



Chairman's Comments

Dear Colleagues,

It is with deep regret and sympathy for the families, that I have to tell you of the deaths of two of our longest serving members, Betty Kynaston, wife of our President, and Barbara Hardman. The Trust was well represented at Betty's funeral service in Church Stretton and at Barbara's burial at Westhope Green Burial Ground. So much more of their active lives was revealed on the day than one gleaned from casual conversations during meetings and visits. They were both staunch supporters of the Trust and will be much missed.

Our next meeting is our Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 12th February (not 14th as in the membership card) at 7.30pm at St. Peter's Church Hall. After the AGM, which we hope will only take a few minutes, (please consider joining the Committee) your Committee has decided to change the format from that in the card in an effort to encourage more members to attend. We will have two small competitions with prizes. Firstly to see how much you learnt from Mark Duffell's presentation on conifers, Peter Aspin will bring along 12 potted conifers for you to identify and secondly we will hold a competition of members favourite personal tree photographs. Those with access to the internet should send a digital copy of their own photos (maximum three per member) to Andy Gordon at the email address from which this Newsletter came. For those without internet, please bring along as large a print of your favourite tree photo as possible which we will photograph and attempt to project along with the others.

Our March meeting, also on Tuesday 12th will be held in the University Centre, Frankwell at 7.30pm. We have been lucky enough to secure the services of Dr Aljos Farjon, formerly of Kew Gardens, who has recently published the definitive book on English oaks. He will speak to us on "Ancient Oaks in the English Countryside." This will be an all ticket meeting costing £3 for members and £6 for visitors. Refreshments will be available after the talk. Please purchase your tickets now, so as not to be disappointed. (Tickets are available on line at Eventbrite and are going well). Please apply for your tickets to John Tuer at Evergreen, Woodside, Homer, Much Wenlock, TF13 6NQ. Please send a cheque **made out to Severn Tree Trust with a stamped addressed envelope**. (For the Tony Russell lecture some members paid John Tuer personally, which cost the Trust money).

David Martin

Our last talk: Mark Duffell's presentation on "Identifying Conifers" (Tuesday, 8th January):

What a wonderful turn-out we had for this talk, the best for a long time excluding, that is, Tony Russell's talk in November when we really went to town with our advertising as we had to fill the University hall.

The fact is that Tony's talk brought us a lot of new members and many turned up for Mark's presentation too. I don't think anyone was disappointed.

Mark visited us a couple of years ago to give his presentation on how to identify winter twigs of broad-leaved deciduous trees. As before, he involved himself in a huge amount of preparation and this was not lost on his audience. He collected material as fresh as he could find it and he had to find a number of different conifer species. He obviously knew just where to look for certain trees but he still had to find time to go out and collect specimens for us. In his wisdom, he already had his own collection of cones which he brought along with him so, at least, that helped him.

As before, Mark showed us that he thoroughly knew his subject. He took us through the uses that people make of conifers, mentioning their woods, their fruit and how certain conifer materials are used as 'medicines'. As examples of the latter, 'taxol' in its use against cancer comes from the yew trees while the ginkgo (yes, this is a conifer) gives us certain antibacterial agent.

Mark mentioned all the families of conifers, six of them: Pinaceae, Araucariaceae, Podocarpaceae (including Phyllocladaceae), Sciadopityaceae, Cupressaceae and Taxaceae (including Cephalotaxaceae), having 76 genera amongst them. And he mentioned that in the U.K. we had only have three native conifers: Scots Pine, Yew and Common Juniper. But it was to try to identifying them that Mark was here to help us and he gave us some interesting tips along the way.

We looked at cones first and tried to identify their major differences. Some are long and thin, others round. Some have a tulip-like shape, others rather like drawing pins pushed into a small ball in the centre. However, there is only one cone that has three-pronged bracts under its scales. This is the Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and, for those who didn't know this, that is something they would definitely take home with them. For the boffins among us, a count of the number of scales on some cones is an identifier. The tulip-shaped cone, by the way, belongs to my favourite tree, the Western Red Cedar (*Thuja plicata*). When Mark asked us to crush its leaves and smell them, I could see there were a number of others for whom this was going to be a popular trees. It makes a good hedge tree, by the way, and try brushing past it on a wet day to get that wafting scent of pineapple. I must be careful, I go on and on about this tree. Did I say that I had one in my garden. Sorry, I must move on !

We looked at the leaves. Some have scale-like leaves, the cypresses for example and for long I have tried to find that resin gland in the leaves of Lawsons Cypress. Mark's tip was to use a lens and hold it up to the light. And I found them, recurring dozens of times regularly along each spray of leaves. I have never found this gland before even having been shown it a number of times so, thank you Mark, that was an achievement for me. Once found, it's a very good way of telling Lawsons and Leyland Cypress apart.

