

HALF TIME IN THE TREENET AVENUES OF HONOUR 1915-2015 PROJECT

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In 2004 at the 5th National Street Tree Symposium, the TREENET Avenues of Honour 1915-2015 Project was launched. It is 'a national project to honour with a tree the memory of every individual who has made the supreme sacrifice on behalf of all Australians, by documenting, preserving and reinstating the original, and establishing new Avenues of Honour, by the Centenary of Anzac in 2015.'¹

It appeared a daunting challenge at the time but one that would be met given the 10 years TREENET had to undertake the task. Moreover it would provide the ideal opportunity to roll out all the new theories and practices that the emerging urban arboricultural profession in Australia was articulating at TREENET Symposia. This was because although Australians might not value trees for all the reasons we appreciate, one could be confident that when it came to valuing them as symbols of commemoration they would embrace the project. In the process they would learn a lot about the challenge that we as horticulturalists and arboriculturalists face daily in managing our urban forests.

In 2009, we are 5 years down the track and in footy terms it's half time. At the moment the mission seems even more daunting, bordering on impossible, given that we can't claim to have kicked too many goals in terms of planting trees. Moreover it sometimes seems that some players who I thought would be on our team seem to be kicking the ball in the opposite direction! Reading through the Symposia Proceedings of the past 10 years, particularly those subsequent to 2004 has provided plenty of food for thought and challenged many of the simplistic assumptions that I had at the outset. So well considered are the contributions by these authors that I can do no better than to quote verbatim from many of these papers as I take stock of our performance to date and develop a new game plan based on the lessons to be learned from looking back over them.

A logical starting point for the project was to research the history of Avenues of Honour in Australia and determine where they were planted. Historical research is not my long suit so I recruited Sarah Cockerell to 'look into it' and 5 years later she is now completing her PhD on the topic. She has presented three papers since 2004 and has uncovered a number of previously lost avenues. I have not yet commenced turning this information into practical action. However my association with Sarah has progressed into something very special. I have also recruited her to the Unley Concert Band, which led to both of us to take part in the dawn service on Anzac Day this year at the Australian War Memorial at Villers Bretonneux. We also did a quick VTA of the ailing chestnut trees at the top of the Champs Elysses as we marched to the tomb of the 'unknown soldier' under the Arc de Triomphe. So we are slowly getting the hang of dealing with real trees in significant Avenues.



April 2009: The Unley Concert Band leads the VTA party down the Champs Elysses.

Sarah² shed some light on the background of Australian Avenues of Honour in her presentation in 2004:

'One theory as to why the Avenue of Honour was so popular in Australia during and after WW1 was soldiers recollections of the manicured tree avenues of France in particular and Western Europe in general (Haddow 1987). These impressions of landscape brought back by the returning soldiers may have suggested avenues as a fitting memorial structure. However there is no evidence for any one source for the avenue concept. Historical records about the planning of avenues rarely credit one person with the idea or explain what influenced the decision. Whatever the inspiration the concept was a popular one.... The exact number of avenues ever planted is unlikely to be conclusively known as where avenues have been lost there are often no surviving records of their existence. What is clear is that the avenue was and still is a popular memorial type in Australia.'

John Dargavel³ made the distinction between Avenues as a statement of patriotic pride or as expressions of grief in his observation:

'The largest avenue was planted at Ballarat by 500 young women, the 'Lucas Girls', from a local clothing factory. They planted one tree for the 3000 men, and a few nurses, who went to war. They were a patriotic group who strongly supported the war effort. Their planting has to be seen in the context of the intense social and political controversy over conscription. Notably, both referenda on conscription were narrowly defeated. Most of the other avenues were planted after the war with one tree for each man who had died. They were expressions of grief rather than patriotism.

Like the stone war memorials, the avenues were created by local committees and were not centrally organised. However, the avenues had a much more domestic and personal ambience and were often planted by women or children. This contrasts markedly with the stone memorials—and the later ANZAC Day ceremonials around the stone memorials—from which women were virtually excluded. The Avenues enhanced the town's amenity by creating a green entry, whereas the memorials took a central position.'

