The Awabakal descendants recognise this Macquarie 2010 Quest to find the Foundation and Inscription Stone as being intrinsically woven into the cultural fabric of the Awabakal landscape.

“Every culture and spiritual tradition has a story to tell and for thousands of years, the Awabakal People walked and lived within this land and passed down knowledge of their lore (laws), culture and customs as part of their fundamental educational and spiritual growth.

The Awabakal cultural environment is a holistic one that interconnects the spirituality of this land and waters to our past, present and future. We as Awabakal descendants believe that the principles of the Awabakal tradition and culture still exist today to keep intact the moral and spiritual fibre of this land.

So many landmarks within the Awabakal cultural footprint are iconic and majestic places that illuminate our Dreaming Stories within this regions mythology, mystery and organic presence that is quite simply, uniquely Awabakal.

Dreaming Stories are symbolic messages that guide us in how we care for each other and our land, creative expressions to communicate the meaning of life and all its mysteries. Whibayganba / Nobbys headland and its surrounding landscape is just one of the many Dreaming Story locations and today, this place is still a magnetic destination where many people come to enjoy its inspirational context whether it is a backdrop for people’s fitness regime, for gatherings or poignant conversations.

We believe it is essential to nurture new visions that are inspired by the cultural integrity of our ancestral family and we are encouraged that so many people in this town are focused on gaining an ever-growing respect and understanding for the Awabakal People, this land and environment.

We as descendants understand and appreciate how many generations of Novocastrians have called this place home. We bear witness to their commitment, hearing the passion and attention for their environment and hopes for the future.

This land has had a wealth of knowledge walk over it. It is a place where people still come together and enjoy the beauty of the land and waters, celebrating relationships old and new, each one of us who have indeed called this place home, deepening the footprints of our ancestral family, the Awabakal People”.

Excerpts from a selection of statements by the Awabakal Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and “Welcome to Country” speeches by Nola Hawken, Awabakaleen Elder. Copyright 2010.
In recognition of Macquarie 2010, The University of Newcastle’s Coal River Working Party and The City of Newcastle will embark on the quest to find the Foundation and Inscription Stone laid in Newcastle by Governor Lachlan Macquarie back in 1818, and believed lost for over 190 years.

By 1816, the Stockton Oyster Bank had become a graveyard for ships and so the visionary Commandant of Newcastle, Captain James Wallis sought a solution in the form of a causeway to link the mainland to Nobbys. It was on the Governor’s second visit to Newcastle in 1818 that it was decided to commence the construction of the Pier with a ceremonial laying of the Foundation Stone.

Governor Lachlan Macquarie laid the foundation stone for the Newcastle breakwater, named in his honour by Commandant Captain James Wallis as “Macquarie Pier” on the 5th August 1818 at 4 pm.

Where exactly the foundation stone was laid is not known, many believe it was lost, but a map by the A.A. Company surveyor John Armstrong, drawn in 1830, indicates the point of commencement of the stonework with annotations on both sides of the Pier reading on the left “The stonework begins here on this side” and further along the Pier towards the present Nobbys surfhouse sheds “The stone work begins here on this side”. This plan is the key to possibly identifying the stone’s present location.

The University of Newcastle’s Coal River Working Party has assembled an archaeological ‘Time Team’ team with the professional expertise drawn across Government, Business and community to re-discover the Macquarie Pier Foundation Stone.

We have received a grant of funds from the Institution of Surveyors (Hunter Manning Group) and Emeritus Professor John Fryer to create a bronze plaque to be inlaid into the path adjacent to the spot that marks the start of the stonework.

