REMEMBRANCE DRIVEWAY:  
A Living Memorial  

Allan Correy

Introduction

Most people who have travelled by road between Sydney and Canberra would have noticed the familiar circular markers, with their large green tree silhouette on a yellow background and the words ‘Remembrance Driveway’ in bold red lettering, placed at irregular intervals along the Hume and Federal Highways. Many would have guessed that these markers and the plantations of trees with which they are associated, are some kind of war memorial. Few, however, know the history of this unique living memorial and why it is now recognised as an important national cultural landscape.

Two years ago I began tracing the history and development of Remembrance Driveway and I have uncovered some fascinating details relating to its 40 year history. I have searched the Remembrance Driveway Committee Records held in the NSW State Archives Repository, personally interviewed living members of the original committee and carried out extensive field investigations to document each of the 50 or more plantations along the 310 kilometre route from Macquarie Place, Sydney, to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Today’s venue, therefore, is a fitting place for the presentation of this paper, and 1995, the ‘Year Australia Remembers’, could hardly be a more appropriate time to discuss this World War II memorial.

Antecedents

To put Remembrance Driveway into a wider context it is useful to trace some of the antecedents of war memorials in general and memorial plantings in particular.

Nearly all cultures have found ways of honouring war heroes. Some preserved the memory through myths and legends and others built monuments in some form. Early monuments, carved in wood or stone, or in the form of stained glass, were placed in cathedrals and churches, but it was not until after the Napoleonic Wars that freestanding monuments appeared in public places. These memorials were not to common soldiers and sailors but were heroic tributes to victorious generals or admirals. One of the most notable of these is Nelson’s Column in Trafalgar Square, London.

The first memorials to ordinary servicemen came after the Crimean War of 1854-56 when the suffering and courage of British soldiers was recognised for the first time. In Australia, the first war memorials were to those who served in the South African Wars of 1899-1902. However, it was the aftermath of the Great War of 1914-18 that fostered an enormous community need to establish lasting memorials to all those who had served. Australia, in fact, has more war memorials than any other country.2

We are all familiar with the monuments in stone: the architectural war memorials in every capital city, the memorial arches in municipal parks and the statues and obelisks in country towns, but the living memorials are less well known. Many people considered the stone monuments a waste of public money and favoured the planting of trees instead. Planting trees was seen as a symbol of hope for the future and adding beauty to towns and countryside but, above all, it was something tangible which ordinary people could become personally involved with, and few could object to the concept.3

In Australia, from 1917 to 1921, hundreds of avenues of honour were planted to commemorate those who served in the Great War.4 The first and most famous of these was the one planted between 1917 and 1919 at Ballarat in Victoria.5

All the World War I memorial plantings followed a similar pattern. They were formal avenues usually of a single species or sometimes two species, oaks and elms being the most popular; plaques to individuals were placed on, or at, the base of trees and the wording on commemorative plaques was simple and did not glorify war: there was no ‘Duty to God, King and Country’ which typified the architectural monuments.6 Unfortunately, the ravages of time, lack of maintenance and road widening have all taken their toll and few of the original avenues remain intact.

Why was the avenue so popular? Scholars agree that it was symbolic of the tree-lined country roads of France and Belgium down which young men marched in their rendezvous with death and that trees represented victory of life over death, the memorial trees becoming living symbols of the sacrifices made in foreign countries. If one studies the official war photographs and drawings of the war artists, the avenue of trees, or the broken remains of such avenues, together with the endless marching columns of men is seen as a very powerful symbol indeed.7

After World War II, monuments in stone were no longer in favour, although often rolls of honour were added to
existing World War I memorials. While many people were opposed to monuments, most still supported the idea of some sort of memorial, and once again, a living memorial found widespread community support. It is not surprising, therefore, that the suggestion of establishing a Remembrance Driveway, linking Sydney and Canberra, appealed to politicians and the public alike. However, unlike its predecessors, this particular memorial was to be no formal avenue but it was to be planned and designed with meticulous precision from the outset. Furthermore, it was to be appropriately managed with the result that it has not suffered the same decline as many of the earlier memorial plantings.

