



PHOTOGRAPHY: NORA DEVAI

City historian Shirley Fitzgerald is on top of the world, or at least the city, at Custom's House.

Sydney's defining tales

Underworld criminals, working folk, politicians and nature have all had a hand in shaping Sydney. Now they will share the stage in an online resource that aims to tell the story of the harbour city.
Report Alexandra Walker

Steak and kidney may be a popular pie filling, but few know the phrase was also commonly used as rhyming slang for Sydney.

This tidbit is part of an information buffet on offer in the *Sydney Dictionary*, an online resource dedicated to the history of the harbour city.

Among those working on this joint initiative is City historian Shirley Fitzgerald who said the multimedia Web site would include maps and audio as well as written articles. Visitors to the site would be

able to search for information about everything from geology and botany to the use of slang and colloquial language. Phrases like "steak and kidney" would have their own entry.

"Anything about how we define what Sydney is will be in there," she said.

Sydney sandstone, used to build many of the City's early buildings, would have a particularly long entry devoted to it, Dr Fitzgerald said.

Underworld figures would also rate a mention as would people like Jack the

local historical societies and libraries.

An Australian Research Council grant of \$916,000 has provided the project with an boost that will be used to research content and develop ways of presenting the information on-line.

"What we're doing in the first phase is trying to get something about every suburb [in greater Sydney]," Dr Fitzgerald said.

Every suburb from The Rocks to the newest land releases would have its history recorded on the site, with more to be added as the City grows.

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Miller who, in 1820, fell off his windmill during a drunken spell. Jack died from the fall and that is how the suburb Miller's Point got its name.

"It's going to take years," Dr Fitzgerald said. "We've already commissioned about 600 articles and that's just the start."

The project, a joint effort involving the City of Sydney Council, the University of Sydney, State Records of NSW and the State Library, will also rely on input from

While the project sounds ambitious the historian said a number of cities across the globe have been working on compiling their history in similar ways.

"New York has one," Dr Fitzgerald said. "It's a beautiful book but it was all done before September 11."

The ability to add to the resource so it reflects the City as it changes is, according to Dr Fitzgerald, one of the strengths of presenting the information online. ■

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