

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES



AN ARTICLE, AN EXHIBITION & A BOOK

Lorraine Chaffer, Geography Education Consultant

1. Article: 'Following the River' Openbook magazine, 2021 State Library of NSW

This article, recently published in the NSW State Library magazine Openbook, uses stories from Darug women as a lens for understanding the geography and history of Dyarubbin (the Hawkesbury River). In the article, the author Marika Duczynski, recounts visits to the river with Aboriginal women and the stories told about places along the river and cultural and spiritual connections with those places. Marika refers to and draws on Aboriginal place names found on McGarvie's List, an archived record of 178 Aboriginal place names recorded by a Presbyterian minister in 1829.

2. A list, an idea, a project and an exhibition

According to historian Grace Karskens, the discovery of McGarvie's list during her research on the river was the stimulus for the idea for an exhibition. The visits to the river are narrated by Marika Duczynski and are a part of this story.

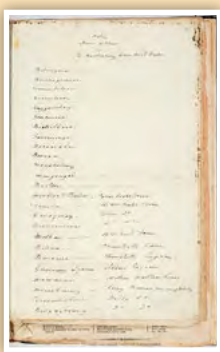
In her own words Grace wrote:

'I'm stunned. I sit there staring at the screen, hardly believing my eyes. After years of research, my own and others, I had thought that most of the Aboriginal names of the Hawkesbury were lost forever, destroyed in the aftermath of invasion and dispossession. Yet, suddenly, this cache of riches.'

Grace's article 'A list of Aboriginal placenames was a trigger for seeking the 'real secret river' tells the story of her discovery and the idea for the 'Real Secret River Dyarubbin' collaborative project. As well as reconnecting the list to living Aboriginal knowledge, the project 'explores the history, languages, ecology, geography and archaeological evidence of the Hawkesbury River', and tells an Aboriginal history until recently considered 'lost'.

A list of Aboriginal placenames was a trigger for seeking the 'real secret river' <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/exploring-dyarubbin>.

Of great interest to Geographers are plans to map all of the names on McGarvie's list and to educate Australians about the history behind the words.

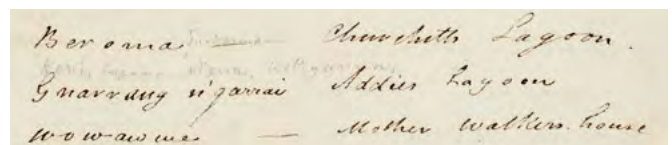


Rev John McGarvie's list of 'Native names of places on the Hawkesbury' 1829


List of 178 Darug and Darkinyung names of places along Dyarubbin (Hawkesbury River) compiled in 1829 by the Reverend John McGarvie, Presbyterian Minister at Ebenezer and Pitt Town, as he

and his Aboriginal informant/s travelled along the riverbanks. The words appear in geographic order and often with locational clues, like settlers' farms, creeks and lagoons. The list is in McGarvie's papers in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

https://dictionaryofsydney.org/artefact/rev_john_mcgarvies_list_of_native_names_of_places_on_the_hawkesbury_1829



Detail from McGarvie's list Source: https://dictionaryofsydney.org/artefact/rev_john_mcgarvies_list_of_native_names_of_places_on_the_hawkesbury_1829



STATE LIBRARY
NEW SOUTH WALES

What's On

Dyarubbin

27 MARCH 2021 TO 13 MARCH 2022

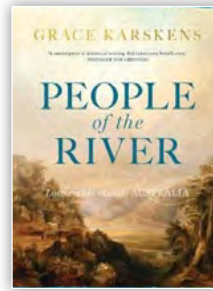
EXHIBITION

DESCRIPTION +

Darug knowledge-holders, artists and educators Leanne Watson, Jasmine Seymour, Erin Wilkins and Rhiannon Wright share their culture and stories of special sites along Dyarubbin (the Hawkesbury river).

3. State Library Exhibition DYARUBBIN

This year long exhibition is about Aboriginal places and people along the Hawkesbury river as told through the stories of living Aboriginal knowledge holders, educators and artists involved in the project.



4. Book 'People of the River: lost worlds of early Australia'

Grace Karskens

In her book, Grace explores Aboriginal and British histories of the Hawkesbury River.

Recommended reading for Geography and History teachers.

