

CHAMPION TREES IN COMMONWEALTH WAR CEMETERIES



Erythrina abyssinica-This beautiful tree grows in **Nanyuki War Cemetery** in Kenya. It is commonly called the red-hot poker tree, Flame tree or lucky bean tree. It has a number of local names: Mwambangoma (Swahili); Muyirikiti (Luganda); Mriri (Chagga). It is a deciduous tree growing up to 12 metres in height and is found from sea level to 2000m. The round shiny red seeds are popular as curios and for necklaces. The soft wood is used for carvings, drums, beehives, and as bee forage. The leaves can serve as fodder.



Arbutus andrachne- This splendid tree grows in **Jerusalem War Cemetery**, Israel, and is the largest of its kind in the whole of Israel. It is known as the Grecian Strawberry tree and is native to south eastern Europe growing to 5m with a spread of 8m or more in favourable locations. It is well known for its smooth, cinnamon-brown flaking bark. It is related to heaths and heathers and



has larger white pitcher-shaped flowers which are often seen at the same time as the fruits which resemble strawberries.



Pinus pinea, the 'Lone Pine'- Growing in **Lone Pine Cemetery**, Gallipoli, Turkey, this tree has an interesting history. In 1987 it was inspected by an Australian botanist who confirmed that it was **Pinus pinea**, the stone or umbrella pine, and an estimate of its age indicated that it was planted sometime in the 1920s. In 1987 it was ten metres in height with a diameter at breast height of 44cm. Historically it is reported that during the offensive launched by the 1st Australian Infantry Division on 6 August 1915, the Turks had cut down all but one of the trees to cover their trenches. The ridge dominated by a single Aleppo Pine (**Pinus halepensis**) became known as Lone Pine. Two



Australian soldiers collected pine cones from the ridge:

Lance Corporal Benjamin Smith of the 3rd Battalion sent a cone home to his mother, Mrs McMullen at Inverell in New South Wales. Mrs McMullen kept the cone for thirteen years until 1928 before planting the seeds. She grew two seedlings, one of which she presented to the town of Inverell and the other to the Parks and Gardens section of the Department of the Interior in Canberra. The Duke of Gloucester planted this second tree at the Australian War Memorial in October 1934. It is at present over 20 metres tall.

SGT Keith McDowell of the 24th Battalion carried a pine cone in his haversack until the end of the war. Upon returning home to Australia he gave it to his Aunt Mrs Emma Gray, who lived at Grassmere near Warrnambool, Victoria. A decade or so later Mrs Gray planted the seeds and four seedlings resulted. One was planted in May 1933 in Wattle Park, Melbourne; another at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne and another at the Soldiers Memorial Hall at The Sisters. The last was planted in Warrnambool Gardens.

Thus at some stage a decision was made to plant a stone pine at Lone Pine Cemetery, a tree well planted around the Mediterranean, rather than an Aleppo pine which is also found around the

Mediterranean and in particular near Aleppo, Syria. What is important is that it was a pine tree and is symbolic of the sacrifice made by Australian forces on this ridge.

The Duckworth Oak, *Quercus robur* - This tree grows in **Redoubt Cemetery**, Gallipoli.

2nd Lt Eric Duckworth died on 7 August 1915 whilst serving with the 1st/6th Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers in Gallipoli. His grave was not found and he is commemorated on the Helles Memorial. He was the son of James and Mary Duckworth of Dunsterville, Rochdale and was one of three brothers.

In 1922 his parents visited Gallipoli and planted an oak tree in Redoubt Cemetery to the north of Helles and close to where he was thought to have died. The tree was a sapling one metre in height and was kept in a bucket of water until their ship reached Gallipoli. The tree was planted with the assistance of Colonel Hughes. In 1934 the tree had reached three metres in height.



Albizia saman, the rain tree - a group of these magnificent trees grow outside the entrance to **Rabaul (*Bita Paka*) War Cemetery**, Papua New Guinea (left picture) and two more at Ambon War Cemetery, Indonesia, (right).

