



Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association

Tree Watch

Issue 10

August 2011

On 14th August 2011 we had **5000** trees in our database and **4937** photographs

This is a landmark issue of Tree Watch - not only is it the tenth issue - it marks the recording of our 5000th tree, a lovely oak in Bearwood Recreation Ground, Winnersh (see page 2).

The other important news is that we have now formally joined the Tree Warden network (see page 3). Stephen Loyd is taking the lead here. There is a new web page and a new e-mail address: treewardens@wdvta.org.uk

We had a very entertaining and informative talk from Glynn Percival in July. We now have a rather different image of the royal corgis! His PowerPoint presentation is on our web site.

Owen Johnson's book "*Champion Trees of Britain and Ireland*" was published in May this year and features just two trees in Wokingham Borough. One is the Oriental Plane in Wokingham Town (MRN 76) and the other is the yew in Ruscombe Churchyard (MRN 2277). Is that yew the best one in the Borough?

In the last issue there was a report on Charlie Harrison's dissertation project and the small part we played in trialling his EpiCollect project. I'm delighted to say that he got 85% for his dissertation and a First Class Honours degree. Well done Charlie. His dissertation is now on our web site.

The next issue of Tree Watch will be November 2011 and the copy deadline is 31st October. All comments and contributions please to: Elaine Butler datamanager@wdvta.org.uk



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Events planned for September - December

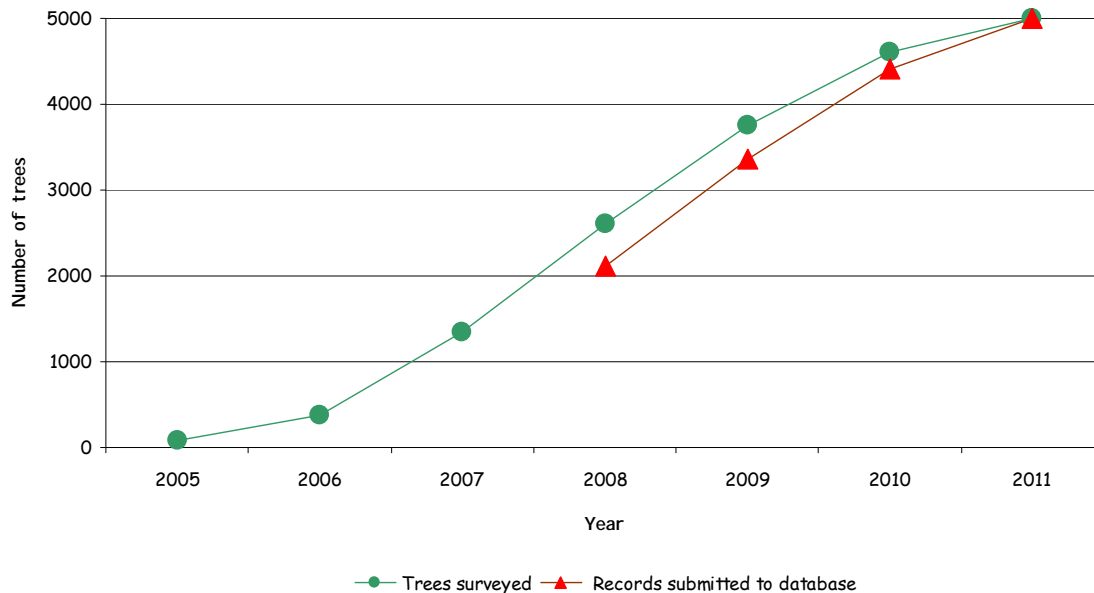
- ① Saturday 3rd September - Guided walk - veteran trees at Valley Gardens. Meet at 10:00 Valley Garden car park. No charge (even parking is free!) Booking essential - e-mail honsec@wdvta.org.uk
- ① Sunday 9th October - Cantley House Autumn Tree Walk - 11:00 - morning coffee, guided walk and lunch £20. Contact www.cantleyhotel.co.uk - 0118 978 9912
- ① Thursday 6th October 14:00 Apple Walk - guided walk around the orchard and wood at Waltham Place. £7 Numbers limited. Booking essential - e-mail honsec@wdvta.org.uk
- ① Tuesday 8th November 19:30 talk by local tree surgeon Steve Arnold. 19:30 Loddon Room Dinton Pastures. Booking not required.

For details and updates see the events page on our web site - wdvta.org.uk/events.php

5000 trees recorded!

