



Tree Watch

Issue 13

May 2012

On 9th May 2012 we had **5759** trees in our database and **6258** photographs

Welcome to the May issue of Tree Watch. We had a very successful AGM in March. The highlight was the presentation of "Trees in Wokingham Town". This report on the Wokingham Town survey, written by Barbara Stagles, Alison Griffin and Malcolm Inglis, has been circulated widely and is available to download from our website. There are a few hard copies for sale too. They cost £2.50 (plus p&p) - anyone wanting copies should contact equipment@wdvta.org.uk. We have received many complements on the quality of this document and it does seem to have raised the profile of trees with the Town and Borough Councils. Its timing is good too, since trees feature prominently in this Jubilee year (as mentioned in the last Tree Watch). Ruscombe has recorded several boundary oaks such as the one shown here (MRN 2292) and for the Jubilee they are planning to replace the missing ones. There's more about jubilee plantings on page 2.



The date for the Tree Warden Training Day is 21st July. Full details, including venue, will be circulated to all members. I do hope that many of you will want to be part of this newly formed Wokingham Tree Warden Network.

In September we are having a members evening, with the opportunity to talk one or two of your favourite trees. So start thinking about which trees you'd like to share with us.

There is a variety of items in this issue - ranging from the serious threat from the longhorn beetle to a prize-winning poem. Thanks to all the contributors - please send more!

The next issue of Tree Watch will be August 2012 and the copy deadline is 31st July. All comments and contributions please to: Elaine Butler datamanager@wdvta.org.uk

Main items in this issue:-

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Events planned for June - August

- ① Guided walk around Winkworth Arboretum: Friday 1st June 11:00 - £3 National Trust members; £9.50 non-members - numbers limited - booking essential (email honsec@wdvta.org.uk)
- ① The Big Jubilee Lunch - Sunday 3rd June - Wokingham Town Centre
- ① Jubilee Tree Planting and Tree Warden Initiation - Saturday 21st July 10:30 - 13:00 venue tbc

For details and updates see the events page on our website - wdvta.org.uk/events.php

JUBILEE PLANTINGS

In a joint project with WDVTA, WBC is funding the planting and initial maintenance of 60 specimen-sized trees at appropriate locations across the Borough. Parish councils, schools, environmental groups and "Friends of.." groups are being contacted for suggestions of suitable places to plant these trees, but if you know of a location that you think would be suitable do let us know. Nominations should be submitted to jubileetrees@wdvta.org.uk by the end of August. We want these trees to be healthy specimens in a hundred years time and so choosing the right location and caring for them is essential. Although WBC will pay for professional maintenance, our Tree Wardens will be involved from the start, checking them to ensure they grow well and prosper. Our Tree Warden training day will concentrate on these Jubilee plantings - choosing suitable sites and how tree wardens will be involved in monitoring these trees.

These trees will of course be included in the Woodland Trust's "Royal Record" (as mentioned in the last issue of Tree Watch), and so in a hundred years time people should have no trouble finding out about them. Unfortunately the same can't be said for trees planted to commemorate previous jubilees. Have you got any jubilee plantings in your parish? If you have then they can be added to our list of commemorative trees.

Barbara Stagles (as you can see she's been very busy since stepping down as chairman) has just produced a leaflet on the trees planted along Jubilee and Connaught Avenues in Wokingham Town to celebrate the silver jubilee of King George V in 1935. You can download it from our website.

Since these trees are less than 80 years old, they are not veterans, but one is in our veteran tree database. MRN 451 (see photo) has a girth of 3.3m and is the largest tree in the avenue. Has it grown faster than the others in the avenue, or was it larger to start with?



English oaks bordering Jubilee Avenue



TREES HELP ESTABLISH WELSH HERITAGE.