With respect to patriotism or grief as motivators for the project, I have to confess to having a foot in both camps. As I was born on April 25th in 1948 I was always reminded by my mother's sadness on Anzac Day over the loss of her only brother Lt Walter Claude Sheldon, the last of the 48th battalion mortally wounded in action in the closing days of the WW 1. He was my only Uncle and I'd missed him by 33 years. In learning more about his courage and achievements through the excellent AWM (Australian War Memorial) website just prior to departing for the Western front this April, I was filled with both pride and grief. He was recommended for the Military Cross four times, the Military Medal twice and the exalted Belgian Croix de Guerre for his final and fatal storming of the Hindenberg Line whilst attached to the 27th American Division. He was awarded none of these. Medals and decorations have as much to do with luck as they do merit. The family never planted a tree for Claude but in 2004 I dedicated my efforts in the AoH Project to his memory. My recent visit to the battlefields and cemeteries of the Somme at a time when thousands of Australians were on the same pilgrimage convinced me that my mixed sentiments of patriotism and personal grief were common—and ready to be expressed in a re-emergence of the Avenue as a memorial.

It is interesting that Dargavel contrasts the roles of granite and greenery in commemoration and the historical record of exclusivity attributed to stone memorials. Exactly the same subtle but powerful distinction was made recently in Adelaide when the opportunity arose to plant an Avenue of Honour in the median of West Terrace, a major perimeter road of the CBD. There would be 58 trees planted to honour the 58 South Australians killed in action in Vietnam. Thousands of commuters would pass their way each day and have the opportunity to reflect on their sacrifice. There was a lot of support for the proposed Avenue. The Adelaide City Council had budgeted for an upgrade so the money was available, the DTEI (Highways Dept) who are responsible for the road were supportive, and Dr Bob Such, MP and TREENET Management Committee member, had promoted the idea widely as well. But in the end, the proposal was not embraced by the RSL SA because there was already a perfectly adequate new stone memorial to the Vietnam conflict in place at the Torrens Parade ground, which is the central position around which Anzac Day ceremonies and Vietnam Remembrance services, on August 18, are conducted each year. The RSL SA didn't oppose the idea: but a more positive response to the initiative may have got the ball rolling. I don't blame the RSL SA for this lost opportunity, more my overconfident assumption that 'honouring with a tree the memory of every

individual' by creating a green entry to the city had equal value to a stone memorial. After Dargavel's warning I should have done more to get the RSL on board at the outset.

Back in 2005, Sarah and I reported⁵:

'The Avenues project has really only just begun. We have historical and arboricultural details on only a fraction of the Avenues identified and have not even begun to implement replanting or restoration plans. Currently we are steadily forming links with other community groups who are already researching, restoring and maintaining their own local avenues. Clearly this project is very timely and judging by the ever increasing community awareness and concern it is guaranteed to succeed.'

What still needs to be done?

- *Further promotion of the project for community awareness and support.*
- *Contacts network expanded, especially local community and RSL groups.*
- *Record oral history and locate records of known Avenues where possible.*
- *Photograph and record GIS data for existing avenues and assess the condition of trees and plaques.*
- *Publish freely all information on website including searchable list of names associated with trees and locations of relevant avenues.*
- *Encourage local schools, community groups and organisations to be involved in all aspects of the project, especially restoration and replanting.*
- *Commence long term monitoring of trees and plaques.*
- *Determine with others appropriate strategies for commemorating all unrepresented combatants lost in service.*
- *Negotiate sites for new Avenues with State and Federal road authorities.*
- *Plant new Avenues for a new century and for all unrepresented combatants lost in service.*

In 2005 we could talk about a plan! However in the same year, Adrian Howard, founder of the highly successful project to restore Soldiers Walk in Hobart, was able to talk of achievement⁶. The Avenue was established in 1917 and had fallen into a neglected state.

'In 2002, Friends of Soldiers Walk (FOSW) began a series of working bees under the aegis of the Hobart City Council Bush Care program. These working bees focussed initially on clearing competing smaller vegetation around the trees and later extended to a six-metre radius around the canopies. Number plates were also installed to allow identification of Avenue trees.'

