



Chairman's Comments

We are eternally grateful to John Tuer for his tour of the Limes and Ancient Holloways on Wenlock Edge. This was a fascinating tour of some very rare trees on John's local patch. Following on from this we have another local tour this month of some of the 50 best trees of Telford, but don't be alarmed we are only doing 28 this year, the rest next year! This will be a great opportunity to see some trees in Telford and the Corporate Woodland, which even your chairman has only seen with a tantalizing glimpse from the train. This looks to be a very interesting tour and I am told will be mainly off road and we won't be hovering on pavements. I am fascinated by Shropshire's industrial past and we must remember that this came about because there were so many trees in the area, so please join us if you can.. Please see below John's details for the visit.

David Martin

Our first visit of the year: "Wenlock Edge – Lime Trees and Holloways" (Saturday, 13th April 2019)

I've been asked to write the report on this visit although I led it myself, really because I have all the details already fixed in my mind but, naturally, I shall have to say more about what we saw than the quality of the visitor experience ! That's up to you, the visitor, to say whether or not you enjoyed the afternoon although I have received a few messages from people to say "thank you" and how interesting they found the afternoon to be.

Fifteen of our members came along to Wenlock Edge to look at these very special old Large Leaved-Lime trees (*Tilia platyphyllos*), trees with a mystery surrounding them. We looked at these limes along holloways (just along one side of each holloway), those in a line along the top of the Edge and one large individual specimen at the foot of the Edge between the wood and the farm fields. These three locations are particularly significant.

When I first embarked on trying to find all the large-leaved limes on the Edge back in 2012, I was staggered to find so many holloways, ancient sunken tracks, crossing the limestone of the Edge. Then I was equally amazed to find that many of these holloways had the limes situated just along one of their sides. I reported this back to Professor Donald Pigott (the author of the monograph on lime trees) who started me off on this odyssey and he, too, was surprised by my findings. After my discovery of all these trees, he asked me to go back to each, photograph each and work out its precise site reference. This I did. Then he asked me to write up my findings, something on which I'm currently working.

Let's start with the large isolated lime at the foot of the Edge. My belief is that this is a boundary marker tree and is one of three other similarly aged and similarly located trees along the foot of the Edge. This individual has a girth at 1.5 metres of approximately 8 metres, a sizeable tree indeed. If it is, in fact, a

boundary marker, has it been planted and by whom ? It is also a pollard so who, before the ownership by the National Trust, pollarded the tree on a regular basis ?

Those limes along the holloways are also in lines. Have they been planted or have they grown on these sites naturally ? If they have been planted, again by whom ?

And the limes in a line along the top of the Edge ? These can't possibly have generated naturally for it is obvious that they were planted to create a hedge as they have been pleached (i.e. bent over when young and kept in place with vertical stakes, as is a common practice in hedging today) and the form of this pleaching might be considered as a "palimpsest". Those of you familiar with this term will know it as meaning a structure or form in which remnants of some pre-existing structure are preserved. So that today we see the pleaching of former times albeit showing the bent over thin stems now as huge horizontal trunks from which shoot vertical new growth. This new growth has been regularly pollarded. So we must ask the same questions ? Who planted these lime and when ?

I had found that all these large-leaved limes were situated between Roman Bank, above Rushbury, and Much Wenlock. There were none south westwards between Roman Bank and Craven Arms. Limes were often found around abbeys and priories because their flowers provided bees with honey and wax, much used in these institutions. Lime trees in the past were often used for their "bast" – fibres beneath the bark which could be used for rope-making, net-making, ladder-making and sandal-making. In America, lime trees are called "basswood" from the term "bast". So, because Wenlock Priory owned the land along Wenlock Edge from Much Wenlock to just beyond Roman Bank, everything pointed to these trees having been planted by the monks of the Priory.

