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## Place Name SUMMARY (PNS) 4.04.02/01

### PILTANGGA

(last edited: 23.1.2017)

#### Abstract

*Piltangga* (or *Pirtangga* in KWP's New Spelling 2010) is the Kurna name of the area at Willunga South on Sections 700 and 268 which was known as 'Beltunga' and 'Beltunga Gully' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The name means 'brushtail possum place'. Probably this signifies that the thick forest here was a particularly good place to obtain this species whose skins were used for cloaks; the prime skin-curing site was only 10 kilometres away at Wakondilla near Silver Sands (see PNS 4.04.01/03). Or perhaps a site here had some connection with an unrecorded Brushtail Dreaming. Perhaps both were true.

The name was recorded first as 'Piltongga' by Louis Piesse during the first survey of the area in 1839; doubtless he obtained it from Kurna guides employed by the Survey Department that year. Early settlers recorded it as 'Beltunga Gully' and "Pell-tonga (the opossum trees)": independent spellings which indicate that they heard the same name independently from local Aborigines visiting the gully and doing seasonal farm work in the neighbourhood of Willunga or McLaren Vale.

Piltangga was a place of "good water", with thick forest on the surrounding slopes and tea-tree swamps on its lower reach extending into Section 267 and beyond. According to pioneer settler Richard Hill (as paraphrased by GH Manning in *Hope Farm Chronicle*, 1984), it was used in the early 1840s by groups of up to 300 Aboriginal people at a time. But it seems likely that their presence at both Piltangga and the superior campsite Wilangga (see PNS 4.04.02/02) was curtailed and controlled very soon after the Police Station and Depot were established at the latter in late 1839. In later decades Willunga and its ration station became the focus of visits by Encounter Bay people, while the local Kurna-speaking remnant had been quickly reduced to invisibility.

<b>Coordinates</b>	Latitude -35.281382°, Longitude 138.557033° [nominal centre of Beltunga Gully]
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## Language Information

Meaning	'place of the brushtail possum'
Etymology	<i>pirlta</i> 'common Brushtail possum' + <i>ngga</i> 'at, place of'
Notes	
Language Family	Thura-Yura: 'Kurna'
KWP Former Spelling	Piltangga
KWP New Spelling 2010	Pirltangga
Phonemic Spelling	/pirltangka/
Syllabification	"Pirl-tangga":
Pronunciation tips	Stress the first syllable. 'r' is an / with the tongue curled back (Retroflex). Every <i>a</i> as in Maori 'haka'.

## Main source evidence

Date	[1837-9] / 1879
Original source text	"Peelta – opossum, black tail".
Reference	William Wyatt [1837] / 1879, 'Some account of the manners and superstitions of the Adelaide and Encounter Bay tribes', in J.D. Woods [ed.] 1879, <i>The Native Tribes of South Australia</i> , Adelaide: Government Printer.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Mullawirraburka, Kadlitpinna, Ityamaitpinna, etc 1837-9.

Date	1839
Original source text	<i>Three creeks shown in full on Sections 700 and [1007] south of it = Beltunga Gully; creeks converge on southwest corner of Section 268, running northwest across [St Andrews Tce].</i>
Reference	Richard Counsel 1839, Field Book 102, Hundred of Willunga: 38.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	

Date	1839-40
Original source text	- "Good W <sup>l</sup> " [marked at junction of two creeks in southwestern corner of Section 268, i.e. mouth of Beltunga Gully]. - "Good W <sup>l</sup> " [marked on Wirra Creek on Section 258].
Reference	J McLaren map 1/9/1840, 'Country South of Adelaide...', London, Arrowsmith.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	

Date	n.d. [1840 & onward]
Original source text	"mostly good water" [marked along partial creek line roughly located on an un-labelled Section (later 267) = Beltunga Creek].
Reference	Diagram Book pages (GNU), Hundred of Willunga: 11-2.
Informants credited	Surveyors' Field Book 102
Informants uncredited	



Date	1840
Original source text	- "Pilta, opossum; hip; side." - " <b>Piltangga</b> , together."
Reference	Teichelmann & Schürmann 1840, <i>An Outline of the Grammar...</i>
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Mullawirraburka, Kadlitpinna, Ityamaitpinna, etc 1838-40.

Date	1844
Original source text	<p>- "Half-an-hour's walk brings us to Willunga (properly Willa), being Section No. 258, 'C,' on the maps... Adjoining Willunga is the slate quarry. Slate has been discovered at other places in the neighbourhood; but it seems most accessible at the so-called quarry, and when it was let the Government prohibited any other being worked. The quarry is not properly at Willunga; the glen in which it is situate is called <b>Piltongga</b>. It is in this glen that many of the so-called Willunga settlers reside, several of the quarrymen having built themselves neat little cottages. This quarry would be a property well worth securing, and if sold under the new regulations, unless the Government fixed an exorbitant minimum price, it would be sure to go off a bargain. The slate is easily obtained, of the finest quality, and in quantity sufficient to supply all the Australian Colonies..."</p> <p>- "Surface water is not scarce to the South. I think I could go from Adelaide to the Slate Quarry at <b>Piltongga</b> and obtain surface water on an average of four miles. Distances measured from Government-house, Adelaide.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warriparri, River Sturt 8½</li> <li>2. Number two* 12½</li> <li>3. Cowemanilla, Hurtle Vale 13½</li> <li>4. Maundarilla, Morphett Vale 16½</li> <li>5. Onkaparinga (Noarlunga) 22</li> <li>6. Turungga, McLaren Vale 25½</li> <li>7. Willunga 30</li> <li>8. Piltongga 31</li> </ol> <p>Or, surface water may be had instead of the three last by Turneeyundingga and Cunyanyapella, to <b>Piltongga</b>, which also saves a mile in distance. Now an occasional [<i>sic</i>] distance of four or five miles, without surface water, in districts where settlers are rapidly locating themselves, is a great evil; and as most of the springs are on private property they are getting fenced in. Aldinga too is really deficient in surface water. Most of the ravines in the Iron-stone Range have water in them in the winter, and</p>



