



As of 15th November 2009 we have **3138** trees in our database and **2547** photographs

Welcome to the third issue of *Tree Watch*. I can't believe that summer is over and that we should now be thinking about Christmas! As you can see from the number of trees in our database, many recorders were busy this summer measuring trees and of course they still are, because in many ways winter is a good time to survey trees. At least the nettles die down! The Wokingham Town recorders are particularly keen to finish their survey this year. They are already considering how to report their findings.

Stephen Loyd, co-ordinator of Ruscombe, Coralie Ramsey, a new surveyor for Wokingham Town, and I recently attended a course on managing ancient trees, especially pollards, held at Burnham Beeches. It was run by Helen Read, conservation officer there, and David Lonsdale, who gave a WDVTA talk in September. It was an excellent day and Stephen and I would like to thank Andy Glencross and WBC for financial support. It inspired us to consider doing a report on the pollards of Wokingham, so if any of you have any information or ideas about any of the pollards in the Borough, please let me know. There's a piece about the pollarded willows along the Emm Brook later.

I'm sure many of you know Burnham Beeches. I used to go there on Sunday School outings several decades ago. If you don't know it, or haven't been recently, let me recommend a visit. You could join their "Ancient Trees" guided walk on Sunday 28th February, 2010. It's free but you do need to book. For details about this and plenty more see their website: www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/burnham



The Cage Pollard in Burnham Beeches - one of 50 trees designated 'Great British Trees' for the Queen's jubilee in 2002. It also featured in the film 'Robin Hood Prince of Thieves'.

The next issue of *Tree Watch* will be February 2010 and the copy deadline is 31st January. All comments and contributions please to: Elaine Butler datamanager@wdvta.org.uk Perhaps Heather and Gill's piece will inspire others to tell us about their tree surveying experiences.

VALIDATION AND VERIFICATION

We validate our records as far as possible with the Excel sheets. This validation includes a broad check that the grid reference is in the Wokingham area (actually within a rectangle enclosing Wokingham). It doesn't prevent a tree being wrongly located in South Oxfordshire (as you may have noticed on the web map before it was corrected recently), but it does mean we trap more extreme errors. All tree names are checked against a list to ensure correct spelling and we use drop-down lists in several columns to help ensure conformity of terms. Validating the data doesn't mean that it is correct - just that it complies with certain rules. We have not verified any of our records yet, although of course many recorders and surveyors do check their own records and Malcolm Inglis in Wokingham Town has done an incredible amount of work in this regard. However to verify a record we need an independent person to go out to the tree and check that its record and position is correct. Until now the consensus amongst co-ordinators has been that they'd like to get the survey completed before they start verifying. How we go about this is being addressed by the Wokingham Town group and will be discussed at the co-ordinators meeting this month. If you have any ideas about verification or would like to do some verifying (of any of the records) then please do get in touch. If you can't get out, you could check the photos in our database. We recently had a photo of a Wellingtonia submitted for a record of an oak tree! This of course was a case of the wrong photo being sent. I noticed that one, but I may have missed others. So it would be very useful if someone could check through our photos and see whether they are what they claim to be.

FAVOURITE TREES - POLLARDED WILLOWS ALONG THE EMM BROOK

Barbara Stagles and Miriam Laurent, have recorded 17 old pollarded willows on the banks of the Emm where the brook meanders in marked curves along Riverside walk. We think they are crack willows but are waiting to have this verified.



Willow trees have enormous value for biodiversity. They support a huge number of insects and provide homes in their hollows for bats and birds. When Barbara and Miriam were surveying, blackcaps and chiffchaffs were singing in the branches and a fox was disturbed, sheltering in one of the hollowed trunks. Some of the willows have fallen or have broken branches, but their damaged trunks are providing rich habitats, not only for invertebrates but also for mosses, lichens and epiphytes, plants that grow on trees.

