



Chairman's Comments

Dear members

We look forward to seeing some of you on our exciting series of summer visits to some of the best local collections of trees in various arboreturns around Shropshire and the West Midlands. Our next visit is a private visit to Brampton Bryan and a famous bookshop Aardvark books, followed in August by the lovely Winterbourne Gardens at the university of Birmingham. We look forward to seeing you soon.

Please see below at the end of Peter Aspin's interesting contribution details for the Brampton Bryan visit.

Our Visit to Arley Arboretum Saturday June 8th.

Maybe it was changing the venue for the meeting at relatively short notice but probably it was more to do with the rather poor weather forecast but whichever way, it was disappointing that not many members turned up for this visit instead of the originally planned visit to the Winterbourne Gardens, at Birmingham University. Certainly one or two people who said they would turn up didn't, which was in marked contrast to Lynn Culf and Graham Pearce who despite trusting their satnav managed to get to Arley all the way from their home in Nottingham just in time. In the event not one drop of rain fell on us and the forecast crowds were nowhere to be seen so our Chairman David who finished his trip to Arley via the Severn Valley Railway, had very quick and good service in the Tea Room in time for the start.

Arley Arboretum was started in 1800 by Earl Mountnorris and was extended for over a hundred years by the Woodward family before being bought in 1959 by Roger Turner an industrialist. By this time the arboretum was in a state of neglect and he set about returning it to its former glory and expanding it even further. On his death in 1999, he left the whole estate of 1600 acres to the Roger and Douglas Turner Charitable Trust which he had formed 30 years earlier. The consequence of this is that nowadays on week-ends it is mainly run by part-time staff which meant that there was no-one available to show us round. Our visit therefore was largely self-conducted and we were very thankful to have Graham, our dendrologist with us.

Nor was a guidebook available as it is out-of-print and being completely revised. At the same time all trees will be labelled and properly numbered. I was able retrospectively to obtain a digital copy of the plant list which was included in the old guidebook and this just accentuated the number of incognito trees we saw and failed to identify with certainty! That was the one disappointing element of the visit as quite a large percentage did not have labels. Apart from that criticism, the grounds were beautifully maintained by the staff of four full-time gardeners and a team of volunteers. The beautiful walled

garden through which all visitors enter was particularly impressive. It had been fully restored and was opened as an education centre for all ages by Lord Lichfield in 2002.

All paying visitors received a diagrammatic map of the Arboretum with 14 of their Historic Trees listed and position identified. Graham also had come with a print-out of Arley's County (Worcestershire) champions from the Tree Register of Great Britain, so we had some simple plan of action. After passing the three very tall closely spaced Corsican Pine (*Pinus nigra laricio*), Giant Redwood or Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron gigantean*) and the semi-evergreen Lucombe oak (*Quercus x hispanica* Lucombeana) we strode down the longest (65m) Laburnum arch in the country, which was just holding on to its last few flowers towards the look-out point over the river Severn where we saw the Seven Valley Railway operating. Arley station is less than one km from the Arboretum.

Close by is an area of large monumental conifers and it is here that four of the six county champions for height are to be found. They are cultivars of Lawson Cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*) of which I have never heard and Nootka Cypress now properly called *Xanthocyparis nootkatensis* but it was interesting to find out from the Ancient Tree Inventory that Owen Johnson The Registrar of the Tree Register had been to Arley as recently as 30th April 2019 to up-date their records.

In 2000 an extension of the arboretum, known as the Turner Ride was planted to the west of an old ha, notable for the fact that the land on both sides was at the same level!. Here we picked out just some of the 150 new species and cultivars that have been planted there. As there was no designated leader to our group we all picked our way from one tree that interested us personally to the next and occasionally re-grouped to consider one that particularly took our fancy. One such was a tree which even foxed Graham – so we were quite glad that this one did have a label! It was a *Poliothyrsis sinensis* - given the name of Chinese pearlbloom by the Americans which accurately describes its inflorescence although the blooms are also fragrant when out in late summer.

In my own walk through the area I noticed among many others the following *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Brilliantissimum', *Aesulus flava* (the Sweet buckeye) *Betula utilis* var *jacquemontii*, *Corylus avellana contorta*, *Davidia involucrata*, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, *Nothofagus antarctica* and *Tilia tomentosa*. We gathered again around the pool to look at several Swamp Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) – one of the few deciduous conifers and to look for the champion *Acer griseum* which according to the Tree Register was in this area. It is not surprising that we failed to find it as its grid reference – also in the Tree Register- places it near the monumental conifers!

Another focus point was at some Cedars where Graham pointed out some of the differences between *Cedrus deodara* and juvenile *Cedrus libani* and *C. atlantica*. The shoots of the former are longer and much more droopy and the needles are longer than the other two species. This discussion was particularly for me as I am having second thoughts about whether the replacement trees planted over the last 40 years in the Cedar of Lebanon plantation at Attingham are indeed all *C. libani*!

We then realised that we had not visited the easternmost area of the arboretum where four of their heritage trees are located. We quickly passed by the Common Lime and Black Walnut but were brought up short by the Maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) said to have been planted in about 1820. With its stem of barely one metre in girth we all agreed that this could not be the original! What we did not doubt was the nearby Whitty Pear or True Service Tree (*Sorbus domestica*). It is said to have come from one very old tree in the near-by Wyre Forest which was the sole reason why this species is listed as a British native! This one is in rare health as the photo below shows and is covered in juvenile fruits. Many *Sorbus* spp exhibit apomixis so there is a good chance that the fruits will contain viable seed of the same genetic make up.