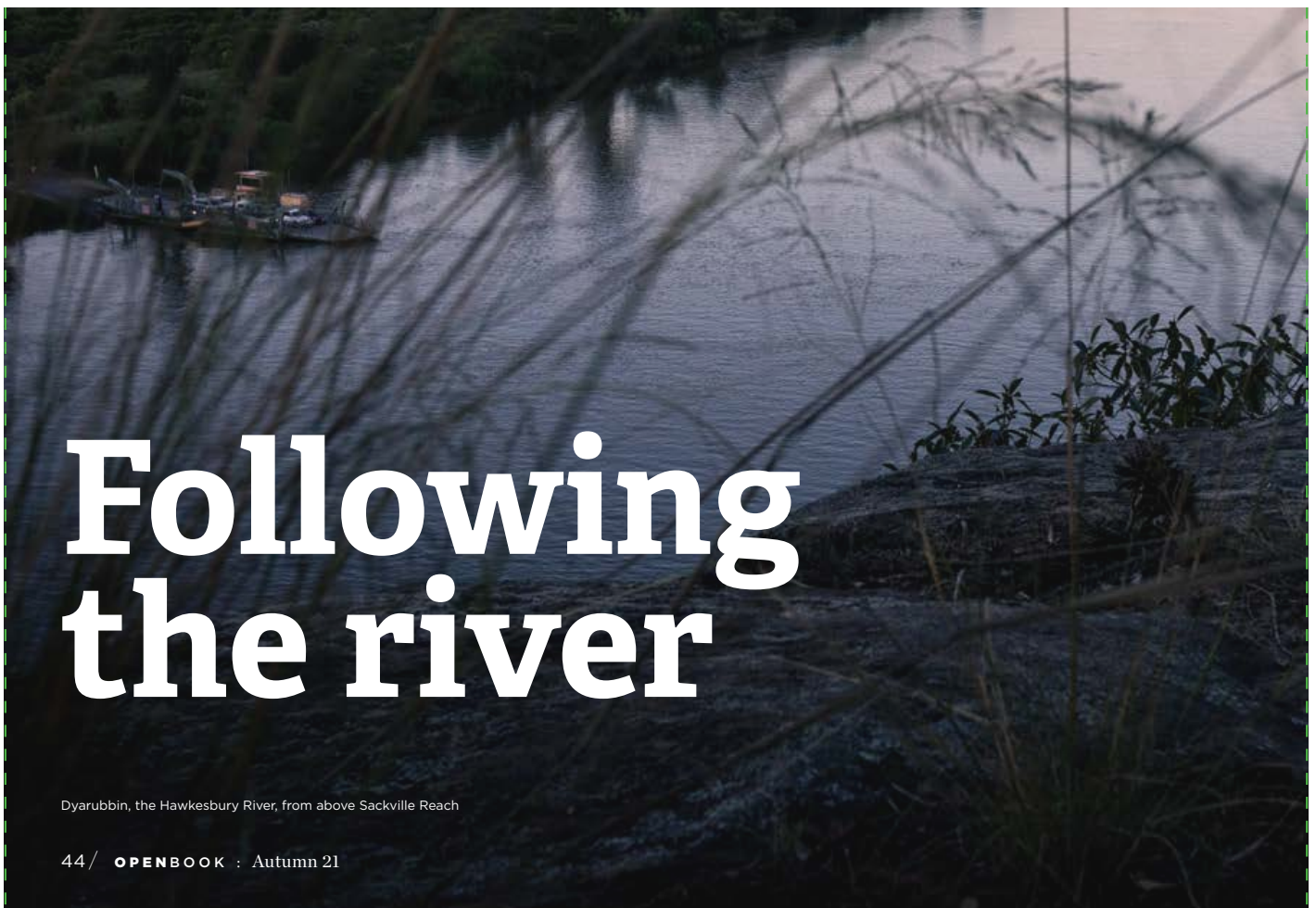
5. Video Interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDgLNr1dz9s>