And then there was the Hiba (*Thujopsis dolabrata*), that cypress-like tree with very white shapes on the undersides of its leaves. Once seen, never forgotten. When I was first shown this tree years ago, I was told to I look carefully at the shapes of these white patches. They are supposed to be the shape of a Roman entrenching tool – yes, really ! If you now look in your Latin dictionaries, which of course you all have, you'll see what I'm talking about. Look up “dolabrata”. Now is that another conifer that you'll remember ?

What about the differences between firs and spruces ? Did you see the short pegs on the twigs where the leaves have come off ? I didn't say “been removed” because if you try to remove these needles, you are likely to take the pegs with them. Look at where the needles have dropped off naturally. Compare these to the peg-free fir twigs where the needles have fallen off to simply reveal scars. Mark had excellent examples to show both of these features.

He mentioned the pines with their clusters of needles in twos, threes or fives, another good identifying feature. Once you've counted the needles, looking them up in your tree books becomes easier having narrowed your pines down to just a few.

I sometimes, without looking at the cones, get my cedars mixed up with my larches. The needles are both in little tufts (technically 'whorls') with many needles per group. Mark told us that with over thirty needles per whorl and it's likely to be a Larch whilst a Cedar generally has less.

I could mention a few other conifer species that we looked at, but I shall finish, as Mark did, with the Japanese Redwood (*Cryptomeria japonica*). Now all you gardeners who are looking for something colourful, interesting, unusual, get along to your garden centres and try to track down *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Elegans'. This variety of the Japanese Redwood is slow growing into a beautifully-coloured bush with reddish-copper-brown leaves. They do start green, however, when the tree is young, but have patience.

I think that all who attended will agree that this was a fascinating evening. Mark had provided us with much information with which to go outside to try to identify conifers. Even at the basic stage of just telling a fir apart from a pine or a spruce, is a start. Knowledge grows from knowledge. Thank you, Mark, for all the trouble you took to give us a thoroughly enjoyable and useful evening.

John Tuer

Tree Planting sessions

Tree planting sessions have been and will be sporadic events this season. Before Christmas I finished the planting at Cuan Wildlife in Much Wenlock myself as there really wasn't enough work to get everyone out. To follow the hedgerow requirements of the County Planners, we had to plant standard trees along the hedgerow to remain uncut and grow into mature trees. This is a very sensible requirement as we have been losing many hedgerow trees. I bought six rowans and planted them. Cuan repaid us what we spent.

The founder of Men of the Trees, Shropshire and Montgomery Branch, the organisation from which we sprang, was a David Cresswell. He set up the branch in the mid-1980s and when we became the Severn Tree Trust, he became, with his wife Ruth, our first President. Sadly, David passed away quite a few years ago and we planted an Oriental Plane for him in Copthorne Park in Shrewsbury near to where he and Ruth lived. More recently Ruth has died and their family have asked if we can now plant a tree for their mother. We have obtained permission to plant a London Plane near to David's tree and the planting will take place on the afternoon of **Saturday afternoon, 16th March**. David and Ruth's daughters and son are all arriving in Shrewsbury from their various homes around the country, some from the south coast and one from South Africa. A number of our members knew Ruth very well and all are invited to this special memorial tree planting.

Please join us at one of our large planting sessions

But before this, we shall have one of our larger planting sessions on **Thursday, 14th February** at The Hurst between Clunton and Clun. This is a writers' retreat, part of the Arvon Foundation and the former home of playwright, John Osborne. We have been planting a hedge for The Hurst over the last 4 years and have made a significant contribution to the environment here in that the hedge gives clarity to the existence of an old mediaeval track. We have planted a few thousands trees over this period. Our planting has now reached the main drive of The Hurst and, following the County's requirements, we shall plant standards to become mature trees every few metres along this stretch of hedge. The planting on 14th February will be to plant a number of oaks between the house and the main road. Then at our March planting (date yet to be decided), we shall fill in between these oaks by continuing the hedge. All the trees for this project have been donated. There will be no cost of any of this planting to the Severn Tree Trust.

So please come and help us. We shall start at 10.30am on Thursday the 14th.

Where is The Hurst ? From Shrewsbury, take the A49 to Craven Arms. Turn right at the main roundabout, signposted in the Clun direction (B4368), and carry on through Aston-on-Clun and Clunton. After Clunton, at a sharp right-hand bend in the road with a white house on your right, look for the drive for The Hurst on your left, signed at the main road. Go up the drive and you will see us on the right. We can direct you to the parking area. Please bring a spade and strong footwear. The Hurst is excellent at providing us with coffee and cake after our planting so you don't necessarily need to bring any refreshment, but you can if you wish. We hope to see many of you there.

John Tuer

