

TREENET: 2000-2009

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TREENET stands for Tree and Roadway Experimental and Educational Network.

It is an independent not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the urban forest. It is funded by grants and voluntary contributions from participating councils, nurseries and other groups¹.

In 2000 at the inaugural TREENET symposium, David Lawry gave the introductory address where he outlined TREENET's origins and its visions. It is my mission, at the tenth annual symposium, to reflect on David's paper and consider TREENET's achievements and perhaps its direction for the next 10 years.

Its spiritual home is in Adelaide at the University of Adelaide's Waite Arboretum. The arboretum is on land gifted to the University of Adelaide by Peter Waite 'to be held upon trust and in perpetuity as a park or garden for the enjoyment of the public'. It covers approximately 30 hectares and contains about 2,200 specimens representing 800 species from about 200 genera from around the world².

TREENET was co-founded by Dr Jennifer Gardner, Director of the Arboretum and David Lawry who for 20 years had been a producer and installer of urban trees. He had enjoyed the Arboretum as a student at Waite in the early 70s. Together they recognised the unique opportunity the Arboretum provided as a focus for research and education in urban arboriculture.

The first meeting of The Urban Tree Cooperative Research Group in February 1997 brought together four representatives from State Government, the nursery industry and education. Its aims were 'to improve the streetscapes of South Australia through a co-ordinated assessment of existing and potential client needs, species, production methods, establishment practices and information sharing³'. Transport SA was happy to finance research and Urrbrae Agricultural High School, located across the road from the Arboretum, was keen to involve students in projects.

The initial meeting envisaged three main areas of activity: street tree trials (to broaden the palette of species for street plantings and to focus on species that required less intervention), production of *Pyrus* 'Lynington' to generate income and kudos for the Waite Arboretum (this is a splendid selection of *Pyrus calleryana* made by Dr David Symon, former Curator of the Arboretum), and to test new technology in irrigation and research soil and water properties in relation to dryland and wetland plants. Future projects that were envisaged included storm water harvesting, incorporation of green waste into tree planting, running a two day conference in 1999/2000 and conveying information on all projects via the internet.

One week after the first meeting, the group had grown to seven and the name TREENET was adopted. In his 2000 introductory address, David stated that by that stage the group had achieved most of its original aims including the establishment of street tree trials, the production of *Pyrus* 'Lynington', and the expansion of the TREENET network to include many individuals, organisations and professions who influence the condition of the urban forest.

This progress was made possible by a Local Government grant of \$30,000 to survey SA Councils regarding tree policies and practice⁴, to set up a website and run a two day conference. That Conference was the Inaugural Street Tree Symposium in the first week of September 2000.

In this paper I'd like to reflect on the meaning of TREENET and in doing so, highlight some of its achievements and the highpoints of previous symposia from the past 10 years.

¹ <http://www.treenet.com.au> accessed 16.08.09

² <http://www.waite.adelaide.edu.au/arboretum> accessed 16.08.09

³ Lawry, D. 2000 "Introductory address", *Treenet Proceedings of the Inaugural Street Tree Symposium*, Treenet Inc. Adelaide

⁴ Hodges, G "TREENET Local Government Survey South Australia" *Treenet Proceedings of the Inaugural Street Tree Symposium*, Treenet Inc

TREE

TREENET is all about trees. However, trees in our urban landscapes are also about interactions with people, other assets, infrastructure and other organisms. The fact that TREENET's home is the Waite Arboretum reminds us that there are thousands of species of trees in the world, but very few of them see the light of day in our streets. Over the years various papers have highlighted the potential of many of the species planted in the Arboretum as possible street trees, especially as the trees in the Arboretum receive almost no supplementary irrigation.

The street tree trials continue to be a resource for tree managers; however, the full potential of this approach has yet to be seen. Sadly, conservatism still rules in most local government areas throughout Australia.

Trees provide a significant number of environmental services. They do this 24 hours a day with no sick pay, no holidays and no overtime, and they manage to do this in very challenging growing environments. The benefits of trees to human health are becoming clearer, not only in providing shade and reducing UV radiation; but in less tangible ways through their effects on attitudes, behaviour and general human well-being. Research from around the world confirms that the benefits derived from urban trees far outweigh the costs associated with their planting and management.

The importance of trees to individuals and communities is illustrated in another of TREENET's achievements, the Avenues of Honour 1915-2015 Project. David Lawry founded the project based on a challenge arising from Dr Greg Moore's paper at the 2000 Symposium to create more tree lined avenues and boulevards in Australia.⁵ It was officially launched with great fanfare at the 2004 Symposium, the only time TREENET held the Symposium in a tent in the Arboretum. The aim of the project is to commemorate every individual who has fallen in the service of Australia with a tree. The sale of Gallipoli Rosemary partly funds this project.⁴

The role of trees in a rapidly changing world of increasing urbanisation, increasing population density and global warming presents trees and their managers with significant challenges. This symposium highlights how the capital cities of Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney are meeting those challenges.

ROADWAY

Roadways are an integral and inescapable part of our lives. We live, work, and commute in and along streets. They contain the 'grey' services necessary to our daily lives and should contain the 'green' services. Unfortunately, trees are still seen by many as simply ornaments or embellishments and not as essential infrastructure.

Streets are challenging environments in which to grow trees. Streetscapes are dynamic and as urban environments become more densely populated and more complex, the challenges for tree managers will increase. Some tree managers are embracing these challenges and are working with other professionals to engineer planting spaces that meet the needs of the tree and minimise negative interactions with other infrastructure.

