



Name plaque at Skipton.

AVENUES OF HONOUR A Victorian cultural landscape



Avenue of Honour, Ballarat. Originally 14 miles long, consisting of 3912 trees.

BY JANINE HADDOW

In response to the tragedy of World War One, almost every Australian township erected a memorial to commemorate soldiers (and sometimes nurses) for the district. One form of memorial was an Avenue of Honour. This article is based on a Master of Landscape Architecture research project which documented Avenues of Honour in Victoria and developed a methodology for assessing historic landscapes.

IN MAY 1917 Mrs W.D. (Tilly) Thompson, a director of the clothing manufacturing firm E. Lucas and Co., suggested to her staff — the “Lucas girls” — the idea of planting an Avenue of Honour in Ballarat. The idea was accepted enthusiastically and the first trees were planted by the 500 “Lucas girls” on June 3, 1917. Two years later on August 16, 1919 the final planting took place. The avenue they had planted stretched for fourteen miles along the Western Highway and consisted of 3,912 trees. It was here at Ballarat that the first sentences in a chapter of the history of the Victorian landscape were written. From 1917 to 1921 Victorians planted at least 128 avenues in locations as distant as Woomelang, Orbost, Dartmoor and Cudgewa (see Map 1). Although avenues exist

in other States of Australia (see Map 2), they were most popular in Victoria. Interestingly, there are no known examples of Avenues of Honour being planted by local communities in the United States of America, United Kingdom or New Zealand.

Avenues of Honour are cultural landscapes peculiar to Australia which reveal much about our society in the period 1914 to 1921; they are an important part of Australia’s heritage and some are worthy of conservation. Continuing pressures for development, combined with ignorance of their importance, have caused many avenues to die or fall into disrepair. Herein lies a challenge for landscape professionals to assess and conserve the most significant avenues and to develop appropriate management programs.

Cultural Landscapes

Very few Australian cultural landscapes have been documented. In 1974 and again in 1987 noted British geographer Professor David Lowenthal commented on the tendency of Australian landscape writers to concentrate on the natural landscape, an approach which either ignores people or emphasises their negative impact on the landscape. By contrast, American and British authors have written extensively about their cultural landscapes, attempting to read and understand the landscape in which people live. They offer some refreshing new ways of viewing the landscape. Most notable of these authors are W.G. Hoskins, who writes of the English historical landscape; J.B. Jackson, who focuses on the vernacular and political landscapes of contemporary U.S.A.; M. Samuels, who is interested in the biography of landscape; and D. Cosgrove, who argues that landscapes are symbolic because they reflect the prevailing political and economic ideology. Central to all these methodologies are people as agents of change in the landscape. For these authors the landscape is an artifact which reflects the society of the time. By using these methodologies, Avenues of Honour can be read, to reveal much about Victorian society in the years 1914 to 1921.

