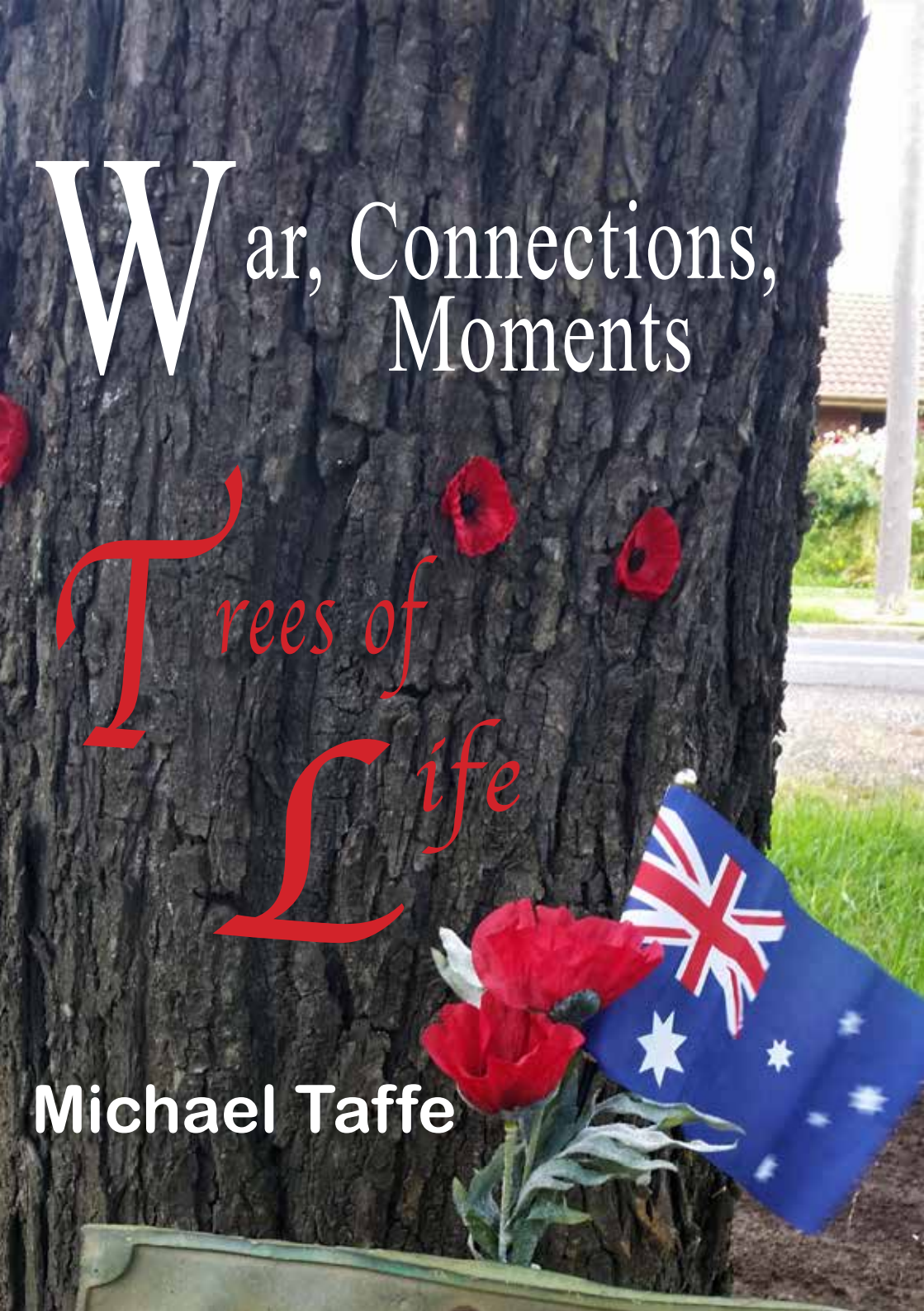


# War, Connections, Moments

## *Trees of Life*

Michael Taffe



Cover: J.P Smith tree in the Ballarat Avenue of Honour 2018  
demonstrates the ongoing family connections continuing after 100 years.

