

Pryor's tree: his growing tribute

BY SUSAN PARSONS

There was a clap of thunder and a bolt of lightning and the heavens opened yesterday afternoon as Dr Lawrie Johnson unveiled the plaque beneath *Eucalyptus pryoriana* in honour of Professor Lindsay Pryor.

A large group had gathered to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, the 50th year since the first unofficial plantings, the fifth anniversary of the inauguration of the Friends of the Gardens, and to celebrate the 80th birthday of Lindsay Pryor and his contribution to the foundation of the gardens.

As Professor Pryor said, "I thought when the lightning struck [that] if it had split the tree in half it would be a fitting end to a tragic play."

Among the 23 handsome, white-barked manna or ribbon gums (*E. viminalis*) growing near the Rainforest Gully at the gardens is this one eucalypt with a relatively short trunk covered with rough bark. After recent examination, botanist Andrew Lyne decided that it is actually *E. pryoriana*, the only specimen of this tree in the gardens.

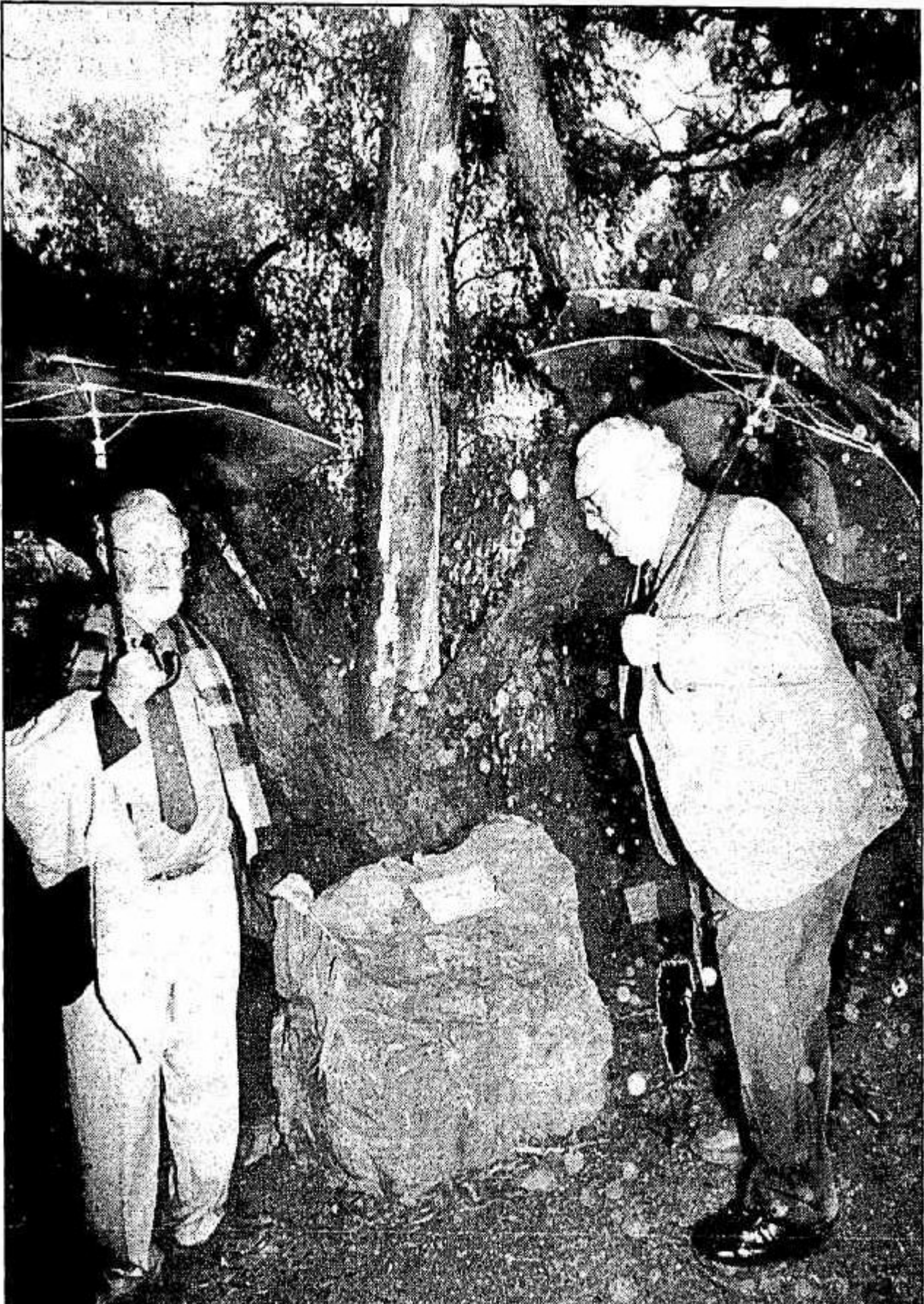
In 1962 the Gippsland manna gum was raised to species rank by Dr Lawrie Johnson, a botanist and former director of Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens, in honour of Professor Pryor, who had contributed so much to the understanding of the *Eucalyptus* genus.

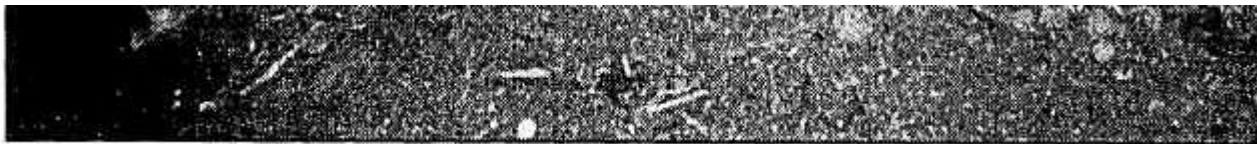
The men have known each other since 1949 and are "old bush mates". As Dr Johnson said, Professor Pryor is a forester of note, a geneticist and a botanist of note; "he has a character of scientific integrity and he has brains". Around 1953 the two men were drinking sherry together around a campfire and decided that the eucalyptus genus needed revision, resulting in the publishing of *A Classification of Eucalypts* in 1971.

Dr Johnson said he was reflecting earlier yesterday why

he had named this tree after Lindsay Pryor — "not a forest giant but just a tree" — and decided that at the time he could not think of anything distinctive to call it so "I'll name it after Pryor ... so now he's saddled with it".

Professor Pryor was a forester who became director of Parks and Gardens from 1944 to 1958. He was foundation Professor of Botany at the Australian National University from 1958 to 1976. In 1945, a few weeks after the end of World War II, Professor Pryor recommended





Picture: MARTIN JONES

Lindsay Pryor, right, with Dr Lawrie Johnson at yesterday's unveiling of the plaque in the gardens.

that a start be made on the Botanic Gardens which had been proposed in the Dickson report of 1935.

Then, the area which is now the gardens was just a paddock,

but "after VE Day people were keen to do something and get things moving, equivalent to the time, say, after a bad bush-fire and this provided the foundation," Professor Pryor said.

In September, 1949, the first two trees were planted by Prime Minister Ben Chifley and the director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Sir Edward Salisbury.
