

# The Tree Register



Newsletter No.25  
2016/2017

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## Report from the Chairman

Colin Hall

# Exploration to discover our tree heritage continues

We were delighted to see so many of you at our 2016 Alan Mitchell Lecture at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, the first Alan Mitchell lecture held in Scotland. After guided tours of the garden and its Champion Trees, led by Tom Christian and Garden Curator, David Knott, guests enjoyed a drinks reception in the Visitor Centre and bidding at the Silent Auction for a collection of fine specimens of rare and unusual trees.

As the hammer went down on the auction, we moved to the Lecture Theatre, where John Grimshaw, the curator of the arboretum at Castle Howard, gave a stimulating and extremely interesting lecture on "New Trees". We are very grateful to Tom and David for their help in organising the event, to John for the lecture, and to The National Tree Collections of Scotland and the Royal Botanic Gardens for hosting the day. We are also very grateful to Maurice Foster and all who donated plants for the auction.

### New Discoveries

Owen Johnson and our tree hunters, continue to explore all corners of the British Isles discovering new champions and species that one would not expect to thrive in our climate and David Alderman leads our partnership with the Woodland Trust, working with their tree volunteers, finding more and more ancient and veteran trees to add to the database. Alison keeps you in touch with all this activity in our newsletters.

### New Trustee

We are very pleased that Jim Gardiner, who has recently retired as Executive Vice President of the RHS, having previously been Curator of RHS Wisley, has agreed to join the board of trustees. His formidable knowledge of trees and gardens will be most valuable to The Tree Register.

### European Champion Tree Forum

We are looking forward to welcoming our friends in the European Champion Tree Forum in the late summer, when we will be hosting the 2017 Forum. David and Philippa Lewis are currently busy organising the schedule for this.

### Volunteers

The Tree Register owes everything to our volunteers, so thanks are due to all those who have helped and supported us during 2016: to David, Owen, Philippa, Alison, the Ancient Tree verifiers, all our other tree recorders, Tim Hills and the Ancient Yew Group, Clair McFarlan, our volunteer support officer, Pamela Stevenson, our hard working secretary and, finally, to you, our members.

*Colin Hall*

Chairman of the Trustees

**We are very grateful to Sir Paul McCartney for his continued generosity in sponsoring this newsletter**



Love or loathe them, it is unusual to find a purple birch this big that hasn't reverted. The Champion *Betula pendula* 'Purpurea', at Palmerston Park, Southampton (Photo: Owen Johnson)

### The Tree Register

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The Tree Register of the British Isles (TROBI) was founded in 1988 by Alan Mitchell VMH and Victoria Schilling

## Re-discovery of a heritage tree

David Alderman

### Yester's Elusive Yew...

Yester House in East Lothian was built 300 years ago on the site of a C16th tower house. The oldest trees appear to be contemporary with this and planted from c.1690 into the early C18th, including the lime avenue that leads the visitor up to the Gifford Gate. Just beyond these gates and still some way from the house, is a pair of quite remarkable yew trees.

#### JC Loudon

First reference to there being notable trees at Yester appears in the 1837 *Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum* by J C Loudon. He described a large sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), and a Silver birch (*Betula alba* syn. *B. pendula*) planted in 1757, presumably a commemorative planting. The Sycamore, we believe, is the one that today stands by St Bathans' Chapel, originally built as Yester parish church in the C15th but rebuilt c.1650, from when the 6.5m girthed sycamore could well date.

#### Hutchison

First mention of a yew here is from 1894, when Robert Hutchison, of Carlowrie Castle, President of the Royal Scottish Arboricultural Society and Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, measured one tree, the imperial equivalent of 9m tall x 3.86m girth. He recorded several trees between 1880 and 1894, including Loudon's sycamore but, apparently, only one of the two yew.

#### Conference

The 1931 RHS Conifer Conference Report was provided by Capt. G I Campbell, on behalf of the Marquess of Tweeddale, whose family owned the estate up until the late 1960s. The report lists a "fine specimen" yew with an 88ft spread of branches. We have always presumed that this was Hutchison's tree but today we find there are two trees next to each other, the wide spreading and layering tree and the second much taller and slightly larger in girth.