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W ar, Connections,  
Moments

T rees of L ife

**Michael Taffe**



J. P. SMITH  
225  8<sup>TH</sup> BATT



# War, Connections, Moments - Trees of Life

*The white road leads past the old country store  
Where sugar gums standin a row near the door  
Each memorial tree represents a life lost  
In a war to end wards but oh what a cost*

*Courage by Fay Lucas*

Australia's premier memorials to the First World War were its memorial avenues of trees where, as Fay Lucas poignantly wrote, "each memorial tree represents a life". Ballarat, having coined the term "avenue of honour", went on to popularise these avenues as a form of memorial throughout the nation.

In 1974, Ken Inglis turned the attention of Australians to memorial structures in the landscape and their meanings; however, he largely overlooked Australia's avenues of honour.

This book concentrates on what was originally a form of memorialisation to those who served in the Great War, a form that was then unique to Australia.

The Avenue of Honour; originally intended as a tribute to the only volunteer army to take the field in the Great War, eventually captured imaginations across the allied countries. By the end of the war the practice was being emulated in Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the USA.

Later again, while less prolific than that initial outburst of arboreal memorialisation, Australians planted avenues of honour to commemorate World War II, Vietnam and Afghanistan. Over the past four years many communities have been re-visiting and re-dedicating their World War I avenues, as well as initiating new ones as centennial projects to honour those who served in that conflict at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Normanville in South Australia planted its avenue in May of 1915, even before news broke of the full extent of the losses at Gallipoli. The newspaper reported, “Each volunteer has had planted in his honour a Moreton Bay fig tree, which is intended to serve as a living monument to his gallantry”.<sup>1</sup> Local man, Mr R.B. Clark donated the trees and covered the cost of the planting. Each tree had a marker with the details of

the volunteer honoured. I believe this was Australia's first such avenue of honour.

Further east, towards the Victorian border at Tantanoola, in July 1915, the showgrounds were favoured for that town's avenue of trees where, "[a] space has been set aside for the planting of some suitable trees to commemorate the actions of those who have gone to the front. A tree will be planted for each one who has enlisted from here".<sup>2</sup>

Another early example, at Renmark in 1915, highlights this need to mark the story of their serving men, even in the early stages of the Great War, which thereby created a tangible link to them: "An Arbour Day in connection with the public schools, and an avenue of trees in honour of the men from Renmark who have volunteered for service at the Front".<sup>3</sup>

On 11 September 1915, the town of Renmark was described as being, "en fete":

Throughout the day ladies and lasses thronged the streets offering for sale flags, buttons and other tricolour



ANVILLE  
BEACH  
TURN LEFT  
100 m





The original surviving trees in the main street of Normanville South Australia. Planted in May 1915 each tree carried the name of a local volunteer.

favours. The first part of the formal proceedings; that of planting palms along the riverbank, was carried out by the schoolchildren under the supervision of the leading men of the town and settlement.<sup>4</sup>

These plantings foreshadowed those that occurred at Ballarat two years later by commencing with the firing of a gun and ending in the same manner. Four months after this and still in South Australia, Robert Cameron in January 1916 suggested a memorial avenue be planted in Victor Harbor: “The suggestion is that the Town Council be approached and asked to allow, under their supervision, ground to be prepared for ornamental trees ... This avenue could then be known as ‘Our Soldiers’ avenue”.<sup>5</sup>

By 1916 memorial avenue plantings had commenced at Laurieton and Gundagai in New South Wales, with others across South Australia and Victoria.

In Victoria the small settlement at Warrion started planting its trees in June of 1915 followed by the school communities at Lal Lal and Smeaton near Ballarat.



Planting such avenues of honour commenced in May 1915, with over 40 avenues planted by August of 1917. Writing on the avenue of honour reported planted at Lal Lal in 1915, arguably the earliest avenue in the Ballarat district, Chris McConville relates:

The avenues took shape slowly as young trees grew. For townsfolk these trees connected familiar streets and homes to men serving overseas, to neighbours in the town, and to hopes not yet extinguished rather than to death and reflection on the past.<sup>6</sup>

Cloke and Pawson have summed up the dynamic here in terms of treescape memories in that:

The ability of trees to carry significant memories of past events into the present involves myriad slippages and all kinds of untidiness: the settings in which memorial trees are asked to perform are subject to significant and often transformative cultural change; the trees themselves are active organic components in the changing co-constitution of place and place meanings; and tree places can afford emotional responses and serve as spaces of much more immediate and pre-reflexive practice and performance.



