olympian talent with hypocoristics—those informal short forms of placenames. Why indeed say *Rockhampton* when *Rocky* will do? Not that we want to boast, but we in Oz do seem to be rather good at it. Is it just another manifestation of the tall poppy syndrome? Anyway, more examples have come flooding in:

- **Alan Monger** (Benalla Historical Society) says that almost universally you'll hear

*Wang* for *Wangaratta*  
*Yack* for *Yackandandah*  
*Yarra* for *Yarrawonga*  
*Shep* for *Shepparton*

- **Greg Ryan** (Albury & District Historical Society) confirms the first three examples, and adds

*Burru* for *Burrumbuttock*  
*Barni* for *Barnawartha*  
*Denni* for *Deniliquin*  
*Mully* for *Mullengandra*  
*Dart* for *Dartmouth*

Our regular Tasmanian correspondent **Christopher Woods** had long ago (in 2019) told us that

*Launceston* was *Lonny*, but this time he agrees with Bill Forrest that certain types of placenames don't get shortened (*Wee Waa* and *Curl Curl* were Bill's examples). Chris



suggests (and we reckon he's right) that those names with internal duplication only get shortened if they have more than one syllable. You can't do it with *Woy Woy* and *Curl Curl*, but *Wagga Wagga*, *Burra Burra* and *Yarram Yarram* are commonly *Wagga*, *Burra* and *Yarram*.

We're always ready to hear of further examples, folks! Our insatiable Database stands waiting...

**David Blair**

# Placenames Puzzle Number 91

**Feasts and holidays** *The clues in this puzzle reveal the names of places named after Christian holy days or after saints commemorated by such days. For example: (SA) A lake—the week's seventh day, the day of resurrection. Lake Sunday.*

1. (TAS) A mountain—all about romantic love, February 14
2. (TAS) A mountain—Ireland's patron saint, March 17
3. (TAS) A river—Jesus' father, March 19
4. (NSW) A mountain—crucifixion day
5. (NSW) A creek—three days after the crucifixion
6. (JERVIS BAY TERRITORY) A cape—England's patron saint, April 23
7. (WA) A Perth suburb—the patron saint of Spain, July 25
8. (NT) A park near Darwin's Howard Springs—Jesus rose to heaven, 39 days after Easter
9. (QLD) An island in the Whitsundays—50 days or seven Sundays after Easter
10. (QLD) A beach—the first Sunday after clue 9, celebrates the triune God
11. (QLD) A stream—the patron saints of Rome, June 29
12. (WA) An island—the wheat harvest, August 1 in the north, February 1 in the south
13. (WA) An island in King George Sound—remembers the archangel, September 29
14. (NSW) A trig station in Sydney's Liverpool area—for all the saints, November 1
15. (VIC) A town NE of Melbourne, once Queenstown—Scotland's patron saint, November 30
16. (NT) A cove—patron saint of sailors, December 6
17. (AUST TERRITORY) An island in the west—the natal day, December 25
18. (NSW) A Sydney suburb—the fisherman, who shares the day with another, June 29
19. (QLD) An island—encompasses clue 9
20. (NSW) A trig station in Sydney's suburb of Randwick—patron saint of lost causes, October 28

[Compiled by **Jan Tent**  
Answers on page 2]

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Supporting photographs or other illustrations are greatly appreciated.

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December Issue: 15 October