

# The Honeysuckle Story: Merewether Wharf

The Coastal Banksia, or Honeysuckle, prospered on the banks of Newcastle Harbour for many years, prompting the name Honeysuckle Point.

This is the eastern-most point of the Honeysuckle urban renewal project area which stretches in a westerly, then northerly direction along 4km of Newcastle Harbour to Linwood and Carrington, its western and northern limits.



*Aerial view of Honeysuckle site (1992)*  
(SOURCE: HDC)

For most of the 20th century the Honeysuckle project area was dominated by railway workshops, wool stores, cargo sheds and warehouses, both active and dormant. In more recent decades, the rich and important industrial heritage of the land left it contaminated, derelict and blocked off from the people of Newcastle.



*Aerial view of Lee Wharf (2001)*  
(SOURCE: HDC)

By the late 1980s it was recognised that there had been a gradual but sustained period of decline in the number of people living and working in Newcastle, Australia's second oldest city.

Formed by the State Government in 1992 and initially funded with \$100 million from the Commonwealth/State Building Better Cities program, the Honeysuckle Development Corporation set about working in partnership with the local community to transform 50 hectares of surplus government land.

At the heart of one of the biggest urban renewal projects in Australia was the task of opening up Newcastle Harbour to the community. By creating quality residential, commercial and recreational waterfront areas, the project has unlocked lifestyle, economic and environmental benefits for the city and received urban design awards and international recognition along the way.

The Honeysuckle story is an important chapter in the city's growth into a mature, rejuvenated city with a diverse, modern economy home to a range of residential, employment, cultural and recreational opportunities.



*HMAS Newcastle arriving in Newcastle Harbour (1993)*  
(SOURCE: HANNAN PHOTOGRAPHY)



*Aerial view of Merewether Wharf (2006)*  
(SOURCE: HDC)



*Aerial view of Lee and Merewether Wharves (1993)*  
(SOURCE: HANNAN PHOTOGRAPHY)



*Aerial view of Lee Wharf A & C Buildings (2006)*  
(SOURCE: HDC)



*Aerial View of Merewether Wharf (1998)*  
(SOURCE: HDC)



*Banksia integrifolia (a 11646)*  
(SOURCE: D. GREIG © AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS)



# Meekarlba: Place of sweet honey

Traditional Custodians of Newcastle call the river the Coquun, and this country Muloobinba (place of the Mulubin sea fern).



*Shield & Woomera.*  
Shields were used by Aboriginal people as a defensive device and a Woomera is used for throwing a spear longer distances  
(SOURCE: NEWCASTLE REGIONAL MUSEUM)



*Stone tools & hand axes*  
(SOURCE: NEWCASTLE REGIONAL MUSEUM)

## COQUUN RIVER AT NEWCASTLE NSW



**Muloobinba** - Newcastle • **Coquun** - Hunter River • **Meekarlba** - Honeysuckle  
**Derrigarba** - Wickham • **Onebygamba** - Carrington • **Yohaaba** - Port Hunter  
**Whibaygamba** - Nobbys Island • **Tahlbihn** - South Headland • **Burrabihngarn** - North Headland

*Aboriginal place names for locations around Newcastle Harbour c2008*  
(IMAGE SOURCE: NSW DEPARTMENT OF LANDS)

The Dreaming conceptualises the spiritual philosophy of Aboriginal people, and related stories convey how land, sky and beings were formed.

Aboriginal ancestral heroes created all celestial bodies, geographical features, flora, fauna, and human forms. Today Aboriginal peoples' sense of place, community, and continuity is linked through their dreaming stories and song lines.

Song lines inform communities of the locality of significant sites and places, assisting them in the identification, preservation and conservation of local cultural knowledge and property.

Aboriginal cultural traditions and kinships are aligned to totems as a means of safeguarding animal and plant species from extinction, to define social order of clan groups, and to convey and maintain local lores.

Aboriginal people believe spirits to be responsible for good and bad omens. In particular, the clans of the Coquun revered the eagle-hawk, Biriban and dreaded the evil spirit of Koin (Kuwiyn).

Aboriginal peoples' fear of Koin, an imaginary male being, emanated from his maleficent behaviour, and invisibility. Communities feared Koin most at night, and would not drift from camp fires unless carrying a fire stick to ward off the spirit ghost. They feared Koin's visits believing he would steal them away as an eagle taking its prey to his lofty nest.

Biriban on the other hand provides status and authority for those that align with the eagle-hawk totem. The eagle is prominent in landform features located north, south, and west of Muloobinba. Places of significance associated with Biriban are held in safeguard by Aboriginal Custodian of the Coquun.



