Please join us from 5-7pm Friday 8 November at History House (133 Macquarie Street) to hear:

Crossings: New histories from the old legends

2013 marks the bicentenary of the famous ‘first’ crossing of the Blue Mountains. It also marks fifty years since geographer Tom Perry pointed out that the crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813 was not driven by the search for new land at all, but by a need for more grass for cattle and sheep. Since then many other key strands of the ‘first crossing’ legends have also been challenged or dismantled. This is why bicentenary event organisers have been careful to add the qualifiers ‘first official/ reported/ recognised crossing of the Blue Mountains by white men’.

Can we move beyond simply adding qualifiers to the old story? What new insights has the historical, geographical and archaeological research of the last half century revealed about the crossings? In this paper, I return to the environments, animals and people of the mountains, river, ford and floodplain. What did the crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813 mean to convicts, emancipists, settlers and Aboriginal people in their own time and place? What new light does this throw on colonial life in the 1810s and 1820s?

Associate Professor Grace Karskens teaches Australian history at UNSW. Her research areas include Australian colonial history, cross-cultural history and urban environmental history. Grace is currently a Trustee of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales and the Dictionary of Sydney; and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Her latest book, The Colony: A History of Early Sydney, won the 2010 Prime Minister’s Literary Award for non-fiction.

Postgrads, professional historians and members of the public are particularly welcome. Refreshements will be served. For more information, please contact Lisa Ford (l.ford@unsw.edu.au) or Nancy Cushing (nancy.cushing@newcastle.edu.au).