

JULY 2021  
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# Newsletter



## Care of our National Heritage

The story of the 1860-61 Burke and Wills expedition, the first to traverse the continent from south to north, is iconic in the history of European exploration of Australia.

The key site – the Dig Tree at Fort Wills on Cooper Creek where the expedition established Camp 65 – exemplifies the determination, struggles and efforts of the participants, with valuable support from the local Yandruwandha Aboriginal people.

A disastrous succession of errors, with the base camp group departing just hours before Burke and his party returned, and Burke's failure to change the markings on the Dig tree to indicate they had indeed returned, led to a tragic outcome.

For its significance, the Dig Tree site is included in the National Heritage List – Australia's list of 'natural, historic and Indigenous places of outstanding significance to the nation.'

Located at the heart of the nation's capital, the Australian War Memorial (and Anzac Parade) is at the centre of the nation's tribute to the courage and sacrifice of generations of men and woman who served in war, and is also of recognised as important to the nation.

The list includes everything from the home of surf lifesaving



This painting by Colonial artist Samuel Thomas Gill reflects the despair of King, Burke and Wills on their return to the abandoned Cooper Creek Camp. John King was the only survivor of the Gulf Party.

Image: State Library of New South Wales collection

(Bondi Beach) to fossil and dinosaur, mining, convict and shipwreck sites. Sydney Harbour bridge and Opera house, the MCG, various land and ocean reserves and numerous indigenous sites.

Some of the sites, such as Melbourne's 1880s Royal Exhibition Building, the Opera House, Uluru, various convict sites and Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, are also included on the World Heritage List.

This issue takes a closer look at the Dig Tree and the War Memorial and their management and the complex issues of heritage management.

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# FROM THE PRESIDENT

In 2020 FAHS introduced a new policy of sharing or rostering the collection and editing of its bi-annual Newsletter between its eight constituent organisations.

The first was undertaken by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria in late 2020, and this second one was initiated by the Royal Historical Society of Queensland.

RHSQ is in a unique position – as far as we are aware it is the only Australian historical society that is the manager of a site that is on the National Heritage List, the Burke and Wills Dig Tree. (*below*) <https://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/national/burke-wills-king-yandruwandha>

The two articles relating to the Dig Tree were written by long-serving RHSQ Councillors. Dr Ruth Kerr OAM FFAHS, also served on the FAHS Council

for many years, and Dr Denver Beanland AM is the current RHSQ President.

To add to the theme of national heritage, Dr Peter Dowling was invited to write about the Australian War Memorial, which is listed on both the National Heritage List and the Commonwealth Heritage List (Commonwealth-owned properties).

He has served both the Canberra and District Historical Society and the National Trust at the national and ACT levels.

While the Dig Tree appears to be increasingly well recognised and protected, the War Memorial has been the subject of some controversy in the last couple of years because of a proposal to demolish and replace an important part of the building (among other concerns).

An unusual sequence of development proposals and procedures was followed in this case, culminating in the Minister over-ruling the Australian Heritage Council and approving the demolition and redevelopment.

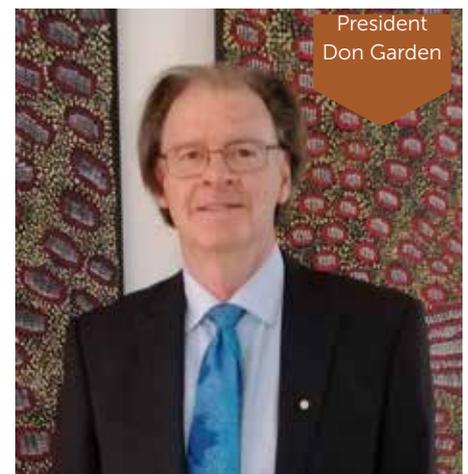
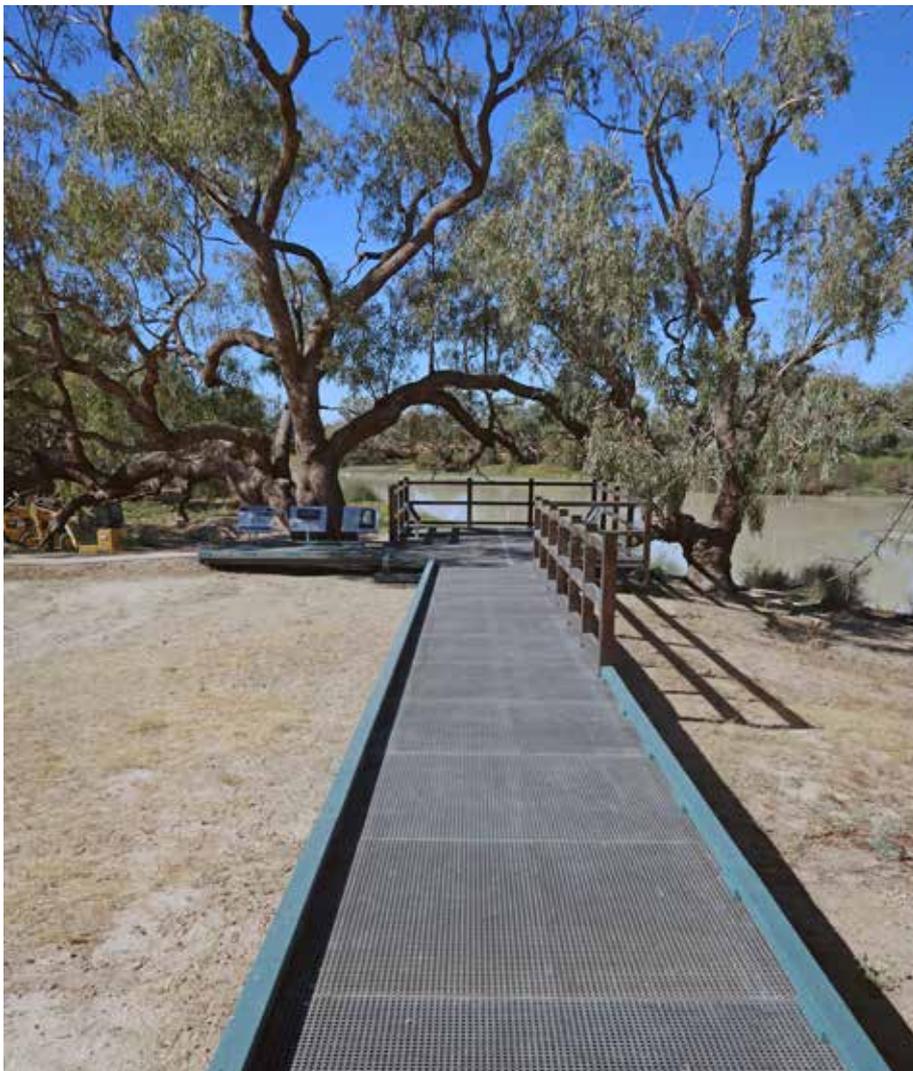
All this has brought to mind the momentous changes that have taken place in Australia's heritage regime in the last 20 years or so. Under the regime introduced by the *Environment Protection & Biodiversity Act (1999)*, a process was begun that has seen the Commonwealth abdicate most of its role in protecting built heritage to the states and territories.