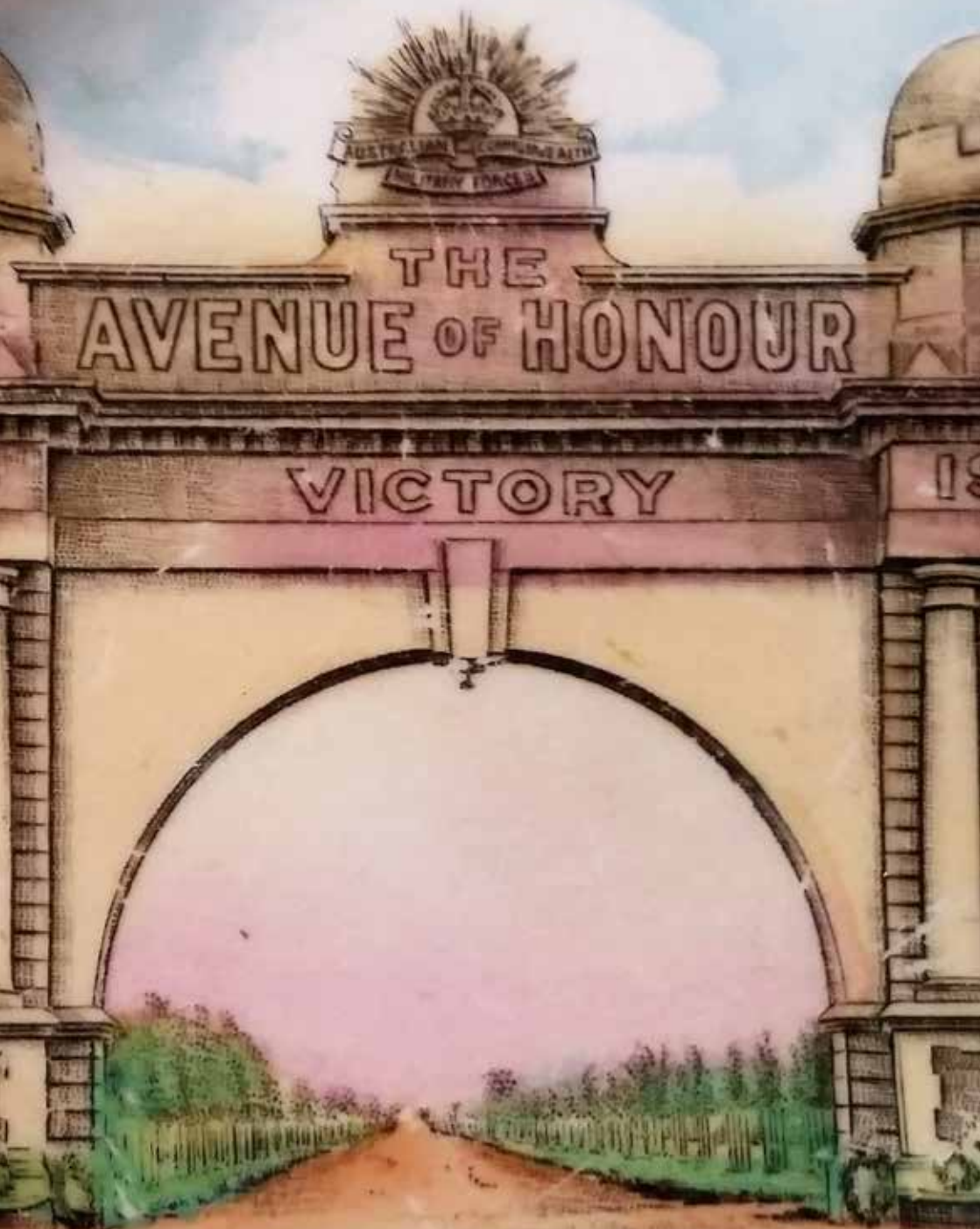
The mature Ballarat Avenue of Honour planted 1917-1919 framed by its entrance arch. This Arch of Victory was erected in 1920 from funds raised by the women of the local firm of Lucas Pty Ltd. The Arch and Avenue were officially opened by the Prince of Wales in 1920. Today this avenue is Australia's longest avenue of honour with all trees carrying individual plaques.