Historical Background

Concept
It was Margaret Davis, MBE, who first contemplated establishing a living memorial to all those Australians who had served in World War II. Mrs Davis was the Founder President of the Garden Club of Australia, established in 1950, and she suggested it as the Club’s first project. Her initial idea was far more ambitious: she envisaged trees being planted by local groups right across Australia. This was not only an impossible dream, it was also ecologically unsound and culturally undesirable. Nevertheless, dreams do sometimes come true, or partially true, and the many mature plantations which today make a major visual contribution to the roadsides along the Hume and Federal Highways, testify to this.

Recognising the Garden Club’s limitations, Margaret Davis enlisted the help of other members who had influence in the right places and who were enthusiastic about her idea. Those she turned to were Lieutenant-General Frank Berryman, Commanding Officer at Victoria Barracks, R. H. Anderson, Curator and Chief Botanist at the Botanic Gardens Sydney, and Colonel Charles Moses, General Manager of the Australian Broadcasting Commission. All were fellow members of the Garden Club of Australia.

A preliminary committee, chaired by Moses, was formed in April 1952, nearly two years before the first official plantings by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip. A large number of interested people were invited to attend the inaugural meeting of what was called the National
Memorial Highway Committee held on 21 May, 1952 at Broadcast House. An Executive Committee was elected with Frank Berryman as President, and this committee was instructed to investigate the:

practicability of establishing a Memorial Highway between Sydney and Canberra to commemorate those who served in the Australian Armed Forces in the Second World War by planting avenues of trees and establishing groves, memorial parks and other appropriate memorials.

As we have seen, the idea of a living memorial was not new. What was different was the scale of the proposal, nearly 200 miles (310 kilometres) in length, and that the planting would consist predominantly of groves and copes. Planting a continuous avenue of trees was not favoured from the outset, and the failure of so many of the avenues planted after World War I were actually cited as examples to support the argument for a more informal planting style.

Predictably, the whole operation was run with military precision. Berryman obtained government approval for secretarial assistance and a room to hold meetings. Professional advice came from Nigel Ashton, Senior Town Planner, Department of Local Government. R. H. Anderson, Director Botanic Gardens Sydney, and David Shoobridge, Assistant Superintendent, Parks and Gardens Canberra. Berryman orchestrated the operation superbly; he knew the right people in government and he, himself, was highly respected. Ashton had access to land use and land ownership information, and Anderson and Shoobridge knew their trees.

By December 1952, the entire route had been inspected and a report prepared. This report identified potentially suitable sites on which to establish plantations, together with lists of recommended species.

Models
Two earlier war memorial planting styles were used as models to promote the idea of Remembrance Driveway, and both featured prominently in the original publicity brochure. The first of these was the World War I Avenues of Honour, and the avenue at Ballarat was cited as an example. The second model was that of the Blue Star Memorial Highways, a system of inter-regional highways across the United States which are dedicated to "all those who have served or will serve in the nation's armed forces". Beginning with a six mile stretch of highway in New Jersey, designated as a war memorial in 1944, the system now includes more than 70,000 miles (112,651 km) of highway, each identified with a uniform marker, the symbolic blue star of which is taken from the United States service flag.

Publicity
From the outset it was agreed that there would be no premature publicity. After all the committee had been asked to investigate the practicability of such a scheme, and everyone wanted to be sure that all was in readiness to proceed with plantings immediately the project was officially launched.

A publicity sub-committee was formed consisting entirely of ABC staff, with full authority to proceed with development of publicity, including production of a brochure. The cover illustration, which depicts the spectre of a soldier with head bowed over reversed arms at the end of a formal avenue of Lombardy poplars, is highly emotionally charged and symbolic of the public image of war memorials which still prevailed as late as the 1950s (Fig. 1). It is interesting to speculate on why such a cover illustration was used, as clearly, the committee did not favour the planting of formal avenues, and I have found only one example of such a planting along the whole length of the Driveway. This example, on the northern approach to Bowral (Fig. 2), is almost a replica of the cover illustration. Perhaps this first brochure was designed to appeal to the widest possible audience to gain initial support for the project; certainly no subsequent cover illustrations have been so emotionally charged.

