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Hawkesbury
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Heritage Highlights

- Wilberforce
- Ebenezer
- Pitt Town
- Wisemans Ferry

Sydney's early penal settlement soon ran out of food as the shores around Botany Bay were too sandy to support agriculture. In 1789 Captain Arthur Phillip sailed north to Broken Bay and sighted the mouth of a river which Phillip named the Hawkesbury River after Lord Hawkesbury. He travelled to the area which had taken on the name 'Green Hills' (now known as Windsor), where he noted arable land ideal for growing fruit and vegetables, and for grazing livestock.

By 1794, 22 families were farming the area, with more constantly arriving. At that time, much of the transportation was by river. When Governor Lachlan Macquarie arrived in Sydney in 1810, part of his brief was to prevent further losses of food stores, buildings and possessions caused by floods which had plagued the Hawkesbury since 1794. Macquarie gave these instructions high priority and established townships on the high ground in various parts of the district. Today many fine buildings from the 19th Century still survive providing insight into early European colonisation.

WILBERFORCE

One of Macquarie's five towns planned in 1810, Wilberforce is located on the left bank of the Hawkesbury River, about 7kms north of Windsor. It was named by Macquarie in 1810 after William Wilberforce (1759-1833), English politician, anti-slavery campaigner and one of the founding members of the RSPCA . Early in 1811, Macquarie returned with James Meehan, the surveyor, to mark out the township.

1 Wilberforce Park

47 George Road Wilberforce

Marked as the Town Square in 1811, this public space bounded by Macquarie, Church, George and Duke Roads is now known as Wilberforce Park. Like the parks in Windsor and Richmond, Wilberforce Park is a rare remaining example of Macquarie's foresight and town planning.



Wilberforce Park by G.Ewin 2010

2 The Macquarie School House

43 Macquarie Road Wilberforce

Located behind St Johns Anglican Church, the school house was established by Governor Macquarie in 1819-1820 and is the only surviving schoolhouse from the Macquarie era remaining in the Hawkesbury. The building served many purposes including accommodation for the schoolmaster and a venue for church services until 1859 when St Johns Church was consecrated.

The school house was constructed, to Macquarie's design, of sun-dried brick coated with a mixture of lime and fat to keep moisture out. The building was rendered in 1911 to preserve it.



The Macquarie School House, Wilberforce by G.Ewin 2010

3 St Johns Church

43 Macquarie Road Wilberforce

Following a public meeting in 1846 a new church was planned for Wilberforce and public donations raised. Edmund Blacket, who designed the University of Sydney, was engaged to design a church separate from the existing school house.

The sundial on the northern most wall of the church was erected to commemorate the consecration of the church in 1859, by John Wenban, the local schoolmaster. One evening in November 1859, the Wenban family was returning home in a spring-cart. While turning a corner close to home, one of the wheels hit a pothole and John was thrown out. The horse bolted and the cart overturned, with two of the children severely injured. John died 20 minutes later of a fractured skull. The date on the sundial, 1859, marks both the consecration of the church and the year of John Wenban's unfortunate demise.



St Johns Church, Wilberforce Hawkesbury Library Service (HLS)

4**Wilberforce Cemetery**

15 Old Sackville Road Wilberforce

In 1811 Governor Macquarie directed that all burials were to take place in consecrated cemeteries "in a decent and becoming manner". Many well-known Wilberforce pioneers are buried here including members of the Everingham, Rose, Cobcroft, Bushell and Turnbull families. A number of the graves have retained their original wrought iron railings and there are some lovely carvings surviving, including the cherub on one of the Turnbull headstones.



Wilberforce Cemetery

5**Australiana Pioneer Village**

5 Rose Street Wilberforce

The site of the Australiana Pioneer Village was first granted to William MacKay in 1797, but then owned by subsequent members of the Rose family until 1961. Dugald Andrew "Bill" McLachlan purchased the property and the village opened in 1970 with a number of buildings that had been transferred there for preservation.

Some of the re-sited buildings include the Black Horse Inn stables from Richmond, Bowd's Sulky Shed from Wilberforce, Marsden Park Public School and the Kurrajong Railway Goods Shed. The village was purchased by Hawkesbury City Council in 1984 and the buildings were listed on the NSW Heritage Register in 2004. In 2010 The Friends of the Australiana Pioneer Village leased the site and it officially reopened to the public in 2011. Run by volunteers, it opens every Sunday and on public holidays (Except Anzac Day).