#### McLean and Mitchell

Colin McLean and Alan Mitchell, both working for the Forestry Commission's Forest Research, visited Yester in the 1950s but focussed their recording on the larch and beech, looking for potential seed trees. Mitchell returned in 1967 but it was his more detailed survey of 71 trees in 1987 that highlighted Yester as a notable tree collection, whilst failing, both times, to record either of the yew.



Thanks to new owners Gareth and Nicola Wood, Donald Rodger admires one of the two great yew of Yester (Photo: Charles Henderson)

#### Today

Scrambling between the lower branches today reveals two trees (3.71m and 3.58m girth) that equal many other famous Scottish yew, including the nearby and a similarly layering tree, the Darnley Yew at Whittinghame. Their age is unknown but their position is, perhaps, more relevant to the old Yester village, moved to Gifford in the C17th, whilst the remains of the 14th century Yester Castle is more than one mile to the south-east.



Scottish Wildlife Trust volunteer, Alison Smith, is dwarfed by the spread of the Yester yew (Photo: Charles Henderson)

## Registrar's Report

Owen Johnson

# A detailed picture of performance!

805 UK and Ireland champion trees have been recorded through 2016. Of these, about 350 are updates of trees which were already champions, last measured generally a decade earlier. 120, which had also been measured before, have leapfrogged the competition to become the record-holder. But 190 of the champions are completely new discoveries and nearly 140 belong to species which were previously unrepresented in the champions list: either because they are recent introductions which are only now reaching 'tree' size, or had been overlooked as the single example in cultivation of a very rare form, or because I had unjustly written them off as mere bushes.

### Wild Buckthorn

85 existing champions have also been confirmed as lost and have been replaced by specimens recorded in previous years. Reasons for their demise are various - the more bizarre being the fate of the former Bedfordshire county champion Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) which has been uprooted by a herd of elephants. (It was at Whipsnade Wildlife Animal Park. Its replacement, also at Whipsnade but securely protected by a brick wall, is one of those 190 brand-new national champions, measured by David Alderman at 8m tall with a girth, above the first fork, of 146cm.)



Purging Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) in the old lion's den at Whipsnade Wildlife Animal Park (Photo: David Alderman)

### Thriving species

The proportion of champions we've been able to change or update this year is the highest yet (except for 2010 when work concentrated on updating our records for lots of big estates in preparation for *The Tree Register Handbook*). Many of the new record-holders were recorded during a fortnight in Cornwall when I revisited Caerhays Castle, Tresco Abbey and other gardens full of thriving species you just don't see elsewhere in Britain.



Tresco Abbey (Photo: Owen Johnson)

### Unique microclimate

29 almost frost-free years have allowed Tresco Abbey to enhance its reputation as the only place in northern Europe to see all kinds of subtropical trees – such as the 6m-tall *Brachychiton discolor* from the rain-forests of Queensland, which sheds its maple-like leaves in spring and grows a new crop in autumn - and looks completely dead when nearly everyone visits the garden. But this time round I allowed myself long enough on the Scillies to discover that gardeners across the archipelago have been exploiting the unique microclimate to grow many of the species for which the Tresco Abbey Garden is renowned. Most of the trees we plant in Britain are really exotics; but the Scillies are the only place where they look so exotic so that, after two-and-a-half hours on the ferry and then half an hour on a smaller boat to reach the 'off' islands, you feel that you've landed in somewhere genuinely foreign. Where gardeners on the mainland may use *Leylandii* for evergreen hedging, Scillonians from St Mary's and St Martin's choose the New Zealand Karo (*Pittosporum crassifolium*. Around Tresco it's *Olearia traversii* instead, another New Zealander.) For a flowering tree on the lawn, instead of a *Prunus* 'Kanzan' it could be *Metrosideros kermadecensis* 'Variegata', from the Kermadec Islands. For a steely-grey feature, instead of *Cedrus atlantica* f. *glauca* it's the Silver Tree, *Leucadendron argenteum*, part of South Africa's Cape flora.