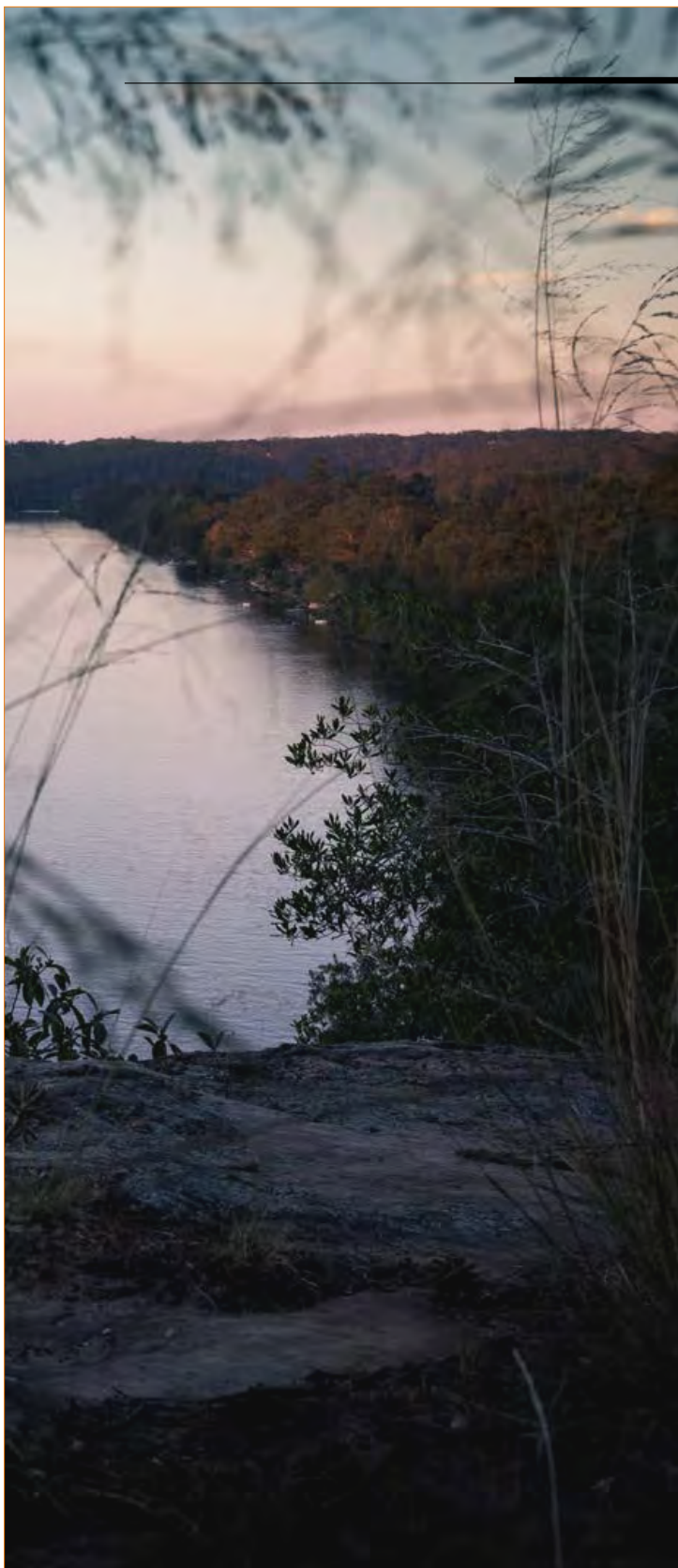


'Grace Karskens joined Hornsby Shire Libraries in September 2020 to discuss her book 'People of the River: lost worlds of early Australia' in conversation with Mariko Smith. This is a history of the Dyarubbin (or Hawkesbury-Nepean River) where the two early Australias – ancient and

modern – first collided. People of the River journeys into the lost worlds of the Aboriginal people and the settlers of Dyarubbin, both complex worlds with ancient roots.'



Dyarubbin, the Hawkesbury River, from above Sackville Reach



EXHIBITION

WORDS **Marika Duczynski**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Joy Lai**

It's time to tell a deeper and more truthful story about Darug Country.

I'm standing on the banks of Wianamatta, or South Creek, with Darug knowledge-holders, artists and educators Jasmine Seymour, Leanne Watson and Rhiannon Wright. Together with my colleagues Avryl Whitnall, Joy Lai, and videographer Bill Code, we're here filming for an exhibition we're putting together on Darug stories of Dyarubbin, the Hawkesbury River.

We raise our voices to talk to one another against the noisy traffic heading in and out of Windsor on the Fitzroy Bridge. Leanne tells us that Wianamatta was an important pathway and resource for Darug people, running north some 70 km from Oran Park through some of Sydney's driest, hottest Country before eventually joining with Dyarubbin. I try to follow its long line with my eyes but it curves out of view almost immediately, the closest bend thickly obscured by shrubs and weeds.