The rain tree is native to tropical America and has been widely planted in many tropical regions, lining the streets in Singapore and Bangkok. It is a huge tree growing to

24m or more in height and 30m spread. The flowers, a mass of pink stamens, are followed by dark brown seed pods. The rain trees shown here are laden with epiphytic orchids and ferns. The popular name derives from the fact that the leaves close at night, or during heavy rain, which allows dew or raindrops to drip from them.



Tilia cordata avenue – these trees, growing in an avenue at **Canadian Forces Memorial, Bourlon Wood, France**, are reputed to be more than 200 years old, dating back to Napoleonic times. A popular herb tea is made from the flowers; it has a sweet, fragrant pleasant flavour. A fibre from the inner bark is used to make mats, shoes, baskets and ropes. The fibre can also be

used for making paper. The stems are harvested in spring or summer, the leaves are removed and the stems steamed until the fibres can be stripped. The outer bark is removed from the inner bark by peeling or scraping. The fibres are cooked for 2 hours with lye (sodium or potassium hydroxide) and then beaten in a ball mill. The paper is beige in colour. The wood is soft, white and easily carved.



Schinus molle avenue - Gilgil War Cemetery, Kenya.

Commonly known as the pepper tree, it is native to Mexico and South America (Peru). It has attractive yellowish-white pendulous flowers followed by bunches of small lavender fruits. It is particularly tolerant of drought, is evergreen and thrives well in the cemetery where water is limited. It can grow up to 8 metres in height. All parts of the tree have a high content of essential oil and can be used to combat viral and

bacterial infections. The resin is used as mastic, latex is produced from many parts of the tree, juice is produced from the fruits and the seeds are used as a substitute for pepper.



Ceiba pentandra, white silk cotton tree, kapok tree - Freetown (King Tom)



Cemetery, Sierra Leone. The tree existed before the cemetery was built and is probably at least one hundred years old. It is deciduous from tropical America but grown throughout the tropics. The tree can reach enormous sizes, up to 35 metres with 2.5m trunk diameter. Huge buttresses at the base of the trees can reach up to 10m wide. The fruits contain a mass of black seeds and fine silky floss known as kapok. It is not suitable for weaving but is used to stuff pillows, mattresses and sleeping bags. Kapok oil is extracted from the seeds and is used to make soap and margarine.



Carpinus betulus 'Fastigiata' - Villers Bretonneux Military Cemetery, France.

The double avenue of fastigate hornbeam was planted in the 1930s. The trees were selected because of their ability to thrive on the shallow chalk soils of the Somme which suit this tree very well. It has been remarked that the trees shown here mimic lines of soldiers marching across



the fields. However true that may be, the cemetery and Memorial (from which this photograph was taken) have certainly assisted in making this a splendid feature.

Hornbeam wood is among the hardest known and immensely strong. It was used for cogwheels in mills and for the centres of cartwheels. It is still used for the hammers in pianos and in butchers' chopping blocks, where the hornbeam centre is set in beech; the beech wood is softer and wears away to leave the raised centre required for chopping meat.



Albizia lebeck - Tel-el-Kebir War Memorial Cemetery, Egypt.

Common names such as "woman's tongue" and "rattle pod" derive from the noise of pods shaking in the wind. Albizia lebeck is particularly promising as a fodder tree for semi-arid regions in the tropics and subtropics. Timber is very suitable for construction, furniture and veneer. The tree is also used as a folk remedy for many ailments. Another common use is as an avenue tree, and sometimes it is used to shade coffee and tea.



Saponins and tannins in the bark can be used for making soap and in tanning, respectively. Bee keepers like the species for the light-coloured honey its nectar provides. Soil-binding ability makes it useful for soil conservation plantings.



Peltophorum ferrugineum (syn. Pterocarpum) - Taukkyan War Cemetery, Myanmar.