Despite two reviews that were highly critical of the regime, there has been no real improvement.

One of the main weaknesses is that much decision-making has been taken away from experts and handed to ministers who are liable to make decisions on ideological and political rather than strictly heritage terms.

An excellent history of Australian heritage regimes since the 1970s was written by the late David Yencken – it should be mandated reading for anyone interested in Australian heritage – David Yencken, **Valuing Australia's National Heritage**, Future Leaders, 2019.

Don Garden OAM FFAHS FRHSV  
President



# CONSERVING THE DIG TREE SITE

This is a report of the conservation project undertaken between 2014 and 2021, by The Royal Historical Society of Queensland (RHSQ) on the Dig Tree Reserve at the Bulloo Bulloo Waterhole, on the bank of Cooper Creek in the Bulloo Shire Council Queensland, and related measures.

The Dig Tree Reserve is in south-western Queensland, in the locality of Durham, approximately 326 kilometres along the 'Adventure Way' west from Thargomindah towards Innamincka turning left where the sign indicates 14 kilometres to the Dig Tree.

The Dig Tree Reserve is within the pastoral lease of Nappa Merrie Station.

In 1964 the Queensland Government gazetted the reserve, where Burke and Wills established Camp 65, and appointed The Royal Historical Society of Queensland as Trustee of the one-acre reserve.

In 1987 the Queensland Government resurveyed and re-gazetted the site as 4470 square metres, described as Reserve 7, being Lot 1, on Plan CPR4, Parish Oontoo, County Cooper.

The reserve includes the three historic trees; the Dig Tree, Brahe Tree and Face Tree (*below*).



## THE HISTORY

Cooper Creek was named by explorer Charles Sturt in 1845 after the first judge and later chief justice of South Australia Charles Cooper.

In 1860 on their journey from Melbourne across Australia from South to North, Burke and Wills of the Victorian Exploration Expedition camped on the bank of Cooper Creek and established a depot Camp 65 before their dash for the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Burke was given secret instructions which presumably instructed him to follow from Cooper Creek the 140th meridian of east longitude and mark their journey on the way.

This occurred at a time when Victoria had rivers of gold but was short of land.

The area they traversed during their journey was beyond Queensland's western boundary which was only extended in March 1862 after representations by the Queensland colonial government, which commenced three weeks after Burke and Wills departed Melbourne.

The government requested that the area north of the 26th parallel of south latitude from 141st meridian to 138th meridian east longitude, the current western boundary, be included as part of Queensland.

This was the area within which Burke and Wills trekked and includes Mt Isa, Cloncurry and the surrounding mineral province.

## CHALLENGES

The major challenge confronting the Dig Tree Reserve has been and remains how best to protect, manage and interpret a remote site in a fragile and extreme environment.

As it had been more than two decades since the last detailed report, the RHSQ appointed Nissen Associates & Susan Hill to prepare a Conservation Management Plan (CMP), which was completed in February 2016.

The CMP relied on a number of earlier reports including the 1987 CMP and arborist Adam Tom's inspection report from 2012 together with earlier reports.

On 17 January 2018 Tom provided an updated Arborist's Report to the RHSQ which stated that the health of the Dig Tree was very good.

An earlier 1987 CMP report was prepared by PA Roe of Cameron McNamara, entitled Burke and Wills Dig Tree Conservation Plan for the RHSQ.

The report noted that since the early 1970s the reserve had become more accessible with the discoveries of oil and natural gas in the region, which had triggered a rapid improvement in the road network with the Dig Tree Reserve becoming readily accessible by conventional vehicles.

The recommendations prompted fencing of the reserve to exclude vehicular traffic which was damaging the site.

In 2003 the Dig Tree Reserve was entered on the Queensland Heritage Register.

Later, in 2016, it was part of the iconic site entry on the National Heritage List for the Burke, Wills, King and Yandruwandha National Heritage Place.

The listing acknowledges the role of the Aboriginal people in the Burke and Wills narrative.

## DIG TREE SITE CONSERVATION (continued)



### CONSERVATION PROJECT

In July 2014 the RHSQ applied for a grant of \$20,000 from the Queensland Government's Everyone's Environment Grants Program (Heritage Phase) in the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

In December that year the RHSQ's application was successful. It followed representations by the RHSQ for Conservation Management Plans to be eligible for grants from the program.

The main findings from the 2016 CMP report were that the ever-increasing visitations were placing a growing strain on the reserve.

It was estimated at the time that visitors numbered more than 30,000 annually, which had increased substantially in more recent years.

Furthermore, the report maintained that, with increasing visitor numbers, there were growing demands for attractive, informative and comprehensive interpretation of the local and wider story of the Burke and Wills Expedition.

Although all reports maintained the trees on the reserve remained in good health, recommendations were made to put in place further safeguards to withstand the tourist numbers.

They included:

- an upgrade of the existing limited boardwalk
- the construction of an extended boardwalk to include and link the Brahe Tree as well as the Dig Tree and Face Tree
- formalisation of a pathway through the reserve to the boardwalk to protect the tree roots and reserve
- remedial work around the Dig Tree roots.

In addition, the interpretative signage required revitalising while the blazes carved on the trees were generally overgrown.

Over the years, little additional conservation work had occurred on the Dig Tree Reserve by the RHSQ because of a lack of funding and the remoteness of the site.

Visits had been made by the Society's Council members and its Dig Tree Committee at various times.

### SHIRE PARTNERSHIP

In 2015, members of the RHSQ visited the Dig Tree, flying to and from Thargomindah and travelling by bus to the Dig Tree.

In March 2017, three councillors of the RHSQ's Dig Tree Committee, Stephen Sheaffe, Ruth Kerr and Denver Beanland, equipped with the CMP, visited Thargomindah, to meet with the Bulloo Shire Council, its

then Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Edwina Marks and other officers regarding the reserve. From this visit the relationship between the RHSQ and the Shire Council has grown rapidly.

To have the creative, concept and design work undertaken, the RHSQ contracted with Anne Jones of Toadshow, a Brisbane firm.

Discussion occurred over several years with Toadshow and the Queensland Government's Department of Environment, Heritage Branch as the Society endeavoured to gain sufficient funding to undertake the conservation work and other issues covered in the CMP.

The first opportunity arose in May and June 2017 that proved successful, which enabled the RHSQ to obtain \$80,000 excluding (ex) GST from the Commonwealth Government's Australian Heritage Grants 'Protecting National Heritage Sites Program' to upgrade the interpretative signage on the reserve that briefly tells the Burke and Wills story.