	<p>the water could be preserved in them for summer use; but works of this nature are expensive. What I would propose would be more simple. There are several springs along the Range, which, on being cleared out, only give a more abundant supply. Here we have the water already preserved for use, and all that would be required would be to convey it in pipes or by aqueducts in leading directions. There is no occasion for expensive water works; wooden pipes are superior to iron pipes for the purpose, and I should anticipate that as timber is so abundant here such pipes would not be expensive. The spring at <b>Pittonga</b> [<i>sic; typographical error</i>] might be carried a considerable distance over the Aldinga Plain”.</p>
Reference	<p>‘L.P.’ [Louis Piesse] 1844b, ‘Descriptive Tour Through Part Of District C’, <i>Observer</i> 13/4/1844: 7b-c, 8a-b,  <a href="http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/page/18834087">http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/page/18834087</a>.</p>
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Kaurna survey guides 1839

Date	[1840s] / 1893
Original source text	“ <b>Pell-tonga, (the opossum trees)</b> ”.
Reference	<p>“a lady.... one of the one of the earliest residents of Maclaren Vale and Port Lincoln” [Faith Emily Lockwood, nee Hewett], reported by ‘A Native’, <i>SA Register</i> 11/10/1893: 7e,  <a href="http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/53635067">http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/53635067</a>.</p>
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Kaurna informants around CT Hewett’s Oxenberry Farm at McLaren Vale, 1840s.

Date	[1840s] / 1984
Original source text	<p>[in Chapter 18, ‘Early Willunga’:] “I was seated next to Mr Richard Hill and during the course of the evening, following much prompting on my part, he recounted the experiences of early settlers in the Willunga district... ‘When [the Aborigines] were not on walkabout they camped at <b>Beltunga Gully</b>’, he said. ‘When we first arrived in 1840 this gully possessed an abundance of water and game. A large tea-tree swamp extended through the land and it was here that Evelyn Sturt camped with herds of cattle, which he had overlanded from Sydney. ‘The nomadic natives of the district were harmless and friendly. Their life was one long holiday as they roamed the tiers and valleys, migrating annually to the seaboard and the lagoon at Sellick’s Beach. We early pioneers had implicit faith in them, and that faith was never shattered – messages given to natives for pioneer friends, thirty miles distant, were faithfully delivered.</p>

	'As many as three hundred would assemble at <b>Beltunga Gully</b> , and under the shelter of the hills they built their wurlies. Piccaninnies fished the creeks for yabbies to provide a delicacy to be eaten with meals of kangaroos and opossum'."
<i>Reference</i>	Geoffrey H Manning 1984, <i>Hope Farm Chronicle: Pioneering Tales of South Australia 1836-1870</i> , The Author: 116-7. (This book refers to actual diaries and letters, but is partly fictionalized in presentation).
<i>Informants credited</i>	(p.202) "SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES: Diaries and Letters...Chapter 18: Aldam Family Papers."
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	

<i>Date</i>	1853
<i>Original source text</i>	"MARRIED... On the 3rd instant, by the Rev. A. B. Bennett, at Willunga Church, Mr. Thomas Martin, to Miss Elizabeth Jane, eldest daughter of Mr. Thomas Polkingham [ <i>sic for 'Polkinghorne'</i> ], farmer, <b>Beltunga</b> ."
<i>Reference</i>	<i>Adelaide Observer</i> 10/12/1853: 5d, <a href="http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/158095729/18793337">http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/158095729/18793337</a> .
<i>Informants credited</i>	
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	

<i>Date</i>	1857
<i>Original source text</i>	- "bilta: the black bushy-tailed opossum". - "bilta: the side of a thing; <b>biltangga</b> on, upon the side lying". - "pilta: hip, side of the body (alt. <i>bilta</i> ); <b>piltangga</b> , 'on, upon the side'."
<i>Reference</i>	Teichelmann MS Dictionary 1857.
<i>Informants credited</i>	
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	Mullawirraburka, Kadlitpinna, Ityamaitpinna, etc 1838-46.

