

# Where Did Ensign Barrallier Camp in 1801?

## Report to Coal River Working Party

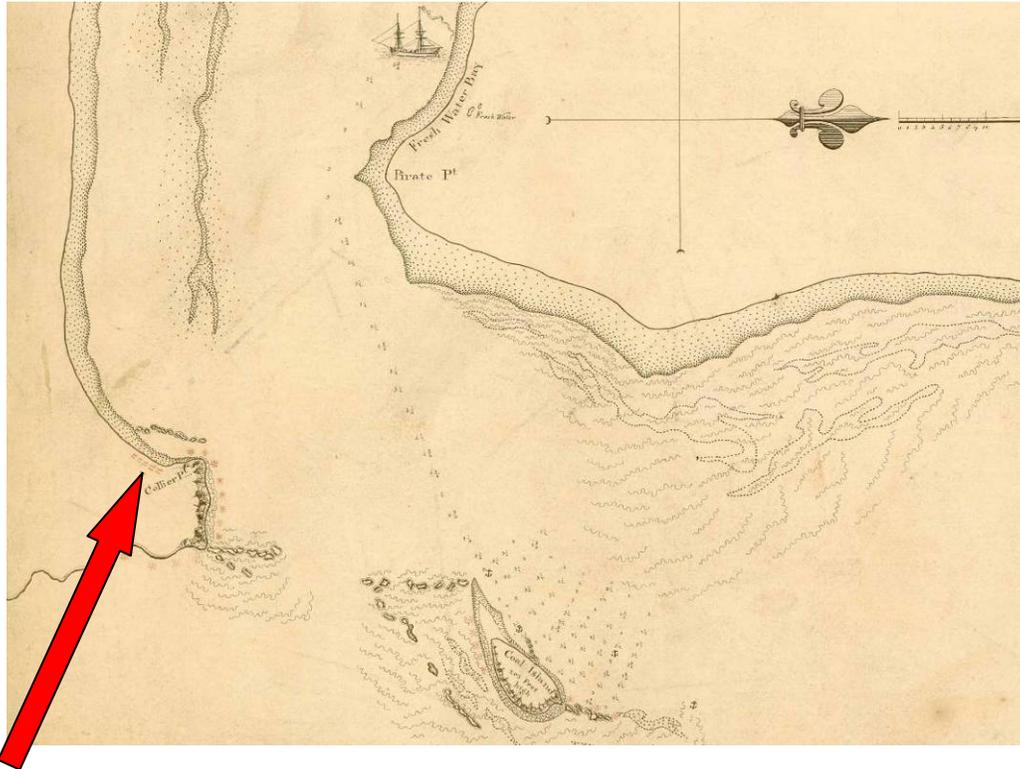


Figure 1. Part of Barrallier's 1801 Plan, arrow indicating campsite, then and now.



Emeritus Professor John Fryer  
February 2008

## **The Campsite for an Expedition.**

From Sunday 14 June 1801 until Thursday 23 July 1801 an expedition from Her Majesty's armed surveying vessel, *Lady Nelson*, comprising Colonel William Patterson, Lieutenant James Grant, Dr. John Harris and Ensign Francis Barrallier explored the Hunter River, its Harbour and tributaries. On the map of their findings which details the Hunter and Patterson Rivers, there are some small markings which it is believed show two rows of tents where the main campsite of the party was established (see red arrow on cover page).

The objective of this report was to locate that campsite, and position it in its modern-day context in Nobbys Road (also on front cover page).