Although grant monies would enable new signage and sculptured blazes to be created and manufactured, it was not sufficient to enable other work to be undertaken.

## DIG TREE SITE CONSERVATION (continued)

Sculptor David Renn was commissioned to make the sculptured blazes from resin, resembling the bark and timber on the trees, by the use of moulds.

Once manufactured, the signs and blazes were transported from Brisbane to the Bulloo Shire Council work's depot at Thargomindah awaiting the other work to be progressed.

A second visit by four RHSQ Council and Dig Tree committee members, Sheaffe, Kerr and Beanland who had visited earlier in March, together with John Pearn, occurred in September 2017.

They again visited the Bulloo Shire Council at Thargomindah, and this time also the Dig Tree Reserve and Nappa Merrie Station.

A ranger employed by and accommodated at Nappa Merrie Station supervises both the reserve and the adjacent camp site. The Bulloo Shire Council supply a vehicle at their own expense for use by the ranger. The ranger's wage is paid from the Dig Tree Trust Account at the Bulloo Shire Council into which Conservation Fee monies are paid. The Trust Account is reliant on revenue from the Conservation Fee either paid into the honesty box when visiting the reserve or online bookings.

Apart from the ranger, funds in the Trust Account pay for maintenance and operating costs on the Dig Tree Reserve.

The visit allowed the RHSQ members to again see first-hand the issues raised in the CMP and to better understand the work that was required. As part of the visit, Pearn organised on behalf of the RHSQ an open history conference at Thargomindah entitled 'In the Footsteps of Burke and Wills'.

In June 2017, three months after the visit by the Society, the Bulloo Shire Council agreed to support the proposed project should funding opportunities occur as the Dig Tree was a major tourist attraction and historic site within the Shire.

When the opportunity arose, Bulloo Shire Council CEO Marks submitted an Expression of Interest to the Queensland Government's State Development Department 'Building our Regions Program'. Entitled 'The Dig Tree Visitor Experience Redesign Project'. The application was successful in 2018.

During the period Lew Rojahn became the CEO of the Bulloo Shire Council and has continued the strong support that the Society received from Edwina Marks.

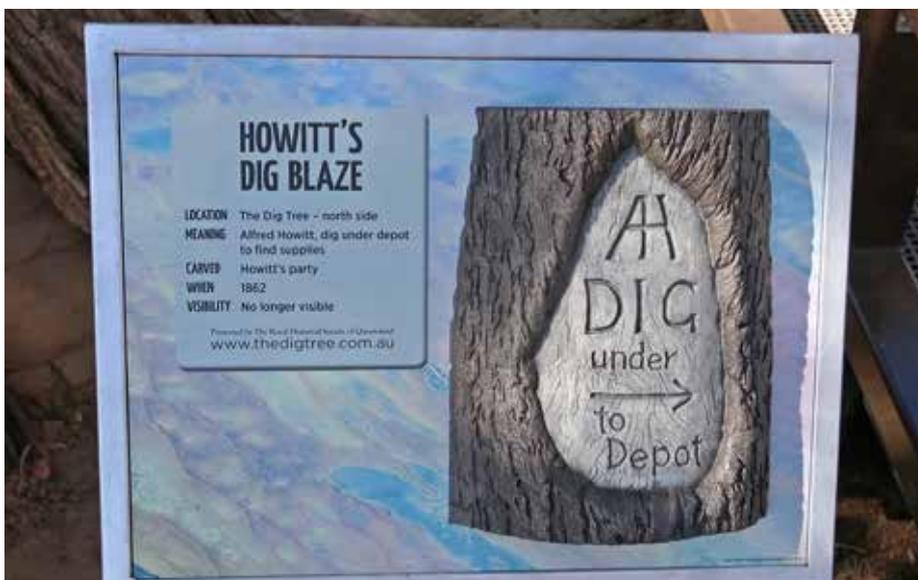


Soil erosion occurring around the roots of the Dig Tree, in a gully on the bank of Cooper Creek, was leaving the tree's roots exposed, which threatened the long-term stability and longevity of the tree.

In July 2018, professional hydrological engineers CDM Smith, who were undertaking work for the Bulloo Shire Council, were contracted to provide advice for remedial work on the erosion to enable the work to be undertaken at the same time as the other conservation work.

A report dated 5 August 2018 with recommendations for low impact remedial work was forwarded by the professional engineers to the RHSQ, which enabled the Society to obtain a Riverine Protection Permit Exemption in December 2018 from the Queensland Government's Department of Natural Resources, Mining and Energy.

It was estimated that the cost of the remedial work would be \$53,137 ex GST with additional costs because of the remoteness of the site.



# DIG TREE SITE CONSERVATION (continued)

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE REDESIGN

On 19 August 2019, Bulloo Shire Council and the RHSQ signed a Memorandum of Understanding for The Dig Tree Visitor Experience Redesign Project and associated work.

The memorandum stipulated that the work at the Dig Tree Reserve was to be undertaken by the Bulloo Shire Council. The works provided employment and other opportunities for the local people. The project was estimated to cost \$500,000, apart from the work covered by the Commonwealth Government grants, which was separate.

The agreed estimated funding contributions in the Memorandum of Understanding were:

- \$57,800 from the RHSQ's Dig Tree Reserve Account
- a \$40,000 Queensland Government Heritage Grant obtained by the Society
- \$135,000 from the Bulloo Shire Council
- \$17,200 from Bulloo Shire Council Dig Tree Trust Account
- \$250,000 from the Queensland Government's 'Building our Regions Program' \$250,000.

The Queensland Government provided funding on a 50:50 contribution provided the Bulloo Shire Council and the RHSQ provided the other one-half portion from various sources.

In 2019 Toowoomba company Wagners CFT Manufacturing Pty Ltd was engaged for the construction of a raised boardwalk on footings approximately 50 metre in length and 1.5 to 2 metres in width made of composite fibre materials which would have minimum impact on the iconic heritage reserve.

Owing to the height off the ground for some parts of the boardwalk, hand-rails were required for these sections to

meet state government safety standards. The colours for the Wagners boardwalk were chosen from their colour chart: railings Iron Bark x 63 and boardwalk dark grey x 64. The cost of the boardwalk materials for construction from Wagners totalled \$47,543 ex-GST.

The stabilised soil pathway between the entrance to the Dig Tree Reserve and the boardwalk came from a Bulloo Shire Council approved quarry and consists of crusher dust stabilised with concrete powder.

On 11 October 2019 the Department of Environment and Science issued the final exemption certificate for all the work, which included the new stabilised soil path, the boardwalk and railings, installation of seven interpretive signs and six blaze replicas, the removal of the existing information shelter on the reserve and the remedial work on the erosion.

The RHSQ also was required to undertake a self-assessment of the above project under the Commonwealth Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

This assessment was undertaken on the basis of the state government approvals. The RHSQ through the approval

process ensured all aspects of the work would have minimal impact on the heritage nature of the reserve.