<i>Date</i>	1893
<i>Original source text</i>	"VINEGROWING AT MACLAREN VALE. Mr. W. J. Blacker, Hon. Secretary of the Willunga Agricultural Bureau, writes: — "On Friday, February 10, Messrs. L. Fidge and McKae and myself, as members of the Bureau, and Messrs. F. Hart, W. Fidge, and J. P. Hughes paid a visit to the currant vineyard of Messrs. T. Hardy & Sons at Maclaren Flat, which has for about the last four years been under the sole management of Mr. Richard Cooper... This vineyard in the past has been known as 'Leslie's,' after a settler who first planted a few vines in the locality, but the owner has now changed the name, and in the future it will be known as the ' <b>Beltunga Vineyard</b> '..."
<i>Reference</i>	<i>SA Register</i> 13/2/1893: 3b, <a href="http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/48739517/4064521">http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/48739517/4064521</a> .
<i>Informants credited</i>	
<i>Informants uncredited</i>	



Date	1902
Original source text	“FLOODS AT WILLUNGA. DAMAGE TO PROPERTY. LAND AND ROADS UNDER WATER... <b>Beltunga Gully</b> has suffered severely, all the summer crop of vegetables, together with tons of valuable soil, having been washed away...”
Reference	<i>Advertiser</i> 18/12/1902: 7a, <a href="http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/4908145/908951">http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/4908145/908951</a> .
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	

Date	1949
Original source text	“Clinging to the foot of the hills a mile or so from McLaren Flat is the tiny hamlet of <b>Beltunga</b> , whose houses were mostly built at the instigation of Richard Bell, founder of Bellevue. Jonathan Swift, a builder, was an early resident here, and was doubtless responsible for the erection of most, or all, of the homes, in one of which his grandson, Sidney Manning, still resides... Old residents still use the name of <b>Beltunga</b> , but it is unknown to most people nowadays.”
Reference	Adele Pridmore 1949, <i>The Rich Valley: An Account of the Early Life of McLaren Vale</i> , McLaren Vale Institute Committee: 36.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Probably old residents' folklore.

Date	1990 – 2011
Original source text	“ <b>Beltunga</b> : a tiny hamlet 2 km from McLaren Vale, whose houses were mostly built at the instigation of Richard Bell, the founder of ‘Bellevue’. Apparently it was corrupted from the Aboriginal <i>pell-tonga</i> – ‘the opossum trees’; more specifically it refers to the mother clinging to its young.”
Reference	GH Manning 1990, <i>Manning's Place Names of South Australia</i> , The Author: 32; = Manning 2011, <i>Place Names of Our Land</i> , Modbury, Gould Books: 92.
Informants credited	[2011:1335] “T p.165; Adele Pridmore, <i>The Rich Valley</i> .” [T = <i>Talbot Book</i> , GNU]
Informants uncredited	‘a lady...’ [Faith Lockwood], <i>Register</i> 11/10/1893.

## Discussion: PLACE OF THE BRUSHTAIL POSSUM:

### THE PLACE:

‘Beltunga Gully’, as it was known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Willunga South, as this area is now known – is ecologically separate from Willunga Town less than a kilometre away. In this gully around St

Johns Tce, the watercourses are part of the catchment of Willunga Creek, whereas the main watercourses at Willunga itself, including Wirra Creek, are part of the Maslin Creek catchment.

In 1839 the Survey Department employed Richard Counsel to compile the first detailed maps of the land during John McLaren's first surveys of the Willunga district (then part of 'District C'). Many of his meticulous sketch maps survive in the Field Books, preserved by what used to be called the Geographical Names Unit.<sup>1</sup> His work was the main basis for the first published maps such as McLaren's 'Country South of Adelaide' (1840).

Though Counsel's field book marked the three main converging creeks of Beltunga Gully, it was not until the publications that "Good W"<sup>2</sup> was shown on Section 268, around the junction of these watercourses just north of the intersection of today's Quarry Rd and St John's Tce. Downstream from this was an area of swamp and dense tea-tree scrub, of which a remnant can still be seen southwest of the underpass of St Andrews Tce.<sup>3</sup>

There was a spring somewhere in this gully,<sup>4</sup> one of a series along the scarp of the Ironstone Range southwest from Willunga. Louis Piesse knew the whole area from his participation in the 1839 surveys. In 1844 he regarded the spring at "Piltongga" as a potential supply for new settlement on the plains to the south-west; its water "might be carried a considerable distance over the Aldinga Plain", which was "really deficient in surface water". From his viewpoint that year as a journalist writing (under his initials 'L.P.') a 'descriptive tour' for new settlers and travellers, he spoke as though Piltongga was a destination more important than Willunga.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Now part of the SA Land Services group.

<sup>2</sup> "Good water".

<sup>3</sup> Richard Counsel 1839, Field Book 102, Hundred of Willunga: 38; McLaren 1/9/1840, 'Country South of Adelaide... ', London, Arrowsmith. A slightly later map derived from Counsel and the other first surveyors marked "*mostly good water*" on the creek in Section 267 west of St Andrews Tce, the swamp area (Diagram Book pages (GNU), Hundred of Willunga: 11-2.). The upper part of the swamp is shown on Wadham's 1857 plan (William Wadham 1857, map of township of Willunga [with National Trust, Willunga], in Rob Linn 1991, *Cradle of Adversity: a history of the Willunga district*, Cherry Gardens, SA: Historical Consultants Pty Ltd: 37).