Their management plan set

'August 3rd 2014, which is the 97th anniversary of the first plantings, as the goal for total restoration. This was chosen, as August 4th 2014 is the centenary of the outbreak of war. All missing trees will be replaced as the main priority followed by the dead and the unwell, with family agreement.'

In 2003, FOSW received a grant from the Hobart City Council to develop a website and a map of the Avenue. In 2004, the HCC endorsed a management plan for the Avenue, developed in cooperation with FOSW with a commitment to the restoration of the Avenue by 2014 and an allocation of \$20,000 per year over the decade for replacement trees and maintenance on the Avenue. In addition, other budgets have been used to resurface the path, install new signage and other works along the Avenue. The Management plan includes provision for the replacement of not only missing trees but missing sites and the installation of new plaques at each tree. 'For every soldier a tree, for every tree a plaque' was the basic slogan for FOSW's efforts and this has now been accepted as a proper goal under the plan.'

Here was one Avenue that would be restored over 12 years and we were hoping to facilitate the same outcome for a nation of avenues in 10! The Howard paper documented the components of a successful plan and highlighted the fundamental need for a committed community leader, a champion for the cause, like Adrian, to gather support and drive each project. The other basic need was money, and lots of it!

We have a number of emerging champions dotted around the country, and over the next year the TREENET project will try to identify them to find out how we can assist.

Charlotte Wells from Willunga is one such local champion. In 2005 she set about establishing the first next generation Avenue of Honour in collaboration with a number of organisations including the City of Onkaparinga, the local RSL branches, DTEI and TREENET amongst others. The aim is to plant 100 trees for 100 years and it has been decided that these should be *Quercus suber*, Cork oak, after an inspection of the magnificent specimens in the Arboretum.

Apart from technical support, TREENET also needs to identify major sources of funding so that we can deliver that support. Most importantly we need to set up a comprehensive online interactive database so that we can follow the action around the country and promote the cause of restoration of the dwindling number of original avenues.

At the 7th Symposium in 2006 I reported on the progress thus far as follows¹⁰:

2004

- *Project initiated by Director of Treenet and approved by Management Committee.*
- *Site visits to ACT, NSW, Vic, and WA.*
- *AoH project launched at the 5th National Street Tree Symposium at the Waite Arboretum. Keynote presentations made to 200 delegates and 100 rosemary bushes propagated from material originating from Anzac Cove in 1915 planted in RSL sanctioned ceremony.*
- *Website www.avenuesofhonour.org commenced.*
- *Survey of Avenues nationwide commenced. Over 100 councils contacted.*
- *Relationships with key stakeholders established.*

2005

- *Promotion of project via radio, newspaper and magazine articles and commencement of community feedback*
- *Funding sought (\$75k) from Dept of Veteran Affairs for appointment of full time project officer and IT support for the project. No response during the year.*
- *Letters written to all Federal politicians outlining the project and asking for help in making appropriate contacts in each electorate. Over 40 positive responses received including personal response from the PM and the Leader of Opposition.*
- *Network expanded, especially local community and RSL groups.*
- *Rosemary cuttings from Gallipoli Rosemary hedge planted at 2004 Symposium distributed to Greenhills Propagation Nursery in Vic and Aitken and Newman in Queensland. Intention is to release plants for sale to public in 2006 in order to raise funds for the project.*

2006

- *Response from Dept Veteran Affairs received. Standard application form for \$3k offered. No action pursued for further direct funding.*
- *Application to Dept of Veteran Affairs for permission to use "Anzac" in the naming of the Gallipoli rosemary.*
- *Sarah Cockerell (TREENET) awarded PhD studentship to study Avenues of Honour.*
- *Ben Kenyon (Treenet Advisory Board) volunteers to produce draft standards for recording Avenues of Honour.*
- *ABC2 runs segment on Australia Wide on Anzac Day promoting project and rosemary.*
- *A number of journals run stories on the project.*
- *Successful negotiations with nursery industry leads to national release of Gallipoli Rosemary on November 11th 2006. Treenet to receive 50 cents per plant sold to support project.*
- *To date 350 sites around Australia under investigation.*

In 2006 I was more into raising money for the project than looking for opportunities to plant Avenues. The commercialisation of the Gallipoli Rosemary started out with promise but almost ended in disaster when plants with a non royalty paying substitute label were found on sale by an observant member of our Advisory Board in NSW. Prompt action by the unsuspecting vendor and a great deal of goodwill by others in the Nursery Industry saved the day and we are now beginning to see a steady stream,

soon to become a torrent I hope, of funds into the AoH account. This will initially fund the creation and maintenance of the interactive website.

