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# Hawkesbury-Nepean Chapter Newsletter

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## KATHLEEN'S CORNER

Well as one year ends and another is about to begin the committee would like to take this opportunity to wish our chapter members and friends a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. We hope to see you all in 2024.

We have had some great speakers over the past year and have more lined up over the coming year. Members recently visited the Hawkesbury Museum where Curator Rebecca Mc Crae gave a talk on 11 Stories From the River Dyarubbin. More information available in this newsletter for those who may be interested in participating further.

We will have our Christmas Luncheon at the Nepean Rowing Club this year on 7th December and should be a lovely day.

Our first presenter in 2024 will be Steve Ford in February talking about Land Records.



*Kathleen Forrest*

President

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### 2023 CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

**Date:** Thursday 7th December 2023

**Venue:** Nepean Rowing Club

32 Bruce Neale Drive Penrith

**Time:** 11:00am



### FEBRUARY CHAPTER MEETING

**Date:** Saturday 10th February

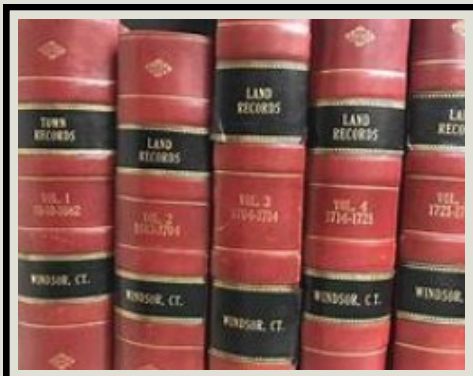
**Venue:** Tebbutt Room

Hawkesbury Central Library, Windsor

**Time:** 10:30am

**Speaker:** Steve Ford

**Topic:** NSW Land Records



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### MARCH OUTING

**Date:** Saturday 9th March

**Venue:** Rouse House

356 Annangrove Road, Rouse Hill

**Time:** 10:30am



### APRIL CHAPTER MEETING

**Date:** Saturday 13th April

**Venue:** Tebbutt Room

Hawkesbury Central Library, Windsor

**Time:** 10:30am

**Speaker:** Ron Moore

**Topic:** The Kokoda Track

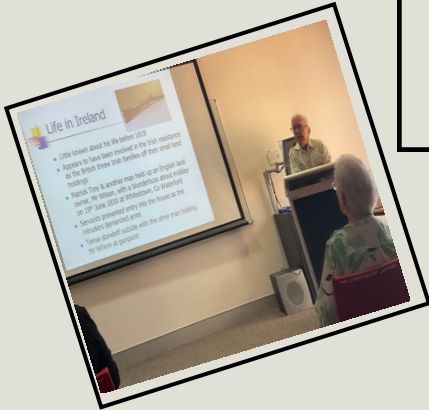




L) Laurie Turtle presenting  
“A Hanging in the Family”



## CHAPTER IN ACTION



R) Rebecca McCrae led a tour  
of the Hawkesbury Museum



## QUOTES FROM THE COLONY

**Thursday 15th December 1778**

*I admire the Governor’s restraint as at times he comes near to losing his temper with the Major, who seems to miss no chance of harassing the Governor in every possible way.*

**Judge Advocate Collins**

**Friday 23rd December 1788**

Yultide is almost upon us and my hope is by no means exhausted despite the difficulties met with, given time and additional force, together with proper people for cultivating the land...I know now that I can make a nation.

**Captain Phillip**

**Saturday 31st December 1788**

Saturday I will give a dinner for all the naval, marine and civil officers for tomorrow, New Years Day. I intend to also invite Manly who I found out this day that his name is ‘Arabanoo’ Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to see him at ease with the party.

**Captain Phillip**

## HANNAH SINGLETON– submitted by Janet Chaseling

We know Hannah Singleton only from church records of births, deaths and marriages in England and later in the colony of New South Wales. She was the wife of William Singleton, described as a 'gentleman' in the baptismal records of their son Benjamin at St. Giles, Cripplegate, London on 7th August 1788. The minister did not record Hannah's maiden name or where she came from.

In New South Wales, her movements and those of William, for the first five years after their arrival can be inferred only from the baptismal records of their children born in the colony. Ann Maria was born in Sydney in 1793; Sarah Maria in Sydney 1795; Susannah was baptised at St Phillip's, Sydney in 1798; Hannah was born at Freeman's Reach on the Hawkesbury in 1802, after William had received his freedom and a grant in 1805; while Elizabeth was born in Wilberforce in 1806.