<sup>4</sup> This is also suggested by the name 'Springhill' given to "*one of a group of earliest surviving quarryman's cottages*" on St Johns Tce (Baxendale & Lush 2006: 23). On the old 'Beltunga' cottage property at the corner of Quarry Rd and St Johns Tce, there is today a waterhole, marked on government maps online, e.g. <https://data.environment.sa.gov.au/NatureMaps/Pages/default.aspx>; but it does not appear in Counsel's sketches, and may result from diversion of watercourses.

<sup>5</sup> 'L.P.' [Louis Piesse] 1844b, 'Descriptive Tour Through Part Of District C', *Adelaide Observer* 13/4/1844: 8a-b, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/page/18834087>. There were many more creeks along the scarp of the Ironstone Range southwest of Willunga, but according to Piesse they were (as now) short and not transient: "*In the winter almost every glen or ravine has water in it; but the little rivulets soon run to waste, and after a few warm days they dry up*". However, the geology and hydrology of the area is such that many of them are also spring-fed from the same underground stratum. A number of these "*little rivulets*" were important enough in Aboriginal eyes to have names which Piesse recorded in 1844. We need a detailed study of the underground hydrology of the whole scarp from Willunga to Mt Terrible Gully. This I must leave to others, recommending as a start the McLaren Vale Prescribed Wells Water Allocation Plan, which has studied 22 spring sites along this line and no doubt has an archive of information for us to put alongside Piesse's essay and Counsel's sketches. See also Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board 2007, 'Water Allocation Plan for the

The first sketch maps show all the surrounding slopes of Beltunga covered with forest.<sup>6</sup> Richard Hill moved onto his property at Willunga in early 1840 – probably on Section 245, on Aldinga Rd two km away from Beltunga – and called it “Forest Farm”.<sup>7</sup> His later memories included the fact that “a large tea-tree swamp extended through the land and it was here that Evelyn Sturt camped”.<sup>8</sup> In this he was probably referring to the land between his Section 245 and Sturt’s 257 (the western half of old Willunga town) and further southeast into 266, to where Counsel had marked “Tea Tree Scrub” on 267 at the outlet of Beltunga Gully.<sup>9</sup>

This rather narrow Gully was well supplied with drinkable water, though not as amply as Wilangga.<sup>10</sup> But its relatively large and steep catchment is prone to flooding, especially in the flattest sheltered areas,<sup>11</sup> which at times would have been dangerous places to camp.

#### THE NAME:

On the ‘Aldinga survey’ of 1839 (which included Willunga), the Department employed Aboriginal men as guides and interpreters.<sup>12</sup> It was doubtless from these men that Piesse obtained the Aboriginal name, though he did not publicize it until 1844. By then the site had been defined – in the eyes of settlers for the next several generations – by the discovery of high quality slate at the top of the gully:

*Adjoining Willunga is the slate quarry. Slate has been discovered at other places in the neighbourhood; but it seems most accessible at the so-called quarry, and when it was let the*

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McLaren Vale Prescribed Wells Area’, online via home page

<http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtoftyranges/water/water-allocation-plans/mclaren-vale> [3/6/15].

<sup>6</sup> Hundred of Willunga Diagram Book pages (GNU): 12-2, “Original Plan Signed J McL[aren] Senior Survey[or] 31<sup>st</sup> Jan<sup>y</sup> 1840”. On this map trees are marked thickly around all the hills behind Willunga including those at unlabelled areas known elsewhere as Sections 268, 700 and 1007 in and around Beltunga Gully.

<sup>7</sup> – “because of the area being heavily timbered with large gum trees”, according to the Willunga National Trust (Willunga National Trust, [http://willunga.nowandthen.net.au/Hill\\_Richard](http://willunga.nowandthen.net.au/Hill_Richard) [13/1/17]). Section 245 is on the plains, where an early map shows a belt of trees extending eastward to Willunga and westward along the road to Aldinga (Diagram Book pages (GNU): 11-2).

<sup>8</sup> GH Manning 1984, *Hope Farm Chronicle: Pioneering Tales of South Australia 1836-1870*, The Author: 116-7 (cp. p.202). This chapter is a fictionalized conversation with Richard Hill, said to be derived from actual diaries and letters in the Aldam Family Papers in the SA Archives. I leave it to others to confirm or question Manning’s version of Hill’s information, and my extrapolated geography. Evelyn Sturt was Captain Charles Sturt ‘s brother, and settled here after overlanding stock from NSW; for his Section see McLaren map 1840.

<sup>9</sup> Counsel 1839, FB 102: 38.

<sup>10</sup> See PNS 4.04.02/02.

<sup>11</sup> e.g. There was a dangerous major flood in 1902: “FLOODS AT WILLUNGA. DAMAGE TO PROPERTY. LAND AND ROADS UNDER WATER... Beltunga Gully has suffered severely, all the summer crop of vegetables, together with tons of valuable soil, having been washed away...” (Advertiser 18/12/1902: 7a, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/4908145/908951>).

<sup>12</sup> SA Register 10/8/1839: 6a, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/27440703/2049497>.



