



Tree Watch

Issue 16

February 2013

On 1st January 2013 we had **6342** trees in our database and **7337** photographs

Welcome to the February issue of Tree Watch.

As I write this it's gently snowing, but the daffodil bulbs are coming up and even flowering in some places, so spring is on its way. Toads will be migrating to their breeding ponds soon. Do look out for them and let me know if you see any crossing the road. As the warmer weather arrives our veteran tree surveyors will no doubt be out again to record more veteran trees for our database. Several more parishes are now nearing the completion of their surveys.

Our next major event is the AGM, when there will be reports on our various activities over the last year and a look forward to what is planned for 2013. This year our major focus has been

the Jubilee Oak plantings. The ceremonies associated with these have been a great success. The photo shows Barbara and Ray Stagles performing the ceremonial planting for the oak planted at Rooks Nest in Barkham (number 28) on 15th December. There are more photos on page 3. Some ceremonies have been held back until the warmer weather and so there are still a few to come. Next year we plan to concentrate on hedges and hedge trees. You will already know that our treasurer, Ian Potts, is stepping down and hence we are looking for a new treasurer. If you, or anyone you know, would be interested in this position, please contact Kerry or me. If you feel that you have anything to contribute, do consider joining the committee and help shape the future of our association.



The threat to our ash trees is still present and we won't know how serious it is until spring, when the trees come into leaf and any symptoms become apparent. For an assessment of the number of ash trees in Britain, see the recommended reading on page 12. As mentioned in the last issue, we'd particularly like to have pictorial records of our ash trees and their contribution to the landscape, in case we do lose them. So if you know of any ash trees (veteran or not) please take some photos of them - both as individual trees and as part of the wider landscape. Send any photos to datamanager@wdvta.org.uk or upload them to our Yahoo site. There's an "Ash trees" folder there for this purpose.

The next issue of Tree Watch will be May 2013 and the copy deadline is 30th April. All comments and contributions please to: Elaine Butler datamanager@wdvta.org.uk

Main items in this issue:-

- | | | | |
|----|--|-----|--|
| p2 | Events planned for March - May | p7 | Hedgerows |
| p2 | Diamond Jubilee Trees project - report | p8 | Sadly Departed - in 1868 |
| p3 | Jubilee Oak planting ceremonies - photos | p8 | Sadly Departed - now |
| p4 | Profile - Angus Ross | p9 | The duck and the world sculpture, Earley |
| p5 | Tree Warden Activities | p10 | Bayesian identification keys |
| p6 | World's oldest timber structures | p11 | Climate change and trees |
| | | p12 | Did you know? - computer classes |

Events planned for *March - May*

Remaining Jubilee Oaks dedication ceremonies - full details at:

www.wdvta.org.uk/features.php#jubilee

AGM - 19:30 Tuesday 26th March at Dinton in the Multi Activity Centre, Sandford Lane (same venue as last year).

25th April 19:30 - WDVTA stand at Finchampstead Freshers Fayre; Finchampstead Memorial Hall.

April - a guided walk in the Pang Valley - details tbc.

May - a guided tour of Wytham Woods, Oxfordshire - artistic, scientific and archaeological aspects.

For up-to-date information - see the events page on our website - [wdvta.org.uk/events.php](http://www.wdvta.org.uk/events.php)

ROUNDING OFF THE WBC/WDVTA

DIAMOND JUBILEE TREES PROJECT

A great deal has been accomplished since our initial meeting in April 2012 when David Lee, Leader of Wokingham Borough Council, proposed the WBC/WDVTA Diamond Jubilee Tree Planting project: to plant 60 English oaks across the Borough.

