

AVENUES OF HONOUR: LOCATION, ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF WAR MEMORIAL TREE AVENUES IN AUSTRALIA

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A large body of research exists on the topic of war memorials. From ancient to modern times wars have been a part of human history and memorials to battles, hero's, victory and defeats are common all over the planet. However most investigations into the form and history of war memorials have only focused on completely artificial structures. There are many in depth examinations of sculpture, obelisks, cenotaphs and buildings (Borg 1991, Inglis 1999, McIvor 1994, Richards 1996) but few look at trees or gardens. In the book *Sacred Places*, memorial avenues are only mentioned as an indigenous novelty and it is suggested that many of the avenues could be considered an accompaniment to existing or planned artificial monuments (Inglis 1999). Such is the number of war memorials in Australia, and overseas, that all studies must be focused but while most have limited themselves to the totally artificial very few have dealt with the organic.

MEMORIAL TREES

Historically mankind has had a long association with trees. Trees have been valued as the focus of worship or as markers of important sites or landmarks for centuries (Dwyer 1991). Many of these ancient significant trees were not intentionally planted or dedicated but were valued because of their great age or location. As human culture became more sophisticated so did our beliefs about the significance of trees.

The tree as a symbol of life and the cycle of life, death and renewal is very common (Hageneder, 2005). It is understandable then that trees dedicated to the memory of the dead appear in many cultures. These trees may be planted specifically for a person or event or may be already established trees that have gained an association over time. The latter is more common when large trees are present near a significant location. This connection can then lead to replanting of similar trees in other locations as a living connection to a person or event. The Lone Pine (*Pinus Halepensis*) memorials around Australia are an example of this.

Different tree species are often associated with a specific meaning as well as the symbology associated with trees in general. These associations are often rooted in ancient history and mythology. Elm trees were planted by the ancient Greeks in graveyards and were traditionally used to make coffins in England. The Pine is significant in many cultures and is associated with mortality, vitality and continuity. In particular it has a strong association with death in Scotland where ancient clan chiefs and warriors are often found buried under a pine. Oak trees are connected with Virtue and Majesty and have a very strong connection to western culture through various myths and legends. Perhaps most significant is the lore from Ancient Britain and Germany where the oak is associated with kindness and nurturing but also the ability to fight when needed. (Hageneder 2005)

Such associated meaning makes these trees a natural choice for memorial avenues and may have influenced species choice for Australia's avenues as much as aesthetic or climatic considerations.

MEMORIAL AVENUES

It is not a great leap from a single memorial tree to an avenue of trees. The idea of a straight, double row of evenly spaced trees is not complicated or counter-intuitive. Man has been building roads since the invention of the wheel and lining a road with intentionally planted trees is an obvious progression. There is evidence that significant artificial avenues were planted in Ancient Rome although we do not know if they were intended for any purpose beyond a landscape feature. After the 16th century various

avenue types were being developed around Europe and by the 19th century tree lined boulevard were standardised and very common, particularly in France (Lawrence 1988). There has been a long-standing tradition of the planting of grand avenues in England, again possibly influenced by the French and Dutch, and many of England's historic manors have or had associated tree avenues (Carmichael 1994). It would be difficult, if not impossible to identify the earliest memorial avenues in the world but it is clear that the concept is not recent.

One of the biggest myths about Avenues of Honour is perhaps the idea that they are an uniquely Australian phenomena. Tree memorials occur all over the world. They are not always planted as part of an avenue or to commemorate fallen soldiers but the significance and community value of a memorial tree is not restricted to one culture. While memorial trees and particularly avenues appear to be more common in the Western world scattered examples are turning up all over the globe. At least 5 war memorial avenues still exist in the USA (Robbins 2003) and 7 in Canada (Lanken 1997). The UK National Inventory of War Memorials records over 250 war memorial tree plantings but it is not yet clear how many of these are avenues. Other avenues have been planted in such diverse locations as the Solomon Islands and Jerusalem. Exactly how many war memorial avenues still exist worldwide is unknown but they are more common than many people realise.

MEMORIAL AVENUES IN AUSTRALIA

When Australia was colonised by Europeans the planting of avenues and memorial trees was part of our cultural inheritance. One of the oldest intact avenues in Australia was planted in 1876 at Camperdown, Victoria. The earliest memorial avenues are difficult to identify but at least two commemorating the Boer War exist and others may have existed that are now lost or destroyed.

It has been suggested (Haddow 1987) that the inspiration for a WW1 'Avenue of Honour' originated in Ballarat and was then taken up by other nearby Victorian towns and to a lesser extent other communities across Australia. However an article in the Ballarat Courier on Friday 17th May 1917 claimed that Mrs Thompson (the driving force behind the Ballarat avenue) was inspired by an avenue planting at Mount Lofty in South Australia. The planting at Ballarat was certainly the largest in the state but it was not the earliest. The avenue of honour planted in Eurack in 1916 is the earliest WW1 memorial avenue in Victoria (Taffe 2006) and one of the first in the country. However it is not yet certain exactly when and where the first WW1 avenue was planted.