Wales was once considered a century or more behind England in the "Great Rebuilding" of the C16th, but timbers from a dilapidated cowshed in Conwy have proved otherwise. This cowshed is supported by a cruck frame built from two whole tree trunks. In fact it is the only building in Wales in which the cruck beams were formed out of whole as opposed to split tree trunks. According to the "*North-West Wales Dendrochronology Project*" the trees were probably felled in the late C14th. The blackened timbers suggest it was a dwelling, making it the oldest known house in Wales.

ASIAN LONGHORN BEETLE (*Anoplophora glabripennis*)

It has arrived in the UK and it's NOT good news for trees.



Where is it? At the moment (as of 5th April) FERA (The Food and Environment Research Agency - part of DEFRA) believe they have contained an outbreak in a wood in Maidstone.

Where did it come from? China/Far East.

How did it get here? Probably in untreated packing case wood.

What does it do? The beetle and lava eat the sapwood and heart wood of many deciduous tree species eg maples, willows, poplars and even mulberries. As they are so big this physically weakens the wood, sometimes girdling the tree and cutting off sap flow. Finally the large exit holes allow secondary threats into the tree.

What can be done? Nothing for infected trees. If the beetle is discovered quarantine and felling of the tree and all trees in a 100m radius will be considered by FERA. This is why prevention of the spread of the beetle is our only defence.

What can I do? As we are out surveying, walking, looking at trees - look especially for the 1cm wide exit holes. From May to August the adults emerge from these holes. There could be some wood dust in the vicinity of the holes.

What should I do if I find one? FERA says - Anybody finding one of these distinctive beetles should secure the specimen (preferably in a sealed glass jar) and contact the Fera Plant Health Helpline 0844 2480071 or email the information to planthealth.info@fera.gsi.gov.uk, along with a good-quality digital photo if possible. An inspector can then collect it.

For more information and pictures see:-

Centre for Invasive Species (America) site http://cistr.ucr.edu/asian_beetle.html

FERA site www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/HCOU-4U4J45

Coralie Ramsey

"God has an inordinate fondness for beetles" - Darwin did not actually say that! It's often attributed to J.B.S. Haldane, but the closest he came to saying it was "The Creator would appear as endowed with a passion for stars, on the one hand, and for beetles on the other..." in "What is Life?" (1940)

THE SIBLY HALL SAGA

Reading University has obtained permission to re-develop its Sibly Hall site in Earley with 89 houses and to put a 30m phone mast just within Redhatch Copse which is designated semi natural ancient woodland.

The Copse is one of the few remaining pieces of ancient woodland in Earley and its shape is unchanged since at least 1756. Sheila Crowson and I surveyed it for veteran trees in 2008 and found 11 including an unexpected old pollard Oak (MRN 1222) on a boundary bank.

To site the phone mast there and permanently destroy even a small area of ancient woodland is vandalism, and should be unworthy of Reading University. But I think the greater threat to the Copse in the long term is the housing, because of the pressure it will bring with hundreds of extra people and their dogs and cats using the woodland.

An exhibition in July 2010 outlined Reading University's plans for the whole 8.25 hectare site off Redhatch Drive in Earley, of which 3.8ha is Redhatch Copse. The plan was to demolish the Hall (a 1960's tower block) and build 100 houses, whilst retaining and managing the Copse. The array of communications masts on the top of the Hall would be re-sited just within the Copse on a single 30m lattice mast. From the start local residents were very concerned. So many came to the exhibition that the venue was overwhelmed and the display had to be moved outside.



The University's representatives came to an Earley TC planning committee meeting in August 2010 to give a presentation and answer questions. Many residents came to think that the attitude of the University to the local community was typified by this quote - attributed by several sources to University Estates Manager Nigel Frankland - *"It's going to happen. Get used to it."* A Sibly Action Group was formed.

Two applications were submitted, one for the housing and one for the erection of the Mast in the Copse. Countless letters of objection to both were sent in from residents, the Action Group, Earley Environmental Group (EEG), the Woodland Trust and others. WBC turned down the housing application but another for 89 houses was eventually passed by WBC Planning Committee in February 2012 despite furious local opposition. This is on condition that a management plan for the woodland will be implemented.

