Dawes Point
Geographical Review

To the Royal Australian Historical Society,
Geographical Society of NSW, and the
Geographical Names Board of NSW
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Synopsis

Leading Sydney historians have noted persistent confusions about the appropriate mapping of Dawes Point—as several places of colonial history significance and a suburb gazetted in 1993.

This report suggests that Lt. William Dawes’s science, defence, construction and linguistic contributions to colonial Sydney would be appropriately honoured by:

—Recognising Dawes Point as all the public pedestrian areas occupying the western headland of Sydney Cove from the north headland of Campbells Cove to Ives Steps beside Pier 1 on Walsh Bay;

—Renaming Hickson Road Reserve as part of the existing Dawes Point Reserve—which also has been identified in state government documents as Dawes Point (Tar ra) Park*;

—Including all the Dawes Point public open space area in the suburb of The Rocks (which currently includes only Hickson Road Reserve);

—Delisting the microsuburb of Dawes Point (2016 pop. 357), which since 1993 has overlapped half of the Walsh Bay conservation zone (SREP 16 1989-2009) and parts of the Millers Point and Dawes Point Park conservation zones; and

—Including Lower Fort Street (west side) and Trinity Street in the suburb and conservation zone of Millers Point (LEP 2012), to conceptually rejoin Fort Street on Observatory Hill.

Summary
Dawes Point has been inconsistently mapped since the early 1800s. Lt. William Dawes’s original activities on the west headland of Sydney Cove now are mapped at the east head of Walsh Bay, on the other side of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Sydney’s early colonial history would be properly represented by recognising Dawes Point as all the public park and pedestrian areas around the headland from Campbells Cove to Ives Steps; including this whole parkland in the suburb of The Rocks, and delisting the current suburb of Dawes Point (because it inappropriately overlaps both the north west area of The Rocks and the east half of Walsh Bay).

Dawes lived in Sydney for only three years, 1788-1791. He built the colony’s first cottage (his home-observatory) on high ground north-west of what is now Campbells Cove. Nearby, he also built the colony’s first powder magazine/battery. Both sites lie within Dawes Point Reserve—which now is separated from the shoreline of Sydney Cove by Hickson Road and the Hickson Road Reserve. Although this area is divided between the suburbs of The Rocks and Dawes Point, both reserves are combined in the conservation management plans for Dawes Point (Tar ra) Park.

There is no current map label for the north point of Campbell’s Cove. Dawes seems to have named this place Point Maskelyne (for his London mentor, the Astronomer Royal, Rev. Dr. Nevil Maskelyne).

After Dawes returned to London in 1791, it was mapped for some years as Dawes Point—but successive cartographers gradually moved that label westwards, to encompass the whole headland—and its current POI location matches Ives Steps, beside the north-west corner of Pier 1 on Walsh Bay. These shifts responded to increasingly prominent fortifications of Dawes Battery (closed in 1916) and Fort Phillip (now Sydney Observatory) atop Flagstaff/Observatory Hill.

When Dawes lived in Sydney, transport was not motorised but in the early 20th century, the city began modernising its routes. Hickson Road (built between 1910 and 1920) now curves around the Dawes headland from George Street at Campbells Cove to Sussex Street at what is now Barangaroo South. Developed as a freight thoroughfare for then-new wharves and warehouses at Walsh Bay and north-east Darling Harbour, it divides the Sydney Cove zone where Dawes previously lived.

Since the Sydney Harbour Bridge opened in 1932, the history of The Rocks and Dawes Point has been confused further by aerial images suggesting that the headland is divided by the southern (elevated) road to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. This non-terrestrial demarcation may be why the suburb of Dawes Point was gazetted in 1993 on the west side of the bridge.
Summary (cont.)
In 1989, Walsh Bay was declared a conservation zone via the Sydney Regional Environmental Plan (SREP) No. 16—but its addressing remains divided between the Dawes Point and Millers Point suburbs (both gazetted in 1993, before there were any residents of Walsh Bay or Barangaroo). Neither Walsh Bay nor Barangaroo are included in the Millers Point conservation zone as defined in the Sydney Local Environmental Plan—Millers Point, 2012.

This review anticipates that Dawes Point would be dissolved as a suburb and its main colonial street, Lower Fort Street (west), would rejoin (upper) Fort Street on Observatory Hill, as part of the Millers Point heritage conservation area and suburb. Trinity Street and Downshire Street, Dawes Point, also have been included in the Millers Point LEP.