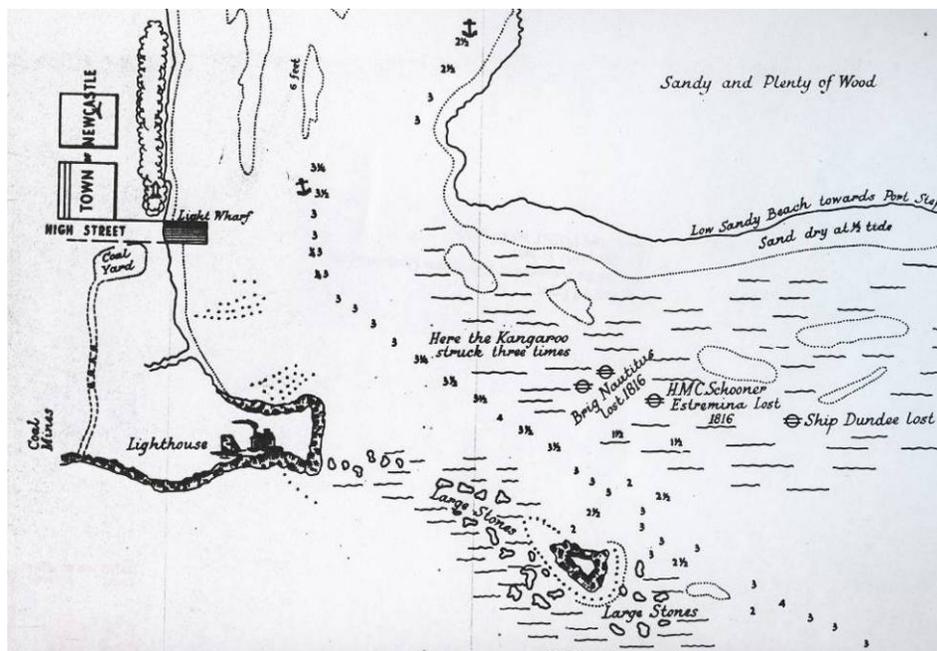
## **Methodology Employed and Interesting Evidence from other Plans.**

Barrallier's plan was first checked against other historical and modern survey plans and nautical and hydrographic charts as to its overall accuracy. That is, the first question to be answered could be posed as "Was it a reasonably true representation of actual topographic features?" The answer was found to be in the affirmative, with distances from Nobbys (Coal Island) to Signal Hill (Fort Scratchley) and other prominent features agreeing to within approximately 10 metres.

Given the scale of the maps, the possible stretching and warping of the map sheets and their later photocopying and scanning, this provided assurances that in the region near the mouth of the Harbour, the survey work and plotting was sound. Further up the Hunter and Patterson Rivers where the survey work was extended, the method of surveying would have been largely from on-board a small rowing boat. This would mean Barrallier would have had a limited ability to get long distance sightings in order to control the angular changes along the rivers, so one could expect that the accuracy would decrease considerably. This can be shown to be the situation by overlaying Barrallier's map with modern aerial photography or topographic plans. **In summary, it could be expected that the placement of Barrallier's campsite on the map was accurate near the entrance to Coal River.**