Plantings and events

44 suitable planting sites have been found in 14 of the 17 of the Borough's towns and parishes and all but one of the trees have been safely planted - the missing tree is awaiting confirmation of permission to plant on the site. 41 'welcome to the tree' ceremonies have been completed and dates have been fixed for 5 more (3 at the end of February and 2 in March - details on our website). Plans have yet to be made for events on some sites, the contacts for which have indicated that they wish to wait for better weather. There has been some publicity in the Wokingham Borough News and local press and photos of all the events can be seen on our website - follow link to Jubilee trees.

General Response

In general it can be said that as well as the trees being widely welcomed for their own sake, the planting and associated events have generated considerable community interest among voluntary groups and local residents in the sites themselves. All the sites are attractive and environmentally valuable and many have an interesting history which might be more widely known. The presence of the Jubilee trees may well encourage people to visit places they would not otherwise know about and in some instances it has led to suggestions about further improvements for the sites, including ideas for additional tree planting.

Barbara Stagles



Jubilee Oak Planting Sites snapshot

53%

Parks & Open
Spaces

25%

Roadside

3

Village Halls

2

Churches
Schools

1

Football Ground; Farm;
Roundabout; Central Reservation;
Sheltered Accommodation

JUBILEE PLANTINGS

Here is a selection of photos from the various planting ceremonies that have been held so far. You can see these and many more on the Yahoo site (where there is a separate folder for each ceremony) and they are also in a Photo Gallery on our website.



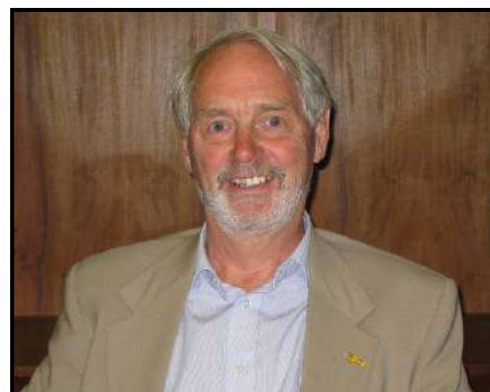
Extremes of weather in Twyford - bright and sunny at Verrey Close (#39) and frost covered two days later at King George recreation ground (#41). Spencers Wood Football Club by Oakbank School, Ryeish Green (#52); Central reservation in Woosehill with Hawthorns School (#21). Black Boy roundabout Shinfield with St Mary's School (#49); Sir John Madejski at Grazeley Village Hall (#53).

PROFILE – ANGUS ROSS

I'm sure you all know Angus Ross, if not for his WDVTA role, then as a WBC councillor. Angus has been our auditor, as well as a great supporter, since WDVTA's inception. Having a WBC councillor as an advocate is clearly a great advantage to the association, especially one who currently holds the environment portfolio. He has been particularly enthusiastic about the Jubilee Tree project, attending our meetings and almost all the ceremonial plantings (see photos on the previous page); a considerable time commitment for someone who is so busy. The WDVTA committee is very grateful for his continued support and encouragement.

I was delighted to join in the celebrations at the inaugural meeting of WDVTA back in 2006 when I was the Borough Mayor. This has started a connection which must not be confused with those many and very active members who have scoured the Borough looking for, measuring and recording our veteran trees. They are the ones with such interest and community drive and I'm delighted the project has been so successful and well supported.

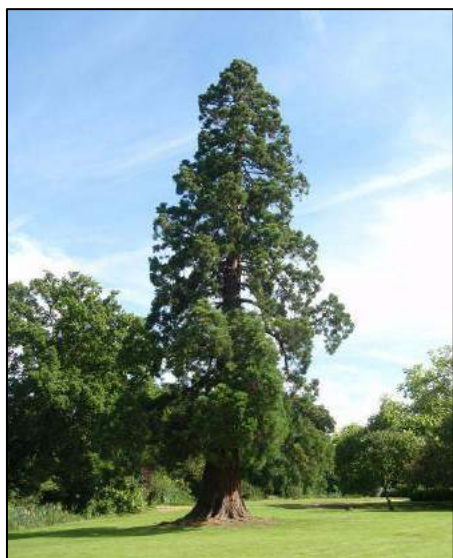
I've been a Borough councillor since 1990 and over the last 5 years can wake up and view two veteran trees, a beautiful Oriental Plane and Wellingtonia, probably of the same batch as Wellingtonia Avenue, within the grounds of Barkham Manor. More recently I have enjoyed working with WDVTA members and the Borough's Tree Officers to find, plant and, in many cases, unveil the plaques for the 60 Diamond Jubilee oaks across the Borough. Meeting members and local people at these ceremonies has been a rewarding and heart-warming (though often very cold!) experience.