The only known official record of Hannah Singleton was that of her death in 1813, twenty one years after her arrival. Again, neither her maiden name or birthplace was shown, but the Death Register at St. John's in Wilberforce, shows that she was buried in the graveyard of St. John's. Today there is no stone to mark her grave and the site of the plot is unknown. So, official records tell us very little about Hannah but other records involving her husband and family help us to know something of her life.

William and Hannah had been living in London for at least five years after William had given up farming in Cheshire, where the large Singleton family had been known as farmers for several hundred years. By 1791, William had obviously fallen on hard times as he was transported in July of that year in the convict ship 'Pitt', bound for Port Jackson. His wife Hannah, and two small sons, Benjamin; nearly three years old and Joseph, were accommodated on the gun deck of the former 'East Indiaman', along with the other women on board.

William had been working for a linen merchant in Lad Lane, London. He had fallen prey to temptation and stole a bolt of 27 yards of calico and he was caught red-handed. He was convicted at the Old Bailey and sentenced to seven years transportation to NSW for his crime. Life would have had little to offer Hannah and the two boys if they had stayed in England, so she chose to risk the voyage and accompany William.

The sailing of the 'Pitt' had been delayed because charges had been made that it was dangerously overcrowded. When at last the ship sailed on the 17th July 1791, she carried a total of 402 prisoners, 56 of them women, as well as sea-men, soldiers and some of them with wives and children. The ship's officers had to keep their baggage in the Great Cabin where there was scarcely room to hang their cots. The accommodation on the gun deck for the women consisted of three separate places, two of which measured 6ft 7" by 7ft 10" and were each intended to house 10 women. The third space was intended for 27 women and measured 13ft 7" by 8ft 4". Children were not mentioned in these arrangements. The ship was also loaded to capacity with casks and cases bound for the new colony.

The July heat had become almost intolerable as they headed the the island of Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands, where some went ashore to procure water. Conditions became even worse after leaving the island when they were becalmed for almost a month with incessant rain, and with the smallest breath of wind but frequent, heavy squalls with severe thunder and lightening. These conditions, according to Captain Manning, "brought forward a most malignant epidemical fever", which spread rapidly among the soldiers and sailors, but not the convicts. In fourteen days they buried 27 sea-men, soldiers, their wives and children.

When the ship emerged from the doldrums, these misfortunes were succeeded by adverse winds which drove them far to the westward, followed by continual hard gales from the south, and very heavy seas which continued until they reached Rio de Janeiro. In order to enter Rio's harbour, the captain was forced to liberate many of the convicts and trust them to assist in the venture, as only five sea-men were fit enough to be mustered in each watch. The venture was successful and the Viceroy and all the officers in the town came to their assistance.

Immediately, orders were given for as much beef as they could desire with all the fruits with which the country abounded. The sick were taken to hospital and the convicts to an island. The day before he left, Captain Manning reported that the number of deaths were: 7 sea-men, 13 soldiers, 5 soldiers wives, 5 soldiers children, 15 convicts and 2 convict children of the smallpox; a total of 47 people.

Although the ship was reported to be a healthy condition at the Cape of Good Hope, sickness broke out again after departing and remained with them for the remainder of the voyage. Hannah's spirits must have sunk even lower when she saw the pitiful little settlement on the Tank Stream at the head of Sydney Harbour. The sick and dying were carried from the ship to the hospital, while some of the dead had already been thrown overboard to float among the rocks near the shore.

There is no record of the condition of the Singleton family but at least they were still alive. The half-naked, starving inhabitants and the few Aboriginal people who stood about frightened Hannah. The only records which exist to show the family lived on and moved about from 1792 for the next five years, are the baptismal records mentioned at the beginning of this story. However, we can follow the vagaries of life experienced by Hannah and her growing family, now ensconded on William's grant on the Hawkesbury. Hannah had no time to keep a diary but others have described very well the life she must have experienced.

The home itself would have been of the simplest construction - slab walls and a bark roof, simply a place for cooking and eating with a room or two for sleeping. An open fire where the few cooking utensils were kept in almost continuous use, and where the family sometimes lingered for a while together before retiring to the simplest beds made from sacking or canvas and saplings, to ready themselves for another day of hard toil. Hannah washed up in a tin dish and did the washing in a large tub outside, which was brought inside to double as a bath when required. She swept the floor each day with a broom made from twiggly pieces of bush gathered for the purpose. She prepared home-grown pumpkin and potatoes and soaked the salted pork in the evening and made damper bread in the camp oven. Hannah made-over, patched and cobbled the shabby clothing and kept an anxious eye on the children playing outside in the dust. William's attempts to grow crops were thwarted in turn by caterpillars, droughts and three disastrous floods and also by raids by local Aborigines. One day, Hannah was busy in the hut when she heard cries from a field nearby. She ran to the door to see the cause and saw the boys, Benjamin about eighteen at the time and Joseph, 17, armed with guns running after some Aborigines who had crippled one of William's convict helpers with an axe when he tried to stop them from destroying hops near the house. They fired on the blacks, killing one and wounding others.