The phone mast was also turned down but the University appealed against this decision and a public inquiry was held in March 2012. WBC decided not to argue their case as they thought enough mitigation measures had been put in place (at the very last minute) to satisfy their second reason for refusal - the damage done to the ancient woodland. The Inquiry went ahead with just local people, and me representing EEG, opposing the professional array of witnesses laid on by the University, including a barrister who was a veteran of other University ventures in the Shinfield area. The Inspector allowed the appeal and work began to clear the area for the compound and access track at the end of April. This has caused yet more anger as work has started just when the birds are nesting!

This development shows in miniature how the planning system continues to fail to safeguard ancient woodland sites. WBC tried to do the right thing for the Copse by refusing the Mast application, but in the end the law wasn't strong enough to win out over the 'over-riding need' for a telecommunications mast which, according to the University's expert at the Inquiry, could go nowhere else but in the Copse. As the Council put up no opposing experts to challenge any of the evidence I remain unconvinced. In reply to my question the Ecologist did admit that the Copse would be better off with proper management in place and no Mast.

The issue of whether siting new housing so close to ancient woodland was a threat to its biodiversity didn't really get taken seriously by WBC at all. Despite Reading University admitting that 'a long-term adverse impact is certain', mitigation measures were deemed sufficient to offset this.

Anne Booth

Anne has done sterling work in fighting these planning applications, writing to various newspapers and organisations, as well as to the Vice Chancellor. Her letter relating to the nesting bird problem was featured as the letter of the week in the Reading Chronicle (26th April) under the very appropriate title "Birds suffer as university feathers its nest."



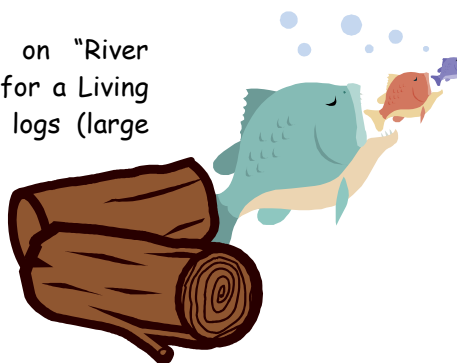
I had planned to feature the refusal of these planning applications as an excellent example of the consideration given to ancient woodland and trees, but as Anne describes above, the reasons stated in the refusal by WBC were ignored at the appeal. In particular, in an email in February, a reason given for the refusal of the mast was "Ancient Woodland is recognised as an irreplaceable resource. The proposal would result in the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland without compensatory mitigation. The proposal would encroach upon the area of the natural woodland and have ongoing implications for the management of the adjacent trees in order to maintain the mast in the future. The proposal will therefore be detrimental to the habitat and biodiversity value of the woodland." They went on to say that the "reason for refusal as far as the council is concerned may be overcome by conditions and a legal agreement. The Council is likely therefore to withdraw both reasons for refusal and present no evidence to the appeal."

"Woods planted or growing up today will not become ancient woods in 400 years' time Our remaining semi-natural ancient woodland is therefore irreplaceable. If we lose what little we have left then it is gone forever."

Woodland Trust website (2012)

FISH LIVE IN TREES TOO

This is the catchy title of a Wildlife Trusts' report on "River Rehabilitation and Large Woody Debris", subtitled "Working for a Living Landscape". The report details the importance of putting logs (large woody debris) in rivers. The value of leaving dead trees standing and dead wood as a useful terrestrial habitat is now well established, but in Britain the importance of dead wood in rivers is now also being appreciated. Apparently we lag behind other countries in this respect.



CONFUSED BY RECENT BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVES?

If you'd like a succinct description of the biodiversity implications of the recently published National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) or want to know what LNPs, BOAs and CTAs are, then see pages 6 and 7 of TVERC's summer newsletter.