*Government prohibited any other being worked. The quarry is not properly at Willunga; the glen in which it is situate is called Piltongga. It is in this glen that many of the so-called Willunga settlers reside, several of the quarrymen having built themselves neat little cottages.*<sup>13</sup>

‘Piltongga’ is clearly a Kurna word, using the Locative suffix *ngga* correctly after a two-syllable root. The second vowel given here as ‘o’ could represent either of the sounds *a* and *o/u*. For the root *PiltV*<sup>14</sup> there is no known *pilto* in Kurna, but there is *pilta*, the name of the common Brushtail possum.<sup>15</sup>

At some very early stage the quarrymen’s cluster of cottages became known as ‘Beltunga’, ‘Beltunga Gully’, occasionally ‘Beltunga Creek’, and even ‘Beltunga Township’.<sup>16</sup> Several of the cottages are still in use, such as William Male’s at the property still named ‘Beltunga’ on the corner of Quarry Rd and St Johns Tce.<sup>17</sup> This spelling represents the same sounds as ‘Piltongga’, written down by some other independent observer, probably first- or second-hand from Aboriginal contacts. Quite likely it came from another surveyor before Piesse was published in 1844, using a spelling influenced by Teichelmann & Schürmann’s 1840 publication.<sup>18</sup> It confirms the sound of the second vowel as *a*.<sup>19</sup>

The meaning ‘possum’ is confirmed in a poem written by Faith Emily Lockwood (nee Hewett), “one of the one of the earliest residents of Maclaren Vale and Port Lincoln”. During her late teens, speaking (we may deduce) to Aboriginal visitors and labourers on her father’s pioneer Oxenberry Farm from 1840-6, she sought out and cherished a large number of place-names, among which

<sup>13</sup> Piesse 1884b: 7c.

<sup>14</sup> Here the capital V represents an unknown vowel.

<sup>15</sup> In the light of Lockwood’s ‘possum’ gloss (see below), we are justified in disregarding the alternative meanings recorded for *piltangga*, ‘place of the hip’ or ‘[lying] on the side’.

<sup>16</sup> The earliest record of this spelling which I have found is in 1853, the newspaper notice for the marriage of the “eldest daughter of Mr. Thomas Polkingham, farmer, Beltunga” (*Adelaide Observer* 10/12/1853: 5d, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/158095729/18793337>). ‘Polkingham’ was more usually Polkinghorne, co-owner of the slate quarry which later became Bastian’s (Ruth Baxendale & Faye Lush 2006, *Willunga Walks*, Willunga, The Authors: 23). The earliest records I have found for compound usage of the name are: for “Beltunga Gully”, either Richard Hill’s notes (if found) or *Advertiser* 18/12/1902: 7a, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/4908145/908951>; for “Beltunga Township”, *Adelaide Observer* 29/3/1862: 4c, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/158186031/18803427>; for “Beltunga Creek”, *SA Register* 27/1/1887: 7c, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/46089149/4046612>.

<sup>17</sup> For William Male’s cottage see Baxendale & Lush 2006: 23; Willunga District Heritage Survey 1997: 263-4; [http://www.onkapingacity.com/onka/discover/history\\_heritage/built\\_heritage.jsp](http://www.onkapingacity.com/onka/discover/history_heritage/built_heritage.jsp) and search for ‘Beltunga’ [20/1/17].

<sup>18</sup> By the time of his second long essay in April 1844, Piesse had obviously read “*the Missionaries*” – i.e. the publication T&S 1840 – and had modified some of his 1839 spellings in the light of it (e.g. 1839 “*Coortandillah*”, “*Tu-run-ga*”; 1844 “*Kurtandilla*”, “*Turungga*”), while retaining his own independent form and derivation for “*Nurlongga*” (cp. Piesse 1844b: 7a).

<sup>19</sup> The ‘u’ in English ‘Beltunga’ can only be interpreted as in ‘but’ (which is the sound *a*), not as in ‘put’ (which is *u*). In Kurna there is no significant *e* sound, and a written ‘e’ must usually be interpreted as *i*.

she remembered in her old age “Pell-tonga, (the opossum trees)”.<sup>20</sup> This independent spelling represents the same sounds as does Piesse, making it certain that the place, though unspecified, was the same as ‘Piltongga’. She did not know the language, but her gloss adds what is doubtless a formula for the significance of the place from the viewpoint of her Aboriginal informants: it was a place of trees, and in them you found brushtail possums. As we saw above, old maps have confirmed the trees.

The possums are also perhaps confirmed by two other sources. One is Adele Pridmore’s history of McLaren Vale, compiled partly from old local residents. In the chapter about Aborigines she wrote,

*Food was plentiful and they ate possums (which were particularly plentiful around Willunga)...*

We may wonder whether a site in this gully had some connection with an unrecorded Brushtail Dreaming. If so, we are tempted further to wonder whether there was a Brushtail Dreaming trail which may have included *Piltawodli* (New Spelling *Pirtawardli*), ‘brushtail home or shelter’, the Native Location on the banks of the River Torrens.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps Beltunga Gully had both the ecological and the spiritual connections. We don’t know.

