

The Tree Register

Newsletter No.20
2011/2012



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- Kew Lecture - Special Event for Members

Report from the Chairman

Colin Hall

Champion Trees of Britain & Ireland

The Tree Register Handbook

Our new Champion Tree Handbook was launched in June, in conjunction with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and such was the interest generated that The Tree Register was even given publicity in The Sun (a first!), as well as in many other newspapers and journals. We owe a tremendous vote of thanks to Owen Johnson, our registrar and the author, who did a magnificent job in collecting and compiling the data and photographs. We are also grateful to Kew Publishing for the very professional result. If you do not yet have a copy of the book, buy one now on the Kew Books website www.kewbooks.com.

Our initiative in promoting the first European Champion Tree Forum in 2010 was followed up by our German colleagues who convened a second Forum in October in Bonn; the forum was well attended, with David Alderman and Chris Carnaghan representing us. Read their report on page 5.



TROBI trustees with the champion *Zelkova serrata* at Hergest Croft
L-R Colin Hall, Roy Lancaster, Christopher Carnaghan, Thomas Pakenham, Maurice Foster and Tony Kirkham

The Heritage Lottery funded first phase of the Ancient Tree Hunt drew to a close last year, and The Tree Register has been appointed to maintain the ancient tree database for the Woodland Trust, continuing our partnership with them. David Alderman will manage this on our behalf and assist Jill Butler, the Woodland Trust's Conservation Policy Officer and ancient tree advisor,

supporting the volunteer tree verifiers. In 2011, we were delighted to welcome Alison Evershed as our new newsletter editor and Clair McFarlan who will be helping provide support for volunteers.

Philippa Mitchell retired as a trustee in October, having been involved with her late husband Alan (co-founder of The Tree Register) in his work for many decades and we will miss her very much. It is not quite the end of an era since we are very pleased that Philippa accepted our invitation to become an Honorary Vice President.

Congratulations are due to trustee Maurice Foster who received the Victoria Medal of Honour (VMH) from the RHS in the summer for services to horticulture; this is the highest honour awarded by the RHS and well deserved.

Once again thanks are due to all our supporters and helpers during 2011, and to David, Owen, the Ancient Tree Hunt verifiers, all our other tree recorders, Tim Hills and the Ancient Yew Group and Pamela Stevenson, our hard working secretary.

We hope to see as many of you as possible at Kew in June for our 2012 Alan Mitchell Lecture - see back page for further details.

Colin Hall
Chairman of Trustees

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We thank Paul McCartney
for his continued generosity in sponsoring this
newsletter

Registrars Report

Owen Johnson

A Splendid Year

2011 saw the culmination of eight years' recording work in the publication of the new *Champion Trees of Britain and Ireland*, but we are never going to run out of new trees to discover, and already local volunteers have tracked down a few replacement champions.

At the start of the year we didn't know of any tree-sized Pomegranates (*Punica granatum*) in Britain; now we have three. Bryan Roebuck's discovery in Richmond, reported in last autumn's *Latest News for Members*, was quickly trumped by two older though somewhat bushier examples in front of Trinity House, School Hill, Lewes (the double-flowered 'Plena'), independently reported by Peter Varnham and by local Trees and Landscape Officer Daniel Wynn.



Lewes Pomegranate in Flower (Daniel Wynn)

In Oxford, the city Tree Officer Chris Leyland has measured a splendid new champion for Western Catalpa (*C. speciosa*) in the garden of Worcester College, 21m tall and 114cm trunk thickness. Henry Girling - who started his career with trees in the 1950s, working for the illustrious dendrologist Maynard Greville - has been studying Wild Service Trees (*Sorbus torminalis*) in Hertfordshire and reports a new champion, 28.5m tall, in the Woodland Trust's Wormley Wood, Broxbourne.



