



As part of our Covid-19 recovery we are updating our membership records. We would be obliged to our members to return the form to S.T.T. with any updates on your membership information.

Dear Member,

We were sad to learn recently of the death of member Stella Salt, the wife of Len Salt, who was a long term member of STT, as well as of David Richards from Wem who in recent years has been a regular attender of our visits and meetings. Appropriate notes of condolence were sent to their families.

I am sorry that my talk on 11 January had to be cancelled. At that date numbers of infections were rising in Shrewsbury and it was felt that it would be better to re-arrange the talk for a later date when more members might be able to attend.

Rules have changed since then so Dougald Perce's talk on Trees and Climate change will go ahead on 8th February (See below). I hope to see many of you there.

I have spent many hours during the pandemic investigating the trees that have been recorded in the Ancient Tree Inventory on Offa's Dyke or 5m from it as opposed to those on the Offa's Dyke Path which often deviates from the Dyke. In this newsletter you will see a short report of my findings as well as photos of two ancient Pedunculate oaks, one of which is the oldest tree on the Dyke at about 1000 years old. These two trees can be seen by anyone without getting out of their car! They are to be found beside the B 5400 about 2miles along the Ceiriog valley from the left turn at the top of the rise on entering Chirk village. I would point out that they are well worth looking at!

We have tried to lay on a suitable programme of visits during the pandemic along with some interesting lectures and walks to look forward to in the autumn. We do hope that you will renew your membership. *Andy Gordon, Chair.*

January Tree planting

A thank you to those who turned up to the planting at Upper Darnford for CPRE, working alongside Trees For Shropshire, on Saturday 29 January.

A 120m mixed hedge was planted between 9am and 12noon.

The Next planting date is **26 February 2022** with CPRE's Hedgerow project working alongside Trees for Shropshire planting a 140m hedge, 840 whips, to include 10 Oaks and 10 Beech trees with 60cm plastic spirals with canes. At **AFFCOTT HALL COTTAGE, AFFCOTT, CHURCH STRETTON. SY6 6RL.**

Signs will be up for the last bit off the A49.

TIME 9.30 am onwards. *Richard Dorrell 07790 956 496*



The Trees of Offa's Dyke by Andy Gordon

The Welsh border's greatest man-made feature is Offa's Dyke. The dyke ran from the Bristol Channel to the Irish Sea following roughly the line of the modern English- Welsh border, a distance of approximately 150 miles. It is now thought that the dyke was never continuous but consisted of three main sections, one from Chepstow to the Gloucester- Herefordshire border, a middle section from north Herefordshire, through Shropshire into Powys and the final section from north Powys through Flintshire and ending near Prestatyn in Denbighshire. The dyke actually runs for 81 miles of the 150 miles from sea to sea. It replaced a number of earlier features with a much grander scheme.

It is widely accepted that Offa's Dyke was built during the reign of King Offa of Mercia who ruled from 757 to 796. It had a ditch on the Welsh side with the excavated soil piled into a bank on the Mercian side. No trees would have been planted on the dyke itself at the time of construction and there are no records of trees actually having been planted at any time, instead many trees would have been clear felled on the route. With a few exceptions existing trees are likely to have arisen adventitiously and none is likely to date from near the date of construction, which would make them c.1200 years old. Only oak and yew trees are known sometimes to reach this age and none of the trees actually on the dyke are of that age.

Using the Ancient Tree Inventory website and the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey maps it has been possible to identify the exact course of the dyke and to investigate the trees in the Ancient Tree Inventory (ATI) which are located actually on the dyke or up to 5m from it. These have been found normally to be on the bank rather than in the ditch on the western side which has now largely been filled in.

In total 441 trees have been recorded in the ATI either on the dyke or within 5m of its track. 135 trees have been named as "oak" with 51 identified as pedunculate and 15 as sessile oak totalling 211 oaks or 48% of the total recorded trees. Probably the oldest tree on the dyke is Tree number 195, a Pedunculate oak known as the Tree at the Gate of the Dead, at the very southern end of the National Trust's Chirk Castle Estate beside the B4500. It was recorded on 3 January 2009 by Robert McBride who over



Figure 1: Another ancient oak near to the Duelling Oak (photo Andy Gordon/ATI)

the next 13 years has visited the whole length of Offa's Dyke and added the majority of the records although Brian Jones added most of the records from Chepstow as far north as Monmouth. The Chirk oak, before half of it split away and died, measured 9.53m indicating an age of approximately 900-1000 years. Another 35 oaks along the dyke have girths in excess of 5m suggesting ages of over 300 years.

The largest and possibly the oldest yew on the dyke has a girth of 4.32m and is probably about 700 years old. Although a maiden it has significant fluting which makes ageing it difficult. It is located in Garnons Wood on Garnons Hill to the west of Hereford and was recorded by Gareth Bowen, who has recorded many trees for the ATI in this part of the country.

