

Tree News from the Regions

April 2001

SCOTLAND

Archie Smith

Douglas of the Firs

The bi-centenary of the birth of David Douglas occurred on the 25th June 1999. He was born in the Parish of Scone in the old county of Perthshire. His name endures in the nomenclature of botany, in the legends of North West America, and at Scone. Although people relating to those interests and areas know his name, only a few know his amazing life story. From Scone came a message which will help to change that.

David Douglas Society

Ten years ago, the people of the parish raised funds to repair the Douglas monument by the old church. Erected in 1841 by the Royal Horticultural Society of Perthshire, it was sadly decayed. At the service of re-dedication was the President of the David Douglas Society of North America. His part in the proceedings, a slide talk in the church hall was inspirational. Thoughts then turned to another form of memorial, a David Douglas Garden. A society of 'Friends of the David Douglas Garden' was founded and a suitable site sought. A small one was started, but in time ambitions for a greater one grew. This was coupled with thoughts of introducing him to a wider world. During May of 1997, The David Douglas Society was founded at Scone with an initial membership of 32. Now it is nearer five times that and continues to grow from Scone through Scotland and beyond. It may yet rival its North American predecessor.

Worthy guardians

Scone is a special site of Scottish heritage. There, kings were crowned on a sacred stone. Celtic preachers proclaimed a new faith and the Cuddles, their monastic brotherhood, settled. In time they were replaced by Augustinian monks and an abbey founded. Later the site was secularised and granted by King James the 6th and 1st to a member of the Murray family. They were to become Law Lords of England, enobled as Earls of Mansfield. Today, they are worthy guardians of this special site and encourage all to see its treasures. Peacocks prance on the manicured lawns before the Palace. Behind the boundary wall of the former Abbey is the area designated as the Wild Garden. Here is the oldest stone monument, the market cross of the medieval church burgh. Nearby is its sylvicultural equivalent a tree of character if not outstanding height. A plaque tells that this tree was grown from seed sent from the Columbia River in 1826 by David Douglas. He was never to forget his first employer, the third Earl of Mansfield.

Scientific traveller

David Douglas left primary education at age eleven to begin a seven year apprenticeship as a gardener. Realising where this profession might lead he returned to higher education. His next post gave him access to the greatest private botanical library of that time. The Botanic Garden in Glasgow which was managed by the University completed his formal education. He attended the lectures of the Professor of Botany, the celebrated William Jackson Hooker. Douglas had botanised in the Highlands previously and now helped Hooker with his outreach. Well grounded, well educated, experienced in field work over tough terrain, he was to be a 'scientific traveller', to use Sir Joseph Bank's term. His field was to be North America.

Ecological utopia

First, he was sent to the long settled North Eastern United States primarily to procure fruit trees and with a lesser remit to botanise. Here he met the great and good of their botanical world. All were impressed with his potential, both the botanists in New York and also the great landowners of the Hudson Valley. Their good reports to his sponsor, the London Horticultural Society, speeded him to the ecological utopia of the West Coast of the Continent in 1825. North of San Francisco there was no European settlement. Fur traders had followed the mighty Columbia River from its source in the Rocky Mountains to its outlet in the Pacific Ocean. Their little line of Forts from there back to Hudson Bay was to be David Douglas's line of outreach over the following two years. Ecotopia, to use a modern American geographer's term, the land of the rain forest between the Pacific Mountain chain and the sea, occupied him first and provided his greatest return. Often alone with Indians, friendly or otherwise, he explored and botanised. The journal, which he religiously kept, is an account of adventures beyond the imagination of the writers of fiction. The collecting of Sugar Pine (*Pinus lambertiana*) alone almost cost him his life. Crossing the Rocky Mountains with a little party, he returned home via Hudson Bay

early in 1828. The harvest of his labours had preceded him. Fame followed, but praise preceded neglect. He had saturated the Society with plants and they had their use of him. However events in the diplomatic field changed that. The United Kingdom required a survey of the great river Columbia, to trump United States expansionist ideas.

The final chapter

David Douglas returned to Fort Vancouver in 1830, the servant of many masters, but remained as always his own man. In California, he corresponded with the Countess of Mansfield and Professor Hooker. He received a long sought invitation from the Governor of Alaska to come to the territory of the Czar where he would be welcomed and enabled to return to Europe via Siberia. This was his personal project, long planned. He resigned his position and pressed on, reaching Fort St. James, by Stuart Lake, in new Caledonia. This was his last post before crossing to Alaska. He had left it too late. Blind in one eye, poor in the other, worn out overall, he returned to the Columbia and the road home. He sought a ship at Honolulu. None came, so he botanised on Hawaii. On the 13th July 1834, in the 35th year of his life, David Douglas died a death terrible to tell. His remains were found in a cattle trap occupied by a wild bull. Americans have raised a monument at this sad spot. Scone has its own worthy edifice. Every time we tape a tree brought here first by David Douglas, we see his monument. To us, they are all around.