Toadshow issued an installation guide on 18 November 2019 for The Dig Tree Visitor Experience Redesign Project together with the new signage and sculptured blazes, which were funded separately by the Commonwealth Government.

The guide contained instructions for the erection of the boardwalk, railings, signs, interpretative signage and blazes, and the construction of the stabilised soil pathway.

The new panels include two new arrival signs installed outside the Dig Tree Reserve, one placed on the right-hand entrance to the gateway headed 'Information', where the payment of the Conservation Fee occurs, the other erected on the right-hand side of the commencement of the stabilised soiled pathway headed 'Dig Tree Reserve'.

Seven interpretative signs and six blaze replicas were erected along the soiled pathway and the boardwalk from the entrance to the reserve.

The public are encouraged to remain on the pathway and boardwalk, and touch the sculptured blazes but not the original blazes on the trees.



## DIG TREE SITE CONSERVATION (continued)

At the entrance a new 'honesty box' for the Conservation Fee and an envelope box have replaced the previous 'honesty container'.

Two other signs were erected on the Dig Tree Road just after it commences from the highway providing information on the Burke and Wills Dig Tree Reserve and Conservation Fee.

Late in 2019, the RHSQ resolved to increase the Conservation Fee at the Dig Tree Reserve from \$10 to \$20 for a private vehicle, which includes bicycles, motor cycles, cars and four-wheel drives, while buses were increased from \$30 to \$60.

The previous fee set in the mid-1990s and was inadequate to maintain the reserve and pay the ranger.

The South Australian Desert Parks Pass does not cover the Conservation Fee as the Dig Tree Reserve is in Queensland.

The fee increased from 2 July 2020 after the erection of the new signage when Beanland visited the Dig Tree Reserve to inspect the almost complete work.

### PROJECT COMPLETION

The conservation project - The Dig Tree Visitor Experience Redesign Project - and its associated work was completed in July 2020.

After two failed attempts at launching the completion of the project because of COVID-19, the work was to be officially opened at 12 noon on 27 March 2021 at the start of the tourist season.

However, the opening was with a difference as major rainfall was recorded at the headwaters of the Paroo and Bulloo Rivers earlier in that week which flooded both river systems, while the Dig Tree Road was closed.

Moreover, the days leading up to 27 March witnessed large rainfalls in many parts of southern Queensland to the extent that many of the roads were flooded, which in turn meant that some motorists travelling to the opening were also stranded.

Late on Tuesday evening 23 March it was decided that the opening would now occur by 'zoom', live streaming, if the RHSQ could not reach the Dig Tree Reserve by road.

Those RHSQ members who were travelling to the opening would have the option of spending five days in Charleville with Graham Reid of 'TravelWest' or cancelling.

Reid had provided a bus or four wheeled drive vehicle on previous occasions and was to take the RHSQ party of 18 to Thargomindah and on to the Dig Tree. He was now asked to arrange a Charleville program for the party, while members of the Burke and Wills Society from Townsville and Melbourne as a well as others were contacted to advise of the situation.

Additionally, accommodation at Thargomindah was cancelled and that at Charleville was extended. Charleville's economy was boosted by the stay as 14 of the 18 who booked for the opening travelled to Charleville where they stayed for four nights and five days.

But the opening still occurred at 12 noon on Saturday 27 March as planned, although from different locations. The planned visit by members of the RHSQ and others to Thargomindah and the Dig Tree did not eventuate.



Master of ceremonies for the Zoom launch, Denver Beanland AO (right) and participants at Murweh Shire Council Chambers, Charleville.

# DIG TREE SITE CONSERVATION (continued)



Instead, the launch occurred via 'zoom' (above), live streaming, between John Ferguson, Mayor of the Bulloo Shire Council, in the Shire Chambers at Thargomindah who officially opened the project and Denver Beanland, the President of The Royal Historical Society of Queensland, in the Murweh Shire Council Chambers in Charleville as the Master of Ceremonies.

The RHSQ is appreciative of the support of both Councils to enable this to occur, particularly for the arrangements made by Lew Rojahn, CEO of the Bulloo Shire Council and Neil Polglase, CEO of the Murweh Shire Council.

Meanwhile, the 'Burke and Wills back under the Stars' social function planned for 6 pm Friday 26 March for the amphitheatre in the Thargomindah Memorial Park, the night before the opening, was also cancelled although it many had booked to attend.

## VIDEO

To further promote community engagement and awareness of the heritage significance of the Dig Tree Reserve, the RHSQ decided that a professionally produced video was required for wide-spread distribution.

In the later part of 2020, an opportunity occurred when a professional photography firm [destinationphotography.com.au](http://destinationphotography.com.au) was at Thargomindah, and it was agreed the Bulloo Shire Council and the RHSQ would jointly have professional filming undertaken for video production.

The new Dig Tree video was launched by the President of the RHSQ at the official opening on 27 March 2021. It was to be launched at the 'Burke and Wills back under the Stars' social function.

The video is on both [www.thedigtree.com.au](http://www.thedigtree.com.au) and The Royal Historical Society of Queensland's websites.

Copies are in the process of being distributed to all interested parties to promote the historic reserve.

## GOVERNMENT HOUSE RECEPTION

The patron of the RHSQ the Governor of Queensland, His Excellency the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC, was initially invited to perform the opening but,

because of the remoteness and transport difficulties getting to the location, he was unable to accept the invitation.

His Excellency and Mrs Kaye de Jersey then extended an invitation to Councillors and volunteers of the RHSQ to an 'Afternoon Reception in support of The Royal Historical Society of Queensland as Trustee of the Dig Tree Reserve' at Government House, Brisbane on Tuesday 20 April 2021.

## ONLINE BOOKING

As booking online has become part of modern society, the RHSQ entered into an arrangement with the Charleville Visitor Information Centre, part of Murweh Shire Council, who utilise Bookeasy online booking services for their tourist attractions.

The Murweh Shire Council, after deducting commission of 12.5 percent, forward payment for all bookings made online to the Society on a fortnightly basis, which are credited to a separate bank account for the Dig Tree Reserve.

## WEBSITE

The RHSQ was successful in obtaining a grant in the first half of 2017, from the Commonwealth Government's Department of Environment and Energy, for \$10,000 ex-GST for the creation of a new website [www.thedigtree.com.au](http://www.thedigtree.com.au) to improve the community engagement and awareness of the heritage significance of the Dig Tree Reserve as part of the Burke and Wills Dig Tree story.

All signage at the Dig Tree Reserve contains the website [www.thedigtree.com.au](http://www.thedigtree.com.au) and online Conservation Fee entrance payments can occur prior to visitation to the site. As with the other work, Toadshow undertook the design, concept and creation of the



# DIG TREE SITE CONSERVATION (continued)



website, which fulfilled another recommendation of the CMP.