This ceremony will mark the spot and bless the forthcoming archaeological works. It will also honour the Macquarie Pier as a land bridge safe guarding our Port, and connecting land and all peoples across time.
This painting by convict artist Joseph Lycett displays Aboriginal people resting by camp fire, near the mouth of the Hunter River in Newcastle, ca. 1817. You can see Nobbys (Whibayganba) as an island and Fort Scratchley (Tahlbihn) as it looked before the completed construction of the Pier. Also notice how tranquil and placid the waters of the Newcastle Port are viewed.
FIRST EYE SKETCH OF THE PORT OF NEWCASTLE (1797)

Courtesy of Hydrographic Department Ministry of Defence, Taunton, U.K.

Lieutenant John Shortland drew this eye-sketch of the Newcastle harbour in 1797. He is known as the first European ‘discoverer’ of this ‘fine coal river’ on the 10 September 1797, which he named Hunter’s River in honour of Governor Hunter. Please note the locations of ‘natives’ marked on this original sketch held in Taunton, England. No published versions of this famous eye sketch include these details.
An Eye Sketch of Hunter's River.

Judge this River large. N.W. 1/2, broad. 3/4 mile.

Port Jackson

Side Honey bee flat, now about 2/3 to 4/5 about 2 miles.

Determined this place Decr. 17, 1784, by Mr. and Mrs.

D. Depe [?] [Legible text]

Mark [unreadable]

Scales of these miles

[Unreadable text at bottom right]

These initials are presumed to be those of Mr. John Alexander, Jr., the son of Lieutenant John Alexander, who returned to England in 1783 in the Alexander.
This detail is from the first official survey mission completed in June-July 1801 by surveyor Ensign Francis Barrallier. He described the entrance to the river as it appeared from the sea:

“You can see from my map what a fearsome passage one has to traverse in order to reach this beautiful river. The roaring of the waves, crashing one upon the other and breaking with a terrible noise on the steep rocks of the island, and raging as they roll onto the sands of the opposite shore, would make the most intrepid sailor tremble. [If you had been here] you would have seen all the seamen, with terror showing on their faces but remaining firm at their posts, obeying with incredible dexterity their captain’s orders in order to extricate him from this almost impenetrable labyrinth. The doctor [Dr Harris] is a man who is truly necessary, for he is indefatigable in whatever he undertakes, and were it not for his great perseverance neither we nor the schooner would have entered the river that day.

The full plan CO700/New South Wales 16 was re-discovered in its complete form in the National Archives in London. Copies were made and presented at a special ceremony in Newcastle Town Hall on the 1st February 2008 by Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO Governor of New South Wales to the Staff and Students of Wollotuka School of Aboriginal Studies, Stockton Historical Society, the Lord Mayor of Newcastle John Tate and Vice Chancellor of the University of Newcastle Professor Nicholas Saunders.
This image beautifully encapsulates how the entrance to the Port of Newcastle looked from the sea. The landmarks of Nobbys and Signal Hill and the hidden oyster bank together formed the guardians of the Port, and like the mythical monsters of Greek mythology, Scylla and Charybdis, always ready to bring the unwary ship and its crew to its death on the Stockton oyster bank. This image was originally published in the Illustrated Sydney News on the 26 June 1875, many years after the construction of the Pier, and makes a charming contrast to the tranquil view of Lycett.
“HERE THE KANGAROO
STRUCK 3 TIMES”
LIEUTENANT JEFFRIES (1816)

Courtesy of Cultural Collections Auchmuty Library (from an old
glass plate) Original held in Hydrographic Department Ministry
of Defence, Taunton, U.K.