Archie Smith's excellent book on the life and adventures of David Douglas "All for a handful of seed" is available to members of the Tree Register at a price of only £7. Contact Mr A K Smith at 16 Katrine Close, Callander, Tayside Region, Scotland FK17 8OS

IRELAND

John Anderson

Abbeyleix Estate

A glimpse of trees old and new

It is with great enthusiasm that the new owners of Abbeyleix Estate Mr and Mrs David Davies have taken a special interest in the preservation of one of Ireland's notable estates. The Gardens and Arboretum have for the past quarter of a century fallen into decline, with many features such as the 2 acre lake completely silted up to the point of no visible water to be seen under a dense matting of weeds. The boundary to this area boasts several important trees and two national Irish champion trees of Field Maple (*Acer campestre*) and Grecian Fir (*Abies cephalonica* var. *apollinis*).

Magnificently restored

Today the lake is once again magnificently restored and visible from the main house with the bridges rebuilt in order to connect a series of small islands, which give wonderful vantage points to other parts of the gardens. Perhaps one of the biggest undertakings to date is the replanting programme of the amenity areas within the estate. Covering several distinct areas but one of the most important is that of the Pleasure Gardens. A charming area of native and exotic specimen trees which boasts several excellent large specimens of Turkey Oak (*Quercus cerris*), Weeping Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Pendula') Copper Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Purpurea'), Tulip (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) a mature specimen with flowers only a few feet from the ground in July. Recent new plantings include the Dove-Tree (*Davidia involucrata*) also known as 'The Peace Tree' planted in 1997 by the Taoiseach of Ireland.

Original introduction

Dogwood - Bentham's Cornel (*Cornus capitata*) a recent wild collected tree from the Himalayas by the Earl of Rosse who himself planted his own collected specimen in 1996. By far the most impressive tree in height is that of the Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) believed to be an original introduction from David Douglas in 1835. It over shadows, by far, another National Champion Tree Bhutan Pine (*Pinus wallichiana*) which was 40ft in 1891 and over 100ft in 1991. For those interested in more unusual trees, there is a good fruiting Downy Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus vilmoriniana*).

Oak Paddock

Several areas have been renamed and extended to incorporate a 'Tree Theme' and include the Oak Paddock, where several new oaks have been planted to complement a 200 year old native specimen. Both native and exotic oak species have been included and several unusual plants have been planted with success. Of these a Weeping Pyrenean Oak (*Quercus pyrenaica* 'Pendula') and Kermes Oak (*Quercus coccifera*) are doing very well. The Oak Paddock is also the site of two very fine Giant Redwood's (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) which were given to Abbeyleix as part of the Sponsor a

Redwood Scheme for The Tree Register. These will complement the large specimen of Sequoidendron which was planted in the last century. Opposite the Oak Paddock and across the main drive is the Walnut Paddock which comprises 12 specimen walnut trees (*Juglans regia*). These were carefully selected from a batch of 50 walnuts growing in a grove by the walled garden.

New millennium pinetum

While the programme of replanting continues and will do so on a continuous basis, the single biggest planting is the establishment of a new pinetum to mark the arrival of the millennium. A special area of approximately 2 acres was put aside to prepare for this new millennium pinetum to complement the old pinetum. Between these two pinetums is the remaining section of the 'Thatch Bog'. Once the area had been prepared, by rotavating and harrowing, the ground was then drained.

Sixty new conifers

The first plantings began in the autumn of 1997 after a special deer fence had been erected. The orientation of the new pinetum is east - west, with a central grass roadway for easy access. In the centre of the pinetum is a small pond which acts as a drainage reservoir for the area. Each of the sixty new conifers has a special cage for protection against hares and rabbits. The cages are 1m.sq. with a strengthened plastic mesh enveloping the wooden stakes. The first conifer to be planted was a specimen of Mountain Pine (*Pinus uncinata*) which ranges from the Pyrenees to the Eastern Alps. A number of other conifers were planted and completed in Spring 1999 Each plant received a label, which indicated the common name, scientific name and accession number with country of origin. While the old pinetum stared down on its new neighbours, it was neglected as regards restoration and replanting. In undertaking this the first objective was to remove sizeable numbers of briars, elderberry, nettles and seedling willow which had smothered many of the specimens.

