CARVED TREES
Aboriginal cultures of western NSW
The Exhibition

- rare surviving photographs of traditional Aboriginal carved trees
- the carving of trees is almost a lost tradition
- carved trees are heritage listed
- created by the Wiradjuri and Gamilaroi nations
Wiradjuri and Gamilaroi

- the Wiradjuri are the largest Aboriginal group in NSW
- Wiradjuri carved trees were primarily for burial markers
- Gamilaroi carves trees were primarily for ceremonial initiation ‘bora’ ground markers

Graphic created by Simon Leong for the State Library of NSW.

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Carved Tree Designs

- those beside graves marking a notable member of a tribe often feature geometric patterns
- these designs represent ritual and kinship affiliations of the deceased
- those found on initiation or ‘bora’ grounds often had animal totems such as goannas and snakes
European Discovery

- the first European account was given by the explorer John Oxley in 1817
- during the early 1900s, many Europeans documented and collected carved trees
- Europeans also removed trees to destroy evidence of Aboriginal occupation

Aboriginal Arboglyph, one of four trees carved by the Boree tribe on the death of Yaranigh 1847 a3525001
Location

- predominantly in Western NSW
- there are around 60 original trees still standing
- the largest site of surviving trees is at Collymongle station
Return of the Trees

- this tree from Baradine was carved in 1876
- it was removed by Europeans in 1918
- it was returned to the Baradine community 92 years later
- it is now on display at the Barradine Local Aboriginal Land Council

Sacred tree from the bora ‘initiation’ ground from Barradine. Photo courtesy of Baradine Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Sacred Tree from Barradine on display at the Barradine Local Aboriginal Land Council. Photo courtesy of Baradine Local Aboriginal Land Council.

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Bibliography

Images (in order of slideshow)
Unless stated, all photographic images from the Clifton Cappie Towle Collection

Wiradjuri country
PXE 1018/Vol11_2a

Graphic created by Simon Leong for the State Library of NSW.

Aboriginal Arboglyph
One of four trees carved by the Boree tribe on the death of Yaranigh, 1847
a3525001

Wiradjuri country. Taphoglyph near Dubbo.
Henry King
a3533002

Gamilaroi country snake design
pxe1018vol5_5a

Map of NSW Reproduction
Lindsay Black
BurialTrees002

Aboriginal Tree carving near Barradine NSW

Tree on display at the Barradine Local Aboriginal Land Council

Digital Sources
www.sl.nsw.gov.au

Books
Etheridge, R. 1918. The Dendroglyphs or ‘Carved Trees’ of New South Wales, Department of Mines, Sydney

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