Western Catalpa (*C. speciosa*) - at Worcester College, Oxford. (Chris Leyland)

Sufficient elms continue to withstand Elm Disease to spring surprises. In the Brighton and Hove control zone, the indefatigable Peter Bourne continues to research surviving examples of forgotten weeping and fastigate clones such as 'Lombartsii', 'Smithii', 'Pitteursii' and 'Klemmeri'. Driving through the small Suffolk village of Holton St Mary, Johnny Greenwood spotted the largest elm yet found to remain in the county, with a trunk approaching 2m thick, in a back garden opposite the church.



Giant Wild Smooth-leaved Elm at Holton St Mary, Suffolk. (Johnny Greenwood)

Flora of Cardiganshire

Arthur Chater's *Flora of Cardiganshire* is remarkable for its beautifully-illustrated wealth of information; Arthur has also spent thirty years recording the notable trees in what was previously among the least-studied of British counties, and the Flora includes a comprehensive list of trees cultivated here, with measurements of all the largest. The county champions list (type in 'Ceredigion' on our website) now has 243 entries. Arthur has found eight new UK champions, including a wild alder near Llanllyr with a single trunk 202cm thick at 1m in 2005, and much the biggest Oregon Alder (*Alnus rubra*), in the Penglais dingle on the Aberystwyth University campus, 32x76 in 2002.

The Flora is already out of print, but can be downloaded as a PDF file to a Dropbox account (follow the links from www.bsbi.org.uk/cardiganshire.html), or alternatively by posting a USB memory stick to: BSBI, 66 North Street, Shrewsbury, Shropshire,



New champion alder, on private farmland near Llanllyr, Ceredigion (Arthur Chater)

Hat-Trick

Owen Johnson

Discovering gardens with triple champions

The champion Chestnut-leaved Oak (*Quercus castaneifolia*) at Kew is so monumentally eye-catching that it's easy to forget that the trees which it grows beside and dwarfs are record-holders too and would dominate any other prospect: a Hybrid Wingnut (*Pterocarya x rehderiana*), 23m tall and 141cm trunk thickness in 2010, and a Golden Cappadocian Maple (*Acer cappadocicum* 'Aureum'), 16x93 at 0.6m.

Triple champions

A photo of this triumvirate by Edward Parker set me thinking of other instances where three or more national champion trees grow side-by-side, or were discovered one upon another. Triple champions can easily be visited in quite close proximity at Petworth Park in West Sussex where, along the eastern border of the gardens



Triple Champions at Kew Gardens (Edward Parker)

immediately north of the mansion, Madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*, 15x106 at 0.5m in 2010), Cut-leaved Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa* 'Laciniata', 15x90) and Hop-hornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*, 16x95) are record-holders for girth, and at Syon, across the Thames from Kew, where another clone of Cut-leaved Chestnut ('Aspleniifolia', 20x69 in 2002) and two American oaks, the Shingle (*Quercus imbricaria*, 27x72) and the Burr (*Q. macrocarpa*, 24x86) grow behind the statue of Flora.

More ambitious

If Britain and Ireland's champions were evenly distributed, each would be three miles from the last, but in reality they congregate in gardens like Kew where rarities have long been grown, and especially in collections with particularly congenial conditions.

Undocumented

A classic instance would be the Ardkinglas Woodland

Garden beside Loch Fyne in Argyllshire: in just one of hundreds of pineta established in the Scottish Highlands through the Victorian era, and hardly one of the more ambitious, Common Silver Fir (*Abies alba*, 46x303 in 2007 and possibly Britain's most massive tree), Grand Fir (*A. grandis*, 64.3x210 in 2010 and currently our tallest tree), Hinoki Cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*, 24x92 in 2007), Patagonian Cypress (*Fitzroya cupressoides*, 20x74 at 0.7m in 2007), Jeffrey's Hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana* var. *jeffreyi*, 25x62 in 2007), and Western Red Cedar (*Thuja plicata*, 47x189 in 2007) tower within falling distance of each other, alongside others almost as eminent. In the drier eastern side of Scotland, a similar concentration occurs at Doune Park near Stirling, with emphatic champions of Incense Cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*, 40x220 in 2009), Lawson Cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*, 40x150) and Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*, 43x225). This little collection remained undocumented until 1957, so we don't know how old these giant trees are; they stand completely hidden from the surrounding countryside along the floor of a small valley.

