

## Current Activities

- Members of the Working Party participated in the Coal River Public Forum held as part of the National Trust Heritage Festival on the 4th April, 2003, at the Newcastle Museum.
- In partnership with the Newcastle City Council, the Working Party is helping to locate the convict coal mines beneath Signal Hill (now Fort Scratchley). We are undertaking geological and historical research in order to select sites for exploratory drilling. As the first European industrial enterprise outside of the Sydney basin, we see this as a crucial yet poorly understood aspect of our early history.
- The Working Party is also seeking government, community and business involvement towards the commissioning and preparation of a Heritage Master Plan for the precinct. The diverse elements of Coal River need to be identified, better understood, preserved and more effectively presented to the public.

## Patron

Hon. Ms Sharon Grierson – Federal Member for Newcastle

Lieutenant C Jeffries' Survey of Part of the Hunter's River (Or the Coal River) 1816



## Contact Details

### Dr Erik Eklund

Chair

Coal River Working Party

Phone: 4921 5219

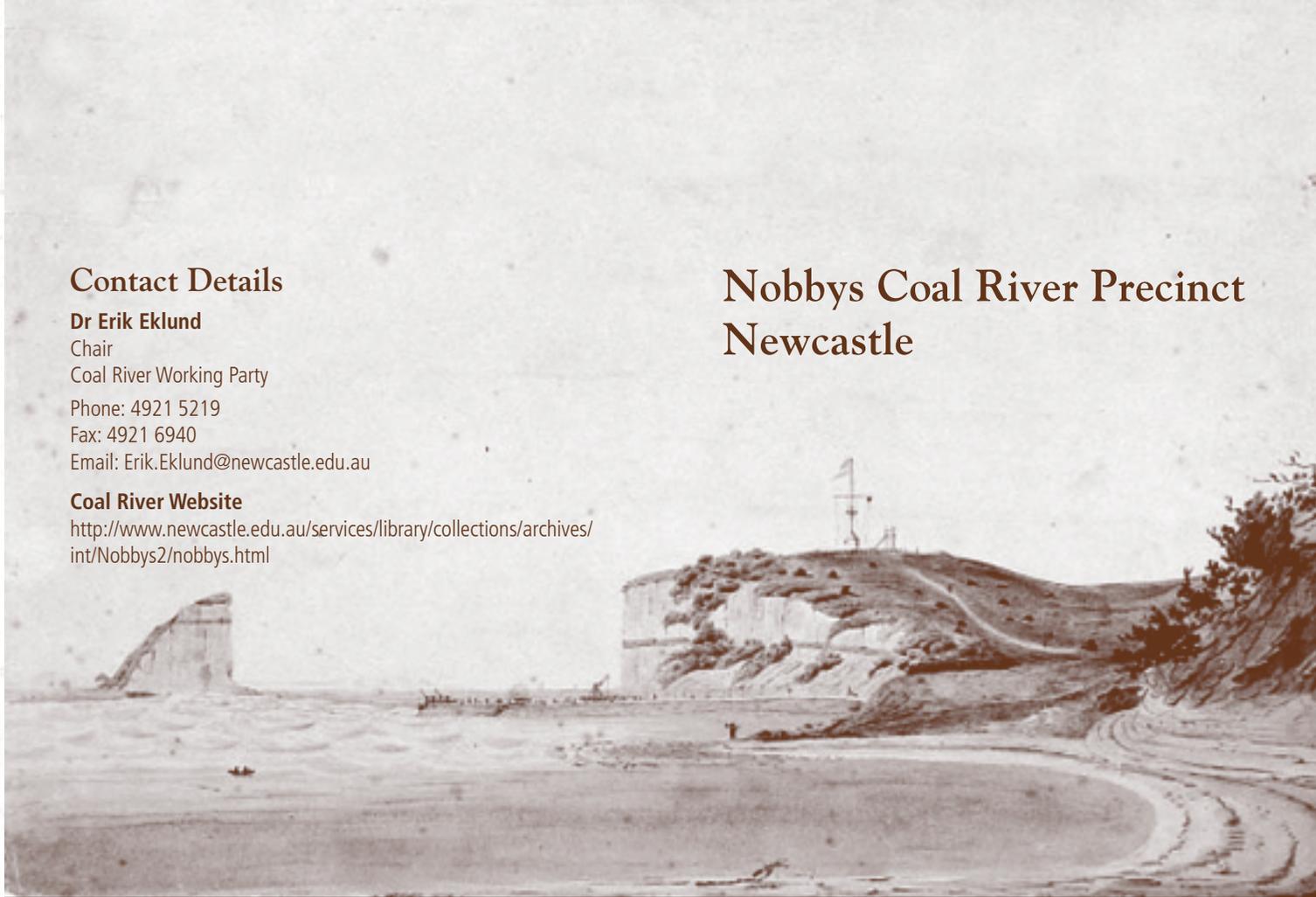
Fax: 4921 6940

Email: Erik.Eklund@newcastle.edu.au

### Coal River Website

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/services/library/collections/archives/int/Nobbys2/nobbys.html>

## Nobbys Coal River Precinct Newcastle



The printing of this brochure was generously funded by the School of Liberal Arts, the University of Newcastle.