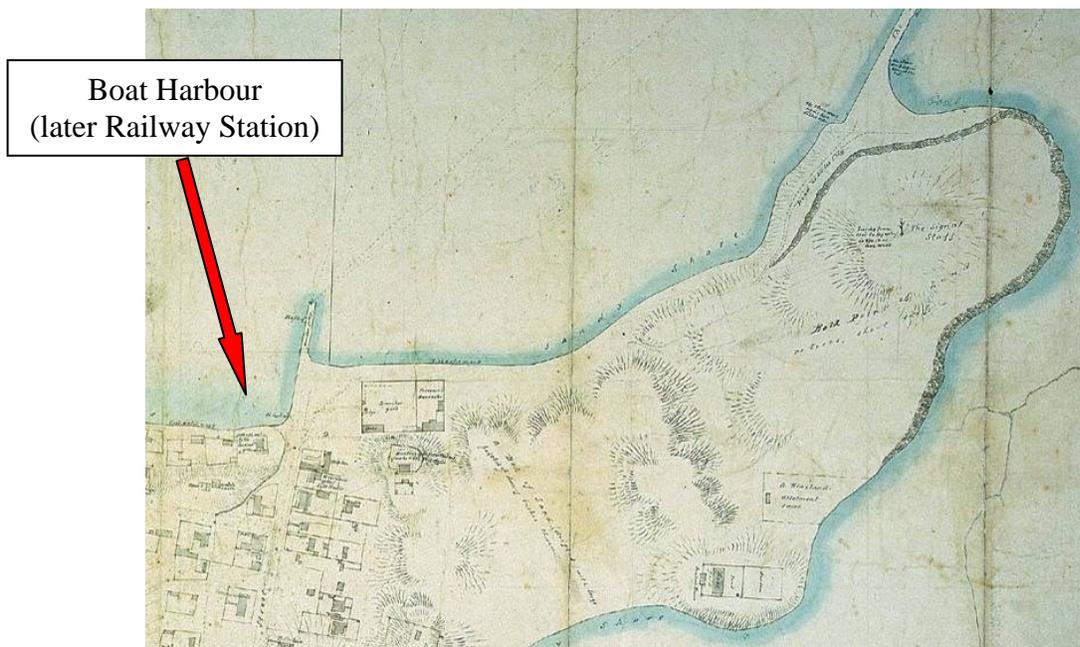
## **Has the Landscape Changed?**

The problem confronting this investigation is that since 1801, a considerable expanse of what was the shoreline for Newcastle Harbour has been re-claimed, thus making the corresponding of topographic features from the early 1800s to equivalent modern day ones a potentially difficult task. An inspection of Lieutenant Jeffries' March 1816 plan of *Part of Hunter's River* (see Figure 2) indicates a large wharf had already been built at the end of "High Street" (presumably the end of present day Watt Street). An investigation of Jeffries' plan would suggest it was not as accurate as Barrallier's, though it may be that the survey measurements were accurate but the plan production is certainly 'amateurish' as the printing and line-work is not of the standard expected of someone skilled in cartography.



**Figure 2. Lieutenant Jeffries' March 1816 Plan.**

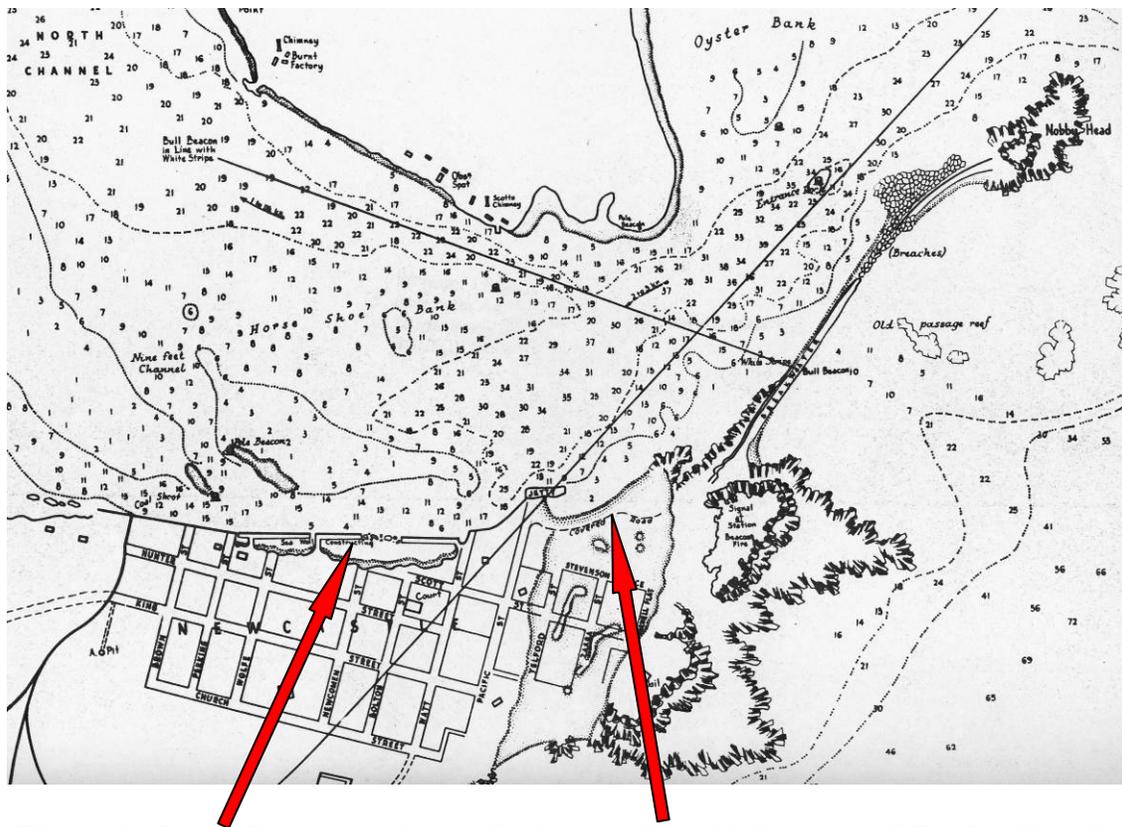
Armstrong's 1830 *Plan of the Town of Newcastle* (see Figure 3) clearly shows that wharf at the end of Watt Street and the Lumber Yard and buildings. An appreciation of the amount of future reclamation can be gained from that map.



