

BARROSA, *alias* 'BAROSSA'

William A.R. Richardson investigates the historical journey, through misspelling and mis-translation, of a celebrated Australian placename

It is fairly well known that the name Barossa, identifying South Australia's famous wine district, the Barossa Valley, is derived from the name originally bestowed by Colonel William Light, in 1837, to the Barossa Range. It commemorates the Peninsular War Battle of Barrosa that took place between the French and a mixed British–Spanish force on 5 March 1811. This was a decisive engagement which attempted to break the French army's blockade of Cádiz, then the Spanish capital. Colonel Light's friend, Thomas Graham, later Lord Lynedoch, was in command of the British troops involved; the Barossa Valley town of Lyndoch is a misspelled version of his name.

Unusual names, especially foreign ones, are particularly subject to corruption. Colonel Light's correct version, *Barrosa*, was misspelt within two years of its bestowal. Geoffrey Manning cites a reference to the 'Barossa Range' in the *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register* of 27 April 1839. He goes on to quote from an article, 'A Vulgar Error', in the *South Australian* of 3 March 1848, which notes this regrettable spelling change, later applied to the Barossa Valley as well, and passes on the supposed translation of the Spanish name as 'the hill of roses'. This 'translation', though apparently still generally accepted, is also wrong, for there is no Spanish word *bar* meaning 'hill', and if the remainder of the word *barrosa* meant 'roses', it should obviously have been *rosas*, not *rosa*. Variant spellings of the original name have also included Barosa, and Barossa.

The word *barrosa* is actually the feminine form of the Spanish adjective *barroso*, from *barro* 'mud'—and thus means 'muddy', 'mud-coloured', or 'reddish'. What feature(s) did this adjective describe?

It has been said that Colonel William Light 'named the Valley after the famous wine-growing area in southern Spain'. The



above:
George French Angas
(1822–1886)
*Lynedoch [i.e. Lyndoch] Valley,
Looking Towards the Barossa
Range* 1849
hand-coloured lithograph
19.6 x 24.2 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an7351722

site of the battle of Barrosa, and Jerez de la Frontera, the centre of the nearby famous sherry-producing area, are both in the province of Cádiz, but there appears to be no wine-growing area in Spain specifically named *Barrosa*. 'Sherry' itself is an English corruption of Xeres, an old spelling of modern Jerez, which can be seen on the map of 1816 on page 16, top left. In 1597, the name was recorded in English in the form 'Sherris'. At some stage this was wrongly believed to be a plural form, so a 'singular' word 'sherry' was coined. Barrosa is elsewhere stated to be 'a village in a wine-growing area in Spain', and said to mean 'hillside of roses'. Rodney Cockburn (*What's in a Name? Nomenclature of South Australia*, 1908) says that 'it is a village in Spain', and briefly mentions the battle, but does not translate the name. However, in view of the real meaning of *barrosa* (reddish), he gives an interesting quote from Sir Walter Scott's poem, 'Vision of Don Roderick', thus: 'and red Barossa shouts for dauntless Graeme [i.e. Graham]'. Could this possibly suggest that Scott knew its real meaning, or is it just a reference to the bloody nature of the conflict?

The 'mud-coloured', or 'reddish' feature responsible for the name *Barrosa* is

below:
T. Haebleren
Colonel Light 1892
wood engraving
9.0 x 9.0 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-an22863925





above left:
Detail of the Museo Naval's 1816 map, showing the coastline between Cádiz and Tarifa, including the Torre Barrosa watchtower and the Torre del Puerco to the southwest of the unnamed Cerro [de la Cabeza] del Puerco. (Compare with the modern Spanish chart on page 17, bottom.)
Courtesy Museo Naval, Madrid
Map GE33

above right:
A depiction of the Battle of Barrosa (1811), one of many Peninsular War illustrations depicted in the margin of an 1816 map of the Iberian Peninsula held in the collection of Madrid's Museo Naval
Courtesy Museo Naval, Madrid
Map GE33

opposite top:
Plans of the Battle of Barrosa. Note the positions of the Torre Barosa [sic] and [Torre] Bermeja reproduced from *History of the War in the Peninsula and in the South of France, from the Year 1807 to the Year 1814: Vol. III* by Sir W.F.P. Napier (London: Thomas Et William Boone, New Bond Street, 1831)

opposite bottom:
Instituto Hidrografico de la Marina, Cadiz, Spain
Oceano Atlantico Norte—Costa SW de la Peninsula Iberica—De Cabo Santa Maria a Cabo Roche. Numero de la Carta 103 (3rd edn) 1971
coloured map; 78.2 x 110.5 cm
Map Collection
MAP G6561.P5 svar



BATTAGLIA DI BARROSA NEI CAMPI DI CHICLANA. B. Puerco della Spagna. La Bata della spiaggia di Cadix capi 8 mila uomini di sua nazione e 4 mila di quelli del loro paese, come Graham, e l'azione fuor al po a quora della sua...
B. Puerco della Spagna. La Bata della spiaggia di Cadix capi 8 mila uomini di sua nazione e 4 mila di quelli del loro paese, come Graham, e l'azione fuor al po a quora della sua...
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identified on a huge map of the Iberian Peninsula held in the Museo Naval in Madrid. Made in 1816 by a little-known Spanish cartographer, Francisco Pomares, the map is surrounded by 32 imaginative depictions of incidents in the Peninsular War. As the whole was made for presentation to Pope Pius VII, the title, some inscriptions, and the picture captions are in Italian.