At the same symposium, Ben Kenyon presented his ideas on the kind of data that the website would collect¹¹. In a very comprehensive discussion paper, as a practicing arboricultural consultant, Kenyon provided the basic requirements for assessing condition. He also turned his attention to the recording and display of the personal record of each person honoured with a tree.

The database aims were to:

- *Develop an online database that documents the location and current condition of each tree within an existing or future Avenue of Honour across Australia.*
- *To catalogue each tree that has been planted to honour an Australian soldier and detail the location and condition of corresponding plaques. Where possible, personal information on the soldier honoured will also be included.*
- *Detail generic information on each of the Avenues of Honour.*

The database is a geospatial database: that is, all of the information contained within the database can be displayed and utilised in a map format through GIS programs such as MapInfo, ArcView or AutoCAD. It is envisaged that users of the database will utilise and search the information in a similar manner to that of 'Google Earth'.

The Kenyon paper is an excellent start in the development of the online database and the 'Google Maps' street view technology is an exciting tool in its interpretation and management.

In 2007 Lyndal Plant and Neridah Parke¹³ presented a paper, the purpose of which was 'to describe Brisbane City Council's journey so far in researching, recording, promoting, protecting and restoring memorial tree plantings in support of the national project. Some of the stories are revealed, as well as the lessons learned and proposed next steps.'

Encouragingly it recorded that:

'Once the word was out, numerous anecdotal stories began pouring in. The value of our contracted, qualified historian and the support of our own Heritage Unit staff ensured that these stories were carefully screened and verification sought in documented records. Initial drafts were also rechecked with each contributor. Many of the original avenues or individual memorial tree plantings still remain today.'

The progress on three Avenues in Brisbane was reported with the reassurance that:

'Steps are underway to add those sites that are not already listed to these Registers. More importantly, as part of the identification and assessment of all significant trees on public land in Brisbane, the memorial plantings have been assessed by a qualified arborist and scheduled for regular maintenance visits. Already, many have been mulched to help them survive the drought. Where possible, every effort will be made to involve the local community in the care and protection of the sites.'

Brisbane is an excellent example of a city that has embraced the Avenues of Honour 2015 Project and to date has been best on ground in the first half of our metaphorical footy match.

Recently in Adelaide, the City of Burnside donned a guernsey and went out on a limb to replace the dying and dead elms in Prescott Tce, Rose Park that were planted in 1919 to honour the memory of 23 local fallen heroes. Seven of those original trees are missing and replacements have struggled. The Council produced a comprehensive report and options paper and the community was consulted. I was shocked on my return from the Western Front to see that this responsible and well considered initiative was meeting strong resistance from a very vocal minority, mostly residents of the street who were worried about property values and who seemed to pay scant regard to the original purpose of the Avenue. In the end, the more widely supported and practical option of staged block replacement between cross streets was rejected by the community and restoration of the Avenue in the short term is on a back burner. However nature is on the side of the fallen, as trees 'like us that are left grow old and the years condemn' so in a few short years there will be no trees left to fight over and commonsense will prevail.

There have been several important papers presented since 2004 that provide valuable insights into what is happening around the country as communities are forced to come to grips with dying heritage trees.

In 2004 a paper by Parker, May and Moore⁴ on the challenge of mature tree replacement reported on four studies that were 'conducted to further the understanding of the many facets of tree replacement.'

These are:

- *the Mature Tree Management Study,*
- *the Mature Tree Costs Analysis,*
- *the Tree Establishment Experiment, and*
- *the Root Recolonisation Experiment.*

Drawing on the findings from all four studies, some general conclusions and recommendations were made on the tree replacement process.