In my current role as Executive Member for Environment I am responsible for ensuring we maintain our Parks & Open Spaces and Country Parks (including Nature Reserves, SSSI's etc) and Sport & Leisure opportunities, as well as Flooding, Energy and Waste Management. My aim is that, in these ever more challenging economic times, we obtain as much funding and income as possible to keep our extensive natural environment for our use, relaxation and pleasure. Trees are fundamental to this, especially as we face possible disasters such as ash dieback.

I was born in the London suburbs but was fortunate to go to school in the wilds of north Scotland followed by RAF service in many fairly remote locations which has given me a love of the countryside. To Boy Scouts, back in the 40's & 50's trees were always of interest, both to name them and to learn axing skills (little H&S!). To an RAF pilot they became helpful map references, except the total cover over the Malayan jungle! To me now trees are things of beauty, need, interest and to be preserved and replaced.

Angus Ross



The Barkham Manor Wellingtonia (MRN 1888) and Oriental Plane (MRN 1887) – more photos on the webmap.

TREE WARDEN ACTIVITIES

At the end of November last year Barbara Stagles (WDVTA Jubilee Tree Planting Coordinator), Stephen Loyd (WDVTA Tree Warden Coordinator) and Angus Ross (WBC Executive Committee Member for the Environment) represented WDVTA and Wokingham at a House of Lords reception organised by the Tree Council to launch the start of National Tree Week and welcome new Tree Warden groups. The photo shows them with Terry Molloy, who plays Mike Tucker in the BBC Radio 4 series, *The Archers*.



In October, Derek Oxbrough attended the South East Region Tree Warden Forum, held at Gatton Park in Surrey. Here is his report.

SOUTH EAST REGION TREE WARDEN FORUM

As an introduction, I am the new "Old" boy on the block. After helping Janet in Barkham for a couple of years with the Veteran Tree Surveying and attending the Wokingham "Tree Warden Meeting" last July I decided to have a go at being a Tree Warden for Barkham.

To learn some more about trees, and the responsibilities of a Tree Warden, I went along to the South East Region Tree Warden Forum at Gatton Park, Surrey, in October. Gatton Park is a country estate, landscaped by Capability Brown, that is now run partly as a private school.

The Forum consisted of a morning of talks followed by an afternoon of practical workshops.

After the opening remarks the morning's subjects were:

Dry then Soggy

This was a very interesting talk given by Derek Patch, of the Tree Advice Trust, and was mainly about the damaging effects on trees of the early Dry then later Wet climate of last year.

Our Living Landscapes

Rob Davies, of the Surrey Wildlife Trust, gave this talk. It was a detailed look at the forest makeup of Surrey and an analysis of the decline in "ancient woodland" and an increase in unmanaged areas of young trees of the same age.

Keeping it Local

This was a general talk, by Jon Stokes of the Tree Council, on getting involved with all local tree issues from Tree Councils Action Programme to "Localism" and Planning issues.

After a very pleasant lunch, there were three practical workshops:

Technical updates

This involved an informative walk around Gatton Park, looking at tree safety and other tree issues that could be seen. This included visiting a huge 300 year old Beech, that had been purposely planted on a high mound so that it could sweep low to the ground in an impressive "ball". There was much discussion by the experts on whether this had been "bundle" planted or had just grown into what looked like 12 main trunk stems.