CHINESE POMPEII

This is how a recent discovery in the Inner Mongolian district of Wuda is being described. It's not a city that's been preserved, but a forest. A huge amount of ash, falling over just a few days, 300 million years ago, has preserved a square kilometre of early Permian forest. Tree ferns formed a lower canopy, with different species of taller trees dominant in different parts of the forest. Remains of 25m tall *Cordaites* (gymnosperms) and *Sigillaria*, (lycopods) and the smaller *Noeggerathiales* have been preserved in superb condition. All are extinct, but whilst the *Cordaites* are well known from coal measures, the spore-bearing *Noeggerathiales* are currently poorly defined because of gaps in the fossil record.

The detail available in this flora will provide a baseline for the study of other fossil floras in East Asia and the early Permian globally and should also lead to a better understanding of paleoclimate evolution.

HEDGE TREES

As you know our Tree Warden Jubilee Project is planting or identifying 60 hedge trees - saplings now, but, we hope, mature hedge trees of the future. The one shown here is an ash sapling, self-seeded from the row of ash trees to the right - at the edge of Ruscombe Woods.

Having completed their veteran tree survey, the Wokingham Town group are now focusing on hedge trees and are initially concentrating on the hedges on Buckhurst Farm, part of the South Wokingham SDL (Strategic Development Location).

As well as the new hedge trees being planted or indentified for preservation within hedges, there are many existing hedge trees of all ages across the Borough. Those qualifying as veteran trees are in our database.

Below is a 3.8m girth oak (MRN 1131) recorded in 2007 in a hedge at Buckhurst Farm - hopefully both hedge and tree will be retained within the new SDL.



Recorders are asked to choose up to two settings when they record the veteran trees. One of these settings is "hedgerow", but often more than two settings apply. The tree may be by a ditch and in a hedgerow that is a field boundary, and it depends on the surveyors which two settings they think are most appropriate. This can be a subjective decision, depending on the interests of those surveyors. If you record a tree with more than two settings, then choose the most significant settings from the drop-down lists, and then record any other settings in the "Comments" column. The statistics shown here include all trees with a setting of "hedgerow" and those with either hedge or hedgerow in the comments columns.

Unfortunately, not everyone records settings as it isn't a required field, so there may well be more hedge trees in the database, which haven't been identified as such. It's so important to record all relevant settings.

Survey snapshot

8.85m

girth of the largest hedge tree in the database
(English Oak in Shinfield)

675-12%

of trees in the database
are in hedgerows

74%

of these hedge trees are
maidens

11

parishes have specified
hedgerow as a setting -
6 parishes apparently have
no mature hedgerow trees
!!



The largest hedge tree in our database with girth of 8.85m (MRN 4951) - a multi-stem oak in Shinfield



This hedge oak in Toutley Road, girth 4.11m, (MRN 1965) is featured in the Wokingham Town report.

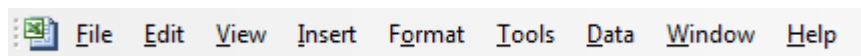
"I'd like to propose the hedgerow as the new national symbol of Britain. A green, gold and brown design to replace the red, white and blue of the Union Jack"

Hugh Barker in "Hedge Britannia" (2012)

EXCEL TIP FOR RECORDERS - Sorting Data

Our database now has nearly 6,000 lines of data. How do you find the largest trees amongst that lot?

The (usually top) menu bar should look something like this:



Click on *Data* and you'll get a drop-down list with *Sort* at the top.

Click this and you get the sort box: -



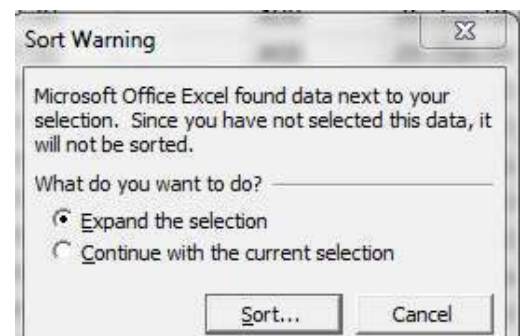
You then select the column you want your data sorted by (eg girth, common name, parish, recorder code).