- *The processes that exist in tree management organisations for tree removal, planning and planting represent positive advances in the management sophistication required to produce tree populations that will fulfil the requirements and benefits of an urban forest.*
- *Advanced planning is important to coordinate the timing of replacement activities in relation to the activities on nearby plantings.*
- *Tree policies that call for a certain number of trees to be planted each year are positive as they instigate the renewal of the landscape.*
- *Tree establishment programs are important in publicly managed landscapes.*
- *Flexibility and adaptability are important when approaching tree replacement. Some organisations are using both staged replacements, to maintain the aesthetics in an area while the replacement trees are growing, and full-street replants to create streets with a uniform avenue effect.*
- *In some cases it may be possible to use different replacement tactics based on the importance of the landscape feature or street.*
- *While the mentality of maintaining trees until they die or become hazardous is positive in that the desire exists to care for and retain trees in the landscape, it also limits effective long-term management as the ability to remove trees is important for coordinating replacement programs.*
- *The skill and professionalism of tree managers will have a major impact on the successful planning and management of tree replacement and the future of the treescapes.*
- *Tree record databases offer the potential for greater strategic planning of tree replacement, however in many organisations the sophistication of systems and minimal updating of records currently limit their use.*
- *It was possible to establish and obtain adequate growth from trees in an inter-planting replacement situation. However, the success of this method will be dependent on the tree species involved and the local factors in a particular case.*
- *When planting replacement trees near existing vegetation there will be root invasion of the planting hole, which could be expected to result in a high level of competition between trees for edaphic resources.*
- *Large planting holes are recommended when planting trees in competitive environments.*
- *The use of temporary root barriers to restrict the re-colonisation of planting holes by surrounding roots requires more research and may only be appropriate in highly competitive sites. The size of the soil volume contained in the root barrier will impact on the growth of the tree.*

For much of Melbourne's history, tree replacement has largely been reactive to tree failures. Tree management is now moving to more active processes, with prioritising of removals and deliberate staging of works. The challenge now is to increase the proactive management of tree populations, to allow for the coordinated and continual replacement of trees in our urban landscapes.

This provided plenty of support for the idea of block replacement ahead of inter-planting, as individual trees die in Avenues. There are many potential problems to this approach as I found out in Prescott Tce. There are no trees to commemorate seven of the 23 lives honoured in the Avenue but what do we do with the trees that are still alive and still have a family connection to the original planting? I am confident on the evidence of previous failures, and the findings in this report on planting hole re-

colonisation and the resultant loss of amenity, that we have to find a way of dealing with negative community responses to removing living trees for the greater good.

I am very fortunate to be a member of the ACT's Urban Forest Renewal Program's (UFRP) Expert Reference Group which is tackling this issue head on in a most comprehensive way. Many of the findings will be put to the test in the streets of Canberra and the results will be of national significance as other local government organisations and the Avenues of Honour 2015 project adopt the ideas.

At this Symposium Ian Shears is presenting a follow up to his 2005 paper which outlined Melbourne's strategies for replacing aging boulevards⁸. He said:

'Community support for these strategies is of paramount importance. The removal of trees is invariably unpopular and especially so in high profile landscapes. While landscape professionals can clearly see the immediate need to remove hazardous or declining trees, the public will often respond strongly against removing trees that are still alive. An important part of these strategies is the preservation of heritage values, with the significance of plantings in major parks established through Conservation Analysis and Master Planning. Determining what was previously planted however often requires research of literature, anecdotal accounts and council records. This research is essential to ensure that replanting is in line with the period of significance of the particular landscape.'

I agree absolutely with the sentiment of preserving heritage values but worry about where that may lead in practical terms to the restoration and replacement of existing Avenues of Honour.

I have only just come into contact with the Burra charter which was used by one objector to sink the Prescott proposal based on an argument that seemed to fit the built environment very well but gets lost in its interpretation with dynamic living systems. I don't think I like the word "Burra Charter" very much unless it's a bus heading north on a post symposium tour! I'm not a supporter of mandatory replacement of the original species as often they proved to be poor selections. You can't do the same thing and expect a different result! Elms seem to have a life around 80 years in Adelaide. If some oaks such as Q suber or Q ilex had been planted in 1919, Prescott Avenue would be in great condition.