Victorian collection

At the opposite end of Britain, a sheltered slope, surrounding woodland, and deep, acidic, well-watered soils also conspire to create near-perfect growing conditions in a late-Victorian collection called Borden Wood in the Milland Vale of north-west Sussex, first shown to me by Tree Warden Paul Strike in 1997. As you walk up the drive you pass beneath the tallest known trees of three common sorts: Sawara Cypress (*Chamaecyparis pisifera*, 28.5x62 in 2007 and still adding height quite fast), Scarlet Oak (*Quercus coccinea*, 29x92) and Cherry Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*, 18x43, with many other trunks), while by the rear drive is a 21metre-tall tree of the often-bushy *Pterostyrax hispidus*. Cherry Laurel is familiar as an invasive bush, so to see a single tree with a 25m spread is quite intimidating.

Lavishly beautiful

One small garden which, thanks to its maturity and an outstanding location, has five champions and several other superb specimens, is West Porlock House, a bed-and-breakfast establishment on the north Somerset coast. A lavishly beautiful evergreen, tentatively identified as *Photinia nussia* and 23x66, was perhaps the most inspiring tree here when I first recorded them in

Champions may crop up in conditions which seem, at first, far less promising. One of the first Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) planted in England, around 1843 by Charles Lamb at Beauport Park near Hastings, is now a vast, layered, storm-broken hulk, its trunk 342cm thick under the first giant limbs in 2004. Soils at this end of the park are waterlogged and sticky – bad news for most conifers – but the cypress grows alongside a Giant Sequoia with a layered stem already as tall as its parent, and this is alongside one of the very best Irish Yews (14x127 on the single stem at the base). As the Victorian forester who planted them may have appreciated, the cypress and the yew (and the layer of the Giant Sequoia) grow directly above the free-draining metal surface of the Roman road from the adjacent ironworks to the nearest port at Sedlescombe, which is now hidden under half a metre of earth but was excavated during the 1990s.

Classic hat-trick

A classic hat-trick of champions is on the back lawn of Keeper's Lodge on the Durris estate on Deeside, with three Chinese silver firs symmetrical in size and appearance (*Abies fabri* subsp. *minensis* 19x60 in 2007, *A. recurvata* var. *ernestii* 20x67, and *A. squamata* 18x49), each probably from E H Wilson's first collections. Durris a century ago was the most ambitious tree collection to be established so far north; it has been built over, but most of the trees remain, so that another trio of champions can be found beside Banchory Drive, where the biggest *Kalopanax septemlobus* var. *maximowiczii* (15x80 at 0.8m in 2007), grows near the largest cut-leaved Elder I've seen ('Laciniata', 8x25) while, in the side garden of number 16 opposite, *Picea schrenkiana* from the Tien Shan (18x55) has made an unexpectedly handsome spruce.

Wooded quarries

I have been lucky enough to have studied the trees of Britain at a time when startling discoveries could still regularly be made. Tramping suburban London, in the summer of 2001 when Foot and Mouth Disease had shut down the countryside, proved the happiest tree-hunting of my life, constantly confounding the assumption that remarkable trees won't be found in unremarkable places. Maryon Park is a tiny park nestling amid old wooded quarries on the northern slopes of Shooters Hill; here I chanced on what is still probably the tallest and handsomest Red Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus x carnea*, 21x89 in 2010) next to the tallest fastigiate Robinia ('Pyramidalis', 20x36 but since blown down) and what at the time was a landmark example - also now dead - of a giant-leaved Chinese thorn (*Crataegus pinnatifida* var. *major*) which I was to go on to discover is one signature species of these old London parks.

Remaining fragments

Bath's four main public parks all have great trees, while Green Park by Charles Street is another very small public garden to boast three very big champions: the two outstanding examples of the double-flowered Horse Chestnut 'Baumannii' (27x178 at 0.5m and 31m x 167 at 0.8m in 2002), and a London Plane of the burry (and generally pint-sized) clone 'Pyramidalis' (23x182 at 1m).



