

## The Avenues of Honour Project Down Under – A Trail of Discovery

### Le projet australien “Avenues of Honour” - Un parcours de découverte

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#### Introduction

At TREENET's inaugural Symposium in 2000, a vision posed for the future of treescapes in Australia, included an insistence there must be more avenues and boulevards, not less.<sup>1</sup>

During that discussion, casual reference was made to historical avenues planted as war memorials, principally occurring in response to Australia's involvement in WW1. What did we know about them and their contribution to the landscape?

TREENET has claimed that more than any other people, Australians have chosen to recognise war service and sacrifice through community plantings of memorial trees. For centuries, Avenues of trees were planted by many countries for a variety of reasons. Avenue plantings in Australia as a landscape feature and for memorial significance have been a cultural legacy since European colonisation. However, nowhere else has embraced the concept of a living War Memorial in the form of an Avenue of Honour, like Australia.<sup>2</sup>

So where are all the Avenues to support this claim? In answer, many Australians would likely nominate the iconic, 22km WW1 Ballarat Avenue of Honour in regional Victoria; for those more geographically aware responses might tease out another handful of notable Avenues, such as at King's Park in the city of Perth, Western Australia; Bacchus Marsh in regional Victoria; Soldiers Memorial Avenue, city of Hobart, Tasmania.

Instinctively it was understood there were likely to be more memorial avenues in the Australian landscape planted in the first half of the century after the Gallipoli landing, or at least some history marking their purpose, even if lost to the ravages of time.

Embarking on this quest to discover Avenues, as part of the decade's countdown to various WW1 centenary events for the Gallipoli landings, service on the Western Front in France and peace heralded by Armistice Day, TREENET launched its ambitious Avenues of Honour 1915-2015 Project in 2004 – as conceived and founded by TREENET's first Director, David Lawry OAM.

TREENET sought to preserve the history, the stories and the very personal nature of these living memorials. In the void of no centralised, national record of these commemorative plantings, TREENET became a self-appointed champion to locate and record existing, known Avenues of Honour and to encourage where possible their restoration, reinstatement and to promote the tradition through the establishment of new memorial trees.

Core to these aspirations was the desire to engage with pivotal organisations, family relatives, local communities and historians in such a way as to match the drive and the sentiment behind the plantings of original avenues of honour for those commemorated.

The term “Avenues of Honour” immediately conjures a precise image in the mind, of a double-row of sentinel trees, lining either side of a roadway, a street, or a path in a park or garden.

It must be noted TREENET's Avenues of Honour project uses the term more broadly, to record details about ALL commemorative trees, be they a solitary specimen (as in the case of the “War Memorial Oak”); or arranged as a single-sided row; or planted as a copse or memorial grove of trees.

<sup>1</sup> GM Moore A Management System and Choices for Australia, Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> National Street Tree Symposium, 2000

<sup>2</sup> S Cockerell TREENET Avenues of Honour Survey, Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> National Street Tree Symposium, 2004

Whatever aspect or spatial arrangement they have secured in the landscape, these living memorials signify a common purpose for honouring the lives, the service, the sacrifice and the suffering.

For the purpose of this discussion, the focus is simplified to reflect on actual avenues of living memorials.



### Developing the trail of discovery 2004 - 2012

In response to the challenge, TREENET had to consider some key questions:

- How to secure a dedicated person and resources to help manage and coordinate the initial search?
- What type and from what sources could information be found and collected?
- What search tools were available?
- How would the information be stored?
- What to do with the information once collected?

Sarah Cockerell, a natural science Honours student from Flinders University, Adelaide, was secured by David Lawry to assist with TREENET's emerging Avenues of Honour Project. First in a volunteer capacity, then as a part-time, casual employee and eventually supported by her PhD scholarship, Sarah embarked on further research, dedicated to Australia's memorial avenues.

Existing, historical, piecemeal surveys were explored, some having been commissioned as early as the 1920s at a national level. Others were revealed as either state-based or at local community levels.

These existing surveys, invaluable internet searches, coupled with initial contacts with councils, local community history groups, Returned Services League (RSL) branches and private individuals, had identified 184 avenues but had failed to confirm the health or even the continued presence of many of these avenues planted after the First World War.<sup>3</sup>

The Project launch in 2004, early media promotions and word of mouth elicited further interest from the public and other parties. The injection of information from the broader community began to bolster the number of records.

In 2006, Homewood Consulting in Victoria and supporter of TREENET, developed the structure for a geospatial [database](#). It was envisaged that users of the database would utilise and search the information in a similar manner to that of 'Google Earth'.<sup>4</sup> This set the aspirational model for the types of information and how the data might be stored.

In 2008, as a body of work towards Sarah's PhD thesis, a formal paper-based survey was distributed to many Councils (local government authorities). Memorial avenues and the trees that comprise them are typically on public land and most often managed by local Councils. The [detailed survey](#) was designed to identify war memorial tree avenues around Australia and provide an overview of their condition and management.