**Figure 3. Armstrong's 1830 Plan of the Town of Newcastle.**

The 1851 plan *Port of Newcastle* surveyed by Captain Stokes RN provides the first real evidence as to the extent of reclamation which was starting to take place. A string of sea walls were under construction from the end of Perkins Street to Watt Street with the intention of back-filling behind them. These were to form the basis of wharves for coal loading.

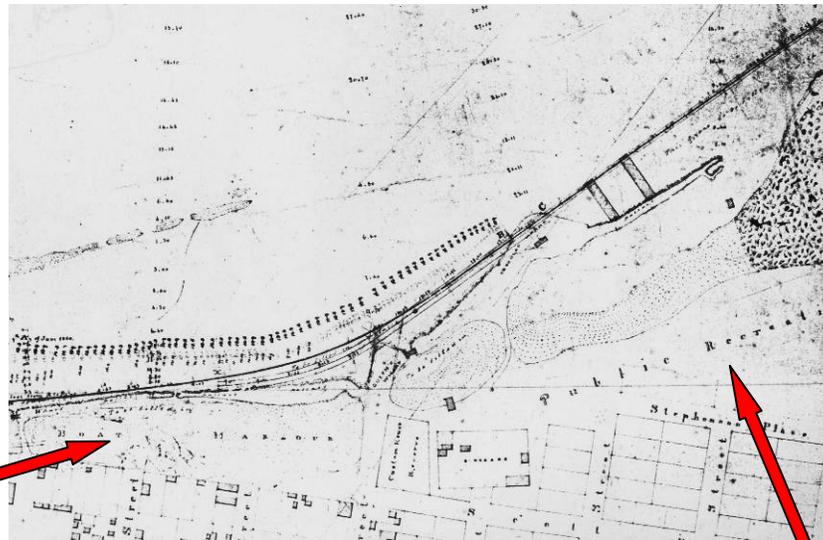
By 1851 the large shallow flat area of Harbour in front of Stevenson Place had been filled in to a distance of well over 100 metres from the old shore-line. From looking at the earliest depicted topographic features in Newcastle's East End on Armstrong's plan, it can only be assumed that sand hills and dunes had been levelled for this purpose. Captain Stokes' plan shows as a dotted line a 'covered road' in front of Stevenson Place, running from the end of Pacific Street towards Signal Hill. Presumably this road had been covered by the reclamation process (see Figure 4).



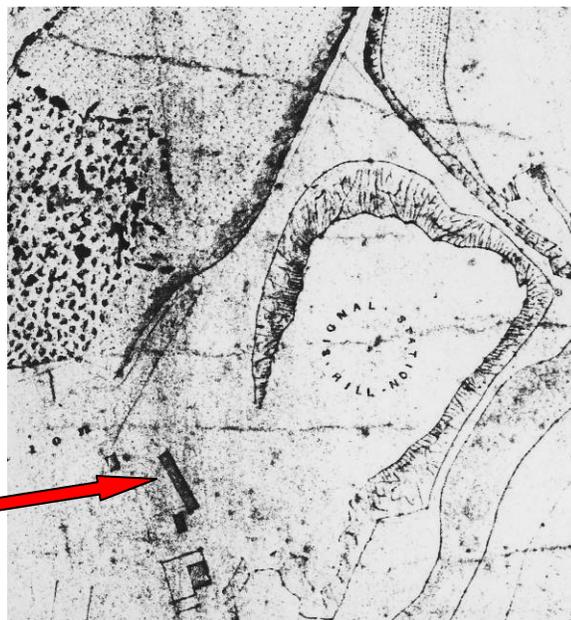
**Figure 4. Sea wall construction and a 'covered road' shown on 1851 plan *Port Of Newcastle* by Captain Stokes RN.**

