

Kent Men of the Trees Part ii 2013

Following a severe reaction to a beard-trimming incident, the doughty Mick Merritt was unable to escort the judge from KMT on his visit this year. Cometh the hour... so I stepped in at his request.

In truth I had no idea what was where, but the ever-reliable Mick provided a list and I set of with Wend and Millie to find the trees. I was ok on most, but a few were rather elusive, however I took a few photos and Mick put me right. What I have tried to do in this article is add some facts about the trees explaining why they are of interest.



The judge was David Gray, left, a most charming Scot from Canterbury and an experienced and very knowledgeable committee member who has been judging this for many years. He didn't know how many for sure, but it was a lot.

Mick had sorted a circuit starting at the green, going down Ewell Lane to Mill Lane, along Lower Road incorporating stops at the church, cricket ground, Court Lodge Park and Don Goodwin's, to Kettle Lane and back up to the green. It didn't look like much, but it took over three hours to do the

business. At the end of the visit I presented him with a loquat tree I had grown from a seed I brought back from Spain.



On the green and its extension, the trees passed muster, although the oak opposite Jacky and Ron's house seemed to be suffering on one side. The Acer saccharinum is now well established as is the Holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) and the walnut tree by the Good Intent car park.

A Honey-locust in front of a contrasting Copper Beech at the GI.



On extension green the Sweet Gum (*Liquidamber styraciflua*) is promising a good show this autumn as the chlorophyll becomes depleted and the yellow/red carotenoids begin to show more dominantly. Mick thinks the prunus here is not doing too well and he proposes to replace this with a Winter flowering cherry (*Prunus sublurtella autumnalis* on rootstock F12/1 moderate vigour. His words, not mine!)



First port of call after the green was to view the brilliant planting by Lesley Cushing and he was intrigued by her very unusual Kentish Gooseberry apple developed in the 1830s that grows along the ground, barely thigh high. A plant with vertigo? We looked at a dozen different trees on her property including some shown below, which got the ball rolling nicely.

Here's a selection of the treats behind the fence.



Indian Bean
(Note gloves. Les has two pairs...)



American Red Oak



Silver Maple



Column Birch



White Poplar



Gooseberry Apple



Beech



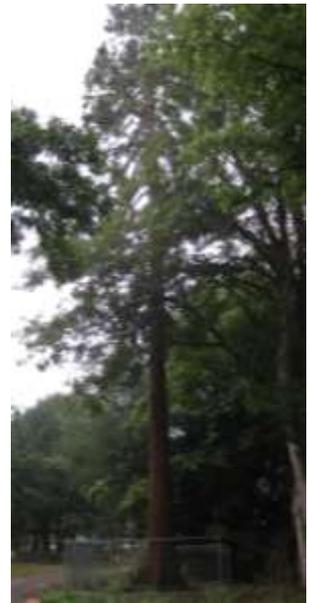
Judas Tree



Judas Tree pods



The drive down Ewell Lane enabled me to point out the two huge limes in Ewell Manor's grounds and I was able to tell him of the developments going on there and the fact that the original woodlands and orchards are being reinstated. This met with his approval and he hoped it would be possible to have a look next year. I am sure Peter and Cathryn Allen would be happy to allow this. There is a beautifully, up-sweeping Wellintonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) just inside the grounds.



Lime Trees (*Tilia x europaea*), above, were an important and very versatile tree when wood was needed for domestic fuel and coppiced to make hop and bean poles. The pale green flowers make a tasty and soothing infusion. A fibrous bast layer under the bark made matting and ropes. The flowers provide nectar for honey bees and the leaves made cattle fodder. The wood was good for bowls, ladles, musical instruments and Morris dancing sticks! It is still used for carving and features traditionally in the making of cuckoo clocks.



At this point I gave Brian five of six photos I had taken the day before to give him a tantalising taste of what was lurking behind Smith's Hall in Stephen Norman's memorial arboretum. He had to admit he had not come across a Hop Tree a Kentucky Coffee Tree (leaves about 90cm long!), pictured left, or a Pawpaw quite unlike the big juicy fruit he knew from his time in the Far East. He thought he had come across the Cucumber Tree, right, though. However, there are loads more for him to marvel at next year if it possible to do so.



The towering Maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) in Smith's Croft drew an appropriate response as did the view down the valley by the Tickled Trout. The ginko, incidentally, is a proto-tree which has remained unchanged for 250,000,000 years - the sole survivor of its family. The tree is also known as the White Fruit Tree in the Far East (*yin kuo* in Chinese) because of the pale nuts it produces. These are a popular food ingredient in Asia, as are the leaves which are infused as a tea high in flavonoids. An extract from the tree, B12, is a common dietary supplement for maintaining good blood circulation.