*Joseph Lycett (ca. 1817) Aborigines spearing fish, others diving for crayfish, a party seated beside a fire cooking fish*  
(SOURCE: NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA) (an2962715-s017)



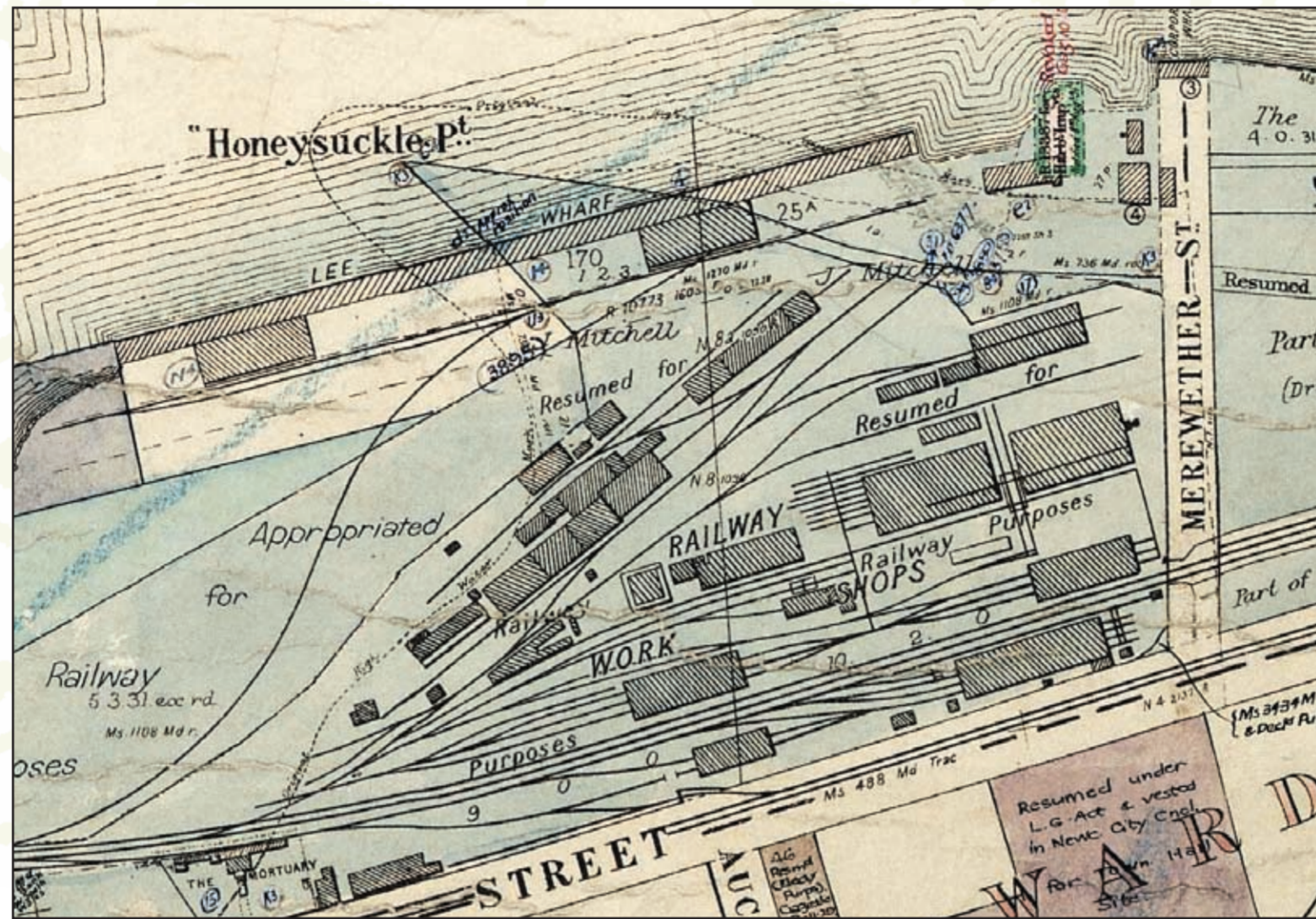
*Unknown Artist's A view of King's Town (1820-28)*  
(SOURCE: COLLECTION OF NEWCASTLE REGION ART GALLERY)



# Great Northern Railway

Northern railway development was begun at Honeysuckle Point Newcastle, in November 1854 by the Hunter River Railway Company. Following a takeover by the New South Wales Government, initial development continued until the opening on 30th March 1857 of the Honeysuckle Point to East Maitland Line. Then the Great Northern Railway (GNR) was steadily extended through the Hunter Valley to the Liverpool Plains.