The present day Railway Station was clearly below High Water Mark on both Armstrong's and Stokes' quite accurate and detailed plans. In fact the area of the present day Railway Station was later known as 'Boat Harbour' after sea walls had been built in the 1850s, but this boating 'haven' was soon to be filled in as per notes on an 1859 *Plan of the City and Port of Newcastle*, signed by E. Moriarty, Civil Engineer (see Figure 5a).

Of immediate interest on this 1859 plan was the depiction of two small buildings near where it is believed Barrallier camped back in 1801 (see Figure 5b). On later plans these are termed the “Pilot’s Houses” (see Figure 6).



**Figure 5a**

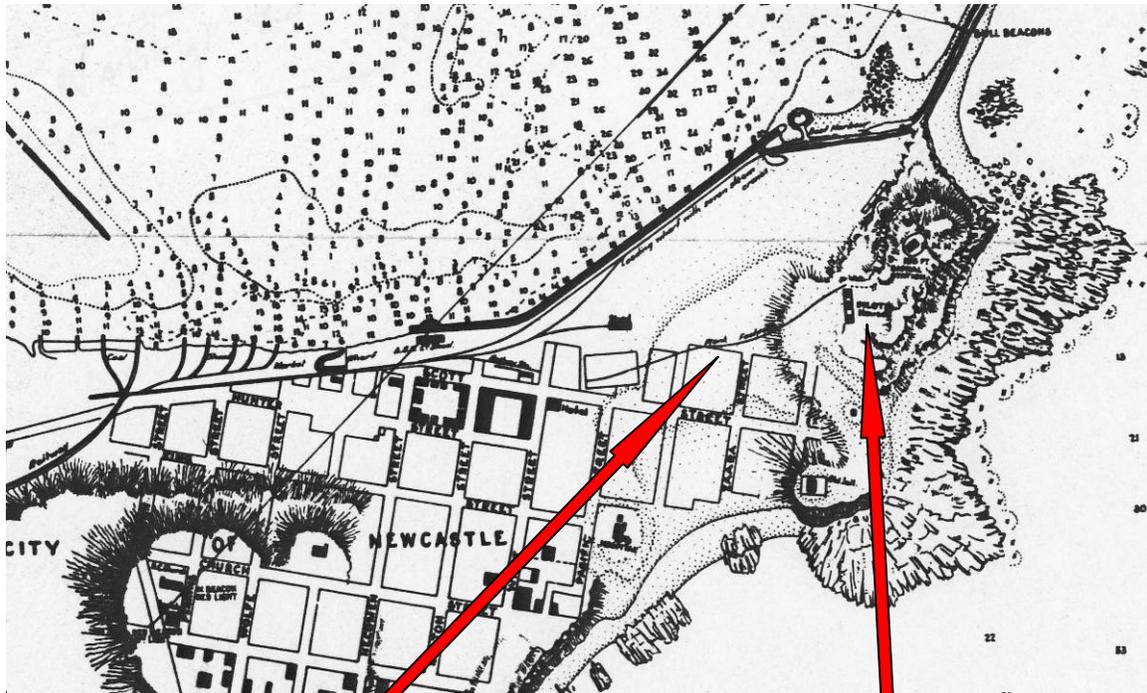


**Figure 5b**

**Figures 5a and 5b. 1859 Plan of the City and Port of Newcastle, E. Moriarty, shows the Boat Harbour (later Railway Station) and Pilot’s Houses near Signal Hill.**

