



Chairman's Comments

Dear Members,

For those of you can tear yourselves away from the Shrewsbury Flower Show I can recommend coming on this month's visit to the lovely Winterbourne Gardens in Birmingham. The University of Birmingham has done an amazing job in establishing and maintaining this arboretum as an oasis of calm in a busy city suburb. Created at the home of one of the founders of GKN, it is a great day out guaranteed! See some of you there.

David Martin

Visit to Brampton Bryan Park 13th July

There was a rather better turn-out of members for this visit than the last, including John and Christine Scott, who later joined the Trust and whom we welcome and hope to see regularly at future visits and meetings. Most members had heeded Peter's plea to arrive early and visit the very well stocked Aardvark Book Shop and on the day there was a live Jazz band playing as an added bonus.

I had invited Brian Jones to help show us around the Park as he had recorded over 500 trees in the Park for the Ancient Tree Inventory, which was a joint project between the Woodland Trust and the Ancient Tree Forum initially set up in 2006 with Heritage Lottery Funding. Its objective was to record within the five years of the project at least 100,000 ancient, veteran and notable trees in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It had long been acknowledged that this country has an enormous number of these trees mainly because no destructive war has ever been fought here; it now transpires that as the recorded number approaches 200,000, there are more ancient trees in the UK than in all other European countries combined. As the original target was met, with several months to spare, the Woodland Trust decided to carry on the project using their own funds. Any member of the public can record the presence of a remarkable tree by opening the Ancient Tree Inventory website (ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk), finding the position of the tree using an inter-active map then filling in as many details as they can, including the girth, even when not knowing the species. A verifier, like Brian and me, then visits the observed trees, checks the species, completes the data and adds photos if there are none and verifies the tree. Once verified the tree, pictures and details are then visible for anyone accessing the site to look at. This is done by clicking on Tree Search, putting in the grid reference or name of the nearest town or village, and clicking on the icons which appear.

This is what Brain Jones did for over 500 trees in the Park at Brampton Bryan. He did this over a two year period and has now passed the 8000 mark for verified trees in Hereford and Gloucestershire. Most of the sites with the largest collections of ancient tress have been found to be Deer Parks established by the nobility since the days of King Charles I. Aljos Farjon in his talk in March touched on this when describing where the oaks over 9m in girth he used for his analysis were located.

What is special about Brampton Bryan is the very high proportion of their trees in the Park that have been classified as Ancient, as opposed to Veteran or Notable trees. But what makes an ancient tree ancient as opposed to veteran? This is difficult to answer as each species differs in their ability to survive. Thus an oak needs to be approaching 400 years of age before it shows ancient characteristics whereas an ancient hawthorn tree rarely exceeds 200 years. It would take an essay to explain the differences further!

In the Brampton Bryan Park most of the land is given over to Wood Pasture of oak and sweet chestnut with much smaller numbers of lime and beech, although there are some commercial plantings of conifers. By using the Filter option on the ATI website, once one has Searched for a location it is possible to sort the data for any of the data fields. Thus I was able to find out that at Brampton Bryan there are 14 ancient sessile oaks but only four ancient pedunculate oaks, 47 ancient sweet chestnuts, seven ancient small leaved limes but no ancient beech trees.

On the day of the visit we were allowed to park a limited number of our cars well inside the park which saved us a mile of walking. After introducing Brian Jones, who had also guided us round the Eastnor Castle estate a couple of years ago, we set off with the objective of finding one of the largest oaks on the property. We passed along a line of very large Sweet Chestnuts, most of which are classed as ancient as well as a number of oaks and limes. Most of the trees are still standing and some of the chestnuts have developed into very weird shapes after losing their leaders. One dead tree long since fallen had the form of a prancing lizard.

After walking about a mile along the chestnuts it became obvious that Brian was leading us to a different ancient oak than the one I was hoping to show members! We therefore turned north east to begin to circle back towards the cars and saw three of the few conifers that have been recorded in the Park. These are veteran European Larch which had been allowed to grow as single trees without competition with the result that many of the lower branches have grown massively - some had even rooted - with a form a forester would describe as hideous and the timber only of use as firewood.

After we had passed by a small (c. five acre) planting of Norway Maple of a colour that displeased most members present (!) Peter Aspin reprimanded the leaders for not explaining what we had just walked past. He then proceeded to explain that the planting served as a shed to keep the sheep and cattle (there were none present on the day) dry when it rains. The broad leaves of the maples at close spacing deflect most of the rain and the animals can remain dry on the bare soil below.

We espied a large oak in the distance and while making for it we passed a mixed conifer plantation which included Scots Pine and Noble Fir. The difference in rate of growth and quality of growth of the two species was very obvious. The noble firs had grown ram-rod straight and were at least 10 percent taller than the Scots Pine of much poorer form. The large (up to 25 cm) upright cones were a useful diagnostic characteristic for which fir we were looking at.