### Longleat

Many other volunteer recorders have contributed to this season's haul of champions. Tall tree specialist Rob Lynley used a holiday at Center Parcs at Longleat to record 58m and 57.5m Giant Sequoias in the Redwood Grove in the village – probably the tallest anywhere outside California and a relic of the Longleat Estate's long-standing experiments with 'continuous cover' forestry. Aubrey Fennell has also been using his laser



The Chinese Persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*) in Chippenham (Photo: Ellen Forward)

height recorder to discover some of Ireland's tallest conifers; these include new UK and Ireland champions for Cedar of Lebanon (41m) and Western Red Cedar (48.4m) in a previously unexplored corner of the Powerscourt estate south of Dublin. A thorough survey by Chic Henderson at Mount Stuart on Bute has increased this magnificent garden's tally of champions to 16 (see page 8).

### Reliable

In northern Cumbria, Charles Bennett came across a new champion for the Norway Maple *Acer platanoides* 'Cucullatum' in the garden of Gelt Hall, 23m x 380cm girth. Ellen Forward spotted a record-breaking Chinese Persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*) against an old wall in the carpark for Chippenham Library, its trunk 93cm thick at 1m. Although the Kaki is little-known today, there must once have been a tradition of pleaching it against walls, where it becomes the only *Diospyros* to fruit reliably in southern England.

### Remotest garden

In April, John Purse and Graham Tuley visited Kinloch Hourn, surely Britain's remotest garden (it's the only house at the end of 20 miles of single-track road along Lochs Garry and Quoich in the western Highlands), where from about 1880 Robert Birkbeck had experimented with all kinds of *Eucalyptus*; four of the surviving species here (*coccifera*, *johnstonii*, *urnigera* and the smaller-growing *vernicaosa*) turn out to include the largest and tallest of their kind in Europe. I was very sad to hear of John's sudden death this last November. His expertise in this most difficult of genera, and the



*Metrosideros kermadecensis* 'Variegatus'  
Tresco Abbey (Photo: Owen Johnson)

friendly generosity with which he shared his knowledge, have greatly improved the Tree Register's coverage of *Eucalyptus* across Britain and Ireland.

### Secure

In last year's Summer News, after visiting the Forestry Commission's Douglas Fir plantation above Waterloo Bridge at Betws-y-Coed and finding the tallest trees there were 67-68m tall after 94 years' growth, I stuck my neck out and announced that, following decades during which the title of Britain (and northern Europe's) tallest tree had alternated almost yearly among the various long-known contenders in north Wales and the Scottish Highlands, a prolonged (and relatively dull) period was now underway when the title would remain securely in Welsh hands.

### Laird's Grave

This did the trick nicely. Graham Alcorn (Head Gardener at Mount Stuart) had grown up in Ardentinny by Loch Long in Argyllshire and was impressed by the height of the tallest Douglas Fir in the Laird's Grave, just 200m from his house. But no-one had ever measured this tree until September 2016 when Graham bought himself a Nikon laser recorder and found it to be 68.4m tall, a measurement since reproduced exactly by Chic Henderson.

### Sitka updates in Ireland



Ireland recorder Aubrey Fennell re-measures an original Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) planted 1835 at Curraghmore House, Co. Waterford 56m x 701cm 2016 (Photo: David Alderman)



Aubrey checks the growth rate of the tall Sitka at Shelton Abbey, Co. Wicklow, 58m x 717cm 2016 (Photo: David Alderman)

## Putting the record straight

John Oates

# The story of the original introduction of Giant sequoia

Patrick Matthew was born in 1790 on a farm named Rome near Scone Palace, Perthshire. He was educated at Edinburgh University until the age of 17 when he was forced to drop out due to inheriting an estate at Gourdie Hill in Errol and having to manage it. Matthew had a keen interest in horticulture, silviculture and agriculture, contributing much to the knowledge of these fields. He created extensive orchards across his estate, planting over 10,000 apple and pear trees. It has recently been discovered that Matthew came up with the theory of natural selection, years before Charles Darwin published his book *The Origin of Species*.