Australiana Pioneer Village by W.Irving 2016

6**Rose Cottage**

Rose Street Wilberforce

Built during Macquarie's governorship, this is Australia's oldest timber house still standing on its original site. It was built in the early 1810s by Thomas Rose from Dorset who arrived in 1793, one of the first free settlers in the colony. It has lathe and mud plaster walls, whitewashed with pipe clay, a shingled roof and hessian ceiling. The cottage was continuously occupied by the Rose family until 1961. The cottage is usually available for inspection when Australiana Pioneer Village is open.



Rose Cottage, Wilberforce by G.Ewin 2010

WISEMANS FERRY

By 1794, settlers had moved into the area west of this town originally known as Lower Hawkesbury or Lower Portland Head. Grain and other crops were being grown for the colony by these early farmers who provided Sydney Town with almost half its food supply. The produce was delivered by boat down the Hawkesbury River, leading to the town rapidly developing as an important river port. This was the beginning of a riverboat industry, which continued throughout the 19th century. By the 1830s the town was known as Wiseman's as a tribute to Solomon Wiseman, the emancipated convict who operated the ferry service across the Hawkesbury River.

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Wisemans Inn Hotel & Cobham Hall Museum

5545 Old Northern Road Wisemans Ferry

Cobham Hall was built in 1826 by convict labourers, commissioned by Solomon Wiseman as a home for himself and his second wife Sofia. It was constructed of hand-hewn Hawkesbury sandstone which is mostly still intact today. Red gum rafters can be seen throughout the roof structure as well as lime made from crushed, cooked oyster shells in the mortar of the walls. The home was later transformed into a hotel. The museum is located upstairs in the hotel and is open 1-3pm on Sat, Sun & public holidays, with free entry.



Cobham Hall, by M.Duncan 2018

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Great North Road

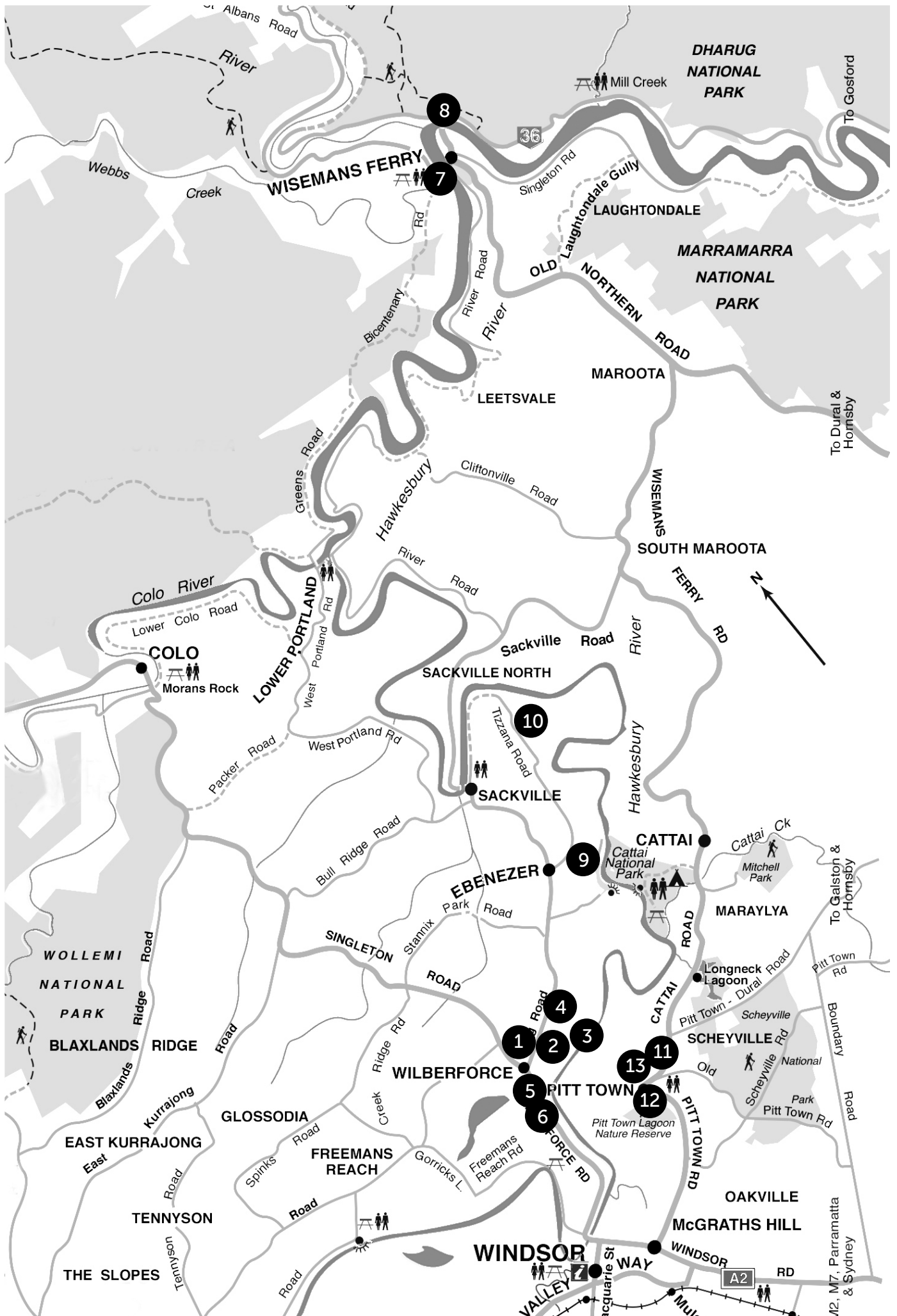
The 240 km Great North Road was built between 1826 and 1836 by convict labour to connect Sydney with Newcastle and the Upper Hunter Valley. The portion of the road covering Devines Hill and Finches Line is registered as a World Heritage listed site. The road is an excellent example of the extensive road building undertaken by Governor Darling.