As part of the designated northern expansion of the NSW Government railway network, the Honeysuckle precinct expanded with construction of the Per Way and Locomotive Workshops through the late 1880s and into the 20th century.



*Workshops as shown on the 1916 town plan of Newcastle  
(before construction of Civic Station)  
(SOURCE: NSW DEPARTMENT OF LANDS)*

Although Locomotive Workshop activity slowed following the opening of Cardiff Workshops in 1929, some of the workshops remained in use on the site until 1993; by this time known as the Civic Workshops.

In the 1930s a new Civic Station replaced some of the railway workshops and enabled people to access the Civic centre complex and other nearby shops and services. Wickham railway station was built at this time.

A railway system must have supporting infrastructure; Workshops built in 1856 close to the original Honeysuckle Point Station were enlarged in 1872, and reached their peak of development about 1890 and continued to serve the railway system for another one hundred years.

In 1891 some of the work was transferred to workshops at Hamilton. After World War One the railway yards again expanded, employing about 500 men in the early 1920s. In 1926 new workshops at Cardiff took over some maintenance and other tasks.

The main trades at Honeysuckle Workshops were boiler making, machining, blacksmithing, woodworking and painting – all taught at the nearby Technical College from the 1890s.

In the workshops, imported locomotives, rolling stock and other machinery were assembled. Spacious and lofty buildings were needed for maintenance and for permanent way materials and equipment.

From 1887 until the 1920s the steam trams used on the Newcastle tramways were overhauled and maintained at Honeysuckle workshops.



*Aerial of workshops and redevelopment of cleared railway and wharf area  
(SOURCE: HONEYSUCKLE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION 2006)*



*Lee Wharf and Railway workshops circa late 1930s  
(SOURCE: STATE RECORDS NSW)*



# Details of Remaining Railway Buildings

With site redevelopment in the latter part of the 1980s and into the 1990s many of the Honeysuckle Point railway buildings were demolished and the rail infrastructure scrapped. Today, only six of the buildings survive but these are among the most important of all buildings on the site. Five are from the 19th century and one is from the early 20th century.

All six buildings have undergone restoration and are in use as commercial or public buildings.



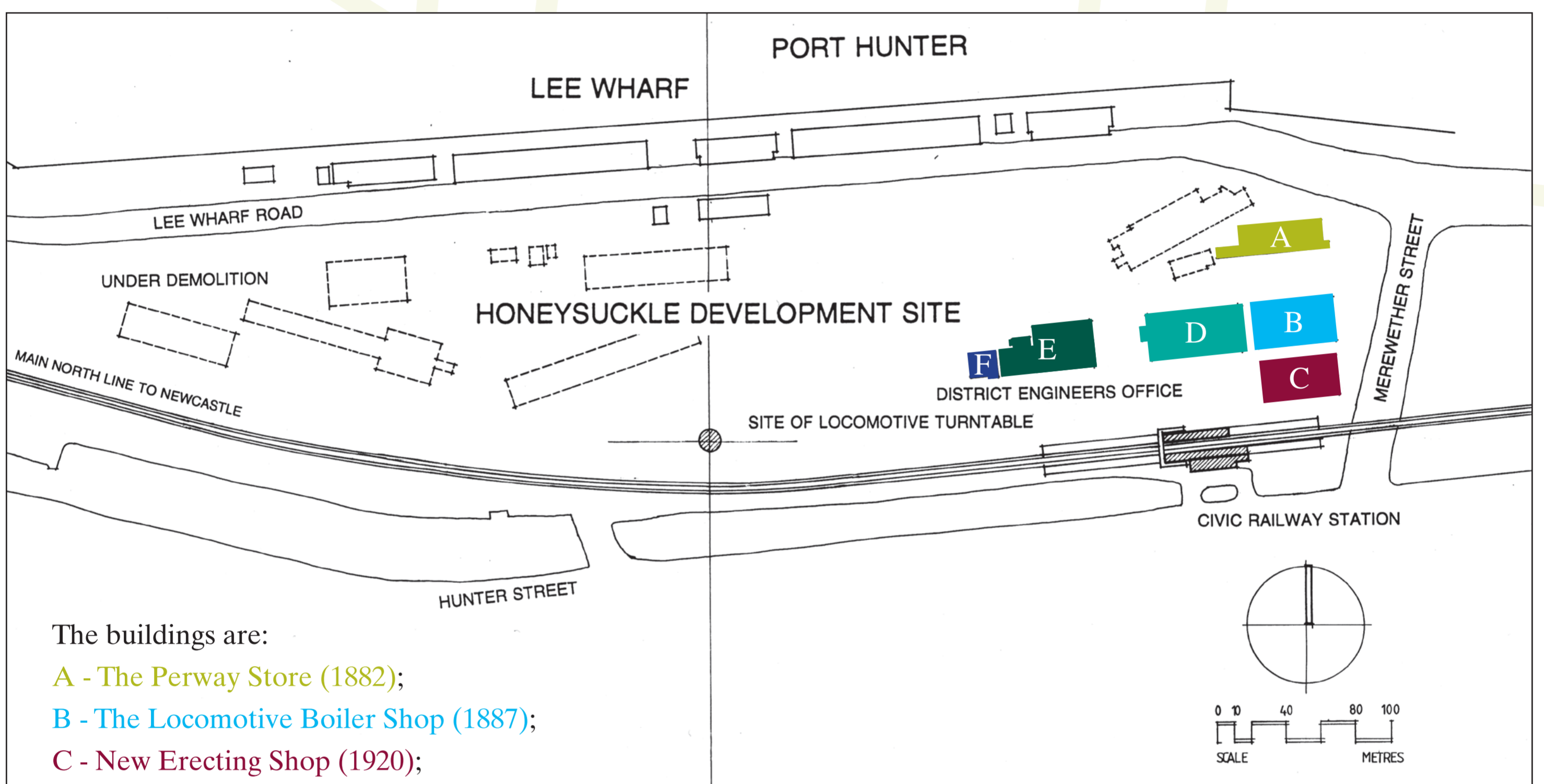
**A** *The Perway Store c1882*  
(SOURCE: NUSPORT 2006)