Survey results identified 567 known Avenues of Honour across Australia; over 400 were planted during WW1 or its aftermath – many of which remained in some form; some depleted or in poor condition.

<sup>3</sup> S Cockerell, D. Lawry TREENET Avenues of Honour Project 1915-2015 – Progress Report, Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> National Street Tree Symposium, 2005

<sup>4</sup> B Kenyon *Development of a Standard for Avenues of Honour Database, Proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> National Street Tree Symposium, 2006*

The information gathered from various sources (principally TREENET's survey) was stored and maintained as a flat-file spreadsheet.

A lapse in people resources and financial support towards the end of this period impeded further progress.

The journey of discovery continues 2013 - 2017

Since 2004 TREENET had been managing three key aspects:

- research and documentation of avenues planted for WW1, WW2 and other conflicts
- project promotion and support for community activities
- community engagement and education

In 2013 TREENET reviewed these aspects to find ways to accelerate outcomes.

Courtesy of unsolicited philanthropy from a TREENET supporter, a new, dedicated Avenues of Honour, wiki-style website was initiated. The digitally mapped locations and snapshot summaries of known Avenues of Honour became conveniently accessible for the first time. It was also imagined the integration of blog-style community conversations would encourage greater community reach Australia-wide. A separate, internet based [Flickr media site](#) was also established to capture community-supplied images of memorial plantings. In tandem, TREENET was dabbling in social-media platforms at this time and supplementing the [TREENET Facebook](#) page, a dedicated [Avenues of Honour Facebook](#) page was established.

A critical and vexing issue however was TREENET's lack of capacity to link avenues of honour to the individual service men and women represented, along with their stories and service history.

In mid-2016 a successful Australian Government grant, solved the issue allowing TREENET's living memorials database to be integrated with a marvellously versatile, interactive, web-based platform established two years earlier, by the RSL of South Australia. Now a national program and a feature of the Australian War Memorial, an ongoing and collaborative partnership has been forged between the national TREENET Avenues of Honour Project and the [Virtual War Memorial Australia](#) (VWMA).



Complementary to the VWMA, a new [Avenues of Honour website](#) was launched in September 2018 to help reinforce the expected benefits for the community, including:

Greater access and interactive capacity to learn about Australians, their service and their memorial avenues of honour;

Improved stimulation and engagement whilst participating in the trail of discovery and sharing of information;

Living memorials will be better known, recognised and discovered by their descendants, relatives, local communities and other interested parties;

Ensure that Avenues of Honour continue to play an important role in community commemoration of military service and sacrifice;

Support for the coordination of community-based initiatives to conserve, restore, reinstate and establish memorial avenues of honour.

TREENET continues to strengthen partnerships with key organisations across Australia, including but not limited to RSL Sub-branches, National Trusts of Australia, state and local governments, community historical societies, historians, educational institutions and community service and sporting clubs.

The process of fostering local champions, be their relatives and descendants of persons commemorated, community historians or simply tree-centric, civic-minded individuals, is particularly vital to the continued success of the Avenues of Honour project.

In 2018, TREENET's original mission is still very clear and the rewarding journey of discovery continues.



## Glenn WILLIAMS

Director, TREENET, Australia  
Directeur de TREENET, Australie

Glenn has enjoyed the role of Director of TREENET (Tree and Roadway Experimental and Educational Network) since January 2013. In a past life, Glenn has a background as a former school teacher and adult educator; followed by a professional career in local government as a Natural Resources Officer and personal involvement in the care and conservation of natural areas for over 30 years. As a former Natural Heritage Manager with the National Trust of South Australia, Glenn commanded the Trust's Register of Significant Trees. His experience supporting the panel of significant tree experts, only serves to increase his love affair with culturally significant trees. Glenn continues to support this work of the National Trust. As Director of TREENET, Glenn's passion for heritage tree conservation is rewarded with a focus on Australia's living memorials through the national Avenues of Honour project.

Glenn est depuis janvier 2013 directeur de TREENET - Tree and Roadway Experimental and Educational Network - un réseau de recherche et d'éducation autour des arbres et de la route. Auparavant, Glenn a été enseignant (pour enfants et adultes), puis a été en charge des ressources naturelles dans une collectivité locale. À titre personnel, il est impliqué depuis plus de 30 ans dans la gestion et la conservation d'espaces naturels. En tant que gestionnaire du patrimoine naturel au sein du National Trust d'Australie du Sud, Glenn a dirigé le répertoire des arbres remarquables (Register of Significant Trees). Son expérience aux côtés du groupe d'experts, spécialistes des arbres remarquables, a renforcé encore son histoire d'amour pour les arbres porteurs d'une dimension culturelle. Glenn continue à apporter son soutien au National Trust pour ce travail.

