HUNTER ESTATES

A Comparative Heritage Study of pre 1850s Homestead Complexes in the Hunter Region

Volume II
Appendix 2: Aboriginal Archaeology Reports
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Aboriginal Archaeological Overview of the Hunter Valley

Introduction

An introduction to a recent Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Plan (Umwelt Australia Pty Ltd 2011) prepared to guide future operations at one of the larger coal mines in the Hunter Valley at Ravensworth (midway between Singleton and Muswellbrook) provides a framing context for the following Aboriginal archaeological overview of the project area:

‘The Aboriginal history of the Hunter Valley extends from the present day back many thousands of years, and is evidenced by both the tangible and intangible aspects of Aboriginal culture and history. Past studies have identified archaeological sites – the tangible footprint of culture and history – demonstrating occupation to the last Ice Age, over 20,000 years ago. The area contains..... archaeological sites, including grinding grooves, scarred trees, engraving sites and artefact deposits; that reflect the sustained use of the landscape by.....people into historic times. These sites link generations of Aboriginal people over time, and represent the history of a complex Aboriginal belief system linked to the whole environment, which in turn sustains people and culture.

These interrelated categories of information (the landscape, the archaeological record, and the shared Aboriginal and European history) are touched on briefly below and each are examined in further detail where records allow for a number of individual homestead sites in separate supporting documents.

- The reconstructed landscape history of the Hunter Valley from the Pleistocene, when Aboriginal people first entered the region, emphasises how the place differed from today as a cold and treeless environment that progressively changed over time.
- The archaeology concentrates on the Central Lowlands region of the Upper Hunter Valley which comprises over a third of the study area and within which most research has been undertaken to date.
- The history looks at the period since European settlement and highlights what can be seen as a sequence of phases of Aboriginal land dispossession (with periods of resistance and conflict), patterns of exclusion, and subsequent Aboriginal adaptation and assimilation into a settler society that can be traced in certain places and times within the history of occupation of some of the project homestead sites between c.1820 and 1850.

How this historical, archaeological and environmental evidence combines to represent important Aboriginal cultural heritage values that contributes additional ways to an understanding of the history and significance of the nominated project homesteads is also explained here.
The Environment and Change over Time

Background

The history of landscape and environmental change that occurred during the long record of Aboriginal occupation of the Hunter Valley is fundamental to the interpretation of the documented and potential archaeological evidence that pre-existed across the land before c.1820 and after which time it became overlain by an interconnected network of European homesteads, roads and pastoral estates. The rapid environmental changes that accompanied this comparatively short European history of the place have significantly affected the survival and visibility of older evidence for Aboriginal occupation of the region. The environments of five broad time periods can be reconstructed within which the Aboriginal archaeological resources of the Hunter Valley can be evaluated:

- The Late Pleistocene from about 40,000 years ago that overlaps with the time Aboriginal people first settled in the Hunter Valley.
- The Last Glacial Maximum (LCM) that peaked around 20,000 years ago during which people adapted to significant climactic and environmental change.
- The Holocene, spanning the last 10,000 years, that mid-way through saw sea levels and positions stabilise at their current positions.
- The landscape in c.1790 as it was immediately before Europeans arrived.
- The last 200 years when the landscape was dramatically altered by European settlement and landuse practices.

The Upper Hunter Valley and its Sub Regions

An extensive corridor of lowlands runs through the centre of the Hunter Valley that consists of flat, undulating and gently hilly landscape with abrupt transitions to steeper country on three of its sides and continues to the coast on its fourth side. At the latter, the altitude gradually rises moving inland from sea level to about 500m above sea level (asl) at around Murunundi, with local relief in any given locality within this central landscape rarely exceeding 60m except over the mountain ranges that define the ‘edges’ of the project area.

This ‘Central Lowland’ was the focus of European settlement from the c.1820s, and at a broad geographical level the land can be described to consist of a line of alluvial flats that is up to 2.5km wide in places that extends along the Hunter River and its major tributaries where they flow in a complex meandering pattern through this landscape belt.

The margins of this central landscape also contain a number of varied sub regions as summarised below (adapted from ERM Pty Ltd 2004). These defined how the European settlement of the ‘Hunter Valley was therefore approached more or less as if it were an island’ (Atkinson 2012) at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and which appears to have followed in much the same way how Aboriginal occupation of the region appears to have occurred on the basis of the archaeological evidence that tells us about people’s movements and landuse some 20,000 years before that.
The southern third of the Hunter Valley ('Southern Mountains') is occupied by a wide tract of rugged sandstone land with ridges that rise to about 1,000m asl with intervening steep-sided valleys up to 450m deep.

The Central Goulburn River Valley is a belt of sandstone and basalt country that is about 15km wide with irregular plateaux and ridges rising to 400m asl with broken and steep-sided valleys, gorges, and escarpments that are up to 150m deep and interspersed with undulating lowlands.

The Merriwa Plateau to the north of the Goulburn River is generally rolling to hilly basalt country that rises to about 450m at the foot of the Liverpool Ranges which marks its northern limit. It is crossed by parallel south-flowing streams which in their lower courses have cut valleys up to 100m deep into the plateau surface. At its western margin the land passes into sandstone and shale country with topography that is comparable to the Central Lowlands that extends into its boundary with the Hunter Valley.

The northern watershed of the Hunter Valley is formed by the rugged Liverpool and Mt Royal Ranges that rise to over 200m asl on basalt. The more extensive plateau which is known today as the Barrington Tops delimits the Hunter Valley to the northeast and ranges in altitude from approximately 1,200m to 1,650m asl.

The north-eastern mountains country is about 20km to 25km wide and is traversed by deep valleys draining from the high Mt Royal Range and Barrington Tops, the latter of which can be divided into three concentric areas of land. Adjacent to the higher watersheds, steep and narrow ridges rise to 1,200m asl with slopes cut by deep ravine tributaries to the upper valleys of the main rivers flowing to the Hunter River. On the periphery of this land the topography is lower with broken hills. The third belt within this mountainous country occupies its southern and western margins, and consists of steep, massive hills and plateaux rising up to 900m asl between Blandford and Muswellbrook.

Environment and Climate Change

Late Pleistocene & Last Glacial Maximum

From about 40,000 years ago the global climate became colder and drier, and temperatures reached their lowest between 30,000 and 15,000 years ago during a period which is known as the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM). There is little evidence for what conditions were like within (inland) lowland eastern Australia during this time. Sea levels were about 120m lower than present day, and the shoreline at the mouth of the Hunter River would have been at least 20km east of its current position. The available evidence suggests that throughout the LGM much of the Hunter Valley would:

‘have been cold, dry, largely treeless and generally bleak landscape. It certainly would not have had the rich and diverse range of resources to support a large resident population as was the case in 1790 just before the arrival of Europeans’ (ERM Pty Ltd 2004:20).
It is likely that Aboriginal populations were during this period small and transient, especially during the severe ‘winter’ conditions that would have prevailed. People may have lived permanently or only in the Hunter Valley region near the coast, where the year round climate would possibly have been more temperate, although occupation in the ‘interior’ landscapes is also probable at different times and in different places over this long geomorphic time period.

The Holocene

After the LGM, global temperatures began to warm from about 15,000 years ago and by about 10,000 years ago the climate is likely to have become broadly similar to that of today. While the fluctuations in the climate during the last 10,000 is likely to have been complex, the sea returned to its present level around 7,000 years ago and environmental changes after that time are likely to have been relatively minor when they are compared with those during the preceding 40,000 years of Aboriginal occupation of the region.

The landscape of the Hunter Valley and the resources that were available to Aboriginal people are also likely to have been broadly comparable to the way they were in the early 1790s. The study area as a whole would have consisted of undulating country and flood plains that were lightly timbered with Iron Bark Gum and Box trees and well grassed. In contrast, the banks of the major rivers systems such as the Hunter, Goulburn, Paterson, and Williams were most likely to have been thickly treed with ‘swamp oaks’ and similar timber canopies, and tributary creek systems were most likely to be only shallowly incised and appear to have had grassy or swampy ‘meadows’, ‘chains of ponds’ and ‘billabongs’.

Little is known of the flood history of the Hunter River before European settlement. The descriptions of Paterson and others around ‘Schanks’ Forest Plains’ around Maitland in 1801 (HRNSW 1801 [Volume 4]:448-453) provide details of what these European people saw of the visible results of past floods with scoured terraces and driftwood seen high in the tops of trees up to 80 feet above the Hunter River.

The subsequent European settlement history of the Hunter Valley from the 1820s was punctuated by a series of significant flood events with over 200 being recorded, with over a dozen of these having been higher than the river’s normal peak limit. In this regard, the Singleton Argus (25 March 1893) reported the following retrospective account that broadly coincides with the European settlement of the Hunter Valley:

‘When my father.....arrived on the Hunter at Glendon, in the beginning of 1849, now fifty years ago, there were then flood marks on the trees at the top of the river bank, in the vicinity of Scott’s Flat and Glendon, that a man standing could only reach with a stockwhip; and the Glendon blacks of that era verified them to be marks of a flood which one of the oldest of them had witnessed, at a period described by them which, according to the calculation of the white man, would be sometime between the years of 1815 and 1820’.
The Landscape at Contact and Environmental Change

There are few direct lines of evidence (archaeological, ecological, geomorphic etc) that document what the landscape was like in the early 1790s when European settlement started at the mouth of the Hunter River and the first explorers, then settlers, began entering the inland parts of the Valley. The 1801 descriptions by Paterson's party, and those made later by people such as John Howe in 1819 and 1820, Allan & Peter Cunningham from 1823 onwards, and Henry Dangar from 1824 show the environments of the study area were complex with sometimes dense vine forests and 'scrub' in places forming impenetrable corridors along the banks of the rivers and creeks, with flood plains and the hills above being lightly timbered with grassy plains suitable for agriculture.

Changes to these environments that were brought about by European landuse were apparent to some contemporary observers only a decade later, and all of the project homestead sites under study themselves will be able to document their own individual environmental impact record. The most significant (and visible) impacts across the Hunter Valley that quickly left their mark on the land during the first half of the nineteenth century includes:

- The rapid drainage and subsequent use for agricultural purposes of the large swamps and wetlands that were once dominant features of areas such as in the Paterson Valley that can be hardly traced as landscape features today.
- The rapid removal of the original rich and diverse riparian riverbank vegetation along all of the river systems right up to their headwaters in places and its replacement over time by regrowth trees and introduced species such as willows, the creation of extensive tracts of both improved pasture and lands modified for monoculture agriculture, and expanding suburbia around the first township sites.
- Extensive creek and river gullying, erosion, and channel flow changes that have occurred from early over-clearing, animal grazing and dam construction.

While nineteenth century rural landuse practices that involved timber felling, vegetation clearance, cultivation and grazing have had a widespread impact on the Aboriginal archaeological record of the Hunter Valley, this level of historical impact however has often seen the disturbance to, rather than the complete destruction of, some Aboriginal archaeological sites.

The historical development of the town and villages and their associated infrastructure such as roads and rail networks established to service the rural economy since the 1820s has resulted in further accumulated impacts to the archaeological resource over time. Many of the Aboriginal archaeological landscapes that were first recorded at the end of the nineteenth century for example now no longer exist.

This development impact has continued significantly since the 1980s in particular with the increase in open cut coal mining that often leads to the total destruction of archaeological sites (and their landscapes) that occur on the affected land.
How this current landuse affects at least the scientific values of the Aboriginal archaeological resource (that is finite and provides important information about Australia’s prehistory for which there are no written records) can be illustrated by one example provided by a recent Aboriginal cultural heritage management plan (ACHMP) prepared to guide future operations at the Ravensworth Mine Complex (Umwelt Australia Pty Ltd 2011):

- Since the 1970s within the Ravensworth project area there have been at least 17 archaeological surveys reporting over 500 archaeological sites that have resulted in at least seven archaeological investigations.
- Excluding those heritage sites that have been previously destroyed by mining and other development activities, a total of 404 extant site locations are known within the Ravensworth operations area. These comprise 240 artefact scatters, 156 isolated finds, 4 scarred trees, one scarred tree/artefact scatter complex, and 1 massacre site (which is understood not to occur within the project area, although the registered site location over Ravensworth village identifies the conflict as part of the history of the area).
- All of the known archaeological sites have been identified to be of cultural significance by the registered Aboriginal community organisations involved in the preparation of the 2011 ACHMP, with some sites – including an engraving site, a grinding groove/scarred tree/artefact scatter complex, scarred tree and large artefact scatters along major creek lines – identified to be of very high cultural significance.
- Of the 403 known Aboriginal archaeological sites (excluding the massacre site) within the Ravensworth project area, 174 will be impacted upon by future operations which include 93 artefact scatters, 79 isolated finds, 1 scarred tree, and 1 scarred tree/artefact scatter.

How this particular prehistoric and historic Aboriginal archaeological landscape immediately to the west of the SHR listed Ravensworth homestead site has now been overlain by a modern mining landuse is illustrated in Figure 1. The mine is placed in its historical context in Figure 2.

