



Autumn lecture; Archie Miles. Yet another reminder of our special talk on **Tuesday 11th November, 7.30 at Shropshire Wildlife Trust.** Don't forget to email me for tickets whether you are a member or not. We need to know numbers as the Hall holds just 70.

From the Chair,

I think we have truly moved into Autumn with a real kaleidoscope of tree colour to enjoy before the frosts and wind deal the final blow.

We decided to find as good a selection of autumnal hues as we could and visited Bodenham Arboretum, near Kidderminster. Here you will find an excellent selection of over 3000 species of trees and shrubs. Set in 170 acres of woodland in a bowl shaped site within which are two miniature valleys and a number of lakes. The arboretum was begun in 1973 and is still a family concern and has a good selection of mature trees – North American Oaks, Alders and a grove of California Redwoods.

Scarlet Oaks make a fine show along with the expected Japanese Acers and additional colour is added by the weird-shaped bright red seed pods of Magnolia. The walks are not strenuous though there are some gentle slopes with good views over the Worcestershire countryside.

Finally I found some interesting facts about our only native maple – *Acer campestre*. Often overlooked as it is most commonly found in hedges but if left to grow in open ground it can reach up to 65ft. and live for 300+ years. Seeing it's gleaming bright yellow autumn hues makes a real splash of autumnal colour, but I liked the description which came from the Druids who considered the colour changes to be natural alchemy and called it 'sunshine fire' – how apt is that! *Julie Kaye*

Our visit to The Leasowes, Cressage, on Sunday, 19th October 2025

This was our second visit to this fantastic garden owned by our member Robert Bland and his wife Tricia. Our first was on 10th June 2023 but that visit being in summer and this time being an autumn visit, we were able to see Robert's trees in all their colourful glory.

I say 'fantastic garden' but this is truly an arboretum because Robert is passionate about trees and is still collecting rare and unusual specimens. If any of you keep your old Newsletters, you can look up our July 2023 one and see that I wrote then that "by far the majority of the trees here were rare cultivars or varieties" and that many of these "were trees that one would have to travel a long way to find planted elsewhere."

Once again, Robert himself showed us around his trees. He was so pleased to be able to take a group of like minded people around his ten-acre site. And, once again, our visit coincided with an open day to raise funds for the Shropshire Historic Churches Trust. On our part, we were happy to help Robert with that by bringing fifteen members, some of whom came last time to our visit to The Leasowes, Cressage, but a number, who had heard us extolling the wonders of this arboretum, came for the first time and were just as awed as we were on our first visit.

Robert added to what he had told us before that this site had originally been his father's dairy farm. He inherited it and gradually turned it into this arboretum. So he had been planting trees here for many decades and we see here trees of many ages.

I'm sure that this won't be our last visit here and if any of you reading this have not yet been, you will note by now that you are missing something special. Please try to come next time. You won't be disappointed.

You will see that I have not mentioned one tree in this report. That's for two reasons. One is that the day promised to be miserably wet and I felt that juggling in the rain with notebook and pen and with my stick, that I'm appalled to be having to use these days, would be rather difficult. The other is that my last report in July 2023 mentioned so many tree species and varieties that I thought I might save a mention of trees I didn't mention before until our next visit and I'm sure there will be one! As it happened, the day was overcast but unexpectedly dry and we could even have our cuppa and cake outside at the end of our visit.

Our thanks *once again* to Robert and Tricia for, *once again*, a super visit, a visit which ended for some to a call on Cressage's two noted oaks, the Lady Oak and the Cressage Oak. For those who wish to know more about these, please see below in my appended item. *John Tuer*

The two Oaks at Cressage

Many of you will know that the village of Cressage is named after 'Christ's Oak', hence the picture on the village sign on your approach.

As you leave Cressage towards Cross Houses and Shrewsbury you will see a very dead oak tree in a field to you right. This has a new young tree growing right out of its centre. Now I always thought this to have been the original Christ's Oak. But not so. My current reading of an article in a 1953 copy of the Shropshire Magazine tells me that the original Christ's Oak, a tree under which the Gospel was preached by early missionaries, was



Figure 1:
Sorbus berries
(photo A and
R Hughes)

actually in the centre of the village to be replaced later, when it had died, by a cross. It is believed that none other than St. Augustine himself, on a tour of the Severn Valley, stopped to preach under this tree (note, this is the tree where the cross now stands in the centre of the village).

Now returning to the tree off the Shrewsbury road, this apparently is called 'The Lady Oak'. The veteran, the remains of which can be seen surrounding the new young tree, we are

told, may be a remnant of the Long Forest and is many centuries old. The tree was 'clamped and propped up' but over time became completely hollow. The new tree within it is supposed to derive from an acorn from the original tree that dropped inside it.

It is said that Dean Swift (of 'Gulliver's Travels' fame) once sheltered under this tree in a fierce thunderstorm with two other travellers, a man and a woman. Whilst sheltering, obviously for some time, the couple asked the Dean to marry them. He immediately did, under this very tree, and gave them a certificate 'written in rather scurrilous verse on the spot'. (Thanks to G.S.Hewins. October 1953)



Figure 2: The Leasowes, Cound. (photo Angela and Roger Hughes)