Beech is the next most numerous species with 45 records or 10% of the total with a multi-stem tree measuring 9.5m girth at 0.5m in the woods on the eastern slope of the Wye River near Whitebrook being the largest. Only 2km further north in the same wood on the eastern side of the Wye is a coppice beech measuring 8.5m at 10cm above the ground. Ash with 36 trees and 8% of the total is the next most abundant species, with a massive multi-stem tree with a girth of 8.4m at 50cm on private land to the north east of Chirk Castle as the largest. It also was recorded by Robert McBride.

Limes of all species come next with over 6% of the total but with only one recorder confident enough to specify Common lime as the species. The presence or absence of fine hairs at the vein junctions of the underside of the leaves is listed in the identification books as the diagnostic feature but even Professor Piggott who authored the definitive work on limes regards the position of the flowers and fruits as the best feature to separate small leaved lime from large leaved lime. The former carries its flowers and fruits erect above the leaves whereas the flowers and fruits of large leaved limes are pendulous and hang below the foliage. The best way to identify common lime which is a natural hybrid between the two species is to look for the mass of epicormic shoots at the base of the trunk rather than trying to interpret the presence or absence and colour of the tufts of hairs on the underside of the leaf.

Strangely the next most common species on the dyke is Scots Pine. Until a few years ago one would have immediately said that these were planted trees but recent research by Dael Sassoon at Manchester University has demonstrated and reported to us in his talk (see newsletter - April 2020 - on our website) that Scots Pine is native to this part of Wales and England so the 21 Scots Pine growing on the dyke might just be natural regeneration, although unlikely. One other pine on the dyke from the photograph looks like *Pinus nigra* and from its age is likely to be the Austrian Pine variety rather than the Corsican Pine variety which has been widely planted for timber production in the UK until hit quite recently by the Red Band needle blight fungus.

Veteran and even ancient hawthorn with girths up to 3.15m at 0.5m for a multi stem tree, feature all along the dyke and these almost certainly will have arrived adventitiously as a result of birds eating the fruits. In contrast the field maple plants which are almost as frequent as the hawthorn will have grown from the winged seed distributed naturally by the wind. The largest field maple is a multi-stem tree with a girth of



*Figure 2: The Duelling Oak
(photo Andy Gordon/ATI)*

3.55m at 0.4m from the ground. It is located very close to the beech at Whitebrook mentioned above.

All along the dyke there are many hazel coppice trees with some having been left uncut for very many years. The largest with a girth of 4.5m at 1.0m above ground level is near Brompton Hall at Churchstoke and from the picture has some individual coppice shoots well over 50cm in size. A twin-stem rowan tree just 10m from the dyke near Llanfair Waterdine has a girth of 4.32m and nine other rowans with girths greater than 1.9m have also been recorded.

Very few birch trees feature in the ATI on Offa's Dyke, with the largest of nine recorded trees, although not specified, having a girth of 2.74m. at 1.5m above ground. It is located near Churchtown and is one of the later records added by Robert McBride. Birch, with its very light wind-blown seed, is one of the first species to invade uncultivated areas but it is relatively short lived and in the whole of Wales only 22 birch trees exceed 4m in girth.

Nine wild cherries have been recorded on the dyke but three of the largest all with girths of over 2.5m are no more than sawn off stumps on the dyke near Chirk Castle.

Sycamore seems to have invaded the dyke relatively late as the largest is only 4.88m in girth suggesting an age of barely 150 years. One multi-stem holly with a girth of 4.55m at 30 cm from the ground near Evenjobb, south of Presteigne, is worth noting.

Several trees have been given names. The most famous is the Oak at the Gate of the Dead near Chirk, already mentioned; other interesting names are The Duelling Oak a few metres from the last, The Bluebell Inn Oak at Brompton Hall near Churchstoke, the Mellington Hall Lodge Oak nearby, The Three Shepherds, three replaced yews on Rushock Hill near Kington, Prince Charles Rowan near Selattyn to the north-west of Oswestry and the Caeaugwynion Oak also near Chirk.

Recent research estimated that there are over a million ancient and veteran trees in the UK which have not yet been recorded. Maybe some of these are still to be found on Offa's Dyke! *Andy Gordon*

Our next meeting: Tuesday, 8 February 2022

A talk by Shropshire Tree Officer, Dougald Perce on "Trees and their role in the Climate and Biodiversity Crisis"

Many of you will remember Dougald from when he came to talk to us on Tree Preservation Orders and Trees in Conservation Areas. He's a good speaker who knows his subject well. He has now accepted our invitation to join us to give this second talk on a very topical theme regarding trees. He tells us that his emphasis will be on trees in the U.K.