**B** *Craven Crane installed inside the Locomotive Boiler Shop*  
(SOURCE: HDC 1997)



**C** *Saw tooth roof profile of the New Erecting Shop*  
(SOURCE: HDC 1997)



The buildings are:

- A - The Perway Store (1882);
- B - The Locomotive Boiler Shop (1887);
- C - New Erecting Shop (1920);
- D - Blacksmith's and Wheel Shop (1880);
- E - Locomotive Machine Shop (1874);
- F - Divisional Engineer's Office (1883).

**LOCALITY PLAN - HONEYSUCKLE PRECINCT**

<b>PETER FENWICK</b> INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGIST PHONE (049) 59 1847 P.O. BOX 663 TORONTO, 2283 AUSTRALIA.	PROJECT <b>LOCOMOTIVE TURNTABLE          C. 1857          EXCAVATION REPORT</b>	CLIENT <b>HONEYSUCKLE DEVELOPMENT          CORPORATION</b>	SHEET TITLE <b>LOCALITY PLAN</b>	
	LOCATION <b>HONEYSUCKLE DEVELOPMENT          SITE - NEWCASTLE</b>	DATE <b>OCT '94</b>	DRAWN <b>M.P.F.</b>	

*Plan showing status of site clearance at October 1994 with building names added May 2008*  
(SOURCE: PETER FENWICK ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT ON TURNTABLE 1994)



**D** *Blacksmith's & Wheel Shop c1880*  
(SOURCE: HDC 1997)



**E** *Locomotive Machine Shop c1874*  
(SOURCE: HDC 2005)



**F** *Divisional Engineer's Office c1883*  
(SOURCE: HDC 1997)



*View between the Locomotive Boiler Shop and Blacksmith's & Wheel Shop*  
(SOURCE: HDC 1997)



*The Locomotive Boiler Shop c1887*  
(SOURCE: HDC 1997)

Further information about the buildings can be found on the brass plaques fixed to the façade of each building.



# Background to the 1857 Turntable

Part of the original point to point rail system, the 1857 turntable was used to turn locomotives to allow forward running of passenger and goods trains. There was also a turntable to turn locomotives at the East Maitland end. The Honeysuckle Point turntable location was lost to knowledge after it was firstly bypassed and then filled in. The possible existence of the c.1857, Locomotive Turntable was noted in the “Honeysuckle Point Heritage Study” (1990) prepared by C and M.J. Doring Pty. Ltd. with strong recommendations that the site of the Turntable should be precisely located and recorded.



Similar turntable to one installed at Honeysuckle in 1857 but this photo is believed to be of the turntable at Goulburn  
(SOURCE: STATE RECORDS NSW)



Honeysuckle Railway Workshops  
(SOURCE: NEWCASTLE REGION LIBRARY)

The location and outline of the Turntable appeared in at least three early State Rail Authority (SRA) drawings with slight variation from one to another. At a scale of 1:500, measurement from the drawings was not considered to be sufficiently accurate to guarantee the exact position of the Turntable. One of the drawings, c.1905 identifies the Turntable as “Old Turntable, Filled In”. No other record has been found regarding the condition of the Turntable before it was filled in or any further action since 1905.