Archaeological Research in the Hunter Valley

Prehistory

Aboriginal archaeological research in the Hunter Valley largely began with the work of Mathews who recorded rock art sites in the Bulga area in the early 1890s. This included in 1892 a survey of pastoral property near Milbrodale where he was shown a sandstone rock shelter in which a large man-like figure (2.75m high) had been painted by Aboriginal people on the rear wall, along with other motifs including hand and forearm stencils, boomerangs and hafted hatchets. This art was described and illustrated in a paper subsequently published in the 1893 volume of the *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*. In this he identified the human figure as a depiction of the ancestral being, Baiame (also spelled Baiamai and Baami), and the site is today one of the most significant Aboriginal heritage places in the Hunter Valley and is included on the Register of the National Estate. It has now been set up as a ‘tourist cave’ by the NPWS (see Figure 3).
Archaeological excavations carried out by staff from the *Australian Museum* during 1965 and 1966 in two rock shelters nearby to ‘Baiame Cave’, one containing a possible post-Contact Aboriginal burial, revealed occupation evidence of the ‘Small Tool Phase’ of Aboriginal history that is dated at its basal levels to about 1,400 years ago (Moore 1970).

At a wider level, archaeological interest in the Aboriginal stone artefacts of the region probably began with McCarthy and Davidson (1943) who collected and analysed large numbers of stone artefacts from a series of high terraces over the Hunter River at Gowrie. Little work was done subsequent to this until the 1960s and 1970s when a number of surveys and excavations were undertaken by the *Australian Museum* under the supervision of its *Curator of Anthropology*, David Moore. This work included the excavations above at Milbrodale and others such as at Sandy Hollow and Bobadeen Shelter on the Goulburn River, with the latter producing occupation evidence dated to approximately 5,000 years ago. These sites provided ‘benchmark’ artefact assemblages against which subsequent archaeological excavations and analyses were compared to during this period.

Following this initial phase of research, a considerable amount of archaeological work began to be undertaken in the Hunter Valley from the 1980s as a direct consequence of coal mining development and the requirements of environmental impact assessments. There are currently about 35 coal mines operating in the Hunter between Muswellbrook and Singleton, and the majority of archaeological survey and excavation has been carried out in the landscapes between these two major towns.

Aboriginal occupation within the Hunter Valley commenced at least 20,000 years ago. Koettig (1987) has reported a date of >20,200 years Before Present (BP) from a hearth at Glennies Creek, some 35 kilometres north of Branxton. Kuskie has also reported at least one site of Pleistocene age (NPWS #37-6-402) at the South Lemington mine near Singleton, on the basis of geomorphological evidence. In surrounding regions, Aboriginal occupation has been dated to 19,000 years ago on the Liverpool Plains (Gorecki et al 1984), 11,000 years ago in the upper Mangrove Creek catchment of the Hawkesbury River (Attenbrow 1987), and 17,000 years ago at Moffats Swamp near Raymond Terrace (Baker 1994). However, the majority of dated Aboriginal archaeological sites in the Hunter Valley are less than 4,000 years of age (Brayshaw 1994:15, Kuskie and Clarke 2004).

Despite the paucity of securely dated archaeological evidence for Pleistocene occupation it is plausible that Aboriginal people have occupied the region for at least 20,000 years and possibly for far longer. This assumption is based on evidence of occupation in other parts of the continent between that has been dated to between 40,000 and 60,000 years ago and the landscape history of the Hunter Valley region itself. Given the limited evidence of early occupation, it however difficult to investigate what cultural changes in occupation may have occurred over time. Also, archaeologists have in some respects not commonly speculated about the specific pattern or chronology of occupation of the area. Moore (1970:70) however suggested quite early in the research history of the region that:

*The Hunter system may have been occupied from the coast. This could be quite consistent with the geography of the region, since Great Dividing Range would have constituted a*
formidable barrier in most places, whereas to a people skilled in navigating in sheltered inland waters, movement up and down the coastal plain and up the river valleys would have presented no problem’.

Aboriginal Archaeological Heritage Site Types

The vast majority of Aboriginal archaeological heritage sites that have been recorded in the Hunter Valley to date consist of stone artefact scatters and isolated finds (over 98%). A ‘gap analysis’ prepared for the Upper Hunter in 2004 (ERM Pty Ltd 2004) reported that over 3,500 sites had been recorded at that time. Some of these open campsites have been recorded in detail where their surface manifestations are exposed on the ground, and a number have also been salvaged through subsurface archaeological excavation. Less common Aboriginal site types include painted and stencilled art in rock shelters, rock engravings and axe grinding grooves, rock shelters with occupation evidence, open shell middens on the coast, burials, scarred and carved trees, stone arrangements, stone quarries, and ceremonial sites. The latter type of site in particular are rare, and is an example of a type of heritage place that will have considerable significance to Aboriginal communities today.

A number of ceremonial sites (often referred to in the literature as ‘Bora grounds’) first recorded in the early to mid nineteenth century, including some at the turn of the century, have since been destroyed by European landuse. It is also highly likely that an unknown number of these important places will have been destroyed during the rapid European settlement across the Hunter Valley from the early 1820s for which we have no record.

Historical descriptions also document the continued use of some of these ceremonial sites (and burial places) well into the second half of the nineteenth century, with some records in places around Singleton and Muswellbrook continuing into the first decade of the twentieth century. One example was recorded by a former squatter in Aberdeen in the 1870s at Old Glenegie or Gundy, at the junction of the Page and Isis Rivers. This was described at the time to have consisted of a circle of raised earth ‘about 150 yards in circumference’, and with a figure of a man also made from raised earth ‘in a pleasant glen at the foot of one of the highest hills in the neighbourhood’ (Etheridge 1918:85). The description also reported that the ‘ground about this place for some considerable distance, are about one hundred and twenty trees marked with tomahawks...on some the marks reach as high as fifteen feet above the ground’ (Macdonald 1878:255). Two other trees with carvings were also on the riverbank immediately in front of the ‘homestead’ not far above the present crossing but were believed to have been destroyed from a flood in the 1920s (Brayshaw 2001:1087-1089).

Another ‘Bora’ ground was recorded at ‘Kelvinside’ near the junction of the Page and Hunter Rivers ‘where large cattle yards are now in position....many box trees in the vicinity bore beautiful carvings’ (Bridge 1924:133). Etheridge (1918) and Fawcett (1898) also describe a number of similar sites near the town of Gloucester, and one on the Allyn River ‘three to four miles north-west of Gresford’ that had carved trees around the smaller of the two Bora circles that had been destroyed by bushfires.
around 1897, and other carved trees that survived at that time which were ‘situated a short distance from the circle along the top of a ridge’.

There is an historical record of a particularly large Aboriginal ceremonial gathering being held at what is often referred to as the ‘Bulga Bora Ground’ (AHIMS #37-6-0055 & 0056) in 1852 that is suspected to be partially located on the Warkworth Mine lease, and partly on the neighbouring Wambo mining property on the eastern side of Wollombi Brook. The account comes from Alexander Eather’s ‘History of Bulga’, some of the original manuscript of which that is reproduced below (from ERM Pty Ltd 2004:67) is held by the Singleton Historical Society.

‘Here also is to be seen the remains of an ancient Bora ground with its sacred circles still defined by small mounds of earth and a being of carved trees still bearing the emblematical devices which marked this strange and mystical ceremony of initiation of young men of the tribes to tribal rites.

This Bora ceremony was held in the year 1852, and on reliable authority of residents of the locality and attended by between 500 and 600 Aboriginal people from various tribes from as far as Mudgee and Goulburn. It is also interesting to note that during the months that this Bora was being held no record is in existence of a single crime or outrage being perpetrated on any of the white settlers though they must have been completely at their mercy had the Aboriginal people proved hostile. The white settlers were rigidly excluded from the Bora, nor would a single native divulge what transpired. In later years however, considerable scientific light has been thrown on the matter and it is thought to have been the last muster of the tribes who attended before the advance of the white man’.

This Bora site was subsequently recorded by Thorpe in 1918 and a number of photographs (held by the Australian Museum) of carved trees were taken. The photographs indicate the carvings on the trees were made by steel axes. ERM Pty Ltd (ibid:67) further noted in 2004 that:

‘Although map coordinates are provided in the AHMS record for the Bora site, the precise location of the site is unknown, despite many attempts by archaeologists to locate it (eg. Brayshaw 2003). The fabric of the site may have been completely destroyed by natural processes, bushfire and farming activities. Nevertheless it remains an important site with considerable historic and social value’.

Central Queensland Cultural Heritage Management (2010:57) report that there has been a long history of aboriginal people seeking to ensure its continued protection including an unsuccessful application for protection under Section 10 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage Protection Act 1984. Complicating factors that have also surrounded the protective management of the site include a lack of a clear understanding of the site’s location and extent, a lack of clear consensus in the Aboriginal community about those who are empowered to speak for the site and how it should be managed, and the fact that the site straddles land that is owned by two separate coal
mining entities. The generalised location of the site is now reported to be reasonably established for the purposes of management, and the extended Bulga Bora Ground area straddles the boundary between the Warkworth Mine lease and the adjacent Wambo Mine property (see Figure 4).

Our understanding of the social and ritual functions that these examples of ceremonial places played in people’s lives is not well understood. This is largely because the nineteenth century historical records that tell us about the people who created and used them was recorded (even from the early 1820s) during a time when Aboriginal life was vastly different to life prior to European settlement. The accuracy of the information is therefore sometimes questionable and/or the reliability of the sources commonly require considered. Most records also commonly concern aspects of life that are not visible in the archaeological record (cultural knowledge about kinship, beliefs, rituals, land ownership/territorial boundaries and perishable material culture etc) and therefore are difficult to investigate through archaeological investigation alone.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that the predominant type of archaeological evidence that survives today consists of flaked stone artefacts or shell middens on the coast that represent only one type of ‘marker’ point in a network of movement where people may have only stayed for a few hours or a few days at any given place that resulted in the creation of an archaeological ‘footprint’. Therefore, very few sites representing the social or spiritual aspects of people’s lives, and which are likely to have been to them the most important parts of their lives, are visible today in the archaeological record.

Post Contact Aboriginal Archaeological Sites

Identifying Post Contact Aboriginal Evidence in the Archaeological Record

A review of nineteenth century historic/ethnographic literature by Brayshaw (1986) provides details for how Aboriginal people in the first decades of Contact with white settlers in the Hunter Valley were seen to have used at least some of their pre-Contact artefact types (such as flaked and ground-edge stone tools, wooden spears, shields, clubs and coolamons etc) alongside items of metal, ceramic and glass that were probably ‘borrowed, stolen or salvaged’ from European material culture.

Within a research context, this mixing of materials and new methods of tool modification and use in itself may have made for a distinctive archaeological Aboriginal ‘tool kit’ at Contact. However, it is difficult to identify this type of ‘signature’ in the archaeological record because Aboriginal post-Contact campsites appear to have often been located in the same places where people had camped possibly for thousands of years before Contact. Many of these places in the landscape were also those that were chosen by the first European settlers from the 1820s to establish their estates and construct their homesteads. Overlapping historical layers of cultural landscape and landuse at a general level, and European and Aboriginal ‘activity overprinting’ at site-specific levels will in most cases make it difficult to distinguish between ‘culturally’ distinct archaeological layers (and their artefact types),


particularly at those locations that have long histories of landuse and high levels of land disturbance such as pastoral properties.

‘Contact’ archaeological sites are often identified today at places where evidence is found in the form of European materials that have been modified by Aboriginal people in the course of pursuing ‘traditional’ practices and for ‘traditional’ uses. As a result, the most common artefact types that are occasionally found are items such as flaked glass and ceramic. These materials are however not frequently reported in the current archaeological literature in the Hunter Valley outside of those places that later in the post-Contact Aboriginal history became ‘missions’ or ‘reserves’ (St Clair, Redbournberry, Singleton Common etc). Some examples that have been sourced for this review include that of McCardle who reported on the presence of flaked glass artefacts from an excavation at Redbournberry Bridge at Singleton (McCardle CHM 2004), and those more recently identified during surface survey on the Warkworth Mine site near Mt Thorley (Central Queensland Cultural Heritage Management 2010).

One of the best known ‘Contact period’ Aboriginal heritage sites in the Hunter Valley is at Gowrie that is located approximately 5km to the west of Singleton. Between 1941 and 1943 members of the Australian Museum collected a large amount of flaked glass artefacts during an early archaeological survey along the northern bank of the Hunter River on a terrace about 60m above the river and its alluvial flats. These glass materials were found in places along the railway line and a branch road through the town that formed a part of a larger and older Aboriginal archaeological landform that could be traced for about 6km along this river terrace (McCarthy & Davidson 1943:226-227).

The green, brown, blue, amber and white shades of coloured glass artefacts were distributed over ground surfaces in and amongst patches of broken bottles, and it was reported that none the glass items collected at Gowrie appeared to have been embedded within the clay soils within which large assemblages of flaked stone implements were also found.

McCarty & Davidson (1943:226-227) noted that at Gowrie stone flake and blade artefact types were reproduced in glass and ceramic and drew a specific comparison with the frequency of ‘concave and nosed tools are so common in glass indicates’ that suggested these people had used much the same kinds of knapped implements as those who had made the flaked stone archaeological artefacts found in same river terrace landscape dating back to possibly many thousands of years.