The roots of willows help to stabilise river banks. According to Oliver Rackham, author of acclaimed books on Woodlands and the Countryside, when trees are pollarded they have permanent bases that live longer than those that are uncut. This means our willows must

be of some age. They would have been pollarded when the land was still being cultivated as farmland, possibly for hurdlework. It would be good to know more about the agricultural history of this section of the Emm Brook. If you have any information please get in touch with Barbara at chair@wdvta.org.uk or phone 0118 9784013.

Barbara Stagles

THE JOYS OF VOLUNTEERING FOR WDVTA.

It isn't just the trees we measure but the people we meet who make this job enjoyable. Occasionally we are mistaken for 'people from the Council' but we can't think why! Perhaps a bold badge made from the delightful WDVTA logo would help.

One gentleman shot out of his front drive on a bicycle as we entered. He explained that he had just crossed swords with the Council on the phone and needed to let off steam! We hope that explaining his anger to us prevented 'bike rage'. Another lady took one look at us and ran indoors, banging the front door. I suspect she thought we wanted to sell something 'theological' to her.

Usually, however, our request to measure trees is met with interest and can lead to long conversations. One gentleman approached us across farmland, accompanied by his large dog, and we thought we were in trouble but his interest in the project soon drew from him an account of the changes in farmland usage over the long period he had owned it, and before.

When we visited new houses, we often heard stories about developers. On one occasion the occupants of new houses in a discreet Close were determined to stop the erection of flats next to them; a not uncommon story. We were urged to look for signs of bats or newts in the neighbouring gardens but we only found a magnificent Turkey oak and two fine plane trees.

Recently we have taken to asking about orchard trees and this lead, on one occasion, to a very detailed account of the history of the ancient estate on which the south-east quarter of Wokingham had been built. Not only did our historian have ancient fruit trees but he also proudly showed us a fine mulberry tree (Black?), just less than 3 metres but recorded because of its rarity and possible links to Wokingham's silk industry.

The wealth of information shared by tree owners, about many subjects, has often enriched our explorations. Most recently, an elderly gentleman gave us a detailed account of the oak trees planted in his lane. There had been 7 when he and his wife first moved in and each a different variety of oak. However, one of the finest now leans at 10% because a new road had been made close to it and a huge root taken out on one side. It was standing close to an old water course and the new houses needed garages which had to have very deep piles sunk into what had been a bog!

We discovered that our learned informant had worked for years, managing government owned land, but his proudest claim was to have been a Spitfire pilot, flying highly polished reconnaissance planes over Northern France in the Second World War. The polishing had been done by Vincents of Reading, renowned for the splendour of their Rolls Royces.

Our knowledge of Wokingham and many other serendipitous facts is being added to on every exploration and our ability to identify species is improving but not yet up to Kew standards!

We are grateful to Malcolm for checking our queries and for relocating some of our inaccurate grid references. Without his help, you would have to negotiate a line of oak trees down the centre of Reading Road!

Heather Mills and Gill Hopkins

Lichens on trees and tar spots on sycamore leaves

I think everyone who attended Martin Haslam's workshop on lichens in the summer, was inspired to look at trunks and branches in a new way (definitely increasing the time spent to survey trees!) You can now combine your vet tree surveying with lichen surveying for the Opal air survey. They are also interested in tar spots on sycamore leaves. If anyone wants to participate in these surveys at the same time as recording trees for WDVTS, please note that these surveys want the girth measured at 1m instead of our 1.5m. You can type the names of the lichens into our Notable Features 2 column or I can provide a recording file with them included in the drop-down menu.

All details on: <http://www.opalexplornature.org/?q=AirSurvey>



PROFILE - RAY STAGLES

You all know Ray - he's the one who sits on the door at our meetings and he's been our efficient secretary since WDVTA's foundation. However, he has decided he's getting too old for the job and will be stepping down at the next AGM in March. I just hope that I have his energy and enthusiasm when I'm his age! Of course he'll still do a lot for the society even after he's ceased being our secretary.



Ray was born 1921 in Leyton, East London and graduated from University College London in 1942 with an English degree. He then established a career in Education and moved to Wokingham in 1964 as the first Head of the Bulmershe School, Woodley, subsequently moving to Bulmershe College of Education, where he met Barbara. He lists his interests as literature, classical music, cryptic crosswords, Scrabble and the Great Blasket Island, County Kerry, Eire (where this photo was taken).