The construction of the Ballarat avenue may have influenced other small towns in Australia to plant avenues but this was only possible because the concept of a memorial avenue was already understood and accepted by the greater Australian public. 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 memorial avenues in Australia is unknown and may be impossible to ever state definitively. Current research suggests that over 300 avenues were planted around Australia with almost half of those found in Victoria.

A Government survey conducted in 1919 and 1920 of war memorials around Australia found 123 avenues had been planted around the country with 92 of those to be found in Victoria. A much later study found 142 avenues (Haddow 1987) in Victoria and others are being discovered and planted to this day. 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.

THREATS TO URBAN TREES

The management of urban trees has become increasingly complex and important as Australia has developed and in many cases avenues that were planted in semi rural environments are now in the middle of towns. This has often resulted in conflicts between the trees and the progress of modern infrastructure.

The difficulties a tree must overcome in an urbanised environment are considerable. They are competing for space in an increasingly crowded environment and have often been poorly regarded by

those interested in urban infrastructure. Consequently most urban trees regularly face one or more of the following

- Radical pruning away from powerlines
- Soil compaction
- Root zone damage from construction and utilities
- Arid Soil Conditions
- Total removal for building or road widening
- Damage from road accidents
- Air and Soil pollution

This means that good quality management of significant trees is often not only desirable but necessary if they are to be retained.

IDEAL MANAGEMENT

Defining the best management practises for urban trees is a difficult task and there are several opinions on the subject (Clark 1991). However it can be said that any management strategy needs to consider these elements:

- Protection of the Rootzone
- Watering
- Pruning
- Professional arboricultural assessment
- Removal and replacement
- Interaction with urban infrastructure

Exactly what management a tree requires will depend on its situation but almost all will require some maintenance during their life and all will need to be dealt with at the end of their lives.

MAINTAINING THE LANDSCAPE

The biggest difficulty with maintaining these kinds of memorial trees is to also maintain the avenue as a landscape feature. The preservation of a single tree is important but should not necessarily be continued if it damages the impression of the avenue. However when the tree in question is a memorial dedicated to the memory of a specific person it can be difficult to determine the best course of action. This is further exacerbated by the somewhat more modern problems of safety and litigation where public trees are under enormous pressure and scrutiny.

One of the common features of tree avenues is they are generally all the same species (sometimes even the same clone) and are all planted around the same time. While this is ideal for developing a uniform avenue it does lead to problems when the trees approach senescence. When all the trees in an avenue approach the end of their safe lifespan the continued survival of the avenue as a landscape feature and as a historical site requires some difficult decisions.

A memorial avenue should perhaps be considered as a complete entity requiring the replacement of various parts as required. When the damaged sections are signs or plaques the replacement is a fairly simple process. However when the damaged section is a tree things become more complicated. If each individual tree has been dedicated to a person the preservation of that tree becomes an issue of sentiment and remembrance as well arboricultural management. It must be accepted that for all the sentiment associated with a particular tree it cannot be preserved forever and if the memorial is to continue it must be replaced. Within the context of an entire avenue the removal and replacement of an individual tree poses its own set of problems. Essentially there are three options for avenue replanting (Carmichael 1994). Aging or unhealthy trees can be removed individually and the gaps replanted. A new line of trees can be planted inside or outside the original. The third option is the most drastic where the entire line of trees is replanted after clear felling.

Once replacement is deemed necessary the question arises of what type of tree to plant. Opinions on what is an appropriate street tree have changes over the last 90 years. Many of the historic avenues use species that are no longer considered appropriate for various horticultural reasons as well as aesthetic and cultural fashion. Some government agencies have even gone as far as producing guidelines for tree selection, planting and maintenance along urban roads (Department of Planning Sydney 1999). When well thought out these guides can be a helpful but they can also conflict with the original spirit of an avenue. Further problems arise from the needs of various utilities. Power

companies usually have their own opinions on what pruning regimes should be implemented (Energy Authority of NSW 1983) and in some cases these have had disastrous impacts on individual trees and in some cases whole avenues.

Fortunately there is an increasing trend of valuing urban trees and preserving them. Memorial trees often do well in such assessments. Recently a large amount of work has been done to develop assessment categories and methods for evaluating heritage landscape. Commonly significance is broken down into four categories; Cultural value, Historical Value, Scientific value and Aesthetic value. (Dept of Planning Sydney 1990, Schapper 1993) Memorial avenues could be expected to rate highly in several or all of these categories. There is no standard methodology for establishing significance across Australia but memorial avenues are likely to be considered significant by any appropriate set of heritage criteria.

