

## Media Release

### Libraries dig deep and reawaken lost Indigenous languages

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Detective-style research into 14kms of original colonial manuscripts at the State Library of NSW has uncovered vital details on 100 ancestral Indigenous languages – many of which were considered lost – and will be presented for the first time at an **international symposium at the Library from 26 – 27 August 2013.**

***Hidden Gems: The Role of Libraries and Archives in Cultural Revitalisation*** brings together a diverse and passionate line-up of Indigenous people, librarians, archivists, linguists and museum professionals to share their experience and ideas on how libraries and archives can reawaken and restore lost Indigenous languages.

“Connecting today’s Indigenous communities with the linguistic heritage of their ancestors is an important and powerful initiative which has far reaching benefits for Indigenous communities and all Australians,” says Alex Byrne, NSW State Librarian and CEO.

“Institutions like the State Library of NSW possess a rich vein of original unpublished papers authored by colonial surveyors, officers and missionaries that can yield valuable details on Indigenous languages that were thought to have gone,” Dr Byrne said.

At the time of Australian settlement in 1788 there were some 250 known Indigenous languages, but now only about 20 are spoken comprehensively.

With strong support from Rio Tinto, the State Library of NSW has undertaken the project, *Rediscovering Indigenous Languages*, to identify as many word lists as possible in the Library’s collection of unpublished manuscripts and make them available to their relevant Indigenous communities in culturally appropriate ways.

Researcher and linguist Dr Michael Walsh has spent the past two years painstakingly sifting through hundreds of letters and diaries and boxes of personal documents from the Library’s collection, and his findings will be revealed at the *Hidden Gems* symposium, including:

- the unearthing of 200 original papers significantly documenting 100 Aboriginal languages – many thought to be lost; and
- the discovery of an 1801 word list in the Perth language, Noongar, compiled by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century surveyor, Charles Tyers - previously the earliest known written record of that important language was in 1831.

continued ...

# Hidden Gems

The Role  
of Libraries  
& Archives  
in Cultural  
Revitalisation

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“Every word or phrase discovered links to a larger community history, and libraries and archives play a vital role in contributing to cultural revitalisation by making access to their rich collections more community friendly,” said Kirsten Thorpe, State Library Indigenous Unit Coordinator.

“We’ll be talking to communities about the most appropriate processes around access so that kids through to elders use these documents and revive their language on a local level.”

### Highlights of the *Hidden Gems* symposium include:

- Daryl Baldwin, a citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, USA, who will present his work in resurrecting the Myaamia language of his people to develop culture and language based educational materials and programs for the tribal community, and
- Kimberly Christen, Associate Professor, Plateau Center for American Indian Studies, who will discuss cultural protocols and the role of libraries.

As part of the symposium, recently unearthed Indigenous Sydney language lists will be displayed for the first time in the Library’s AMAZE Gallery.

*Hidden Gems: The Role of Libraries and Archives in Cultural Revitalisation*, is a free symposium at the State Library of NSW on 26 - 27 August 2013. Limited seats. For more information contact: Monica Galassi [mgalassi@sl.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mgalassi@sl.nsw.gov.au), (02) 9273 1453.

**Get in on the conversation #hiddengems13**

**Kirsten Thorpe is available for interviews.**

### For more information, interviews and images, please contact:

Vanessa Bond, Media & Communication Branch, State Library of NSW  
(02) 9273 1566, 0411 259 898, [vbond@sl.nsw.gov.au](mailto:vbond@sl.nsw.gov.au)