The brochure concluded with a special appeal for donations from all members of society, from large corporations to sponsor a whole plantation, to individual citizens who could donate a single tree. The cost of planting and maintaining each tree was to be £10, and it was estimated the whole project would cost £100,000. It was pointed out that this was not a large sum, considering that over 700,000 Australians, including 300,000 from NSW, served in World War II.

Official Marker
Several designs for the official marker were submitted and the committee adopted the now familiar sign in October 1953. Although the umbrageous tree silhouette was thought to resemble an English oak, it was considered abstract enough to represent a tree generally, and be easily identifiable by the public. The first markers produced were of the gallows type, with the sign hanging from a metal arm, several of which still exist at Windsor Park, Chullora.

Official Launch
Remembrance Driveway was officially launched by the NSW Premier, the Hon J J Cahill, MLA, and the Federal Minister for the Interior, the Hon. W. S. Kent Hughes, MP, on 9 December 1953, with a broadcast over ABC radio. To officially open the Driveway and symbolically mark each end of it, HM Queen Elizabeth II and HRH the Duke
of Edinburgh planted the first trees (Fig. 3) two London planes, in Macquarie Place, Sydney (Fig. 4) and a snow gum outside the Australian War Memorial, Canberra in February 1954. Planting then commenced from both ends.

While the Royal plantings are officially recognised as the first plantings, my research has shown that 82 trees had already been planted by the Australian Army at Studley Park, Narellan in April 1953 and dedicated as part of Remembrance Driveway on 5 January 1954, one month before the official plantings. However, it seems none of the original trees survived road widening in 1956, and the single row of Lombardy poplars which now exists on the site are replacement plantings, carried out in 1958, and with further replacements in 1993. Theoretically, although not officially, this is the site of the first memorial planting along Remembrance Driveway.

High Profile Years

Following the official launch and the Royal plantings, general enthusiasm and public support for the project was high and remained so for about ten years. Publicity, through the media, continued and was aimed at encouraging individual donors. Progress on the Driveway was broadcast over ABC radio and, later, was given good television coverage: in 1959, the ABC staff sponsored its own plantation south of Camden. In 1956 the AWA, 2CH Women’s League, Garden Lovers and Touring Club sponsored a plantation at a site near Warwick Farm railway station, which was later named Berryman Park in honour of Sir Frank Berryman, Foundation President of the Remembrance Driveway Committee from 1952 to 1981. The Garden Club of Australia established its own plantation at Fairfield in 1955, and various branches of the Garden Club organised regular ‘working bees’ to plant and maintain trees wherever help was needed.

Initially it was intended that a small circular plaque, bearing the Remembrance Driveway badge and the name of the individual being commemorated, would be placed at the base of each tree when it was sufficiently advanced, but this was found to be impractical. Instead, it was decided to include the names of all individuals on a single plaque fixed to a boulder placed centrally within a plantation. Many individual donors first heard about the project on radio programs or through articles in the ABC Weekly and local

![Figure 3: Official tree planting ceremony in Macquarie Place, Sydney on 5 February, 1954. (NSW State Archives)](image)

![Figure 4: The London plane trees, planted in Macquarie Place, Sydney on 5 February, 1954, as they are today. (The Author)](image)
newspapers. As a result, enquiries followed by £10 donations came flooding in, and today, the fine plantations at Upper Bass Hill, Burke Square and Lansdowne Bridge are predominantly composed of trees paid for by individuals.