Please come along to hear Dougald at our usual venue, St. Peter's Church Hall on Monkmoor Road. We start at 7.30pm, again as usual, but for those of you who have not yet renewed your subscriptions for this year, please bring along your completed membership form and we can take your subs before the talk. We look forward to seeing lots of you there. John Tuer.

To finish with we have an update (revision) of something John wrote in the previous newsletter (*Still learning- ed*)

Fasciation

Have you found occasions when your computer thinks it knows better than you? I suppose in many cases there are but there those particular occasions when you don't want the computer to try to correct you because you just might be right.

One such occasion was in my report on Bob's talk in our last Newsletter, the third paragraph contained the word 'fascination'. It should have been 'fasciation' but, no, my computer changed the word thinking it was being kind to me. Thank you Google or Microsoft or whoever you are, wherever you are!

Let me explain. When Bob showed us his ash branch specimen, it was flat with lots of buds appearing where one wouldn't expect them. This was a case of, what I call, cells going awry. It's scientific word is, yes you've guessed it, 'fasciation'. Let me quote from my dictionary of botany: '*An abnormal form of growth in which a shoot becomes enlarged and flattened, giving the appearance of several shoots fused together. It may be caused by mechanical injury, by fungi or mite attack or by infection with a bacterium. In some plants it is due to mutation.*'

So there you have it, unless between now while I write this and it appearing in the next Newsletter, Microsoft stretches its silent and unseen tentacles and feels that, well actually 'fascination' might be a more appropriate word. The specimen certainly was fascinating! *John Tuer*

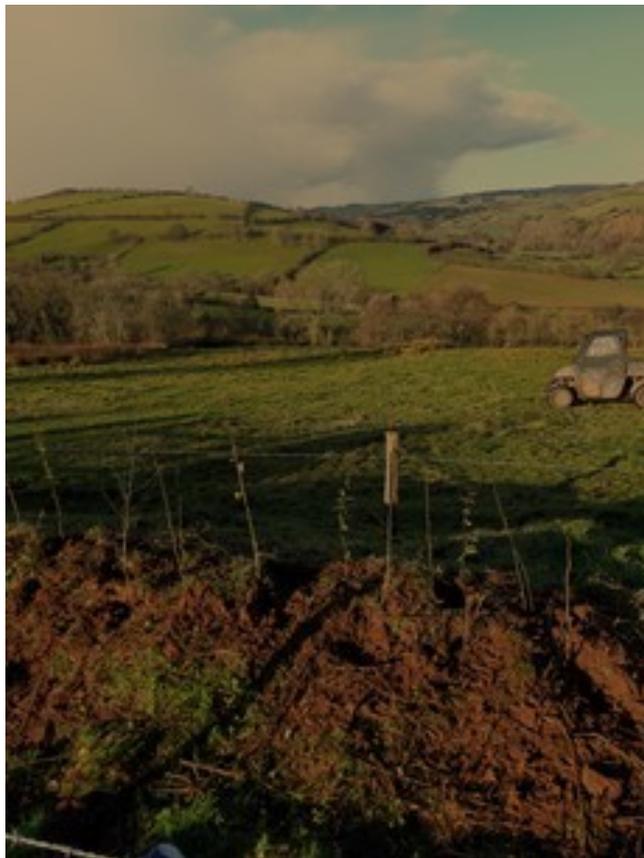


Figure 3: Revisiting Newcastle-on-Clun; the planting from last month at Cow Hall (Johanne Bracchi)

THE SEVERN TREE TRUST – Membership Renewal 2022

For those who completed a Standing Order form last year or earlier, please use this form to correct your details if necessary.

For those renewing their membership by cheque, please complete the following and send it to our treasurer.

John Tuer, Evergreen, 5 Woodside, Homer, Much Wenlock, TF13 6NQ

(please tick as appropriate)

Single Adult membership (£15) _____ Under 21s Membership (£5) _____

Double Adult Membership (£20) _____

Title (Mr.) (Mrs.) (Ms.) (Miss) (Dr.)

Name(s) _____

Your email address if you have one (This is to confirm that we have your correct current email address) and phone number.

Address

Receipt of newsletter. If possible we would like to send you the newsletter to you by email as it saves on postal costs. However our editor will post it to you if you have no email access.

Some people with emails have NOT been receiving the newsletter by email, mostly due to Firewall settings. Some have had trouble opening pictures and attachments. If you have had any problems in receiving the newsletter, usually sent during the last ten days of the month please indicate below.

Newsletter received by email _____ Newsletter received by post _____

(newsletter always available on the website)

Newsletter not received or other problem

Membership cards: These will be sent out on receipt of your subscription but can also be collected at the next talks and the AGM in March.

Thank you for renewing your membership. The committee will do its best to provide an indoor and an outdoor programme as restrictions permit.