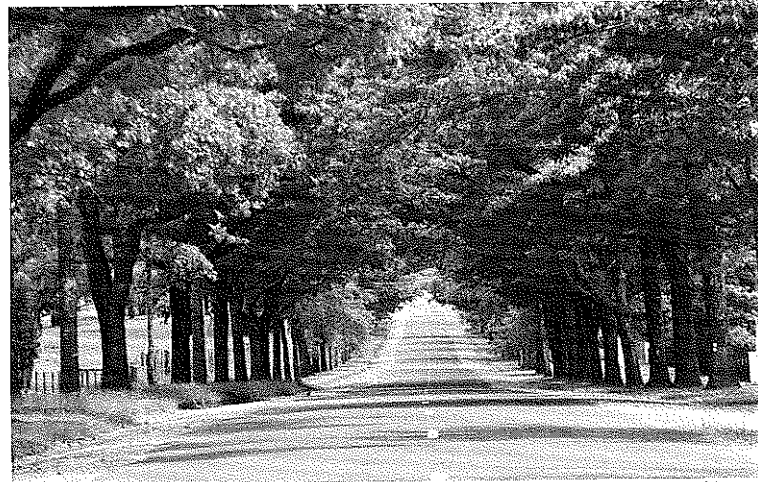
For many of us it is difficult to comprehend the impact of World War One, but by 1918 the extremely high casualty rate (64.93% — the highest of all the allied forces) meant that every Australian was related to or closely associated with someone who had been killed during the war. For Australians the war was personalised. These facts help to explain why most Australians were involved in creating war memorials (Australia outdoes all other nations in war memorials). At Ballarat the "Lucas girls" raised 2,000 pounds for the avenue by holding garden parties and ladies' football matches and selling a large range of souvenirs. They then set about planting the trees, with the help of "fathers and uncles who helped dig the holes for the trees" and "the farmers who delivered the ten wagon loads of tree guards".¹ Activities like these were taking place throughout Victoria. At Mt Macedon working bees were held each Saturday for three months, when residents "took their own spades, picks and axes to help clear the site, cut timber, dig holes, lay drain pipes and assemble tree guards in preparation for the tree planting ceremony."² These avenues and the other 126 throughout Victoria demonstrate the nation's shared feelings and memories; they are landscapes which symbolise national harmony. They also symbolise Australian egalitarianism. Every tree in an avenue represents someone who enlisted, but no differentiation on the basis of rank or special status was made in the order of planting. At Ballarat the trees were labelled in order of enlistment and at Mt Macedon the order was determined by ballot. Avenues serve a recollective purpose, commemorating less in terms of individual leaders than all its participants — honouring ordinary people. These memorials contrast with the hortatory monuments of the Old World which emphasise authority and status.

Avenues of Honour are symbolic landscapes; they are a dramatic expression of the symbolism of national harmony and egalitarianism, because each soldier is represented in the physical form of a tree and collectively the trees create an impressive and formal atmosphere by means of their regularity and vista.

Many communities chose memorials other than Avenues of Honour but in these cases the community involvement was usually limited to raising the money to pay for them. Memorials such as statues, obelisks and honour boards required skilled tradespeople and often they were crafted and assembled in factories hundreds of miles away. By contrast Avenues of Honour were designed and planted by the local people; for example at Rokewood "the trees were supplied by the residents and planted by voluntary labour"³ and at

Seymour "children planted the avenue".⁴ Such community involvement meant that there was considerable variation in the details of the avenues throughout Victoria. Each one bears the individual mark of the community which created it. The seeming uniformity of Avenues of Honour is complemented by variations in detail which reflect their populist origin. In their time Avenues of Honour were everyday landscapes created by ordinary people; they are what J.B. Jackson has termed vernacular landscapes. Jackson's vernacular landscape is the private, emotional landscape in which people live; "they are the most fundamental expressions of our society."⁵

The people who created these symbolic and vernacular landscapes are what interests Samuels, who writes of the biography of landscape; he insists on "authorship", emphasising that it is individual people who have altered the landscape and left their mark. For him landscapes are not the unconscious outcome of impersonal forces but "the responsibility of 'real' people."⁶ He advocates that we should "concentrate upon the evidence, direct and indirect, that individuals have left as explanation, rationalisation or description of their intentions."⁷ It is difficult to determine whether planting an Avenue of Honour was an idea which belongs to a particular individual or whether their origin lies hidden in the complexity of our shared history. Nonetheless some significant individuals have emerged from this study of avenues: the charismatic Mrs Thompson, and the "Lucas girls." And of course there are many others, who will be discovered with more detailed research. Interestingly, there is



Avenue of Honour, Mount Macedon. Originally 154 Quercus palustris.

no evidence of the involvement of landscape professionals in the creation of the landscapes; their success can be attributed to enthusiastic individuals and interested communities of people — those people who "authored" the Victorian landscape.

