Larrakia were the first people to live in this area and know ‘Stokes Hill’ to have within it a spiritual ancestor known as Chinute Chinute, which manifests itself from time to time as a Tawny Frogmouth Owl (*Podargus strigoides*). Stokes Hill is a sacred site.

The wharf area has been the site of port activity since Goyder landed nearby in 1869 to survey the new Town of Palmerston (now Darwin).

Captain John Lort Stokes (after whom the hill is named) and Captain John Wickham of HMS *Beagle* had noted the presence of the anchorage between Emery Point and Stokes Hill on 12 September 1839. Three days earlier they had named the harbour Port Darwin in memory of their ‘old shipmate and friend’ Charles Darwin.

Prior to the construction of a wharf Palmerston was served by a number of causeways, the most famous being that known as the Gulnare Jetty. John George Knight designed the first wharf, which was constructed using a Chinese immigrant workforce. Described as the first railway pier of its kind in the colonies, it was a timber construction that was opened in January 1887. It was replaced in 1904. The wharf was partially destroyed by Japanese bombing on 19 February 1942 but was not rebuilt until 1956. The pattern of expanding and rebuilding the wharf structure has been a constant feature of the history of the wharf area.

The approach causeway was constructed along the base of Stokes Hill in 1895. It has been a constant feature incorporated into all the wharves that have been constructed since 1895.

The wharf site is of exceptional interest as it represents the considerable human endeavour required for servicing the remote outpost of Darwin under harsh physical conditions, extreme isolation, war and cyclone. It also has been pivotal to the existence of the township. All necessary foodstuffs and materials for the community arrived by sea and any disruption caused social and economic upheaval.
During World War II the wharf played a major role being the focal point for supplies to troops stationed in the Northern Territory and as a supply line for Allied Forces deployed in the Far Eastern region and Pacific theatres of war.

The wharf site is an eloquent reminder of the spirit and determination of the explorers, pioneers, immigrants and defence forces who have shaped the history of Darwin. It is an eloquent reminder, too, of the spirit of Chinute Chinute.

See also Stokes Hill Wharf (number 6 on the Heritage Trail).

_Tawny Frogmouth Owl (Chinite Chinite). Image: nimrodcat.blogspot_
Further reading

Stokes, John Lord (1812-1885)
By G C Bolton in Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 2 (MUP), 1967

John Lort Stokes (1812-1885), explorer and hydrographer, was the son of Henry Stokes. He entered the navy in the Prince Regent in 1824 and was soon transferred to the brig Beagle, in which he served for eighteen years, becoming midshipman in 1825, mate and assistant surveyor in 1831, lieutenant in 1837 and commander in 1841.

After marine surveys of South America in 1826-32 and the voyage around the world described by Charles Darwin in 1833-36, the Beagle was sent under Commander John Wickham to survey Australian waters, arriving in December 1837. During the survey of the Timor Sea in 1839 Stokes was several times entrusted with the closer examination of what is now the Northern Territory coast. He was the first European to observe and name the Victoria River and Port Darwin, commemorating his old shipmate. While examining Point Pearce in December 1839 Stokes was speared in the shoulder by Aboriginals, but recovered from his wound and in March 1841 succeeded Wickham in command of the Beagle. Between June and August of that year he surveyed part of the Gulf of Carpentaria, indulging whenever possible ‘the exquisite enjoyment of discovery’ by making excursions inland. He named the Flinders and Albert Rivers, and between them the Plains of Promise, whose pleasing appearance prompted him to foretell the spread of ‘many christian hamlets’ throughout the area. Stokes had not allowed for the fluctuation in northern seasons, and 120 years later the area was still largely unoccupied but for cattle stations. A later piece of prophecy was no more fortunate. In December 1841, while the Beagle was off the coast of Western Australia, Stokes was requested to inspect Port Grey, a site proposed for the Australind settlement on the basis of enthusiastic reports by Captain (Sir) George Grey. Arriving in midsummer, Stokes was not impressed, and the Western Australian Co. accordingly decided to retain the site near Bunbury originally proposed for its settlement. Within ten years the Port Grey-Champion Bay area was settled and later became one of the earliest successful wheat-growing areas in Western Australia. Stokes’ doubtful judgment as a land explorer could not obscure his merits as a marine surveyor. Many of the hydrographic maps prepared by Wickham and Stokes during their North Australian cruises, and later while Stokes was examining Bass Strait in 1842, were still in use during World War II.

After returning to England he published in two volumes Discoveries in Australia (London, 1846). He rose high in the service of the Admiralty, ending as admiral on the retired list in 1877. He spent his retirement on an estate at Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, and died on 11 June 1885. An enterprising and efficient officer, Stokes was a man of genial personality, with considerable ability as a vivacious writer.

He was married twice, first to Fanny Jane, née Marlay, and second to Louisa French, née Partridge, widow of H. J. Garratt.
Wickham, John Clements (1798-1864)

By AA Morrison in Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 2 (MUP), 1967

John Clements Wickham (1798-1864), naval officer and magistrate, was born on 21 November 1798 at Leith, Scotland, the son of Lieutenant Samuel Wickham R.N. and his wife Ellen Susannah, née Naylor. He entered the navy as a midshipman in 1812 and from 1827 to 1830 he served as lieutenant under Phillip Parker King in a survey expedition off the coast of South America. From 1831 to 1836 he was second in command of the Beagle in the expedition for which Charles Darwin was the naturalist and from 1837 to 1841 he commanded the Beagle while charting the north-western coasts of Australia. His health was undermined by long and arduous service and he retired from the navy in 1841. He settled next year in New South Wales, where he married on 27 October 1842 Anna, daughter of Hannibal Macarthur.

In January 1843 with a salary of £300 he became police magistrate at Moreton Bay, newly opened to free settlement. Though not in control of other government officers in the district, he was regarded as the senior. He showed much sympathy and understanding, and exercised his authority with judgment and a genuine sense of responsibility; he had the confidence of the settlers and was able to contribute much to the early development of Brisbane. In 1846-47 he added to his duties by carrying out a survey of Moreton Bay, financed by local squatters through a district improvement fund. In 1853 the increasing extent of his duties was recognized by a rise of £200 in salary and by his appointment as government resident, a post which necessitated the surrender of his magisterial duties.

To replace the tumbledown commandant’s quarters allotted to him, in 1847 he bought from his brother-in-law, Patrick Leslie, a property known as Newstead, and it became an unofficial Government House. His first wife died in 1852 leaving him with two sons and a daughter, and, in 1857 he married Dublin-born Ellen Deering, of Ipswich, who bore him two sons.

On the eve of the formation of the new colony of Queensland Wickham was offered the post of colonial treasurer in the new administration. Fearing that he could not afford to bear the costs of an election, and that a defeat would leave him with nothing, he refused the offer and sought a pension from the New South Wales government. This was refused on the ground that the responsibility belonged to Queensland. In June 1860 he made a similar request to the secretary of state for the colonies, who passed it on to the Queensland government. Despite strong support by Governor Sir George Bowen the request was refused, the chief reasons appearing to be pique that Wickham had refused to stay and help the new colony, and a desire to push the responsibility back on New South Wales, the whole question being complicated by a quarrel between the two colonial governments on adjustment of debts. Offended by what he regarded as ingratitude and forced to live in somewhat straitened circumstances, Wickham retired to the south of France, where he died from a stroke on 6 January 1864, and was buried at Biarritz.