Aborigines Resting by a Camp Fire near the Mouth of the Hunter River, Newcastle, NSW Joseph Lycett (ca.1775 – 1828)



Nobbys Island and Pier artist unknown. Newcastle 23 January 1820



c1830s Nobbys island from Mullumbimba Cottage Newcastle



2003 Nobbys

The Nobbys Coal River Precinct is situated at the mouth of the Hunter River and includes a number of historic sites; Nobbys Headland, Macquarie Pier (Nobbys Breakwater), the convict coal mines beneath Signal Hill (now Fort Scratchley), the military fortifications and the convict lumber yard. The precinct is an area much loved by Novocastrians, a place of historical and cultural significance.

## University of Newcastle Involvement

The University of Newcastle has established a Coal River Working Party which will channel University expertise towards researching, uncovering and interpreting Newcastle’s past as revealed through this area. Our ultimate goal is to support the construction of a world-class Interpretive Centre – a major educational, cultural and economic resource – at an appropriate on-site location.

## Aboriginal Heritage Significance

The Awabakal people lived peacefully in the area now known as the Coal River Precinct for countless generations. To the Awabakal, the area is known as Coquun (Hunter River), Whyba Garba (Nobbys), Tahlbihn (Fort Scratchley), Muloobinba (Newcastle) and Yohaaba (the mouth of the Hunter or port area). The area was also of importance to the convict artist, Joseph Lycett who recorded the activities of the Awabakal people in paintings. However, to the Awabakal the importance lies much deeper with the rich cultural heritage alive today in many ways, including the well known Kangaroo that remains locked away continually showing his presence to those who walk nearby at Whyba Garba.

Cover image: ‘Nobby’s Island and Pier Newcastle 23 January 1820’  
Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales

Other images: Reproduced from the John Turner Collection, the University of Newcastle

## Coal River Heritage Significance

Coal River is an historic place that gives tangible expression to Newcastle’s Aboriginal, industrial, maritime and military heritage. Potentially Australia’s most significant regional historic precinct, Coal River is the location of Lieutenant Shortland’s 1797 ‘discovery’ of the Hunter River and of winnable coal. On the 30th March 1804 the site was occupied by a small group of convicts and soldiers. The 30th March 2004 will represent 200 years since the foundation of Newcastle.

## World Heritage Significance

Convict lives dominated the early cultural landscape and convict labour contributed to Australia’s early economic success. Coal River is one of a number of locations in Australia first settled by convicts banished from their host country. It is emblematic of the world-wide movement of forced labour of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which is a world heritage theme.

## National Heritage Significance

The Coal River lumber yard site marks the first industrial workplace outside of Sydney, servicing the convict coal mines and the Hunter’s cedar cutting gangs. The lumber yard is the only known site to retain evidence of early convictism on a broad scale, and therefore retains evidence of Australia’s convict origins.

## State Heritage Significance

The convict coal mines provided New South Wales with its first commercial export cargo. Techniques used to mine in the early 1800s were at the forefront of world mining practice. Coal was a much sought-after commodity for the domestic comfort and industrial growth of Sydney. Lime for mortar, and cedar were prepared at Coal River for use in such buildings as Hyde Park Barracks, St. James Church and the Macquarie-era extensions to Government House. Coal River was the first penal settlement for secondary offenders established within the penal colony of New South Wales. In August 2003, the State Heritage Register Committee recommended to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning that the Coal River Precinct be placed on the State Heritage Register.

## Local Heritage Significance

Coal River marks the birthplace of Australian coal mining and the beginnings of a major industrial city. Picks, shovels and other equipment used in Australia’s first coal mines were forged and maintained at the lumber yard. The construction of the Macquarie Pier increased the navigational safety of the port of Newcastle, encouraging international shipping participation in the coal trade. Further archaeological and archival investigation may reveal the routines of daily life for both the convict and military population as well as further evidence of convict labour, particularly coalmining, quarrying and pier building. This provides the potential to reconstruct the convict/military community as a dynamic whole.



Pagoda c.1818 Built by E.C. Close. Original is in the Mitchell Library  
Detail from a sketch made by Thomas Mitchell during his field trip in 1828