Frank Berryman was indefatigable in his efforts to attract money from business houses and industries of all kinds. He had an extensive personal network of associates through which he made contact with potential sponsors. Large corporations like Qantas, Ampol, Tooheys and Hoyts established magnificent plantations at Bass Hill, Lansdowne Bridge, Lennox and Lake George.13

**Auxiliaries**

From a public relations point of view it was important that planting should be seen to be proceeding all along the Driveway, but the Central Committee was fully stretched coping with the section of highway from Sydney to Bargo. Additional groups seemed the only answer, and so the formation of Remembrance Driveway Auxiliaries was encouraged. The first of these was established at Goulburn in 1954, mainly through the efforts of the Garden Club; a second was formed in Canberra in 1955, ably managed by David Shoobridge, by this time Superintendent of Parks and Gardens, and a third one was in the Southern Highlands controlled by Sir Cecil Hoskins. Each auxiliary was responsible for arranging plantings and continuing maintenance, and sent monthly reports to the Central Committee.

As a result several distinctive regional planting styles emerged, reflecting the influence of different designers as follows:

1. Nigel Ashton, Alan Wilson and Rex Hazelwood designed formal and informal plantations, using mainly native species, in the Bankstown, Liverpool and Camden sections.

2. Peter Spooner, Professor of Landscape Architecture at UNSW, designed a large formal plantation, using blocks of poplars, pines, sheoaks and paperbarks at Lansvale.

3. Sir Cecil Hoskins designed informal plantations, using spring flowering and colourful deciduous species, in the Southern Highlands.

4. David Shoobridge designed informal plantations, using exotic conifers and spring flowering and deciduous species mixed with native species, in the ACT section.

**Planting Policy**

The committee’s policy was not to plant more trees than could be adequately maintained. Right from the beginning Anderson had cautioned against an over-enthusiastic planting policy and had recommended no more than 2000 trees each year, to be planted during the winter only. By 1959, 12,000 trees had been planted, and by 1970 the figure had reached 20,000. Today there are around 50,000 in over 50 separate plantations.14 Most of the seedling stock was supplied, free-of-charge, by the NSW Forestry Commission and the Parks and Gardens Section of the Department of the Interior, Canberra. Some advanced stock and the more exotic conifers and deciduous species were obtained, at discount prices, from commercial nurseries.

In spite of a number of severe droughts, the occasional fire and some vandalism, there have been surprisingly few failures. Much of the planting and continuing maintenance was undertaken by volunteers and local councils, and most of the mature plantations we see today are the result of the efforts of dedicated workers.

**Decline**

By 1962, 45 plantations had been established, but despite renewed publicity public interest was waning: no new sponsors were forthcoming, and individual donations had long since ceased.15 The first plaques were unveiled in 1968 for plantations at Berrima and in the ACT, and others followed whenever it was felt that trees had reached a suitable size. These dedication ceremonies were well attended, were given full military support and received good media coverage.

In 1977, an article appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* titled, ‘Living War Memorial Now Built’, and many people believed that Remembrance Driveway had been completed and the committee disbanded. While the auxiliaries had ceased to function - the Canberra Auxiliary was the last to operate but was officially wound up in 1972 - the Central Committee has continued to exist and, once again, is playing a leading role.

**Current Revival**

The committee realised that, in time, the new freeway would replace the old Hume and Federal Highways, and discussions began relating to freeway planting policies which could continue the spirit and symbolism of Remembrance Driveway.16 There had always been a cordial relationship between the committee and the NSW Department of Main Roads, and the latter had been represented on the committee from its inception. The new Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) has supported, in principle, the idea of continuing the theme of Remembrance Driveway, wherever appropriate, along the F5 and has also taken over the role of providing secretarial services for the committee. In addition, the RTA’s Environment and Community Impact Branch is able to design new plantations and assist in funding, all of which augurs well for the continuing success of the Driveway.