A appropriate boundary for the locality of Dawes Point is defined in the state government’s 2011 conservation management plan for Dawes Point (Tar ra) Park—including Hickson Road Reserve and the foreshore walkway under the harbour bridge, to the sandstone cable hut at Ives Steps.

Fig. 1: Latitude coordinate specified by William Dawes in a 1788 letter to Britain’s Royal Astronomer, Nevil Maskelyne. Because his longitude coordinate was in the Tasman Sea and thus cannot be accurate, this latitude (assumed as accurate) could be located at any point directly west towards Lower Fort Street (but most probably east of the bridge).
Dawes Point: First Maps

In 1788, Lt. William Dawes, the astronomer with Britain’s First Fleet, named as Point Maskelyne the north-west head of Sydney Cove; in honour of his London mentor, the then-Astronomer Royal, Rev. Dr. Nevil Maskelyne. On high ground near this point, he built the camp’s first house-observatory—then the colony’s first gunpowder magazine and a modest battery of eight cannons (from the *Sirius*)—targeting potentially hostile vessels sailing through Sydney Heads. After Dawes returned to England in 1791, this headland area became known as Dawes Point.

Figs. 2 and 3: Francis Fowkes’s 1788 west-at-top map of the colonial settlement around Sydney Cove. The cove’s north-west tip was labelled Point Maskelyne and its function was noted as ‘The Observatory’.
Fig. 4: Dawes's July 1788 map of the settlement, including 'The Observatory' he had just set up on the north-west head of the cove. At this time, he had not built the powder magazine which was rebuilt as Dawes Battery during the three decades after his departure.
Fig. 5: *Sydney Cove, Port Jackson* (detail, south at top), as surveyed by Capt. John Hunter (commander of the Sirius, 1 March 1788, with Dawes’s home and observatory shown at bottom right.)
Fig. 6: Governor Arthur Phillip’s 1792 Survey of the Settlement at New South Wales, New Holland, showing Dawes Battery at the end of George Street and ‘Observatory’ at the end of the easterly path to the point north of what is now Campbells Cove. Dawes left Sydney in the year before this map was drawn.
Dawes Observatory-Home (Reconstruction)

Fig. 7 (above): Reconstruction of Dawes's home-observatory at Old Sydney Town, near Gosford, 1970s-1980s. The large sandstone rock emulated the rocky ground on which the original building was constructed. Parts of the roofs were made of canvas and designed to be retractable for viewing the night sky. Fig. 8 (left): Dawes Point map (detail), showing the Dawes Point horse ferry dock, from the City of Sydney survey maps 1949-1972.
Tar ra: Aboriginal Occupation

The peninsula on the west side of Sydney Cove has the Aboriginal name Tar ra. This area was occupied by the Gadigal clan of the Eora language group, who used flat sandstone rocks around the shoreline to cook fish, rock oysters, cockles and mussels.

Remains of a campfire found in The Rocks have been carbon-dated to the 1400s — relatively recent evidence of human habitation compared to archaeological material from north-western Australia that dates back at least 50,000 years.

Australia’s first British Governor, Capt. Arthur Phillip, recalled of the First Fleet’s arrival in Sydney: ‘Sailing up into Sydney cove we could see natives lining the shore, shaking spears and yelling.’

Capt. Lt. Watkin Tench, who arrived with the First Fleet, recalled that Sydney’s Aborigines tended to sleep in different places – mainly in communally used caves and wigwams made from tree bark.

Other early colonial papers record that within a year of the First Fleet’s arrival, over half the native population had died—most from smallpox, syphilis, influenza and other introduced diseases. Many natives also were shot dead by colonial farmers and police, usually due to property-related conflicts created after Aboriginal lands were granted to new settlers under a British property ownership policy known as ‘terra nullius’ (land belonging to no-one).

After 1788, Sydney’s first colonial astronomer, Lt. William Dawes, worked with an Aboriginal woman, Patyegarang, to compile the first dictionary of Sydney’s Aboriginal language. In 1883, Irish settler Richard Sadleir published a book, The Aborigines of Australia, including his post-1820s recollections of Aboriginal carvings on sandstone rocks near Dawes Battery. These engravings, which Sadleir said included a whale, human and spirit figures, and weapons, have disappeared—perhaps during construction of the harbour bridge.

