Revisiting Bennelong Point: Urban Aboriginal Settlements and the Origins of the Aborigines Protection Board

In the late 1870s Aboriginal people from south coast NSW and elsewhere re-entered Sydney, colonising the Government Boat Shed at Bennelong Point, and establishing settlements at Double Bay, Botany and other places. Concern over their presence in the city helped to convince the government that a Protection Board should be established. The settlements were duly shut down, and their residents banished to their ‘home districts’, to the newly established reserve at La Perouse or to the Maloga Mission on the Murray. Or at least that’s how the story goes. This paper argues that the reality was somewhat more complex. Many of the Aboriginal ‘immigrants’ of the 1870s were already linked to Sydney, and some of the settlements they supposedly established had already been in use for decades. The establishment of the Board had more to do with the changing way these settlements and their residents, and ‘Aboriginality’ more generally, were viewed by the government and concerned citizens.

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Postgrads, professional historians and members of the public are particularly welcome. For more information, please contact Lisa Ford (l.ford@unsw.edu.au). Please circulate!

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| 11 Oct. | Paula Hamilton – Memory and Sensory Urbanism in Australia |