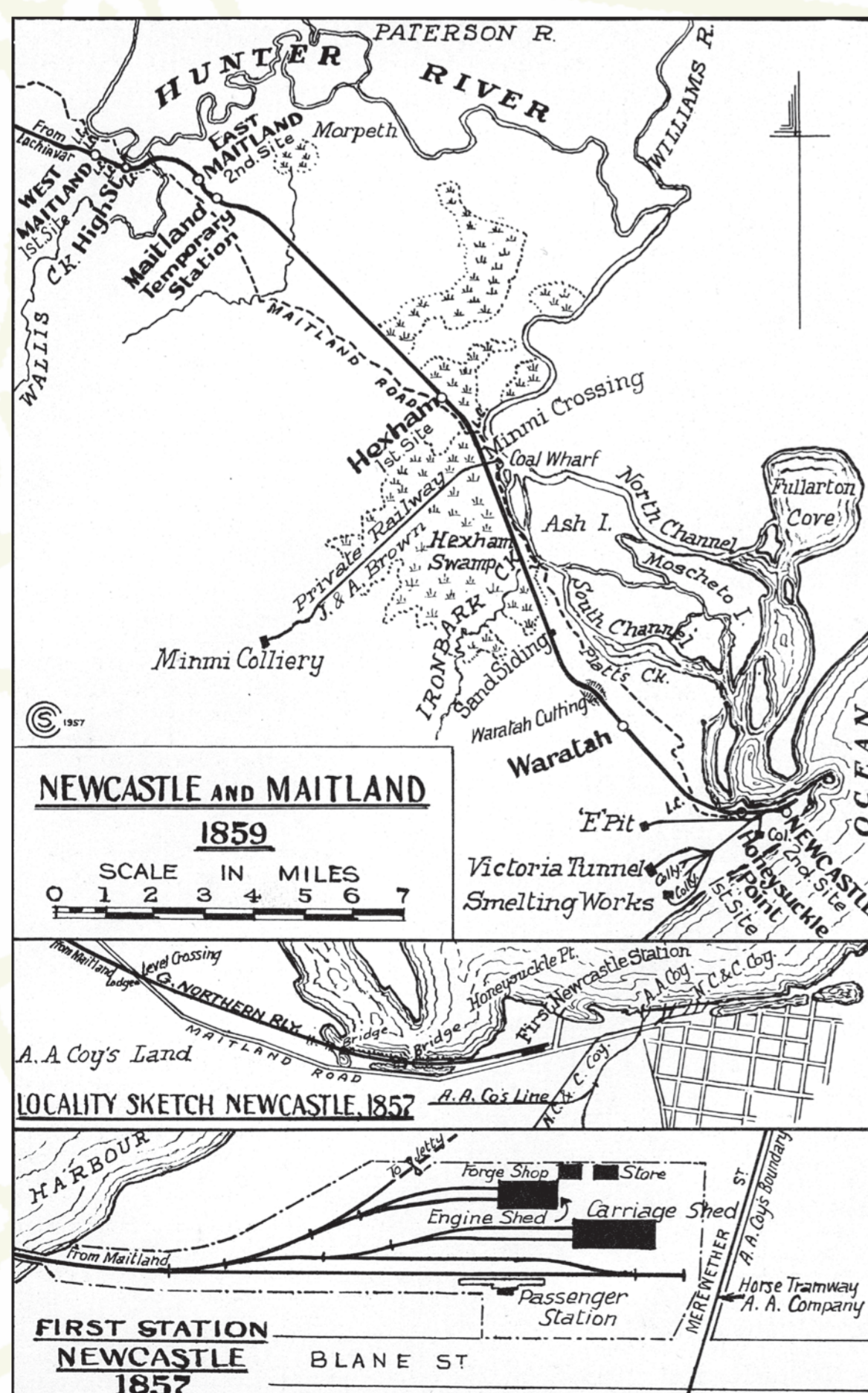
Lee Wharf and Railway workshops  
c late 1930s  
(SOURCE: STATE RECORDS NSW)



Class Z1903 (A93) locomotive at the Newcastle Railway Yard c1937  
(SOURCE: STATE RECORDS NSW)



