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Report from the Chairman
Colin Hall

Welcome to New Members

I am delighted to be able to take this opportunity to welcome many of you who have joined The Tree Register since our last newsletter. We launched our membership scheme some fifteen months ago and have been heartened by the response, with membership exceeding 500. Membership income is so vital to a small charity, such as ours, which has no endowment, helping to finance our annual expenses and so enabling us to carry on our work.

Our website develops

Our website has continued to develop as an effective means for us to communicate not only with our members and supporters but also tree lovers everywhere. The Champion Tree List is now located on our members only section of the website and we are very grateful to Kit Neill for his help in getting this data on to the site for members to access easily.

Roy Lancaster to give memorial lecture

We will be holding our biennial Alan Mitchell Memorial Lecture this April at Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire, where Roy Lancaster will be giving the lecture on "Trees for Connoisseurs". We look forward to meeting many of you there but I have to tell you, if you were not one of the early birds, all tickets were sold out within a few weeks. The event will be held, by kind permission of The Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum, in The Great Oak Hall, which was opened by HRH The Prince of Wales in November. This will be preceded, provided the current restrictions imposed as a result of the Foot and Mouth crisis are eased, by guided walks around the splendid Arboretum. We hope to be able to hold similar events for members but need an Events Organiser to help us with this. If you are interested in helping, please do contact us.

New trustee

The Trustees were pleased to welcome Philippa Mitchell, Alan's widow, as a new trustee this year. Philippa's knowledge of trees and Alan's work will be of great value to the Tree Register.



Our thanks to you

Our programme of work relies on the dedication and hard work of our Registrar, David Alderman, and our Assistant Registrar, Owen Johnson. On behalf of the Trustees, I would like to warmly thank them. We are also most grateful to our Secretary, Pamela Stevenson, our volunteer tree measurers, our members and sponsors for their continuing support and enthusiasm.

Tree Register Members Ian Hopcraft (left) and Richard Garnett (right) with Estate Manager Michael Harrison and the largest oak tree in Buckinghamshire at Wotton House. (Tree Register)

The Ancient Tree Forum

Jill Butler – Conservation Policy Officer, Woodland Trust

Conserving our veteran trees

The Ancient Tree Forum is the main UK organisation concerned solely with ancient trees and has always championed their conservation. Initially this was at home but it is now also active in mainland Europe.

Combined operations

The Ancient Tree Forum was a major player in the Veteran Tree Initiative, a 5-year project spearheaded by English Nature that came to an end last year. It generated great interest in old trees and to capitalise on the growing awareness, the Ancient Tree Forum and the Woodland Trust forged a new joint working arrangement. The two organisations are committed to working together to secure a long term future for old trees because of their inestimable value for wildlife and their historical and cultural significance.

The two organisations want to see:

no further avoidable loss of ancient trees through development pressure, agricultural clearance, mismanagement or poor practice.

ancient trees being properly managed. This will require research and education in management techniques for ancient trees and their surroundings.

the development of a succession of future ancient trees, properly identified, protected and managed as part of a new cultural landscape, in sympathy with modern society and reflecting present day values as well as those of the past.

greater awareness and understanding of the value and importance of ancient trees. The part that ancient trees play as a host to a specialised range of wildlife together with their importance as part of the cultural landscape and social history of the UK is not widely appreciated. One of the ways in which ancient trees will be protected and cared for is in developing understanding of their importance and concern for their future.

Meeting the threat to our ancient trees

One of the greatest threats to our ancient trees is misunderstanding and lack of care. Positive action is crucial to conserve them and the wildlife they support. As a priority, action will be focused on ancient trees where they occur in woodlands and in sufficient numbers in the wider countryside to be of real wildlife value. This will involve recording their presence (many are already recorded on the Tree Register) and tracking their future care. It will also involve finding ways to encourage and support owners of trees to act to protect not just the current

generation of ancient trees but to commit to future generations. To do the right thing owners, land managers and their advisors must have access to the most up to date information on best practice and be inspired by knowing that they are contributing to a living heritage of international value. The Woodland Trust will contribute to the understanding of how to look after old trees by the way it manages ancient trees on its own properties.



Veteran Field maple, Savernake Forest,
Wiltshire (J Davis)

Greater protection

In addition it will be necessary to ensure there is a robust system of regulation and legislation which recognises their importance to society and has mechanisms to protect them adequately. Lobbying for greater protection and providing the necessary best practice advice and support will be key elements of the two organisations strategy in the next two decades.