What I hope is emerging from this article is an appreciation of the interesting stories which can be unravelled from our landscape if we broaden the way in which we view it. We can also begin to appreciate that many Australian landscapes are intrinsic to people's lives and as such have been, and some still are, highly valued by the people who created them.

But these interesting and valued landscapes are constantly being modified in response to changing lifestyles and nothing demonstrates this more dramatically than the growth of the highway and freeway system. The need of the wider community for an efficient road system (the political landscape) often takes precedence over highly valued or heritage landscapes. In 1965 the Coroner, inquiring into the death of a motorist, referred to trees in the Ballarat avenue as "a menace"; he said "the trees belong to the horse and buggy days and should not be where they are today."⁸ Because

Avenues of Honour were always planted in public places along the main street of a town, they are constantly threatened by road works, or as in the case of Ballarat they represent a serious road hazard. Only 52 World War One avenues are known to still exist and most are in very poor condition (Refer to Table 1). It is therefore important to establish their cultural significance and to determine which avenues should be conserved.

	TOTAL	RECORDED IN 1987	USING NATIVES
WWI	128	52	7
WWII	12	10	8
TOTAL	140	62	15

Table 1: Comparative statistics, Avenues of Honour.

The Distribution of Avenues of Honour

Maps 1 and 2 highlight some interesting patterns in the distribution of Avenues of Honour. Nationally they are a south-eastern Australian phenomenon and in Victoria they are concentrated in the Central Highlands, with very few in the Wimmera, Mallee and East Gippsland. Within this broader distribution pattern the tendency for avenues to be found in small clusters is of interest. Only four avenues are more than 50 kilometres from another avenue and most are much closer (between 5 and 30 kilometres).

The concentration of avenues in the Central Highlands can probably be attributed to the effect of the Ballarat avenue, the earliest recorded avenue. Possibly it acted as a stimulus for other communities who were debating the type of memorial they would have. The Ballarat avenue was grand in conception and form and from its inception it was associated with some interesting and notable people; Mrs Thompson, the State Premier, the "Lucas girls" and perhaps most importantly, in terms of publicity, the Prince of Wales who officially opened the avenue on June 3, 1920. Thousands of Victorians would have been exposed to this avenue through the publicity and associated activities. It is not difficult to imagine the snowballing effect. One of the characteristics of taste is that it is infectious, and among a continually widening circle of

imitators the geographical distance from the source of the idea and the strength of the original idea influence the spread of the concept. The source of the idea was Ballarat, from which individuals took the idea to secondary radiating points — the regional centres and townships around which other clusters of avenues developed. However, Avenues of Honour would not have been so widely adopted if the social climate had not been conducive; in the period 1914 to 1921 avenues were regarded as appropriate memorials. By World War Two avenues were no longer as popular; only 12 were planted. By then the general opinion was that war memorials should be utilitarian and benefit the whole community, so monies were raised for community halls and other similar projects.

European trees have long been associated with concepts such as virtue, longevity and eternal life and it is possibly the preference for exotic trees in avenues which explains their absence in the Wimmera and Mallee. The drier climates of these regions would have made it extremely difficult to grow exotic trees successfully. Only 8 World War One avenues consist of native trees (refer to Table 1); they were *Eucalyptus ficifolia* at Campbelltown, Grantville, Sandringham and Tooradin, "Eucalypts" at The Heart, *E. cladocalyx* at Kotupna, and *Brachychiton populneum* at Nathalia.

