

Place Name SUMMARY (PNS) 2/04

PILTAWODLI (PIRLTAWARDLI)

(last edited: 28/2/18)

Abstract

Pilta-wodli (or *Piltawodlingga*; in KWP New Spelling 2010, *Pirtawardli* and *Pirtawardlingga*) was the Kurna name of the area of the earliest 'Native Location' & School established in 1837, where the German linguist missionaries Teichelmann, Schürmann & Klose did most of their work recording the Kurna language & using it to teach Kurna children, 1838-45. The place (probably a campsite) was chosen by the Kurna themselves: on the Torrens River, in the present North Adelaide Golf Links just north of the Torrens Lake weir. It is now marked by a memorial plaque at the carpark by the weir.

Its meaning was not given at the time, but is almost certainly 'brushtail possum home'. This may have been due to the many possums who lived in the big River red gums which grew then along this stretch of the river (see PNS 2/5 Karrawirra-parri).

Coordinates	-34.91337° Latitude 138.58857° Longitude
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Language Information

Meaning	'Brush-tailed possum house'
Etymology	<i>pilta</i> 'Brush-tailed possum' + <i>wodli</i> 'wurlie, house' > <i>Pilta-wodli</i> 'Brush-tailed possum house'; (optional) + <i>-ngga</i> 'at' > <i>Pilta-wodlingga</i> 'place of the black-tailed possum house'.
Notes	
Language Family	Thura-Yura: 'Kurna'
KWP Former Spelling	<i>Piltawodli</i> , or <i>Piltawodlingga</i>
KWP New Spelling 2011	<i>Pirtawardli</i> , <i>Pirtawardlingga</i>
Phonemic Spelling	/pirtawartli/, /pirtawartlingka/
Pronunciation	"Pil-ta-wod-li", "Pil-ta-wod-ling-ga"
Pronunciation tips	Stress the first & third syllables; 'o' as in got'. The 'l' in <i>pilta</i> , & the 'd' in <i>wodli</i> , are pronounced with the tongue curled back (retroflex).

Main source evidence

Date	1837-9
Original source text	“Districts of the Adelaide tribe: Peelta werlingga ”.
Reference	Wyatt [?1837-9] / 1879: 179.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Kurna informants

Date	1839
Original source text	“The Governor visited Piltawodlinga in the company of his wife”.
Reference	Schürmann (tr. Spoeri) <i>Diary</i> , 12/8/1839; cp. 18/6/1839, 5/8/1839 et al.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Mullawirraburka, Kadlitpinna, Ityamaitpinna, etc

Date	1840
Original source text	“ <i>pilta</i> opossum; <i>wodli</i> hut, house; Piltawodli, the native location on the Park Land ”.
Reference	Teichelmann and Schürmann 1840, 1:39, 57 and 2:75
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Mullawirraburka, Kadlitpinna, Ityamaitpinna, etc

Date	1857
Original source text	“ <i>bilta</i>: the black bushy-tailed opossum; <i>pilta</i> or <i>bilta</i> the blak {sic} tailed opossum; <i>wodli</i> hut, house. Variant: <i>worli</i> ”.
Reference	Teichelmann unpublished MS Dictionary 1857.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Mullawirraburka, Kadlitpinna, Ityamaitpinna, etc

Discussion: PILTAWODLI, THE ‘NATIVE LOCATION’

The site on the north bank of the Torrens was “a place chosen by the natives” in 1837 when Interim Protector Walter Bromley established the first ‘Native Location’ there. Some of its layout is shown on Freeling’s 1849 map of Adelaide, rediscovered by Rob Foster in his 1990 essay cited below.

It was probably a campsite, and it is possible that the place had some importance for Kurna ceremonies, judging by Schürmann’s record of initiations there in December 1839.

From 1838 until 1845 German Lutheran missionaries lived there alongside Kurna people, learning the language, evangelizing, and teaching Kurna children in their own language in an onsite schoolhouse from December 1839. Here or nearby was recorded most of what we know of the language and culture: Mullawirraburka ('King John') and Kadlitpinna ('Captain Jack') who lived with their families in houses onsite, and others such as Ityamaitpinna ('Rodney'), passed on their knowledge to William Williams, William Wyatt, Christian Teichelmann, Clamor Schürmann, Samuel Klose, Matthew Moorhouse, and William Cawthorne. Here also the school-children wrote letters and sang hymns in Kurna, some of which have survived.

A high picket fence was built around the Location in 1844 to separate Kurna campers from the rest of the city, and they became known as *Taralye meyunna*, 'split wood or stockade people'. In July 1845, by government edict that "no native shall any longer remain within the fence", the Location's 'native houses' were demolished, and from then on all teaching of Aboriginal children was done in English at the Native Schools at Kintore Avenue and Walkerville.

There is no record of the connotations of the name *Piltawodli*. It could mean either 'possum house' or 'house of the hip or side'. If either of these meanings had mythological connections, nothing of them is known. It might refer to the European-built huts of the Native Location.

"Peelta werlingga" is how Wyatt spelled *Piltawodli-ngga*: the same name plus the suffix meaning 'at'. The English 'wurlie' is probably derived from Kurna *worli*, a variant of *wodli*.

For him in 1837-9 this was one of several "*districts of the Adelaide tribe*", but he did not specify the exact site. Schürmann's diary referred to 'Piltawodlinga' (sic) six times between June and November 1839, always clearly meaning the Native Location.

It is on record that "*a possum used to climb through the floorboards into the school room*".¹ But most of the extant records of the site name precede the opening of the schoolhouse in December 1839. Teichelmann and Schürmann's dictionary, ready for the printer 4 months later,² still applied the name to the Native Location, not the school; so the name did not commemorate this particular *wodli* and *pilta*.

The animal *pilta* is almost certainly the Common Brush-tailed Possum. No doubt these were common in the big red-gums along this stretch of the Torrens River, though possibly no more than elsewhere. Conceivably a wurlie here may have featured in a Brushtail Dreaming story. Another conjectural Brushtail Dreaming site is *Piltangga* (Beltunga Gully at Willunga South).³

¹ DECS 2002: 23.

² Schürmann *Diary* 21/12/1839, 7/4/1840.

³ See PNS 4.4.2/1 Piltangga.

See

Rob Foster 1990, 'The Aborigines Location in Adelaide', *Journal of Anthropological Society of SA* 28(1): 31, 12, 18, 22.

Schürmann (tr. Hans Spoeri), *Diaries*, unpublished typescript, Adelaide: Lutheran Archives, 28/12/1839 et al.

DECS 2002, *Kurna Walking Trail Guide: Karrawirra Parri*, Adelaide: DECS and City of Adelaide: 21-4.

Rob Amery 2000, *Warrabarna Kurna!*, Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger: 56-63.

Klose letters 3 Sep 1844, 29 Aug 1845, in J Graetz (ed.) 2002, *Missionary to the Kurna: the Klose Letters*, Adelaide: Friends of Lutheran Archives: 35, 44.

End of Summary