If you would like to keep in touch with the work of the two organisations or join in with one of the national events, log onto the web site found on the links page.

www.woodland-trust.org.uk/ancient-tree-forum

Registrars Report David Alderman

Practical solutions to identify champion trees

The advantage in having seen nearly every tree recorded on the Register meant Alan Mitchell could assess which trees were the best and worthy of champion status. If asked about their shape and form he could tell you. Dealing with raw data without descriptive notes such knowledge is not available. A tree measured near the ground may be single stemmed or a coppice stool. Lacking such vital information requires some data to be treated with caution until the tree can be seen and the Register updated.

Joint agreement

Several years ago, Tree Register supporters actively measuring trees were consulted regarding a proposal to create a recording system that identified different tree growth characteristics. This coincided with Thomas Pakenham researching for Meetings with Remarkable Trees and his frustration on finding many large trees were frauds. The Tree Register of Ireland took this a stage further and we jointly agreed the use of three main categories A, B and C for their survey work. Comments received from Tree Register "tapers" were most valuable in helping towards a workable solution.

New categories being used are as follows:

Category A

Trees growing with a clearly defined single **clean** stem measured at 1.5m.

Category B

Trees growing with a clearly defined single stem which have:

1. natural features that increase the girth at 1.5m.
- or
2. to be measured at a height other than 1.5m.

Category C

Trees growing without a clearly defined single stem at ground level, such as multiple stems or coppice.

Category D

Trees that are relics made up of separated parts, un-measurable and/or not comparable with another tree.

Exceptional cases

Any recording system needs to be clearly defined, easily understood and easy to use by those people collating the information in the field. In reality there are an infinite number of growth forms and there will always be borderline and exceptional cases. After TROI spent a successful year using categories A, B and C, I felt it appropriate to include details on our new web site, which some of you will be familiar with. Category D has since been added so a number of surviving veterans may continue to be recognised.

Comprehensive list of champions

The result of this is that in the future we can provide a more comprehensive list of champion trees than at present, with many species represented by several champions. This will not only include the largest

and tallest but also more of the remarkable trees growing in Britain and Ireland which are worthy of champion status. A few hours spent looking at trees in a park can soon highlight these diverse growth characteristics. The need for a measurer to make additional notes is therefore always essential. For anyone not convinced that this is particularly important, hopefully the photographs shown here highlight some of the problems we encounter!



The Howlett Zoo Sweet chestnut, Kent (O. Johnson) Category B



A thicket of low branches from a Monterey cypress (O. Johnson) Category B



Separate stems or one tree? The Llangernyw, Clwyd yew has been reported elsewhere as the biggest yew. (T. Hills) Category D

Mistletoe

Owen Johnson

Buckeyes – an exotic host

Mistletoe on *Aesculus flava* (O. Johnson)

Mistletoe is a parasite which one could readily imagine is getting scarcer - like so much of our native flora - but which a recent survey by Plantlife shows is actually holding its own. It is of particular interest to the tree-recorder because of the broad range of taxa on which it can crop up, and I cannot imagine what the secrets of its predilections are.

I cannot remember seeing mistletoe on the common horse chestnut, but the yellow buckeye – an American representative of the same genus - is perhaps its favourite host species. Buckeyes are nowhere common in this country, but specimens in areas where mistletoe is already present are often smothered. Orchard apples are a traditional host, and I have spotted mistletoe on various trees of the rose family, such as Pissard's purple plum, the 'Paul's Scarlet' hawthorn and rowans (including *Sorbus* 'Ghose' in the Heather Garden at Windsor Great Park). Poplars are also favoured, and again the mistletoe seems happy to colonise a few exotic taxa, such as the hybrids 'Regenerata' and 'Serotina Aurea'.



Champions take it in their stride

Among *Acers*, both the field maple and Norway maple are regular hosts, but not, to my knowledge, the sycamore. As a partial parasite, mistletoe must reduce the vigour of its host, but only in the case of an exceptional infestation is this evident: a heavy crop of mistletoe has not prevented a red maple in the pinetum at Bagshot Park from growing to champion size (19x129@0.8m in 2000. This tree is now moribund, but old age alone can account for this.) Even more remarkable is the abundance of mistletoe on one of the most emphatic champions it has been my pleasure to find: a silver maple of 23x169, with a clean straight bole and a huge symmetrical crown, growing in woodland behind Wallage Lane near Rowfant in West Sussex. There are a number of silver maples along the lane here: all are large, and several have mistletoe, the only hosts of this species that I have seen.

All of these host species have fairly open crowns, but mistletoe is also characteristic of common lime, a tree with very dense foliage. Curiously, it was mistletoe growing on oak which was sacred to the Druids, and yet I know of very few recent records of oak as hosts. The most obscure exotic on which I have so far found it is a *Davidia* in a garden in Watlington, Kent, but doubtless other tapeworms will have still more records.

With its sticky berries that are eaten by birds – who then wipe the remaining flesh off their beaks, along with the seeds, on a convenient twig – mistletoe has a highly effective distribution strategy.