Seed gathering

This was a practical talk and part demonstration on how to propagate various types of trees from seed. This included using a potato masher to crush seeds, to simulate the action of passing through a bird's gut, before being planted.

Trees for Bees

This was a practical talk about the properties of honey, the current problems with wild bee colonies and how we can help them by leaving dead wood in gardens and woodland.

I learnt too many things to list them all, but my main memories of the Forum were:

Derek Patch's discussion on the fact that all tree root systems go outwards rather than down and that the "tap root" idea is largely a myth. Also, that tree supports often do more harm than good (bark damage etc); particularly if the sapling is over one year old, as it then has an adequate root system to withstand wind etc. There is a series of very informative leaflets available from "The Tree Advice Trust" www.treehelp.info

Once more Jon Stokes talks were inspirational and particularly informative was the walk around Gatton Park with him. We were asked the age of the good looking mature oaks that were dotted around the vista from the main house. We all assumed that they were planted 300 years ago by Capability Brown, but were informed that they were the selected remnants of hedge tree oaks from the original farmland and were all about 500 plus years old.

I never fail to be impressed by trees.

Derek Oxbrough



Gatton Park - what a great location for a Tree Warden conference.

WORLD'S OLDEST TIMBER STRUCTURES

In issue 11 (November 2011) I reported that the remains of a wooden door over 5,000 years old had been found in Switzerland. Now the date of the oldest timber structures has been pushed back by 2,000 years. At Neolithic settlements near Leipzig in Germany, four 7,000 year-old timber wells have been dated by dendrochronological analysis. The timbers came from mature oaks with a girth of 3m and were felled between 5200 and 5100 BC, more than 1,000 years before the development of metal tools in central Europe. It had been thought that metal woodworking tools were necessary for complex timber construction. These well-preserved timbers revealed that highly developed carpentry skills were used. Complex interlocking corner joints secured the planks in a box-like frame, suggesting that other Neolithic structures, such as houses, may have been more complex than previously thought.



HEDGEROWS



The Jubilee hedge tree project, which has recorded 33 hedge trees so far, will continue next year and will be extended to encompass all hedgerows, starting with those on council-owned land in Wokingham Town. One of the sessions at our AGM in March will describe this project.

Hedgerows have been protected since 1st June 1997 by the Hedgerows Regulations under section 97 of the Environment Act 1995. They give Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in England and Wales powers to protect 'important' hedgerows in the countryside, by controlling their removal through a system of notification. Subject to certain exemptions, landowners wishing to remove a qualifying hedgerow must first notify the LPA, explaining their reasons for wanting to remove it. The LPA then has 42 days in which to grant or refuse consent, taking account of whether the hedgerow is 'important' and the reasons given for its removal. If the LPA does not respond within this period, the hedgerow may be removed. The criteria that make a hedgerow 'important' relate to their archaeological, historical, landscape or wildlife value.



There was considerable publicity recently, when a farmer in Shropshire applied to remove over 6 miles of hedgerows to improve the productivity of his farm by increasing field sizes. Fraser Jones wanted to create 12 fields averaging 13ha (32 acres) each, on his 155ha (384 acre) farm. To achieve this he wanted to remove 64 hedges, totalling over 11km in length. The farm currently has 39 fields, but in 1850 there were 59 fields and 20 hedges have already been removed. The proposed field size was not considered out of character for the area, but the destruction of so many hedges was opposed by CPRE, the Wildlife Trusts and many local residents and they were all delighted when the application was withdrawn prior to the council's decision meeting in January.

After walking the footpaths around Marrington Farm in Chirbury, West Midlands MEP Phil Bennion, who himself farms in South Staffordshire, said "It is a wonderful patchwork quilt of fields with some quite incredible, fabulous, old oak trees growing in the hedgerows."

Legislation together with public pressure can save our trees and hedgerows.

"The grubbing up of Hedge Rows is become general, and the Growth of Timber in them is thereby totally destroyed."