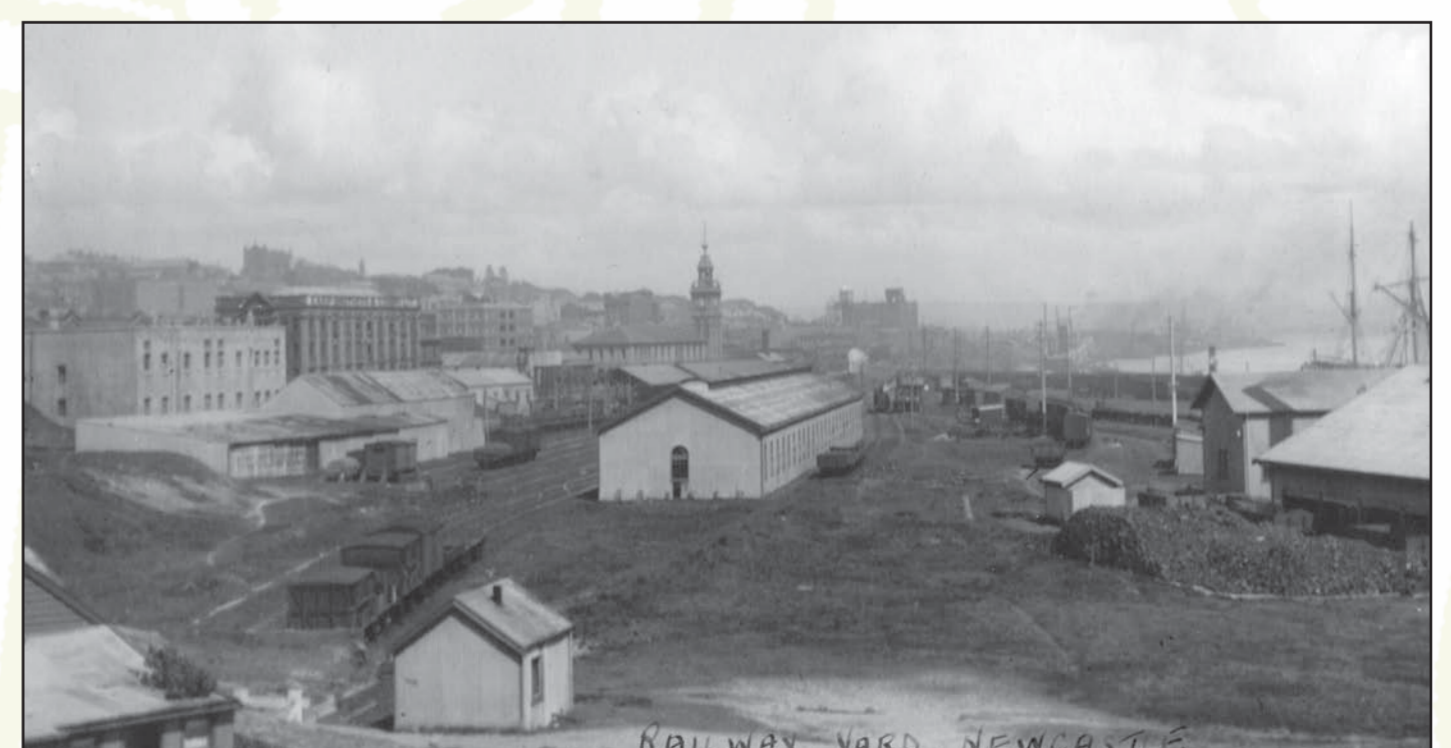
“Newcastle – Railways – Newcastle Railway Yard (September 1927)”  
Railroad Yard at Newcastle.  
The three loads shown contain lumber. The car on left (about 16ft long) contains dimension timber. The middle car, logs, and the flat car on right carries hewn hardwood timbers.  
(SOURCE: NEWCASTLE REGION LIBRARY)



Map of original layout of The Great Northern Railway  
(SOURCE: THE AUSTRALIAN RAILWAYS HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN NO233, MARCH 1957)



“Newcastle Railways” Railway Yard and Harbour (east)  
(SOURCE: NEWCASTLE REGION LIBRARY)