Content for the website was produced by the professional volunteer historians, part of the RHSQ research team, and the Dig Tree Committee.

## BLAZES EXHIBITION

A 'Dig Tree Blazes' Exhibition at the Commissariat Store, the RHSQ's headquarters, 115 William Street, Brisbane was approved by the Society in 2019. The project was designed to:

- inform the public about the significance of the Dig Tree in Australia's history
- to encourage more visitors to journey to the Dig Tree Reserve
- to educate visitors about the RHSQs role as Trustee of the Dig Tree Reserve

- to create a new exhibition in the Commissariat Store.

The Society obtained a grant of \$35,000 ex GST from the Queensland Government's Gambling Community Benefit Fund for the exhibition created by Tony Powell of Planet Productions. The concept for the exhibition came from Toadshow.

The three-dimensional sculptured replicas of all six original blazes featured on the three trees with interpretive text is displayed separately on free-standing panels. The exhibition is a replica of the sculptured blazes at the Dig Tree Reserve.

The exhibition was launched at 6 pm on Friday 12 February 2021 by the Assistant Minister to the Attorney-General Senator the Honourable Amanda Stoker, a member of the RHSQ.

## OUTSTANDING MATTERS

The RHSQ is continuing to make representations to the Bulloo Shire Council to have the 14 kilometre dirt and gravel road constructed and sealed from the main highway to the reserve, a major iconic tourist attraction in the Shire and Queensland.

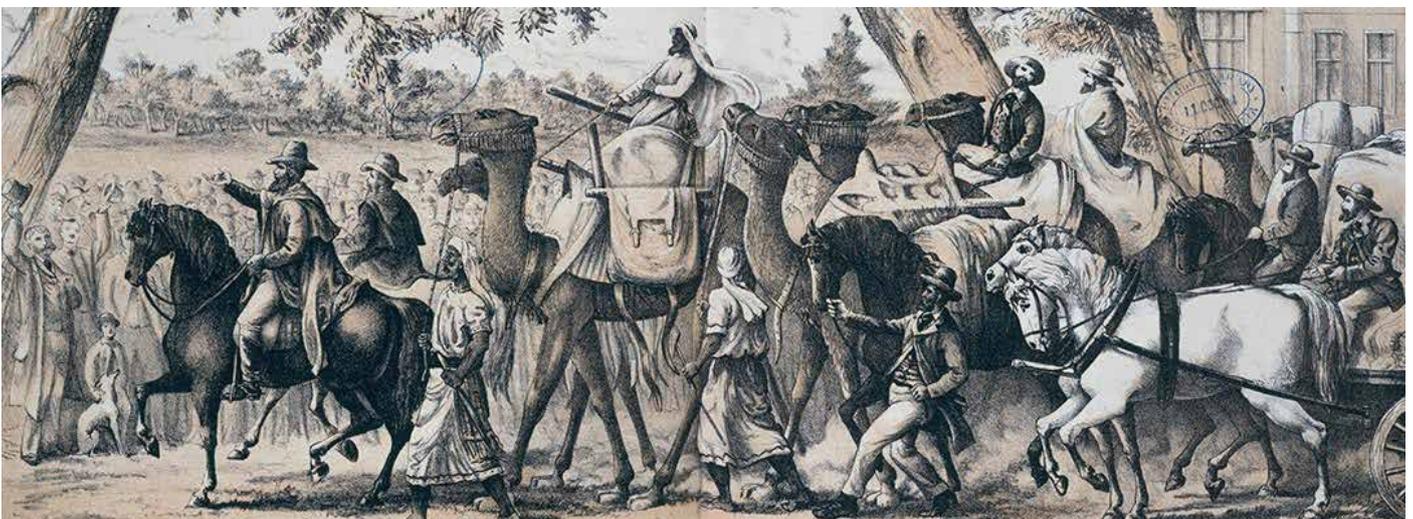
The Society will continue to support Bulloo Shire Council in its quest for funding from the State and Commonwealth Government's for this project.

The Society also continues to press Telstra and other providers for Wi-Fi connectivity at the Dig Tree Reserve to enable visitors to both pay the Conservation Fee online and importantly for safety reasons while travelling in this part of far western Queensland.

The RHSQ greatly appreciates the role played by our partners David and Kim Coulton and staff at Nappa Merrie Station and the Bulloo Shire Council in matters relating to the Dig Tree Reserve.

**Dr Denver Beanland AM,  
Chair of the Dig Tree Committee,  
and RHSQ President**

*Images: Denver Beanland or as attributed.*



The expedition made news headlines across the country. This image from the State Library of Victoria shows the Burke and Wills expedition as it set off from Royal Park Melbourne in August 1860 and is from Illustrated Australian News 4 May 1881.

# MANAGING THE DIG TREE SITE

The Royal Historical Society of Queensland (RHSQ) is Trustee of the Dig Tree Reserve.

This Reserve was gazetted in the Queensland Government Gazette dated 2 July 1964 (page 1083) covering about one acre and again in the Queensland Government Gazette dated 22 January 1987 (page 285), R7 being lot 1 on plan CPR4 an area of 4470 square metres in the Parish Oontoo, County Cooper, on the bank of Cooper Creek.

RHSQ initiated a meeting of interested persons and agencies on 2 October 1996 to discuss the management of the Dig Tree.

The parties at the meeting were:

- The Royal Historical Society of Queensland (Michael White and Pat Comben)
- Department of Environment, Department of Natural Resources (Bob Lack and Geoff Edwards)
- Bulloo Shire Council (Mayor and CEO)

- Stanbroke Pastoral Company (Andrew Gatenby and David Foote)

- Australian Environmental International (Hugh Lavery).

The meeting agreed that:

- the Dig Tree Advisory Board be created
- the RHSQ appoint Stanbroke Pastoral Company Pty Ltd, lessee of Nappa Merrie, as manager of the Dig Tree Reserve
- the Department of Environment circulate wording of the plaque shelter via the Secretary for distribution
- the Department of Natural Resources to provide a copy of the relevant by-laws
- Bulloo Shire Council act as local agent for the road gazettal
- The first meeting of the Advisory Board be set for 4 December 1996 in the Stanbroke Pastoral Company board room in Brisbane.

The Council of the RHSQ agreed with the recommendations.

On 24 October 1996 RHSQ appointed Stanbroke Pastoral Company Pty Ltd as its agent to manage the area of the Dig Tree with power to control entry to the site and to charge fees (permissible under the legislation).

An Advisory Board was established comprising Department of Natural Resources, Department of Environment and Heritage, Bulloo Shire Council, Stanbroke Pastoral Co Pty Ltd, and RHSQ. Fees were to be placed in a Trust Account held by Stanbroke Pastoral Company Pty Ltd. Stanbroke took out a \$10 million public liability insurance policy.