The differences in landscape study and social history are highlighted in 1975 through Janine Haddow's summary of the vernacular, political, biographical and symbolic landscapes. Her 1975 Master of Landscape Architecture thesis "Avenues of Honour in Victoria" highlights the problems of language in landscape studies. Language is important and needs to be understood and the words "landscape", "culture", "memory" and even "heritage" need to be understood because today they have a strong nexus with politics, tourism and commercial interests. The Great War generated this new ritual of public commemoration in Australia, a country which previously had little collective, unified or truly national memory.

In 2004, Damian Powell posed the question: "[h]ow do we, as Australians, remember our wars?" In the first instance, Australians remembered the Great War in the planting of avenues to honour those who went to serve.

Individually, they are not national monuments but they are part of a regional legacy speaking to us today, a century after their being planted. They enable us to

read the regional case in the larger context of a national – and now an international culture – of memory and its translation into these memorial sites. Collectively, they form part of the national heritage and, properly interpreted today they can contribute to a better understanding of a community's wartime heritage and contemporary identity.



ANCE TO AVENUE OF HONOUR, 14 MILES  
BALLARAT, VICTORIA.



*Australia's Global Connections  
in its unique contribution to memorialisation*

In October 1917, one of Ballarat's newspapers, *The Courier*, featured a story that advised its readers who were writing to their wounded friends or relatives lying in hospitals in Britain how to circumvent the military authorities from withholding letters from home to these soldiers. After explaining the reasons, the lengthy article continued:

For the guidance and assistance of all, we publish below a list of hospitals to which such letters may be addressed to wounded Australian soldiers, and also the text of a letter by Mr J. B. A. Thomas of Smythes Road, that may appeal to many as suitable for copying purposes for transmission to our brave boys. The list of hospitals is as follows.

The article then lists 29 hospitals and their addresses where letters could be sent without being intercepted by the military and includes a sample letter which had been used by Mr Thomas. In his letter, he emphasised the planting of the avenues of honour:

Dear Soldiers in Hospital, We are delighted to hear from time to time of the noble deeds and heroism of

Left: A transfer printed porcelain souvenir of the avenue and its entrance arch. These souvenirs were produced by Shelley in England to the order of R. Tunbridge & Sons Ballarat further spreading the word of the avenues in England.

the Australians on the battlefield. ... We are planting living memorials for you in the shape of avenues of mountain ash, and elm, and other trees. God honours the brave, you know, and we hope we have the spirit of the Master in doing this. The trees are being planted on each side of the road from Ballarat to Lake Burrumbeet. This is called "The Avenue of Honour".<sup>7</sup>

As early as 1917 word of Australia's Avenues of Honor was being broadcast across Britain. The *Leeds Mercury* published the story of the Ballarat Avenue of Honour in glowing terms concluding, "an avenue of five miles of beautiful trees adorn that distance of the entrance to the city". At the same time the *Newcastle Journal* reported on the planting of an Avenue of Honor in Melbourne in August of that year where, 'Mr Hughes, the Commonwealth Premier, the occasion of his planting here to-day the first tree in the Soldiers' 'Avenue of Honour.'<sup>8</sup> Shortly after this the city of Bradford in Yorkshire announced its intention to plant a memorial avenue of 3268 trees.<sup>9</sup>

The earlier Arbor Day movement that spawned the practice in Australia had originally been introduced from the USA and both North American nations still

Right: One of the original trees of the memorial avenue at University of Manitoba, Winnipeg Canada in 2017.

