

Tree news from the regions

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Bundle beech at Clumber

When Stephen Peaker reported an 8m girthed Beech at Clumber Park, we were obviously very interested. Clumber has a reputation for veteran Beech although the biggest previously recorded are 5.5-6m in girth and in declining health. This tree is very healthy and a closer look confirmed that it was planted as a bundle of 4 or 5 trees within a row of ornamental trees planted c.1875. It still looks like one fantastic tree and appears on our extended list of champion Beech – but be aware of its origins! The tree is publicly accessible and many thanks to Stephen for bringing it to our attention.



The great bundle Beech at Clumber Park (Tree Register)

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Althorp Park



Steve Benamore with the finest Oak he has discovered so far, at Althorp Park. (Tree Register)

Steve Benamore has been searching out notable trees in Northamptonshire for the past four years and

continues to discover hidden gems and giants. Steve found the county's biggest solid boled Oak on part of the Althorp estate having gained permission for his survey. With a girth of just over 8m the tree is a superb standard in exceptional health. It grows in the park within a group of smaller Oaks which have a stone stating "Planted by Robert, Lord Spencer, in the 1602-3 season." This suggests that the big tree could easily be beyond its 6th century.



Steve Benamore updates the champion Santa Lucia Fir (*Abies bracteata*) 35m x 149cm dia. (4.68m girth) in the pinetum at Althorp House - open July and August. (Tree Register)

SCOTLAND

Tallest tree becomes TV star



Dughall Mor the Douglas Fir at Reelig Glen, Inverness with (L-R) David Jardine (FC District Manager), Tony Kirkham and John Hammerton (RBG Kew) and Jim Paterson MBE, after the BBC had filmed FC experts record 64m to confirm the title of tallest tree. The film will be shown as part of a new series "Trees Which Made Britain", to be seen in Autumn October 2006. (Tony Kirkham)

Discovering a nations champions

When we produced *Champion Trees* in 2003, only about 110 were known in Wales. Clearly, the principality deserved more attention. After several fascinating taping trips, the total has now risen to 234 and Wales has a range of champions almost proportionate to its size and population.

Unrivalled profusion

Welsh trees always seem to have been under-appreciated. Elwes and Henry's monumental *The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* - the centenary of whose first volume falls this year - featured about 130 specimens from Wales, as against 500 or so each for Scotland and for Ireland and over 2500 from England. Many if not most of the ancient Yews, which grow in remote Welsh churchyards in unrivalled profusion, have only been 'discovered' in the last three decades.



Ancient Yew at Llanfihangel-Nant-Bran, Powys. First recorded only in 1970 during the Brecon Yew Survey (Ancient Yew Group - Photo Geoff Garlick)

Rivalry for tallest tree

Wales is small, but is geographically so diverse that the potential for growing great trees remains enormous. There are mountains: high enough to generate the rainfall and deep shelter the giant conifers of the American North West need to do their stuff. The 1931 Conifer Conference Report turned up two rivals for the crown of Britain's tallest tree - a European Silver Fir at Kilbryde in Argyll and a Douglas Fir in Gwen Morgan Wood near Montgomery, both 51m tall. Since then, the bar has risen another 11-12m and at every stage the rivalry

between Wales and the Scottish Highlands has been too close to call, although the Scots always seem to have made sure their candidates are much better known. For the last decade, the Welsh contender has been a Douglas in an 1887 plantation above Llyn Efyrynwy (Lake Vyrnwy) near Bala, but this is due to be overhauled in the next few years by throngs of fast-growing Grand and Douglas Firs planted by the Forestry Commission in the 1920s and 30s on often precipitous mountain slopes in the Gwydyr and Coed y Brenin Forests of Snowdonia: young, perfectly spire-shaped ranks that seem capable of growing taller by far.

Pembrokeshire sticks out into the warmth of the Atlantic half way between Cornwall and Co. Cork. That it lacks these counties' famous old gardens, packed with strange and tender trees, is a historical accident: only by late Victorian times were there enough really wealthy landowners in Wales for tree-collections to begin to appear (and half of these, admittedly, were created by Englishmen). Colby Garden, below Kilgetty, is among the best that Pembrokeshire does offer, and the 39m champion *Cryptomeria* by the woodland pool is a superb tree.

Glamorgan - with half of Wales' total of champions - also enjoys mild, Atlantic winters. Brynmill Park, a small public park in Swansea, has a 12m Silk-oak (*Grevillea robusta*): a giant flowering tree from Western Australia which began life in a greenhouse but is now surviving perfectly well without it. Pre-eminent for its tender plantings, perhaps, is Portmeirion on the coast of Gwynedd, with its champion Maitens and New Zealand Ribbonwoods (*Plagianthus*). Its grounds are best known for Clough Williams-Ellis' Italianate village but the trees here actually have nothing to do with him: the collection was begun in the Gwyllt woodlands at the start of the 20th century by Caton Haig, and has been resumed by the Portmeirion Foundation in the last few decades.

Bodnant - the richest of them all

Severnside, and the valleys towards the Marches, provide the summer heat that so many ornamental trees crave. Tulip Tree, from the eastern United States, has grown to a monumental 281cm in trunk thickness (at 1m) in a garden below the Golden Grove Country Park near Llandeilo, while the intriguing but tricky Raisin Tree (*Hovenia dulcis*) from southern Japan was a perfectly respectable 11x42 in the Botanic Garden at Singleton Park in Swansea by 2000. Coastal Conwy, where the prevailing south-westerly airstream tumbles a thousand metres from the Carnedd Llewelyn range, rapidly gaining heat as it falls, enjoys a combination of warmth, humidity and shelter that is perhaps unique in Britain. Bodnant - the National Trust's richest garden of all for trees - is here, and one of Bodnant's most remarkable and characteristic champions is the Coast Redwood by the lower Dell stream. We all know what Coast Redwoods look like in Britain: slightly dejected, slightly tattered towards the tip, and distinctly off-colour in winter. The Bodnant tree, a broad dense

spire of deep and vivid blue, is so different that you may not recognise it until you are close enough to see the fibrous red bark. At 48m its height growth has slowed, but with even taller trees to shelter it on the banks all around, there seems no reason why it should stop.

Remarkable corner of Wales

Metasequoias resemble Coast Redwoods in their predilection for summer heat and year-round humidity, a combination not normally met in Britain. The best of many at Bodnant, just below the lake, is now 24x108 and the one in the walled garden at nearby Penrhyn Castle, whose bole is scarcely fluted, is 20x121: it is trees like this which, in the longer term, are probably going to overhaul the champions growing today in the hotter, but drier, south-east of England. The Stone Pine, 17x115, in the hotel garden at Bodysgallen Hall above Llandudno is another example of a warmth-loving champion from this remarkable little corner of Wales.



A huge Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) growing out of the decaying bole of an even more ancient Oak tree on a mountain side in Powys. (Tree Register)

Welcome competition

Ancient parks, and the huge veteran oaks and chestnuts which are such a feature of the Marches, peter out in the historically-impooverished interior of Wales. On Anglesey meanwhile, the park of Plas Newydd was landscaped by Humphry Repton and two huge trees (neither of them on the line of the public paths) stand out. At the edge of a field below the school, a Common Lime has a trunk 294cm thick at 0.8m, inflated somewhat by the buttresses on one huge side-limb. And in the woods at SH525705, a boundary-bank Beech 'coppard' or 'stub' - I don't suppose there's a Welsh word for this - has a very short trunk 306cm thick at 1m, offering welcome

competition to the hegemony of candidate champion Beeches from the Sussex High Weald.

Riotous growth-rates

Last, but certainly not least, there is Cardiff. I rashly suggested to the City Council last summer that, for all I knew, they have in their care the most remarkable assemblage of rare and outsized trees of any capital in the world. Much was made of this at the time, but nobody, as yet, has stepped forward to set me right. The story began in 1896 with the layout of Roath Park (complete with Botanic Garden) along 4km of valleys through the city, and has continued since 1947 with two waves of arboretum plantings in Bute Park by the River Taff. Bute Park is interesting because the slightly alkaline alluvial soils are superbly fertile, and it's not often that ground of this quality gets left to grow trees rather than crops. Riotous growth-rates mean that Bute already boasts more than 50 champions: most of these are wonderfully rare, but those which are impressively big in their own right include the Butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) north of the Abbey ruins, the Paulownia and the Hybrid Wingnut (171cm in trunk thickness at 0.7m after 55 years or less) by the Millennium Footbridge, and the healthy Marn Elm (*Ulmus villosa*) tucked away in the northern woodlands.



Prunus 'Ukon' is one of several champion Japanese Cherries to be seen in Bute Park (Tree Register)

Cardiff now has five beautifully-maintained parks containing champion trees, streets planted with a huge and healthy range of varieties, a Horticultural Officer and an Arboriculturalist with a remit to source the rarest trees from wherever he can, and a magnificently informative 'parks and gardens' section to its website: a capital performance which ought to be an example to towns and cities everywhere.