



The little known history about Parramatta and eels

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The story behind eels in western Sydney is one that is thousands of years old, involving storytelling, food and trade.

In 2016, these ancient traditions have been revived.

In the heart of western Sydney's Parramatta, which means 'place of the eels' in the local Burramattagal language, an ancient totem is being prepared for lunch.



Cooking eel. Source: The Point

This is the inaugural Eel Festival, a celebration of a traditional gathering where eels are caught and cooked, and the environment that protects it is looked after.

Jayne Christian, a Burramattagal woman from the area, says it's taken a long time for this custom to rekindle.

"This is the beginning of where Australia has to go on much deeper levels," she told 'The Point'.

"But it's happening, and that's a great thing."



Eel is prepared for eating. Source: The Point

Clive Freeman, Aboriginal education and interpretation programs co-ordinator for Sydney Living Museums, says eel breeding was traditionally "very important" to the people and environment of the region.

"It's the season when they travel, when they spawn, when they start a new life cycle. And it's the season of change," Mr Freeman says.

"So for the native people, that natural cycle created a calendar event, and for thousands of years we would have gathered here.

"One the carers of the eel would share that natural resource [with others]. And that was their cultural economy, that was their trade."

Mr Freeman says he wants to ensure Indigenous history is told alongside the already-recognised colonial history.



One of the colonial houses looked after by Sydney Living Museum. Source: Sydney Living Museum

Sydney Living Museum oversees 12 properties with colonial pasts, and Parramatta is home to wool pioneers John and Elizabeth Macarthur.

“Indigenising these places means that we're bringing back to life that cultural value of country,” Mr Freeman says.

“Bringing back the Aboriginal descendants and making a presence for them in this place.”