If you don't get a list of column headings, then you need to click the *Header row* button near the bottom of the box. You can sort by up to 3 criteria (eg common name, girth, parish).

You can sort in ascending or descending order.

Note: make sure that you are sorting all the data and not just a few columns. If you have part of the data selected you'll get a warning:

Clicking on *Sort* in this box will include the whole dataset.



[These screen shots are from Excel 2003 - previous versions are the same; 2007 & 2010 are different - but the principle is the same.]

THUNDERBIRD USERS - do you have a fonts problem?

You'll know if you do - the font changes unexpectedly when you are typing a message.
There's a solution - download the add-on *QuoteandComposeManager*

PROFILE - ANNE BOOTH

Anne is a "founder" vet tree surveyor, helping to get the project started and surveying in Wokingham Town, before the survey was extended to the rest of the Borough, when she became joint co-ordinator for Earley. She is also a committee member of the Earley Environmental group (EEG)

I started surveying veteran trees in Wokingham Town with Sheila Crowson when the project first started, and then, on behalf of the Earley Environmental Group, we recruited other surveyors and began to tackle Earley's trees. We have found 462 so far and the end is now in sight. I hope that by identifying them and passing the information to WBC they have more chance of being protected and living to become ancient trees.

Although I spent the first 5 years of my life in south London, and then a lot of the time since in suburbia, I've always wanted to be out in the natural environment, preferably by the sea. My parents were Londoners through and through but they loved the countryside and my brother and I were taken on long walks on holiday, often in driving rain. Surprisingly this didn't put me off! We moved to a growing village in Essex and went out on trips to the nearest wood where we picked armfuls of bluebells and primroses (as one did back then), and then loads of blackberries later on. These early experiences, I'm sure, helped me to value the natural world.



I joined several campaigning organisations including Amnesty and CND and in 1975 discovered practical conservation when a friend took me on a BTCV task clearing a pond. I haven't stopped since!

In the early 1980's I spent a year and a half working as part of a Community Programme estate team at BBOWT's reserve at Moor Copse, Tidmarsh. This was hard manual work which taught me a lot about management of woodlands and made me want to see woods become a useful resource again as well as being good for wildlife. This may now at last be beginning to happen. I was on the spot when the then voluntary Reserve Manager (now re-named Warden) left in 1985, and I was asked if I'd take it on - a job I'm still doing, more often than not cutting trees down!

At about the same time I became a surveyor on the Reading Habitat Survey for Reading Urban Wildlife Group. The aim being to identify, map and evaluate all open space in Reading. Important sites found went on to have a detailed Phase II survey. The results went back to Reading Borough Council for them to use in formulating policy on nature conservation and development.

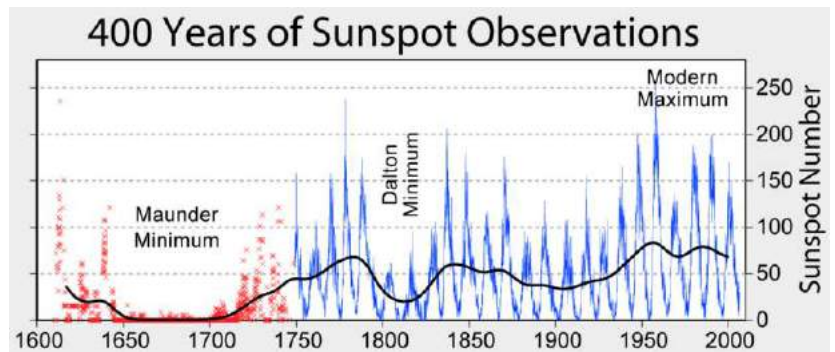
I also took part in the Berkshire Churchyards wildlife survey for BBOWT, and have been active with Reading Friends of the Earth on varied issues including saving Rushey Way pond (and saving Whales!).

Identifying veteran trees is a wonderful thing to do and a great combination of pleasure and purpose. Being involved with the project has definitely made me more aware of large trees, and I spot a lot when on holiday and wonder whether anyone has measured them.....