At the meeting on 4 December 1996 Department of Environment stated that its sign was adequate but RHSQ and Stanbroke Pastoral Company and Bulloo Shire Council felt that it was too wordy. The Department of Environment proceeded to make the sign.

The meeting on 4 December 1996 determined that the role of the Dig Tree Advisory Board was:

- to advise the trustees (RHSQ) in respect of the Dig Tree Reserve
- to assist in developing management policies for the trustees if desired
- to advise on broader issues outside the Dig Tree Reserve
- to provide skills and knowledge to the trustees, Stanbroke Pastoral Company and Bulloo Shire Council required for managing the area in a responsible manner
- to provide a conduit for information between the public, local government bodies, state government bodies/departments, The Royal Historical Society of Queensland and Stanbroke Pastoral Company.



## MANAGING THE DIG TREE SITE (continued)

The Advisory Board agreed to meet annually.

At the meeting on 17 September 1998 the Bulloo Shire Council undertook to review the condition and status of the road in the vicinity of the Dig Tree. Bulloo Shire Council was concerned that Stanbroke Pastoral Company not monopolise the promotion of tourism in the area of the Dig Tree and was concerned that the conservation fee not be set too high. The Bulloo Shire Council representative noted that the trustees were obliged to comply with the Integrated Catchment Management Plan for Cooper Creek and that they would supply information to Stanbroke Pastoral Company.

An officer of the Queensland National Parks at Thargomindah and the Ranger were to liaise about the repositioning of the board walks. Department of Natural Resources undertook to investigate a separate agreement with the Nappa Merrie lessees.

In February 1999 the RHSQ considered forming a company with Stanbroke Pastoral Co Pty Ltd to manage the Dig Tree operations with a separate bank account. This was subject to the approval of AMP Limited, the owner of Stanbroke Pastoral Company.

In April 1999 a copy of model by-laws approved by regulations under the *Land Act 1994* were provided by the Department of Natural Resources. Stanbroke Pastoral Co Pty Ltd and their Dig Tree Ranger were to liaise with the Society as to which by-laws were appropriate.

It was noted at the meeting that with the sale of the Nappa Merrie pastoral lease to Santos Ltd and subsequent leaseback by Stanbroke Pastoral Company additional conditions had been imposed by the state government in the lease regarding public access to the Dig Tree.

The airstrip near the Dig Tree was upgraded. Erosion areas around the Dig Tree had been fenced off. Stephen Sheaffe of RHSQ arranged for chartered accountants to audit the 1998 accounts which were a separate cost centre within Stanbroke Pastoral Company's accounts.

It was noted that all assets built outside of the Dig Tree Reserve belonged to the pastoral property.

At the Advisory Board meeting on 20 December 1999 it was stated that the Australian Geographic Society provided \$12,000 for provision of public toilets (pit type). They were to be put near the visitor centre (a simple bough shed) outside the Dig Tree reserve. They were to be capped in flood time.

The Advisory Board continued to meet periodically and discussed the management and preservation of the reserve.

The Dig Tree Advisory Board met at Nappa Merrie on 4 July 2007 and decided to meet each year. Their advice to the RHSQ Council was:

- that an agreement be negotiated with S Kidman and Co in place of that with Stanbroke Pastoral Co Pty Ltd
- RHSQ be requested to apply for a grant of \$12,000 for material to upgrade of facilities outside of the reserve
- acceptance of Bulloo Shire Council's offer to provide information about the Dig Tree at Thargomindah turnoff from the main road.

They thanked Nappa Merrie station for its assistance in looking after the Dig Tree Reserve.

A separate meeting was held in Brisbane on 20 June 2007 between RHSQ, EPA, Kidmans.

Alf (Bomber) Johnson, ranger of Dig Tree worked on half pay with Kidmans and maintained the reserve, the camp site and the

area around it for many years. Johnson kept the camping area and reserve in good condition. He used his own Hilux vehicle.

People paid a conservation fee in an honesty box. He took the money weekly to Innamincka Store where the cash was exchanged for a cheque. The money was agreed to pass through the Kidman's account. They were to furnish a yearly report to RHSQ.

At a meeting of RHSQ Councillors and Anthony Simmons of Department of Environment and Heritage Protection on 2 February 2012 the idea of a paid manager was discussed as an aspiration.

A meeting of the Advisory Board was held at Nappa Merrie in 2012.

At the Advisory Board meeting of 28 November 2014, the Burke and Wills Society was admitted as a member of the Advisory Board. The meeting discussed transferring the trust monies to Bulloo Shire Council to be held in trust for RHSQ. RHSQ undertook to consider this.

The monies were transferred by Santos Limited to Bulloo Shire Council and RHSQ and the Shire Council have managed this since.

Since then the RHSQ Council has taken a strong leadership role in oversight of the Dig Tree Reserve and has obtained grants for the conservation of the reserve, interpretation signs, new board walks and erosion control from the Commonwealth and State Governments.

The RHSQ Council has worked in close association with the Bulloo Shire Council, especially in administration of the Shire Council's grants fostering tourism in the shire.

Ruth S Kerr

# AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL



In August 1916, a tall and lean figure, dressed in the khaki of the Australian Infantry Force, strode through the battle field of Pozières, Somme Valley in northern France, not long after the fighting had ceased.

He was Charles Bean, the official Australian war correspondent. With him were two others – one a military chaplain, Walter Dexter, and the other a young man, a lad really, Arthur Bazley, who was Bean's assistant. They spent the summer night on the battle field under the stars.<sup>1</sup>

In his role as the official war historian for Australia Charles Bean had witnessed most of the recent battle which in the end had accounted for 23,000 Australian casualties, 6,800 of whom had died in action or of their wounds. He was deeply moved by the carnage. On 4 August he wrote in his diary:

*Pozières has been a terrible sight all day – steaming with pink and chestnut and coaly smoke. One knew that the brigades which went in last night were there today in that insatiable factory of ghastly wounds. The men are simply turned in there as into some ghastly giant mincing machine. They have to stay*

*there while shell after huge shell descends with a shriek close beside them – each one an acute mental torture – each shrieking, tearing crash bringing a promise to each man – instantaneous – I will tear you into ghastly wounds – I will rend your flesh and pulp an arm or a leg – fling you, half a gaping quivering man like these that you see smashed around you, one by one, to lie there rotting and blackening like all the things you saw by the awful roadside, or in that sickening dust crater.<sup>2</sup>*

It was here at the aftermath of Pozières reflecting on the loss of Australian lives that Charles Bean began to develop his vision of a national memorial.

