

## Place Name SUMMARY (PNS) 2/04

### PILTAWODLI (PIRLTAWARDLI)

(last edited: 24/9/19)

#### Abstract

*Pilta-wodli* or *Piltawodlingga* (in KWP's New Spelling 2010, *Pirltawardli* and *Pirltawardlingga*) was the Kurna name of the area of the earliest 'Native Location' & School established in 1837, where the German linguist missionaries Teichelmann, Schürmann and 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 2/05 Karrawirra-parri).

<i>Coordinates</i>	-34.91337° Latitude 138.58857° Longitude
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#### Language Information

<i>Meaning</i>	'Brush-tailed possum house'
<i>Etymology</i>	<i>pirлта</i> 'brush-tailed possum' + <i>wardli</i> 'wurlie, house' > <i>Pirlta-wardli</i> 'Brush-tailed possum house'; (optional) + <i>-ngga</i> 'at, place of' > <i>Pirlta-wardlingga</i> 'place of the black-tailed possum house'.
<i>Notes</i>	
<i>Language Family</i>	Thura-Yura: 'Kurna'
<i>KWP Former Spelling</i>	<i>Piltawodli</i> , or <i>Piltawodlingga</i>
<i>KWP New Spelling 2011</i>	<i>Pirltawardli</i> , <i>Pirltawardlingga</i>
<i>Phonemic Spelling</i>	/pirltawardli/, /pirltawardlingka/
<i>Syllabification</i>	"Pirl-ta-wardli", "Pirl-ta-wardlingga":
<i>Pronunciation tips</i>	Stress the first and third syllables. Every <i>a</i> as in Maori 'haka'. The 'rl' in <i>pirлта</i> , and the 'rdl' in <i>wardli</i> , are pronounced with the tongue curled back (Retroflex).

## Main source evidence

Date	<b>1837-9</b>
Original source text	“Districts of the Adelaide tribe: .... <b>Peelta werlingga</b> ”.
Reference	Wyatt [?1837-9] / 1879, in JD Woods 1879, <i>Native Tribes of South Australia</i> : 179.
Informants credited	
Informants uncredited	Kurna informants

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

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

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

## Discussion: 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 historian 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 / Pirtawardli*. 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 *Pirtawardli-ngga*: i.e. the same name plus the suffix meaning 'at'. The English 'wurlie' is probably derived from Kurna *worli* (N.Sp. *warli*), a variant of *wodli* (N.Sp. *wardli*).

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*".<sup>1</sup> 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 four months later,<sup>2</sup> still applied the name to the Native Location, not the school; so the name did not commemorate this particular *wardli* and *pirlta*.

The animal *pirlta* 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

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<sup>1</sup> DECS 2002: 23.

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

elsewhere. Conceivably a wurlie here may have featured in a Brushtail Dreaming story. Another conjectural Brushtail Dreaming site is *Piltangga* (N.Sp *Pirltangga*: Beltunga Gully at Willunga South).<sup>3</sup>

See

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

Clamor Schürmann, Diaries 1838-40 (translated by Geoff Noller), unpublished typescript, Adelaide, Lutheran Archives: 28/12/1839 *et al.* (Also accessible in abridged translation by Hans Spoeri, in EA Schurmann 1987, *I'd Rather Dig Potatoes: Clamor Schurmann and the Aborigines of South Australia 1838 – 1853*, Adelaide, Lutheran Publishing House).

DECS 2002, *Kurna Walking Trail Guide: Karrawirra Parri*, Adelaide: SA Dept of Education & Children's Services and City of Adelaide: 21-4.

Rob Amery 2000, *Warrabarna Kurna!*, Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger: 56-63; also as ebook, *Warraparna Kurna!*, University of Adelaide Press, 2016, <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/press/titles/kurna/kurna-ebook.pdf>: 64-71.

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.

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*End of Summary*

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<sup>3</sup> See PNS 4.4.2/1 Piltangga.