1808 was a special year for Hannah and William, for their son James, who had remained behind when they left England seventeen years earlier, arrived in the 'Aeolus' as a free settler. He had been about fourteen in 1791 at the time when children over the age of five years were not welcomed as emigrants with convict parents, as they cost too much to support from Government stores. James, too, settled on the Hawkesbury where, with Benjamin, he became involved in establishing at least two water mills. Life, it seemed, was always difficult on the Hawkesbury and Hannah knew the terror of several big floods. Descriptions by others published in the Sydney Gazette, tell of the houses, crops, animals and people being swept away. Of one of these floods the Gazette reported: "The distress and horror of the evening can neither be described nor imagined - the day heavy and gloomy, the night fast approaching, torrents of rain pouring with unabating fury and not a house except at Green Hills (Windsor) to be seen; the roofs of one or two of the other side of the water being the only ones then visible. Muskets were discharged by the settlers from the trees and roofs all day; in the evening the dismal cries from different quarters; the reports of firearms dangerously loaded to increase the noise of the explosion, the howling of the dogs that by swimming had got into trees, all concurred to shock the feelings of the few that were out of reach, but were the sorrowful spectators of the calamity they could not relieve".

Obviously, Hannah and the family were among the sorrowful spectators, though they lost their crops and William, appointed Special Constable for the duration of the calamity, was absent from his home. The 4th February 1811, was a happy day for the Singleton family as they gathered at St. Matthew's, Windsor, for the double wedding of two of the children. Benjamin, now 22 years old, married Mary Lane Sherland (Sharland, Sherling), daughter of Thomas Sherland of the 102nd Regiment and Lucy Lane. Sarah Maria married Thomas Siberry (later spelled Sibraa) and the Rev. Richard Cartwright was the officiating minister. Caterpillars, drought, floods and pilfering by the Aborigines were not the only troubles suffered by William and Hannah. She may not have known of Joseph's activities until he was brought before the Bench of Magistrates in April 1813, charged with having in his possession one gallon of spirits distilled in the Colony and with having distilled the same. Joseph pleaded guilty, but because of his youth (about 23 and apparent contrition and having given up the apparatus when demanded), the Bench unanimously recommended his case to the clemency of the Governor. In 1822, jointly with his brother James, Joseph made application for permission to distill spirits and this was granted.

Hannah's death on 17th August 1813 was a crushing blow for the family, when they lost the mother who had tended the family and shared the many hardships which they had survived. Although so little is known of Hannah's own actual experiences, she must be credited with a major part in supporting William in his endeavours to lead a decent life and make a living for the family, three of whom were under the age of 12 at the time of her death.

No doubt the three married children, Benjamin, Ann Maria and Sarah would have rallied to assist but perhaps Sussanah, who was fifteen, would have assumed responsibility for the role of homemaker and looked after her father and her siblings. William continued to live on the Hawkesbury for about ten years after Hannah's death before he joined Benjamin at Patrick's Plains, where he died in 1835, forty three years after his arrival.



## 11 Stories From the River Dyarubbin-submitted by Rebecca Mc Crae

Hawkesbury Regional Museum has launched a new exhibition *11 Stories From the River Dyarubbin*: a collaborative exhibition containing stories, videos, objects, and artwork based on 11 sites along the Hawkesbury River or Dyarubbin as it is known in the Dharug language.

This new exhibition forms part of the larger *11 Stories Project* commenced in 2018, by composer and producer Oonagh Sherrard. It is a collaboration with local community members who shared their stories and music of the river. There are over 80 contributions from the wider Hawkesbury area including Dharug educators, long-time residents, historians, scientists, descendants from early settlers, and school and university students. They all come together to tell stories of the river's formation, Aboriginal culture, colonial settlers, and memories of historic floods, farming, boats, recreation, and ecology, from deep time to the very present, that now feature in 11 accessible audio walks. The series of 11 audio walks are located along the banks of the river between Yarramundi and Sackville. The walks feature the river's history and focus on environmental concerns and aspects of ecology, geography, and geomorphology. The audio experience is carried by an original score of music, featuring contemporary Dharug singers and voices, inspired by the stories of the river and are streamable from your mobile phone or device either at the 11 locations, or from your favourite place to listen.