The next year while at the British headquarters in France he wrote:

*Every country after this war will have its war museums and galleries and its library of records rendered sacred by the millions of gallant precious lives laid down in their making. In London, Paris, Belgium, the war collections, and the war pictures, the war archives will be the goal of millions of visitors, and the*

## AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL REDEVELOPMENT (continued)

*centre of thousands of students as long as their peoples endure. Some day a magnificent collection in Australia will be the equal of them all, and will contain a war museum as interesting to visitors from Europe or America and to Australians themselves as, are the great London collections with their relics of Nelson and Wellington, the Crimea, the Mutiny and the Soudan, today.*<sup>3</sup>

Sharing Bean's vision was John Treloar. Treloar had been a public servant in the Commonwealth Department of Defence before enlisting in the 1st Division, AIF. He served as a Staff Sergeant at Gallipoli before being evacuated back to Australia with enteric fever. On recovery he re-enlisted in No 1 Squadron of the Australian Flying Corps as a lieutenant (equipment officer) and served in Egypt and France. In May 1917 he was selected to organise the newly formed Australian War Records Section.

Although Treloar has been somewhat overshadowed by Charles Bean in the Australian War historiography, together they were both the driving forces for the eventual establishment of the Australian War Memorial. Treloar was to become the first and longest Director from 1920 to 1952.<sup>4</sup>

I do not wish to go into the details of the formation of the War Memorial we know today other than to say Bean and Treloar had to face enormous difficulties and setbacks. At the end of the war Australia had serious financial challenges to resolve, followed by a devastating influenza pandemic and then a world-wide depression.

Bean and Treloar had difficulties in first gaining government approval for a national Memorial and then in gaining the necessary funds to establish, maintain and develop it primarily as a memorial and as a museum. But they endured and an incomplete memorial opened in 1941, during another world war, and was not sufficiently completed until 1971.<sup>5</sup>

Today, the Australian War Memorial has become one of the most visited and important cultural institutions in the country. Many Australians have a deep respect for it and what it stands for particularly the veterans and their families and descendants of those who fought in conflicts. The experience they have during a visit is often emotionally moving and unforgettable.

The building and contents were placed on the Commonwealth Heritage List in 2004 and the National Heritage List in 2006. Established in 2003, the Commonwealth Heritage List is a heritage register of places under the control of the Australian Government on land (and waters) directly owned by the Commonwealth – the people of Australia.

The National Heritage List is Australia's list of natural, historic, and Indigenous places of outstanding significance to the nation as a whole.

Part of the statement of the significance for the Commonwealth Heritage List reads:

*The Australian War Memorial (AWM) is Australia's National Shrine to those Australians who lost their lives and suffered as a result of war. As such it is important to the Australian community as a whole and has special associations with veterans and their families...*

It goes on to state:

*The AWM building is a purpose built repository reflecting the integral relationship between the building, commemorative spaces and the collections. This is unique in Australia and rare elsewhere in the world. The values are expressed in the fabric of the main building, the entrance, the Hall of Memory, the collections and the surrounding landscape.*<sup>6</sup>

But now the Australian War Memorial is about to enter a new phase of its existence. A major redevelopment is being undertaken, backed by the Australian Government. The redevelopment entails major changes over a seven year period at a cost of \$498 million.

According to the Memorial management the motivation behind the development is "to modernise and expand our galleries and buildings so we can tell the continuing story of Australia's contemporary contribution to a better world, through the eyes of those who have served in modern conflicts, connecting the spirit of our past, present, and future for generations to come".

To do this the redevelopment is planned to provide space for the recent conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Solomon Islands and East Timor and for conflicts to come.

At present only four percent of the Memorial's collections can currently be displayed.

The changes will include a new southern entrance and a large exhibition space constructed at the rear of the building which will necessitate the demolition of Anzac Hall which was constructed just 20 years ago. Further landscape changes are also planned.

Thankfully, the present Commemorative Area, Hall of Memory and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier will not be affected.

The redevelopment proposals have come under strong professional and community opposition. Foremost objections come from the Australian Heritage Council, a Commonwealth Government

## AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL REDEVELOPMENT (continued)

appointed body, to advise on National Heritage. The council reviewed the proposal under the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act* and advised strongly against the redevelopment proposal. In a carefully worded letter to the Australian War Memorial Development Project Team the Council concluded:

*Regrettably, the Council cannot support the conclusion that the proposed redevelopment will not have a serious impact on the listed heritage values of the site and recommends that the [proposal] be given serious attention.*<sup>8</sup>

Further objections to the redevelopment came via an open letter to the Prime Minister signed by more than 70 notable Australians of broad professional backgrounds, many of whom were recipients of Australian Honours and Awards, including veterans, academics, historians, architects, former diplomats, former heads of Commonwealth agencies, heritage consultants and former staff of the Australian War Memorial.<sup>9</sup>

But perhaps the most telling criticism of the proposed development comes from Brendon Kelson (not Nelson), former director of the AWM (1990-1994), who stated in a submission to the

Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee inquiry into National Cultural Institutions that:

*This huge redevelopment would turn upside down the Australian War Memorial's unique standing as the most revered memorial museum of its kind and among the world's great national monuments.*<sup>10</sup>

The 'unique standing' of the AWM is that first and foremost its role is remembrance for those who have served in conflict and secondly as a museum of military history. It would seem (to me at least) that the management of the AWM has lost sight of this very salient role.

But now I would like to offer a challenge to those politicians and senior bureaucrats who will be making the final decisions on how these proposed redevelopments will eventuate.

I would like them to take some time out of their offices and stand out in front of Parliament House, our symbol of democracy, and look down over Federation Mall, across Lake Burley Griffin and up along the line of Anzac Parade to the stark but imposing form of the War Memorial building.

The whole vista has been deliberately planned this



## AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL REDEVELOPMENT (continued)

way so that our political leaders can stand at the entrance of the Parliament building and reflect on the sacrifices that have been made by our service men and women before they enter Parliament House to go about the daily business.

I challenge them to think hard and long about what they have just seen. Think about the debt that is owed by us all.

But I would like to offer them a further, more personal challenge. Take some more time out of your offices and go to the Memorial itself. It is not far.

While there cast your eyes and minds over the names inscribed in the Wall of Remembrance and the sea of red poppies that have been placed in the joints next to a name by the people who visited and who have deeply cared.

Now take some more time and go into the research centre. Ask at the desk to see one of the original letters or diaries that are stored there written by men and women who have put their lives in danger. I would suggest a diary written during the Pozières campaign so you can perhaps get an inkling of what Charles Bean saw and felt. Ask for a hand-written original and not a transcript.

Now, sit down in a quiet place and carefully take the pages from the file cover and read about the experience of the writer.

Perhaps you will notice that the diary entries or the letter is written in pencil with a shaky hand. Perhaps you will notice that the lettering becomes thicker as the tip of the precious pencil wears down and is reduced to an unwieldy stub. Perhaps you will notice grubby finger marks on the pages as the writer struggles with the mud or dust in his small dugout as the shells fall about, some too close for comfort.

Or perhaps there will be blotches on the page where the tears of a weary nurse have fallen while she writes exhausted but quietly after a long day caring for the wounded desperately trying to save

their lives.

