

## WAVERLEY COUNCIL

# SAND AND SCRUB: WAVERLEY IN 1850

### A Waverley Library Local History Fact Sheet



Images from top:

Bondi Bay, from a collection of watercolours of scenes in and around Sydney, and views of the Nepean River, Bathurst Plains and Sandhurst, 1857-1861. George Kilgour Ingelow, image courtesy of Dixon Library and SLNSW.

Bondi Lagoon on O'Brien estate, Bondi Beach, 1900.

The Waverley of today, urban and densely occupied, bears little resemblance to its bushland past. Heath on sandstone, eastern banksia scrub and extensive sand dunes dominated the area, sweeping wild down to the coast. In the late 1800s Bondi Beach is described as:

*"long sweeps of beach and nothing behind but gums and stunted brush, with a stream meandering through fern gullies and palm groves to a blue lagoon just behind the sand. The wooded land belonged to Francis O'Brien. To such an extent was it regarded as 'no man's land' that three woodcutters, cutting down the trees, refused to stop till Mr O'Brien gave them the option of having their traces cut or going they went."*

A range of native and introduced species flourished, including:

- Red Bottlebrush (*Callistemon citrinus*)
- Coast Teatree (*Leptospermum laevigatum*)
- Broadleaved Paperbark (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*)
- Tree Broom-Heath (*Monotoca elliptica*)
- Christmas Bush (*Ceratopetalum gummiferum*)
- Pine-leaf Geebung (*Persoonia pinifolia*)
- Swamp Lily (*Crinum pedunculatum*)
- Moreton Bay Fig Trees (*Ficus macrophylla*)
- Climbing Guinea flower (*Hibbertia scandens*)
- Coastal Correa (*Correa alba*)
- Wedding Bush (*Ricinocarpus pinifolius*)



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- Pink Waxflower (*Eriostemon Australasius*)
- Button Grass (*Gymnoschoenus sphaerocephalus*)
- Silky Purple-flag (*Patersonia sericea*)
- Red Five-Corners (*Styphelia tubiflora*)
- Green Five-Corners (*Styphelia viridis*)
- Native Quince (*Alectryon subcinereus*)
- Norfolk Island Pine trees
- Many varieties of wattle (*Acacia*)
- Banksia, including Honeysuckle or Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*)

*"Travellers had to pass up and down sand hills and through dense Australian bush. The locality from Mill Hill to the Tea Gardens was little else that tea-tree scrub."*

*"Mandeville house was surrounded with ubiquitous pine tree and wild flowers; five-corners and geebung flourished. Being comparatively undisturbed country, the native birds sought its solitude and it was a great patch for birds' nests."*

*"A fine clump of Christmas bush grew just inside the gates of Lugar Brae which, when in full bloom, was the delight and envy of passers-by."*

There are many descriptions of the area and the natural environment in the library archives, including the following interesting reminiscences:

*"In the 1850's that portion of Waverley known as Charing Cross was practically virgin scrub. The journey between Charing Cross and Tea Gardens (now Bondi Junction) was like passing along a country road till the next village was reached."*

*"A rustic bridge spanned the stream in Tamarama Gully which rippled its journey through the ferns to an outlet in the southern side of the beach, wherein nasturtium seeds, carried down by the stream, would lodge, germinate and blossom into a field of varicoloured flowers, impregnating the air with their perfume."*

Images from top:

Bondi Beach, 1875. Image courtesy of the Mitchell Library and SLNSW.

Botanical illustration of Honeysuckle Banksia. *Banksia marginata* Cav., family Proteaceae, ca. 1886 by Ellis Rowan. Image courtesy of the NLA.

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Images from top:

'A view of the Farm'. Postcard advertising Barracluff's Ostrich Farm, Sydney, c. 1900. Image courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum.

Group of people outside Bronte House, Waverley, c. 1872-1875. Photograph by J. Bischoff, Landscape Photographer. Image courtesy of the NLA.

*"Joseph Barracluff owned five acres of land (for his ostrich farm), having a frontage on Old South Head Road. The surrounding country was chiefly vacant land in its virgin state, composed of scrub-covered sandstone, with soil interspersed. A shallow watertable led into a culvert and emptied into a natural watercourse on his land."*

*"The country around the Bondi Dance Hall was scrub. The beach side of the hall was a grassy slope with honeysuckle trees growing in isolated clumps."*

*"The first waratahs grown at Bronte were planted by Hugh Beattie (grandfather of Dame Mary Gilmore) for Mrs Georgiana Lowe at Bronte House. The estate presented the appearance of a valley or ravine, flanked on the north and south by lofty and wooded hills. Through it flowed a creek, giving freshness to the flowers and fruit of the upper and middle gardens, and the*

*orchard and paddock of the lower one, now occupied by Bronte Park. Here was a breadth of grass and foliage sleeping in the summer sun, with clustering beds of blossoms haunted by numerous bees. One lofty Norfolk Island Pine stood in the centre of a circular sweep of turf."*

*"The whole of the grounds were thickly timbered with native trees and scrub, interspersed with imported trees such as camphor laurel, bunya palm and bay trees."*