When we reached the oak it turned out not to be the one I was looking for but with a girth of over 7.3 metres nevertheless provided many talking points, not least the number of juvenile sessile acorns that were forming in the axils of the leaves at the end of the branches. Common, English or Pedunculate oaks have their juvenile acorns on long stalks or peduncles which makes differentiation of species particularly easy at this stage.

As we headed back to the cars in the distance we suddenly saw the large oak we had been looking for from the start on the top of a prominent knoll to the south. We had in fact walked all the way round it at a distance of about 300 yards! It is shown in the accompanying photo. At 9.2m in girth it is estimated to be over 900 years old. As some of us approached the tree a ewe emerged from a small gap in the trunk, which even a small child would have had difficulty in going through, which was proof of the hollow state of the tree, one of the characteristics of ancient oaks and which would have been difficult to ascertain otherwise!

Having finally found the oak we were looking for we hastened back to our cars and to the Aardvark cafe before it closed, for our customary tea and home made cakes.

Andy Gordon



A 9.2m Sessile oak, known locally as the 4G oak as being the only place on the estate to receive a 4G signal!

Our next visit Winterborne Gardens Saturday 13th August

Note: This is the replacement for the visit listed in your Membership Card

Graham Pearce, who will be leading this visit has provided the following:

Winterbourne House and Garden at the University of Birmingham is a seven acre Edwardian Arts and Crafts property on the university's Edgbaston campus. The botanical garden is Grade II listed and offers colour and interest throughout the year. The restored walled garden, complete with crinkle-crinkle wall, is a riot of rainbow shades from May until October. The lawns are fringed with striking colour themed borders, and beyond lies an original sandstone rock garden and a woodland walk through Gunnera leaves and Rhododendron displays. The garden contains some 6,000 plant species from around the globe, with examples from China, North and South America and the Alpine areas of the world.

Address: 58 Edgbaston Park Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham BS15 2RT.

Entry to the house and garden costs £7.20 or £8 (Gift Aided).

Meet in the car park at 2 pm.

I shall be doing a recce visit this Friday 2nd August as I haven't been there for a few years, and among other things I shall check if the tea room as still as impressive as it was!

Directions. Remembering our global footprints Members might prefer to get there by train rather than car unless they can car share!

Train – Take any train from Shrewsbury to Birmingham New Street. Change at Birmingham New Street (journey time 1 hr 10) and take the train to Bromsgrove (usually Platform 11) as far as University station 7 minutes) then turn left out the station and walk across the campus to Egbaston Park Road and turn left. This takes 15 minutes heading roughly north west.

Or Bus from New Street - walk through new concourse to road Tunnel under Bull Ring follow signs to Moor Street station; The X20, X21 and X22 buses stop just round the corner from Winterbourne. It picks up from the city centre by Moor Street Station. More details about frequency and other stops can be found on the National Express Bus website www.nxbus.co.uk.

Car There are many routes to take but as the Gardens are right beside the A38 trunk road from Droitwich I personally would get myself to Junction 4 on the M5 to the south east of Stourbridge and take the A38 to the city centre from there. The post code of the gardens is B15 2RT

An additional visit for September Saturday 28th

Members may know that this year is the centenary year for the foundation of the Forestry Commission. The Forestry Bill received the Royal Assent on 19th August 1919 and The Forestry Act came into operation on 1st September of that year. Eight Commissioners were immediately appointed under the chairmanship of Lord Lovat, the first trees being planted within a matter of days at Eggesford in Devon.

To commemorate this event Keith Pybus and I have been putting together a walk and talk within a Forestry Commission Forest. Some of you will know Keith as a local historian who writes regularly in the Shropshire Magazine and has, throughout the past few World War I commemorative years, been running a series of WWI Walks and Talks. Keith wishes to see this event as his final WWI walk as, certainly, the loss of our timber during that war was the prime mover for the foundation of the new Forestry Commission.

We shall be holding this event on two Saturdays – one, a charged event, for the public and one, a free event, **for members of the Severn Tree Trust**. This members' event will be **on Saturday, 28th September**.

So members will have two visits to attend in September ! What excellent value you get for your membership ! But please do not let this interfere with your normal monthly visits and, if you can only manage one visit, it really ought to be that to Bodenham Arboretum, our listed September monthly visit. If, however, you wish you attend both Bodenham and this Forestry Commission visit, you will be most welcome but I must inform you that the Forestry Commission visit will be in Mortimer Forest over rough ground, will need stout shoes or boots and involve a couple of steepish footpaths.

I shall give you more details of this visit in the next newsletter.

John Tuer