National champion trees

Once the area was cleared and vistas opened up, a selected number of conifers were planted. This area contains yet another couple of national champion trees: Norway Spruce (*Picea abies* 'virgata'), a curious wispy conifer with pendulous branches and a short distance away a magnificent Grey Poplar (*Populus x canescens*) which stands over 110ft in height. Plans are afoot to plant several more specimens of this poplar in case this monster tree is blown over by a severe gale. Other trees in the Old Pinetum include a Norway Spruce (*Picea abies* 'Clanbrassiliana') which was discovered in Tollymore Estate, Co.Down in approximately 1790. It is planned to have 100 different conifers growing in the Arboretum and Gardens in the year 2000. This is only a short glimpse of the hard work that has been going on at Abbeyleix since 1996, work that will benefit everybody in the years ahead and will no doubt be an important milestone in the history of this important collection of trees.

KENT

Owen Johnson

Kentish trees and trees of Kent

This season, Philip Clarkson Webb and myself completed a thorough survey of notable trees in Kent, with the idea of producing a companion volume to my very successful Sussex Tree Book. All the known sites of unusual plantings have been visited, along with churchyards, cemeteries and town parks; the best areas for tree-growth, such as the High Weald, the greensand hills and the foothills of the North Downs have also been intensively explored on foot. Just over 1000 distinctive taxa of tree have been found: the total is fewer than that for Sussex with its wealth of arboreta, but Kent's warm, sunny climate is ideal for the growth of trees such as planes, walnuts and catalpas.

Ornamental cherries thrive

Discoveries have been too numerous to mention. Sycamore is one species which, rather surprisingly, finds much of Kent to its liking, and a hollow tree in a field at Betteshanger is probably the finest in England at 25x218@1m (Ht/m x Dia/cm). The pecan is a good example of a warmth-loving tree which appreciates the county's continental climate: examples at Bedgebury Pinetum and Great Comp gardens constitute much of the UK population, whilst probably the oldest example in Britain was planted in 1897 in a front garden in Eynsford by Elliot Downs Till, who pioneered Arbor Day. Ornamental cherries also thrive in a climate which is less conducive to pathogens, and new champions have been found this year for 'Pandora', 'Snow Goose', 'Spire', for the almond, the double gean, the spring cherry 'Ascendens Rosea', the double sour cherry, and the Sato Zakura 'Amanogawa', 'Ichiyo', 'Kiku Shidare Zakura', 'Mount Fuji', 'Ojochin', 'Pink Perfection', 'Tai Haku' and 'Taoyama'. The largest recorded plum - 10x60 - was discovered thriving in extreme exposure over shingle in the churchyard at Lydd.

Fifty Wych elm survivors

The survival of elms is always a subject of supreme interest - particularly in a county like Kent where they have not enjoyed the benefit of any Dutch Elm Disease (DED) control programmes. Kent is a homeland of the smooth-leaved elm (*Ulmus minor* var. *minor*), which in parts of the east completely replaces English elm. It shows a higher resistance to DED, and several thousand mature examples have been found this year. It also hybridises with wych elm to give a variety of often resistant wild populations. Wych elm itself - never abundant in Kent - is represented by about 50 mature survivors, the finest 23x130 in St Nicholas' churchyard at Strood. Among planted elms, 'Sapporo Autumn Gold' is now most in evidence, having been planted everywhere since the outbreak of the current DED epidemic. But it has been gratifying to find young, planted examples of at least 12 other taxa. The old elm likeliest to survive DED is the Huntingdon, 'Vegeta', of which several dozen persist (including 28x135 at Lyminge Old Rectory). There are still a few old *glabra* 'Camperdown' and several 'Horizontalis' - including a new champion of 13x116 at the Chafford Arms at Fordcombe, which has been injected with fungicide over the years at his own expense by the publican. Half a dozen old Wheatley elms have survived, a few Plot elms, a weeping smooth-leaved elm, several examples of 'Wredei', two Belgian elms (?), a Dutch elm at Leeds Castle which is one of the tallest elms left anywhere at 38m, a Downton elm (?), one example of 'Pinnato-Ramosa', one of *glabra* 'Lutescens' and a corky elm collected by Collingwood 'Cherry' Ingram near Toulon.

Ancient yews

Ancient churchyard yews are nowhere more abundant than in Kent, and a single day's walk north of Ashford took me past no fewer than 29 examples. Particularly interesting is the survival of planted patterns of trees around churchyards which, combined with a study of the earliest settlements in the area, makes it possible to suggest an earliest date at which the trees might have been planted.

