

As seen in the Canberra Times

Autumn reprieve for mighty oaks of York Park

BY EWA KRETOWICZ, CITY REPORTER 10 May, 2011 08:08 AM

Almost 80 mature English oaks were in danger of being cut down seven years ago, but now a \$2 million redevelopment of York Park has ensured their future.

The park's official reopening on a chilly Canberra autumn day yesterday came a day before the 84th anniversary of the plantation's inaugural oak tree planting on 10 May, 1927.

The first sapling was planted by Prince Albert, Duke of York who later became King George VI. The Commonwealth Government expanded the park with a work program during the Great Depression with a further 78 English oak trees planted on a 12m grid. Another three oaks were planted during the redevelopment bringing the number to 82.

Minister for Regional Australia Simon Crean said he remembered walking through the park from the Hotel Kurrajong as a child. It was a place where Australians could come to reflect on their history.

"[It's] an early reminder of ties to the British empire [and] of the fledgling new capital of Australia at the time," Mr Crean said.

"It's important to remind ourselves of the past it's terribly important, people should be proud of where their nation is, but they should reflect on from where it has come."

In September 2007 the woody weeds and self-sown trees obscuring the plantation from view were removed, revealing the original formal grid which sets out 13 trees in six rows.

Its Commonwealth Heritage listing ensured the National Capital Authority commissioned a heritage management plan to guide York Park's conservation. A masterplan was designed by architect Romaldo Giurgola. NCA chief executive Gary Rake said the trees would have died without intervention.

"It was used as an informal car park. Occasionally people would back into the trees. They were also compacting the soil which damages the roots and the trees were starting to show sign of decline," Mr Rake said.

The multi-million dollar upgrade included new public access paths, stone walls and seating.

"Oaks can live for hundreds of years. I'd be surprised if we didn't get 50 or more years out of these trees."

Mr Rake paid tribute to the late Robert Boden who campaigned to save the park from redevelopment.