Lieutenant C. Jeffries - Commander of H.M.S.
Brig Kangaroo carried out a survey of the
Newcastle harbour in March 1816. You can
see the graveyard of ships on the oyster
bank. Even the Kangaroo almost came to
grief having ‘struck 3 times’. This survey was
probably the last straw that broke the camel’s
back for Commandant Wallis. Something had
to be done, and the birth of the Macquarie Pier
solution for the safety of the harbour became a
distinct goal.
This view of Newcastle painted from the top of Nobbys in 1818 shows what the area of the Newcastle breakwater looked like before construction. This painting was originally attributed to Sophia Campbell, and has recently been attributed to her relative, Edward Charles Close of Morpeth. It shows how the area between the landmarks looked as well as the rest of the harbour and surrounds prior to August 1818. The original height of Nobbys was recorded as 203 feet (61m) by Barrallier in 1801. In 2010 members of the University’s Coal River Working Party flew over Nobbys at a commensurate height. They were attempting to check the survey readings, as well as deduce how much of Signal Hill had been removed to create the Pier. They found that while the height of the hill has remained the same, the sides have been shaved, much like a pudding, to form the Pier below. It was also discovered that Barrallier’s recorded height for Nobbys was an overestimate, with the original height being about the level of the top of the tallest building on the summit.
The Stockton Oyster Bank had become a graveyard for ships and so the visionary Commandant of Newcastle, Captain James Wallis sought a solution in the form of a causeway to link the mainland to Nobbys. Governor Lachlan Macquarie agreed, and so it was on the Governor’s second visit to Newcastle in 1818 that it was decided to commence the construction of the Pier with a ceremonial laying of the Foundation Stone.

This plan of the intended Pier was made by surveyor James Meehan two days after he accompanied Governor in laying the foundation stone. The plan is dated 7 August 1818.

Governor Lachlan Macquarie laid the foundation stone for the Newcastle breakwater, named in his honour by Commandant Captain James Wallis as “Macquarie Pier” on the 5th August 1818. He records in his Journal:

“At 4 p.m accompanied by Capt. Wallis, Revd. Mr. Cowper, Major Antill, Lt. Macquarie, Ensn. Roberts and Mr. Meehan, I went to the shore of the channel dividing Coal Island from the South-Head, for the purpose of laying the Foundation and first stone of the Causway or Pier to be constructed across from the Main to the Island; and the stone being cut and ready, with an inscription, it was laid accordingly with all due Form in presence of the Artificers & Labourers to be employed in the construction of it; and Capt. Wallis having proposed that it should bear my name it was accordingly called after me “Macquarie Pier” — which [with] the present year 1818 — was cut and inscribed on the Foundation Stone. After the Foundation Stone had been laid, the artificers and Labourers were served with an allowance of Spirits to drink success to the undertaking — which they did with 3 hearty cheers.”

[Transcribed by Macquarie University]
Work on Macquarie Pier began soon after the Governor’s visit and continued. It was the Colonial equivalent of the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and just as costly. Such huge expenditures came under the watchful eye of Commissioner Bigge whose report signaled the death knell to such Macquarie era public infrastructure projects as well as to Governor Macquarie himself. Work on the Pier continued up until about 1823/4 when the project was discontinued. Newcastle had ceased to be a penal settlement, and Governor Macquarie was recalled back to England. This painting showing the cranes and equipment used in the construction of the Pier is entitled ‘Nobby’s Island and Pier 23 January 1820’ (Anonymous artist) and is held in the Mitchell Library.
This extract from the Sydney Gazette of the 26th December 1818 is a statement by Governor Macquarie on the merits of Commandant Wallis and of his building achievements in Newcastle, a place he has turned from “the appearance of a humble Hamlet, to the rank and capabilities of a well laid out, regular, and clean Town.”

He continues:
“In addition to the foregoing useful and permanent Buildings, Captain WALLIS has commenced and made great progress in another most important undertaking, namely, constructing a strong massy stone Pier across the Channel, dividing the Main Land (on which the Town is situated), on the South side of the Harbour, from Coal Island (or Nobby). For the purpose of confining the whole of the water of Hunter’s River to the principal Channel by which vessels enter the Harbour of Newcastle, and preventing that Channel from being choaked up, and consequently rendered dangerous, if not impracticable for Navigation.’

The subsequent image and article were published on the front pages of the Illustrated Sydney News of the 8 April 1875 showing what Newcastle looked like ‘50 Years Ago’ (i.e. 1825) and with a summary of the achievements up until 1875.
Newspaper clippings.
EXTRACT FROM THE SYDNEY GAZETTE.