Abies Squamata at Durris (Callum Pirnie)

I remeasured the grand-daddy of Britain's ashes, 307cm thick at 1m around three remaining fragments of its vast hollow trunk, in 2009, 130 years after it had last been recorded by Robert Hutchison; on the perimeter of a historic pinetum near Crieff, it is not a tree that can readily be visited. Fittingly, the previous tree I'd recorded, and the next, were champions too: *Pinus peuce* 25x143 and *P. resinosa* 26x60.

Glaucous selection

I find that the greatest number of champions I've recorded consecutively (during a general first-time survey, rather than in merely updating record-holders) was at Castle Howard in 2009, in a corner of Ray Wood north of the east gate, with a glaucous selection of *Abies koreana* ('Blue Standard', 10x21) followed by six exceptionally tall *Sorbus* (*esserteauana* x *scularis*, 12x28; *aucuparia* 'Aspleniifolia', 15x24; *aucuparia* 'Fructu Luteo' 11x24; x *hostii* 9x17 at 0.8m; *foliolosa* 8x18 at 0.8m; and *sargentiana* 11x29 at 1.1m).

Asiatic champions

Yorkshire is not a county noted for its outstanding trees, but another concentration of champions is at Thorp Perrow near Bedale. The Lime Avenue, planted by Sir Leonard Ropner largely in 1936, alternates commoner kinds with five handsome Asiatic champions (*japonica* 'Ernest Wilson' 21x41 in 2004, *mandshurica* 15x31, *mongolica* 20x59, *paucicostata* 21x39 and *tuan* 21x55).

Elm Watch

Peter Bourne

Discovering the Old, Bringing in the New

Brighton & Hove is now recognized as a haven for the elm (*Ulmus*). Fine, mature examples can be found - national champions; also a diversity exceeding more than any other city in the world. In the years when both towns were separate boroughs, the main thing that was done for *Ulmus* was to keep the population alive and away from Dutch elm disease. In 1987 hundreds fell in the October storm, being replaced by an increasing number of other trees to prevent a treeless environment. In 1997, to celebrate the uniting of the two boroughs, Brighton & Hove applied for - and won - National Collection status for *Ulmus*. Before the application there were still thousands of mature elms, covering a melancholy array of species, cultivars and hybrids. Trees from the Regency era, DED resistant clones from Holland and rare garden cultivars filled streets, embellished parks and graced private gardens.



Ulmus minor 'Lombartsii' - Peter Bourne

Rediscovered

Some trees remained mysterious; their characteristics covered not even by the most in-depth references. The internet changed all that. What's more, some elms on websites like Wikipedia, mentioned particular cultivars as being "not known to survive". How wrong we were. Elms like *Ulmus x hollandica* 'Pitteursii', *Ulmus minor* 'Lombartsii' and *Ulmus x hollandica* 'Smithii' are now rediscovered, in full maturity and are champion trees. The city then added to diversity by planting new clones from North America. *Ulmus* 'New Horizon', *Ulmus* 'Homestead' and *Ulmus x hollandica* 'Patriot' now fill the ranks where some trees were lost to DED, along with clones from Holland.

Earliest clones

Dutch Professor Hans Heybroek, whom in the 1960s sent elms for DED tests in the UK, was astonished to find some of his earliest clones in Brighton. Numbered clones like *Ulmus* '202' and *Ulmus* '148' are still frequently seen. Even Kew Gardens has to contend with the fact that we have the only groups of *Ulmus wallichiana* (Bhutan elm) in the British Isles. For more information contact Peter Bourne through the Tree Register, and look out for a report in the next newsletter.

Out and About

Judy Dowling—Ancient Tree Hunt Verifier

Champion Trees of Fife

The Kingdom of Fife is situated north of Edinburgh, sandwiched between the Tay estuary to the north, and the Forth estuary to the south, with the North Sea on its eastern fringe. It consists mainly of undulating, good quality arable farmland, with the Lomond Hills acting as a spine from west to east, across the centre. The northern part is covered in glacial deposits. Fife is not known for its trees; in one instance I found it recorded as 'the treeless county' of Scotland! Its neighbour, Perth and Kinross, to the North West, (Big Tree Country) overshadowing it, somewhat.