One of the illustrations is a depiction of the Battle of Barrosa, with a rather strange perspective. The fortified port city of Cádiz appears on its island, the Isla de León, with a pontoon-style bridge across the Sancti Petri river. The town on the mainland represents Chiclana [de la Frontera], and the little island in the foreground is the Isla Sancti Petri. In English, the caption reads:

BATTLE OF BARROSA ON THE FIELDS OF CHICLANA

The Spanish general [Manuel] La Pegna [La Peña] leaves the city of Cádiz, with 8 thousand men of his nation, and 4 thousand English under their commander Graham [Lord Lynedoch]; they are joined a short while later by the Spanish general Laudizabal [(sic) José de Lardizábal] with his division. This combined force, having repelled several attacks, and overcome varied resistance, reach the vicinity of Chiclana; there they are engaged near Barrosa in a furious battle with troops of [Claude] Victor [Perrin], on the 5th of March 1811. The enemy are defeated and dispersed, with the loss of one eagle [a military standard], 5 cannon, 2 generals, Bellagarde and [Chaudron] Rousseau, 1 adjutant of Marshal Victor, and General Ruffin taken prisoner with about 4 thousand men, most of whom are wounded.

On the relevant part of the map can be seen Cádiz, the rocky islet of Sancti Petri, Chiclana

inland from it, and the coast continuing to Cape Trafalgar and Tarifa. Between the Isla Sancti Petri and Cape Trafalgar can be seen three coastguard towers: the Torre Barrosa, the Torre del Puerco and, just beyond the port of Conil, the Torre Castillo; the names themselves are placed well offshore. The original dispatches of Lieutenant General Graham to the Earl of Liverpool, Principal Secretary of State for the War Department, and to Henry Wellesley, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Spanish Court, were written on 6 March 1811 and 24 March 1811 respectively. They were published, both in English and in Spanish, shortly thereafter. The English version of the latter mentions that 'a Sketch of the ground & of the action of Barrosa' accompanied the dispatch, but it was not reproduced in the published version.

The 'reddish' *vigia* (watch tower) or *torre* (tower) was evidently so described, either because of its colour, or that of the local reddish cliffs, or from the hill on which the engagement took place, then known by the British as Barrosa Hill. In an on-the-spot report written by Colonel Willoughby Verner on the first centenary of the battle and published in *The Saturday Review* on 22 April 1911, it is clear that, at that time, the *Torre Barrosa* was a ruin. The then owner of the land on which it had stood, the Marqués de Bertémati, 'expressed his intention to build a memorial on the recently re-discovered site of the Vigia and to bury there any of the remains of the gallant fellows who fell on 5 March 1811'. An article published recently on the Internet includes a colour photograph of what is stated to be the Torre Barrosa. If it is, then in view of

Verner's report, it must have been rebuilt. There is another tower, the Torre Bermeja (Reddish Tower—*bermeja* also meaning 'reddish'), slightly nearer Cádiz. The same Internet article also includes a photograph of a modern view roughly corresponding to that depicted by the artist.

Major-General Napier's history of the war (*History of the War in the Peninsula and in the South of France from the Year 1807 to the Year 1814*, pub. 1890) gives a quite detailed description of the Battle of Barrosa, and includes a plan of it. Napier also reproduces the text of a letter sent by Lieutenant General Graham to Henry Wellesley on the Isla de León a few days after the battle: 'The engagement took place in the vicinity of, and on, a low ridge, which the British called "Barossa Hill" [sic] or "the heights of Barrosa"'; according to Napier this is the Cerro del Puerco, or 'Pig Hill'. (See the 1971 Spanish chart, below right. Perhaps because of that unflattering name, it has recently been renamed Loma de Sancti Petri, 'St Peter's Hill'.)

Napier and Graham both refer to another ridge named Bermeja (also, as stated, meaning 'reddish'), west of the Barrosa ridge, and presumably named after the Torre Bermeja shown on the relevant Spanish and British Admiralty charts. There appears to be some considerable name confusion in published accounts between the names Torre Barrosa, Torre del Puerco and Torre Bermeja.

The Spanish chart (below right) marks an offshore rock called Laja Bermeja (Reddish Rock) in the immediate vicinity of the Torre Bermeja. From its position it would seem to be a variant, modern version of what was formerly called the Torre Barrosa. To the south-east of this Torre Bermeja there is a sandy beach called Playa de la [Torre] Barrosa. At the end of it is the Torre del Puerco (ruins) and, further on, beyond the little port of Conil, the Torre Castilobo. In addition, the chart marks the Cerro de la Cabeza del Puerco ('Pig's Head Hill') just inland from the Torre del Puerco. The relevant British Admiralty Pilot Book (*Admiralty Sailing Directions: West Coast of Spain and Portugal Pilot*, 7th edn, 1999) mentions the Torre Bermeja as a 'Useful mark', and describes it as 'a round tower 9m in height'; it does not mention the Torre Barrosa. It describes the coast south of Sancti Petri as being 'a sandy beach backed

by low reddish cliffs [italics added]'. Though the Battle of Barrosa was almost certainly named after the Torre, or the nearby hill, both of these (as well as the Laja) were presumably named after the reddish coastal cliffs. The fact that the British applied the name of the tower to the nearby hill presumably explains why Colonel Light also applied it to hills in South Australia. Its application also, in its already misspelt form, to the adjacent valley, was a logical development.

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