## MEMORIAL AVENUE OF ELMS

IN 1922 THIS AVENUE OF ELMS WAS COMPLETED, AND WAS DEDICATED AS A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE MEN FROM THE MANITOBA AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE, WHO HAD LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY IN WORLD WAR I, 1914-1918.

THE FIRST OF THESE MEMORIAL TREES WAS PLANTED DURING THE WAR YEARS BY STUDENTS IN HOME ECONOMICS.



Between Ballarat and Melbourne in Australia the Bacchus Marsh Avenue of Honour is a favourite among Victorians. It is an example of the many such avenues in rural towns inspired by that at Ballarat and created after correspondence and advice from the larger provincial centre.



had vestiges of that interest and influence. However, following the international publicity among the allied nations, Australia's, and particularly Ballarat's, memorialisation of its service men and women in the planting of avenues of honour was emulated in other countries. From the UK the practice was promoted in Canada through those involved in Britain's Roads of Remembrance Association which had Australians on its committee and whose president was Major Arthur Haggard whose sister took the concept to Victoria BC.<sup>10</sup>

Within a year following the official opening of the Ballarat avenue and its entrance arch, by the Prince of Wales, Britain and the United States were made familiar with the experience and enthusiasm of the Prince through the story syndicated across both countries by *The London Mail*. Appearing in Florida and Minnesota paper it related:

He approached Ballarat, the great goldmining city  
... a broad avenue, some fifteen miles long lined on

either side by trees, which are flourishing ... Each tree ... commemorates a Ballarat boy who gave his life for the Empire.<sup>11</sup>

Still in the United States, the *Albuquerque Morning Journal* related the story of the Ballarat Avenue of Honour and concluded by advocating that New Mexico should follow suit:

The little city of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia, has planted a tree for every enlisted soldier. The planting is done with public ceremony, a certain unit of troops being honoured at each ceremony ... Great advantage would arise to New Mexico from such tree-planting.<sup>12</sup>

Closer to home in New Zealand a country bonded to Australia in the Anzac legend, favoured built memorials. However, despite this, several memorial avenues were planted and publicity again featured across the nation. As early as 1918, there were letters to newspapers in New Zealand advocating avenues to be planted as memorials. From Invercargill it was suggested: “If it is to be a plain memorial for plain people, what could be more suitable

than a stately avenue of trees leading into and out of the town, suitably named and properly cared for?”<sup>13</sup>

As elsewhere around the globe, newspapers such as the *Oamaru Mail* in New Zealand carried the story of the Ballarat Avenue of Honour:

The proposal of Dr Douglas to plant trees as memorials to fallen soldiers finds endorsement far beyond North Otago, as witness the following extract from a Victorian paper: A living growing monument of honour to the brave boys who have gone forth from their city is the Avenue of Honour at Ballarat.<sup>14</sup>

At nearby Ashburton a similar message was published and referred to the initiatives in Australia at Ballarat, concluding: “An extract from a Victorian paper backs up the action of the Waitaki County Council in the matter of planting trees in honour of fallen soldiers”. After the Great War other memorial avenues were planted, in Dunedin, that at Green Island was planted a year after





The Newlyn Avenue of Honour is an example of the many avenues planted by students in rural schools not on roadways but on school property



the Treaty of Versailles in 1921, “[a]s a living memorial to the boys from the district who fell in the Great War.” Of the avenue at Wanganui in 1938 the *Evening Post* in Wellington reported, “[t]he living avenue of trees planted in memory of New Zealand men, made a perfect, permanent and growing memorial.”

This ideal of a living memorial recurs throughout every reference and every community involved in planting these avenues. Global connections between this form of memorialisation are also embedded in the spiritual nature of man in terms of symbolism for life, regeneration and for Christians, resurrection. Other arboreal forms such as forests and groves feature in Simon Schama’s work especially in reference to the German wilderness and sacred forests.<sup>15</sup> George Mosse also explores the German appropriation of nature in relation to World War I.<sup>16</sup> Germany however, did not pursue the creation of avenues as memorials as happened across those allied countries mentioned. This

Left: An example of the ongoing tradition of the avenues in Australia is this to those killed in the Afghanistan conflict. This avenue was officially dedicated in 2015 a century after Australia’s first at Normanville in South Australia.