However, I have been the verifier for Fife for the Ancient Tree Hunt since early 2008, and during that time I have verified at least a dozen champion trees, some found by myself, and some recorded by others. Big trees are not in abundance here, but there are some gems amongst the mundane; some important for size, and some for rarity.



The Cockairnie Sweet chestnut - Judy Dowling

Cockairnie Sweet chestnut

The most obvious inclusion is the Sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) at Cockairnie House, Aberdour, also noted in the Heritage trees of Scotland book. I visited it on a very cold snowy day in January 2011, and was immediately struck by its huge girth of 8m 91cm at 0.90m, the largest tree I have ever measured in Fife! It is one of 3 Scottish champions in Fife, and was thought to be planted around the 1500's.

Golden sycamore Corstophinense

Further west, just east of the Kincardine Bridge, and the border with Perth and Kinross, in Torryburn, is a very impressive sycamore, (*Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Corstophinense'). It is situated on waste land on the Forth estuary, to the south of Craigflower House. The land it is growing on would have been part of the grounds of the house originally, and there are several large old trees in here. I measured it at 4m 57cm at 1.20m, below its huge limbs which stretch out and down around it, some touching the ground. In May it had golden leaves, standing out amongst the other sycamore around it, but by June they were green and no longer noticeable. Owen Johnson noted that this tree was either an early propagation or a sport, of the original Corstophinense, in Edinburgh.



Corstophinense sycamore at Craigflower House - Judy Dowling

Previously unknown yew

Travelling north east of here, we reach the latest champion tree find, yet to be accredited – a fine upstanding yew tree, (*Taxus baccata*) in the grounds of Lindores House, on the shore of Loch Lindores, SE of Newburgh. It has a girth of 4m 81cm at 1m 50, and is very impressive indeed! It reaches up into the sky, not hugging the ground like some of the yews I have seen in Fife, and is many branched; these reach down to the ground from over 10ft, and the circumference of the crown is over 60 m. The house dates from 1820, but the tree seems to predate this by possibly a couple of hundred years.

St. Andrew's Botanic Garden

Next, we move onto St Andrew's, the ancient university town on the east coast. It has 2 champion trees in the quad of St Mary's college; a Holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) and a hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), the latter reputedly



Lindores House Yew - David Alderman

planted in 1563, it is noted as a heritage tree, but only remnants remain of the main trunk. The Holm oak has a girth of 3m 92cm (2007), and was planted c.1740. Also in St Andrew's is a very northerly champion apricot, (*Prunus armeniaca*), the British champion! It is situated in the car park of the Botanical gardens. It is covered in lichen and has evidence of fungal growth, but in good years it still bears fruit, although the Curator, Bob Mitchell, says it is the only apricot to grow *dried* apricots...!

Last, but certainly not least, my favourite tree of all in Fife, a Field maple (*Acer campestre*), growing on the field edge of Kemback woods, Kemback House, to the east of St Andrews. I came across this tree while taking nursery children into the woods for forest kindergarten experience, and often wondered what it was.....one day I went up there, and discovered someone had very kindly labelled it! It has a fine main bole, and is in good health, although it lost some smaller branches in the recent gales up here. At 3m 25cm, at 0.90m, it is a very worthy Scottish champion.



Kemback Field maple - Judy Dowling

The Llanfoist Yew - A Fallen Giant

This ancient yew at St. Ffwyst church in Llanfoist, Abergavenny, Powys, was felled by storm force winds on Thursday 5th January 2012. By Monday 9th all that remained was a large stump.



Earliest records

The known history of this tree can be traced to 1836, when JE Bowman's article on *The longevity of the yew, and the antiquity of planting it in the churchyard* appeared in the *Magazine of Natural History*. He referred to an account he "had read somewhere" in which the yew at Llanfoist had been measured with a circumference of 33 feet. Expecting to see one of Britain's largest girthed yews, he visited the churchyard, only to be "disappointed to find

that this measurement must have included a great arm or bough that proceeds from the very base of the trunk on the south side, and therefore formed no part of it." Bowman tried to correct the misleading measurement that had lured him to Llanfoist by adding the following details: "Even with this bough, the circumference at 3ft. high, is only 27ft. 6in.; without it the circumference of the real trunk, at the same height, is only 21ft. 6in." It is not known when the great arm finally snapped off and opened up the south side of the tree as we see it in the 2005 photographs.