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

One of the most notable features of the planting of memorial avenues in Australia was the level of community involvement. These avenues were almost always planned, organised, paid for and planted by local community groups. This did usually involve the local council to some extent, particularly as they were generally responsible for the long term management of the trees, but very few involved State or Federal Government. In fact larger government bodies have had difficulty in replicating local efforts (Dargavel 1999) and grander plans such as the Roads of Remembrance Project have had many difficulties over the years. Therefore the avenues cultural significance is twofold. Nationally these avenues represent a unifying need for commemoration of the sacrifices of two world wars and a popular desire for a living memorial to the dead. At a local level each avenue is a very personal monument for the community that created it. In some cases almost the entire town was involved in designing, planting or paying for the avenue and trees were regularly planted by relatives of the soldiers the commemorated. They not only symbolise a communities grief over the losses of war but also the communities pride in their people and their town. Such communal events are great milestones in the history of a local community.

Another unusual quality of these memorials is that their significance is not necessarily tied to one or two historical events. These memorials are not static and can be modified or added to without damaging their value as a memorial for earlier events. Often new trees are added to old avenues to commemorate new conflicts and soldiers. This means the avenue can be a symbol for the all the communities war dead rather than simply representing a single conflict.

HORTICULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

It cannot be denied that urban trees provide a large number of benefits to the environment and the community. Various reports have examined the benefits and costs of street trees (Dwyer 1992, Brack 2002) and are too extensive to be reproduced here. However it must be acknowledged that all urban trees also pose some potential hazards.

The value of a tree combines benefits and hazards. There have been several attempts to place a dollar value on a tree using such factors (Dwyer 1992, Killicoat 2002, Maco 2003) and it becomes clear that mature trees are often significant financial assets. They are also often strongly valued by the local community and the removal of these trees can require careful handling of public relations (Munson 1993).

Generally when trees are removed it is not because the benefits of the trees have reduced but because the hazards posed by the trees have increased to unacceptable levels. How long this takes will depend on the lifespan of the trees and the quality of the maintenance they receive. When a tree is removed the community losses a valuable asset and this is a strong argument for replacing trees to provide an asset for the future. Therefore without effective succession planning the urban treescape will deteriorate in general and where an avenue is a landscape feature it becomes vitally important.

CURRENT RESEARCH

In 2004 TREENET began the Avenues of Honour 1915-2015 Project with the aim of identifying and restoring all memorial avenues in Australia by 2015. An internet search for avenues was conducted which provided information many avenues and identified previous studies in individual states. Contact was then made with many local governments and arboricultural professionals through TREENET's network resulting in more information including the discovery of many more avenues. Local publicity

about the project resulted in contact from general public with further information. The initial results were reported at TREENET's Annual Street Tree Symposium in 2004. An extensive literature review was conducted expanding on the information already identified as part of the TREENET project. This involved a detailed web-based search as well as investigations of traditionally published material including the original documents from the Federal survey conducted in 1920. Personal contact was also made with several state heritage associations and history groups.

Earlier this year a 6 page survey form was sent to 533 Local Councils around Australia. All councils were included with the exception of rural aboriginal community councils. The survey requested basic details about the location and history of any local memorial avenues as well as asking specific questions about the condition, usage and significance of the trees. Further questions investigated the past, current and future management of the trees. The initial contact with council was a hard copy mailout of the survey form and a cover letter outlining the TREENET Project and the intent of the survey. This was followed 3 weeks later with a general email to all councils which had not yet responded reminding them of the study and providing another electronic copy of the survey. Further contact by phone or email is being conducted on a case by case basis to further improve the response rate.

A two page survey form was also sent to many RSL branches around Australia. The survey requested basic details about the location and history of any local memorial avenues as well as asking specific questions about the condition, usage and significance of the trees. Questions were also asked to assess the value placed on these kinds of memorials by the RSL and how they would like to see them developed and managed.

DISCUSSION

Memorial avenues require a very close relationship with the local community. Their survival is often dependant on the value placed on them by local community groups, RSL Branches and Local Council. Where the avenues are well remembered and regarded the trees are more likely to have protection against potential urban threats and in some cases the avenue may have associated friends groups helping to maintain it. It is when this community support fades from a lack of interest or the fading of community memory for the significance of the trees that they are in the most danger. Unfortunately the older an avenue gets the more likely community memory has faded especially if signage has been lost. This can mean that as the trees approach the end of their life and their horticultural value reduces the cultural and historical value of the trees can also be forgotten. This will often result in the complete loss of the avenue as trees are removed and not replaced appropriately.

The response from the Local government survey has been positive. Surveys are still being submitted so no data analysis has yet been conducted. However details of over 80 avenues have been received and the total response rate will exceed 30%.

The response from RSL branches has been less positive although when they have replied they have been helpful and supportive. It was expected that the RSL survey could be problematic as many RSL branches around Australia are no longer active and there are often difficulties in contacting the relevant people.

It is expected that full results and analysis of both surveys will be completed by the end of the year. However from the quality of the data received so far this project is on target to collate the most comprehensive list of Australia's memorial avenues currently available. The information provided by councils should also allow some assessment of the types, and hopefully the effectiveness, of management practises affecting the avenues.

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