In 1988, as part of the bicentenary, Prime Minister Hawke...
made Federal funds available for major planting along the F5 under his ‘Plant a Billion Trees’ campaign. In 1992, over 500 trees were planted within the existing Villawood plantation (Fig. 5) to commemorate those who served in the Vietnam War and, in 1993, one of the original sponsors, Qantas, carried out additional planting in their Bass Hill plantation. In the same year, the Australian Army planted and dedicated the largest single planting ever undertaken on the Driveway when it planted 3,000 trees on the F5 and Narellan Road interchange at Kenny Hill. Unfortunately, this planting took place in November to commemorate Armistice Day and, during the following summer, many trees failed to survive. If only the Army had followed the advice of R. H. L. Anderson and timed the exercise for winter.

One of the very early plantations, established in 1955 at Towrang Creek north of Goulburn, has been isolated by highway re-alignment for some time. In 1990, a new plantation to replace it was established and re-dedicated by the Goulburn Branch of the Garden Club alongside the cemetery on the northern approach to the town.

Recently, the Remembrance Driveway Committee engaged the services of a firm of landscape consultants to prepare a Strategy Plan which will establish future directions and activities for Remembrance Driveway up to and beyond the year 2000.¹¹ This plan, it is hoped, will be adopted as part of the Australia Remembers 1945-1995 program.

The Future
The consultant’s Strategy Plan outlines a range of concepts which aims to raise the profile of Remembrance Driveway within the community while still respecting the original spirit of a living memorial linking Sydney and Canberra.

Additional plantations, which reflect the particular character of each locality: urban, suburban, rural, are proposed wherever suitable sites can be found. These will strengthen and visually link existing plantations to give the Driveway greater continuity throughout its length. A number of new elements such as sculpture, pavement plaques, interpretive signs, shelters and rest areas which commemorate Victoria Cross winners is also proposed. Rededication ceremonies, performed by high profile public figures who attract the media, are proposed to make the community more aware of Remembrance Driveway.

There are many existing plantations which should be further investigated to evaluate their potential for linking Remembrance Driveway into a scenic route associated with historic towns and places. Real possibilities are at Lansdowne Bridge, Mittagong, Bowral, Berrima (Fig. 6), Towrang Creek, Rose’s Lagoon and Lake George. However, the success of these ambitious ideas to carry Remembrance Driveway into the next century relies, once again, on attracting major sponsors, and so marketing strategies feature prominently in the consultant’s plan.¹² I wonder what Sir Frank Berryman, who achieved so much with his gentle powers of persuasion, would think of it all?

In Burra Charter terms,⁶ Remembrance Driveway is a highly significant cultural landscape; it has high aesthetic, historic, scientific and social value. I believe it has national heritage significance and should be given an appropriate listing.

Figure 5: Villawood plantation: predominantly Australian native species. (The Author)

Figure 6: Berrima plantation: predominantly exotic spring-flowering and autumn-foliaged species. (The Author)
Conclusion

In the original brochure, published in 1953, it was stated:

Many countries of the world have planted avenues and groves of trees. It is believed that Remembrance Driveway will take its place amongst the foremost of these and be quoted abroad as one of the finest arboreal achievements ever planned.

While it might not have achieved international fame, Remembrance Driveway is now recognised as one of Australia's most significant cultural landscapes. The year Australia Remembers is, therefore, providing the right catalyst to re-focus attention on this project and to revitalise the initial concept of establishing a living memorial between Sydney and the National Capital.

To date, the number of established plantations is about 55, and the current policy of upgrading all mature plantings and establishing new plantations testifies to the farsightedness of those founding members of the Remembrance Driveway Committee who believed that it was not just an impossible dream.

Allan Correy is a senior lecturer in the Department of Architecture at the University of Sydney.

Endnotes

5 J. Haddow. op cit.
7 P. Gough, 'The Avenue at War', Landscape Research. 18 (2). pp. 78-20.
10 Remembrance Driveway Committee, Remembrance Driveway: A Living Tribute from Those Who Remember Yesterday and Have Faith in Tomorrow, Sydney, 1953.
11 History of Blue Star Memorial Highways, nd, (unpub. notes).
12 Remembrance Driveway Committee, op. cit.
18 ibid.
20 Remembrance Driveway Committee, op. cit.