But we must not jump to conclusions. Having given my girth measurements of the trees to Donald Pigott he used his graph of known dates of planting of limes plotted against their girths and informed me that the large 8 metre girth "boundary" tree probably dates back to the latter half of the sixteenth century. The girth of three and four metres for two pollards in one of the holloways that we visited give us a possible planting date during the first half of the eighteenth century. So as Wenlock Priory was dissolved in 1540, none of these measurements give any dates of possible planting by the monks of the Priory. So this thickens the plot even further.

Donald Pigott has discovered that lime trees regenerate more easily where they can grow along the tops of limestone cliffs and those trees in two of the holloways we visited did show this feature. The limes were, indeed, growing along the top of exposed Silurian limestone. Yet the third holloway we visited showed its row of limes to be on the opposite side so the answer to the puzzle is not yet wholly explained. And this answer does not explain the row of pleached trees along the top of the Edge nor the boundary trees along the bottom.

However, we might be able to assume that the original trees came from France and were brought over by the Priory from Cluny, its parent abbey. For most of its life, Much Wenlock Priory was a Clunaic institution. It had constant contact with Cluny and may well have received its original trees from there. On that basis, we can say that, whilst large-leaved limes are a native tree in the British Isles, Wenlock Edge may not have been a "natural" site for this species to appear naturally. So, possibly, and just possibly, the trees we saw may have originated from the regeneration from original trees planted by the Priory.

The jury is still out, as they say ! There are still pieces of the jigsaw yet to be found and I hope all those who came found the attempts to solve it as fascinating as I have.

Certainly, following the visit to the trees, a small group of us went off to see the Forester's House on the Edge and found this to be very fascinating especially as the owner (tenant) invited us inside. The house dates from 1280, we were told, and foresters at that time were very unpopular people. They had to stringently adhere to the forest laws and act as police in reprimanding those who fell foul of them. So the lower part of the forester's house was, in fact, a "dungeon" for those caught infringing the laws while

in the upper part lived the forester and his family, a part of the house with difficult access – small windows and the door, being on the first floor, requiring a moveable ladder or some such, to be taken away once the inhabitants were inside. For those of you who wish to see this house, it is easily accessible to view from the outside as it is on that part of the Millichope Estate that borders on the road down into the Corvedale.

Thank you for joining me in whichever part of the afternoon you came to. I hope you enjoyed the visits.
John Tuer

The next visit: To the 50 Telford trees – Saturday, 11th May 2019

The Friends of Dothill Local Nature Reserve in Telford (DLNR) designated 50 trees in the Admaston area of Telford as special enough to help celebrate Telford's fiftieth anniversary in 2018. It so happens that our own Corporate Woodland is a part of the area looked after by DLNR. They know of our existence and we have had frequent contact with them including one joint planting so, on this visit, you will be able to see our Corporate Woodland and just how we have been helping each other. The route of the 50 trees actually passes through our woodland.

The total distance to view the 50 trees is actually 3.4 miles so we have split this visit into two parts and in this year's programme our May visit will look at 28 of these trees while we can add the 22 remaining trees to our next year's programme. This will make the walk this time much shorter (about 2 miles in total) and on fairly even ground.

Although there are one or two unusual trees, most of the trees are relatively common so this will be an excellent opportunity for those of you who are a little unfamiliar with the more common trees, to look at them in more detail.

We meet at 2.00pm, our usual time, but for this visit, in the car park of the Admaston House Community Centre. So how do you get there? The directions I give here will be from Shrewsbury:

Leave Shrewsbury on the old A5/Telford road that passes Attingham Park. At Attingham Park, please put your trip recorder to zero. After 1.6 miles turn left, just after the Mytton Antiques on your right and bus stop on your left. The road is signposted "Allscott and Walcot".

Please set your trip recorder to zero again. Continue along here and you'll eventually see the sign for Admaston. Continue and when your trip recorder says "5 miles", turn right onto Wellington Road. This is just after a "Methodist Church" sign.

When you've turned right, turn left just after the bus stop into the Community Centre Car Park. We look forward to seeing many of you there for a 2.00pm start.

John Tuer