



- Talk: October 8th, at the Shropshire Wildlife Centre, Abbey Foregate. When Peter Thomas will pose the question – ‘Why are Trees so Important?’

Chair's Clippings,

I was sorry to miss the visit to Croft Castle, and more so when I read John Tuer's report. It is certainly a place well worth a visit and we will endeavour to fit in a second event in the not too distant future.

As promised, the answer to last month's intriguing picture. It is in the Barbican Centre in London and is the remains of a 500yr old Beech tree which fell in the forest of Burnham Beeches (Bucks) during a storm in 1990. It is known as Mendelssohn's Tree because it is thought that the composer Felix Mendelssohn may have sat beneath it while seeking inspiration for some of his music.

What is the link with the Barbican Centre which, on the face of it, would have little to do with trees? The Corporation of London bought the ancient woodland of Burnham Beeches in 1880 on behalf of the nation, to enable people to have access to green spaces.

After the devastation of London in World War 2 the innovative regeneration which is the Barbican was built, a concrete 'township' in the Brutalist style.

Walking into the first part of this development I was unprepared for the way in which trees have been successfully introduced. Landscaping was an integral part of the Barbican design particularly which trees would work best including woodland trees which provide autumn colour or are evergreen or have decorative features such as interesting bark, twigs or leaves.

A few to mention – Ash, Ailanthus, Catalpa, Horse Chestnut, Willow-leaf Pear, Whitebeam and Hawthorn to name a very few.

The green spaces created have allowed a rich bio-diverse system to flourish and, for me, shows what can be done in an urban environment. Any town or city could take lessons from what could be described as a concrete jungle in no uncertain terms.

There are some further interesting facts about the Barbican and its green 'heart' in a number of articles on the internet, well worth a look.

Don't forget our first winter talk on October 8th, at the Shropshire Wildlife Centre, Abbey Foregate. When Peter Thomas will pose the question – ‘Why are Trees so Important?’ I hope to see you there. *Julie K*

A message from Andy Gordon to all members;

I am craving the Editor's indulgence for addressing you personally in this way at this time to say good-bye and thank you for your company over the last dozen years or so. I recently suffered a stroke which means I can no longer drive and so will be unable to attend STT visits and meetings. Also I have some comments I want to make on the report by Angela and Roger Hughes on their visit to the Shetland Islands. Maybe next month....

Croft Castle visit: Saturday, 14th September 2024

A good turn out of members for this visit and we were met by National Trust rangers Justin and Chris who had given up their Saturday afternoon to guide us around this remarkable site for ancient trees.



On this day, the weather was probably the best we'd seen for a long time and everyone

Figure 1: Croft Castle: The 'Phoenix' tree, an 18 year old fallen large leaf lime, with young lime trees growing up from it. (photo R Hughes)

was so enthralled by what we were shown, that our discussions along the route meant that our two ranger guides fell behind in taking us on the full tour that they'd planned.

This in no way inconvenienced them. They were delighted to have such a receptive, interested and knowledgeable group to show around and by the end they said that not only had they learned from us, but they would also welcome seeing us again to complete the tour of the Croft Castle estate.

So what was it that made the tour so interesting? Three things I suppose. Firstly the knowledge of our guides. Not only did Jason and Chris know so much about the history of the estate and the future plans and the justification behind them, but they found that we were very much in tune with their thinking; thinking about the future of the conifers on the estate and about the re-creation of wood pasture, thinking about how to protect ancient trees,

And it is these last two that make up the second and third things that made the tour so interesting. Over the years, the Forestry Commission has leased land from the National Trust and planted lots of Western Hemlock and Douglas Fir all of which have compromised any attempt to maintain and protect the old wood pasture that existed beforehand. Those of you who have read Andy Gordon's paper on the Croft

Castle estate will have seen his maps of the wood pasture that existed in the past and will also know something of the attempts which are now taking place to gradually remove the conifers. It was interesting to read this before our visit so we were able to see in reality just what we had read about. We were shown places where this was taking place and where new young broadleaved species had been planted, many of them starting to encourage regeneration themselves. Naturally, this accorded with our own beliefs and we all supported what Jason and Chris were doing. I should add that when the conifers are felled they are pulled off the site by horses.

Thirdly, the protection of the ancient trees. These specimens contrasted considerably with the new growths planted for the wood pasture project. The ancient trees were mainly Oaks (usually *Quercus robur* but not always) and Sweet Chestnuts. These old gnarled



Figure 2: Croft Castle: Spanish Chestnut. An example of why not to 'manage' trees, showing us the unusual 90 degree angle a massive bough has taken and some of the members. (photo R Hughes)

specimens reminded me of what the Reverend Francis Kilvert said about the old Oaks of Moccas: "those grey, gnarled, low-browed, knock-kneed, bowed, bent, huge, strange, long-armed, deformed, hunchbacked, misshapen old men that stand waiting and watching century after century biding God's time with both feet in the grave and yet tiring down and seeing out generation after generation, with such tales to tell, as when they whisper them to each other in the midsummer nights." The Croft Castle oaks reminded me perfectly of the oaks we once went to see at Moccas. The ancient Sweet Chestnuts were exactly the same, some clearly showing the bark spiralling and often hollow with age. What wonderful trees these were and the rangers had a policy of non-intervention generally but this was assisted by the prevention of compaction of the ground surrounding them and the insurance that they were well supplied with water.