In the same publication (ibid:228-229) these authors also refer to earlier work of W.J. Enright who informed that:

‘Old residents of Singleton state that between fifty and sixty years ago they saw up to three hundred natives lined up in the town for food and blankets, but they came from many parts of the surrounding country; they camped regularly on various parts of Gowrie Station, according to Mr. White, who was born there and whose father was interested in their welfare. They used glass, which they obtained from the residents, for implements.'
A subsequent collection of glass items was made from the same site(s) at Gowrie by Davidson with Harry Allen in 1967, and Allen and Rhys Jones (1980:231) later reported that:

‘By comparison, a large collection of glass ‘implements’ from Singleton in New South Wales (McCarthy and Davidson 1943, 226-27) comprising a variety of ‘side, end, concave and nosed scrapers’, came from a cleared field which had apparently been heavily ploughed in the past, and a further collection made there in 1967 by Davidson and one of us (Allen) produced 269 pieces of glass of which only eight could be considered as implements in terms of flaking. Both collections were made near the remains of early European buildings and were associated with European pottery and clay pipe fragments as well as Aboriginal stone implements. The latter, however, can be found eroding out of the gravel layer a few centimetres below the topsoil for some km along the banks of the Hunter River at this point, while the glass is confined to a few hundred square metres. No struck flakes were recovered at Singleton on either occasion, and if this is to be explained as being the result of manufacture elsewhere, then the implements could be expected to be distributed more widely, as are the stone tools, rather than being confined to the immediate area of European buildings -their probable origin. Finally, of the eight possible implements collected in 1967 the most convincing was the flaked base of a brown glass beer bottle, with a moulded date underneath of 1938. Thus the distribution and specialisation of the glass ‘tools’ coupled with what is known of the immediate environment in which they were found, combines to throw doubt on the authenticity of the entire Singleton collection.

Identifying Historic Aboriginal Heritage Sites

In 1990, Rich prepared a management study of Aboriginal historic sites in northeast NSW for the NPWS and the Australian Heritage Commission. This heritage assessment included the Hunter Valley and the objectives of the this study were to ‘provide an overview of aboriginal history in the region; identify and describe and assess the significance of Aboriginal historic sites; and provide guidelines for future research and management of these sites’ (Rich 1990:2).

The 1990 study identified thirty-one (31) potential Aboriginal historic places within the Hunter Valley, including sites associated with conflict or ‘invasion period at locations where grazing and agricultural activities took place’ for which ‘the precise location…..may never be known’, and other places where Aboriginal and European interactions may have been in more peaceful environments. Some of these places date to the 1820s, while others were occupied and used by Aboriginal people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These places identified in 1990 (from ERM Pty Ltd 2004:85) are listed in Table 1.

Some of the places identified by Rich include a number of the project homestead sites that are discussed in greater detail in a series of supporting documents that have been prepared in addition to this archaeological overview.
Table 1: Potential Aboriginal Historical Sites Identified by Rich (1990:75-77).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site type</th>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Sites</td>
<td>Maitland Tribal Fight</td>
<td>1843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Sites</td>
<td>“Kelvinside” ceremonial ground, Aberdeen</td>
<td>Used before 1872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Sites</td>
<td>Gresford initiation ceremonial ground, Aberdeen</td>
<td>Used before 1872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Sites</td>
<td>Singleton corroboree</td>
<td>1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burials</td>
<td>Bellwarran burial, (38-4-611) Lorn</td>
<td>No date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burials</td>
<td>Mount Olive (37-3-20)</td>
<td>20th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warfare</td>
<td>Hunter River – massacres of both Europeans and Aboriginal people</td>
<td>1799</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warfare</td>
<td>Singleton – Europeans killed</td>
<td>1825</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warfare</td>
<td>Foy Brook – both Europeans and Aboriginal people killed</td>
<td>1826</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warfare</td>
<td>Fal Brook – Europeans were killed</td>
<td>1826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation sites</td>
<td>Marton</td>
<td>1820s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation sites</td>
<td>Carrington campsite</td>
<td>1820s-30s; late 1840s or early 1850s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation sites</td>
<td>Eccleston – Aboriginal people lived here</td>
<td>At least in 1830s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation sites</td>
<td>Mount Olive mission – camp</td>
<td>Present in 1850s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation sites</td>
<td>Willis’s Hill campsite, near Gundy (Scone)</td>
<td>After 1867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation sites</td>
<td>Lorn campsite</td>
<td>Late 19th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation sites</td>
<td>Redbourneberry Hill, Singleton</td>
<td>1860s, 1880s, 1909 onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation sites</td>
<td>Gowrie camp sites, Singleton</td>
<td>1880s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserves</td>
<td>Glennies Creek Reserve</td>
<td>1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserves</td>
<td>Mount Olive (St Clair) Reserve</td>
<td>Gazetted 1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserves</td>
<td>Singleton Reserves? Redbourneberry Hill</td>
<td>Gazetted 1889 and 1896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places</td>
<td>of “Dagworth”</td>
<td>1824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>of “Merton”</td>
<td>1820s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>of Bridgeman</td>
<td>1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Institutions</td>
<td>Singleton Girls/Boys Home</td>
<td>1905, transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Institutions</td>
<td>Singleton Superior School</td>
<td>1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Institutions</td>
<td>Mount Olive Aboriginal School (37-3-20)</td>
<td>No date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1. Rich mentions Glennies Creek reserve as a separate site; however original title deeds show Glennies Creek reserve to be an extension of St Clair Reserve’s original grant (Figure 4.2).
A ‘gap analysis’ prepared for the Upper Hunter in 2004 (ERM Pty Ltd 2004:133) identified a number of cultural heritage sites that are listed on the SHI and SHR for their European heritage values that ‘have no recognition of their shared Aboriginal heritage values’. These sites are listed in Table 2, and along with a number of other locations in the landscape mentioned in the historical records, they are mapped in Figure 5. A summary of the historical data compiled in 2004 to support this map is reproduced in Appendix 1.

These places, with a focus on a targeted selection of the project homesteads, are evaluated in further detail in a series of additional supporting documents that augment our understanding of the Aboriginal archaeological, environmental and historic heritage values of these places. A rationale that underpins this mapping is provided below (ERM Pty Ltd 2004:125):

‘The historical records indicate that places, which were favourable for European occupation were the same places which Aboriginal people found favourable. Early towns such as Aberdeen, Scone and Singleton as well as areas where homesteads were constructed are places where Aboriginal people are documented historically as having camped on at the time of contact with the presumption that this occupation had occurred prior to Europeans arriving in the area. A similar situation is identified with the establishment of Aboriginal missions and reserves. Redbournberry Reserve and St Clair were both occupied by aboriginal people prior to their establishment as Aboriginal reserves. It is not surprising that conditions such as the location of freshwater sources, available food resources and well drained land that Europeans favoured for habitation were also favoured by Aboriginal people. The following table provides a list of areas that are documented in the historical (both primary and secondary sources) records. These places may have some archaeological potential today, although the specifics of where Aboriginal people camped is often missing, there is an insight into the patterning of occupation’.

Aboriginal Landuse & Predicting Heritage Site Locations

Modelling Prehistoric Aboriginal Archaeological Site Distributions

A number of speculations exist in the nineteenth century literature for where and why Aboriginal people chose specific locations for their ‘camps’. For example, Fawcett (1898:152) noted that ‘proximity to fresh water was one essential, some food supply a second, whilst a vantage ground in case of attack from an enemy was a third important item.’ Other than similar generalisations like these, there is not much direct historical evidence that explain Aboriginal campsite (or activity) location preferences across the Hunter Valley.

Ongoing archaeological research in the region, both through survey and excavation, has now been carried out to a level that can assist in predicting the likely patterns of movement of people through the landscape and how people used the land in the past, and thereby providing clues as to where and what types of archaeological evidence of this is likely to be encountered in different landscapes.
Table 2: Historical Heritage Sites Listed for European Values with Shared Aboriginal Heritage Values (ERM Pty Ltd 2004:133-134).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of item</th>
<th>Listing</th>
<th>Primary Address</th>
<th>Aboriginal heritage significance (not listed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cassilis Station Homestead</td>
<td>State Heritage Inventory</td>
<td>Merriwa Road, Merriwa</td>
<td>Known place for Aboriginal camping during contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invermain House and petrified stump (listed as house and residential buildings)</td>
<td>State Heritage Inventory Hunter Regional Environmental Plan Register of the National Estate (registered early settlement homestead)</td>
<td>Moobi Road, Scone NSW 2337</td>
<td>Known place for Aboriginal camping during contact and post contact, also area of employment for Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry and was also the home of James Noble, the first Aboriginal Anglican minister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merton</td>
<td>State Heritage Register</td>
<td>Jerrys Plains Road, Denman</td>
<td>Known place for Aboriginal camping during contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segenhoe and Outbuildings (listed as built item)</td>
<td>State Heritage Inventory Regional Environmental Plan Register of the National Estate (registered early settlement homestead)</td>
<td>Segenhoe Road, Scone, NSW 2337</td>
<td>Known place for Aboriginal camping during contact and post contact, also area of employment for Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornthwaite</td>
<td>State Heritage Inventory Hunter REP</td>
<td>Upper Dartbrook Road, Scone, NSW 2337</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original buildings</td>
<td>State Heritage Inventory</td>
<td>Ogilvie, Virginia Streets, Denman, NSW 2328</td>
<td>Known place for Aboriginal camping during contact and post contact, also area of employment for Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry. Also well know due to early incidences of interaction between Mrs Ogilvy and local Aboriginal people and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (Cont): Historical Heritage Sites Listed for European Values which also have Shared Aboriginal Heritage Values (ERM Pty Ltd 2004:133-134).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of item</th>
<th>Listing</th>
<th>Primary Address</th>
<th>Aboriginal heritage significance (not listed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Redbourneberry Bridge</td>
<td>State Heritage Inventory</td>
<td>Redbourneberry Road, Redbourneberry, NSW</td>
<td>for acts of violence between different Aboriginal groups post contact. Below Redbourneberry Bridge was the Redbourneberry Reserve an important contact site for Aboriginal peoples and also documented as being a camping ground prior to European settlement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glendon &amp; outbuildings</td>
<td>State Heritage Inventory Register of the National Estate – Registered Place</td>
<td>Glendon, Singleton</td>
<td>Known place for Aboriginal camping during contact and post contact, also area of employment for Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelvinside, outbuildings and surrounds</td>
<td>Register of the National Estate – Registered Place</td>
<td>Rouchel Road, Aberdeen, NSW</td>
<td>Site of important Bora ground.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Searches were carried on-line on the 3rd March, 2004. References for Column 4 are made throughout the thematic history section of this report.
A number of Aboriginal occupation models have been proposed for the Central Lowlands region of the Hunter Valley in particular. For example, it has been suggested that (AMBS 2002:24):

‘It appears that, in the Upper Hunter Valley, the creek valley floors of the Central Lowlands formed the focus of residential base occupation. Sequential positioning of foraging radii along these creek valleys over several millennia would have resulted in a continuous archaeological distribution close to creeks reflecting domestic and maintenance activities in a residential base context. Archaeological evidence on the upper slopes, ridge lines and less domestically amenable areas up to several kilometres from the residential base would reflect resource gathering activity locations. The commonly reported pattern of archaeological evidence in the Upper Hunter whereby artefact distributions are concentrated close to creeks and highly dispersed away from the creeks can be explained by this model’.

In broad terms, the nature of past occupation that may be reflected by most archaeological sites can potentially reflect a variety of circumstances:

- Transitory movement.
- Hunting and/or gathering (without camping).
- Camping by small hunting and/or gathering parties.
- Nuclear/extended family base camps.
- Community base camps.
- Larger congregations of groups.
- Ceremonial activity.

The archaeological evidence could also represent a single episode or multiple episodes of one or more of the above types of occupation or activity. The episodes of occupation could have occurred at different times over the entire occupation time-span in the region. Each episode of occupation could likewise also have been for a different duration of time. Unless the archaeological evidence for individual activity events is readily apparent, it can be complex to establish the likely types of occupation/activity represented, the number of episodes in evidence, and the times and duration represented by the evidence at any given site. In this regard, open sites in the Hunter Valley are often mixed as a result of landuse (post-depositional) processes and the superimposition of archaeological materials by repeated episodes of occupation.

With the above types of occupation events in mind, a model of Aboriginal occupation that could be applied to both the Central Lowlands and the lower regions of the Hunter River catchment has been developed by Kuskie and Kamminga (2000) based on site location and excavation data from across the region. The data in Table 3 has been adapted by MDCA (2004:26) from this model, and provides an indication of the types of archaeological expectations that could be anticipated in different archaeological landuse and landscape circumstances. This model is archaeologically testable, through both survey and particularly excavation, and could be reasonably applied at some levels to post-Contact Aboriginal heritage sites.
Table 3: An Aboriginal Occupation Model for the Central Lowlands and the Lower Hunter (MDCA 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation Pattern</th>
<th>Activity Location</th>
<th>Proximity to Water</th>
<th>Proximity to Food</th>
<th>Archaeological Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transitory Movement</td>
<td>All Landscape Zones, often on Ridge and Spur Crests, watercourses and Valley Flats</td>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>Assemblages of low density &amp; diversity Evidence of Tool Maintenance &amp; Repair Evidence for Stone Knapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter and/or Gathering without Camping</td>
<td>All Landscape Zones</td>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>Nearby Reliable Source</td>
<td>Assemblages of low density &amp; diversity Evidence of Tool Maintenance &amp; Repair Evidence for Stone Knapping High Frequency of Used Tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camping by Small Groups</td>
<td>Frequently associated with Permanent &amp; Temporary Water</td>
<td>Nearby</td>
<td>Nearby Reliable Source</td>
<td>Assemblages of Low to Moderate Density &amp; Diversity Evidence of Tool Maintenance &amp; Repair Evidence for Stone Knapping Hearths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Base Camps</td>
<td>Level or Undulating Ground</td>
<td>Nearby Reliable Source</td>
<td>Nearby Reliable Source</td>
<td>Assemblages of High Density &amp; Diversity Evidence of Tool Maintenance &amp; Repair &amp; Casual Knapping Heat Treatment Pits, Stone-Lined Ovens Grindstones &amp; Ochre Evidence of Heat Treatment Unlikely Large Area &lt;100sqm with Isolated Campsites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Modelling Prehistoric Aboriginal Archaeological Site Distributions

Types of Post Contact Camps and their Place in the Landscape

Dangar’s surveys and mapping used an arbitrary cadastral grid that was centred along the ‘spines’ of the main river and creek systems across the Hunter Valley which was laid over a complex Aboriginal landscape. It quickly created a way for large European pastoral estates, some over 3,000 acres in size, to be established. Each of the ‘selected’ homestead sites in c.1820 contained a diversity of different land units that included in places rugged and rounded hills, river and creek flats, and old river terraces. Each of these in turn will also have had their own features of soil and vegetation that would have supported a range of animal and plant resources.