Three buckeye chimaeras

One tree which can claim to be 'native' to Kent is the chestnut *Aesculus + dallimorei*. This was first spotted by William Dallimore (a retired Director of Kew) as the product of a fusion of the tissues of a yellow buckeye grafted onto common horse chestnut near his home at Bidborough in the 1950s; the 'chimaera' is very vigorous (with striking pale yellow candles) and it has completely smothered the buckeye growth on the original tree - which was erroneously reported to have been lost in 1987. I was particularly excited this year to spot at least two more examples of the fusion having occurred - one example being in front of the Lion Hotel at Farningham where the crown has been invaded by horse chestnut growth from the stock except for one large limb of *A. + dallimorei*, and the other in a nursery at Four Elms where a small branch of *+ dallimorei* has grown up through the yellow buckeye crown. Kent is uncommonly rich in 50-year-old top-grafted examples of yellow buckeye, and it is possible that the three chimaeras arose from trees of the same source and at around the same time.

Largest British limes

Other new finds have included the largest and possibly the oldest lime trees in Britain, in a wonderfully wizened avenue of common lime at Bifrons Park near Canterbury - the largest is 19x294@1m with three surviving strips of trunk forming a giant tripod. The rock-garden conifer *Thuja orientalis* 'Elegantissima' thrives in many Kent churchyards, the champion being at Mereworth church (10.5x49@0.5m). A new champion silver maple is 19x138 in the hotel garden at Chilston Park, and *Taxodium ascendens* is 20x70 at Otham Rectory. One real surprise was a fine and very bright example of the extremely rare Turkey oak cultivar 'Marmorata', with its foliage stippled with pale gold, in a field near Torry Hill (15x74).

The Kent Tree Book a fully-illustrated guide to the history of trees in Kent, their impact on the environment and the locations of the best examples, is due out this year from Pomegranate Press.

CUMBRIA

Derek Holdsworth

The Borrowdale Yews

Walkers and climbers who are familiar with the Lake District will know of Seathwaite, in Borrowdale, gateway to the legendary peaks of the central volcanic region of Cumbria, Great Gable and Scafell Pike to name but two. Nestling in a steep sided glacial valley eight miles south of Keswick, the hamlet lies at the end of the macadam road and the start of the dramatic footpath winding its way into the heart of the mountains. It is a place of adventure. It is also the wettest place in England. Four traditional white cottages stand in a terrace facing a large barn across a cobbled yard. All the inhabitants are of the same family. I have now met three generations of them running the small café in the end cottage.

returned to Seathwaite on a sunny day in October to visit the Yews. It had been cold the previous night and as I drove up the valley the shadows of the mountains in the fields were white with frost. Fortified by coffee and toast in the cafe I crossed the yard and proceeded to the wooden footbridge over the stream which was sparkling in the autumn sunlight. After a short walk downstream I turned to climb the steep hillside, fighting my way through chest high bracken and over loose rocks until, after a few hundred yards, I reached my beloved Yews.

Photograph: (© Derrick Holdsworth)



Protected from the ravages of sheep

The Borrowdale Yews are the only trees named on the Ordnance Survey map in Cumbria (grid reference NY 235126). There used to be four of them but sadly, one perished in a storm on the night of 11 December 1883. The remaining three (118, 144 and 212cm diameter) are situated on a well watered but well drained slope which protects them from prevailing westerly winds: they thrive in this environment. They are probably about 1500 years old. Recently, at the instigation of Thomas Pakenham, they were fenced to protect them from the ravages of sheep.

This particular morning, sweating from the exertion of scrambling up the slope I saw the fence for the first time. My heart sank. Previously I could visit these trees without hindrance: after all my efforts would I be able to get close to them now? I began to follow the outside of the fence, hanging on with both hands negotiating the bracken, the rocks and on at least two occasions scrambling down into a rocky stream bed and hauling myself up the other side. Silently I muttered to myself: was it really necessary to protect the trees with a fence when they had survived the attentions of sheep for at least a thousand years? After struggling round three sides of the fence I was relieved to find a small, single plank stile giving access to the enclosure. All is forgiven, Thomas!