Behind us is the old toll house built at Green Hills (later renamed Windsor) by Andrew Thompson, one of the early colony's most celebrated figures. A convict who became a wealthy landowner, chief constable and magistrate, Thompson is remembered as something of a hero for saving settlers from the floods of 1806 and 1809. He died a year later from complications of a respiratory infection he had sustained in the second flood.

Governor Lachlan Macquarie had these deeds inscribed on Thompson's tombstone and named Thompson Square, in the centre of Windsor, in his honour. When the story of Thompson as the exemplary emancipist is told, even today, one detail is usually omitted.

Thompson led a party of settlers that massacred Darug people at a camp at Yarramundi, about 20 km west of Windsor, in 1805. In this reprisal for the killing of three settlers, seven, eight, or possibly more Darug ancestors were killed, including leader and cross-cultural spokesman Yaragowhy.

This well-documented event is not so much a secret as a rarely mentioned blight on the shining narrative of Thompson's life and legacy. That he would have overseen, facilitated or been aware of other violent crimes against Darug people as chief constable and magistrate further complicates how he might be remembered. Jasmine, Leanne and Rhiannon believe the failure to confront the darkest aspects of colonial history in this region contributes to the continued erasure of Darug people who have lived along this part of Dyarubbin for millennia.

Bulyayorang is the name Darug people still use for the land over which Windsor was built. On a high point above the river — where Thompson Square is now — was a corroboree ground.

Following the river : **OPENBOOK** / 45

Following the river



Dugga (brush forest) Country, Cattai

The information publicly available about Windsor makes little mention of this history, but gives ample information about the site's colonial foundations, promoting the heritage value of its Georgian buildings, and even recounting the time when it was known as Bell Post Square and hosted convict floggings. That a special place for the Darug people was co-opted for this purpose is unquestioned. Heritage sites across the Hawkesbury River region focus almost exclusively on colonial history, Leanne tells us, and don't reflect Darug people's history or culture.

I'm reminded of an 1809 painting of the area by surveyor George William Evans – *The Settlement on the Green Hills, Hawksburgh River N.S.Wales* – which depicts the small but prosperous-looking settlement that would come to be known as Windsor. The watercolour painting has deteriorated over time: its once-green hills have darkened in some places and faded in others; the blue river and sky are now grey. The muted palette lends an even greater sense of calm in the colony than the painting originally intended. It belies the unease that must have been felt in the region at the time of brutal frontier wars. This is Evans' reflection of the settlement as it would like to

see itself, of course, a vision legitimised by denying Aboriginal sovereignty and custodianship of the very same place.

It's well known that Dyarubbin's fertile flood plains became prized agricultural land, the 'food bowl' that was crucial to the early colony's survival. But taking land along the river for farming and settlement came at a great cost, increasingly cutting Darug people off from their most vital resource.

Every year when the maize ripened, Darug people would come and take the produce of their Country. Some settlers shared it with them; others shot at them. Warfare broke out when Darug warriors – men and women – fought to defend not only their lands and livelihoods, but also their culture, spirituality and sense of being. This identity was – and still is – intrinsically connected to the river.

Following the river, we drive about 15 km north-east to Cattai. Even today, pockets remain of the plentiful resources traditionally used by Darug people. Jasmine and Leanne collect spinach-like Warrigal greens, native raspberry and wombat berry vine as well as sandpaper fig, which was used to sharpen tools, and native geranium, a poultice for arthritis.

Following the river



Tool-sharpening grooves at spring-fed rock pools in Marramarra National Park

The site has even greater significance, as Jasmine and Leanne believe Cattai marks the beginning of an important part of Darug lore. It's here that the landscape changes from alluvial river flats to sandstone Country. Rock engravings on the biggest bends of the river tell the story of the Great Eel, the creation ancestor spirit.

We heard that some of the engravings have been destroyed, and we could see that the places where traditional foods and resources can be found are rife with invasive weeds and rubbish, with tyre marks churning up the earth. Jasmine and Leanne call this wirri ngura: bad Country, sick Country. The resilience of the plants is remarkable.

Further north-east, we visit healthy Country at Marramarra National Park, where a rock art cave is protected by a steel barrier. We spend almost all our time here looking up, our eyes running over the beautiful ochre paintings of echidnas, turtles, tiger quolls and ancestor beings. The paintings suggest the cave was a significant site.

