

**DEDICATION OF PLAQUES ON SOLDIERS MEMORIAL AVENUE
BY
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GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
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This is a significant day for the Soldiers Memorial Avenue. The idea was conceived in 1917 but did not mature until the 23rd August 1918 when the planting of about 390 trees was completed. A crowd estimated to have been between 8 and 10 thousand people attended the opening; more than a quarter of the population of greater Hobart. The trees were planted by, and at the request of, the next of kin of men who had died on active service. Most came from Hobart and New Town, but there were also men from Richmond, Bruny Island and the mainland; all had trees because a relative resided in Hobart.

A further 110 trees were planted on February 15th 1919, with the balance of the trees planted during 1919 and 1920. Over 520 trees were eventually planted with the Avenue broadening to 4 lines of trees along most of its length. In the early days after the Armistice, the trees became shrines for some family members at which they could gather to recall their loved ones whose grave was either unknown or was known, but in a land that in those days was far too far away to contemplate visiting.

But as the years passed the Avenue became neglected, the wooden boards in front of each tree bearing the name of the soldier started to disintegrate, as did the wooden fencing placed around each tree and some of the trees died. Also, as the years passed, there were further incursions into the Soldiers Walk, as it was then called, as roads, buildings and sports grounds were constructed on the Domain.

In 2001 a group of people realised that it would not be long before the Soldiers Memorial Avenue was no more than a distant memory. These people formed themselves into an organisation called Friends of Soldiers Walk that dedicated itself to the restoration of the Avenue. There was a public meeting and the Hobart City Council lent its support to the idea. Help came from other areas including the State Archives, the Federal and State Governments and Tassal, who provided the benches along the Avenue other sponsors and, of course, from the families of the soldiers that paid for the plaques.

It's been a long road of dedicated hard work over more than 10 years by members of a tireless committee now lead by Adrian Howard, and many volunteers. But their work is now complete and the Avenue, although not following the same course as it did in 1918, is finally restored. New trees have been planted to replace those that died, although it is here worth noting a touch that indicates the level of care and sensitivity by those involved, namely, that when a dead tree had to be cut down, the family of the soldier whose tree it was was offered the wood to keep as a memento of the original memorial.

Now there are 535 plaques in place and 535 trees, all growing well. All bar two were soldiers. One was a sailor and one was a woman, Jean Nellie Miles-Walker, a nursing sister and army matron who died in 1918. A member of the Australian Army Nursing Service Reserve, Miles-Walker was the principal matron for the Military District of Tasmania and sailed for Egypt with the Australian Imperial Force in November 1914. A detailed account of her service and background is inscribed on the plaque dedicated to her on this Avenue.

I think that it is the detail about each soldier inscribed on each plaque that makes this memorial so special. Those soldiers, one sailor and Matron Miles-Walker, most of whom came from Hobart and died far away in that Great War, are remembered here not just by a number or a name or a badge, but by a short description of what they did, the names of the members of the family, where they went to school and so on. It's personal. It's individual. Each is remembered as someone special as, indeed, they were to their loved ones. Every one of them different, but all of whom died fighting for what they believed to be an important cause for their country.

Lest we forget.