Some of the landforms contained within each individual but contiguous blocks of land along the river and creek frontages will have included places that initially lay ‘outside’ of the lands that were of first European agricultural interest. Some of these discrete environments (such on elevated hills or along the margins of lower swamps and wetlands situated away from the first homesteads and convict accommodation and work stations) are likely to have represented places that Aboriginal people may have been able to use and move through during the first periods of European settlement that constituted ‘gaps in the grid’ of settler landholding.

Byrne and Nugent (2004) have examined an Aboriginal historical approach to looking at how Biripi people who lived to the north of the Hunter around Forster-Tuncurry and Taree on the Manning River may have adapted to a colonial-settler society from the 1830s that appears to be broadly applicable to the current project area. In doing so, this model provides a framework for examining what archaeological correlates may be associated with this type of early to mid nineteenth century Aboriginal landuse history.

Although the Biripi study incorporates a longer Aboriginal history that continues into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century’s, the following Aboriginal ‘site types’ (adapted from Byrne and Nugent 2004) can be reasonably inferred to have existed on the lands associated with some of the project homesteads in so far as Aboriginal people are documented to have ‘lived’ and/or frequently used places such as the Ogilvie’s land at Merton into the 1850s. Two hypothetical Aboriginal landscape use and occupation examples (pre-Contact and historic) are presented here as Figures 6 and 7 (from DEC 2006) as a visual illustration for how the documented and potential Aboriginal archaeological resources across the project area could in the future be viewed and interpreted.

Autonomous Camps

Byrne and Nugent suggest these types of locations would have been chosen mainly in relation to the needs and desires of Aboriginal people, whereby such camps may have been in occasional or cyclical use for thousands of years. They may have been remote from white settlement (including specific property homesteads) and as such chosen partly in order to get away from white ‘interference and surveillance’. These site types are likely to have been more common in the nineteenth century and to
have been located on land not yet surveyed or ‘taken up’ by whites. These authors suggest a
tendency for these early post-Contact camps may be observed to be located on landscape spurs
which inter-finger with alluvial plains, and also to be located on well drained high ground close to
water sources. The implication is that these ‘autonomous’ camps were located in the sort of places
Aboriginal people had always favoured rather than being located in relation to white settlement.

Farm Camps

These are Aboriginal camps that were located either on or adjacent to white farms and pastoral
stations and would reflect interdependence between Aboriginal and white people. Given the size of
some of the early estates in the project area, they could both have been situated close to the main
documented homestead sites or smaller but related properties that included ‘shepherd stations’ and
other convict/free labour places. Aboriginal people were attracted by the availability of European
foods and other products, while the supporting homestead analyses documents illustrate that in some
cases settlers were dependent and/or frequently used Aboriginal labour.

Pocket Camps

These were independent of any specific white farm or station, their locations determined by the
availability of those ‘pockets’ of vacant land existing within the mosaic of white settlement (e.g. water
reserves, town/village commons, travelling stock routes, reserves for roads not yet constructed or in
use). Many of these camps, at least to the north and west of the project area, came into existence in
the 1850s-70s after Aboriginal people found the most productive parts of their country had been taken
up by white settlers. They were often places where Aboriginal people themselves decided to try their
hand at farming.

In the late nineteenth century in the Hunter (around Singleton in particular) some of these were
designated as Aboriginal Reserves in acknowledgment of their existing use by Aboriginal people.
They were sometimes located centrally to a number of white farms which required occasional
Aboriginal labour. These were common in the nineteenth century; some existed in the first half of the
twentieth century.

Fringe Camps

The term is commonly used in relation to camps specifically located on the edges of and sometimes
‘inside’ villages and towns. As with ‘pocket camps’ these types of places appear to normally have
located on land reserved for various other purposes (such as water reserves and town commons etc).
Frequently the women and girls in these camps were employed as domestics by white townspeople.
Byrne and Nugent note that in many parts of NSW (including Sydney and towns in the Hunter), fringe
camps were established from the very moment that towns and villages came into being and existed
into the 1950s and 60s at which point Aboriginal housing cooperatives and the State Housing
Commission began providing houses for Aboriginal people in towns (the latter as part of the
assimilation policy).
References


Baker, N. 1994a. Archaeological Testing of the RZM Pty Ltd Plant 9 Planned Sand Mine Run adjacent to Moffats Swamp, Richmond Road, Medowie. Report to RZM.


Koettig, M. 1987. Monitoring Excavations at Three Locations along the Singleton to Glennies Creek Pipeline Route, Hunter Valley, NSW. Unpublished Report to Public Works Department, NSW.


MDCA. 2004. Aboriginal Archaeological Assessment Lots 1, 2 & 3 DP 1015170 & Lot 1 DP577474 Aberglasslyn Road, Aberglasslyn, NSW. Report to Pulver Cooper & Blackley Pty Limited.


Figures

Figure 1: Aboriginal Archaeology at Ravensworth Mine.

Figure 2: The ‘Ravensworth Estate in 1837 and the Ravensworth Mine Today.

Figure 3: Milbrodale Rock Shelter.

Figure 4: Suspected Location of the ‘Bulga Bora Ground’ at Warkworth.

Figure 5: Aboriginal Places Identified from Historical Documents.

Figure 6: A Hypothetical Pre Contact Aboriginal Settlement Pattern.

Figure 7: A Hypothetical Settlement Pattern of an Aboriginal Historic Landscape.
Figure 1: Aboriginal Archaeology at Ravensworth Mine (Source: Umwelt Australia Pty Ltd 2011).
Figure 2: The ‘Ravensworth Estate in 1837 and the Ravensworth Mine Today (Source: Umwelt Australia Pty Ltd 2011).
Figure 3: Milbrodale Rock Shelter (Source: Ford 2010:323).
Figure 4: Suspected Location of the 'Bulga Bora Ground' at Warkworth (Source: Central Queensland Cultural Heritage Management 2010).
Figure 5: Aboriginal Places Identified from Historical Documents (Source: ERM Pty Ltd 2004).
Figure 6: A Hypothetical Pre Contact Aboriginal Settlement Pattern (Source: DEC 2006).
Figure 7: A Hypothetical Settlement Pattern of an Aboriginal Historic Landscape (Source: DEC 2006).
Appendix 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Relevance</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>The location of where the 'principal tribe' at the Hunter was Bridges, W. (1927), known to have inhabited at various times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulga</td>
<td>1852 and before settlement by farmers</td>
<td>The location of where the last Bora ceremony is believed to have taken place in 1852. Between 500 and 600 Aboriginal people from Alexander Furzer Papers (1852) and many tribes as far Mudgee and Goulburn attended. Used by the article the ground was still defined by small mounds of earth and a ring of carved trees.</td>
<td>Macleod Morgan, H.A. (1958).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumalogue near Belltrees</td>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Located circa 9 miles upstream from Belltrees, settled by the Sutherland, R.J. (1869). Carter family in 1850. An Aboriginal camp was situated less than a quarter of a mile from the house. Two other camps existed further up the brook, close to one of which, evidence for digging for yams could still be seen in 1869 according to the author.</td>
<td>Sutherland, R.J. (1869).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlington &amp; Patrick's Plains</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>60 blankets were sent here for distribution to Aboriginal peoples.</td>
<td>“Australian Aborigines – Civilization &amp; treatment 1835”, Mitchell Library, NSW Card Indexed Catalogue reference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darbyook</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Darbyook is the location where the 'principal tribe' of the Hunter Bridges, W. (1927), known to have inhabited at various times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dartbrook</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>Once the territory of the &quot;Panin-Pkilal&quot; tribe. Edward Ogilvie Wood, A. (1972). camping here in 1854 to find only 6 men left of that tribe including &quot;Coclan&quot; whose father had been king of that tribe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dartbrook</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>A &quot;Mr Vise&quot; recalls tribal fights between the Aboriginal people of Smith, A.E. (1929). Mr Thomas Hall from Dartbrook fighting the Aboriginal people from the Ogilvie's from Muswellbrook &quot;in the vicinity of the local Chinamen's gardens&quot;. Each with &quot;fifty or sixty aside&quot;.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glendon</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Glendon is recorded as the centre of the territory inhabited by the Finas &amp; Howit, (1880). Caerne-gal tribe. Their territory extending 25-30 miles either side along the valley. They had close connections with the &quot;Nattlind Aborigines, less so with the Patterson River tribe and even rarer with the Muswell Brook tribe&quot;.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gowrie Station</td>
<td>c. 1890s</td>
<td>A &quot;Mr White&quot; recalls Aboriginal people camping regularly on McCarthy, P.D. &amp; P.A. Davidson (1943). 210-210, various parts of the station. The same people were also known to go to Singleton for blankets and food among c.300 Aboriginal people from the surrounding country.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gundy</td>
<td>Pre 1867</td>
<td>A site occupied by an Aboriginal camp where in 1867 St Matthew's Green 1959 (?). Church was erected. Local Aboriginal dialect's meaning of &quot;Gundy&quot; is a &quot;camping place&quot;. The Aboriginal inhabitants moved two miles up the river to the site of Willis's Hill. In 1872, Billy Murphy was granted permission to occupy certain sections to the north of the village.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gundy</td>
<td>Not given</td>
<td>&quot;At the foot of the Lagoon Mountain, to the north of Gundy, there Green, W.C. (1969). It is an area of more or less level ground, which the Aboriginal people called &quot;Gundy Gandy&quot; or &quot;the big camp&quot;.&quot; An Aboriginal camp was once located at the site now occupied by St Matthew's church, the Literary Institute, Soldier Memorial Hall and the public school. The camp was moved to the location of Willis's Hill.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invermein</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>100 blankets were sent here for distribution to Aboriginal peoples. Australian Aboriginals - Civilization &amp; treatment 1835&quot;, Mitchell Library, NSW Card Indexed Catalogue reference.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invermein, Stone</td>
<td>1880's</td>
<td>Aboriginal boys were employed by the Doyle's at the station. Doyle (1969)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelvinside</td>
<td>(Rouavel, No date given)</td>
<td>Bora ground, the trees at this site were still there in 1877 and the circular ring of 100 yards in Bridges, W. (1927). The area was covered by cattle-yards. Out of use 50 years prior to 1927.</td>
<td>Brayshaw, H. (2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelvinside</td>
<td>(Rouavel, before 1927)</td>
<td>Possible site of Bora ground - circular ring of 100 yards in Bridges, W. (1927). The area is covered by cattle-yards. Out of use 50 years prior to 1927.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulland &amp; Wolombi</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>100 blankets were sent here for distribution to Aboriginal peoples Australian Aboriginals - Civilization &amp; treatment 1835&quot;, Mitchell Library, NSW Card Indexed Catalogue reference.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merton</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>50 blankets were sent here for distribution to Aboriginal peoples</td>
<td>Australian Aborigines - Civilisation &amp; treatment 1835*, Mitchell Library, NSW Card Indexed Catalogue reference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muswellbrook</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td>A 'Mr Vine' recalls tribal fights between the Aboriginal groups of Smith, A.F. (edi). 1930.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Thomas Hall from Dartbrook fighting Ogilvie's Aboriginal group from Muswellbrook &quot;in the vicinity of the local Chinamen's gardens&quot;. Each with &quot;fifty or sixty aside&quot;.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nectar Bank, near Gundy</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Mr Alexander Campbell's property, where 'King Jacky and Queen Mitchell, E. (1869). Biddy's tribe' were known to have camped.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nectar Bank/Nalaban</td>
<td>No date</td>
<td>A camping ground near Gundy, used after the arrival of white Brasilhaw, H. (2001). settlers - just north of the main part of the village and over the river. From here it is recorded that people also visited Dartbrook and the Page and Isis Rivers. Some individuals lived here over some years and worked in the area.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page River, near Gundy</td>
<td>between 1863 and 1927 (unspec)</td>
<td>Government land settled by the 'last' of the Aborigines (around 50 Bridges, W. (1927). individuals) on the hummer river, known as &quot;Yellow Billy's farm&quot;. The land was later held by a Mr John Pilkington</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paterson</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>40 blankets were sent here for distribution to Aboriginal peoples</td>
<td>Australian Aborigines - Civilisation &amp; treatment 1835*, Mitchell Library, NSW Card Indexed Catalogue reference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Vale, near Beletrees</td>
<td>1866</td>
<td>Settled by Robert Carter and his wife Jane, gave employment to Sutherland, R.J. (1969-8). “Ned Carlo”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segenhoe</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>where the 'principal tribe' at the Hunter was known to have Bridges, W. (1927). inhabited at various times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singleton</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>“Blacks” (sic) from Maitland receiving asylum from the Tat sensen Sydney Herald, (1841). blacks” (sic) who were at war with them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singleton town common/Redbourneberry hill/Redbourneberry Bridge</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>This place was used as an Aboriginal camp in 1862. The Walters Clayworth, D. (1997). were known to have resided here in from at least 1889 until 1909/10 when they returned to St Clair because their children were excluded from the public school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Clair</td>
<td>1906-10</td>
<td>The Walters family is known to have lived here in the late 19th Clayworth, D. (1997). century, and again after 1909/10.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Clair</td>
<td>1851-1923</td>
<td>1851 - Maitland Mercury reports Aboriginal people living on the St Singleton Times Newsletter (1992). site. 1879 - Singleton Angus reports blankets being distributed there to Aboriginal people. 1903 - Opening of the mission church on the 25th of July. 1904 - Rita Dixon was appointed as full time resident missioner. 1923 - mission closed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Clair</td>
<td>Late 19th</td>
<td>Tom Phillips (possibly of Wurrami descent is known to have farmed Heath, J. (1997). at the mission in the late 19th Century</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>century</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Clair - Singleton</td>
<td>between 1863 and 1927</td>
<td>Rev. Dr White's property - where Aboriginal people from Bridges, W. (1927). Dartbrook and Page migrated. A church and school was established on the property.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewarts Brook</td>
<td>before 1925</td>
<td>Where 'Albert', son of King Davey resided with Messrs Carter Bridges, W. (1927). Brothers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willis's Hill</td>
<td>post 1887</td>
<td>At the foot of which, on the flat, Aboriginal people from Gundy Green, W.C. 1959 (2). were moved here after the erection of St Matthew's church at the site of their original homes at Gundy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Summary of the 1828 Census & Annual Blanket Returns in the Hunter Valley: c.1827 to 1844