The second hint (important, though tentative in detail until confirmed as accurate) comes from the possum meals in Manning’s partly fictionalized version of Richard Hill. The old settler is reminiscing about the time immediately after his arrival in early 1840:

*When they were not on walkabout they camped at Beltunga Gully... The nomadic natives of the district were harmless and friendly. Their life was one long holiday as they roamed the tiers and valleys, migrating annually to the seaboard and the lagoon at Sellick’s Beach. We early pioneers had implicit faith in them, and that faith was never shattered – messages given to natives for pioneer friends, thirty miles distant, were faithfully delivered. As many as three hundred would assemble at Beltunga Gully, and under the shelter of the hills they built their wurlies. Piccaninnies fished the creeks for yabbies to provide a delicacy to be eaten with meals of kangaroos and opossum.*<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For more about Faith Lockwood and her poem see the unpublished essay Rob Amery & C Schultz 2011, ‘The Trail of Discovery of Historical Kurna Language Materials’. Her poem was published anonymously in 1893 by ‘A Native’ [EH Hallack] in *SA Register* 11/10/1893: 7e, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/53635067>.

<sup>21</sup> See PNS 2/04 Piltawodli.

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey H Manning 1984, *Hope Farm Chronicle: Pioneering Tales of South Australia 1836-1870*, The Author: 116-7.

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ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AT PILTANGGA:

Thus we come to the question of Aboriginal presence at Piltangga. Richard Hill's observations fit neatly with what we know about the possum-skin curing site at Wakondilla, between Sellicks Beach and Silver Sands.<sup>23</sup> In Hill's time they were 'migrating annually to the seaboard and the lagoon' here, quite likely as part of a routine in which Piltangga was an important source of possums which they then took to Wakondilla (about 10 km away) for processing. Possum-skin cloaks were a vital part of their economy for as long as they retained something like a traditional lifestyle.

This passage is also the only explicit record I know of an Aboriginal presence anywhere close to Wilangga before the 1850s; that is, before the Kurna-speaking locals were decimated by disease or dispersed and relocated. Lockwood's 'Pell-tonga' is indirect evidence from this period, since she had lived at Oxenberry Farm only from 1840 to 1846.<sup>24</sup> From then on, local colonists recorded only Encounter Bay and Lakes people using Willunga as a stopover for their travels to Adelaide, or the police trying (unsuccessfully) to make the Government Reserve there a settlement for the same groups. No doubt the seasonal migrations noted by Hill continued as part of this Encounter Bay lifestyle. Yet, as Gavin Malone puts it, not Piltangga but Wilangga was "a top spot, and given the topography I fail to see how it would not have been well utilised".<sup>25</sup> Why then do the records seem to suggest that in the 1840s Piltangga was well-used and Wilangga empty of its people, both Kurna- and Ngarrindjeri-speakers?

A likely explanation of this paradox in the data may be that Wilangga, having been identified very quickly by the colonists as a top spot, also paid the price very quickly. The government activity (including tree felling); traffic of surveyors in 1839, including people like the military man James Hawker (who would later join his brother George in subjugating the natives around their homestead 'Bungaree' in the mid-North) as well as the benign Governor Gawler; and the first settlers at the well-promoted 'new halfway town', with their enthusiastic felling of trees and fencing to exclude 'trespassers' from their private property – perhaps these had already *by early 1840* pushed people away from Wilangga to more secluded but less ideal places like flood-prone Beltunga – before anyone had a chance to take an interest and record observations at Wilangga. The only exception is one brief and tantalising diary entry by Piesse at Wilangga in 1839.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See PNS 4.04.01/03 Wakondilla.

<sup>24</sup> The Hewetts arrived at McLaren Vale in January 1840. Faith Emily Hewett left Oxenberry Farm in or soon after 1846, having looked after her siblings after their mother's death in 1846, until the second marriage of her brother Charles later that year (Peter L Norman (compiler) n.d. [1986], *Four Hewetts Venture North: A History of Charles Thomas Hewett and Four of His Children 1794-1986*, Adelaide, Hewett Family Reunion Committee: 29, 93).

<sup>25</sup> Gavin Malone p.c., email 10 Jan 2017.

<sup>26</sup> See PNS 4.04.02/02 Wilangga.

It probably did not take long after 1840 before Aboriginal campers found themselves less welcome at Piltangga too. The slate discoveries began in March 1840 at Edward Loud's property about 4 km southeast; by June 1840 Loud's quarry was employing about twelve families.<sup>27</sup> It was followed a few months later by another find a little closer to Beltunga, soon named Delabole; and then Bangor closer still; and by the end of 1841 two more quarries had been opened at the top of Beltunga Gully itself: the one later known as 'Bastian's', and the next to it the one which would be called 'Martin's'.<sup>28</sup> As Piesse noted in 1844, Piltongga Glen was the 'most accessible' compared with others in the steeper and higher gullies further southwest.<sup>29</sup> Here and at Delabole (about halfway to Loud's) the quarrymen and quarry owners built their cottages, beginning in 1840 and "clustered" there by 1841.<sup>30</sup>

'Beltunga' and 'Beltunga Gully' became for several decades the familiar local name for the Gully containing a little enclave of staunchly Methodist Cornish mining families, many of whom were also farmers.<sup>31</sup> Even a short-term visitor like Jessop in the early 1860s mentioned the name.<sup>32</sup> Richard Hill himself became part-owner of 'The Original Willunga Slate Quarry' in 1865, probably Bastian's at Beltunga.<sup>33</sup> But if these industrious and competitive families of Beltunga ever befriended the Aborigines rather than merely observing them or fencing them out, as far as I know it was not recorded.