Each walk is a stand-alone listening experience, with stories unique to location. Listen to one, several or all the audio walks in your own time!

The exhibition and audio walks that make up this project asks audiences to follow the river and listen to how they may understand and care for it. "I grew up playing in the bush around Upper Cowan Creek on Lower Hawkesbury and lived on the Upper Hawkesbury for the last 20 years. The ancient river system flowing across Dharug and Darkinjung Country is a constant source of inspiration to me," says Oonagh Sherrard.

Of interest to members of the FFF HNC are the stories in the audio walks and the objects in the exhibition that tell the stories related to our First Fleeter ancestors and examines their relationship with the river. Some of these include Matthew Everingham, Thomas Arndell, Governor Arthur Phillip, and James Ruse. As well has pioneers such as Margaret Catchpole, The Coromandel Settlers, and the Grono, Pitt and Griffith families.

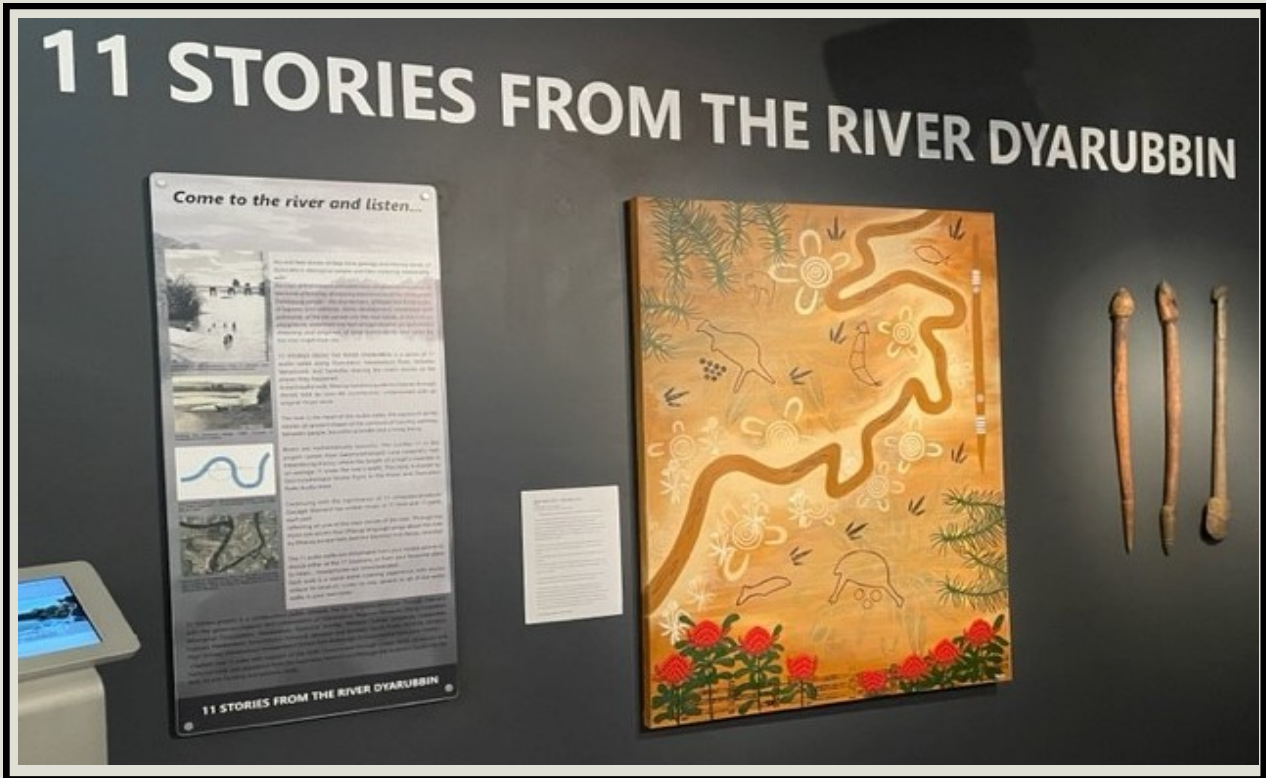
The exhibition is on now at Hawkesbury Regional Museum and is a great place to start before heading out on the audio walks. Three of the audio walks (Howe and Deerubbin Parks, Macquarie Park and Governor Phillip Park) are all in easy walking distance from the museum. The exhibition includes original artwork by students and artists, objects from the museum's collection relating to the river and maps and description of the audio walks and their locations. The museum is open 10-4pm everyday (except Tuesdays).