On the lip of a waterhole above the cave – one of several – are axe grinding grooves. Jasmine, Leanne and Rhiannon believe the circular motif repeated on the cave's interior walls,

joined by one continuous line, may represent the surrounding waterholes – plentiful across the whole area – which then connect with creeks lined with yet more special sites.

This abundance and interconnectedness is reflected in the name of nearby Maroota, which means 'the place of many springs'. Keeping the waterholes and creeks healthy and flowing in such hot and dry Country would have been critical for the ancestors taking care of this place. Today, farming and sand-mining upstream threaten this complex network of waterways.

In 2017 historian Grace Karskens came across a list of Aboriginal placenames along Dyarubbin compiled by Reverend John McGarvie, a Presbyterian minister, in 1829. Titled 'Native Names of Places on the Hawkesbury', this manuscript at the State Library of NSW lists six pages of placenames in the order of their location along the river. The list became the basis of the project 'The Real Secret River, Dyarubbin' – conceived in collaboration with Jasmine, Leanne, Rhiannon and Darug woman Erin Wilkins – which won the Library's Coral Thomas Fellowship for 2018–19.

As most of the placenames on McGarvie's list had been lost, as Aboriginal languages were systematically diminished over

Following the river



Wowawme rock shelf, Sackville Reach on Dyarubbin (Lyra, great-granddaughter of Darug Elder Aunty Edna Watson, in foreground)

time, one of the project's aims is to map and return the names to their river locations. It is hoped that this will encourage wider usage and understanding of their meanings. Concurrent exhibitions at the Library and at Hawkesbury Regional Gallery will be among the ways these placenames and their stories are shared with Aboriginal people and brought to diverse audiences.

On our next weekend of filming we travel to a place of enormous spiritual significance for Darug people: one of the resting sites of Gurangatty, the Great Eel ancestor creation spirit, in one of the deepest parts of Dyarubbin. Even with the cicadas' endless droning, it's peaceful sitting on a ridge high above the river. Jasmine, Leanne, Rhiannon and Erin tell us that the water swirling on the water's surface is symbolic of the Great Eel, which is connected to water, whirlpools and flood power.

Further downstream is Dorumbolooa, which means 'zone of the rainbow' or 'path of the rainbow'. Further still, at Wowawme, another placename on McGarvie's list, Gurangatty is said to keep watch from a steep rock shelf. ('Waway' means 'serpent spirit' and mii is 'eye' according to Professor Karskens and linguist Dr Jim Wafer, who has been working on the Real Secret River,

Dyarubbin project). Jasmine says Wowawme connects the Great Eel to stories of the Rainbow Serpent across the continent.

Our last day of filming is at Shaws Creek Aboriginal Place in Yellomundee Regional Park. An important meeting, fishing and camping place, the site is a traditional river pathway through to the Blue Mountains. We've arrived at the same time as an Aboriginal dance troupe, which is also filming here.

Erin tells us that Aboriginal people from all over Sydney still gather here to socialise and continue the cultural practices of firestick farming, cultural burning and dance. When we ask her what she'd like people to take away from the *Dyarubbin* exhibition, she looks at the camera and says: 'We are still here. This always was, *this always is*, and this always will be Darug Country.' She's right, and there's no better place, and no better way, to say it.

Marika Duczynski (Gamilaraay),
Indigenous Engagement project officer

***Dyarubbin* is a free exhibition in the State Library's galleries from 27 March 2021 to 13 March 2022.**

Following the river

We need to care for Country, it needs to have fire, it needs to clean up all of these areas because then the wildfires come through and just destroy whole habitats. We need to look after our water sources to feed all of the animals that still live here ... and it's really important, the Darug people *are still here*, we need to be able to visit our sites, care for our sites and hold ceremony at our sites.

— Leanne Watson



On Country

Jasmine Seymour, Rhiannon Wright, Leanne Watson

Darug women Jasmine Seymour, Rhiannon Wright and Leanne Watson spoke together at the Canoelands spring-fed rock pool site at Murrumbidgee National Park.

JS: Maroota is very, very special ... this is like a super-highway almost of knowledge and great spiritual significance as well, but also of practical significance because this is water, this is what you need to survive, this is *the* most prized possession we have ...

RW: You could imagine the struggle between the two people with fresh water being such a needed resource ...

JS: People wouldn't have left this very easily, would they? This would have been one of the last places that they wanted to leave, they would have protected this really with everything they had ...