Colonial artists often depicted Aborigines living traditional lifestyles around Millers Point and Sydney Cove through to (at least) the mid-19th century.
Dawes Point: Early 19th Century

Fig. 10 (top): Watercolour of Fort Macquarie (foreground) and Fort Phillip and Dawes Battery on the west side of Sydney Cove, date and artist unknown. Fig. 11 (bottom): Sydney Cove from Dawes Point, 1817 watercolour by Joseph Lycett.
Fig. 12 (top): Land survey map of Sydney 1835 (detail) showing the Francis Greenway redevelopment of Dawes Battery set in parkland, with the former Point Maskelyne at right and the Dawes Point label moved north-west to span the entire headland. Fig. 13 (bottom): Conrad Martens and T.S. Boys, *Sydney from the North Shore*, 1842 (detail). This shows several outcrops on the west headland of Sydney Cove, which all were named Dawes Point at different times. In the centre are ships anchored at what is now Walsh Bay.
Dawes Point: Early 19th Century (cont.)

Fig. 14 (top): View of Sydney Port Jackson, New South Wales, Taken from ye Rocks on the Western Side of the Cove (probably Dawes Battery), artist unknown, ca. 1809. Fig. 15 (bottom): John Skinner Prout’s 1842 painting of Dawes Battery, looking east towards Sydney Heads, across the mouth of Sydney Cove.
Dawes Point: Late 19th Century

Fig. 16: Circular Quay from Dawes Battery (looking south), 1873, glass plate photograph by Henry Beaufoy Merlin.
Dawes Point: Inconsistent Mapping

Fig. 17 (top): Late 18th century map of the headland between Sydney Cove and Darling Harbour.
Fig. 18 (bottom): City of Sydney survey map 1903 (detail).
Dawes Point: Inconsistent Mapping (cont.)

Fig. 19 (top): Shield’s *Map of the City of Sydney*, 1845, with the old Dawes Point unlabelled and a new Dawes Point label in its current position (as seen on Google Maps and the NSW Government’s SIX online mapping tool for cadstral data). Fig. 20 (bottom): Woolcott and Clarke’s 1854 map of Sydney (detail).
Dawes Point: 1855 Town Plans

Fig. 21 (top): Smith and Gardiner’s 1855 Map of Sydney and Suburbs (detail) shows Dawes Point in its present location, and Dawes Battery. Fig. 22 (bottom): Percy Dove’s 1855 neighbourhood plan of what is now Dawes Point suburb shows the absence of many streets that were developed with the Walsh Bay reclamations after 1910.
Walsh Bay Development 1910–1924

The name ‘Walsh Bay’ appeared in 1918—to honour the Sydney Harbour Trust’s Engineer-in-Chief, Henry Deane Walsh, who led the NSW Government’s major wharfage redevelopment of Darling Harbour, including substantial reclamations and new building around the west headland of Sydney Cove. This ambitious project followed the NSW Government’s declaration of a rat plague in 1900, and its ‘Rocks resumptions’ of properties. Construction began in 1910 and was largely completed by 1924, despite WWI budget cutbacks.

Fig. 23: The Sydney Harbour Trust’s 1918 watercolour perspective of the Walsh Bay redevelopment, signed by Henry Deane Walsh, its Engineer-in-Chief. This shows Dawes Point (inappropriately) at the north end of Pier 1 (lower right).
Dawes Point and Campbells Cove 1920s

Fig. 24 (top): Construction site for the southern pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, looking east from the upper level of the Pier 1 wharf building. Fig 25 (bottom): Looking north-west across Campbell’s Storehouses to Dawes Point Park in 1925.
Dawes Point: Harbour Bridge Division 1932
When the Sydney Harbour Bridge was constructed in the early 1930s, the new southern approach road was elevated above the ruins of Dawes Battery and a small new park was created to the north of Campbells Cove. This park now is named Hickson Road Reserve—replacing both the Point Maskelyne and Dawes Point names for the colonial promontory. Since ca. 1880, it has been separated from the original battery site (now part of Dawes Point Park) by a road from The Rocks to the old Dawes Point horse ferry—which became part of Hickson Road by 1920. The horse ferry was made redundant by the bridge.
Campbells Cove: 19th and 21st Century Perspectives

Fig. 28 (top): Conrad Martens, 1856, *Circular Quay* (looking south from the Dawes Point hillside to Campbell’s Cove). Fig. 29 (bottom): Rendering of the forthcoming restaurant/tourist precinct under construction at Campbell’s Cove, looking north-west. (Both images courtesy Property NSW.)
Dawes Point (Tar ra) Park Conservation Management Plan 2011
In 2011, the NSW Government Architect’s Office produced a conservation management plan (CMP) for all the public open space on the western headland of Circular Quay (Sydney Cove)—including Dawes Point Park (sic), an unnamed area matching Hickson Road Reserve, and the Cable Hut near Ives Steps on the west side of the harbour bridge (see Fig. 30). This CMP highlights several discrepancies of naming from the official listings given on Spatial Services’ SIX mapping tool, which is presumed to be a reliable visualisation of the Geographical Names Register.