Now that the old yew had appeared in print it attracted more visitors and writers. The entry in *Arboretum and Fruticetum Part III* of 1838 reported that it grew on a raised platform within a circle of stones. "Since a circle was a sacred symbol among the Eastern nations of antiquity," the writer thought it would be interesting to know whether the practice he had seen here and at other places might be "a remnant of this superstition."

In 1845 John White's *Guide to town and neighbourhood of Abergavenny* described it as "one of the most aged and remarkable yew trees in the county, which has been the theme of poets. This tree is believed to have existed since the time of the Druids." The renowned botanist, Edwin Lees, was less speculative, choosing in 1851 to describe it simply as a "noble tree."

Gardener's Chronicle

We have already seen how an exaggerated 33 feet girth measurement persuaded Bowman to visit the tree. His attempt to present a more accurate record was to prove unsuccessful, for when John Lowe wrote *The Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* (1897), he ignored Bowman's measurements, and quoted instead a girth of 32 feet taken from the 1874 *Gardener's Chronicle*. The outcome of this was the Llanfoist yew's inclusion in Lowe's list of the 27 largest girthed yews in England and Wales. It is not the only yew to incorrectly find its way onto this



When carrying out research for *The Yew Trees of England* (1958), Swanton was sent the following notes by the Revd. H.S.Richards: "Trunk hollow, but the tree is in very vigorous growth. Several very large branches have been cut off some time in the past, but the diameter of umbrage is still 15 yards, and no branch is supported. The roots protrude above the ground and it is difficult to get a true ground level measurement, but I think the girth may fairly be said to be 32' as stated by Dr. Lowe." And so in spite of Bowman's attempt, 120 years earlier, to present an accurate record of the Llanfoist Yew, it continued to be mistakenly regarded as one of the largest girthed in Britain.



1998 (Tim Hills)

Damaged by fire

My first visit to record this tree was in April 1998. It was in a sad state, hidden in a thicket of elder and brambles, its leaves predominantly brown and its interior damaged by fire. But there were also signs of new growth and I was optimistic that the tree would eventually revive.

Girth was 23' 9" at 3'.

Two years later in 2000 the area around the tree had been cleared, and it once again took pride of place in the churchyard.



2000 (Tim Hills)



Above left - 2000 (Tim Hills) and above right - 2005 (Geoff Garlick)

New growth

Between 2000 and 2005 the tree grew rapidly, especially close to the ground, where several new branches had developed and were flourishing. This sort of growth is characteristic of a yew under stress.

And it is one of these branches that has survived the collapse, giving the tree every chance of recovery. Experience tells us that a stump like this will take decades, sometimes even centuries to decay. That is long enough for the stump to be used as a form of scaffolding along which new growth can develop. Its progress will be monitored.

For more ancient yew profiles go to www.ancient-yew.org the web site of the Ancient Yew Group hosted by the Tree Register

Wild Service Tree

Colin Hall

It's all in the name

Winkworth Arboretum, famed for its Autumn colours, has one of the finest collection of trees in Surrey. When I was there recently, a fine specimen native Wild Service Tree was holding its own against the acers, nyssas and other sorbus, with mixtures of yellows, dark reds and purples. It is one of my favourite native trees and I became curious as to how it came by its various names.

Times gone-by

Sorbus torminalis, the Wild Service Tree, is generally only found in ancient woodland, in hedgerows on the clays of eastern and southern England or on limestone in the west. It is said that, as with our native limes, the Wild Service Tree arrived and spread throughout Britain when the climate was far more continental than it is today, with hot summers and cold winters. Being a bird-dispersed species, often producing abundant fruit, it no doubt spread readily across the country.

