

The Tree, a powerful symbol

Following what is commonly believed to be the first successful European crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813, a story emerged of a previously unnoticed tree, near the summit of Pulpit Hill, which adjoined the (by then) heavily used western road.

Over the next few decades, the tale of the tree grew, was told and retold, and the tree assumed monumental status for non-Aboriginal Australians as a symbol of crossing the Divide and opening up the west.

The period after the crossing was characterised by the almost complete dispossession of the Dharug, Gundungurra and Wiradjuri from their Ngurra, despite a fierce and heroic war of resistance.

Their languages silenced, their rich economy broken, they were forced onto missions or into manual labour on rural properties to survive. Their ancient, rich and vibrant culture was forced underground in the face of the rapidly expanding British colony.

By the 1870s, the colony of NSW wanted to assert its prominence and identity, spurred on by the success of the wool trade and the gold rush. The desire to celebrate these achievements was strong and the existence of a marked tree that, in the minds of the colonisers symbolised the march of progress and prosperity, grew in importance.

It is very likely that there was such a tree, marked in some way by the first colonial explorers. The process of marking, or blazing trees, is mentioned in several historical accounts, believed to be a way to mark a path for others to follow or to retrace steps in the dense bushland. It is likely that there were many marked trees in the area for this purpose.

However over the years, a story developed around this tree, to memorialise the expansion of the British colony into western NSW, with a physical landmark.



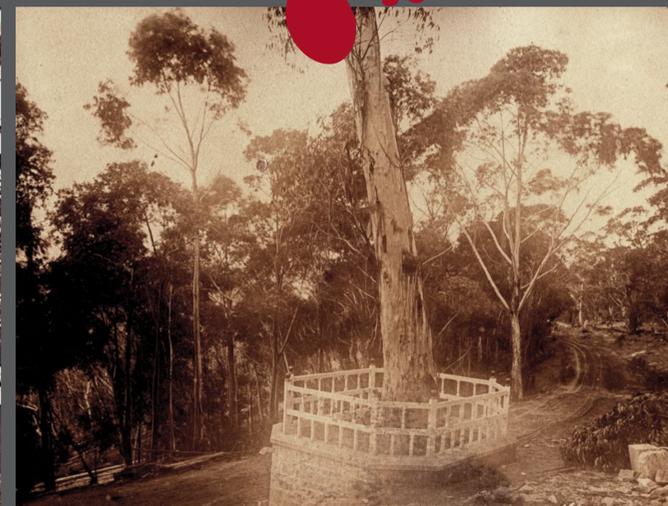
1



2



3



4

1 A similar example of a blazed and marked survey tree.

Survey Office shield tree BM3 - Brisbane, April 1973. Courtesy Queensland State Archives.

2 Detail from the Sydney Mail and NSW Advertiser feature on the Explorers Tree.

22 July 1876.

3 The story of the tree increased in part through tourism.

Courtesy Blue Mountains City Library.

4 Explorers Tree

c1890. Courtesy Blue Mountains City Library.

Use the QR code link below to both explore these signs and discover more about the heritage of the Pulpit Hill precinct.



A NSW 'Heritage Near Me' project 2019