Photograph: (© Derrick Holdsworth)



Wordsworth's dramatic description

At last I was with my old friends. It was cool in the shade under the dense foliage. I sat on a rock to absorb the atmosphere. Small shafts of sunlight dappled the huge trunks with buttons of light which twinkled as a breeze caressed the foliage. It was like being in a cathedral. The trunks were as I remembered, beautiful contorted shapes. I ran my fingers over them and went round the back of the largest one to look into its hollow interior. I must have stayed for at least half an hour, taking photographs and thinking of Wordsworth's dramatic description of the scene:

"...but worthier still of note,
Are those fraternal four of Borrowdale,
Joined in one solemn and capacious grove,
Huge trunks, and each particular trunk a growth
Of intertwined fibres serpentine,
Up-coiling and inveterately convolved.

Reluctantly I left them. Once over the stile I found an easier way down. On the riverside path I stopped a party of walkers. Did they realise that they were passing some of the most remarkable trees in Britain?

Should you decide to visit these Yews I suggest you go in winter. In summer they can be difficult to distinguish from the surrounding broadleaves; but in winter they stand out clearly, patches of green amid the otherwise leafless woodland. Make for the north east corner of the fence. This way you will find the stile and save yourself a lot of time and effort!

Ryston Hall

A masterpiece of dendrological science

Ryston Hall Arboretum was begun in 1907. It is primarily important because of the lengths to which generations of owners have gone to obtain authentic horticultural plant material. The collection was originally sourced from the most reputable nurserymen and plant breeding establishments of the day. Notably Helmut Späth and Karl Koch in Germany and H.J.Veitch and Edwin Hillier in England. The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew provided many of the verified botanical specimens. The collection has similar origins to Thorp Perrow in North Yorkshire and Batsford in Gloucestershire.

Four distinct environments

At Ryston exotic arboretum trees were originally planted into four distinct environments. The Pleasure Grounds close to the house, already well planted and landscaped with existing ornamental trees. Home Wood, a small area of 1775 oak woodland quite close to the house which already contained ornamental specimens. The Park, which is a huge designed landscape with a potential southerly vista several miles long. Not an uncommon feature on the Norfolk 'fen edge'. And open agricultural land to the south of the park, unlimited space devoid of any other trees. Most of the generic collections were planted here in systematic orchard like conditions.

Today the strengths of the collection are numerous. The plants that were in cultivation when the collection was established are of historical and horticultural interest. Taxa that are no longer available elsewhere can still be found there. Very good early records, including photographs, exist including an invaluable 1921 inventory listing around 560 plants.

Sympathetic management

Trees remaining on the site today include several Champions, many very rare plants and indicator species and varieties for the region. There are no comparable collections nearby (the nearest being Bradenham Hall Arboretum, Cambridge University Botanic Garden, Marks Hall Arboretum and Lynford Arboretum). Sympathetic management continues and the potential for tree growth is good. Soils are neutral to acid. Although rainfall is low, soil moisture retention is clearly sufficient to produce commercial poplars and oaks that are equal to anything growing in the wetter parts of Britain.

Champion Trees

Champion trees at Ryston Hall include Maples such as; the Eagle Claw Maple *Acer platanoides* 'Laciniatum', and *Acer steruliaceum*, Alders; *Alnus glutinosa* 'Laciniata', *Alnus glutinosa* 'Rubrinerva', *Alnus incana* var. *lobulata* and *Alnus pumila*, a variegated Ash *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* 'Variegata' and an upright Ginkgo *Ginkgo biloba* 'Fastigiata'. Ryston Hall is privately owned and is only open to the public at designated times, or by appointment. The garden and orangery are available for public functions during the summer months. There is no access to the grounds during the pheasant rearing season. Enquiries should be made to Ryston Estate Office, Ryston Hall Downham Market PE38 0AA.

SUFFOLK

David Alderman

The horizontal larch

Photograph: The Henham larch (©Tree Register)

One of the oddest champion trees has to be a larch (*Larix decidua*) at Henham Hall. Just above head height its limbs contort and twist sideways and level out to form a horizontal carpet of a crown.

In 1952 the tree was said to have a crown spread of 135ft x 60ft.

A photograph, taken by the Hon. Maynard Greville, resides in the Tree Register archives, showing the then Lord Stradbroke silhouetted at one end of a tunnel created by a pergola arrangement of props.

The tree has since died back considerably and is now only about half this size and the wooden props, showing the strain, are helped with a framework of metal scaffolding. The branches show no signs of wanting to grow vertically and if unsupported would weep downwards and be growing flat, across the ground.



Photograph: (© Tree Register)

Yes - this is the right way up!

Beneath the great larch at Henham.

The tree is visible from the locally famous Henham Walks, signposted from the main A12 between Blytheburgh and Wangford.