For more clarity on how Aboriginal people used Wilangga and Pirtangga before colonization, we will have to wait until archaeologists and others compile different kinds of evidence.

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#### FORGETTING THE NAME:

'Beltunga Gully' has not been well served by the place-name enthusiasts. South Australia's top authorities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Charles Harris, Rodney Cockburn, Norman Tindale and Geoffrey

<sup>27</sup> Linn 1991: 41-2.

<sup>28</sup> These two quarries (Bastian's and Martin's) are at the top of Quarry Rd on Section 1008. See Linn 1991: 43-4; Willunga Progress Association 1952: 30;

<sup>29</sup> Piesse 1844b: 7c.

<sup>30</sup> Baxendale & Lush 2006: 23; Linn 1991: 49.

<sup>31</sup> For the history of slate and Cornish miners in this area, and a map of their locations, see Linn 1991: 41-4, 49; see also <http://www.southernaustralianhistory.com.au/slate.htm> [17/1/17].

<sup>32</sup> William RH Jessop 1862, *Flindersland and Sturtland or, The inside and outside of Australia*, 2 vols, London, R Bentley, Vol.2: 150. For Jessop the interest of Beltunga lay only in its suffix 'unga', which he believed meant 'fresh water'; he had probably got this idea from pioneer Noarlunga settler and government surveyor Edward Giles (see pp.234, 245; cp. <http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/sama1141/provlist.htm> [13/1/17]).

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.southernaustralianhistory.com.au/slate.htm> [17/1/17]. However, sources differ on whether this 1865 'Willunga Slate Quarry' was at 'Bastian's' (Willunga National Trust 2016, [http://willunga.nowandthen.net.au/Hill,\\_Richard](http://willunga.nowandthen.net.au/Hill,_Richard) [13/1/17]), or 'Martin's' (Willunga Progress Association 1952: 26), or 'Bangor' (Linn 1991: 43).



Manning – all seem to have been unaware that this name existed. Harris and his colleague Cockburn omitted it in their pioneering compilations in 1893 and 1908 respectively.<sup>34</sup> Tindale made no observations about it, but included on one of his maps a bare note about ‘L.P.’s ‘Piltongga’ in the *Observer*, without trying to locate it or relate it to any other name.<sup>35</sup> Manning did note ‘Beltunga’, as we shall see below, but in the wrong place.

Like many other Aboriginal place-names, ‘Beltunga’ has travelled since the times when Aboriginal people named it *Piltangga* and knew exactly what and where it was. In 2017, if you search for it online you are unlikely to discover much if any of the information above; but you are almost certain to find the Beltunga Estate – at McLaren Flat. In many of the web pages you will find paraphrases of the following passage from the standard history by local chronicler Adele Pridmore. In her chapter about the circle of villages which merged as ‘the private town of McLaren Vale’, she wrote:

*V. BELTUNGA. Clinging to the foot of the hills a mile or so from McLaren Flat is the tiny hamlet of Beltunga, whose houses were mostly built at the instigation of Richard Bell, founder of Bellevue.<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Swift, a builder, was an early resident here, and was doubtless responsible for the erection of most, or all, of the homes, in one of which his grandson, Sidney Manning, still resides... Old residents still use the name of Beltunga, but it is unknown to most people nowadays.<sup>37</sup>*

Until the last few years the web pages usually recycled this in a paraphrase from another passage by Manning, which has appeared in his successive publications since 1990. This is his complete account of ‘Beltunga’. It begins by recycling Pridmore, but adds another unique detail:

*Beltunga: a tiny hamlet 2 km from McLaren Vale, whose houses were mostly built at the instigation of Richard Bell, the founder of ‘Bellevue’. It is apparently corrupted from Aboriginal pell-tonga – ‘the opossum trees’ and more specifically refers to the mother clinging to its young.<sup>38</sup>*

<sup>34</sup> Charles Hope Harris 1893, ‘Geographical Nomenclature of SA’, Adelaide, Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science (reproduction in SLISA); R Cockburn 1908, *Nomenclature of South Australia*, Adelaide, WK Thomas & Co.

<sup>35</sup> Tindale annotated map Hundred of Willunga, AA 338/24/97, SA Museum. Tindale apparently did not know about Piesse or his 1839 letter.

<sup>36</sup> Bellevue was the village which is now the western end of McLaren Vale town.

<sup>37</sup> Adele Pridmore 1949, *The Rich Valley: An Account of the Early Life of McLaren Vale*, McLaren Vale Institute Committee: 36.

<sup>38</sup> GH Manning 1990, *Manning’s Place Names of SA*, Adelaide, the author: 32; Manning 2011, *The Place Names of Our Land*, Modbury, Gould Books: 92. In some of the secondary paraphrases (e.g. Beltunga Estate 2009) the possums became Ringtails, a completely different species.