Before the introduction of hops, it was used to flavour beer and was also made into an alcoholic drink known as 'chequers'. Many inns specialised in this drink and it is possible that the fruits gave their names to the pubs - Chequers Inns - which served the drink. Another view is that the Chequers Inns came first, the name indicating the willingness of the innkeeper to change money, and that the tree and its fruits derived their local name from being served in Chequers Inns.

Berried treasure

The fruits can also apparently be used to flavour other alcoholic drinks such as whisky in the same way as sloes are used with gin. The fruit were once sold in Kentish markets as 'chequers berries'. Eaten on its own, the fruit is said to taste like dates – but not until it is well 'bletted' (meaning 'rotten') which may account for it having gone out of favour!



The former champion Wild Service Tree at Udimore, East Sussex, which collapsed in 2000. (Jeannie MacKinnon)

Bottoms up

The tree is called "wild" to distinguish it from *Sorbus domestica*, the True Service Tree. Some say that "Service" is derived from the Latin *sorbus* by way of Old English *syrf* and is, apparently, unrelated to the English verb "to serve". Others say that 'service' comes from *cerevisia*, a Roman alcoholic drink made by fermenting grain and *Sorbus* berries.

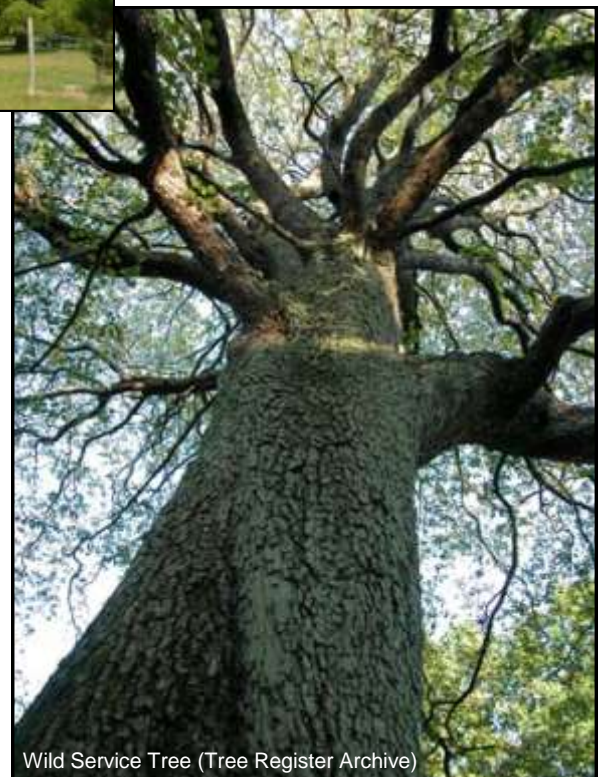
Medicinal compound

It is also known as the Chequer(s) Tree or Checker(s) Tree, after the fruit which is sometimes called "checkers" and may have been derived from its spotted pattern. The fruits were traditionally known as a herbal remedy for colic and *torminalis* (part of the Latin name) means 'good for colic'.

Chequered history

There is a great deal of folklore surrounding the fruit.

Alan Mitchell described it as a splendid and unusual specimen tree for any garden with the necessary space.



Wild Service Tree (Tree Register Archive)

Meeting in Bonn 8th-9th October 2011

David Alderman

European Champion Tree Forum

The second European Champion Tree Forum (ECTF) was hosted by the German Dendrology Society (DDG), German Arboreta Society and the Härle Arboretum. Some twenty enthusiasts took part, representing ten countries.



European Champion Tree Forum at Bonn Botanic Garden (Rob McBride)

Ten European countries

Great Britain was represented by David Alderman and Christopher Carnaghan of the Tree Register and Rob McBride (Ancient Tree Hunt). Arriving on the Friday evening, they met others in a traditional German winebar in the Oberkassel neighbourhood of Bonn. Aubrey Fennell, representing The Irish Tree Society and Tree Register of Ireland, joined the full group meeting on Saturday 8th in the hall of a private school, a venue kindly organised by Michael Dreisvogt, Director of the Härle Arboretum.