The Wokingham District Veteran Tree Project (as it was then called) began in 2005 in Wokingham Town, and was extended to the whole of Wokingham Borough when the Association was founded in 2007.

The graph below shows the how the number of trees in the database has increased over the years. The current database was established in 2008 and the red triangles show the number of records submitted to the database, whereas the green circles show the year in which the trees were surveyed. The gap between the two reflects the lag between surveying trees and submitting records.



Our 5000th veteran tree is this handsome English Oak (*Quercus robur*) with a girth of 5.5m [MRN 5297]. Being over 350 years old, it was a sapling when the monarchy was restored with the coronation of Charles II; when Samuel Pepys started his diary and drank his first cup of tea; when the Royal Society held its first meeting and when Hans Sloane was born.



It is very appropriate that this landmark tree is a *Q. robur* because the majority of trees in our database are English Oaks. They account for over 55% of the 5000 trees recorded.

So far, 34% have been specifically identified as *Quercus robur*, with another 23% simply recorded as *Quercus sp.* It is a reasonable assumption that most of those will be English Oaks (although of course they do need to be checked). The largest oak has a girth of 8.85m and is in Shinfield (MRN 4951), but that is a multi stem. The largest maiden oak has a girth of 7.5m and is in Ruscombe (MRN 2278).

NEW WALKS LEAFLET

You may remember that Linda Martin produced a superb walks leaflet for Bearwood Recreation Ground, but some of the trees featured in it were subsequently felled (see Tree Watch №8 p6). The trees hadn't been properly surveyed then, but now they have, yielding several veterans as well as a small commemorative oak. To celebrate the fact that one of those veterans is our 5000th record, Linda has revised the leaflets. There are two formats - a folded leaflet and a flat sheet. The latter is laminated and available in the on-site café for anyone to borrow. They can also be downloaded from our web site.



TREE WARDEN SCHEME



An agreement has been reached to establish a Tree Warden scheme in Wokingham Borough. The national Tree Warden scheme comes under the aegis of the Tree Council which offer support to the local schemes. Whilst neighbouring schemes already exist in Reading and Windsor & Maidenhead, members of WDVTA can now offer to become a tree warden in their parish under WBC's membership of the Tree Council.

In practice, this will allow greater opportunities for practical tree related projects, as well as increased protection and awareness of local trees. I will be the link person for our tree wardens with the Tree Council, and ensure that all literature will reach those that wish to participate in projects.

The scheme will be launched at Shute End during National Tree Week later in the year, at which it is hoped to outline an initial project to plant mulberry trees around the borough to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Mulberry trees have local and regal significance dating from Queen Elizabeth I and the silk industry around Wokingham, to the present Queen who holds the national collection in the grounds of Buckingham Palace. If anyone would like to help this project, with local history, site selection etc, please get in touch: treewardens@wdvta.org.uk

Further information on the Tree Warden scheme may be found on our website as well as the Tree Council website.

Stephen Loyd

One of the advantages of being Tree Wardens is that we will be able to apply for some grant aid should we need it. The Woodland Trust recently ran an "Ancient Tree recorder challenge" for Tree Wardens. Nidderdale Tree Wardens in North Yorkshire won £900 for recording and verifying more trees than any other network. They have 761 trees in the Woodland Trust database. So if we'd been Tree Wardens last year

Having recorded 5000 trees, you'd expect individual totals to be quite high and a dozen people have recorded over 100 trees each, with two industrious surveyors each having recorded nearly 400 trees, but nobody could match Steve Waters, who won the Woodland Trust's individual challenge prize. He has recorded and/or verified 1675 trees! Is that encouraging or daunting?

MULBERRY TREES AND WOKINGHAM'S SILK INDUSTRY

You have only to visit Wikipedia on Mulberries (*Morus*), Silk and the History of Silk to see what a wealth of fascinating information and research there is about the ancient and worldwide silk industry. It includes *sericulture* (the farming of silk worms for raw silk) and *silk manufacturing* (such as throwing, dyeing, weaving, knitting for the production of silk cloth and artefacts)

There is a tradition that the silk industry in Wokingham was started in about 1585 by refugee weavers from Flanders. However, Dennis Ayres, a local historian, found no evidence for this, the earliest reference being to the knitting of silk stockings, which was a growth industry across England from the late 16th century onwards (Ayres D, *The Wokingham Silk Industry* 1989). As to the growing of mulberry trees locally for the production of raw silk he wrote:

"Although mulberry trees are said to have been planted in Wokingham to provide food for silk worms there is no evidence as to the date when this was done. They may of course have not been planted as an aid to raise silkworms; mulberry trees were grown not far away as early as the 14th century. In the country as a whole the main attempts to cultivate them took place in the late 16th - early 17th centuries. Elizabeth I and James I distributed mulberry trees; (James I alone distributed over 100,000). All attempts to produce silk on a commercial scale failed mainly because of the weather (it was the period of the Little Ice Age), which made it difficult to have leaves available when the silkworms needed them. An additional factor was that the natural food of the silk worm is the White Mulberry, while the tree distributed and grown in England was the Black Mulberry. Silkworms fed on the leaves of the Black Mulberry produce silk of poor quality, of uneven thickness and liable to break when wound. Such silk was suitable for spinning the very coarse thread used by the early silk knitters, but difficult to use for making the fine thread that fashion demanded in the 17th century'.

Ayres suggested that some mulberry trees planted in the Elizabethan or Stuart periods would have survived into the 19th century, and this may have given rise to the tradition of there having been a local sericulture. However, by the 19th century the majority of raw silk used in the larger silk manufacturing centres in the north in Stockport, Macclesfield and Congleton, as well as smaller silk mills around the country, such as those in Wokingham and Twyford, would have been imported. The Twyford mill stopped manufacturing silk in the 1820s and the last silk mill closed in Wokingham in 1832.

No Black Mulberry trees from 16th or early 17th century survive in Wokingham, but one claimed to be planted in 1608 is still to be found growing in the garden of Charlton House, Greenwich, London. Although the leaves of Black Mulberries may not have been as useful as those from White Mulberries for feeding silkworms, Black Mulberries are superior in giving delicious fruit, widely used in pies, tarts, wines, cordials and tea. Undoubtedly popular trees to have in a large garden for this reason alone!



One of the older Black Mulberries recorded in the WDVTA database once grew in the garden of The Elms, Wokingham. Although it fell over a few years ago, it is still fruiting and neighbours campaigned to preserve it by banking up the exposed roots. Another was planted in the town in 1985 by the Town Council to commemorate the centenary of the Mayoralty. Planting Mulberries for various commemorative purposes is very well worth establishing as a tradition in its own right.

Barbara Stagles

We have 5 Black Mulberries (*Morus nigra*) and one White Mulbery (*Morus alba*) in our database. Two of the blacks and the one white are in Wargrave [MRN 4781, 4790 & 4258] and the other three blacks are in Wokingham Town [MRN 81, 2039 & 3029-shown above]. All of them were probably planted in Victorian times or later, and so were not in existence when the silk trade was flourishing.

PROFILE - STEPHEN LOYD

Stephen Loyd is the coordinator for Ruscombe and has now taken on the role of Tree Warden coordinator.

Back in the summer of 1992 a chance leaflet drop by the local Wildlife Trust (BBONT in those days) was to lead to a whole new interest, and now forms the foundation of a very busy and enjoyable retirement. The Trust was inviting local people to visit a nearby neglected wood in Ruscombe with a view to establishing a "Friends" group to take on traditional woodland management. At that time I had not heard of coppicing, let alone "sneeding"; faggots were what granddad ate, and a coupe was a desirable car. Needless to say, I became a founding Friend of Ruscombe Wood (FoRWOOD) and over the intervening years learnt the traditional crafts of coppicing and hedgelaying.



At that time I had a career to contend with, but as retirement approached I was getting itchy fingers to work in the woods. An opportunity arose in 2008 and I decided to take early retirement and become a "hobby coppicer" in another local wood. So I currently work in a couple of local woods earning some pocket money from coppice products.

From my professional career as a technical librarian/information officer for a research body in the heating and ventilation industry, I was aware of the vital need to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, and although burning woodfuel is carbon neutral, its greater use means less fossil fuel is burnt and our woods can be managed in a more sustainable way that also benefits wildlife.

Since retiring, I also volunteer with BBOWT's mid-week team, learning conservation skills for a wide range of different habitats. This knowledge and experience has encouraged me to help advise and establish a new volunteer group in neighbouring Wargrave.

Since joining WDVTA, I have become a committee member, and coordinator for Ruscombe parish. I am progressing the Tree Warden scheme with the Tree Council and WBC and hopefully this should initiate some practical local tree projects in the future.

Stephen Loyd

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - *Why does it take so long to load the trees on the web map?*

The speed at which the trees are loaded depends on several factors - including the speed of your computer and which browser you are using.