The alleged 'tiny hamlet' is now the Beltunga Estate Winery on the Blewitt Springs Rd, "a family-owned vineyard since 1847".<sup>39</sup> The context of the winery's citations – as they were in 2009, but fortunately not now – used to include the second part of Manning's account, implying that 'Pell-tonga' and 'Beltunga' and their associated interpretations all belonged originally at McLaren Flat. But this is certainly not so. The winery here did not adopt the name 'Beltunga' until 1893. A contemporary newspaper notice made the point explicitly:

*On Friday, February 10, Messrs. L. Fidge and McKae and myself, as members of the Bureau. and Messrs. F. Hart, W. Fidge, and J. P. Hughes paid a visit to the currant vineyard of Messrs. T. Hardy & Sons at Maclaren Flat, which has for about the last four years been under the sole management of Mr. Richard Cooper... This vine-yard in the past has been known as 'Leslie's,' after a settler who first planted a few vines in the locality, but the owner has now changed the name, and in the future it will be known as the 'Beltunga Vineyard'.<sup>40</sup>*

In 1898 Frederick Low, "of Beltunga Apiary, near McLaren Vale", had a vine of record size at the associated vineyard.<sup>41</sup> By 1901 this had become "the well-known and justly celebrated 'Beltunga' currant vineyard".<sup>42</sup> Today the property is the Beltunga Estate, and on the government's property website it is given an equal status (equally innocent of history) with William Male's old 'Beltunga' cottage.<sup>43</sup>

Then there is the 'tiny hamlet'. I have found no evidence that there was ever a 'hamlet' around Hardy's vineyard at McLaren Flat, whether called 'Beltunga' or any other name; nor that Richard Bell of Bellevue was involved in the housing there.<sup>44</sup>

An explanation for Pridmore's paragraph is not far to seek when we have noted also, with surprise, that she never mentioned the quarrymen's Beltunga in her book. It is extremely likely that she had confused and merged the 'celebrated' modern wine homestead with old residents' talk about the quarrymen's tiny hamlet of 'Beltunga Township' – probably because she herself had never heard of Beltunga Gully, and did not ask enough questions to discover it. It is a striking example of her own observation that 'it is unknown to most people': even to a local chronicler in 1948.

Manning says that Lockwood's 'pell-tonga' "more specifically refers to the mother clinging to its young". I have not been able to find a source for this clause. Manning rarely sources his items

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.visitvineyards.com/south-australia/wine/vineyards-wineries/info/beltunga-estate> [9/1/17].

<sup>40</sup> SA Register 13/2/1893: 3b, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/48739517/4064521>.

<sup>41</sup> Chronicle 22/1/1898: 9d, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/87771100/8451182>.

<sup>42</sup> Register 4/12/1901: 10d, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/4409412>.

<sup>43</sup> Search for 'Beltunga' on <http://maps.sa.gov.au/plb/>.

<sup>44</sup> Rob Linn's very thorough history mentions no Beltunga at McLaren Flat, nor any 'hamlet' around Hardy's vineyard there.

individually, but lumps all the credits in collectively at the end, and the list is very often incomplete. His source list for 'Beltunga' includes The Talbot Book.<sup>45</sup> This is a scrapbook of information and opinions on place-names from every conceivable source including Harris, old literature, old settlers and newspaper cuttings, which Horace Talbot compiled over many years by up to his death in 1924.<sup>46</sup> It was used for a century (and by Manning) as an authority on place-names and their meanings, and is still kept in the offices of the SA Land Services Group. Although I have not been able to find the clinging possums in this scrapbook, maybe Manning found them there on one of the loose pages which appear to have been lost over the years. The *original* source of the content is unknown, and might still be even if we found the page; perhaps it was one of the many titbits Harris collected from settler folklore during his career as a surveyor. It is conceivable that this gloss could have some credibility if an Aboriginal informant once talked about Piltangga as a prime breeding site for brushtails; but certainly the word itself cannot *mean* that.

'Beltunga' has been moved at times even further away from its home than McLaren Flat. Demoted from its original intimacy with the land to the status of a sweet, simple, rootless word, it has been seen at some 'Beltunga Villas' in Adelaide's CBD in 1904; suburban houses in 1908 and 1913; and at homesteads in Angaston in 1909 and Berri in 1931.<sup>47</sup>

Other Kaurna-based local names originating in the Willunga Basin have also been shifted far from their original location: 'Tatachilla'; 'Aldinga', 'Port Willunga'; and there is even a Willunga homestead in the far Southeast of the state, given equal status on the government web. Others too have faded out of human memory in my lifetime, 'unknown to most people nowadays': such as 'Portachilla' and 'Tortachilla'.<sup>48</sup>

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*End of Summary*

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<sup>45</sup> Given in the Appendix, Manning 1990: 374; Manning 2011: 1335.

<sup>46</sup> Horace Talbot (comp.) n.d. [1880s?-1924], 'The Talbot Book', held previously in SA Geographical Names Unit, now Land Services Group.

<sup>47</sup> *Advertiser* 22/9/1904: 2; *Chronicle* 22/8/1908: 33; *Advertiser* 22/5/1913: 2; *Chronicle* 12/6/1909: 32; *Chronicle* 15/1/1931: 21. In some of these examples families of old Beltunga residents have taken the old name with them when they moved.

<sup>48</sup> See PNS 4.03.02/04 Tatachilla (which includes 'Tortachilla'); 4.04.01/01 Ngalingga; 4.03.02/03 Ruwuru; gazette report on 'Willunga' at <http://maps.sa.gov.au/plb/>. 4.03.02/01 Purditilla.