AFGHANISTAN



**AVENUE OF HONOUR**  
**YUNGABURRA**

**JUNE**

**2013**

**LEST WE FORGET**

further highlights the connections between Australia and the Anglo-Saxon nations in the conflict, whereas Germany was unaffected by allied links of this type and had other pressing needs politically and in terms of memorialisation and conflicted memory.



Autumn along the mile long  
Macedon Avenue of Honour in Victoria.







## *Global Moments and Avenues of Honour*

Australia barely noticed the assassination of the Crown Prince and his consort Sophia, of Austria, at Sarajevo in June 1914 but the stage had been set across Europe for a wider conflict. The *Ballarat Courier* of 30 June of that year featured a long article on the personal tragedies of the Austrian Royal Family, with a detailed exposé of the social and dynastic family marriages of the Hapsburgs. The following page did feature the possible political repercussions for Europe but the story was inserted in a column together with articles on international sport and the upcoming Shackleton expedition.

Initially commemorating participation in wars from Turkey through Europe in the early twentieth century, some avenues were extended to incorporate those involved in World War II and yet others were planted later in the century honouring those serving in the Vietnam conflict. The centenary of the Great War brought a multitude of commemorative activities around the world





A fine example of the use of Australian native Eucalypts in the 1918 Avenue of Honour at Rupanyup in Victoria's Wimmera. On my last visit only one galvanised plaque remained all writing gone. Again there was strong influence from Ballarat. All these trees were supplied by Mr John Lingham of the Ballarat Botanical Gardens.

including those associated with the avenues of honour.

Before the centenary of the Great War however, a global moment of all time for the western world occurred; the terror attack of nine-eleven brought down New York's twin towers of the Trade Centre and war was again visited incrementally upon nations around the world into the early twenty-first century. Among the conflicts arising from this event was the war in Afghanistan where Australians served as part of a multinational force and again many died. In Far North Queensland the community rallied together under the inspiration of Mr Gordon Chuck who lost his son in that conflict.

In 2015, the Governor General opened this avenue of honour at Yungaburra, North Queensland to honour local man Pte Ben Chuck and the 39 men killed in action in Afghanistan. The continuity of this form of memorialisation speaks of ordinary people still wishing to honour their loved ones in a way that comes from the local community and has a deeper and more personal meaning than central politics or military interests. Seventy