House of Commons Journal 1792

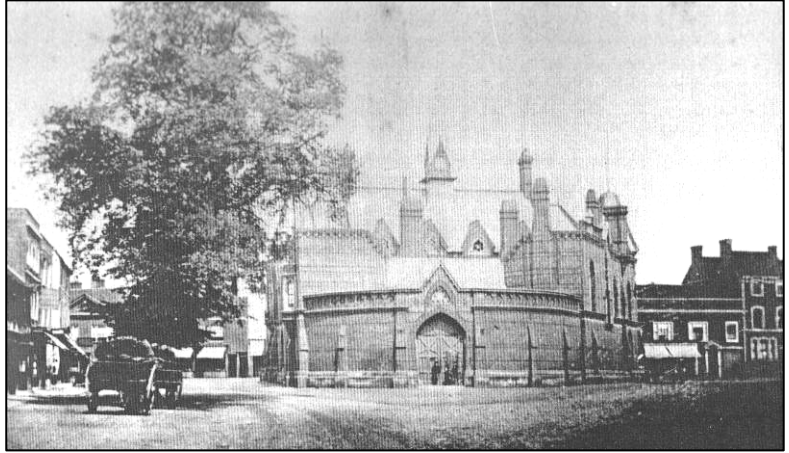
[The grubbing up of hedges was reported from 18 out of 38 counties - this entry is for Hampshire - quoted in Rackham, *"Trees and Woodlands in British Landscape"*]

SADLY DEPARTED - 144 years ago !

Jim Bell, a local Wokingham Town historian passed on the following snippet from the Reading Mercury of Saturday 12th December, 1868

GALE BLOWS DOWN ELM TREE

A terrific gale blew down the old elm tree which stood between the Roe Buck Inn and the town hall and which was regarded as a great ornament. The tree fell about half past one in the morning of Sunday 6th with a loud crash arousing many of the residents. Previously there were several elms in Broad Street but they disappeared one by one until the tree in the Market Place alone remained as a relic of past ages. It was remembered for enabling many hairbreadth escapes when, on bull-baiting days, the townspeople had to scramble into its branches for safety.



SADLY DEPARTED now

Sadly, when the little chapel at Three Mile Cross in Shinfield closed, it was not retained for community use, but sold to developers. Before being sold (by sealed bids) two oak trees were poisoned as described in issue 11 (November 2011). They were not veterans, but fine specimens and could have become veterans of the future. Now four veterans have



MRN 4903

been completely felled before any planning application has been submitted.

Three English oaks (MRN 4901, 4902 & 4903) and a large hawthorn (MRN 4904) have gone, leaving just a pile of shavings.

Unfortunately none of these trees had TPOs.



MRN 4904



MRNs 4901 & 4902 before



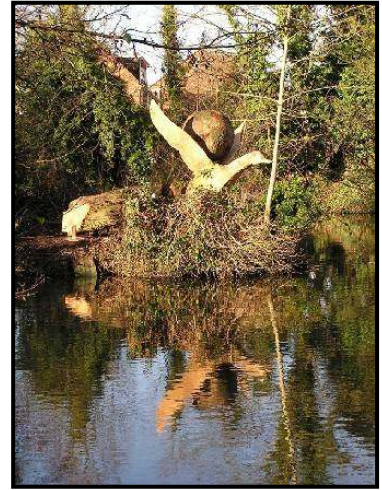
and after



all that remains of MRN 4901



MRN 1188
THE DUCK AND THE WORLD
OAK SCULPTURE
SWAN ISLAND,
MAIDEN ERLEGH NATURE
RESERVE, EARLEY



On 4th December 2007 strong winds blew down a much-loved oak in the back garden of Mr and Mrs Henderson in Silverdale Road, Earley. The oak grew alongside the stream that runs at the bottom of their garden and leaned over the stream at an angle of about 45°. Its roots were probably undermined by the stream, making it more vulnerable to the high winds. Although much missed, the timing of its demise was fortunate because the local residents association wanted a sculpture for the local nature reserve and this fallen oak provided the wood. "The Duck and the World" design was by a local school girl, Anna Zavialova, and it was carved by Andy Noyes, who was involved in the initial stages of the our veteran tree survey.