Anne Booth

MORE POETIC TALENT AMONGST OUR RECORDERS

Martin Haslam has won first prize in the Colin Kenyon Poetry Award organised by the Wokingham Literary Society. His winning entry was inspired by the effect of the Maunder Minimum on tree rings and the density of wood from trees growing at that time. The Maunder Minimum was a period of reduced sun-spot activity and lower temperatures, resulting in slower tree growth and hence denser wood. Instrument maker Antonio Stradivari was born a year before the start of the Maunder Minimum and he used this denser wood in his instruments.



The Maunder Minimum

Contemporary observers noted
the paucity of sunspots.
It had been cold for years –
frost fairs, black vines in Kent,
and Michaelmas snow in Lombardy.
No-one saw how cold might shrink
the signatures of spruce and maple rings,
and squeeze into the starved wood's
heart fine density of grain
such that the luthier in Cremona,
who bent and curved the *Lady Blunt*,
the *Kreutzer*, the *Messiah*, could fix
within their frames a warmth
that's spreading still.



Martin Haslam

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - WHY IS MY WORD DOCUMENT SO LARGE?

Most reports have photos in them and they can make the file very big - often too big to send by e-mail. The size of the file can be greatly reduced if you compress all pictures in the document.

Choose *Format Picture* (from the tool bar or by right clicking on any photo) and then click on *Compress* (bottom lhs of box). Choose *Apply to All pictures in document*, and check that both options (*Compress pictures & Delete cropped areas of pictures*) are ticked.

The last issue of *Tree Watch* was 28,787KB before compression and 2,747KB afterwards. It also means that you don't have to worry too much about reducing the size of your photos before putting them into the Word doc. You can crop and re-size them in Word and the compression process removes the cropped parts as well as reducing the size.

Make sure you do this before printing the Word document to pdf.

DID YOU KNOW? *An oak stump is Grade II listed building.*

It's a hollow trunk, 800 years old and 6m tall called the Elfin Oak. It originally grew in Richmond Park, but after being damaged in a storm, was moved to central London as part of George's Lansbury's appeal for public improvements in the city in 1928. It's now in Kensington Gardens, next to the Princess Diana Memorial Playground. It was added to the "*List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest*" in 1997 - list entry number 1376784. The entry reads: "*Sculpture, 1928-1930, by Ivor Innes. Free-standing gnarled oak tree stump covered with representations of animals, elves and fairies, mostly carved from the oak, some believed to be plaster, all painted (and over-painted). The sculpture depicts the world of Little People (Wookey the witch, Hucklebury the gnome, Grumples, Groodle and many more)' and is a rare and interesting representation in three-dimensional form of the contemporary fascination in the world of fairies, which culminated in J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan, the statue of whom (by Sir George Frampton, listed grade II*) is complemented by the Elfin Oak. It is also an interesting example of George Lansbury's inter-war scheme of improvements of London's public amenities and of popular - public art of the period.*" The Elfin Oak was enclosed in its cage in 2010, following vandalism. The entry concludes: "*The protective railings and shelter are not of special interest.*"



Some recommendations from the Yahoo Group:

WEBSITES: -

- ① www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestresearch.nsf/ByUnique/INFD-5ZABPX - Forestry Commission - tree pests, disease alerts and advisory notes
- ① www.hedgelink.org.uk - information on native hedges, hedgerow conservation and management
- ① www.nationaltrust.org.uk/winkworth-arboretum - our June event

READING: -

- ① Asian Longhorn Beetle - in *Files > Useful Files > Forestry Commission documents*
- ① Woodland Trust Ancient Tree Guide no. 7: Trees for the Future - in *Files > Useful Files*
- ① Wokingham Tree Report - in *Files > News - Publications - Survey reports > PUBLICATIONS*

Images may be subject to copyright, so please do not reproduce any without checking first.

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

groups.yahoo.com/group/WDVTA

Details of all trees in our database are available via the web map pages: wdvta.org.uk/WDVTS

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