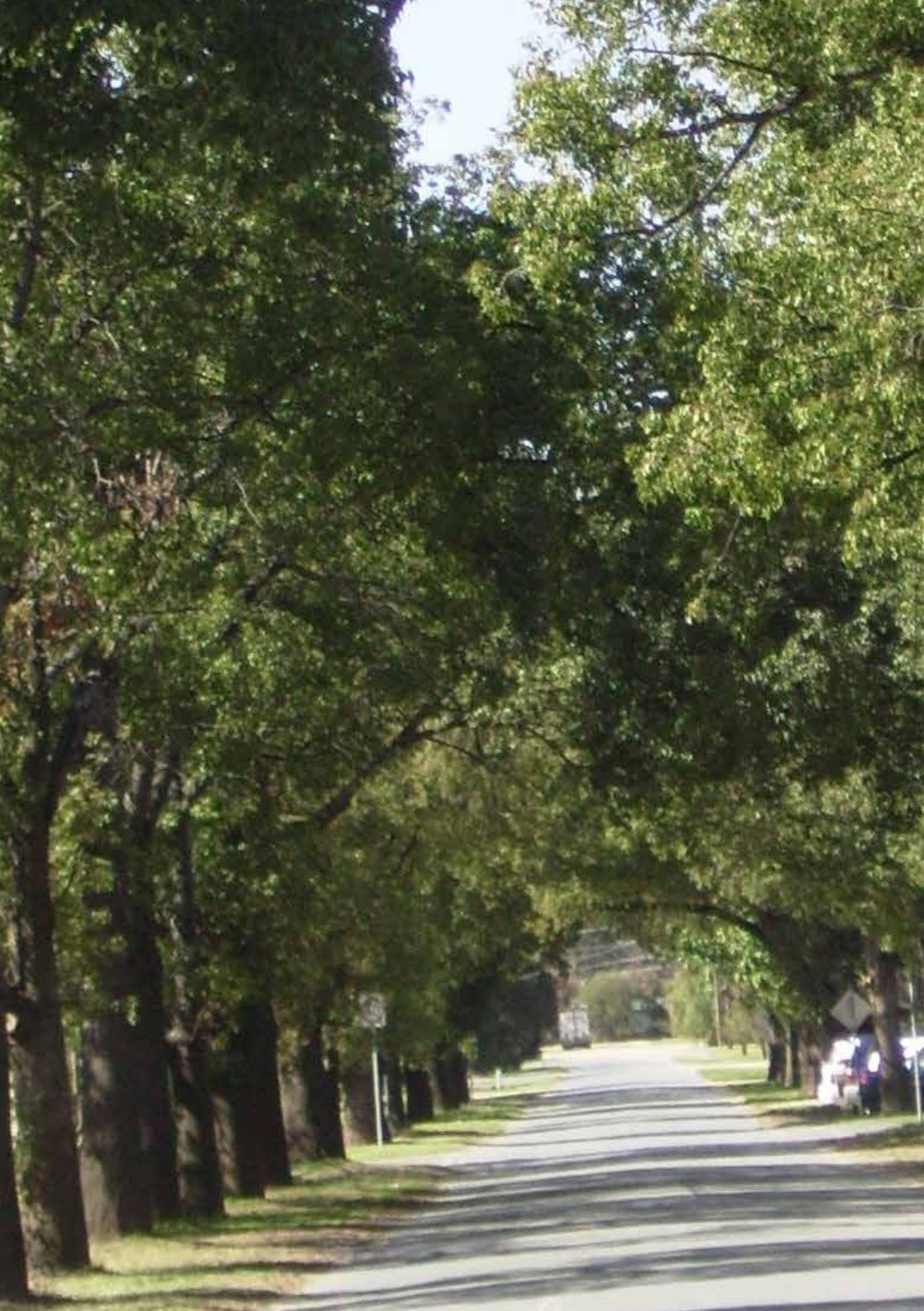


Many of Victoria's avenues of honour planted during the war used Cypress trees and these are now at the end of their lifespan. This avenue at Glendaruel in Victoria is an example of this but also an example of a school community avenue of honour planted along the roadside outside the school.