This is the first page of a 3 page document attached to the record of this tree in our database. When you select "Full record" from our webmap, any related documents will be displayed at the bottom of the record. There is also a brown "Tree Documents" button beneath the webmap. Clicking that will bring up a list of all available documents and web links. This list can be sorted by document name, contributor or tree number. Currently there are 26 documents. This is a great way to attach information about a particular tree or group of trees. If you have any interesting information about any tree in our database, do let me have it. It would be particularly nice to have some old photos featuring the trees.

EXCITING NEW IDENTIFICATION KEYS

These are Bayesian keys and are being developed as part of the iSpot program. Unlike a traditional dichotomous key, you don't have to answer questions in a fixed order. With dichotomous keys, you often find you can't answer one of the questions and hence can't continue, or have to guess to be able to continue (only to end up with something that only occurs in West Africa!). Bayesian keys simply allow you to enter those characteristics that you do know and then, rather than give you a positive identification, they provide a list of the most likely possibilities. The more data you can provide, the more likely it is that the identification will be accurate. The system is based on a theory of probabilities developed by the Reverend Thomas Bayes (1702-1761). He sought ways to calculate probability by concentrating on the most likely result from a set of all possible outcomes. It took 200 years and the advent of computer calculating power for his theories to be put into practice. Bayesian methods are now widely used in artificial intelligence (teaching computers to play chess etc) and in expert systems (diagnosing medical conditions etc). It has revolutionised prehistoric dating. Carbon dating is often rather imprecise, with results expressed in terms of a span of dates that can be several centuries wide. Bayesian methods can use carbon dates from various items and sites to obtain quite precise dates. As far as keys are concerned it's almost "just common sense" - it's the way we actually do it.



OK so don't get too excited because the ones for trees are very limited (as yet) and there aren't any for other plant groups except an obscure group of Hawksweed, but the prospects are great, and so I wanted to tell you all about it, but I'll understand if you don't want to read any further!

So what is available now? There are 20 keys, 8 for beginners, 3 for those with some experience and 9 for experts. Beginners' keys include *'butterflies of parks and gardens'* and *'lichens on trees'* as well as two tree keys. The tree keys are specifically related to public surveys and only include those species in the OPAL surveys and the DEFRA hedge survey. They are very limited and cover just 54 species (and that includes ivy, holly and Leylandii !!!). You are told to ignore features that you can't describe (for instance leaf colour in autumn if it's not autumn), but there is no "don't know" option. You have to use the "characters identified" tab at the bottom of the page to skip over such characters, and that is not intuitive. There are descriptions of all the species covered as well as distribution maps and links to the Woodland Trust site for more information.



As well as the beginners' key, there are 5 experts' keys for lichens on trees; with separate ones for crustose, foliose, fruticose and lichens on orchard trees. The lichen keys were also developed to support OPAL surveys. Amongst the animal ones you might be interested in, are keys for *'ladybirds'* (beginners) and *'dragonflies and damselflies'* (some experience).

Have a look for yourselves: www.ispot.org.uk/webkeys

These keys are particular useful on mobile phones, netbooks and other portable devices.

iSpot also offers the capability of creating your own keys. If you can describe a set of characters for each species in a particular group of species, then you have the information to make a new key. You provide the information and upload it to iSpot; and their software will generate the key.

CLIMATE CHANGE - just a few of the recent reports relating to trees.

