**Reconciliation Week Activity: Rock Shelter at Undercliffe, Earlwood**

My area of Canterbury-Bankstown is home to the Darug and Eora people, the original inhabitants of Canterbury and Bankstown.[[1]](#footnote-1) A surviving First Nations artwork site in this area is a rock shelter in the environs of the Cooks River at Undercliffe, Earlwood.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The artwork comprises of a midden and rock shelter.[[3]](#footnote-3) It depicts hand stencils covering the rear wall of the sandstone overhang at Undercliffe, which is a reminder of the importance of ceremony in First Nations culture and life.[[4]](#footnote-4) First Nations people lived in this shelter over many generations, and the hand stencils represent traces of their presence here.[[5]](#footnote-5) The making of artwork and stencils may also represent First Nations communities connection with ‘ancestral beings, embodied in the natural features of the country’.[[6]](#footnote-6)

This artwork is considered by archeologists to be a rarity in the Sydney region, and the paintings and etching are believed to be 1,000 to 5,000 years old.[[7]](#footnote-7)



Image description: Hand stencils at Undercliffe. The stencils are sketched in white, surrounded by a brown rock midden. Image by: Tanya Koneman. Image copyright owner: Heritage Branch.[[8]](#footnote-8)

1. City of Canterbury Bankstown, *Aboriginal history and places of significance,* [Link to Aboriginal history and places of significance](https://www.cbcity.nsw.gov.au/community/cultural-services/aboriginal-torres-strait-islanders/aboriginal-history-places-of-significance#:~:text=Among%20the%20most%20important%20of,1%2C000%20to%205%2C000%20years%20old). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See *Earlwood Aboriginal Art Site,* [Link to Earlwood Aboriginal Art Site.](https://apps.environment.nsw.gov.au/dpcheritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5060975) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cooks River Alliance, *Aboriginal River along the Cooks River* 2017, p. 17 [Link to Cooks River Aboriginal history report](https://cooksriver.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Cooks_River_Aboriginal_history_WEB.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See *Earlwood Aboriginal Art Site,* [Link to Earlwood Aboriginal Art Site.](https://apps.environment.nsw.gov.au/dpcheritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5060975) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. City of Canterbury Bankstown, *Aboriginal history and places of significance,* [Link to Aboriginal history and places of significance](https://www.cbcity.nsw.gov.au/community/cultural-services/aboriginal-torres-strait-islanders/aboriginal-history-places-of-significance#:~:text=Among%20the%20most%20important%20of,1%2C000%20to%205%2C000%20years%20old). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See *Earlwood Aboriginal Art Site,* [Link to Earlwood Aboriginal Art Site.](https://apps.environment.nsw.gov.au/dpcheritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5060975) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)