Fig. 30: Public open space area (in colour) defined in the state government’s Dawes Point (Tar ra) Park Conservation Management Plan 2011.
Early Colonial Maps of Dawes Point

The Dawes Point (Tar ra) Park Conservation Management Plan 2011 includes recent maps produced by students of architects Philip Thalis and Peter-John Cantrill for the former Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (now Property NSW/Place Management NSW). These maps are derived from all the original maps still available.

Fig. 31: Recent maps of the early shorelines of Dawes Point by students of architects Philip Thalis and Peter-John Cantrill, for the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (now Property NSW/Place Management NSW).
Fig. 32 (top) and Fig. 33 (bottom): Online images of the Sydney Opera House from the jetty at the north-west corner of Campbells Cove—near the original location of Point Maskelyne.
Fig. 34: Terrazzo map of Sydney Cove 1808, installed at First Fleet Park, Circular Quay for the 1988 Bicentennial. In the left foreground is the label Dawes Point (Tar ra). In the centre foreground is Dawes Battery (semi-circle marked with eight cannons). The first observatory site is marked (perhaps inaccurately) just west of what is now the Park Hyatt Hotel. The 1988 shoreline is marked with black dots. This map seems to reinterpret several pre-1810 maps of Sydney Cove.
Conclusions

**Mapping and naming confusions.** Dawes Point today is mapped misleadingly as the eastern headland of Walsh Bay, not the western headland of Sydney Cove.

Current mapping and naming of the Dawes Point promontory, Dawes Point Park/Reserve and Dawes Point suburb are all misleading in relation to the history and geography of both Dawes’s activities and neighbouring conservation areas. This is causing significant confusions across different government agencies, and for the public and key history authorities.

It seems important to emphasise Dawes’s scientific achievements by including Hickson Road Reserve within Dawes Point Reserve (also known as Dawes Point Tar ra Park, see Fig. 30). And it would be appropriate to delist the 1993-gazetted suburb of Dawes Point (currently located west of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, where it occupies the eastern half of the Walsh Bay conservation area (SREP 16 1989-2009), the north-eastern part of the Millers Point conservation area (LEP 2012) and the north-western part of Sydney’s original village of The Rocks.

**Emergency services confusions.** For example, when the Lord Mayor of Sydney hosts her annual New Years Eve party at ‘Dawes Point’ or ‘Dawes Point Park’ (as is reported in newspapers), guests actually assemble on land that the GNB has named Hickson Road Reserve. If there was an emergency (such as an act of terrorism) at one of those mayoral parties, emergency services presumably would be guided by satnav to Ives Steps and the north end of Pier One on the west side of the harbour bridge. If they drove from The Rocks, vehicles would see the emergency at Hickson Road Reserve, but if they drove via Hickson Road through Barangaroo and Walsh Bay, the rescue and crime teams could waste time trying to find the emergency at ‘Dawes Point’ (Ives Steps) before realising that the mayor’s function was actually happening around the other side of the harbour bridge.

**Campbells Cove rejuvenation.** With current renovations of the old Campbells Storehouses for a new generation of restaurants, and because Campbells Cove and The Rocks are increasingly popular with tourists (wedding and Opera House photography), there are state-significant economic and marketing advantages in recognising Dawes Point’s history as the west headland of Sydney Cove.
Acknowledgements

Images and information were sourced from numerous local history books and online archives, including public digital material from:

— Archives NSW
— Australian National University (Australian Dictionary of Biography)
— City of Sydney Archives
— Friends of Millers Point
— Living Sydney Museums (formerly the NSW Historic Houses Trust)
— Millers Point Residents Action Group
— Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences
— National Library of Australia (Trove)
— National Trust of NSW
— NSW Department of Planning and Environment
— Property NSW (Place Management NSW)
— Royal Australian Historical Society Library
— State Library of New South Wales (The Dictionary of Sydney)
— Sydney Theatre Company
— Walsh Bay Precinct Association
— Wikipedia

Selected References

— Dawes Battery heritage site signage.
— Environmental Partnership Pty Ltd, 1990, Dawes Point Reserve Plan of Management, Sydney: