

The Tree Register



Newsletter No.29
2020/2021

- Registrar's Report
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- Lockdown champions
- The yew trees of Edmund Rack
- Vicky Schilling Bursary

Cover photo - a veteran *Fraxinus excelsior* by the walled garden at Thenford Arboretum

Report from the Chairman

Colin Hall

Advancing the work of the Tree Register

2020 was an extraordinary year and it has probably changed the lives of many of us, in one way or another. Nature, however, has benefited in many ways from the reduced pressure on the countryside and our wonderful tree heritage has prospered. Lockdown has certainly resulted in more people appreciating the value of their local parks, green spaces and open countryside.



A *Catalpa x erubescens* 'JC Teas' in St Mary's churchyard, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, dressed to show support for the NHS during the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020.

Closer to home

Owen Johnson and our many dedicated volunteers have been able to continue their searches for new champion and notable trees, collecting and recording data for the Tree Register and often finding noteworthy specimens closer to their homes, given the restrictions on travel.

Vicky Schilling Bursary Fund

We are very grateful to all those who contributed to the appeal for the Vicky Schilling Bursary Fund. We are very pleased to be able now to invite applications for bursaries from those interested in advancing the work of the Tree Register.

Valuable resource

The need to plant more trees and to protect our wonderful tree heritage, as well as forests and woodland worldwide, is recognised today more than ever. The unique database of the Tree Register is a valuable resource for those seeking to plant the right trees in the right places.

Valuable volunteers

The Tree Register owes everything to our volunteers, so thanks are due to all those who have helped and supported us during 2020: to David Alderman, Owen Johnson, Philippa Allen, Alison Evershed, the Ancient Tree verifiers, all our other tree recorders, Tim Hills and the Ancient Yew Group, Clair McFarlan, our volunteer support officer, and Pamela Stevenson, our hard working secretary; and, finally, to you, our members. We particularly send best wishes to Aubrey Fennell, our Irish recorder, for a full recovery from his recent illness.

Colin Hall

Chairman of the Trustees

We are very grateful to Sir Paul McCartney for his continued generosity in sponsoring this newsletter



Michael and Anne Heseltine were able to open Thenford Arboretum briefly in 2020 to show off some superb autumn colour and its 116 British champion trees!

The Tree Register

Registered Charity No.801565

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The Tree Register of the British Isles (TROBI) was founded in 1988 by Alan Mitchell VMH and Victoria Schilling

Open for applications The Vicky Schilling Bursary

Thanks to our generous members and supporters, we are pleased to be in the position to officially launch the Vicky Schilling Bursary. Application forms can now be downloaded from our website.

The Vicky Schilling Bursary is, primarily, aimed at giving tree enthusiasts the chance to travel in Britain and Ireland to discover and record trees. It can include helping to update or improve the data already held on the Tree Register.

The Bursary Committee will meet twice a year and may award funding up to £1,000 per project to successful applicants.

Open to all amateur and student gardeners/ horticulturists and serious tree enthusiasts. For more details please see the Bursary page on our website <https://www.treeregister.org/bursary/>

Before applying, we suggest discussing your project first, with a member of the committee, who can guide you towards submitting a positive application. Contact the Tree Register on Tel:01234 768884 or email: info@treeregister.org



(Above) Vicky measuring a tree for an article in the Mid Sussex Times in October 1984



(Above) *Rhododendron* 'Victoria Hallett', named after Vicky Schilling (née Hallett), flowering superbly at High Beeches, West Sussex, in March 2021.
(Photo: Sarah Bray)



(Left) Vicky posing with a mulberry for an article in the Daily Telegraph c.1990

Commemorative tree for Vicky



David Jewell (left) and Roy Lancaster with the newly dedicated *Quercus x schneideri*
(Photos: Marc White)

At the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, Hampshire, Curator David Jewell, has dedicated a *Quercus x schneideri* to the memory of Vicky.

David said "Following a discussion with Roy (Lancaster), we both agreed that it would be a very nice gesture to dedicate a tree in her memory. I gather *Quercus frainetto* was one of her personal favourite trees (and mine too) but we already have a good number in the gardens and so I decided to have a good look around for an alternative Oak, hence my suggestion of *Quercus x schneideri*. It is located near our outdoor concert arena area and is close to the main visitor centre, thereby providing easy accessibility for personal or professional friends of Vicky to visit."

"At the moment the tree is 5.6m tall with a spread of 3.6 metres and 12.1cm girth. It is a one off Allen Coombes special and, as per his advice, I will circulate some acorns and share material with other gardens. It has survived recent hot summers and wet winters particularly well and, at nearly 10 years old, is already well established."

Allen Coombes provenance details for *Quercus x schneideri*

The *Q. x schneideri* was raised from seed that I collected from a tree of *Q. trojana* and evidently crossed with *Q. cerris*. The female parent was received as a form of *Q. x hispanica* but is clearly *Q. trojana*. This hybrid does occur in the wild in SE Europe and Turkey and I did find 2 trees in a garden in France last year that were received under a completely unrelated name. It will be included in Trees and Shrubs Online. I collected a herbarium specimen of this on an oak society visit to Turkey in 2002.

The original description is in the Biodiversity Heritage Library, with photographs of the foliage of the hybrid and parents. The type specimens are in the Vienna herbarium. The description says that it was named after a Captain J. Schneider who collected the specimen in 1911. On the herbarium specimen it says General J. Schneider; maybe he gave his collections to Vienna after he was promoted. I have not found any information about him. It was described as *Q. cerris x Q. macedonica* but the latter is a synonym of *Q. trojana*.

Trees are being planted or dedicated to Vicky Schilling all around Britain and in Ireland, where a Giant redwood will be planted in the "Giant's Grove" at Birr Castle. All trees will be monitored and regularly measured in true Vicky fashion!

We are still actively fund raising for the Bursary Fund so please contact us if you wish to support this.

Registrar's Report

Dr Owen Johnson MBE

Staying local found new champions in 2020

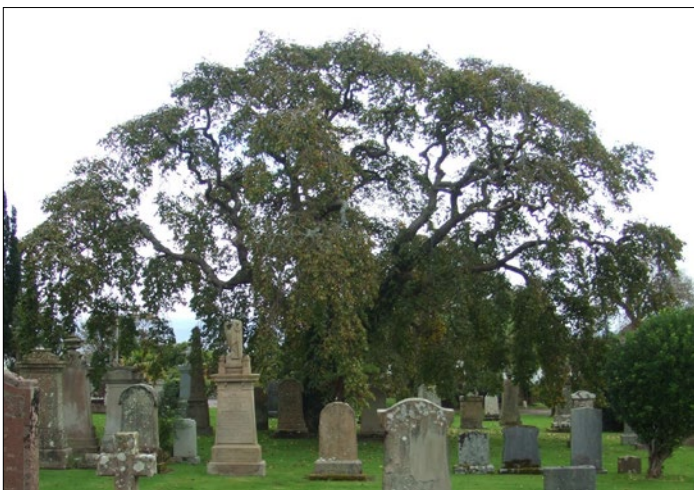
The Tree Register's volunteer recorders can be forgiven for having things other than trees on our minds through 2020, but the lockdowns have at least given some of us new chances to spot previously unrecorded specimens in our own home patches.

Bedfordshire beauty

In total, 140 national champion trees have been discovered or updated during the year. Our honorary Director David Alderman in Bedfordshire has managed to find new champions of the Golden-berried Holly (*Ilex aquifolium* f. *bacciflora*) both for height (15m at Rushmere Country Park) and girth (182cm at Wrest Park).

Remarkable discovery

Tony Leibbrandt meanwhile, who lives on the Mull of Kintyre where few other tree measurers have ventured, reported two champion Camperdown Elms (*Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdown'), again both for girth and for height, in Campbeltown Cemetery. Remarkably, these are bigger and taller than any previously measured in Britain or Ireland, for all the depredations of Elm Disease.



The two *Ulmus glabra* 'Camperdown' recorded by Tony Leibbrandt in Campbeltown cemetery on the Mull of Kintyre (Photo: Tony Liebbrandt)

Staycation finds champion

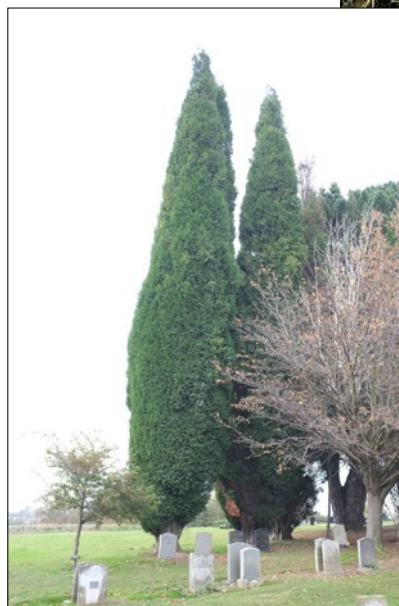
Both John Killingbeck and Alan Hunton have been able to explore parts of Lincolnshire - a county where I am sure that many more good trees await discovery, even though they are likely to be a good distance away from one another. Their finds have included a new champion for Coral-bark Willow (*Salix alba* var. *vitellina* 'Britzensis') at Harmston Park, one of the tallest American Lindens (*Tilia americana*) in Baysgarth Park, and one of the biggest 'Lobel' Elms (*Ulmus* 'Lobel') at Winterton cemetery. On staycation in Moidart in the summer, John was also able to record a new champion European Silver Fir (*Abies alba*) at Kinlochmoidart House, with a short clean bole 654cm in girth.

Splendid Leylandii?

Ron Kemeny found a remarkable Chilean Yew (*Prumnopitys andina*) in front of the Tupwood Gate Nursing Home in Caterham, and also a 100-foot Leylandii (*X Cuprocyparis leylandii*) at the old Birch Farm Nursery near East Grinstead which solves – or possibly deepens – the mystery of the source of the unnamed but strikingly neat and narrow clone which several recorders around the country have independently reported over the last couple of years. This Birch Farm Leylandii is – even I have to admit – a rather splendid tree.



(Above) The Birch Farm, West Sussex, Leylandii (Photo: Ron Kemeny)



(Left) two of several survivors of the un-named narrow clone of Leyland cypress at Bexhill Cemetery, East Sussex. (Photo: Owen Johnson)



Cherry Tree Arboretum

John Weightman and Chris Saunders have continued little by little with their definitive survey of John Ravenscroft's vast Cherry Tree Arboretum in Shropshire. Nearly all the latest hybrids and selections to be sold by UK nurseries are represented here, often in the shape of their earliest plantings, and this had allowed me to add representative data for such trees with more confidence to the part of the Tree Register database which is accessible online, bringing the species and cultivar list you can see on the website closer to comprehensiveness.

RHS Wisley

Spurred on by their garden's slipping from the list of the dozen or so places in Britain with the greatest number of champions, the RHS staff at Wisley have also been re-measuring their best trees – which include early plantings of many rare introductions and garden varieties – and have now been rewarded with a grand total of exactly a hundred national record-holders. John Killingbeck and Alan Hunton have also been able to finish resurveying the Yorkshire Arboretum at Castle Howard, whose tally of champions now stands at 65.

Mild winters

Nicholas Smith at Wynkcoombe Hill in West Sussex is one other arboretum owner who measures his own trees. His *Rhodoleia championii* BSWJ 11603 has grown well to 6m tall - big enough to become a champion *championii*. This is one of many trees to have benefited from our recent run of mild winters; another is the Australian *Allocasuarina littoralis*, 7.9m tall at the Cambridge University Botanic Garden in the shelter of the glasshouses, and measured by direct tape drop while these were scaffolded for renovation.

Honorary award

The Honorary Registrar himself, meanwhile, has explored his own back garden, and awarded himself two champion trees. *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Chabo-yadari', a very Japanese-looking semi-dwarf selection of Hinoki Cypress which we planted in 1981 after it got too big for its pot on my aunt's patio, is now 13.8m tall and seems if anything to be growing faster. *Cornus sericea* subsp. *occidentalis* from the western United States isn't a plant I had ever considered as a tree before; it is usually seen as the yellow-leaved, orange-twigged 'Sunshine', which you are supposed to cut back each year.



Left largely to its own devices in a sheltered valley, with just a bit of judicious pruning to create a single bole, my own 'Sunshine' is now tall enough to be added to the Register.

Up-to-date nomenclature

On dark winter evenings, my online research for projects such as Trees and Shrubs Online have helped to keep the Tree Register's nomenclature up-to-date (and helped keep gardeners on their toes when 'new' botanical names are unfortunately found necessary). A bean-family tree at East Bergholt Place in Suffolk, which flowers reliably each summer but which I had never felt sure about, can now tentatively be named as a new champion for *Platyosprion platycarpum* (syn. *Cladrastis platycarpa*), from Japan and eastern China – incorrectly identified in the past at both the Kew and Edinburgh Royal Botanic Gardens but really seeming to be a very ornamental medium-sized tree for the warmer parts of Britain; in a few years you might even be able to snap one up in your local garden centre.



New Hampshire county champion *Magnolia sprengeri* var. *sprengeri* planted 1963 in a private garden in Chilworth - seen here in April 2020
(Photo: Sheena Dyas)



New British champion Golden-berried Holly (*Ilex aquifolium* f. *bacciflava*) at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire.
(Photo: David Alderman)

(Left) A row of the un-named clone of Leylandii at Nostell St Oswald cricket ground, West Yorkshire.
(Photo: Alan Hunton)

Ancient Yew Group

Tim Hills

Edmund Rack and Somerset churchyard Yew (1781-1787)

Continuing his theme on yew trees found in Somerset churchyards (Newsletter 28) Tim Hills publishes for the first time the descriptions of these trees by Edmund Rack at the end of the 18th century.

Edmund Rack (1735 -1787) spent what were to be the last few years of his life walking and riding the lanes of Somerset as he carried out a detailed study of the county's topography and natural history. This work had been commissioned by the Revd. John Collinson and was to be published as part of the *History and Antiquities of Somerset*. Rack's untimely death left Collinson with the task of completing the work on his own and it is perhaps not surprising that many of Rack's observations were not included in the 3 volume work which was eventually published in 1791.

More than 200 years later the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS) recognised the uniqueness of Rack's contributions and in 2012 published in full *Edmund Rack's Survey of Somerset*. Found in this book are many observations of yew trees - made between 1781 and 1787 – that have not been seen until now. Their worth is inestimable, as these examples illustrate.

At **WEST HARPTREE** Rack found what he regarded as *"10 of the finest clipt yew-trees perhaps in the kingdom. Eight of them have clear bodies 8 ft high and then clipd into cones, flat at bottom, ending in obtuse points 30 ft high. The diameter of the largest cone at the bottom is 36 ft, height 40, the body of the tree 13 ft round."*

Eight of the ten clipped yews live on, their girths between 8' and 13'. Of the largest yew reported by Rack, all that remains is a 16' girthed stump.

While they are no longer clipped, evidence of past management can be seen in this photo (right) from 2013.



One of the surviving West Harptree yews in 2013 (Photo: Tim Hills)



The postcard above is from about 100 years ago and shows the celebrated trees in the churchyard of St Mary, West Harptree, when they were being regularly clipped.

At **COMBE FLOREY** Rack described *"a very large fine spread yew tree with two trunks rising from one root."* In 2016 the girth was 26' 8" at the ground.



The Combe Florey yew in 2012 (Photo: Peter Norton)

The Yew trees of Edmund Rack

At **CHURCHILL** Rack described ‘a large and very ancient yew tree’. At that time it would have stood upright. When one side of the tree was lost it caused the remaining fragment to lean. Such a tree might be regarded as unsafe and cut down, but the Churchill yew was saved for centuries more with a few simple props.



The Churchill yew in 2000 (Photo: Tim Hills)

At **WESTBURY sub MENDIP** Rack described a “very large old yew tree near 20 ft round the body, with a stone seat round at the bottom.” Pieces of the stone seat are still visible today, gradually pushed aside by the slowly expanding tree. Girth at the ground in 2015 was 20' 1”.

At **KINGSTON ST MARY** Rack described “a very large yew tree which branches out from one stool or root into 10 large arms, many of them five and some 6 ft in circumference.” Four of the ‘large arms’ have survived, one of which is seen here in Peter Norton’s 2012 photo. Girth at the ground around these fragments was 36' in 1993.



The Kingston St. Mary yew in 2012 (Photo: Peter Norton)

At **STON EASTON** Rack described “Two very large old yew trees, one 18 ft round, the other near 24.” Both were alive in 1916 when Robinson, in *West Country Churches* wrote:

“Opposite the S entrance are two ancient and famous yew trees. These aged and venerable fathers of the various trees which surround the hallowed spot have weathered the storms and tempests of many centuries.”

One of the pair succumbed in the last century, though its substantial stump could remain in situ for decades to come. The survivor is a fine hollow tree with a girth of more than 20 ft.



The surviving Ston Easton yew and stump (inset) in 2013
(Photos: Tim Hills)

At **COMPTON DUNDON** Rack described “a very old yew tree with a fine lofty top; the body is hollow and measures 23 ft in circumference.” The largest girth recorded since then was 25' 8" at the present ground level in 2016. In Victorian times it was possible to squeeze through the gap, but children were warned to be wary of entering in case they couldn't get out again!

The gap has now reduced to a few inches only and when it closes over the tree will appear to be solid. Many old yews with an outward appearance of solidity are concealing vast hollow spaces.



The Compton Dundon yew in 2000 (Photo: Tim Hills)

Trust not in experts

Henry Girling

Street planting of elm grows to champion size

In the early 1970's, I was Arboricultural Officer for Ealing, and the borough had to face the full force of the Dutch elm disease (DED) epidemic. It is difficult today to envisage the impact of the disease on the landscape and resources, both human and financial. In 1971/2 alone, the sum of £40,000 was allocated for DED control in Ealing, and some of the money was diverted to replacement planting.

Moderately susceptible

Amongst the young trees purchased were a number of the disease-resistant elms bred in Holland between the World Wars, 'Commelin', 'Groeneveld' and 'Christine Buisman'. These were planted in various locations throughout the borough and some still survive. In the mid-1970's, a new aggressive form of Dutch elm disease was identified, to which 'Commelin' and 'Groeneveld' were susceptible and they were withdrawn. The Dutch research scientists persevered and released onto the market 'Lobel', 'Dodoens' and 'Plantyn', which were joined later by 'Clusius'. These clones were produced by including in the genetic mix the Himalayan elm (*U. wallichiana*). On the trial ground and in laboratory conditions these elms were found to be moderately susceptible to DED. The principal trial in this country was at Westonbirt which was wound up as the Dutch clones on trial all succumbed to DED.

Grew vigorously

In the early 1980's, while I was employed as Arboricultural Officer for Welwyn and Hatfield District Council, light standard trees of 'Lobel', 'Dodoens' and 'Plantyn' were purchased from a Suffolk nursery and planted in Woods Avenue, Hatfield, where they were heavily vandalised; the truncated stumps were left in place and subsequently grew away vigorously.

Performance

Whether any remaining elms in our landscape are truly resistant is very uncertain but this should not, however, prevent us from planting them. As the elms in Woods Avenue demonstrate, performance in the field shows we should not entirely trust the experts.



Ulmus 'Lobel' in Woods Avenue, Hatfield, 2012
(Photo: copy of a print by Henry Girling)

Champion Elms

Today Henry's trees create one of, if not the, finest street plantings of post 1970 elms in Britain.

The largest of the 'Lobel' is the biggest on a clean 1.5m stem (Category A) with a trunk girth of 225cm and is 2nd tallest at 21m to a 23.5m tree at Westonbirt Arboretum (2014).

Two 'Dodoens' planted either side of the pedestrian crossing by St. Philip Howard Catholic Primary School, (20.5m x 272cm & 22m x 258cm), are between them now the largest and tallest recorded in Britain.

Quite an achievement to have grown two British champion elm against the odds as part of a suburban street planting!



Above - *Ulmus* 'Lobel', in Woods Avenue, Hatfield, 2021 and inset - summer 2012.
(Inset photo: copy of a print by Henry Girling)



Above - The champion *Ulmus* 'Dodoens' in Woods Avenue, Hatfield (January 2021)

Government restrictions help find local champions



Rare Lancashire cultivar

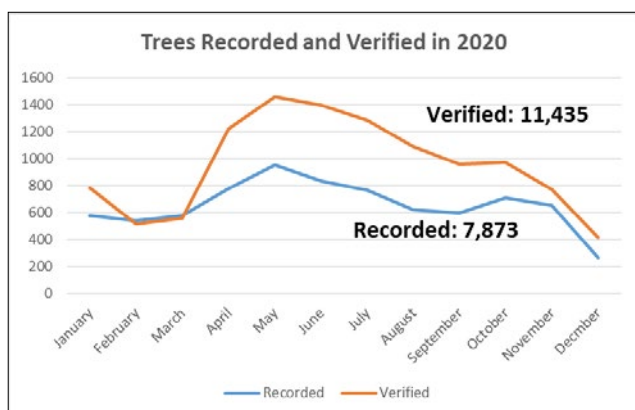
Two variegated *Quercus robur* have been discovered in woodland on the site of Childwall Hall gardens, Lancashire.

Brenda Cameron came across the trees when Covid-19 restrictions lifted in June. These are the only two variegated oak ever recorded in Lancashire. With girths of 160cm and 134cm, their heights will be measured as soon as a volunteer can get to the site! Brenda said; "Childwall Hall dates back to the 1700s but was sold to Liverpool Council in 1939 when the house was fenced off from the grounds and became a college. The grounds were left to become Childwall Woods and opened to the public in 1967. It has had a ranger or two in its day, looking after it but it has mostly been left to nature and the rhododendrons have taken over. The area that was sloping fields next to the grounds was used as a landfill site until the early 1970's when it was burnt, terraced and capped, and left for nature to take it back, which it has."

Friends of Childwall Woods and Fields have a website that will give you a better idea of the site www.fcwf.org.uk

(Photos: Brenda Cameron)

The Tree Register continues working in partnership with the Woodland Trust and Ancient Tree Forum recording trees for the Ancient Tree Inventory. When the first national lockdown began in March 2020, the rate of online verification by volunteers rose considerably and local recording by the public also spiked in May, until restrictions eased in June. People clearly found working with trees and getting closer to nature became an important part of getting through the pandemic.



Volunteer activity on the Ancient Tree Inventory in 2020

The Tree Register benefited from the recording of 138 county champions. Woodland Trust volunteers also helped update more exotic species for the Tree Register. Diligent work by Alan Hunton and John Killingbeck at the Yorkshire Arboretum has seen the results of two years of surveying update over 200 records on our online champion tree database. It is with thanks to all volunteers recording trees that 2020 was so successful.



Stoke Rochford Lime

Just as we were going to print, Woodland Trust volunteer, Kevin Stanley, sent us these photos of a remarkable 9.5m girth lime in the parkland at Stoke Rochford Hall, Lincolnshire.

Never previously recorded, it is evidence that there are still remarkable trees to discover on your "door-step"!

Top heights

Dr Owen Johnson MBE

A virtual tour of our tallest trees

Perhaps the most exciting thing about trees is that they're so much taller than we are. It was my persistent question, 'How tall do you think *that* tree is?' which finally persuaded my parents to buy me a hypsometer for my fourteenth birthday. Forty years later, thanks to more sophisticated instrumentation and a network of tree-spotters, I can now lead you on a virtual tour of our very tallest.

Optimal conditions

Let's start, for the sake of argument, in London. Our big native broadleaves – Beech, Ash, Wych Elm, the two wild limes and the two oaks – have evolved to exploit climates and soils of which the Thames valley's are typical, and must have formed forests and groves where competition for light created a canopy some 35m high. (In more optimal conditions, these natives can reach 45m. Further south in Europe, with longer growing seasons, they can pip 50m.) Today in Britain and Ireland, every county's tallest tree is an exotic, introduced from parts of the world where evolutionary arms races have forced plants closer to the limits physics imposes. In the summer heat and riverine soils of London, these were the English Elm – effectively extinct as a big tree – and, appropriately, the London Plane, now 40.6m at Finsbury Circus near the city's heart.



(Above left) 40.6m London Plane (*Platanus x hispanica*) in Finsbury Circus, London

(Above right) 43.5m Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) at Lydney Park, Gloucestershire.

(All photos by Owen Johnson unless otherwise stated)

Unsurpassed

Less than 50km south, Surrey's sandy hills intercept more year-round rain and offer suitable conditions for a quite different bunch of trees, who take height very seriously. Among these conifers from western North America, Douglas Fir is well-suited to the UK climate, and a group in a sheltered combe at Polecat Copse in suburban Haslemere had reached 51m when I first found them in 2000. By 2015 the tallest was 58.2m, a height unsurpassed in the eastern half of England. At least 30 conifers around Surrey have comfortably outgrown London's tallest tree.

Lightning strike

Pockets of land where Douglas Firs can grow this well are few and far between, and south of Surrey a rather tougher conifer, the Californian Giant Sequoia, tends to dominate: 46.4m at Benenden in Kent, 47.3m at Beauport Park in East Sussex, and 52m by 2016 at Nymans in West Sussex. This tree lost its top to a lightning strike in the 1990s but regrew 10m in scarcely more than a decade.

Atlantic gales

Head west through southern England and increasing rainfall broadens the areas where these conifers can thrive. Hampshire's tallest trees are some quite young plantation Douglas at Holidays Hill in the New Forest, to 55.5m by 2015. Gloucestershire boasts a few to 59.5m by 2015 at Sutton Bottom in the Forest of Dean, while in Somerset a much older Douglas plantation, made in 1874 in the shelter of Exmoor at Dunster Woodlands, includes the first tree in southern England to attain 200 feet (61.2m in 2017). Further west again, it becomes harder to elude Atlantic gales, but Giant Sequoias have reached 54.5m at Knightshayes in Devon, and 53.5m at Endsleigh, which is almost into Cornwall. Wiltshire's tallest trees are all confined to managed woodlands at Longleat, at a high enough altitude to attract plenty of rain but sheltered to the south-west by the tops of the sandstone hills: here Britain's tallest Giant Sequoia is 58m tall, and its tallest Coast Redwood, another Californian, is 57m. Dorset is the one southern county whose top conifer, a 46m European Silver Fir at Minterne, gets pipped by a broadleaf – Britain's remarkable champion London Plane, 49.7m tall at Bryanston.



(Above) Centre-right the 63m Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) by the Findhorn River, Moray, as seen from Randolph's Leap.

Once elms now sequoias

Giant conifers are less comfy in middle England. Oxfordshire has a 45m Douglas Fir at the Warburg Nature Reserve near Stonor, and in 2014 Dropmore in Buckinghamshire had a 47.5m example of an often shorter-lived American giant, the Grand Fir. Pockets of near-ideal conditions along the Welsh Marches contain a 57.6m Douglas near Croft Castle in Herefordshire. Then across the Midlands comes a gap where the tallest trees used to be elms and now tend to be Giant Sequoias (to 42.2m for instance at Compton Verney in Warwickshire) or Common Limes (42.5m at Weekley Park, Northamptonshire). In north Norfolk, slightly cooler moister conditions suddenly allow American conifers to reach 47m again: a Grand Fir at Weasenham Woods, with several Douglas hard on its heels. Lincolnshire has one comparable Douglas plantation, to 44m at Woodhall Spa.

Sheltering hills

Reaching the shelter of the Pennines, Britain's tallest known native, a 45m Beech in the Derwent gorge below Willersley Castle, is eclipsed as Derbyshire's record-holder by relatively young plantation conifers around Ladybower Reservoir, with Grand Firs and Sitka Spruces – an American conifer more dependent on high rainfall – now passing 50m. In Yorkshire, Grand Firs and Sitka Spruces of 53m in Dalby Forest in the North York Moors are pipped for now by older Giant Sequoias to 54m, in Picking Gill on the Sawley estate near Ripon. Lancashire, unfortunately, is on the wrong, windswept side of the Pennines for tall trees, but Durham's tallest are, again, young Grand Firs in plantation at Hamsterley Forest, to 55m tall. Heights continue to rise with latitude as the climate gets wetter and the sheltering hills grow taller: Cumbria's champion is a 57.8m Grand Fir in Skelghyll Woods above Windermere, while the pick of many Douglas Firs at Craggside in Northumberland equals Somerset's as England's tallest tree, 61m by 2013.

Tricky-to-measure



68m Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) in the Gwydyr Forest, Conwy.
(Photo: Rob Lynley)

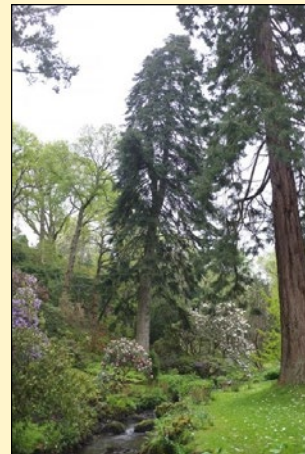
In Wales, Forestry Commission plantations around Snowdonia now include Britain's overall champions; these are still growing fast so should remain pre-eminent. Several tricky-to-measure Douglas Firs above Betws-y-Coed in Conwy are now around 68m. Elsewhere,

Powys has Douglas Firs to 62.6m around Lake Vyrnwy, Gwynedd has Grand Firs to 61m in Coed y Brenyn Forest and Douglas the same height in Dyfi Forest, and Denbighshire has older Douglas Firs to 58m above Llandrillo yn Edeyrnion. In south Wales, without mountain shelter but with plenty of rain, a Grand Fir in Cardiff's Parc Cefn Onn was 50.5m tall in 2013.

Beginning to dominate

In Scotland, good conditions for the growth of giant conifers are more widespread and, away from the

Central Belt with its history of industrial pollution, nearly every county has its giants. In the south, relatively young Douglas Firs in plantations are just beginning to dominate, reaching 56m at Cairn Edward Forest in Dumfries and Galloway, 55m at Glentworth Forest in the Borders and 55m at Loch Ard Forest in Stirling. Comfortably the Lothians' tallest tree is an older 54.5m Grand Fir at Yester, south of Haddington.



(Above left) Some of the tallest trees in England below Craggside House, Northumberland. (Photo: David Alderman)

(Above right) Tall trees in the sheltered Dell at Bodnant, Conwy, Wales

Reach perfection

Among the Highlands, earlier plantings in sheltered valleys still provide Scotland's tallest trees. Douglas Firs have reached 65.6m at Reelig Glen in Highland, while hard-to-measure examples just over 65m vie at Dunans and at Ardentinn in western Argyll. Grand Firs currently hold the record in Perthshire (63m at Blair Atholl) and Aberdeenshire (55.4m at Glendye). In the north-east, Sitka Spruces reach perfection, with a tree now over 63m tall at Randolph's Leap in Relugas in Moray and one of 55.8m at Cortachy Castle in Angus.

Ravines and pockets

Ireland's very tallest trees are concentrated near the east coast in the shelter of the Wicklow Hills, with Douglas Firs just passing 200 feet at Avondale Forest Park by 2018 and with exactly the same top height (61.3m) measured in the same year for Sitka Spruces near Glendalough. Further south, in ravines and pockets of mountain shelter, a Giant Sequoia is 58m in Owennahasad Glen above Lismore in Co. Waterford, near a Douglas Fir of 57.2m, and a Douglas by the Torc waterfall in the Killarney National Park (Kerry) is 57.4m. In the Irish Midlands, plantations of Sitka Spruce made in the Slieve Bloom hills in Laois in 1922 now include trees to 58.2m, with Douglas Firs to 54.3m in Ravensdale Forest in Louth. Offaly has a 51.6m Grand Fir at Birr Castle and Monaghan an older 53m Sitka Spruce at Castle Leslie. In Northern Ireland, a Sitka Spruce of 52.3m at Caledon Castle in Tyrone is rivalled by a 52.5m Giant Sequoia nearby, and by a 52m Sitka Spruce (in 2010) at Tempo Manor in Fermanagh.

Guernsey's tallest

Britain's smaller islands lack enough shelter for trees to grow so high, but, for the sake of including one new species, we could end underneath Guernsey's tallest, a Monterey Pine at least 40m tall by 2006 in the Fermain Valley.

New development for 2021

David Alderman

Website mapping for champion trees



Champion trees of Britain & Ireland 44

Good labelling ✓

Cambridge University Botanic Garden

(Left clockwise)
Catalpa x erubescens 'Purpurea'
Pterocarya fraxinifolia
Broussonetia kazinoki
 Autumn colours of *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*,
Taxodium distichum, *Acer palmatum* 'Sango-Kaku'
 and (bottom right) *Malus transitoria*

Following the successful mapping of public Tree Collections on our website we are now looking forward to developing an overlay showing the position of individual champion trees. This has always been an aspiration of ours and is a frequent request from our members. We haven't done this before as we didn't have the grid references for the majority of champion trees. Recording a tree's position using GPS is now common practice amongst volunteers and, although accuracy, at best, may only be within 5m, it should be good enough to locate a champion tree on the ground, even in a closely planted garden.

Collections where we have now completed a comprehensive survey include; Cambridge University BG, the Yorkshire Arboretum and RHS Wisley, plus many champion trees growing in the wider countryside. This summer we will be working with Exeter University to plot their champions which will also have a Tree Register champion tree blue label!

Such website development is only possible with the support from our membership scheme and we are really looking forward to bringing you this and further developments, over the next year or two.

A flowering first at Borde Hill

This *Magnolia campbellii* ssp. *mollicomata* 'Borde Hill'



planted at the entrance to Warren Wood, Borde Hill, produced its almost purple flowers for the first time in 2020.

Propagated from a cutting from the F 25655 George Forrest collection at Trewithin taken by Sir Harold Hillier in the late 1990s; this was, itself, a layer from the 1925 original at Borde Hill which had died before it flowered in 1952.