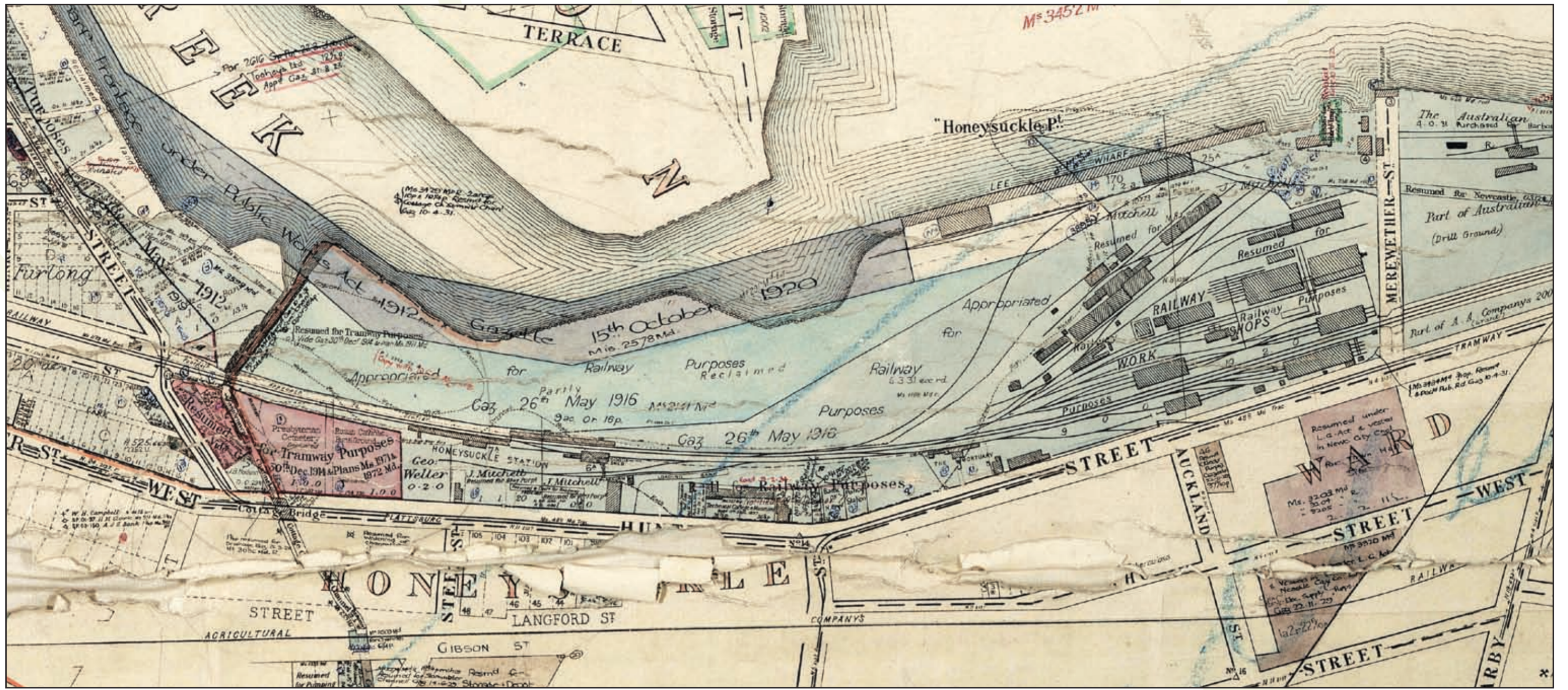


“Newcastle – Railways - Railway Yard” (east) c1900  
(SOURCE: NEWCASTLE REGION LIBRARY)



# Rediscovering the 1857 Turntable

The 1990 Honeysuckle Project Historical Survey, prepared by C & M.J. Doring Pty Ltd quotes from “the first Annual Report of Commissioners of Railway that two 36 Foot diameter turntables were part of an equipment order with Glower & Co. on 17th August 1855, mainly for use on the Great Northern Railway” and additionally in 1857 “a 32 feet (10 metres) Turntable was one of the first items of equipment installed at Honeysuckle Point”. There was no known record as to the construction of the Turntable Pit – stone, brick or a combination of both.



Local rail system as shown on the 1916 town plan of Newcastle edit 1 sheet 1 (before construction of Civic Station)  
(SOURCE: NSW DEPARTMENT OF LANDS)

When first exposed, the top of the circular brick wall of the Turntable Pit was coated with a layer of grease, making brick identification difficult. One loose brick was removed and scrubbed clean enabling a closer examination. The brick proved to be of red, hand pugged clay, hand pressed sand stock with no frog, consistent with 1850s manufacture. One brick exposed on the top of the northern side had a long impressed frog which may mean bricks from different manufacturers were used. The exposed wall has been laid in English Bond (one row of stretchers to one row of headers)