Of the 30th, December, 1818.

CIVIL DEPARTMENT.

GOVERNMENT AND GENERAL ORDERS.

Head Quarters, Government House, Parramatta.

Thursday, 30th December, 1818.

The Governor has been pleased to appoint Captain John Murray, of the 6th Regiment, to be Commandant and Magistrate of the Settlement at Taree, in the name of Captain James Wallis, of the 5th Regiment, the present Commandant and Magistrate of that Settlement.

The Governor has been pleased to appoint Captain James Wallis, of the 5th Regiment, to be Commandant and Magistrate of the Settlement at Taree, in the name of Captain James Murray, of the 6th Regiment, to take his place, and also to appoint the opportunity afforded by the death of Captain James Wallis, to appoint his deputy in the capacity of a Magistrate, by the appointment of Major General John Murray, of the 5th Regiment, to be Deputy Commandant and Magistrate of the Settlement at Taree, in the name of Captain James Wallis, of the 5th Regiment, during the period of his absence from the Settlement.

The Governor has been pleased to appoint Captain John Murray, of the 6th Regiment, to be Commandant and Magistrate of the Settlement at Taree, in the name of Captain James Wallis, of the 5th Regiment, during the period of his absence from the Settlement.

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This view of Newcastle in 1828 (when it was temporarily known as King’s Town) is a painted engraving by artist Joseph Cross. It shows that by this time all activity on the Macquarie Pier had completely ceased. The original engraving formed the frontispiece to Henry Dangar’s book with the long title of: “Index and directory to map of the country bordering upon the River Hunter; the lands of the Australian-Agricultural Company, with the ground plan and allotments of King’s Town, New South Wales: containing a detail of the annual quit rent and amount of the redemption of the same; also historical notes upon the tenure and principle of granting lands in the colony since 1810; also for the guidance of emigrant settlers, a description of the unlocated country in the vicinity of Hunter’s River; useful geographical notes on Liverpool Plains; the present regulations and conditions upon which grants and sales of land are made by government, with observations thereon, with a view of the present state of agriculture in the colony, price of land, advice to settlers, &c. the whole forming with regard to land affairs in that colony, a complete emigrant’s guide by H. Dangar. London: Joseph Cross, 1828.”

On the 1828 map Dangar also records the aboriginal name of Fort Scratchley as ‘Tahlbihn Point’.

It was published to encourage people to immigrate to the region. The University has placed a digitized version of this very rare book online.
Where exactly the foundation stone was laid is not known, many believe it was lost, but a map by the A.A. Company surveyor John Armstrong, drawn in 1830, indicates the point of commencement of the stonework with annotations on both sides of the Pier reading on the left “The stonework begins here on this side” and further along the Pier towards the present Nobbys surf house sheds “The stone work begins here on this side”. This plan is the key to possibly identifying the stone’s present location. This plan has been overlayed on a recent aerial view of the landscape to identify the target location to search for the Foundation and inscription stone. The overlays were prepared by Coal River Working Party member and geologist Mr Russell Rigby.
After the withdrawal of the main source of convict labour to Port Macquarie in 1822, Newcastle was unable to continue construction of the pier. The Pier by 1830 according to Armstrong’s plan was ‘partially worn down’ on the ocean side. Shipping was increasingly becoming crucial to the town and so the settlers began a campaign to urge the Government to repair and resume Macquarie Pier’s construction.