### Emigrated

A less commonly known fact about Patrick Matthew is that he was also responsible for cultivating and planting the first Giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) in Britain as this fact has commonly been attributed to James Veitch and his collector William Lobb. Patrick Matthew had 8 children and three of his sons John, Charles and James emigrated initially to America before the two youngest, Charles and James, at the behest of their father, continued on to New Zealand where they set up the earliest known commercial orchards in Australasia. John however remained in America and took up panning for gold in California.

### Calaveras Grove

In the summer of 1853 John sent a letter home to his father in Gourdie Hill describing a trip to Calaveras grove. Knowing of his father's love for silviculture, as well as his letter he sent *"a sketch of some of them, a*

*small branch and some of its seeds"* (*Gardeners Chronicle* 1866). The parcel was delivered via a steamship (at the time the fastest way to traverse the Atlantic) and arrived in Britain in August of 1853. This meant that Patrick Matthew had received the seeds a full 5 months before Lobb arrived with his collection.

### Purposefully hidden

At the time it was widely believed that Lobb and Veitch were responsible for the introduction of Giant sequoia to Britain. The fact that Matthew received and propagated his seeds months before Lobb's arrived in Britain was virtually unknown. One theory on why this fact remained hidden at the time is attributed to Dr Lindley, editor of the *Gardeners Chronicle* and close friend of James Veitch who could have purposefully hid the information in order to gain the credit for himself and his colleagues. It wasn't until a year after Lindley's death in 1865 that an article was published revealing that the credit of introducing Giant redwoods *"is generally given to Mr. Lobb and his employer, Mr. Veitch, for whom he was collecting. But, if our information be correct, it belongs to Mr. John D. Matthew, son of Patrick Matthew, Esq., of Gourdie Hill, near Errol"* (*Gardeners Chronicle* 1866).

### Recognised

Despite this revelation the article was only small and Giant redwoods were no longer viewed with the same enthusiasm as they previously were. Although John Matthew's stolen achievement was recognised, the fact that Lobb had been the first to return with a Giant redwood was so widely circulated that it is still believed by many even to this day.



### Inchture

Although these redwoods were not included in the list, it is widely believed that the avenue at Inchture

## Giant Sequoia in the Carse of Gowrie

Upon receiving his seed packet in the summer of 1853 Patrick Matthew “...in order to multiply the chances of their success, divided them into three portions, one of which he retained, one was given to Dr John Lyall of Newburgh and the other to Mr, Duncan, then gardener at Megginch Castle” (Ravenscroft & Lawson 1884). It is not known how many seeds were in the packet that John Matthew sent back to his father, however in 1866 the same article in the Gardeners Chronicle that corrected the mistake between Lobb and Matthew, also listed 11 of the trees that Matthew planted and their locations, 9 of which are in the Carse of Gowrie.

### Planted by Matthews

The first trees on the list are two Giant redwoods at Matthew’s house at Gourdie Hill by Errol. In 1991 the house was demolished as a result of a fire several years before that destroyed much of it. New housing development was undertaken and an apartment was built on the previous site of the old house. Despite these changes one of the two Giant redwoods still stands in the garden of the small apartment. This tree is the most likely out of the trees listed to actually have been planted by Matthew. The second tree mentioned no longer stands and must have either been cut down or died.

### Megginch Castle

Two trees were also listed to have been planted at a Mayquick Castle. It is believed this was a typing error for Megginch Castle. These were undoubtedly planted by the head gardener Robert Duncan to whom Matthew gifted some of the seeds. Both trees can still be located next to what was the old gardener’s cottage. A Giant redwood still stands in the view of the picturesque **Inchyra House**, planted on an estate with a



Ballindean House

massive variety of exotic conifers. Out of the two Giant redwoods mentioned to be at **Ballindean House**, only one is left, standing to the side of the estate driveway. This lone survivor blends in with its Western Red cedar neighbours and produces the largest Giant redwood cones I’ve come across.

### The lost and fallen

No mention of a Dr Lyall who lived in Newburgh can be found so the location of his Giant redwood remains a mystery. Unfortunately, Kinnoul Nursery no longer exists and no evidence of where it was previously located could be found. I am led to believe that Kinnoul Nursery was also known as Perth Nursery (which was technically still in the Kinnoul parish boundary). If this was once Kinnoul Nursery it is unfortunately no longer there but was once located where the modern day Riverside Park is.

