



Chairman's note

Dear members

Thanks to all those who made the worthwhile trip to Leighton last month- the weather really brightened up and we did not have more than a spot of rain.

Do make sure you are booked in for November's talk by Tony Russell at University College Shrewsbury in Frankwell. Tickets (at full price only) are available through the Visitor information centre in the Market Square on . Otherwise at members rate through John Tuer. (01952 727642)

I have had the chance recently to visit RBG at Kew for the first time over a lunch break and well worth it, it was too, now that the temperate house is open after its renovation. I have also been on Andy's tour at Attingham and have been to Powys Castle ~ some lovely trees there and the gardens are splendid.

I hope you enjoy our winter season of talks.

David

Our last visit to the Redwood Grove and Charles Ackers Arboretum at Leighton Saturday, 13th October:

Despite the threat of heavy rain and gales, this just didn't happen and a group of eighteen members were guided around these trees by the Honorary Warden for this Royal Forestry Society site, David Williams. Some of our visitors had been before but those new to the , site were truly amazed by this very unusual planting with its great number of redwoods. These were the Coast Redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) whose natural home is in the Coast Range of California between the great Californian Central Valley and the Pacific Ocean. This is the species from which we have the tallest tree in the world, "Hyperion", at 381 feet (116.12m).

The story of the planting of these trees goes back to 1849 when John Naylor, a very wealthy Liverpool banker, inherited the Leighton Estate and introduced a series of elaborate innovations to assist the estate agriculture, earning it a reputation as "one of the wonders of the Victorian Age". He built an elaborate funicular railway to take manure up the adjacent part of the Long Mountain. This was mixed with water to make a slurry in a large tank, which still exists, and which was then piped around the fields on the estate as a rich fertiliser. Among other things, he built water turbines, a gasworks and set up an elaborate irrigation system. He also introduced and domesticated kangaroos, bison and emus. But it was the redwoods that he planted that we had particularly come to see.

This species was first introduced to Britain in 1843 and it was fourteen years later, in 1857, that Naylor arranged for 33 specimens to be brought from California to Leighton, sent in pots by a prospector named Davies. These trees have found the conditions of this borderland site perfect in which to prosper and to now

make a grove of trees unique in Europe.

To continue the story briefly before returning to the redwoods: a Major Charles P. Ackers, managing director of a forest products company, acquired the estate from John Naylor's grandson in 1931 and, in 1958, he most generously gave the redwood grove to the RFS.

To return to these Coast Redwoods, the thirty three originally planted are still there and, in addition, many more planted since. We didn't count them. There is such a huge number of them. In California these trees can live for over two thousand years so it remains to be seen for how long these Leighton trees will survive. With their thick fire-retardant spongy bark, they have an in-built protection against forest fires. I live in Much Wenlock where we have three of these trees. A few years ago, a car veered off the road and crashed into one of them setting on fire. The tree coped with this extremely well. It has grown new thick bark around the large black and charred area of its trunk and now there is no sign of this event. These trees can be chopped down and will sprout again. This is one of only three conifer species that can be coppiced and will send out new shoots, We were shown evidence of this in the grove, not that any of the trees had been felled by man (this was a condition of Ackers's gift) but strong winds had done some damage over the years. Lightning, too, had struck two of the trees in 1988 but these had recovered well with no need for remedial work.

It was also on this estate, in 1888, that the first Leyland Cypress was found (x *Cupressocyparis* 'Leylandii'), a rare generic cross rather than the more usual inter-specific type. Two species – the Nootka Cypress (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*) and the Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) - had been planted on the estate and had hybridised, something they could never do in their native habitats, being over 700 miles apart. The original has since been lost to wind-blow but cuttings were taken from it and the group we saw were now quite tall trees from those original cuttings.

We then moved fairly quickly through the pinetum of trees planted during the RFS ownership from 1961 onwards. Although originally planted to favour native wild flowers in spring and summer, David Williams told us that it became gradually a planting of different conifers asked for by landscape architects so they could see how they grew in these conditions and what they would look like for their major plantings. This pinetum was dedicated by the RFS in gratitude for its 1958 gift and called “the Charles Ackers Arboretum”. David unlocked the RFS chalet for us and we entered to view this fascinating building, built as a miniature of the Great Oak Hall at Westonbirt, but this one built of redwood. Not the redwoods of this grove but the Wellingtonia, or as he preferred to call it, the 'Napoleona' – the Americans call it the 'Washingtonia'. I think I'll stick to Sierra Redwood (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*)

Our thanks to David Williams for coming out all the way from near Blaenau Ffestiniog (a near neighbour of Tony Russell, our speaker for November, whom he knows well) to show us around this fascinating site. As we only cursorily viewed the Charles Ackers arboretum, perhaps this is something for another visit when we can look at this varied selection of conifers more closely. I mentioned this to David and he was very willing to come out on another occasion to show us these other trees.

Before we leave the redwoods, let me tell you about a superb book about them. When we were in the redwood grove, Graham told us about Steve Sillett, who was the first to climb Hyperion and measure it. The story is told, and much more about these trees, in

The Wild Trees by Richard Preston (Penguin)

This is not a book to dip into now and then. You can read the whole story of the discovery of Hyperion like an adventure. It really is an excellent read.

John Tuer