You may even come across a pressed and dried twig of rosemary or the petals of a red poppy wedged between the pages. Were they placed there by the young soldier writing about his experience, or was it the nurse who had found them and picked them with care? Or was it by a loving parent or relative who has received the diary and is now grieving for the writer who will never return?

Whatever the case, you have now looked deep into the very heart and soul of what the present War Memorial represents, perhaps even the heart and soul of this country. The bricks and mortar making up the building structures and the exhibits located under the roof tell a part of the story but the pages you have held in your hand hold the real meaning.

Put the pages back into the plastic cover, tie up the binding of the file and return it.

But do not forget what you have seen and held in your hand. Do not forget who was writing the words and thoughts, where they were, what they did and what they had to endure.

Now go back to your office and ponder your role in the coming planning and developments of the building. What are you doing? Do not stuff it up!

I wonder what Charles Bean and John Treloar would think of the redevelopment?

Peter Dowling

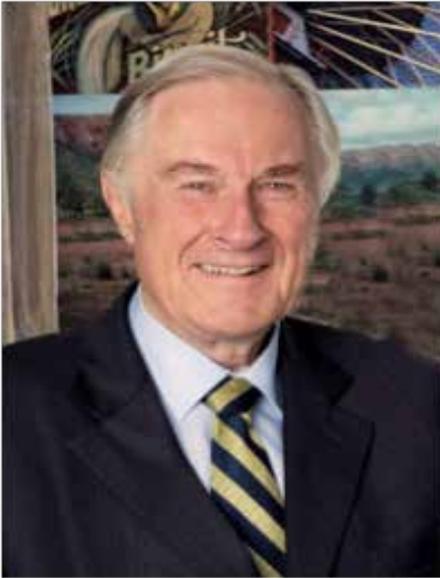
### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Michael McKernan, *Here is Their Spirit. A History of the Australian War Memorial 1917-1990* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1991) p.30.
- 2 Cited in Peter Burness (ed) *The Western Front Diaries of Charles Bean* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2018) p.143)
- 3 C.E.W. Bean, 29 September 1917, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/69805085?searchTerm=Preserved%20as%20sacred%20things>
- 4 Denis Winter, 'Treloar, John Linton (1894–1952)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University*, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/treloar-john-linton-8846/text15525>, published first in hardcopy 1990, (accessed online 12 March 2021)
- 5 Steve Gower, *The Australian War Memorial. A century on from the vision* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2019) p6.
- 6 National Heritage List, *Australian War Memorial and the Memorial Parade, Anzac Pde, Campbell, ACT, Australia*, (Australian Heritage Database ([environment.gov.au](http://environment.gov.au)) accessed 14 March 2021.
- 7 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-15/australian-war-memorial-development-criticised-inquiry/12456226>
- 8 ATTACHMENT-A-AHC-Kemp-submission-BIG.pdf ([nonesthistory.net.au](http://nonesthistory.net.au))
- 9 <http://honesthistory.net.au/wp/petition-on-change-org-against-proposed-war-memorial-extensions/>
- 10 Brendon Kelson, *Submission 18, Parliament of Australia Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, Inquiry into National Cultural Institutions*, [www.aph.gov.au/nationalinstitutions](http://www.aph.gov.au/nationalinstitutions).

Main AWM images: Peter Dowling



## OUR CONTRIBUTORS



**Dr Denver Beanland AO** holds a Bachelor of Arts with first class Honours in History (2003) and a PhD in History (2008) from The University of Queensland. Denver is the author of three books on Queensland history and has written many published articles.

Denver served as a Member of the Queensland Parliament from 1986 to 2001. He was the Attorney-General, Minister for Justice, and Minister Responsible for Consumer Affairs from 1996-98 and was leader of the parliamentary Liberal Party 1990-91. Between 1976 and 1986 Denver was an Alderman of the Brisbane City Council and, in 1985-86, was Vice-Mayor.

Denver is Chair of the National Archives of Australia Advisory Council. He became Chair on 30 June 2015. He is currently President, elected in November 2020, and also a past President of The Royal Historical Society of Queensland, and in 2019 was elected a Fellow of the Society.

Since August 2007, he has been Chair of the Brisbane City Council's Heritage Advisory Committee, previously appointed a member in 2003.

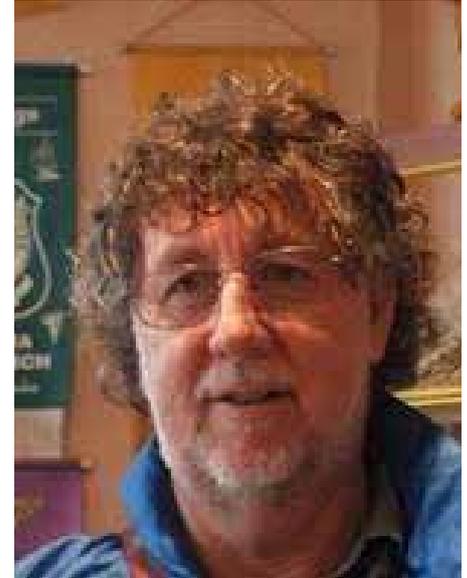
In June 2020, Denver was appointed a Member (AM) of the Order of Australia (General Division).



**Dr Ruth Kerr** is a professional historian who has published on mining and agricultural industries, and local history, and worked in the Queensland Public Service for four decades - in Queensland State Archives, Crown Law Office, Department of Mines and Energy in Native Title, Department of Primary Industries, and as a Research Officer in the Parliamentary Library.

Dr Kerr is Hon Secretary and a past President of The Royal Historical Society of Queensland and is also a member of the Society's Dig Tree Committee.

Dr Kerr is a Fellow of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies Inc and was a member of the Federation Council from 1986 to 2020 and was President twice.



**Dr Peter Dowling** holds a PhD in archaeology and biological anthropology from the Australian National University. He has written and lectured on Australian history, archaeology, military history, Indigenous and European biological contact history and Australian cultural heritage assessment. He has organised and led local, national, and overseas tours with a focus on history, archaeology and heritage. In a previous life Dr Dowling spent 20 years in signals intelligence with the Royal Australian Navy serving in military active zones in Southeast Asia and Vietnam. He is the author of **Fatal Contact. How Epidemics Nearly Wiped Out Australia's First Peoples** to be published by Monash University Press in July 2021.

### A WIN FOR OUR HERITAGE

*On the subject of our National Heritage, it is pleasing to see the Federal Government's response to intense lobbying to end its inaction on funding for the National Archives of Australia. It will provide \$67 million of addition funding over four years to redress the deterioration of vital records and cut waiting times for users as recommended in the Tune review of January 2020 (see <https://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/tune-review> ).*

*An open letter signed by 150 authors, historians and public identities, called on the Government to provide more funding and the campaign was supported by many historical societies and others interested in history from across Australia.*