Whilst there are some wins, there continue to be too many losses. Many councils, utilities and government departments are still risk averse and removing trees seems to be the easiest solution. It is incumbent on everyone in the TREENET family to promote the benefits and values of trees in our streets and along our highways.

EXPERIMENTAL

One of the first initiatives of TREENET was to establish street tree trial sites to test species for their suitability as street trees in the conditions that they would have to endure during their lives. One of the earliest councils to take this up was the City of West Torrens under the leadership of Tim Johnson and his enthusiastic team⁵. The success and challenges of that project will be revisited during this symposium.

⁴ <http://www.avenuesofhonour.org> accessed 11.08.09

⁵ Moore, G "TREENET: A Management System and Choices for Australia" *Treenet Proceedings of the Inaugural Street Tree Symposium*, Treenet Inc

⁵ Johnson, T. 2000 "Greening the City of West Torrens" *Treenet Proceedings of the Inaugural Street Tree Symposium*, Treenet Inc. Adelaide

Over the past 10 years, the TREENET symposia have highlighted a number of experimental approaches to tree planting and establishment. Storm water harvesting has featured in many symposia as have structural soils and other initiatives and innovations. In 2003 a number of trials were established in Claremont Avenue which bounds the Arboretum.

The key to many of the successes reported in those presentations was the engagement with other professionals. Arborists and tree managers are regularly offended by the perceived ignorance of others when it comes to trees. This is probably true for engineers and others who are probably equally annoyed when an arborist or tree manager fails to understand the ins and outs of providing their particular services. Successful experiments are generally collaborative efforts. It is essential that we engage with other professionals to help develop sustainable and green streets. Whether the experiment is intentional or accidental, we always need to learn from both the successes and the failures.

EDUCATIONAL

Underpinning all of TREENET's goals is the need to spread the word. We are all on a learning curve. In achieving the experimental successes we need to educate other professions in the ways of trees. However, we must also inform ourselves of the challenges faced by those professionals.

TREENET has always been linked to educational institutions: formally with the University of Adelaide and less formally but very closely with the University of Melbourne, other universities and Technical and Further Education colleges such as Ryde, Urrbrae and others. Various symposia have featured presentations by research students from the Universities of Adelaide and Melbourne.

Learning should be everyone's lifelong goal. Keeping our eyes open, our brains engaged and sharing the knowledge is essential if we want to make a difference.

NETWORK

Apart from the formal aspects of the symposia, such as the papers and the workshops, much of the 'education' and information gathering comes from the informal gatherings over a cup of tea or a beer. I know that I really look forward to catching up with people from other States that I generally only see at TREENET.

One of the original aims of TREENET was to set up a website so that everyone who had access to the Internet could share information and get the latest on the trial sites. This aim has certainly been achieved through the hard work, persistence and talent of people behind the scenes such as Sean Donaghy who created and maintained the original TREENET and Avenues of Honour websites and Andrea Lawry who manages the new site that went online on July 1, 2009.

One of the excellent features of the TREENET website is the publication of the proceedings of all of the symposia to date. This is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the amazing breadth of material that has been covered since 2000.

TREENET actively encourages links with other arboricultural associations and is grateful for the support of its many sponsors and its institutional members. It is also dependent on the support of everyone who attends the symposia.

CONCLUSION

In 2000 there were 130 attendees and we comfortably fitted into the largest auditorium that the University of Adelaide could provide at its Waite campus. After the rather risky 2004 venture in the marquee we moved to the National Wine Centre which had recently been acquired by the University of Adelaide.

It has been a very successful move as proximity to accommodation and restaurants has encouraged networking amongst delegates, particularly for the hundreds that now fly in each year. The facilities and experienced staff provide a first class venue for up to 400 delegates. This year we have planned for 300 so we can still have room to grow. In 2008 we ran our first field day at the Waite Arboretum on day two, and it is wonderful to make contact once again with our spiritual home and to touch the trees that touch our hearts.

Behind the scenes TREENET has a Management Committee chaired by Dr Greg Moore, Dr Jennifer Gardner, Curator of the Waite Arboretum is Secretary and Brian Measday retired accountant and "Greenwell" inventor is Treasurer. The other members are Dr Bob Such, Independent Member for Fisher in the Parliament of South Australia, Professor Chris Daniels, University of SA, Tim Johnson, City of Mitcham, Judy Fakes, Ryde College of TAFE, John Zwar, Urrbrae College of TAFE and ex officio David Lawry as TREENET Director. Apart from that team, TREENET has an Advisory Board of 50 members from all over Australia representing local government, nurseries, utilities, government departments and arboricultural industry associations. It is truly a TREE-NETWORK.

Over the past 10 years TREENET has grown and matured. It is still driven by an enthusiasm and commitment to improve the urban forest. It is incredibly proud to be a voice for home-grown achievements. It has been policy to date that all papers are about local issues as we have very much to be proud of.

There are many challenges ahead including the big one of climate change and the likelihood of drier times and more storms. We have seen more information on the benefits of trees to human health but the message still needs to get to the policy makers. Financial pressures on utilities and increased foreign ownership don't bode well for trees. We are still to see a more diverse palette of species in our streets. Incursions of exotic pests and diseases are real threats to seemingly bullet-proof species like *Platanus*. TREENET will continue to highlight these challenges and, more importantly, continue to showcase and disseminate solutions.



Delegates to the Inaugural TREENET Symposium 2000



Dr David Symon with Burnley Students 2001 and *Pyrus calleyreana*



Delegates plant Gallipoli Rosemary at launch of Avenues of Honour project 2004