In her 2005 paper on the Heritage trees of 2115, Judy Fakes⁹ reported a more successful outcome for the replacement of 33 Ficus in the Domain. The idea of replacing mature living trees for the greater good met with strong resistance from the usual vocal minority and it looked like the RBG would be stuck with the problem of maintaining dangerous trees they didn't want. Thankfully Judy was able to record that:

In the end, the court found in favour of the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust. All but one of the trees was removed and the 33 new trees were planted. The attention given by the media to the planting was almost non-existent.

Despite the drama, the removal and replanting process allowed for the testing and remediation of the soil; the species selected were chosen on a number of criteria including resistance to compaction, low susceptibility to Fig Psyllids and heritage values.

This small but landmark project is the taste of things to come as the public, politicians and landscape managers come to the realisation that landscapes are dynamic and the largest and most conspicuous elements, the trees, don't last forever.

Could we be winning?

A very important paper was presented in 2006 by Dr Karen Olsen¹² titled 'Reality bites both ways: Heritage values and urban tree management'. For me it has been a reality check. It even talks about the Burra Charter! It is difficult to select the best bits of this excellent paper but the opening paragraph should get you downloading the whole document from the website.

'Who has not had a sinking feeling on discovering that the highly hazardous, structurally poor, uneven-canopied, failing or senescent tree in a local street or park is listed as being of heritage significance? Why does reality have a nasty habit of biting in the midst of our visions, dreams, plans and programs for developing and managing a better, future urban landscape?'

For managers of trees, streetscapes and avenues, there is no doubt that the reality of respecting and responding to community and heritage values and obligations can be frustrating and individual's or community groups' actions can at times seem obstructionist.

On the other hand, for heritage professionals, the very nature of the heritage fabric of trees as living, vegetative matter, might seem to add an annoying complication to the aims of heritage conservation to keep and care appropriately for culturally significant places we have inherited.

The idea that 'reality bites' reflects a range of potential responses to the issue of heritage and trees, anywhere on the spectrum from sharp cynicism to pragmatism, from wise hindsight to grim determination – or, usually, any combination of these, from stakeholders on all sides of a given situation. The aim of this paper is to understand why and how it is that 'reality bites both ways' in the tree management and heritage management. This includes recognising that the realities of both heritage and management by their very nature generate highly emotional responses and reactions. It also includes seeing that each of these realities can offer to its 'opposite' specific insights that can then generate a more holistic value for trees, streetscapes and avenues which is greater than the sum of its parts.

In other words, reality biting can be a useful tool to help us look further than just the immediate problem at hand.'

I feel better already!

Finally the paper on managing and assessing aging and mature trees by Martin Norris⁷ in 2005 was a very thorough treatise on the topic but in the end he boiled it all down to a few simple words. No footy coach addressing a team 10 goals down at half time could say it better.

'Whilst planning is important in managing the complex matrices involving biological entities; the future of the urban forest, whether the community has grand avenues of historical mature trees, has parks with venerated veteran trees, whether we manage our urban areas as ecosystems or merely have streets lined with the latest designer tree clone has nothing to do with biological, economic, engineering, amenity, etc issues; the single most important factor that will influence the urban forest that we have in the future rests solely on philosophy.

Philosophy reflects our attitudes, beliefs, values, and thinking. Once a philosophy is determined you can pick a management strategy that will deliver.

Managing aging trees is not difficult. It merely requires vision, that vision is a reflection of a philosophy. What is your philosophy going to be?'

As a man fond of acronyms I've coined a new phrase that describes my philosophy on the establishment of new Avenues. It's called Street Tree and Urban Forest Friendly Engineered Design. Now I have something to say to the opposition!

Sarah has finished 'looking into it' and will shortly have completed her PhD thesis. It will add substantially to the body of knowledge summarised in her 2008 paper¹⁴. I'll have something to work with.

2010 is the start of the 3rd quarter and I'm kicking with the wind!

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