- ① GM trees are being heralded as the future replacement for fossil fuels. A gene taken from the fast-growing *Arabidopsis* weed has been used by the biotech firm, FuturaGene, to modify eucalyptus and poplars to give a 40% increase in yield. These eucalyptus can grow 5m in a year and are 20-30% thicker than non-GM trees. GM eucalyptus, pines, poplars and fruit trees have been grown experimentally since 1986, but European and US laws have delayed the granting of permission for commercial use. Only China has given permission for large scale cultivation and one million GM pines have been planted there. FuturaGene hopes to get permission to plant GM eucalyptus plantations in Brazil by 2015. The CEO of FuturaGene is quoted in the *Guardian* as saying "The technology we have could be adapted to any tree, but it comes down to scale and intensification. We could put the gene into oak and it would grow faster and bigger. But we've not going to grow monster trees. We want to extend diameter, not height."



- ① Computer models are only as good as the data that underpins them. Like many other models, climate models for the Amazon vary widely in their predictions. Details about past climate are needed to refine these models and this is where trees can help. Tree rings have now been shown to provide accurate climate data. Tree rings in tropical trees are much less pronounced than those from temperate regions because tropical regions do not have marked seasonal differences. However tree rings from just eight cedar trees in one area of the Bolivian Amazon basin have provided a detailed picture of rainfall patterns over the entire Amazon basin for the last century. This has been achieved by measuring relative levels of two oxygen isotopes (oxygen-16 and oxygen-18; rainfall contains more oxygen-18). The extreme *El-Nino* year of 1925-6, which caused very low river levels, clearly stands out in this record. The oxygen ratios in these tree rings corresponds very closely with oxygen ratios in rainfall from field stations in the centre and west of the Amazon basin and with those obtained from ice cores from the Andes to the west of Bolivia. Examination of older trees could provide details of historic rainfall patterns.
- ① The narrow-leaf hopbush of Australia (*Dodonaea viscosa* subsp. *angustissima*) has different leaf characteristics in different climates. A study of herbarium specimens collected from one region over the last 130 years has shown that leaf width has decreased by 2mm. This is attributed to global warming.
- ① And finally - is it better to use paper towels or hand dryers? This notice is in the ground-floor loos at Shute End.

This hand dryer has been de-energised in order to save energy and money. Please use the paper towels provided.

Many Thanks - Facilities

DID YOU KNOW? ABOUT THE COMPUTER CLASSES IN WOKINGHAM

You can get help with any computer problems from the Computer Help Centre held in the Bradbury Centre at the Methodist Church in Rose Street every Wednesday between 10:00 and 13:00.

Each session lasts for 45mins and costs £3. These are one-to-one tutoring sessions, specifically designed to meet individual needs. When booking a session you are asked what you want to learn and a tutor will be selected to match these needs. If you have a laptop you take that along, so that the tutoring is geared to your computer.



Google "Understanding Computers at Wokingham Methodist Church" or phone 077 1116 2375

Similar classes are planned for Spencers Wood, Shinfield, to start in April.

For classes related to individual packages, there are a variety of sessions held at the Crescent Centre Earley.

Some recommendations from the Yahoo Group:

WEBSITES: - in *Links > Identification and how to measure trees*

- ① www.ispot.org.uk/webkeys - see article above
- ① www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infid-5g2kv3l - a dichotomous key to the common trees found in Britain, from the Forestry Commission
- ① http://dbiodbs.units.it/carso/chiavi_pub21?sc=308 - an interactive guide with both dichotomous keys and multi-entry queries, from the Natural History Museum

READING:-

- ① **People Profiles in Tree Watch 2009-2012** - in *Files > WDVTA information*
- ① **FC report on British Woodlands** - preliminary estimates of quantities of broadleaved species in British woodlands, with special focus on ash (December 2012) - in *Files > Useful Files > Forestry Commission documents*
- ① **Urban tree identification key** - printed version of the on-line key from the Natural History Museum - in *Files > Useful Files*

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

The views and opinions expressed in Tree Watch are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the official policy or position of the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association.

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.