Work on Newcastle Harbour must have proceeded at a rapid rate as the 1866 plan of *Newcastle Harbour* by Messrs. Gowlland and Boulton RN, under the direction of Commander F.W. Sidney, illustrates. The Harbour in 1866 had a series of railway lines running down to coal loading wharves and the reclamation process had almost extended

as far as the ‘wave-trap’ area known today as Horseshoe Beach. The Pilot’s Houses at the base of Signal Hill had been named and a ‘Plank Footpath’ constructed to them at the base of Signal Hill (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6. 1866 plan of Newcastle Harbour by Messrs. Gowland and Boulton RN. See Plank Footpath across the reclaimed area and Pilot’s Houses.**

So why all this mention of reclamation? It is important to realize that a massive amount of earth, rock and other material had been deposited into Newcastle Harbour in the period 1830 to 1865. It had to come from somewhere. Presumably some came from rock ballast in the hulls of empty sailing ships coming to load coal, but a large amount had to be moved from the land itself. The early plans showing topographic features and the early paintings by artists of Newcastle such as Browne 1807 (Figure 7) and Lewin 1808 (Figure 8) would indicate sand hills to the east of Watt Street.

In addition, the diary description by Lieutenant Grant on 18 June 1801 of the land just to the south of their campsite states “...*There are also vallies (sic) sheltered from all winds and nevertheless well elevated, though it is understood that they are not of extensive magnitude ... and I suppose might be comprised within the compass of six or seven hundred square acres*”. These are written indications of sand hills and my own rough calculation would put the area encompassed by Signal Hill, Newcastle Beach and Watt Street at approximately 550 acres.



**Figure 7. Watercolour by Browne 1807.**



**Figure 8. Watercolour by Lewin 1808.**

**Note the depiction of hilly terrain between present day Newcastle Beach, the Harbour and Watt Street.**

## So Where Did Barrallier Camp?

The location of Barrallier's 1801 campsite was achieved using scaled measurements from his plan, a consideration of the other plans referred to above, aerial photographs and an actual inspection of the site. The site inspection revealed that much of the shoreline as depicted by Barrallier is now either buried under harbour reclamation work or under the road which passes between Signal Hill and Nobbys Beach Surf Club and Kiosk. The present-day location of many features on his map had to be estimated by considering the slope of the sides of Signal Hill and from reference back from Nobbys (Coal Island).

Also, it became fairly obvious that if the asterisk marks on Barrallier's plan were to indicate coal samples, then if these were close to sea level, they would all be covered by modern constructions, such as roads.

All those provisos considered, I would venture to suggest that the centre of his campsite (row of tents) was approximately 160 metres south of the present roundabout at Nobbys. Measurements taken inland to the west from the Pacific Ocean coastline place it about 10 metres to the east of the kerb and gutter of Nobbys road (see Figure 9). That means it is on the nicely elevated and relatively flat strip of land adjacent to the road and opposite the Allan and Flagstaff apartment buildings which look down over the Harbourside Park and the old Zaara Street Powerstation area. This would have been a perfect place to camp: the *Lady Nelson* could be directly viewed at its anchorage and there would have been shelter from the stiff southerly and south-easterly winds and the afternoon north-easterly breezes. The outlook from the campsite afforded good viewing of anyone approaching and it was close enough to the shoreline to take advantage its amenity. It was about 60 metres north of where the Pilot's Houses were later constructed.



**Figure 9 Barrallier's Campsite.**

Perhaps the 1820 watercolour of Nobbys by an unknown artist shows Barrallier's Campsite location in the most sympathetic and historical fashion.



**Figure 10. Barrallier's Campsite.**

### **Nobbys Road opposite Allan and Flagstaff Apartments**

The present-day location of Barrallier's Campsite is indicated in these February 2008 images (see Figure 11a –e). Note the view he had towards the *Lady Nelson* at anchor.



**Figure 11 a and b. The Campsite**



**Figure 11c and d. View across Nobbys Road towards the *Lady Nelson* anchorage.**



**Figure 11e. Looking north down Nobbys Road towards Coal Island**

Note that all source material for this report came from either the Coal River Party's websites or was kindly made available courtesy of Dave Connors, Newcastle Port Corporation.

John Fryer, Emeritus Professor,  
February 2008.