

*Messages from the Bays*

Wide awake before dawn, somehow not in my room in Marrickville, but immersed in a swirling view of Powderhulk Bay seen from the 'picture window' of my family home at Seaforth. Uncannily this sensation of being elsewhere was repeated on subsequent mornings. It seemed to me that the shape of this mind's eye vision was elliptical.

Through art and research, I sounded the gaze. The abyss of limpid water became a portal that returned me to the shores of Middle Harbour to follow pathways to stories of the Cammeraygal and Birrabirrigal people, of Bangalay bark canoes, plentiful game and shellfish, freshwater streams, waterfalls. A convivial abode contested by European arrivals.

For the Birrabirrigal culture, sandstone formed shelters and galleries for their rock engravings. Europeans laboured the stone into boundary walls, rockeries, tidal pools and steps to the water's edge.

*Messages from the Bays* acknowledges continuing Aboriginal cultural traditions of taking care of place and draws from romantic interventions of various colonial visionaries and the insights and actions of environmentalists, scientists and land care workers through layers of time and habitation.

(c) Toni Warburton 2nd March 2018