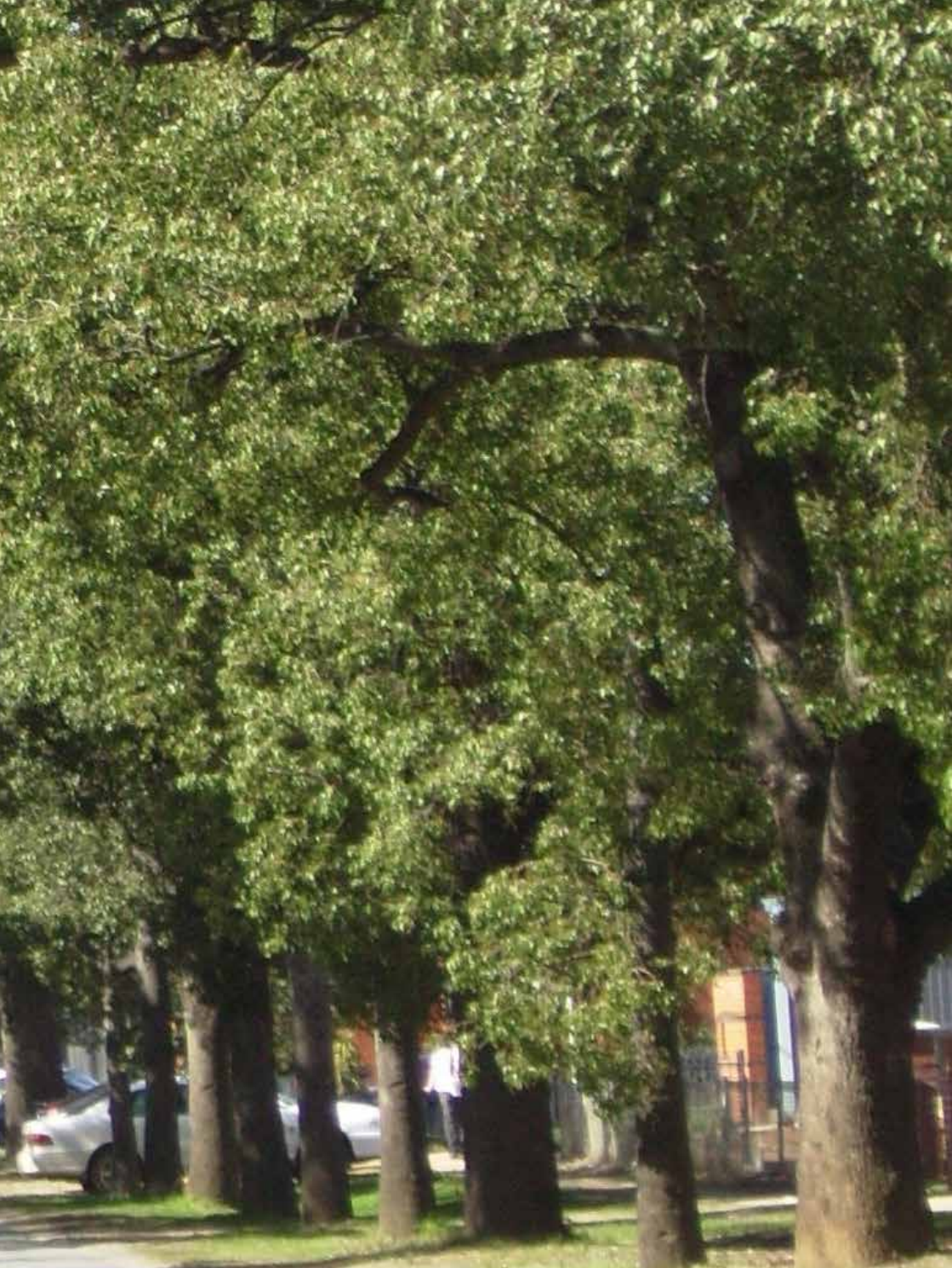
flame trees lead up to a built memorial and Mr Gordon Chuck described the meaning he saw in the avenue in terms that would have resonated with those planting out the avenues for the Great War a century earlier:

Although dedicated to the fallen in Afghanistan, I guess it's a representation of the commitment and courage of the Australian digger over generations, ... It's here to remind people that the freedoms and liberties we seem to hold so dearly, and yet often tend to take for, come at a terrible price – we mustn't forget that. ... The Avenue of Honour over the years will constantly remind generations of that fact.<sup>17</sup>

The meanings that the Great War avenues carry have changed over time; some such as those monumental avenues at Calgary in Canada or Ballarat in Australia have reached the status of sanctification as heritage sites for reasons of local fervour and strong generational ties. This, in turn, has translated also into expressing a wider sense of nationalism, whereby the local community has a tangible link to their identity with others across the nation. In December 1922 Dario Lupi, Italy's Undersecretary for Education implemented the planting of memorial parks and avenues in his country







**Another example of the judicious use of natives the avenue at Nathalia in northern Victoria was of Kurrajongs.**

having been inspired by the example of the Road of Remembrance at Montreal.<sup>18</sup>

Today there are lovely avenues of honour across Australia that still pay tribute to local heroes. They stretch from the remote backblocks to the major cities. In New Zealand the avenue at Green Island at Dunedin succumbed to a major landslip in the 1970s but the oak tree avenue of North Otago stands testament to that community's commitment to their heroes. These avenues have their counterparts from Horsforth in Yorkshire to Victoria in Canada, Michigan in the United States and throughout Italy. All of these avenues do honour to their serving men and women in global war as well as linking global families and communities in this form of memorialisation.

The paper and presentation by Michael Taffe to the conference Global War, Global Connections, Global Moments at the University of Newcastle, Australia in July 2018.

Dr Michael Taffe

## Notes:

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Caithness plaque, Queenscliffe, 2016

**The End**