Captain Cook statue vandalised in Melbourne before Australia Day

Coalition says vandalism a 'disgrace' as Burke and Wills monument also defaced

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The statue of Captain James Cook that was vandalised in Melbourne along with a monument to Burke and Wills's journey to Australia's interior. Photograph: David Crosling/AAP

A statue of Captain James Cook and a memorial to explorers Burke and Wills have been vandalised in Melbourne in the lead up to Australia Day.

Pink paint was dumped on Cook's head at St Kilda on Thursday, with the words "no pride" painted beneath his feet, along with the Aboriginal flag.

A bluestone monument near Melbourne zoo marking Burke and Wills's journey to Australia's interior has also been vandalised, with green paint and the word "stolen" daubed on it.

The federal citizenship minister, Alan Tudge, said the vandalism was a "disgrace".

"These people are trashing our national heritage by doing what they're doing and they're achieving nothing in the process," he told 3AW radio on Thursday. "You can't rewrite our history.

"I want Australia Day to be a great unifying day for our country. It has been for many decades now."

In August last year the words "change the date" and "no pride in genocide" were spray-painted on the statue of Cook in Sydney's Hyde Park. Similar words were also scrawled on a monument to Lachlan Macquarie, the fifth governor of New South Wales, and a statue of Queen Victoria was also targeted.

At the time the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, likened the vandalism of such statues to Stalinist purges, warning the acts were part of "a deeply disturbing" campaign to "obliterate" Australia's history. The treasurer, Scott Morrison, also criticised the vandalism.

An inscription on the Sydney statue of Cook claimed he "discovered" Australia, prompting criticism that it ignored tens of thousands of years of Indigenous history.

Australia Day has been marked by a public holiday on 26 January since 1994, to mark the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney, but had been recognised on numerous other dates in previous decades.

Victoria police is investigating the vandalism.