Introduction

Governor Macquarie initiated the official distribution of blankets to Aboriginal people in 1814. It was hoped that by providing these items, that were occasionally supplemented with other ‘slop’ clothing and victuals, that Aboriginal people would as the ‘settled districts’ expanded be encouraged in their ‘civilised habits and cooperation’ with white settlers. From the late 1820s up to the mid 1840s blankets were sent annually from Sydney to the Hunter Valley, sometimes produced and supplied through private tender, to be distributed to Aboriginal people on the Queen’s Birthday (1st of May) by local magistrates and police constables.

In some cases, where available records identify, blankets and rations were also provided to Aboriginal people directly by some of the larger individual property owners in the Hunter such as the Ogilvie’s at Merton, the Scott’s at Glendon, George Wyndham at Dalwood, George Hobler at Aberglasslyn, Charles Boydell at Camyr Allyn, and Gregory Blaxland at his property at Fordwich. Historical records also suggest such items were likewise provided to Aboriginal people at other project homesteads including Segenhoe and Invermein during the period.

Over time Aboriginal people came to depend on the issue of blankets and rations from Government as their lands were increasingly taken up by white settlers that prevented them from pursuing traditional food-gathering, hunting, fishing and other cultural practices. Animal skin cloaks were one form of protection Aboriginal people had from the elements, particularly in winter. They were made from kangaroo, wallaby and possum skins, and some are recorded to have been created from up to 80 individual animal pelts that may have taken people over 12 months to acquire and fashion together. These cloaks, and other items such as intricate belts, waistbands, armbands and headbands, thereby involved not only a significant investment of Aboriginal people’s time and expertise in customary methods of trapping, preparation and decoration, but they also played an important role in their distribution within complex reciprocal trade networks that linked different groups of Aboriginal people across both the Hunter Valley and also over greater distances extending into Victoria and Queensland.

The same cloaks were also highly valued by the first European settlers in the Valley, and continued to be collected where they were made by Aboriginal people into the second half of the nineteenth century. One example such example (which is held in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington) was collected by in 1839 by American explorer Charles Wilkes during his meeting with Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld and Biraban (M’Gill) at Lake Macquarie. There are only six other nineteenth century possum skin cloaks which are known to survive in museum or private collections.
Historical accounts describe the clothing Aboriginal people wore at Contact, and also how particular types of materials were used for decoration and carrying equipment. The women of ‘Gammon Plains’ (the Merriwa district) for example were seen to wear loose kangaroo and possum skin cloaks with ‘no little neatness’ (Breton 1833:19), while a Marowancal Aboriginal man (called ‘our chief Jerry’ by Mary Ogilvie) who was involved in a significant historical event in 1826 at the Ogilvie’s property at Merton was described to have worn a possum skin rug with strips of fur extending down around his waist (Brayshaw 1986:67). Dawson (1830:115-116) also described men in Port Stephens wearing possum skin belts on which they hung ‘waddies and tomahawks’ and with kangaroo bones in their hair that acted as ‘combs’. These men explained to Dawson that ‘opossums are more numerous inland than they are near the coast, and this is the reason why such an exchange took place’.

Miller (1985) provides contemporary examples that place in context how these important animal food and raw material resources quickly became scarce and/or increasingly difficult to access by Aboriginal people from c.1820. Thomas Mitchell, while travelling in Falbrook in 1831 observed ‘the kangaroos and wallabies had become very scarce’, while a Dungog magistrate (E.M. McKinley) later described in 1845 that ‘the ordinary means of subsistence had diminished on account of the brushes having been cleared, which native game and vegetables formerly abounded in and were easily obtained.’ A further example is provided by a survey commissioned by the Select Committee of the Legislative Council in 1845 into the effects ‘contact’ with white settlers had on Aboriginal people in the Hunter Valley. The observation by Reverend George Middleton of Morpeth in 1846 provides insights into the deterioration of Aboriginal people’s circumstances, and also highlights a number of themes that are examined in supporting documents that deal with Aboriginal interactions illustrated in the histories of homesteads including Ravensworth, Merton, Segenhoe, Invermein and Aberglasslyn. When asked by the Committee to answer such questions as ‘what is their actual condition and means of subsistence? and ‘has their ordinary means of subsistence diminished, and if so, what part of it, and from the causes?, Middleton replied (from Sokoloff 2006:75):

‘Their ordinary means of subsistence has seriously diminished, and is daily diminishing; this is attributable to two causes, - first a general clearance of brushes; secondly the drainage of lagoon. The kangaroos, long since, sought the protection of the neighbouring mountains.’

To account for the ‘expenditure’ on blankets provided to Aboriginal people, Government officials created ‘Blanket lists’ or ‘returns’ that recorded Aboriginal people’s ‘English name’, ‘native name’, probable age, number of wives, children, their ‘tribe’, and their ‘District of Usual Resort’. Police and magistrates were also to report annually on the ‘conditions’ of the Aboriginal people in their districts. These returns were not regularly kept, and in most cases are not overly detailed for the Hunter Valley. However, while the records necessarily represent a ‘westernised’ view of Aboriginal culture, they do provide a valuable base that can be used in combination with other lines of evidence to examine the nature of Aboriginal and European interactions in different places during the study period. Three issues in particular are highlighted in this review:
Firstly, historical evidence suggests some elevated ‘hinterland’ areas that initially lay outside of the lands of first European agricultural interest on the Valley floor are likely to have represented a type of landscape that Aboriginal people may have taken ‘refuge’ in during the earliest periods of European settlement that constituted ‘gaps’ in the grid of settler landholding that people could have used and moved through in an increasingly colonised landscape from the c.1820s. As described below, Mt Johnstone may have been one such example that can be inferred from the 1828 Census returns. Another type of ‘fringe’ landform Aboriginal people may have continued to occupy at the edges of settled lands were the large swamp and wetlands that were dominant features of some of intensely settled areas such as the Paterson Valley. Lake Paterson as an example was one of the most significant wetland complexes at Contact and covered virtually all the eastern side of the Paterson River within the flood plain. This wetland was progressively drained for agricultural purposes from the 1820s and now little evidence of it remains.

Secondly, the records also document one aspect of a gradual process of what some researchers sometimes describe as Aboriginal people ‘coming in’, whereby people gravitated towards individual European homesteads that had been established on and/or near their traditional lands, and who also over time began to increasingly ‘settle’ within or on the ‘fringes’ of the developing towns across the Hunter Valley such as at Muswellbrook, Singleton, Paterson, Dungog, Gresford, and Scone. These records also suggest that some Aboriginal groups were able to maintain a level of ‘autonomy’ for longer in places such as around Gloucester, Merriwa, and Cassilis for example by virtue of the slower and more dispersed European settlement history of these lands, and because the often rugged valley and ridged landscapes were not the focus of initial European agricultural interest beyond the creation of relatively isolated sheep runs.

Thirdly, the blanket returns also provide in particular, after their distribution to people was for a period discontinued by the Government from 1845, a contemporary ‘Aboriginal’ voice that show how this bureaucratic decision directly affected people’s lives that is often lost amongst the larger volume of Government correspondence that documents how the Government approached their dealings with the ‘Aboriginal question’ when it became clear Aboriginal population numbers were declining as a result of a complex interplay of factors including disease, conflict, and social fragmentation.

The 1828 Census

Where Were Aboriginal People Recorded in 1827?

In April 1827 when records were compiled for the 1828 Census approximately 40,000 white people (minus military and their families) occupied the settled districts of NSW, and approximately 3,000 Aboriginal people were counted to be amongst that population. These figures were gathered by the
Colonial Secretary via a Circular (No.19) sent to Benches of Magistrates by Alexander McLeay (AONSW 4/2045) that read:

‘I am directed to inform you that is His Excellency’s intention to issue Blankets and Slops to the Black Natives on the 23rd of next month in commemoration of His Majesty’s Birthday, and in order that a suitable quantity of those articles may be immediately forwarded to you for distribution, I have to request that you let me know as soon as possible for His Excellency’s information the number of the aborigines in your District, distinguishing the several tribes, and the number of Men, Women, and Children belonging to each tribe respectively’.

The ‘Aboriginal returns’ that were received at this time for the Hunter Valley are summarised below (from Sainty & Johnson 1985).

**Table 1: Aboriginal People Living in the Hunter in 1827.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe &amp; District in Which they Reside</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wallis Plains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Names of tribes not stated</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paterson’s Plains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Old Settlers Tribe</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- William’s River Tribe</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mount Johnson Tribe</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick’s Plains and Luskintyre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Names of tribes not stated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>about 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter River</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Names of tribes not stated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>about 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Coal River Tribe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ash Island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reid’s Mistake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tugrah Beach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangaroo Ground</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Stephens (Only part of it)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No accurate records exist for how many Aboriginal people lived across the Hunter Valley before Europeans first arrived at the Coal River at the turn of the nineteenth century. Likewise, there are no reliable ways to estimate the size of the Aboriginal population and its distribution when the landscape was rapidly settled by Europeans from c.1820. In addition, the records we do have derive from a time
when Aboriginal life had been severely disrupted, and it is important to note that by this time the ‘fabric of their society [had been] altered in such a way that no Europeans actually saw the fully traditional Aboriginal life’ (Brayshaw 1986:47). Nevertheless, the table above does reveal through the names of the ‘tribes’ recorded for specific places around Newcastle and at Paterson’s Plains for example where Aboriginal people were ‘counted’ and who presumably received blankets in 1827 that contributes to the project analysis in a number of ways that are explained below.

Newcastle and Lake Macquarie

The ‘numerous Natives with whom we are on the most friendly terms’ referred to by Lt. Menzies at Newcastle in 1804 (Historical Records of Australia 14 May 1804:411-412) had been living in the same place with Europeans for 30 years after Lt William Shortland had first visited the Coal River on his way to Port Stephens in 1797 at the time the census was taken. The use of the Aboriginal reference names marked on Dangar’s 1828 map of Newcastle (see Figure 1) illustrate the area continued to be a ‘shared landscape’ which was recognised by Dangar’s surveyors in 1822.

On this map, Tahlbihn is marked near today’s Fort Scratchley, Burrabihngarn referred to what the Europeans first named ‘Pirate Point’ (now Stockton), and Corrumbah is shown as a large island in the mouth of the Hunter (Coquun) River named first ‘Chapman’ and then ‘Bullock’ Island before the current name of Carrington became commonplace. As indicated in Figure 2, Toormbing Creek is today’s Iron-Bark Creek, and Burraghihnbihgng refers to Hexham Swamp which was part of the core territory of the Pambalong, or sometimes referred to in the historical records as the ‘Big Swamp Tribe’. Pambalong land is believed to have extended from approximately Newcastle West along the southern bank of the Hunter River, through Hexham to Buttai, and across to the foothills of Mount Sugarloaf to the northern tip of Lake Macquarie (Maynard 2000).

In June 1801, Grant (1803 [1973]:153) described the area where his party had found coal at ‘Collier’s Point’ that provides an image of how the current City of Newcastle may have looked like at the time:

‘The spot where these coals are found is clear of tree or bush for the space of many acres, which are covered with a short tender grass, very proper for grazing sheep, the ground rising with a gradual ascent, intersected with vallies, on which wood grows in plenty, sheltered from the winds, forming the most delightful prospects’.

Ash Island was at Contact one of a number of islands (others being ‘Mosheto’, ‘Dempsey’ and ‘Split’ Islands) that were surrounded with extensive mangrove mudflats that today as a result of significant landscape changes form part of the larger Kooragang Island. The original islands have a long history of Aboriginal occupation, and it is possible that Awabakal and Worimi people may have regarded them as ‘common ground’ whereby the river was used as a transport and communication corridor between their respective core territories.