Further light on the design of Macquarie Pier post 1833 comes to us in a recently unearthed document by Sir Thomas Mitchell entitled ‘Report Upon The Progress Made in Roads and in the Construction of Public Works in New South Wales From 1827 to June 1855 by Colonel, Sir T.L. Mitchell Surveyor General’. The original manuscript lies in the vault of the New South Wales Parliamentary Library. This was his final work, completed just before his death. His obituary published in the Sydney Morning Herald 10th Oct 1855, p2 says of this work:

‘The latest work upon which Sir Thomas Mitchell was engaged is one which he did not live to see completed in its full integrity. We allude to his Report upon the progress of the roads, bridges, and other public works of the colony, which, by a resolution of the Legislative Council in October last, the Governor-General was requested to instruct him to draw up. When presented to the Council during the present session, the report was ordered to be printed ; but some difficulty arose as to the expense of engraving the elaborate drawings which accompanied it. This difficulty was soon overcome ; for Sir Thomas, unwilling to have his report published without the illustrations, had them engraved at his own expense, and at the time of his death only two remained unfinished.’

We sincerely thank Deborah Brown, Manager, Reference & Information Resources for her exceptional service in providing relevant images to us relating to the Pier and its construction. Pages 274 to 281 contain Mitchell’s report on the ‘Breakwater at Newcastle’ consisting of three transcribed letters (Nos. 33/31, 33/137 and 33/116) with the Colonial Secretary Alexander McLeay and Mr Charles Hopwood.

On the 8th January 1833 the Colonial Secretary, at the direction of the Governor, wrote to Sir Thomas Mitchell requesting that he:

‘will examine what has been formerly done towards forming a Breakwater at Newcastle, and report your opinion, as to the best mode of proceeding.’

- Colonial Secretary to The Surveyor General
Outgoing Letters No. 33/31 8th January 1833

Mitchell suggests using the mortar cement that has been employed in forming the new docks on the Thames,

‘This mortar was formed from powdered unburnt limestone and coarse sharp sand, the whole being pointed with Puzzolana earth or Roman Cement, by which such embankments become as solid as rock and fully resist the effect of water: But with the clayey stone in the Newcastle Breakwater, it will be necessary to face the work with a harder material, especially on the side towards the sea, which should have an inclination of about 30 degrees.’


“Roman Cement” was developed in England between 1780-1796, and was actually nothing like any material used by the Romans. Puzzolano earth was volcanic ash used by the Romans an additive to cement, to strengthen concrete used on a large scale. Pozzolans may be natural (eg volcanic ash) or artificial (ground up bricks, fly-ash). The Thames Docks were built between the years 1799 and 1815.

Mitchell goes on to propose using ship’s ballast to build up the Pier, as well as lining the walls to create a beach to protect its ocean side.

Sir Thomas Mitchell was Surveyor General of NSW, and instructed all his surveyors to record the indigenous names of places. He recorded the Aboriginal name of Nobbys as ‘Whibayganba’ in his 1828 fieldbook, and as his engineering solutions display a man highly cognisant of Aboriginal methods of working with nature, not against her, to find solutions. See Mitchell’s 1828 sketches of Newcastle on the Panorama displays.

However Mitchell’s involvement with the construction was short-lived. He continued his surveying of NSW, and undertook exploration expeditions to the Darling River and western Victoria. The length of the breakwater was not significantly increased until Major Barney (Colonial Engineer) took over the project in 1836.
The first person to walk across the completed causeway in 1846 was Mr Walter Scott, Clerk of Works. However the ongoing maintenance of the structure was a problem as the southern gales continued to undermine the structure.

By 1866 Macquarie Pier was rebuilt, this time using stone quarried from Waratah and brought to the site by rail. The first delivery of quarried stone for the Pier arrived in 1869, and construction completed by 1873. Further extensions of the Pier to protect shipping from the reef to the Big Ben Rock were completed in 1883 and 1896 respectively.
In recognition of Macquarie 2010, The University of Newcastle’s Coal River Working Party and City of Newcastle Council embarked on the quest to find the Foundation and Inscription Stone laid in Newcastle by Governor Lachlan Macquarie back in 1818, and believed lost for over 190 years.

On the 28 June 2010 NSW Minister for the Hunter, the Hon Jodi McKay made public announcements on the heritage listing for the James Fletcher Hospital site and the formation of the University of Newcastle’s ‘Time Team’.