As is our custom we finished off the afternoon with a welcome cup of tea and a slice of home-made cake!

Andy Gordon



Graham Pierce and Andrew Allott under the Wittv Pear

Some thoughts on the Linley Beeches and Brampton Bryan

In early February an STT working party did some rejuvenation work on the younger versions of the famous Linley Beeches. Judging by the attached labels, they appeared to have all been planted in the 1970s by a Midland walking group in commemoration of some of their members but no maintenance had ever been done, in fact the chicken wire protection had been incorporated into the trunks. What a mess. We removed as much of this as possible whilst also carrying out some formative pruning. If ever there was a lesson that there is no point in planting a tree without some intention of aftercare, then this was it. Folks who walk the countryside really should know better.

Late in May we were down in the area so went to check on how the work now looks. Most of the piles of branches we had left had been removed by the landowner and chain-sawing out all the lower branches had left the earth beneath bare, hopefully to be colonized by the bluebells spreading out from the glades.

As we walked higher up the hillside to the 200 year old beeches, we were joined by a chap who had done this same walk with his dogs for decades. He was the son of a Polish cavalryman POW who had been moved to Walcot Hall (STT visited a few years back) at the end of the war to guard German POWs interned there before repatriation. I never realised how much bad feeling there was to this day towards Churchill as to how he reneged on promises to Poland, and betrayed the country to Stalin. Needless to say the father was never able to return to his homeland. I digress. Our fellow rambler told us as we walked on how many of those great trees had fallen in recent years. The double row, now devastated in places, was still intact until only a short time back. What struck us more than anything was that up here we could barely stand upright, the wind was so intense, whereas amongst the young beeches in the protection of the wood there was not a breath. How could they be so erect, so vertical, when naturally they should be windblown. Did those tree breeders of the past have knowledge on tree selection that has been lost- if there is a good mast year I must collect seed from some of those trees. Or is the reason rather more elusive: as a few of us have been expecting, the major result of climate modulation will not be increased or reduced temperature or rainfall (select as appropriate) but more extreme and frequent “wind events”. The clues are out there.

Slightly higher up than where the working party was labouring was an isolated farmhouse. I asked the grandson of Poland about it and he said occasionally waste bins from it were left where the cars parked. Curious, after parting company we walked the footpath alongside the house. The smell of dead bodies was distinct, never very pleasant. A piece of old bale twine was all that held the shaky gate. I followed my nose to a shed dreading what I would find pushed and pushed the door until it gave way. No humans this time but a solid mass of corpses of sheep. It looked like they had pushed their way in to shelter and the door had closed back on them. Why had nobody else walked that path and investigated, they must

have taken days and days to die. You see so many dead livestock in the countryside these days, if you drive with the car windows open you can sometimes smell corpses when passing the most notorious farms. (When I rang 101 later to say that the property needed searching and securing- it could be a death trap for children- the wonderfully efficient call handler said “Could I ask a stupid question, how do you know what dead bodies smell like”, “I’m a farmer”. She laughed).

On one of the hottest days of last summer several score of us walked the Harley family’s estate at Brampton Bryan. There were so many that they divided us into two groups and walked in opposite directions. It really was a case of Mad Dogs and Englishmen. As far as I know at present, STT’s visit on 13th July will be rather more suited to slow walkers than mountaineers. Those of you who attended Aljos Farjon’s excellent talk in March will know that he is very fond of the place and Andy and John did a recce last autumn with good reports. The family history is fascinating, two of the most famous streets in London are named after the family (there is a clue earlier in this paragraph) and their Civil War story is even more topsy turvy than The Johnson Boris. For history buffs, we’ll probably get the full story. The roadside hedge is one of the most fabulous in the country and Brampton Bryan is the home of Aardvark Books. If there is a better second-hand book shop, coffee shop, sometimes music, sometimes crafts, I ain’t found it yet. Don’t just be there at 2pm, spend the day there. It’s a bit of a haul down to BB, so as always if you want lift/share please get in touch with someone on committee. By the way, almost forgot, there will be trees to see as well.

Peter Aspin

Directions. Brampton Bryan is a tiny village on the A4113 to the west of Ludlow and Leintwardine. Choose one of many ways to get there from Shrewsbury! We will meet in the Car Park of Aardvark Books which is 200m down the minor road first left in the village coming from Ludlow. **Please meet there for 2pm** at which time we will double up in cars and as few cars as possible will proceed for c1km into the Park where we have been given permission to park. Mr Harley himself showed John and me round last summer and the visit will involve a certain amount of up-hill walking but mainly on close cropped grass. I have asked our friend Brian Jones to join us. He guided us round the Eastnor Estate and is almost solely responsible for recording all 500+ ancient trees on the Ancient Tree Inventory at Brampton Bryan. Not long ago he discovered an ancient oak of over 10m girth that the Harleys knew nothing about. He is not in the best of health so may not be able to attend on the day. We have reserved places in the Aardvark Car Park from 2-4.30pm for up to 20 people. So we look forward to seeing you there.

Andy Gordon