RW: Out here still we're taking from this Country there are sand mines and market gardeners and yet our water sources are still so important ...

RW: You also need to give back to Country, that's what our people would have done here, we would have given back, we would have taken care of it ...

Following the river : **OPENBOOK** / 49

Openbook magazine for members, State Library of NSW, 2021



DYARUBBIN

IMAGE: SACKVILLE REACH, DYARUBBIN (HAWKESBURY RIVER), PHOTOGRAPH BY JOY LAI, 2020

Media Release



New State Library exhibition reveals little-known stories of the Dyarubbin

29/3/2021

We are still here, we are still strong and we have more than 60,000 years of culture in our blood and in our hearts. Rhiannon Wright (Darug)

Little-known stories of Dyarubbin — the Hawkesbury River — are revealed by Darug women storytellers in an evocative new exhibition that has just opened at the State Library of NSW.

In *Dyarubbin*, Darug knowledge-holders, artists and educators — Leanne Watson, Jasmine Seymour, Erin Wilkins and Rhiannon Wright — bravely share their stories of seven special sites along this beautiful and haunting place.

According to State Library curator Marika Duczynski (Gamilaraay): “Darug people have lived along Dyarubbin for millennia, but their stories are often unacknowledged in the widely celebrated heritage of the region. The focus on colonial history ignores the devastating impacts to Darug Country and the lived experience of Darug people.”

“It’s time to tell a deeper and more truthful story about Darug Country,” said Ms Duczynski.

“The real story of this place is much darker,” added Jasmine Seymour.

Darug culture, spirituality and sense of being are all connected to the river. Shaped like an eel, its bends and features are all encoded with meaning.

Moving from Yellomundee Regional Park to Canoelands in Marramarra National Park, the women generously share their culture and tell stories of their ongoing connection to Country. They recount oral histories of Darug ancestors whose sustenance, livelihood and spirituality were intrinsically connected to the river. They also reflect on the negative impact of modern farming and urbanisation to Darug Country today.

One site of enormous spiritual significance, which exhibition visitors will have the privilege of experiencing, is one of the resting sites of Gurangatty, the Great Eel ancestor spirit. Visitors will also see a rare Great Eel rock engraving — only a few survive — in a part of Dyarubbin not accessible to the public.

Ms Seymour said seeing the eel engraving for the very first time was “incredibly beautiful and deeply sad.”

E&D-5612-3/2021



DYARUBBIN

IMAGE: SACKVILLE REACH, DYARUBBIN (HAWKESBURY RIVER), PHOTOGRAPH BY JOY LAI, 2020

Media Release



And while the Darug women were overjoyed that it was safe and had not been destroyed, “we were overwhelmed by the cultural loss that our people have had in the Hawkesbury. Many sites are inaccessible to us because they are on privately owned land.”

“Gurangatty is one of our creation heroes. The Aboriginal geography of Dyarubbin shows us the path of Gurangatty and the deep time connection to Country the Darug people have custodianship of,” said Ms Seymour.

“Floods are connected to the Gurangatty story. Gurangatty’s flood power created Country. Floods and fire have always been part of this Country. We are experiencing the same force of nature that Aboriginal people have experienced for eons.”

The exhibition builds on the Darug women’s collaboration with Professor Grace Karskens on ‘The Real Secret River, Dyarubbin’ project, following her landmark discovery of Reverend John McGarvie’s list of Aboriginal placenames on the Hawkesbury (1825–35) in the State Library’s collection.

McGarvie’s list will be on public display in the exhibition for the first time, along with:

- ration lists (1866–84) from the Sackville Aboriginal Reserve;
- 1907 letters written by Aboriginal women living on the Sackville Aboriginal Reserve;
- 1816 watercolour panorama of the Hawkesbury (Dyarubbin) and South Creek (Wianamatta) in flood around Windsor (Bulyayurang); and
- 1809 watercolour of the confluence of the Nepean, Grose and Hawkesbury Rivers.

Dyarubbin is on display at the State Library of NSW until March 2022.

Media contact:

Vanessa Bond, Media & Communications Manager, State Library of NSW
02 9273 1566, 0411 259 898, vanessa.bond@sl.nsw.gov.au

I can highly recommend this free exhibition. It consists of several excellent video presentations with interviews and commentary about places along the river. You will leave with a deeper appreciation for, and understanding of, cultural connections and lost Aboriginal history and geography of place.

Lorraine Chaffer

E&D-5612-3/2021