Its common name is copper pod (from the colour of its seed pods), yellow flame or yellow flamboyant (from the fragrant yellow flowers). It originates from coastal areas of



tropical Australia. Its heartwood is red, hard and strong, and good for carpentry and construction. Medicinal uses include bark for dysentery, tooth powder, eye lotion, embrocation for pains and sores. The bark gives a dye of a yellow colour.



Pritchardia pacifica – *Beersheba War Cemetery*, Israel. Commonly known as the Fiji Fan palm, the palm is endemic to Tonga, and was introduced to Fiji very early on. It is widely planted in the tropics and sub-tropics, growing up to 9m in height. The palm is slow growing and the leaves were once made into fans for the exclusive use of chiefs.



Lagerstroemia speciosa – *Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery*, Myanmar. Its common names are Pride of India (from where it comes) and Queen's Crape Myrtle. In the Philippines, Banaba is a popular medicine plant and is used in treatment of diabetes. Because of its ability to assist in regulating blood sugar, it can be very useful in losing weight.



Alstonia Schloaris – The devil tree, dita bark - *Ranchi War Cemetery*, India. The tree can reach up to 25 metres in height. Dita bark, as it is commonly known, is used as an aphrodisiac and for tooth-ache pain. The name "scholaris" is derived from the fact that its planks, when sanded, were used by school children for tracing letters. The bark is used in

homoeopathy for its tonic bitter and astringent properties; it is particularly useful for chronic diarrhoea and dysentery. In Ceylon its light wood is used for coffins. It is largely used in India for skin disorders and as a febrifuge.



Roystonea regia – Cuban Royal palm – *Christiansborg War Cemetery*, Ghana. The plant is named in the honour of General Roy Stone an army engineer who served in the Caribbean at the turn of the century. With a crown spread of 6 metres, trees can reach a height of 20 metres. Being tolerant of salt drift, Royal Palms will grow near salt water and on the beach if set back from the first line of dunes. It is a classic palm for lining avenues, withstands hurricanes easily as leaves are blown off early, minimizing wind resistance, a useful palm in native habitats, stems for lumber, leaves for thatch and fruit for oil.





Buckinghamia celsissima – common name ivory curl - **Lutwyche Cemetery**, Queensland, Australia. The tree's common name can quite easily be discerned from the curled stamens (male parts) of the flowers. Closely related to grevilleas, with spikes of white flowers about 20cm long in summer, it is named after Richard Grenville, Duke of Buckingham. The tree is a native to



forests in the coastal ranges of Queensland, where it grows in well-drained volcanic soils and rarely exceeds 8 metres in cultivation. It is often used in fire retardant plantings to conserve moisture, serve as a wind break by absorbing and deflecting radiant heat from the fire and act as a barrier to flying sparks.



Prunus avium 'Plena' –gean or mazzard, double white cherry –**Ovillers Military Cemetery**, France. The common name of the tree is perhaps the alteration of Middle English mazer: goblet, hard wood. These popular plants are greatly valued for their delicious, edible fruits, gorgeous spring blossoms and some, for their colourful foliage. The bark of this tree is smooth and grey but turns mahogany-red with age and peels in horizontal



strips to reveal the paler, inner bark. The trunks of fully grown trees are extremely valuable and much sought after for their beautiful decorative golden-brown heartwood. The sapwood is a few shades paler. The wood is used to make veneers and fine quality furniture. Wood turners and carvers value it as well for its lively patterns. If the wood is worked whilst still 'green', it may take on an orange colour.



Paulownia tomentosa – empress tree or foxglove tree – **Chauny Communal Cemetery British Extension, France**. The genus owes its name to Anna Paulownia, an eighteenth-century princess of the Netherlands. In the Chinese tradition, parents planted a *Paulownia* when a daughter was born. As the girl reached the 'marrying age', the mature tree was cut down to make all sorts of handsome



household items for her dowry including the bride's chest of drawers. This charming tradition also underscores the quick growth of this interesting species. Practitioners of a traditional type of joinery called sashimono fashion Paulownia wood into furniture and other household implements without using nails.