Toothwort

Blood stained teeth

Much scarcer and harder to locate is another native tree parasite, toothwort, which again seems to be remarkably cosmopolitan. Toothwort has no chlorophyll. It feeds from the roots of trees and is only visible in spring when its flower-spikes poke above the ground. The individual flowers look rather like blood-stained teeth, and according to the rule of correspondence the plant was traditionally used to treat toothache.

With its dubious dispersal powers, toothwort is an indicator of ancient woodlands, and is characteristic of limestone. It seems likely that it was carried into East Sussex in the nineteenth century on the roots of some 'Regenerata' poplar trees planted around Alexandra Park in Hastings; it has since spread to a number of native trees in ancient woodland near the town. And it has now appeared in Swansea on the roots of a young 'Sapporo Autumn Gold' elm in Cwmdonkin Park.

Rotherham Teak

John White

Plant a locust for durable timber

Our secretary was recently asked whether Teak (*Tectona grandis*) grows, or might have ever grown in Britain, Rotherham to be more precise. The enquirer recollected logs called "teak" being harvested on a local estate. There appear to be no botanical or forestry references to teak ever growing anywhere out of doors in the UK. It is a native to India and Burma and an introduced species only in similarly tropical localities such as Java. Many other woods are misnamed teak but none of them will tolerate the cold winter climate of Britain.

So what was Rotherham Teak? My best guess was Black Locust (*Robinia*). The wood is strong, stable, very durable and resistant to rot and insect attack. It even looks and feels like teak. In the past it was widely grown in Britain, particularly in dry sandy eastern regions. It is an American tree from the Appalachian Mountains but widely planted elsewhere in the USA and indeed Europe. It was introduced to France by J.Robin (hence Linnaeus' name *Robinia*) early in the seventeenth century, but the availability of cheap imported tropical hardwoods has prevented much wider use in Europe. In addition some estate owners resisted it because the bark is poisonous to grazing animals such as horses. Foresters also detest the viciously sharp spines.

Suckers for problem places

Although old specimens hollow out, become brittle and randomly drop branches the potential for this tree is enormous. Its ability to produce new stems from root suckers makes it ideal for covering unstable re-formed land over rubbish tips or quarry and coal waste. Once established on a site, re-generation of subsequent crops is never a problem. In fact the risk of invasive sucker growth on to neighbouring land is probably more of a problem. The American variety *rectissima*, the Shipmast Locust, has long straight stems, as the common name suggests. William Cobbett imported seed of this variety to Britain from Long Island in 1819 and distributed a million plants. A few elderly straight specimens surviving today may be the remnants of this incredible venture.

Cobbett's hearts of locust

Cobbett in his book *The Woodlands* (1825) tells us that he found his Shipmast Locusts while spending two and a half years "in voluntary banishment, for the purpose of avoiding those dungeons into which such numbers of the public-spirited and virtuous reformers were put". He claimed "no man in America will pretend to say that he ever saw a bit of it (locust wood) in a decayed state". "It is to this timber that the American ships owe a great deal part of their superiority to ours". Compared to stanchions of "spine" oak they resist "a sea three times as heavy". Trunnels, the wooden pins holding side planks in place, made of locust last twice as long as oak.

Typical of the numerous observations Cobbett made about Locust wood farm fence posts concerned one which has stood in the ground "upwards of fourscore years" and remained perfectly sound. He noted that "it is not a piece of stuff that was cut out of the heart of a tree; but the whole of a little tree that was put into the ground, bark and all; and that was, in all probability, not above seven or eight

years old". The first Locust trees which he planted at his house in Botley, Hants. in 1805 equalled the height of the three story building by 1817.

Cobbett as taper

His precise measurements will no doubt amuse TROBI measurers. "First, the height to the tip-top; Second, the number of inches round at the bottom, then at three feet high, then at six feet high, then at nine feet high, then at twelve feet high. If there were more than one limb, both, or all the limbs, were to be measured as high up as twelve feet". For example:- Tree No.1 Age 17 yrs (planted at Botley, April 1807) Height 42 ft. Inches Round; 68" at bottom. 58" at 3 ft up. 40" at 4 ft. 32" at 9 ft, limb one. 22" at 9 ft, limb two. 25" at 12 ft, limb one. 18" at 12 ft, limb two.

It is difficult today to understand why we mess about with expensive treated softwood fence posts when it has been demonstrated that Locust fence posts, which are almost indestructible, can be grown in just 8 years. Furthermore new trees spring from the roots of old ones after they have been cut down and in theory the supply of free posts is indefinite.

If anyone has experienced difficulty germinating Robinia seed it is worth trying another of Cobbett's recommendations, to steep the seeds in boiling water, then leave them to soak for 24 hrs