STT

Newsletter

November 2026

(Formerly Men of the Trees following the work of Richard St Barbe Baker)

SEVERN TREE TRUST

Talk by Bob Watson. '*Roots and Shoots: The Progression from soft to bark-covered growth'*. Tuesday 10 November at Shropshire Wildlife Trust HQ on Abbey Foregate, 6.45pm for 7pm start. (Free parking after 6pm).

Dear Member,

A big thank you to John for his review of the visit to Gatley Park in October. I can never figure out how he makes all these notes whilst wandering around huge gardens and estates, presume that is why he was a deputy head and I was only ever a pupil/student.

The only time that I had ever seen Gatley was eighteen months previously from atop the hill fort above Croft Castle so it was fascinating to become more acquainted with the area. Domenica Dunne was very generous with her time and indeed with her Quince as we all left with a couple of Cydonias (true quince) to perfume our cars. There really is nothing better. As we often do, we gave a small donation to the local church in appreciation of our visit. In this case it was the tiny but architecturally characterful St Andrews, well worth a visit in its own right.

The first talk of the winter is by a good friend of STT, Bob Watson. Bob has done a couple of talks over the last few years and they have both been very well received. He was curator of the beautiful Thorp Perrow Arboretum in North Yorkshire before becoming Head of School of Forestry and Woodland Management at Newton Rigg in Cumbria. He has authored all sorts of papers and two definitive books, one on trees the other plants. His talk this time around is "Roots and Shoots- The Progression from soft to bark-covered growth". However, above all else Bob puts all this knowledge across brilliantly and is one of those people who is always worth listening to. Tuesday 10th November at Shropshire Wildlife Trust HQ on Abbey Foregate, 6.45pm for 7pm start. (Free parking after 6pm).

Finally, we are at the moment sorting out the programme for 2027. If anyone has ideas for any arboreally interesting places to visit please let someone on the committee know. It would be much appreciated. Thanks, *Peter.*

Visit on Sunday, 11 October 2026 to Gatley Park in North Herefordshire.

This is the home of our former South Shropshire MP, Mr. Philip Dunne and we were shown around by his wife, Mrs. Domenica Dunne on this, thankfully, dry Sunday morning when 10 members came along. And to those of you who missed this visit, I have to say that you missed an excellent one. Gatley Park is a very large estate with a very old and characterful house in the middle of it. It was part of the estate of neighbouring Croft Castle until the Speaker of the House of Commons bought it and through an number of sales, it eventually came into the hands of the Dunne family.

The house itself was built in 1637 and was extended by the Dunne family over a century ago. The gardens surrounding the house are full of interesting trees including fascinating yew topiary into box and ball shapes which add a lot of character to the front garden.

Mrs. Dunne showed us around the gardens encircling the house so that we could later carry on ourselves to visit the trees on the drive and those in the woodland above the house. It was interesting to see two “Winter's Barks” that we hadn't seen in any of our visits for a long time. The last I recall where in Winterbourne (appropriately) House gardens in Birmingham. Here at Gatley, there was *Drimys winteri* (Winter's Bark), the type species and *Drimys lanceolata*. The latter species is an aromatic shrub with its narrow lance-like leaves often called “Mountain Pepper”.

There was a large female Irish Yew in the front garden with plenty of red arils waiting for the birds to consume them. Yes, Yew is a dioecious tree with male and female specimens but we have sometimes found a male branch on a predominantly female tree and vice versa.

A *Cornus* took our interest with its now russet-turning leaves. But which Dogwood was it ?
It was quite a large specimen for Dogwoods and we could certainly narrow it down a little. Only two Dogwoods have branches and twigs that are not opposites – the Wedding-cake tree (*Cornus controversa*) and *Cornus alternifolia.* All other *Cornus* species have opposite growing branches and this specimen was definitely one of those. However, we really needed to see the tree in the flowering season to look at the colour of the large showy bracts. Even then, there are hybrids of Dogwoods, so it is very difficult to tell which species this particular specimen is without more information.....a label from the nursery where it was bought perhaps!!!

In the garden at the rear of the house and sloping downhill, there were a number of cherries, some still bearing fruit. There were also three Tibetan Cherries (*Prunus serula*) which needed to grow more to show off their wonderful smooth red bark.

There was an interesting Amelanchier at one corner of the house, growing a little closely we thought for safety. Peter suggested, as a replacement, planting a

Heptacodium miconoides, a shrub from China with the first part of its genetic name, meaning “seven”, giving some cause for speculation. So I've been digging to find out the answer to this one and my copy of Hilliers tells me that the name comes from the “Seven Son flower of Zhejiang”. So there really are no seven petals, seven seeds, or seven anything on the plant itself. I'll leave it to you to find out who or what “Zhejiang” is or was ! But, if planted, the flowers are very fragrant. A good replacement anywhere I suspect.

There were both a False Quince (*Chaenomeles japonica*) and a True Quince (*Cydonia oblonga*), the latter having many fruit. Again Peter proved he was a fount of knowledge. Well he could, he grows them himself and he told us that they have a wonderful way of killing off bad smells. Put them in your car and you won't get the petrol or diesel smells. In a greenhouse, it must be a very scented place to work.

There was a very large Silver Fir and a Strawberry Tree with lots of flowers. The latter species usually has its flowers and “strawberries” on the tree at the same time but on this specimen there were very few strawberries.

When we arrived at the house in the first place, we had driven on a long drive bordered by Sweet Chestnut trees. At this point in our tour, Mrs. Dunne left us to go and explore the drive further and have a look at the woodland in front of the house. It was here that we discovered a Chinese Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron chinensis*), some London Planes (*Platanus* x *acerifolia*) and a Walnut (*Juglans regia*).

Mrs Dunne had to leave us to attend to some more visitors. So we thanked her very much for showing us around and telling us much about the history of the estate. It seems that more and more visitors were turning up because the family had a wedding the following week and they were getting together to discuss the arrangements. So we must give an extra “thank you” to Mrs. Dunne for finding time for us during such a busy day for her.

Our group them moved to Croft Castle where we had lunch in their tea room and explored some of the gardens on our own. *John Tuer*