### Claimed as original

Many Giant redwoods in the Carse of Gowrie area can lay a claim to being one of Patrick Matthew’s original introductions however, few have the evidence behind it to genuinely show this. Out of the Giant redwoods I have managed to find, only the one standing at the site of Matthew’s house can be undoubtedly identified as one from his seed stock. Saying this, the others mentioned in this report have an extremely strong claim to being one of his originals.



(Photos: Charles Henderson)

This extract is from a report by John Oates, student at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and was funded by the Cross Trust and Heritage Lottery Fund through the Tay Landscape Project.

# Tree measuring on the Isle of Bute

Charles Henderson

## The trees of Mount Stuart

Arriving here via a scenic route by Loch Lomond, Strachur and a 5 minute ferry crossing from Colintraive to Rhubodach, I drove down through Rothsay to Mount Stuart, where I met Head Gardener, Graham Alcorn. Graham has worked at Mount Stuart for over 25 years and has a thorough knowledge of all the trees, plants and layout of the 300 acres, which are the immediate policies of this, the home of The Marquis of Bute.



*Hoheria glabrata* 8m x 140cm on a single stem, found north of the house by the lower drive.

### Wee Garden

Our aim was to update the records from Owen's survey in 2007, height, girth, location and photographs. We began in what is known as the Wee Garden, south of the house and full of wonderful plants and trees. First specimen was the South American *Maytenus boaria*, a healthy tree which, like most of the trees we measured, had increased in height and girth. A *Persea lingue* drew us, with its lovely shape and leaf colouring, before feasting our eyes on a *Magnolia macrophylla* subsp. *dealbata* with its distinctive large leaf. *Lomatia ferruginea* with its unusual foliage and shape was another delight. *Olearia paniculata* with its pale feathery bark is a joy to see and *Juniperus recurva*, most unusual in shape and appearance and we had only touched on a few examples in this "wee garden".

### British champion

*Hoheria glabrata* drew us, with prolific white flowers and pale green foliage standing near the front of the house while on the south side, a weeping *Katsura* (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum* 'Pendulum') stood proudly in isolation. On the drive stands a magnificent *Rhododendron falconeri* which will be a must to visit in the spring, when in flower. The Corsican pine (*Pinus nigra* subsp. *laricio*) is a British champion and stands straight in the pinetum where some beautiful conifers also grow, including a Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) which is the Argyll & Bute county champion.



### Expertise

We recorded 104 trees over three days and wrote off over a dozen which had succumbed to nature as trees and mortals do! I cannot thank Graham enough for his expertise and knowledge of both trees and Mount Stuart. Together we updated 80 champions, both county and national, with another trip planned for spring 2017 to continue the recording.

46.5m of Corsican pine (*Pinus nigra* subsp. *laricio*) at Mount Stuart, the tallest in Britain and Ireland.

## Nymans adopts Champion Blue Labels

Head Gardener Stephen Herrington and Phillip Holmes have added new Tree Register Champion Tree blue labels to some of the most notable champion trees at Nymans, Handcross, West Sussex.



*Meliosma veitchiorum*



Champion *Magnolia* 'Michael Rosse'

Photo left: *Picea likiangensis* (Collection LANC 908) Just look at those cones! Tree Register Trustee Roy Lancaster (centre), with Phillip Holmes (left) and Stephen Herrington, couldn't hide his excitement at discovering one of his wild collected plants was growing so well at Nymans.





# The Beale Arboretum

West Lodge Park, Cockfosters Road, Hadley Wood, Herts EN4 0PY

This wonderful arboretum was founded in 1963 by Edward Beale, in association with Derek Honour, Arboricultural advisor to the GLC and with Frank Knight, Director of the RHS at Wisley. It has been developed further over the past 52 years by Edward Beale's son Trevor and grandson Andrew. Many of the mature trees were planted by the former owner John Cater in the mid 1800s, including a fine *Quercus robur* (Pedunculate Oak) in the car park in front of the hotel.