Grant (ibid:154) description of the vegetation on these islands drew attention to a tree ‘the quality of whose timber resembles that of the ash’ (after which Ash Island was named) and ‘many large timber
trees’ including a ‘Nettle Tree’. The southern side of the river in this part of the estuary was ‘lowland scrub’ with swampy land covered in Ti-tree, ferns, and honey-suckle. At ‘six miles from the harbour entrance’ Grant ‘found the woods here to abound with trees affording a light timber, and great quantities of the cabbage tree (palm) some of which last I felled to try the eatable quantity of it’ (ibid:160), and several miles up from the mouth of the river his party cut cedar ‘which was growing in abundance on the banks of that river, of a large size, and excellent quality …’ (ibid:152-3).

The distinction between the ‘Coal River Tribe’ and Aboriginal people from (or with attachment to) Ash Island in 1827 is interesting in so far as it was granted to Alexander Walker Scott as part of a larger 2,500 acre parcel of land in the same year. From 1831 Scott and his family shared their time between the island and other properties in the Hunter and Sydney (Australian Dictionary of Biography 2012). It is not known when Aboriginal people may have been forced to stop ‘camping’ or otherwise using Ash Island before and/or at the time the land was granted to Scott, but the rich resources provided by the estuary is likely to have attracted people to remain in the area and continue fishing and shell fish gathering for some after c.1800. For the people who formed part of groups who were recorded as the Ash Island and Coal River ‘tribes’ in 1827, The Monitor (28 June 1828) reported in 1828 that:

‘As the Prisoners have been newly clothed for the winter, so the Blacks of Newcastle shared the like good fortune, by receiving, the men a red serge shirt of excellent quality, and the women a new woollen English rug each, the bounty of the Colonial Government’.

The comparatively large number of Aboriginal people who lived on the coast around Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, and who appear to have comprised quite distinct groups, is also reflected by the 1827 returns from ‘Reid’s Mistake’. The headland at Swansea was known at this time as Reid’s Mistake after Captain William Reid who in 1800 was the first European recorded to have entered Lake Macquarie. Sent from Sydney to collect coal from the mouth of the Hunter River, Reid mistook the channel into the Lake for the Hunter River estuary. Here, Aboriginal people directed him to other coal seams that were embedded in the headland. It was only following his return to Sydney that his ‘mistake’ was recognised.

Part of the land at Lake Macquarie (renamed after Governor Macquarie in 1826) was chosen by Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld for his ‘mission’ in c.1825 after observing that it was a gathering point for Aboriginal people who were drawn by the living conditions and the food resources it provided, and the ‘mission house’ he named ‘Bahtahbah’ was located on a rise overlooking Belmont Bay and which was initially connected to Newcastle by a rough ‘dray track’.

‘Tugrah Beach’ which is also recorded as a place where Aboriginal people were counted in 1827 most likely refers to lands around today’s Tuggerah Lakes. The area between these large coastal saltwater lake systems and the Hunter River is believed to have been part of the traditional lands of the Awabakal. Threlkeld described the boundaries of their country as ‘the land bounded by south Reid’s Mistake, the entrance to Lake Macquarie and north by Newcastle and Hunters River. West by Five Islands at the head of Lake Macquarie’. Threlkeld also wrote that ‘the natives here [the people
around Lake Macquarie] are connected in a kind of circle extending to the Hawkesbury and Port Stephens.’ This would see the boundary of Awabakal activity and interactions extending north and south well beyond Lake Macquarie and the Hunter River, although this does not necessarily imply that traditional Awabakal country extended to these areas (Umwelt Australia Pty Ltd 2011). Related clans were the Pambalong, Ash Island and Cooranbong groups (see Figure 3).

Historical records described Aboriginal camps around the Lakes comprising eight or nine huts, each large enough for six to eight people, and people shellfish gathering around the lake foreshores and fishing using lines, spears and tidal weirs. Archaeological evidence of this occupation survives, with the oldest evidence dating back to c.11,000 years ago. The majority of sites are shell middens, and most are now disturbed as a result of historic landuse. Some large and deep middens, a few with associated burials, have also been recorded at Swansea and in Wallarah National Park at Pinney Beach. The latter is dated to around 800 years ago.

Where Aboriginal people in the landscape were counted at the ‘Kangaroo Ground’ in the 1827 is more difficult to reconstruct. However, within the context of the time when the census was made, it is plausible that it may have referred to a specific place inland from the coast and possibly separate from the ‘Lakes’, and also at a place located away from Wallis Plains, Paterson’s Plains, Patrick Plains and Luskintyre that are also separately listed in the census records. Other than places such as The Camp, Old Banks, and Seaham, historical references to where other large early main ‘cedar camps’ were located from c.1800 is limited.

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century records make frequent reference to ‘kangaroo grounds’. In Sydney for example, accounts from the late 1790s by people such as Watkin Tench (1979) referred to areas of land between Iron Cove and the Cooks River as the ‘Kangaroo Grounds’ where large numbers of kangaroos were seen to have gathered. Historical evidence indicates grassy areas such as these were likely to have been regularly maintained by Aboriginal people (by the use of fire) to encourage kangaroos and wallabies to visit and therefore make easier their spearing when they came to feed on young grass shoots and to find water. In this way these animals could be targeted where they were known to gather in a predictable (and managed) way.

The 1828 Census and Blanket Returns
Wallis Plains, Paterson’s Plains, Patrick Plains and Luskintyre

The Aboriginal population in some areas inland from the coast may also have been relatively large in the years preceding the 1828 census. For example, a settler at Patrick’s Plains in 1824 is recorded to have counted 300 able-bodied men (Wood 1972:16), and in October of the same year Henry Dangar’s exploration party on the crest of the Liverpool Range was attacked ‘and near cut off’ by an Aboriginal party possibly numbering 150 people. One of Dangar’s men was struck in the head by a spear before the group knew their attackers were near. This party eventually reached Bowman’s Ravensworth farm on Foy Brook (Bowman’s Creek), which in October 1824 was ‘the highest on
Hunter’s River’ (The Australian 23 December 1824). As previously noted, over 200 people were seen at Merton in April 1826, and the magistrates at Glendon (Robert Scott) and Luskintyre (Alexander McLeod) wrote in June 1826 (Brayshaw 1986:47) that the ‘Upper Districts of Hunter’s River, [were] principally occupied by Three Tribes, whose numbers we should suppose to exceed Five hundred’.

A number of things can be inferred from the 1828 Census, when correlated with later blanket returns for the period between 1833 and 1844 (see Table 2), by the subdivision of the ‘Paterson Plains’ records into those for people who were listed as belonging to the ‘Old Settlers Tribe’, the ‘William’s River Tribe’, and the ‘Mount Johnson Tribe’ in 1827.

It is probable that the ‘Old Settlers Tribe’ referred to Aboriginal people who had maintained an attachment to the lands where Macquarie had previously granted allotments in 1812 to a small number of convict settlers at Wallis Plains. At this time, small settlements had been developing around places that had originally been timber felling and distribution stations such as ‘The Camp’ located between East and West Maitland, at ‘Old Banks’ further to the north on the Paterson River, and at Seaham approximately 15km to the east on the Williams River. It is likely that the Aboriginal people who had lived in these places in c.1800 continued to live at and move between some of the larger European properties that were established in these landscapes by 1827. A visitor (‘X.Y.Z’) to the area reported in The Australian (3 February 1827) the following, and in doing so drew a comparison between the ‘state of ease and prosperity of the rich settlers’ that was apparent on some parts of the Paterson River, and those of lesser means:

‘The left bank of the river exhibits a number of small farms, in the occupation, for their natural lives only, of men who were formerly prisoners, and under Colonial sentences at Newcastle, who were allowed the indulgence of a hundred acres each. These prisoners’ farms are the oldest on Hunter’s River, but from the slovenly, and wretched appearance which they make, afford little encouragement to future Commandants, to adopt, a similar practice......Being desirous of seeing an old and esteemed friend, in whose literate habits, and polished society, I had often in Sydney been eager in participate, we crossed the river, and soon arrived at the First Branch, or what was anciently called Williams’ River, but, which is now best known by the name of First or Port Stephen’s Branch......A strong prejudice has always prevailed amongst the settlers, against the First Branch and I am inclined to think not without cause. As far as the navigation goes, there is little or no water for cattle; and when the river becomes fresh, you are in mountainous country not all adapted to grazing purposes’.

There are few direct historical references to Aboriginal people at Wallis Plains, or to specific locations on the Paterson or Williams Rivers, prior to c.1827. Evidence presented to the Bigge Commission indicates the first small European farms ‘clung’ to the bank of the rivers where the highest and best land was located on the levee banks. Their farms would have extended along the rivers rather than away from it because of the quality of the soil. ‘Gaps’ in the land along the waterfront at this time would have however still provided Aboriginal people access to resources.
The nature of Aboriginal and European interactions prior to c.1820 is best understood from the records available for Newcastle. The first Commandant, Lt. Menzies, appears to have created a relationship 'on the most friendly terms', assisted by Bungaree, who was victualled from the Government stores during the early months in the expectation that 'should a misunderstanding unfortunately take place he [Bungaree] will be sure to reconcile them' (Menzies to King, 1 July 1804).

Table 2: A Summary of Blanket Returns in the Hunter: 1834-1844 (from ERM 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Tribal Affiliation</th>
<th>Record Taken at</th>
<th>District Inhabiting/Usual Resort</th>
<th>Total No of People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 July 1844</td>
<td>Gnamoicol</td>
<td>Merton</td>
<td>Merton</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 July 1844</td>
<td>Coorcoo</td>
<td>Merton</td>
<td>Merton</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 July 1844</td>
<td>Not Designated</td>
<td>Merton</td>
<td>Merton</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 June 1843</td>
<td>Pages River</td>
<td>Scone</td>
<td>Murrurundi</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 June 1843</td>
<td>Peel’s River</td>
<td>Scone</td>
<td>Murrurundi</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 June 1843</td>
<td>Dartbrook</td>
<td>Scone</td>
<td>Murrurundi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 June 1843</td>
<td>Aberdeen</td>
<td>Scone</td>
<td>Aberdeen</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 June 1843</td>
<td>Gum Flat</td>
<td>Scone</td>
<td>Gum Flat</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 June 1843</td>
<td>Sengenhoe</td>
<td>Scone</td>
<td>Sengenhoe</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1843</td>
<td>Patrick’s Plains</td>
<td>Singleton, Glendon, Wollombi, Falbrook &amp; Patrick’s Plains</td>
<td>Patrick’s Plains</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 1843</td>
<td>Glendon</td>
<td>Singleton, Glendon, Wollombi, Falbrook &amp; Patrick’s Plains</td>
<td>Glendon</td>
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<td>May 1843</td>
<td>Falbrook</td>
<td>Singleton, Glendon, Wollombi, Falbrook &amp; Patrick’s Plains</td>
<td>Bridgman</td>
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<td>Falbrook</td>
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<td>Mount Royal</td>
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<td>Falbrook</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 1843</td>
<td>Falbrook</td>
<td>Singleton, Glendon, Wollombi, Falbrook &amp; Patrick’s Plains</td>
<td>St Clair</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1843</td>
<td>Falbrook</td>
<td>Singleton, Glendon, Wollombi, Falbrook &amp; Patrick’s Plains</td>
<td>Cedar Brook</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 1843</td>
<td>Halbiaston</td>
<td>Singleton, Glendon, Wollombi, Falbrook &amp; Patrick’s Plains</td>
<td>St Clair</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 1843</td>
<td>Halbiaston</td>
<td>Singleton, Glendon, Wollombi, Falbrook &amp; Patrick’s Plains</td>
<td>Bridgman</td>
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<td>13 July 1843</td>
<td>Munmurra</td>
<td>Cassilis</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 May 1842</td>
<td>Yarrumundi</td>
<td>Scone</td>
<td>Scone</td>
<td>94</td>
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<td>Waua</td>
<td>Scone</td>
<td>Yarrumundi</td>
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<tr>
<td>May, June &amp; August 1842</td>
<td>Patrick’s Plains</td>
<td>Singleton, Glendon, Wollombi, Dulwich</td>
<td>Patrick’s Plains</td>
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<tr>
<td>May, June &amp; August 1842</td>
<td>Glendon</td>
<td>Singleton, Glendon, Wollombi, Dulwich</td>
<td>Glendon</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May, June &amp; August 1842</td>
<td>Lower Wollombi</td>
<td>Singleton, Glendon, Wollombi, Dulwich</td>
<td>Lower Wollombi</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May, June &amp; KingsKline</td>
<td>Singleton, Glendon, Wollombi, Falbrook</td>
<td>Falbrook</td>
<td>21</td>
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August 1842 | Dulwich  
August 1841 | Yarrundi | Scone  
August 1841 | Nana | Scone  
1 May 1841 | Castle Forbes | Patrick’s Plains  
1 May 1841 | Patrick’s Plains | Patrick’s Plains  
1 May 1841 | Falbrook | Patrick’s Plains  
1 May 1841 | Wollumbi | Patrick’s Plains  
1 May 1841 | Glendon | Patrick’s Plains  
1 May 1841 | Patrick’s Plains | Patrick’s Plains  
1 May 1841 | Patrick’s Plains | Patrick’s Plains  
1 May 1841 | Patrick’s Plains | Patrick’s Plains  
1 May 1841 | Mulwarie Tribe | Goulburn  
6 June 1837 | Falbrook | Patrick’s Plains  
6 June 1837 | Plains Tribe | Patrick’s Plains  
6 June 1837 | Glendon | Patrick’s Plains  
28 June 1837 | Mulwarie Tribe | Goulburn  
25 May 1834 | Merton | Merton  
2 June 1834 | Bungary Hill | Patrick’s Plains  
2 June 1834 | Patrick’s Plains | Patrick’s Plains  
2 June 1834 | Glendon | Patrick’s Plains  

The later Commandants also appear to have maintained an ordered relationship that was still evident when Macquarie inspected the settlement in 1818 and 1821. As a rule, communication between convicts and Aboriginal people may have been discouraged, but opportunities would have existed for Aboriginal trade and material acquisition (through exchange of meat and fish for blankets, clothing and tobacco etc) as the Newcastle settlement became a principal site of cross-cultural trade that was quickly embedded into the Aboriginal economy during this period.