The 42km section of the original road between Wisemans Ferry and Mt Manning is called the Old Great North Road and is closed to traffic. Today, visitors can take an easy one hour walk of the 1.8km section of the road up Devines Hill where you can explore convict relics.

A fifteen minute walk up a gentle gradient leads to spectacular stone walling, culverts, quarries, buttresses, chiselled and blasted rock faces and hand hewn drains.



The Great North Road, by M.Duncan 2018



EBENEZER

In 1802 a group of free settlers arrived on the Coromandel and settled on grants of land along the Hawkesbury River in the area known as Portland Head. These families – Davison, Hall, Howe, Johnston, Johnstone, Mein, Stubbs and Turnbull – came to the new colony with a request to be settled together. The locality of Ebenezer takes its name from the church, although the area was originally known as Portland Head.

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Ebenezer Church

95 Coromandel Road Ebenezer

Following the settlement of the families who arrived on the Coromandel, church services were held under the gum tree opposite the present day church. Under the leadership of Presbyterian James Mein, and also due to the influence of the Reverend John Dunmore Lang from Sydney Town, Ebenezer Church became the first Presbyterian Church in Australia. Owen Cavanough, a seaman who arrived in 1788, donated the land for a church, which was designed by Andrew Johnston. It was a plain rectangular stone building with few embellishments and was in use by 1809. The stone entrance porch was added in 1929 and the vestry commenced in 1959. This is the oldest church in Australia and is still in use today.



Ebenezer Church by Jonathon Auld

The schoolmaster's residence is thought to have been built in 1817 and is an excellent example along with the church of early colonial architecture designed by Andrew Johnston.

The church and schoolmaster's house is open each day for visitors who are welcome to take a self-guided tour or indulge in a delicious devonshire tea.

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Tizzana Winery

518 Tizzana Road Ebenezer

Tizzana winery was built by Dr Thomas Fiaschi in 1887, to process the grapes grown on his acreage at Sackville Reach. The vineyards at Tizzana were planted with imported French and Italian vine cuttings, the fruits of which were turned into prize-winning wines.

The original winery consisted of a two-storied sandstone structure for living quarters and cellars, attached to a three-storied building to process the grapes.



Tizzana Winery by G.Ewin 2010

In 1955, Tizzana was broken into by vandals and set on fire, leaving only a stone shell. In 1969, the restoration of the ruins was begun, and today this National Trust classified building again manufactures its own wines from grapes grown on the property. By arrangement, the current owners offer wine tasting, group luncheon or dinner functions, as well as luxury B&B accommodation.

PITT TOWN

Pitt Town was named by Macquarie in memory of William Pitt (1759-1806) the British Prime Minister who was involved in the planning of the colony. Pitt Town is unique in that it is the only one of Macquarie's five towns that failed to develop on its chosen site. Little detail of its original form is found in the historical record and there are no physical remains. To be of use to the settlers and be within reasonable distance of their farms, Pitt Town was re-sited and reshaped in 1815, being forced to follow a narrow ridge and have only one long road which bisected the town into two roughly triangular-shaped portions.