**Location:** Hawkesbury Regional Museum, 8 Baker Street, Windsor.

**Website** <https://www.hawkesbury.nsw.gov.au/museum>

**Find out more about the 11 Stories Audio walks here:**

[11 Stories From The River Dyarubbin - Hawkesbury Regional Museum \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.hawkesbury.nsw.gov.au/museum/11-stories-from-the-river-dyarubbin)

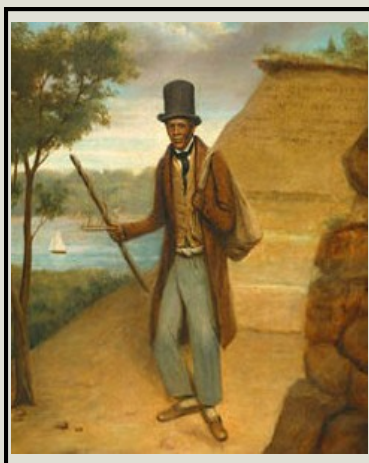
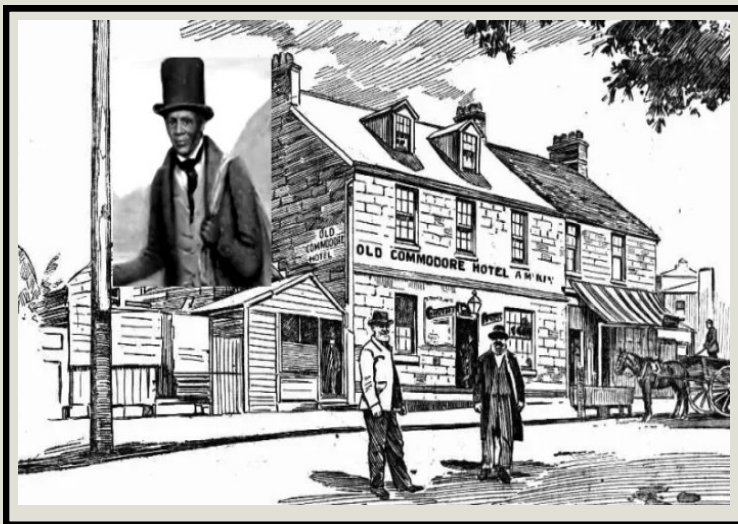




## The Old Commodore– submitted by Judith O’ Donohue

The year was 1796 and a chocolate maker who was living in London was caught stealing a 20lb. weight of sugar and was sentenced to be transported to Australia for 7 years. He was put in the hulk for over 4 years before being transported in the ‘Minorca’ and arrived in 1801. After serving most of his time on the hulks he became a free man in 1803. Billy made his living in Sydney. Around the Harbour he became known as the first “Water Policeman”. Billy supported the removal of Captain Bligh in 1808 and soon came to the notice of Macquarie, the new Governor who made him a Constable and a Waterbaliff on the Harbour. Billy was given a stone house which still stands today in the grounds of Government House. He was able to move his family out of the Rocks and the house became known as “Billy Blues cottage”.

Macquarie mentions in his diary of often of using Billy's ferry service to go to Government House at Parramatta. In 1817 Billy was granted 80 acres of land on the north shore. Billy soon had a house on it and had moved the family to the area. Not long after, the area became known as Blues Point and proved an excellent site for his ferry operations which had increased from one ferry to eleven. Billy became known as the “Old Commodore’ and he continued to run his farm and ferry business with the help of his family. In 1823, the census had him living at Hunters Hill. Wife Elizabeth passed away in 1824 leaving him with 5 children. Billy became increasingly eccentric and was often seen walking along George Street and the Harbour in a battered old coat and a top hat demanding people acknowledge him as the “Commodore” and abusing them if they did not. Billy died in 1834. His youngest son built the “Old Commodore Hotel’ in 1850 at Blues Point.



*Above L) Drawing of the Old Commodore Hotel named for Billy Blue by his son.*

*Above R) Resting place of Billy Blue and several of his family members.*

*L) Billy Blue, by J. B. East, 1834*

State Library of New South Wales

## The Way We Were



George St, Windsor in the 1870's. Image: Hawkesbury City Council Library Service

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