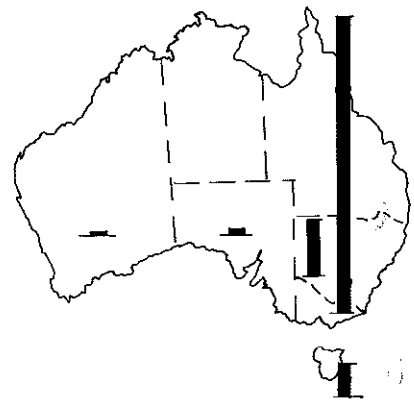
Although avenue planting declined in popularity following World War One, it has remained a remarkably persistent form of landscape modification which continues to capture the imagination of many people — those who admire the avenues as they drive past, those who appreciate and value the avenue in their township and those who still plant them (new avenues were commenced as late as 1987 in Nathalia and Sale). Avenues of Honour illustrate the complex interaction between people and the landscape; Australians have and continue to create landscapes which they feel strongly attached to and are prepared to defend. It is, I believe, the responsibility of landscape professionals to be aware of and actively involved in helping to conserve Australia's valued landscapes.

Assessing Historic Landscapes

The complete significance of Avenues of Honour may not be fully appreciated by contemporary Australians, but they are appreciated for their aesthetic qualities and historic interest. The challenge, then, is to develop an objective method of landscape assessment which will ensure that the most significant Avenues of Honour are placed on the Register of the National Estate and conserved.



Map 1: The distribution of Avenues of Honour in Victoria.



Map 2: Avenues of Honour in Australia based on the 1920-21 survey of war memorials.

In the absence of satisfactory assessment methods, landscapes submitted to the Register accumulate, awaiting processing. In 1987 only 15 landscapes, compared to 1500 buildings, were registered with the Heritage Commission. The method of assessment developed in this study involved describing a "typical avenue" which formed the basis for a type profile. The type profile was then refined by a panel of ten experts using an iterative questionnaire which then became the standard against which avenues in Victoria could be compared. On the basis of this comparison, Avenues of Honour were determined to be of National, State or Local significance.



Avenue of Honour, Kotupna. One of the few examples using native trees.

Extensive travel and personal observation, combined with historical research and interviews with historians, geographers, the R.S.L. and local residents, provided the empirical base from which a description of the "typical avenue" was developed. That description was summarised to 22 criteria which formed the basis of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to formulate and refine the "type profile" and was distributed to a panel of ten experts who had been selected for their knowledge of Avenues of Honour and expertise in heritage issues. The administration of the questionnaire involved an anonymous iterative process, where at the completion of each round the answers of the group were collated, and measures of the central tendency (the median) and the dispersion (the upper and lower quartiles) were recorded and presented to the panel in the next round. The process allowed each participant to use the feedback information in a reconsideration of their earlier response.

Using the information obtained in the three-round questionnaire, it was determined that once an avenue is "intact" and satisfies the basic historic and physical require-

ments the following factors rank highly as considerations in determining the heritage significance of Avenues of Honour. They are: aesthetic and visual effects, value to the community, location and the condition of the avenue. Applying this method of assessment, these avenues are regarded to be of heritage significance:

	NATIONAL	STATE	LOCAL
WWI	Ballarat	Bacchus Marsh Woodend Smeaton-Kingston *Kotupna	Mt Macedon
WWII		Mortlake	Calder-Woodburn
* As an atypical example which used native trees.			

Conclusion

Perhaps out of ignorance or pragmatism, many local councils have erected memorials such as cairns or statues to replace Avenues of Honour which have been destroyed. These replacements are inappropriate because they are contrary to the initial spirit and intent of Avenues of Honour.

"The tall trees of formal allees (avenues) provide a mysterious shade that contributes an appropriate ambience. As the branches join overhead they recall the vaults of ancient convents and Gothic churches, which further dispose the spirit to serious meditations."⁹

FOOTNOTES

1. *Ballarat Courier*, March 13, 1987.
2. Minutes of the Honour Avenue Committee, May, 1918.
3. Survey of War Memorials 1920-21.
4. *ibid.*
5. Jackson, J.B. 'Discovering the Vernacular Landscape' p42.
6. Samuels, M. 'The Biography of Landscape' in Meinig D., 'The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes' p76.
7. *ibid.*
8. *Ballarat Courier*, March 26, 1965.
9. Etlin, R.A. *The Architecture of Death* p231.

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(2) Miscellaneous.

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