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Pitt Town Bottoms

For many thousands of years this land was cared for by the Darug aboriginal people and was known by them, as Bardo Narrang, meaning Little Water. The first Hawkesbury land grants were on the banks of South Creek and here on the banks of the Hawkesbury River. At that time it was named Mulgrave Place by Lieutenant-Governor Grose. By April 1794, most of the initial 22 settlers were farming along these fertile flats on 30 acre grants.



Pitt Town Bottoms by G.Ewin 2010

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St James Anglican Church

110 Bathurst Street Pitt Town

Designed by Edmund Blacket and built by Thomas Collison in 1857-58, this church was constructed from sandstone quarried at Longneck Lagoon. Blacket also designed the 24 pews, pulpit, reading desk and communion rail. Behind the church, looking toward the flood plain, is a stone marker indicating the level of the "terrible flood" where it reached its greatest height on Sunday 23 June 1867.



St James Anglican Church 1962 R. D. Power (HLS)

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Scots Presbyterian Church

112 Bathurst Street Pitt Town

Located opposite the Anglican Church in Bathurst Street, it is in the Gothic Revival style and is listed on the Register of the National Estate. Scots Presbyterian Church, a much simpler building than St James, was built and dedicated in 1862. The church was built of solid blocks of Hawkesbury sandstone, quarried from Longneck Lagoon. The huge hardwood trusses supporting the steeply-pitched slate roof were fashioned with axe and adze.



Scots Presbyterian Church 1985 Peter Poulson (HLS)

Prior to the building of this church the Presbyterian families living on the Pitt Town side of the Hawkesbury worshipped at Ebenezer. Transport was mainly by rowboat, but those fortunate to possess a horse, or buggy, could cross the river by punt at the foot of Bathurst Street, Pitt Town, and from there a track wound its way to Ebenezer Church.

A few notable

Hawkesbury River characters

Dr Thomas Henry Fiaschi (1853-1927)

Born in Florence, Dr Fiaschi migrated to Australia and built a reputation as an outstanding surgeon, introducing Listerian (antiseptic) surgery into Australia. After being on the north Queensland goldfields, he became a 'house surgeon' at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, in 1876 marrying Catherine Ann Reynolds, a nun from St Vincent's.

Fiaschi had a keen interest in viticulture, and was a firm believer in wine as a medicament. He purchased around 230 acres at Sackville Reach in 1882, planting 5 acres of grapes as an experiment, then establishing a vineyard of 55 acres. To handle the vintage, Dr Fiaschi built Tizzana Winery in 1887. Dr Fiaschi lived in Windsor and practised there until he became the Consulting Honorary Surgeon to Sydney Hospital.



John Grono (1763-1847)

Possibly the best known ship-building name on the Hawkesbury River was the Grono family. John Grono was a settler, sailor, ship builder, ship captain, sealer, whaler and farmer who migrated to Australia in 1799 from Wales. Captaining the ship the Governor Bligh, he would later go on to be the first European to fully explore and name parts of the south-western coast of New Zealand's south island including Milford Sound, Bligh Sound and Elizabeth Island. Captain John Grono passed away on 4 May 1847 at his property Grono Park. He was buried in the Ebenezer Churchyard, the church he assisted in establishing in 1809.



Courtesy State Library of NSW

Solomon Wiseman (1777-1838)

Convicted at the Old Bailey on 30 October 1805 of stealing from his employers 740lbs of Brazil Wood from a Thames Lighter, Solomon Wiseman arrived in Australia in 1806, his death sentence having been changed to transportation for life. He became a landholder as well as a merchant and shipowner, and operated the ferry service across the Hawkesbury River. The ferry service enabled Wiseman to supply provisions to the convicts and supervisors constructing the Great North Road.

Wiseman was not noted for his leniency towards his convict servants, leading to many attempted escapes. With death being the penalty for recapture, many usually well-behaved convicts turned to bushranging in the area. His home, Cobham Hall, now forms part of the present day Wisemans Ferry Inn Hotel.



For further information call the
Hawkesbury Visitor Information Centre
(02) 4560 4620
www.discoverthehawkesbury.com.au

The Centre is at Ham Common
(opposite Richmond RAAF Base)
328 Hawkesbury Valley Way
RICHMOND NSW 2753

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