J.T. Bigge showed in 1819 little interest in the way of life of Aboriginal people at Newcastle at that early period of their contact with Europeans. References to Aboriginal people mainly appear in the records of his inquiry because of their usefulness in recapturing escaped prisoners. According to the testimony of Sergeant Evans, these people were rewarded by the return of convict escapees to the settlement through tobacco, corn or blankets.
John Allen, at the time of the Commission, was a constable at Wallis Plains as well as a farmer. He gave evidence to Bigge, which described some aspects of life and his farm on Wallis Plains (Turner 1973:150-3). The situation at Wallis Plains would have been similar to that at Paterson’s Plains. Three simple questions answered by Allen at this inquiry provide an indication of the nature of Aboriginal and European interactions at the time:

- Are the settlers much annoyed by the natives? - They are in the corn season but not otherwise.
- Do they live upon good terms with them? - Very good.
- Do the natives ever labour for the settlers? - Occasionally they will, but not for any time'.

Allen also described that the farms were only twenty miles by land from Newcastle but that the path linking them to the settlement was crossed by two large swamps. The more usual method of travel was therefore by river but the distance involved was estimated to be sixty miles. These first settlers cleared as much as thirty acres, and cultivated the land by hand to grow wheat, maize and potatoes, but with minimal Government assistance. Within this context, although the records are limited, it appears that while the settlers on the first farms at Paterson’s and Wallis’ Plains after 1812 may have been ‘annoyed’ by Aboriginal people during the corn season ‘when they steal large quantities’, they are also reported at the same time to have assisted in bringing in the harvest (Harris to Bigge, 17 January 1820).

Although later in time, Backhouse (1843:402) provides a description of meeting a settler and his wife on a small farm at Wallaroba who according to Mary Keough’s deposition was part of ‘Harry’ and ‘Melville’s’ traditional country (along with ‘Lambs Valley, Bolwarra, [and] Lower Paterson’) in 1843:

‘In this land, they have exerted themselves, with a spirit of independence......they are now possessed of a comfortable home, and a location of land, on which they have a fair stock of cattle. They have also maintained a kindly feeling toward the Aborigines, who live about them in quietness and confidence, but who have been reduced, in this neighbourhood, by various causes, among which has been the Small Pox, from about 200, to 60.

These kind-hearted settlers say, they are convinced, that the misunderstandings between the Blacks and Whites, always originate with the latter; many of whom would destroy the Blacks if they happened to take a few cobs of Indian-corn, from the fields, enclosed from their own country; they also strongly deprecate the indiscriminate vengeance, often returned upon this hapless people, when any of their number have committed outrages, by the Government sending armed police, or soldiers upon them, often before the merits of the case can be properly ascertained’.

Three contrasting entries add to the picture for this period, the first two of which are recorded in Macquarie’s diary of his trip between 27 July and 9 August 1818 on board the brig Elizabeth
Henrietta 'to determine the resources and state of the settlement, and to explore the three branches of the Hunter River'. The first is recorded on 31 July 1818 when Macquarie and his inspection party travelled to Wallis Plains to examine the ‘Cedar Ground’ where he saw a gang of 15 convict men under an overseer cutting cedar ‘about a mile into the woods’ with a military guard of one corporal and 3 privates ‘protect them from the Natives’.....and from which distance they are at present bringing it after being cut into Logs to the Banks of the River’. This description conveys an image of a small party of men in an isolated forest landscape working at times some distances away from their boats on the water with a perceived or real of threat of attack by unseen Aboriginal people.

A week later on 6 August when Governor Macquarie and his party were entertained by ‘Jack Burigon, King of the Newcastle tribe’, along with about forty men, women and children who ‘came by Capt. Wallis’s desire to the Govt. House between 7 & 8 o’clock at Night’ and performed ‘in high stile for Half an Hour’ a ‘Carauberie’ in the area at the rear of the Newcastle Government House. The Aboriginal group were afterwards ‘Treated with some Grog and an allowance of Maize’.

Macquarie visited Wallis Plains again November 1821 (Mander 1979) and described his travels through a ‘fine, rich tract of country’:

‘there being 11 separate Families now settled on their Lands in that District.....At Half past 4 p.m. we arrived at the Government Cottage, which Major Morisset had built some time since.....It is a neat rustic Building, very commodious, and most beautifully situated on the summit of a pretty Eminence, having a large Lagoon of Fresh Water in front, besides the large Creek I named Wallis’s Creek, and Commanding a fine view of all the Farms on Wallis's Plains. Here I found Bungaree, Chief of the Boan Native Tribe, with all his own Family, and 30 more of his Tribe, waiting my arrival, having come on purpose to meet me. Our Boats not having arrived till 6 o'clock, we had rather a late Dinner, not having sat down to it till 9 o'clock. We had then however a most excellent one and we all partook very heartily of it. Bungaree and his Tribe entertained us with a Karaburie after Dinner, and we did not go to Bed till 11 o’clock’.

The 1828 Census names a ‘Mount Johnson Tribe’ which also provides a clue to where Aboriginal people were living and/or travelling during this post-Contact period on the Paterson River. ‘Mt Johnson’ is featured in the background of Joseph Lycett’s 1824 painting of Lake Paterson, and is prominently marked on Dangar’s 1828 map (see Figure 4). The 1832 New South Wales Directory provides the following description that places ‘Mt Johnson’ in its European landscape and landuse context at the time:

‘Cross Pumbe creek, dividing the farms of Webber, (called Tucal) and of Phillips (called Bonavista); their residences are on the right. The road bends easterly to the river.....Where there is about 100 acres of land, recently purchased by the Government for a public wharf and resting place; the road follows the course of the river, winding under mount Johnson, and a range called Bunduckaluck’.
By 1828 Thomas Stubbs was leasing Richard Binder's farm with his occupation listed as 'innkeeper' (Hunter 1997) as marked on Dangar's 1828 map, and this block on the eastern bank of the Paterson River was opposite the Government station at 'Old Banks'. By 1823, Binder had previously cleared 51 acres and erected a weather board and shingle cottage, stable and lumber house and several other farm buildings. Three convicts were assigned to Binder, who also held the position of Chief Constable at Paterson's Plains in 1824 and 1825 prior to the appointment of James Webber at Tocal. Binder's work in this capacity probably required travel across country to the Government post at Seaham, and this may be why the track from the punt crossing at Old Banks towards Seaham carried his name, 'Binders Path' (Paterson Historical Society). In 1831 Stubbs installed an improved punt on the Paterson River at the 'Old Banks' crossing as described as follows:

'An excellent punt has been placed on Paterson's River, at the Barracks or Court-house, Paterson's Plains. It has long been wanted, and will be a great convenience to the settlers on William's River, crossing the country to Maitland, having formerly been obliged to swim their horses, several of which have been drowned in the attempt. The punt is adapted for receiving carriages and waggons, with their loads. It is worked by a rope, extending from one side to the other. The settlers on both Rivers are indebted to Mr. Stubbs for this convenience, which, we trust, will amply remunerate the spirited proprietor.

While the punt crossing and its location near the court house at 'Old Banks' assisted in linking a number of the project homesteads from the early 1820s (such as Tocal, Duninald, and Gostwyck etc), it is possible that 'Mount Johnston' (Bunduckaluck) which was a significant landform on the eastern side of Paterson River may have been associated with the 'core territory' of a group of Aboriginal people who possibly distinguished themselves from those on the 'other side of the river' in the lands around 'Old Banks'.

An inquest in 1841 (Maitland Mercury 30 June 1841) into the death of 'Black Boy' who was a member of the 'Newcastle tribe', at the Queens Head Inn at West Maitland, heard that his assailants were members of the 'Old Banks tribe', but the 'jury returned a verdict that Black Boy was wilfully murdered by some black unknown'. Published extracts from this inquiry place the incident in context:

'.....For some months past Black Boy had been working around Maitland, cutting wood and carrying water for different persons, and was very harmless and quite......Black Boy and three members of the Old Banks tribe were about a good deal together, and in the evening.....camped together in the Queens Head yard.....In the morning the one eyed black had disappeared, as well as every other article the two had possessed......It appeared from the evidence [Black Boy’s throat had been cut] that on the Monday night previously Black Boy had suddenly left the camping place where he was sleeping with some of the Old Banks black, and next day gave as a reason they were going to kill him.'
These types of historical references illustrate that Aboriginal people such as those who may have been first seen by early convict timber getters at places such as ‘Old Banks’ continued to maintain an identifiable presence, at least in the eyes of Europeans, forty years later within the context of life in townships such as Maitland that were steadily developing by this time.

The ‘Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines’

A ‘Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines’ that had been appointed in August 1838 reported it had not been able to examine as many witnesses as thought desirable, and made no recommendation except that the remnant Aboriginal population of Van Diemen’s Land which had been relocated to Flinders Island should not be transferred to NSW. Another Committee was appointed in June 1839 but does not seem to have ever met or reported. In August 1845, Richard Windeyer moved the appointment of a Committee ‘to consider the condition of the Aborigines, and the best means of promoting their welfare’ (from New South Wales Legislative Council 1824-1856, The Select Committees - Doust 2011:142).

The witnesses examined by this Committee (which included John Dunmore Lang and William Bowman) included only one Aboriginal person directly (Mahroot from Sydney), although the evidence did include some replies to a circular letter that was sent by the Clerk of the Legislative Council to Benches of Magistrates, Commissioners of Crown Lands, and also to ‘Gentlemen residing too remote from Sydney’. The following questions were asked in this circular letter:

1. **What is the probable number of Aborigines in your district; distinguishing males, females, and children?**
2. **Has the number diminished or increased, and if so, to what extent, within the last five or ten years?**
3. **Has the decrease been among the children or adults?**
4. **To what causes do you attribute the decrease in your district?**
5. **What is their actual condition and means of subsistence?**
6. **Has their ordinary means of subsistence diminished, and if so, what part of it, and from the causes; if it has increased, what part, and from what causes?**
7. **Have blankets been issued to the Aborigines in your district heretofore, and for what period? What was the effect of giving them? Has the giving of blankets ceased? When did it cease; and what has been the effect of its cessation? Would it be advisable to resume the distribution?**
8. **Have they been allowed or refused Hospital or Medical treatment....and.....at whose expense?**
9. **What proportion of them is regularly or occasionally employed by the settlers, and in what ways? In what manner are they remunerated?**
10. What habits have they bearing upon their aptitude for employment?

11. Are there any... half castes...?

12. Is there any disposition on the part of the white labouring populations, to amalgamate with the Aborigines, so as to form families?

13. Are the Aborigines in friendly or hostile relations with the settlers...?

14. What destruction of property has been occasioned by Aborigines?

15. What are the relations, friendly or hostile, of the Aborigines among themselves...?

16. Are their numbers...affected by their hostilities...?

17. Is infanticide known among them?

18. Will you...state any facts relative to the Aborigines that would assist the Committee in its endeavour to promote their welfare?

Replies were received in 1846 primarily from only some of the ‘Clergy of all Denominations’; Reverend C.P.N. Wilton, (Newcastle); Reverend George K. Rusden, (East Maitland); Reverend George Augustus Middleton, (Morpeth); Reverend Robert Thorley Bolton, (Hexham); Reverend John Jennings Smith, (Paterson); Reverend Joseph Cooper, (Falbrook and Jerry’s Plains); Reverend William Ross, (Paterson); Reverend Robert Stewart (Newcastle).

The responses to these questions varied. Some of the key points evident in the replies was that by this time Aboriginal people were working as farmhands, stockmen, domestic servants, trackers, timber getters and in other such roles on many of the larger properties and in doing so were making a valuable, if unrecognised contribution to the social and economic development of the region. One of the points emphasised by Aboriginal people when asked for their opinion (and few were) revolved around the discontinuation of the distribution of blankets in 1844 that angered people and continued to make things increasingly difficult (particularly in the winter) for most who could no longer obtain traditional foods and make possum skin clothing due to the reduction in animal numbers, their increasing loss of knowledge, and of the disintegration of their trading networks with people who were now becoming dispersed and moving away from their traditional country. A number of the responses provided to the Committee in 1846 illustrate this (as extracted from the Coal River Working Party).

Reverend Wilton replied on the Queen’s Birthday with the following comments:

- 2. The number has diminished within the last ten years, certainly by one-half.
- 5. They are dependent upon the towns-people and settlers for any old clothing they can get. They will work occasionally about a house, especially if that house be an inn, where they may meet with opportunities of obtaining money or ardent spirits from those who frequent it; and on a farm, in pulling maize or burning off, for money or rations.
6. Their ordinary means of subsistence has greatly diminished; the Emu, Kangaroo, Wallibi, and Opossum, having almost disappeared from their hunting grounds. Fish, and....."Kon-je-voi," and which they obtain on the sea coast, are the only kinds of animal food, yet left to them in any abundance. Of vegetable food they still procure.....a native root of a kind of yam called by them, “Ko-ka-bai”and the seeds of the Zamia, which they eat, first soaking them in water, then roasting them, and subsequently beating them to a fine powder. They also suck the “Mi-mal,” or the honey in the blossoms of the Honeysuckle tree, and that of the Grass tree, where it can be now met with, and in the season, when ripe, the fruit of “Pigs’ faces.”