The Coal River Working Party’s Newcastle Time Team (NTT) emulates the format of the popular Channel Four TV series from the UK, “Time Team” with Tony Robinson. Here in Newcastle a group of archaeologists, historians, geologists, surveyors and landscape analysts will use their expert investigation skills with buried, submerged and archival evidence to verify Newcastle’s tangible historical evidence.

The NTT enjoys membership from consultant archaeologists, local firms such as Monteath & Powys, community representatives, Awabakal Traditional Owners, and staff from a number of organisations including University of Newcastle, Institution of Surveyors, Newcastle City Council, Land & Property Management Authority, University of New England, National Trust of Australia and Newcastle Port Corporation.

The NTT works closely with government regulators and as is pleased to be able to collaborate with Excavation Directors Paul Rheinberger and Angela Besant, both qualified consultant archaeologists, to ensure the projects meet stringent requirements under the NSW archaeological permit system.

The 2010 priority project for the NTT will be to locate the inscription stone laid by Governor Lachlan Macquarie on 5 August 1818, heralding the construction of Macquarie Pier between 1818 and 1846, linking the mainland with Nobbys Island.

Both sites, James Fletcher Hospital and Macquarie Pier, have become visual and historic icons for Novocastrians and are among the few remaining relics of outstanding National heritage significance in Newcastle.

They both demonstrate the City’s ‘living history’, and transition from Australia’s convict past to the thriving economic and cultural metropolis of the present day.
On the 4 August 2010 at 4pm The Fort Scratchley Historical Society are inviting Her Excellency to an event to unveil a commemorative bronze marker plaque at the start of Macquarie Pier (Newcastle Breakwater).

Close to this date (5th) and back in August 1818, Governor Lachlan Macquarie laid the foundation stone to Macquarie Pier in Newcastle. The University’s Coal River Working Party have assembled an archaeological team to try to locate the original foundation stone. This ceremony will mark the spot and bless the forthcoming archaeological work.

This bronze marker will display the intertwining histories of black and white Australia. Our histories are linked and blended just like a tapestry.

Macquarie Pier is a land bridge connecting Nobbys (Whibayganba) to Signal Hill/ Fort Scratchley (Tahlbihn). It was intended to make the harbour safer for shipping, and to protect the precious exports upon which the fledgling colony was earning its first return.

It is therefore a bridge connecting land, and people to the land, across time and we would like to see this moment (the dedication of the marker) as a beginning of a path, a turning point, a return, a hope.

Just like people walk the Sydney Harbour Bridge for reconciliation, so we hope to rededicate Macquarie Pier as a new pathway of connecting people and places, a walk of reconciliation for those who answer to the spirit.
An overlay of Newcastle in 1818 on top of an Arial view of the City of Newcastle 2010.
‘At 4 p.m accompanied by Capt. Wallis, Revd. Mr. Cowper, Major Antill, Lt. Macquarie, Ens. Roberts and Mr. Meehan, I went to the shore of the channel dividing Coal Island from the South-Head, for the purpose of laying the Foundation and first stone of the Causeway or Pier to be constructed across from the Main to the Island; and the stone being cut and ready, with an inscription, it was laid accordingly with all due Form in presence of the Artificers & Labourers to be employed in the construction of it; and Capt. Wallis having proposed that it should bear my name it was accordingly called after me “Macquarie Pier” - which [with] the present year 1818 - was cut and inscribed on the Foundation Stone.

After the Foundation Stone had been laid, the artificers and Labourers were served with an allowance of Spirits to drink success to the undertaking - which they did with 3 hearty cheers.’
This is a Macquarie 2010 Event
Sponsored by:
Institution of Surveyors NSW INC (Hunter Manning Group)
Emeritus Professor John Fryer
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The City of Newcastle
Fort Scratchley Historical Society
NSW Land & Property Management Authority