Crack Willows (*Salix fragilis*) along the river seen from Mill Lane. The name comes from the sound it makes when broken - hence fragilis, It is used to stabilise river banks and other waterways.

Had some use in weaving baskets and keep nets, and a purple/red dye can be got from the roots

Classical poems often refer to willow in a mournful way and it is repeated in art with Ophelia drowning herself near a willow.



The Handel Oak (an English Oak, (*Quercus robur*) located at the corner of Teston Bridge and Teston Lane is so named as it was planted in the same year Handel was born, 1686.

On seeing ancient old chap, this Brian Gray positively cooed and was further suitably impressed with its age of 328 years. It seems to be in quite good condition notwithstanding, and we hope it will continue to impress future observers - and the Kent Men of the Trees judges!

There are indications that the tree has been looked after as there are scars of large branches having being removed to prevent damage by collapsing.

On the path leading to the tree are several trunks left lying to provide habitats for a large variety of bugs and insects.



All Saint's church yard boasts a number of superb specimens. Lining the path to the main door is a row of beautifully trimmed Irish Golden Yews (*Taxus baccata aurea group*) and in the grounds are seven very ancient Yews planted in 1721. The ancient Yew Society think there was one more, but why and when it met its demise is unknown.

Yews were planted in churchyards to draw pagans, who used the yew in some ceremonies, to the

idea of Christianity. I'm sure there are readers who will give me a more succinct explanation which I will happily upload!

Yews are still used to make longbows. A stave combining both the purplish heartwood and creamy sapwood is very skilfully shaped and tillered to make a powerful bow much prized today by archers.

Behind the church is a lovely Deodar Cedar (*Cedrus deodara*)



This magnificent Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) graces the front of James Butler's Court Lodge Park. I have been told it's about 30m high, but in the wild, these can reach heights of 50m, so it has some way to go yet. As a matter of interest it is the state tree of Kentucky, Tennessee and Indiana.

The timber is a wood workers delight to use, as it achieves an excellent finish and is very attractive with a pale creamy wood containing reddish to purple streaks and swirls depending on how its cut.

In the grounds there are also, among many other fine specimens, an amazingly gnarled 200 year old Black Mulberry, which has an interesting history linked to James I and the silk worm industry and the

prison-based rhyme, "Here we go round the mulberry bush", some wonderfully elegant Weeping Willows and a stonking Copper Beech.





In Don Goodwin's pasture is a large, dead tree trunk. This shows signs of woodpecker holes and apparently there is an owl in residence.

In this same piece of land there are two saplings, below. One is the Jubilee Oak (*Quercus robur*) the village was given, and a fine Lombardy Poplar (*Populus nigra italica*) we were awarded in the Man of the Trees competition a few years ago. Both are healthy and well established.



Jubilee Oak



Lombardy Poplar



Behind the pavilion are a number of new plantings, among which is a rare young Raoul (*Nothofagus*), which Mick knew as Rauli. He adds the timber is similar to beech, but a darker, cherry red. The tree is related to the Roble Beech. The tree will, when mature, produce a large number of seeds known as beech *mast* every six or seven years, which has an effect on the numbers of small mammals benefitting from a bit of a food bonus.

This tree is well worth a viewing in the autumn when its leaves turn from red to gold to pink. There must be some really whizzy chemistry going on there.



Raoul bark

At the far corner of the cricket ground is a small stand of Alders (*Alnus cordata*), which likes wet ground and has bacteria on its roots which are an important part of the nitrogen cycle making it useful in stabilising banks and improving poor soils.



This ash along the far boundary is a self seeded specimen which Brian Gray is sure is a Manna Ash. His trusty Collins Guide showed the leaf and pod shapes to be consistent with the type.



Manna Ash



Leaves



Seed pods



Some fine walnuts along Lower Road. It's been a good year for walnuts generally, so Christmas looks sorted!



A drive along Lower Lane shows that the trees have been thoughtfully thinned and there is no sign of the dreaded Chalara.



Kettle Lane corner; revenge of the 482 Black poplar shoots. Ha! These were rising from the roots radiating from the stump. It's as if the tree knows it was brutally cut down...

But they had to go, so Larry set to with his trusty brush cutter. All gone, now.



In Holland Black poplar is used to make clogs because the wood is tough, durable, rot proof, easy to work, clean finish

that's not all, folks

Well, that's Part ii done. But . I know that many of you have fabulous specimens of really interesting trees flourishing in your gardens and I'd really like to compile a record of them. I've got a couple myself, not spectacular, but different and not that common - I think! I would be delighted if you contacted me and let me know about your tree so that I can add it to a feature on trees of the village.



Phew! I needed that!

Thanks, Mick.

Chris Stockwell. September 2013

hollyvillas@hotmail.co.uk