It is owing entirely to my wife Barbara that over the past 3 years I have not been able to see the wood for the trees, and have found them, individually, to be quite fascinating. Every public meeting WDVTA has held, and every walk and visit it has organised, has been for me a further revelation. More recently the visit to Kew Gardens arranged by Kerry Clissold, with its

excellent guided tour, has highlighted for me some quite extraordinary individual trees, and infused me, most unusually, to verse.

Ray Stagles

Turner's Oak - Kew Gardens

This huge, hybrid oak
Which rarely sheds its leaves
And weighs hundreds of tons,
In the hurricane of October '87
Was raised, in a Herculean hug
Right out of the ground.

And then, in a split second,
Dumped back down again
On exactly the same spot.
But with all the earth below and around
Loosened, aerated, admitting
Microscopic, rejuvenating life.

And so embarked on a vigorous old age
Like a widower remarrying in his eighties.

Ray Stagles 27 August 2009



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why don't we have more information on our web site and what is the difference between a web site and a Yahoo group?

When we received our lottery funding, the committee decided they did not want to set up a web site because that would be an on-going expense (of about £60 per year). We have a web address (wdvta.org.uk), but this is a domain name with associated e-mail addresses (for which we pay £10 per year). There is no associated web space.

Our web pages are hosted by TVERC (and accessible via our web address or from the TVERC site). This allows us to have our Google map available to all and we send updates to them monthly. We could not put the interactive Google map on the Yahoo site. So we do not have a web site where we can put application forms, files and other information; although of course we do have all our photos on the TVERC site and we plan to put any reports we produce there too. The web site is open to all, but the Yahoo Group is members only. You have to join the WDVTA Yahoo Group before you can see anything other than the home page. To join the Yahoo Group you have to be a WDVTA member and it is a closed group, which means that you will not be able to find it by searching (another committee decision).

The advantage of the Yahoo site is that any member can put things on the Yahoo site - files, photos, links and calendar items. When you upload anything, you can remove it or edit it as you wish, but nobody else can (except the moderators). This is very flexible and should be very useful to all members, but especially to co-ordinators, who can put information for their recorders in their Parish folder. Tree records and photos could also be submitted in this way (instead of sending a CD).

Don't forget you can get information about any tree in our database by typing its master record number into the search box of our Google map to find its location, get a summary of its entry and see all photos associated with that tree. You can also select a parish and see all the trees recorded for that parish. Searches are cumulative, so if you want to see more than one tree or parish you just repeat the process.

Some recommendations from the Yahoo site:

WEBSITES: The Woodland Trust now has more of our trees on their site. You can search for individual trees or display all WDVTA trees: All links in *Links > Woodland Trust* (you can click on the addresses below)

- ① <http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/discoveries/interactivemap> - the Ancient Tree Hunt interactive map showing trees in the Woodland Trust database
- ① <http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/discoveries/TreeSearch.htm> - at the bottom of the page is an "Organisation" search book - scroll down and choose WDVTA.
- ① <http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/recording/tree.htm?tree=8cc90b03-13c2-405d-a8e2-c5c1e22e2c4b> - an example of one of our trees on the Woodland Trust site - the oriental plane tree in Barkham Manor.

READING: (*in Files >*) with Wokingham Town's planned report in mind, have a look at these files

- ① Final report for The Great Trees of Derbyshire Project
(*In Files > Local groups and other vet tree surveys > Other vet tree surveys*)
- ① St_Pauls_Oak_with_pic (*In Files > Parishes > Wokingham Town*)
- ① Areas-status-map (*In Files > Parishes > Wokingham Town*)

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Don't forget: The latest database and all the latest files relating to the survey are on the Yahoo site:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WDVTA>

The maps on our web page (hosted by TVERC) are updated monthly: www.wdvta.org.uk

Finally, and most importantly,
THANK YOU to everyone who is out there recording our trees.
We wouldn't have a database without you.