

Shrine's ray of reflection proves a fitting tribute

Bridie Smith

Despite retiring last year, Rod Deakin still has a very important job to do. As does his colleague Frank Johnston, who has been retired for close to 20 years.

Each year in the days before Remembrance Day the two former RMIT surveying lecturers repeat a ritual which started in the mid-1970s.

Carrying a theodolite, a rectangular mirror and a small stool, they climb the now familiar stone stairs which take them inside the Shrine's roof cavity. Climbing a few more steps, they emerge to daylight on the eastern side of the upper walkway and head for a low steel pillar with a circular mirror attached to the top of it.

With their understudy Steven Sheppard, the trio are in charge of making sure that on Tuesday when the clock ticks 11am, a beam of sunlight will strike the Stone of Remembrance in the main hall of the Shrine, about 35 metres below.

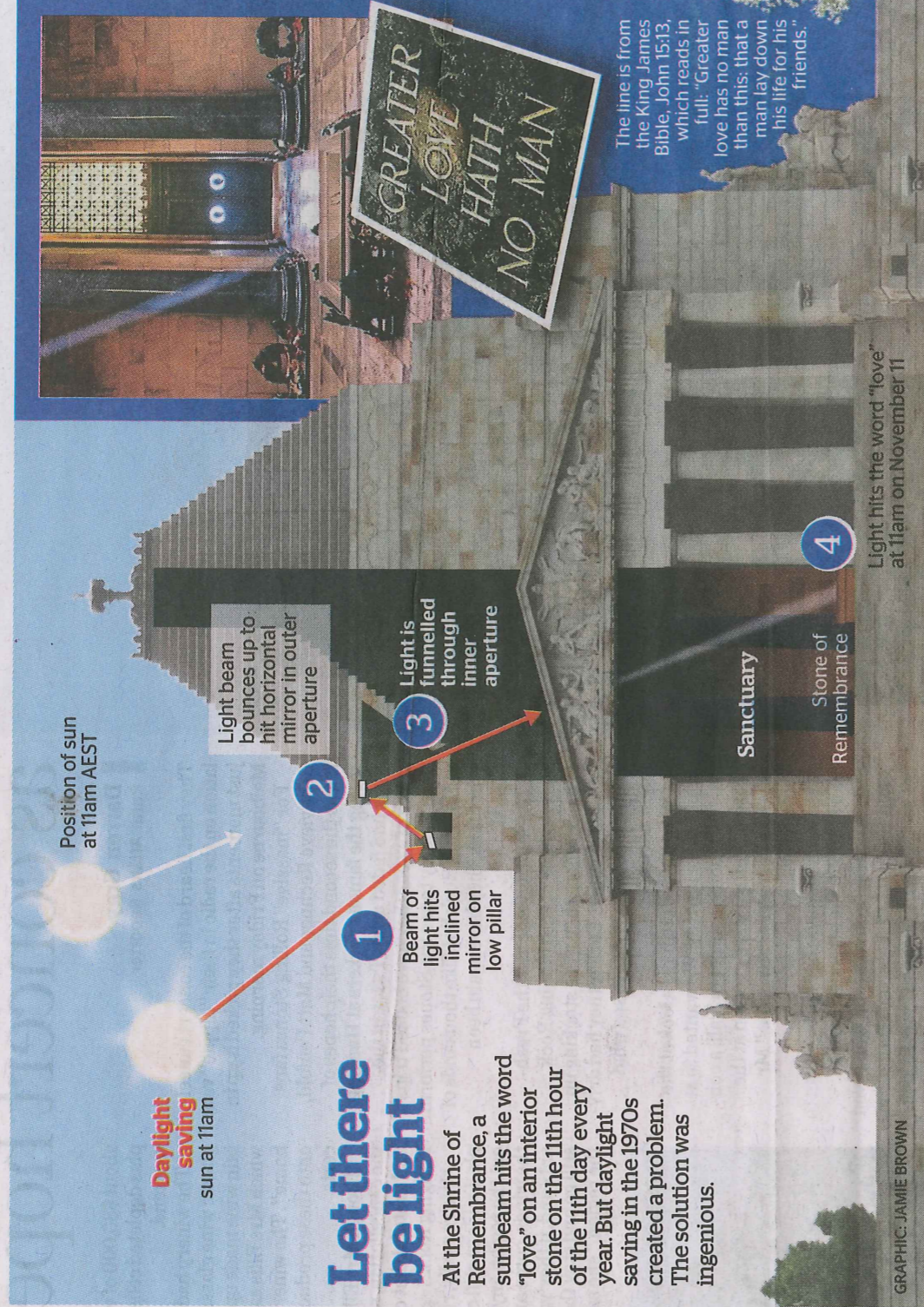
Sounds simple enough, right? After all the Shrine, which was completed in 1984, was designed for this very event.

But the introduction of daylight savings in Victoria in the summer of 1971-1972 meant that the beam of light was an hour behind, arriving on the granite at noon. An artificial light from a theatre spotlight was relied upon until 1976, when Mr Johnson devised a solution.

"It's beautifully simple but it is unusual," Mr Deakin said of his former lecturer's handiwork. "Frank's idea of the two mirrors was elegant.

Alternative solutions had involved a very large mirror, about a metre by half a metre, which would have been a real eyesore on the outside wall of the Shrine."

Instead, at 11am on Tuesday, the sunlight will hit an inclined mirror installed on the pole on the outer walkway. That mirror bounces the light up to a hole in the roof, where a horizontal mirror directs the sunlight through a hole in the ceiling and down



Daylight saving sun at 11am

Position of sun at 11am AEST

1 Light beam hits inclined mirror on low pillar

2 Light beam bounces up to hit horizontal mirror in outer aperture

3 Light is funnelled through inner aperture

4 Light hits the word "love" at 11am on November 11

The line is from the King James Bible, John 15:13, which reads in full: "Greater love has no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends."

GRAPHIC: JAMIE BROWN

Let there be light

At the Shrine of Remembrance, a sunbeam hits the word "love" on an interior stone on the 11th hour of the 11th day every year. But daylight saving in the 1970s created a problem. The solution was ingenious.

to the granite Stone of Remembrance. However, the trio never assume that everything will line up from year to year.

For a start, the pillar holding the first mirror on the upper walkway is slightly as cracks have appeared.

"We always carry out a check," Mr Johnston said. "There was a little bit of movement this year, so we did have to do a bit of a tweak."

The second narrow mirror, about half the size of an A4 page, is installed only on Remembrance Day morning.

"You can go down to the Shrine a week beforehand and about a week after at pretty well near midday and the sun will pass over the Stone of Remembrance," Mr Deakin said.

According to the trio's well-documented records, there have been just five Remembrance Days in 32 years where heavy cloud has kept the sunlight from reaching the granite stone.

The trio represent three generations of RMIT surveyors. Mr Johnston was Mr Deakin's lecturer in the 1970s and Mr Sheppard was a student when Mr Deakin was lecturing.



On web, tablet and mobile

Watch a video of the team's work to ensure light hits the Stone of Remembrance at the right time.

However, there are only a handful of people who know how to make the modifications to ensure the light beam hits the stone at 11am on November 11.

Although Mr Johnston will be overseas on Tuesday, the fact he has again played a part in one of the city's annual rituals is a source of great pride. "It's always been an enjoyable job we've done over the years," Mr Johnston said.

"You feel as though you are doing a bit of a public service and contributing. And I think a little bit of ceremony keeps the community together."

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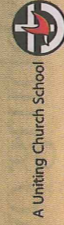
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