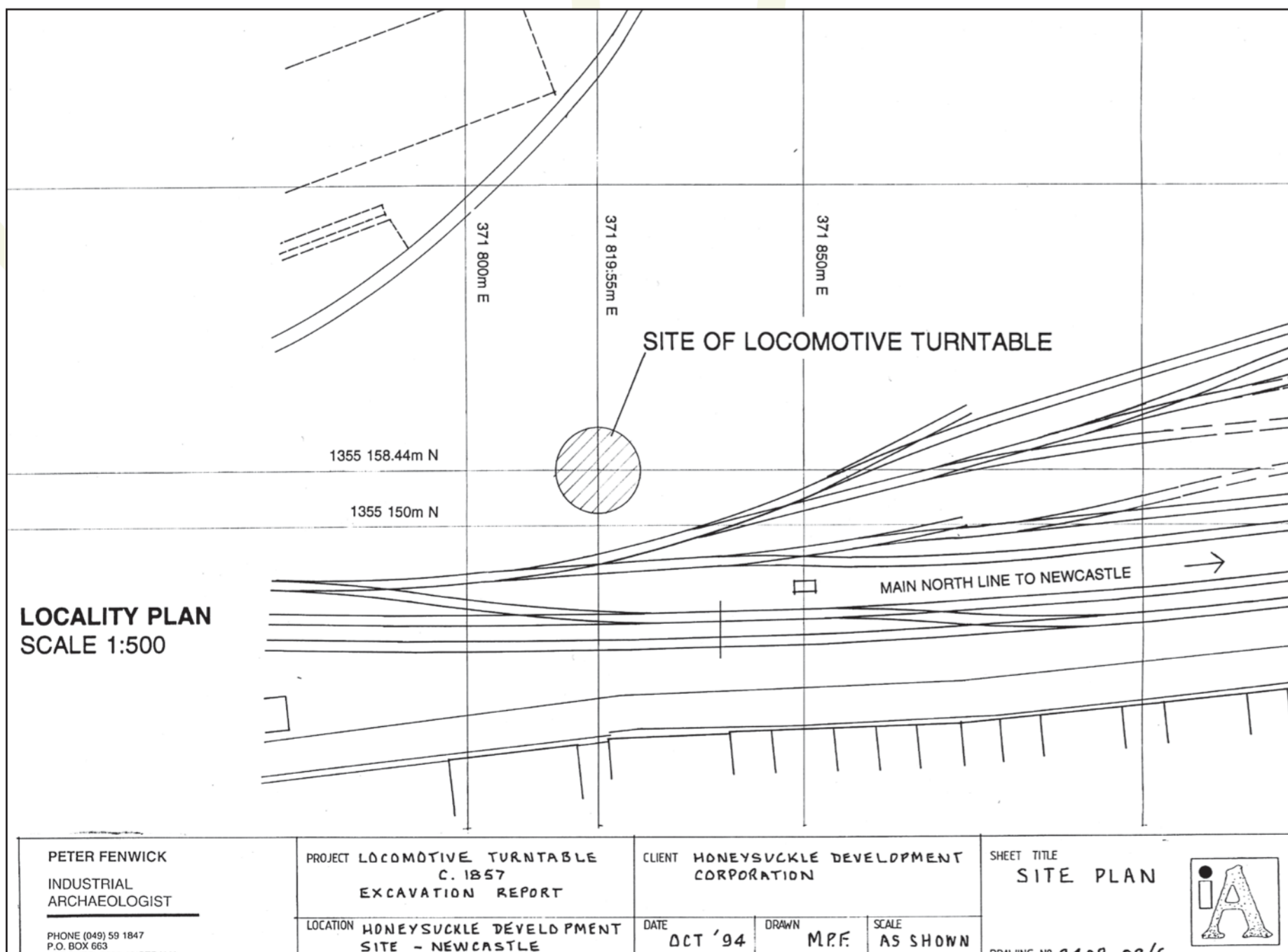
Royal tour of the Duke of York (King George V, 1865 - 1936)  
- Honeysuckle platform Dec 1901  
(SOURCE: STATE RECORDS NSW)

using lime mortar (some crushed shell was visible in the mortar) and is 360mm thick. There are no identifiable marks on the exposed bricks.

At the full depth of excavation on the rim of the Turntable Pit the upper platform of brickwork was identified by Mr Larry Greentree, as having supported the Turntable Running Rail. The rail would have been mounted on “railway sleeper” size hardwood blocks which in turn were fixed to the 460mm wide brick platform by the set in bolts. The lower, deeper section of brickwork, 285mm wide and 125mm deep, was identified as a drain.

The excavation at the centre of the Turntable Pit exposed a 1,390mm diameter concrete block with six set-in bolts, being the mounting base for the central pivot of the Turntable.

*Edited extract from “Honeysuckle Point Locomotive Turntable Report” October 1994 by Peter Fenwick, Industrial Archaeologist.*



Plan showing location of turntable  
(SOURCE: PETER FENWICK ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT ON TURNTABLE 1994)



The Turntable during excavation works in 1994  
(SOURCE: HDC)