7. Blankets had been issued to the Aborigines in my district, from the commencement of the administration of His Excellency Sir R. Bourke, until the last two years. The effect of giving them was manifest in the satisfaction expressed by the blacks at the kindness of the Europeans, in thus providing for their comfort.

No blankets have been issued to the Aborigines of this tribe for the last two winters; they would be very thankful if the issue of them were renewed. When the distribution of blankets ceased, “M’Gill,” the late chief, told me “they all cursed the Governor.” They were indeed much dissatisfied. They now depend upon obtaining any old blanket, or coat that may be offered them by the settlers; while of getting these, they are by no means certain, and failing in obtaining such, they would have to betake themselves to the shelter of bark.

I am decidedly of opinion that it would be desirable to resume the distribution of blankets to these people; the least indeed, that can be done for them on the part of those who have deprived them of the animals, from the fur of which, they were wont to make themselves cloaks. Several individuals of this tribe have lately enquired of me, why “the Governor does not give them blankets to wear in winter, when it is murry cold.” Public decency moreover, would be consulted, by continuing their distribution.

9. The greater part of the Aborigines are occasionally employed by the inhabitants of the town, and the settlers, either about the house, in going upon errands, or on the farms, in gathering in the maize in the season, and in burning off. They receive payment for their work, either by a ration, or by money, as may be agreed upon. Generally, they work for their food, and any old clothing.

13. The Aborigines in this district are on perfectly friendly relations with the settlers.

19. I would here again repeat what I have already stated in my reply to the 7th query. I would strongly recommend the renewal of the issue of blankets to the Aborigines, for the reasons I have therein assigned. And further, to prevent in future the disposal to the whites of such blankets thus issued, I would suggest, that each blanket should be branded with some distinguishing mark, not the broad arrow alone, in several places, and that a law should be passed enacting it a misdemeanour for any white person to have such in his possession. This
would in some measure have a tendency towards checking the hitherto too common practice, among some of the blacks, of selling or exchanging these articles, given them for their own personal comfort.

Reverend Middleton echoed many of the sentiments in his reply on the 10th of April:

- 2. The number of Aborigines at the present time, I consider, does not embrace more than one-third of what they were ten years ago.
- 5. Their condition is one neither of independence or dependence. The rivers, lagoons, and forests, continue to afford a portion of what is necessary to their support; the settlers supply, in remuneration for occasional trifling services, the deficiency.
- 7. I understand the annual distribution of blankets, which had been regularly for several years, (the exact number I do not know) ceased in the year 1844, thereby depriving the Aborigines of what they regarded, as much contributing to their personal comfort. I would most earnestly and most respectfully recommend the annual issue, to each of the Aborigines, of one frock, one shirt, and one pair of trousers; as also, the revival of the distribution of blankets as the acceptable and useful presents; I believe the Aborigines, generally speaking, are little disposed to part with those articles now become essential to their comfort and health.

Finally, Reverend Ross reported his views on the 5th of May:

- 2. The number has greatly diminished; within the last seven years the decrease has certainly been one-third of the number. About seven years ago I have seen eighty and ninety Aborigines encamped in the township of Paterson; the greatest number at the present never exceeds twenty or twenty-five.
- 3. Their means of subsistence has greatly diminished. There are few or no kangaroo; they have either been destroyed, or they have retired far back from the haunts of men. The kangaroo was the chief food of the natives. They still have abundance of opossum, of fish, and cobbera.
- 7. Blankets have been issued in this district for many years previous to 1845, when the issue of them was stopped. I know of no bad effects arising from giving the unfortunate Aborigines blankets; we have, in a great measure, been the means of depriving them of the source from which they formerly derived their warm clothing in abundance, and it seems cruel to withhold the blankets; I certainly think it would be highly advisable, both on the ground of principle and charity, to resume the distribution.

Blanket Returns and Individual Project Homesteads

The blanket returns for the period between 1834 and 1844 (as summarised in Table 2) that are recorded at Patrick’s Plains, Merton, Goulburn, Scone, Dulwich, Singleton, Wollombi, Falbrook, and Cassilis can in a number of cases be either directly shown, and/or reasonably inferred, to have been taken at a number of the individual project homesteads under study. The Maitland Mercury in 1843
(27 May 1843) reports on an example of this that can be seen within the context of a time when the distribution of blankets to Aboriginal people had become erratic just prior to when the practice was for a period discontinued:

‘Monday last being the day fixed upon for the distribution of blankets among the aboriginal natives of this district, a large number of them assembled about the court house, East Maitland, pretty early in the day. There were but thirty-six blankets to be distributed among them. The authorities at Sydney have heretofore sent up to Maitland seventy-two blankets for this purpose, three or four of which have been usually sent to Mr. Hobler’s, and a few to Mr. Wyndham’s, and besides these a quantity have been always before this year sent from Sydney to the Wollombi. This year, however, instead of any having been sent to the Wollombi, an order was sent from Sydney to the police magistrate there stating that he was to receive thirty-six of the blankets which had been forwarded to Maitland; these he accordingly received; so that there were thirty-six blankets less to be distributed amongst the natives in this district than on former occasions. In consequence of this, the chief constable, in distributing the blankets, supplied first the old men and women, afterwards children, and then such men as had gins, as far as the blankets would go; consequently several of the single men received no blanket; four blankets were as usual forwarded to Mr. Hobler’s place; but none have been sent to Mr. Wyndham’s, nor are there any to send. Why the number of blankets usually sent to the Wollombi has not been sent this year it is impossible to say, but it appears to us that the authorities in Sydney ought to look into the circumstance, and if it has arisen from an oversight, a fresh supply should be immediately send up to Maitland for those blacks who have not yet received any, and also for those who are usually supplied at Mr. Wyndham’s’.

Records also exist for the distribution of blankets during this period to Blaxland (at Fordwich) and the Scott’s at Glendon (SRNSW Reel 3706: Frame 0441), Wood (1972:157) notes 60 blankets were distributed to people by the Ogilvie’s at Merton in 1842, and blankets were also provided to people at Invermein and Segenhoe. The records further imply that Aboriginal people were also likely to have maintained associations with the original 1,200 acre parcel of land granted in 1826 to Thomas Clayton at Bridgman (on Fal Brook) that subsequently became the property managed by Richard Alcorn on behalf of Captain Robert Lethbridge, and at that at least one Aboriginal person received a blanket at Castle Forbes (James Mudie) in 1841.

Letters written to Maitland Mercury also provide an important back-story to the distribution of blankets to Aboriginal people that had become erratic during the 1840s before the practice was for a time discontinued that is not apparent in the official ‘returns’. For example, in 1843 the paper (Maitland Mercury 14 October 1843) reported:

‘The Blacks.-The usual supply of blankets for the aborigines of this district has this year been withheld. This appears to be a piece of great neglect on the part of the government. If not from motives of humanity and common justice, that as a matter of mere policy it would be well to
continue this slight mark of attention to this unfortunate race. The blacks, after having waited some weeks for their supplies, have now left this neighbourhood, and as the warm weather has set in a few slops might very well be substituted for the blankets they ought to have had'.

A similar circumstance is reported again in 1847 (Maitland Mercury 27 June 1847), but with the suggestion that the blankets should be loaned rather than given to people, under the headline ‘More Blankets for the Aborigines’:

‘It appears that the destitute condition of the blacks during the winter season has excited other parties besides the bench to apply to government in their favour, for this week a lot of one hundred blankets has been received by the Maitland bench, with a letter from the Colonial Secretary, stating that they were sent in consequence of an application made by E. C. Close, Esq. Under some apprehension, probably, that such a sudden acquisition of clothing would lead to its being made away with improperly, the Colonial Secretary adds, that these blankets are not to be given to the blacks, but lent to them, which must be distinctly explained to them at the time; and further adds, that the blankets must be marked as government property, that any person obtaining any from the blacks may be punished by law.

Francis Little at Invermein was as early as 1828 providing the Government with information about the Aboriginal people he observed in around Scone and recognised how helpful some European goods were to these people and urged the Government to provide them with blankets and tomahawks (Francis Little to Col. Sec. State Records Box 4/2045, Letter No. 30/2152). From the 1850s through to the 1890s the issue of the provision of free blankets by the Government to Aboriginal people was monitored in newspapers such as the Maitland Mercury to ensure the renewal in the following year. Concerned citizens such as Isaac Gorrick, Blaxland, and Boydell kept pressure through public scrutiny to maintain the annual issue of not only blankets, but of clothing as well as illustrated by the following (Maitland Mercury 10 June 1880):

‘We are pleased to learn that thanks to the efforts of Mr Isaac Garrick, the unfortunate aboriginals of this district are to be supplied at once with clothing to protect these poor creatures from the severity of the winter season. Although it would have been much better had the clothes been served out a month ago, still they are always acceptable to these unfortunate people. Mr Gorrick, who has for many years been the true friend of the needy, made application to the Government weeks ago for this small concession for the blacks, but it was only yesterday evening that he received a telegram from the member for the Hunter (Hon. J F. Burns) intimating that the Government had consented that Mr Gorrick should, without further delay, procure and distribute the clotting so much wanted by the aborigines. That the matter could not have been placed in better hands no parson who knows Mr Gorrick will deny, for while he will be sure to exercise a wise economy in selecting the articles of wear, he will, at the same time, choose something appropriate to the season and that will keep out the cold. We understand that it is intended to give a full suit from the hat to the boots, and there will most likely be some
fifty or sixty recipients. It is gratifying to learn, from letters received by Mr. Gorrick from Mr. Blaxland, of Fordwich, and Mr. Boydell, of the Upper Paterson, that the blacks in their localities had taken great care of the clothing previously supplied through the same channel. Both Messrs. Boydell and Blaxland state that from their observation not a single suit had been disposed of or abused by the blacks who received the clothes. We shall no doubt see many of the blacks parading the streets in a day or two, looking quite happy in their new attire. We might also mention that the blankets supplied to the blacks this year are the best they have yet received’.

Although ten years after the end of the project period under study, the circumstances of when and how the issue of blanket distributions was reported in the Maitland Mercury during the 1860s highlights a number of the limitations that are involved in using the official Government records for this aspect of Aboriginal-European interaction when examining the Aboriginal histories of association with the identified project homestead sites that are detailed in supporting documents to this overview. The following extracts are reproduced from the newspaper in chronological order:

- 27 June 1863: ‘The aborigines of this district have not received their usual allowance of blankets, none have as yet arrived. Great numbers of blacks have been waiting about the town in expectation of their arrival for some weeks past. One blackfellow told me the other day that if the blankets did not soon come all the blackfellows would come down to the township and walk about naked. It certainly is a disgrace to our Government to neglect to supply these poor blacks with this small boon. It is to be hoped, for the sake of morality, that the Government will without delay forward the blankets up, and thus avert the threatened indecent exposure’.
- 28 May 1864 (Paterson): ‘Tuesday being the Queen’s birthday the blacks of this district received their usual supply of blankets’.
- 30 July 1864: ‘Complaints are being made in one or two of the up-country districts of the non-receipt of the annual supply of blankets for the blacks, and letters have been received by the authorities in Maitland, to whom are forwarded the blankets in the first instance by Government, enquiring the cause of the delay. We are informed that the flooded state of the country has in some instances prevented the transmission of the parcels to their several destinations. The total number of blankets received in Maitland during the past year, to be forwarded to the various stations northwards, is about one thousand. In Maitland, last year, about twenty-five aboriginals applied for the annual donation of blankets; thus far during the present year only twenty have applied, each of whom has received a blanket’.
- 1 June 1865 (Paterson): ‘During the week the blacks located in this district have been supplied with their usual quantity of blankets’.
- 21 May 1868: ‘During the past week blankets have been distributed to the blacks of this district; some forty or fifty have come in for their annual gift....’.
• 21 May 1868: ‘The annual distribution of blankets to the blacks of the district has commenced, and some fourteen having applied and obtained them from the Clerk of Petty Sessions, who desired us to caution all persona against yielding to the solicitations of aborigines, to exchange their blankets for something more ardently desired’.

• 1 June 1869: ‘On Monday the blacks of the district mustered in strong force at the Court-house, in hopes of receiving their usual supply of blankets, but no blanket having yet been received by the police authorities, the blacks had to go away disappointed’.

• 3 June 1869 (Paterson): ‘No blankets for the black have yet arrived, and our sable friends have left town again without them. The weather is all that can be desired for wheat-sowing; in a very short time this farming operation will be over for this season’.

• 1 July 1869 (Manning River): ‘The two or three yards square of shoddy which are annually doled out to the blacks usually on the Queen’s birthday have been delayed this season for some reasons unknown, but they are here at last. We understand a distribution is to be made at Wingham today and at some of the other townships as speedily as possible’.

• 8 July 1869 (Paterson): ‘The usual supply of blankets to the blacks of this district was distributed at the Court-house, yesterday’.
Figure 1: Aboriginal Place Names at Coal River on Dangar’s Map.

Figure 2: Aboriginal Groups on the Coal River and its Hinterland (City of Newcastle 2006).
Figure 3: An Interpretation of Awabakal Boundaries according to the AIAS 1974 (Umwelt Australia Pty Ltd 2011).
Figure 4: Mt Johnston in the Paterson Valley on Dangar’s 1828 Map of the Hunter Valley.