Champion Tree of the Year

The meeting was enthusiastically chaired by Gordon Mckenthum (DDG). Presentations were given in English by Roel Jacobs (Belgium) on bringing people together through trees and art; Hendrik Relve (Estonia), the leading authority on the remarkable trees of Estonia, with a database of 2,000 trees; Gordon Mackenthum (Germany) spoke about the German Champion Tree Initiative and introduced the idea "Champion Tree of the Year", as they have had in Germany. David Alderman (GB) presented results of the 5 year Ancient Tree Hunt, recording over 100,000 trees and 1,000 champion trees. Volunteer Verifier Rob McBride was on hand to answer questions and meet fellow FaceBook fans!

Living Legends

Miklós Kovács (Hungary) gave a presentation on The Register of Hungarian Champion Trees. 50 volunteers have collected data on 4,000 trees and, like Estonia, they believe their oldest tree is c.700 years old. Susana Dominguez Lerena (Spain) gave a presentation on her Trees Living Legends project. Remarkable trees were illustrated including the Holy Chestnut of Istan, Rascafrias's Yew and a huge olive tree. Jeroen Philippona (Netherlands representing the "International Group") presented Monumental Trees, an international website, inspired and created by Tim Bekeart.

European Standard

After lunch, a measuring workshop recorded a Giant Sequoia in the school grounds, returning with a variety of girths, representing the different guidelines people worked with. It was agreed there was no need to conform to one standard procedure, but that several girth measurements at specified heights should be taken of champion trees, so European champions could be compared more easily. The British and Irish method of recording tree form was explained by Aubrey Fennell and proposed to become the European standard. Monumental Trees www.monumentaltrees.com was accepted as the online database of the ECTF.

The day ended with a tour of the Härle Arboretum, guided by Michael Dreisvogt and the opportunity to see some of Michel Brunner's (Switzerland) amazing tree photos. On the Sunday morning delegates met at the Bonn Botanic Garden for a guided walk. They measured the tallest *Carya ovata* (Shagbark Hickory) in Europe at 34.4m.

Poland in 2014

Piotr Krasinski of the Polish Dendrological Society has offered to host a ECTF meeting in 2014.



Stephan Geifer (Head Gardener) and Michael Dreisvogt in the Bonn Botanic Garden with the European champion Lacebark pine, *Pinus bungeana* (David Alderman)



The Alan Mitchell Lecture 2012

Saturday 9th June
The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew

As many members know, every two or three years we organise a meeting for members and guests in memory of our founder Alan Mitchell. The centre-piece of the day is the Alan Mitchell lecture, given by a distinguished speaker on a topic likely to appeal to our members and to have been of particular interest to Alan.

The Remarkable Ginkgo by Peter Del Tredici

This year our speaker will be Peter Del Tredici, Senior Research Scientist at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University in the USA. He will be talking about the remarkable maidenhair tree, *Ginkgo biloba*. Peter is a seasoned plant hunter, prolific author and well-known public speaker, with a long-standing interest in ginkgos.

Ginkgos are among the wonders of the natural world, described sometimes as living fossils because they have existed, with only very small changes, for over 50 million years. Once widespread across the northern hemisphere, ginkgos became almost extinct during successive ice ages, hanging on precariously only in parts of China. Western botanists, who first saw them during the eighteenth century, while astonished by the size and age of some specimens, decided that ginkgos were extinct in the wild.

Peter Del Tredici has been intensively studying ginkgos since 1989. Working with Chinese botanists he has managed to visit several of the areas in eastern and southwest China where ginkgos still persists as a wild or semi-wild tree. He has also studied the tree in cultivation, both for ornamental and medicinal purposes.

Book Now! Includes free entry to Kew!

Our day at Kew will also include guided tours of the gardens (including some of the greatest Champion Trees), a chance to meet other members over a glass of wine, and the occasion to bid for some rare and unusual trees and shrubs in our silent auction. **Tickets £18**, include entry to Kew, and can be purchased by post from our Secretary, Pamela Stevenson (see page 2 for details). Members and their guests will enjoy priority booking until the end of March 2012.