So this visit was not about looking at lots of individual tree species as is often the case when we visit an arboretum or a garden full of trees. This was about looking at landscapes and their component parts. From the macro to the micro view, however, looking at individual specimens did excite us when we saw, for example an ancient Sweet Chestnut with a girth of about 40 feet that had limb of about 15 of girth stretching from it. How on earth did the tree support this weight without the limb collapsing? Or the Sessile Oak with its girth of about 54 feet, an age of about 1000 years and completely hollow in the middle. Some of the younger oaks around it had

signs of the imminence of Sudden Oak Death but this large Sessile Oak soldiered on just like one of Tolkien's ents and is the second largest Sessile Oak in Britain.

The Sweet Chestnuts in the long avenues of this species may be as much as between 500 and 600 years old and, should any die, the National Trust has a policy of replacing them. Many have been pollarded which, of course, should extend their lives.

At the head of Fishpool Valley stands a fine Oak known as the "Candelabra Oak" as its shape resembles a Jewish menorah. Its appearance is probably due to the last time it was pollarded, about 60 years ago when the National Trust took over the site. This also figures in Andy's paper if you wish to see it again.



Figure 3: Croft Castle: The 'Quarry Oak' recorded as 1000 years old. Growing on the edge of a quarry, so well protected, one of 3 quarries where stone was quarried for Croft Castle. (photo R Hughes)

I could carry on about some of the individual trees we saw but I must stop and say a huge "thank you" to Justin and Chris and "yes please, we'd love to take you up on your offer to continue the tour next year and see

what you're doing on the rest of the site." A big thank you, too, to Andrew who arranged this visit for us and, of course, arranged for us to have such good weather as well ! Oh and I mustn't forget, my own personal thanks to Peter who recommended the curried cauliflower filled pastie in the tea rooms. Now that was something else.

P.S. Jason gave us a version of the saying about the longevity of oaks. I wonder if he got it from John Dryden's poem ?

"The monarch oak, the patriarch of trees
Shoots rising up, and spreads by slow degrees;
Three centuries he grows, and three he stays,
Supreme in state, and in three more decays."

John Dryden (1631-1700) from his "Palamon and Arcite". *John Tuer*



THE SEVERN TREE TRUST PRESENTS:



Two Autumn Talks

At our new location at the Shropshire Wildlife Trust Centre

Tuesday 8th October
Starts at 7.30pm

Why are Trees so Important?



Bomb Protection & Tree Intelligence to Carbon Storage & Cardboard Boxes

Peter Thomas is an Emeritus Reader at Keele University and an Associate of Harvard University, USA. Peter has given talks to us before, and his research and teaching are centred around anything to do with trees and this has taken him to all continents where trees grow.

Tuesday 12th November
Starts at 7.30pm

Can Trees Save the Planet?



John Box: Trustee of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. Trustee of Severn Gorge Countryside Trust. John has an extensive knowledge and interest in habitat restoration and creation and gave us a fascinating talk last year leading to some hot debate!

Shropshire Wildlife Centre,
193 Abbey Foregate,
Shrewsbury
SY2 6 AH

STT Members - **Free Entry**

Non members - **£5**

Students - **Free Entry**

Pay at the door

No need to book!

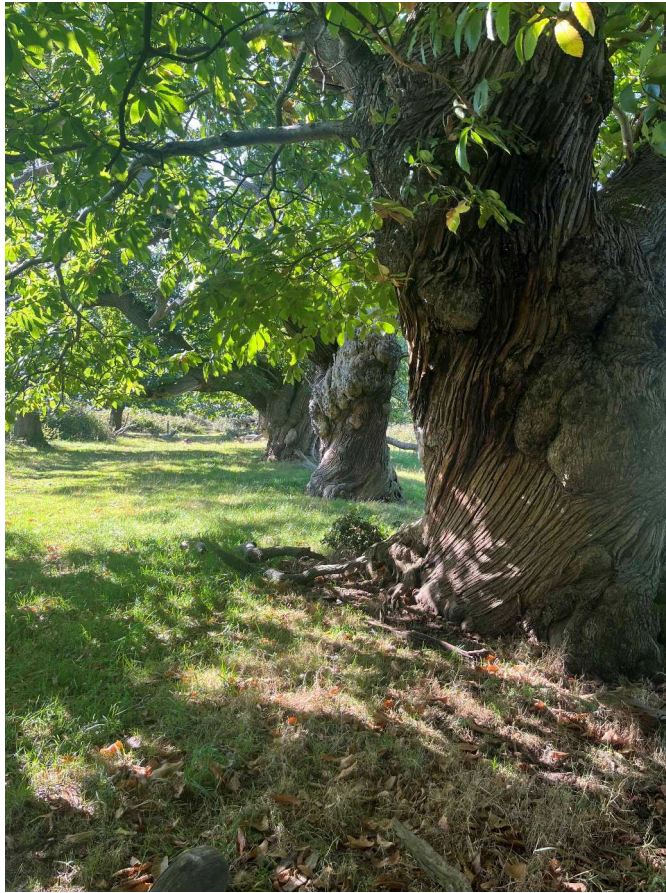


Figure 4: Croft Castle: Remains of the double avenue of Spanish oak, some trees were 500 years old, and some now being pollarded to give light to others. (photo R Hughes)