If you find the map slow - then you should think about using Chrome as your browser. This is a Google product and free to download. Just type Chrome into Google. You don't have to stop using your regular browser, you can just use Chrome for the WDVTA site. That's what I do. I use Firefox as my regular browser (because it has the most effective ad-blocker), but Chrome for WDVTA (my home page is the WDVTA map page and so when I start Chrome, I get the map).

Just out of interest I checked how long it took to "Show All Trees" (4,969 at the time) on my machine (not something that you usually want to do, but a good test). Firefox took over 4 mins, whereas IE9 took 1 min 44 secs and Chrome only 35 seconds.



[For those interested, my Firefox 5 has several add-ons. It took 4min 42secs with several tabs open and 4mins 34secs with no other tabs open and the ad-blocker disabled. It took 5mins 2secs to display the trees immediately after "Remove All", showing that it's not the download time, but the time taken to run the Javascript. The cache was cleared in all instances - including Chrome 12. I had the same results using earlier versions of Firefox and Chrome. In Nov 2010, with 4,266 trees, Firefox took 4mins 15secs and Chrome just 25secs.]

A FAVOURITE TREE - *The Bound Oak, Arborfield - MRN 4197*

This tree shows many truly veteran characteristics and is a very significant tree as it historically marked the boundary between Arborfield and Swallowfield. It is mentioned in a history of Arborfield and Newland published in 1922 and is shown on the 1876 6" OS map, as well as the 1991 2½" OS Pathfinder map of Mortimer & Arborfield (and presumably others too).

It has been the subject of vandalism and has a burnt out trunk. Why do some people feel the desire to burn old trees? It was first surveyed in May 2010, when it was classified as a dead stump. However this year Steve Bacon noticed there were leaves on the two remaining branches. He has written an article about this tree for the Arborfield Local History Society web site and there is a link to that from the tree record on our web site.

Let's hope it survives into the next century.



Oaks are not immortal: they die at random from unknown causes. Oliver Rackham (2006) "Woodlands"

EXCEL TIP FOR RECORDERS

Since we use Excel for our records, and many of our surveyors are not that familiar with Excel, it seemed a good idea to include some tips in Tree Watch.

The first tip is a very simple one: *How to insert today's date:*

Actually it's probably not very useful because most of us don't rush back from surveying and enter the details on the spreadsheet that night!

Ctrl+; (pressing the Ctrl key together with the semi-colon key) gives you today's date in static form (it won't be changed).

[=TODAY gives you today's date, but it will be updated every time the spreadsheet is opened - and the validation on our spreadsheets does not allow its use in the 'Date Recorded' column.]

SADLY DEPARTED

As I hope you all know, we do record any significant changes to the trees in our database. Of our 5000 trees, 43 records (less than 1%) have been updated because the trees have been damaged, pruned, felled or died. Most of these (30) are in Wokingham Town, with between 1 and 4 in Barkham, Charvil, Earley, Finchampstead and Shinfield. Of these 43, 30 were felled, one died, six were damaged and six pruned (often following damage of course). Just over half of these are oaks, but since half the trees in the database are oaks, that's not really surprising. We are not routinely checking our trees and therefore these figures reflect the observation and interest of our recorders as much the state of the trees! The demise of a large oak will be particularly noticed.

Two major branches fell from this tree [MRN 2398] on Friday 4th August. The weather was calm and there was no reason to expect it to shed limbs, although it had already lost a branch in the winter snow earlier this year. It's beside Croft Road and luckily there was no damage to people or property when the branches fell across the road. It a much loved tree, but it may have to be felled.



Some recommendations from our web site:

WEBSITES: - Tree Warden links

- ① wdvta.org.uk/treewarden.php - our new Tree Warden page!!
- ① www.treecouncil.org.uk/tree-wardens
- ① www.reading.gov.uk/environmentandplanning/naturalenvironment/trees

READING:

- ① wdvta.org.uk/pdf/Percival-presentation.pdf - Glynn Percival's presentation
- ① wdvta.org.uk/pdf/bearwoodwalk.pdf - Bearwood Recreation Ground walks leaflet
- ① wdvta.org.uk/WDVTS/doclist.php - list of documents associated with tree records

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Don't forget: The latest database and all the latest files relating to the survey are on the Yahoo site:

groups.yahoo.com/group/WDVTA

Details of all trees in our database are available via the web map pages: wdvta.org.uk/WDVTS

Finally, and most importantly,
THANK YOU to everyone who is out there recording our trees.
We wouldn't have a database without you.