The 35 acres surrounding the hotel form part of the Enfield Chase, an oasis of open space, wonderful views, and peace and quiet within the M25. The Beale Arboretum consists of a large and interesting collection of trees including some 800 different varieties. Many are now mature or well established but a large number of new trees continue to be planted each year.

## Pinetum

The Pinetum contains wonderful conifers from all parts of the world. It is particularly useful to be able to compare so many firs, spruces and pines in close proximity to one another. One novelty that always attracts attention is *Picea abies* 'Acrocona' – notable for its "terminal" cones at the end of each branch.

## National Collections

National Collection status is prestigious recognition of the national importance of particular collections, and is conferred by Plant Heritage. The Arboretum has the National Collections of *Carpinus betulus* cultivars (Hornbeam), *Taxodium distichum* (Swamp cypress) and a planned third National Collection of *Catalpa* (Indian Bean Tree).



Autumn colour from *Acer capillipes* in the Maple collection

The Arboretum has received wide publicity for its beauty and interest, having been featured in The Times, The Sunday Express, Country Life, Gardener's World, The New York Times, The Radio Times and The Royal Horticultural Society Journal.



*Taxodium distichum* 'Little Twister', one of several interesting new plantings in the National Collection.



**The Arboretum is open to the public every afternoon 2.00pm - 5.00pm**

Admission £2.50 payable at reception.  
Admission is free to any hotel resident, or any hotel guest having food or drink in the restaurant, bar or banqueting rooms.



*Acer rubrum* 'Scanlon'.  
Champion trees are clearly labelled in the arboretum

**The Beale Arboretum is a supporter of the Tree Register's Champion Tree Blue Label scheme**

## Ancient Yew Group

Toby Hindson

# The Yew of Newlands Corner & Merrow Down



Ancient yew at Merrow Downs (Photo: Toby Hindson)

The old yew groves at Newlands Corner and adjoining Merrow Down have been famous for a long time, and it will come as no surprise that they have received quite a lot of Ancient Yew Group (AYG) attention. Attention is fine, but fame is not. Fame sometimes kills ancient trees, particularly through compaction from foot fall, souvenir hunting and more major wood theft.

### Precise picture

The AYG studies here have been kept very much under wraps for the 20 years that they have been running for this very reason, but the measuring work has matured and it is now possible to share basic findings. Our work has been centred on two main themes; locating the yews to keep track of losses and to ensure repeatability of our studies (Peter Norton) and repeat measuring over two decades to capture growth rates (Toby Hindson). Work done by Shane Mangan in 1995, recently made available, on the locations of the older yews will also give us a precise picture of attrition from then to the present day.

### Wide range of growth rate

The big thing to share here is the growth rates. 24 yews were studied over the two decade period, with girths between 80 and 723 cm. The mean circumference increase was 7mm each year. The largest 8 yews

studied, all over 400cm girth, were found to be growing at an average 5.3mm girth increase each year. We found that smaller yews had a far wider range of growth rate than larger individuals. The larger trees had shouldered their way into the canopy through time, were all enjoying a substantial share of sunlight and were growing fairly constantly, if relatively slowly. The smaller yews were found in a variety of situations, partly shaded by other yews, overtopped by oak, growing clear, etc. These yews which had not yet established themselves as permanent primary canopy were strongly affected by their immediate environment. One extreme individual, the smallest at 80cm was heavily shaded, growing at a violent angle away from the canopy of a larger yew and was found to have grown at an unmeasurably low rate, perhaps a few millimetres over the whole two decades.

### Oldest cohort

This picture, once the variables in early growth are accounted for, gives us quite a firm understanding of the ages of these trees. It is well known that yews tend to grow up as a result of the decrease of herbivore activity, and so similar sized yews in the wild are likely to date to the same environmental event. The ages and growth rates of yews thought to belong to the same cohort can be averaged, and a mean growth rate used to find the age of the sample.

**Norman invasion**

The oldest cohort of yews at Newlands Corner and Merrow Down has been calculated as originating from about the time of the Norman invasion, that is to say there are, demonstrably, yews at the site which are about 950 years old. There also appears to be a "Black Death" cohort which grew up immediately after 1348. These yews are about 670 years old. Not as old as the 2,000 years guessed at by some authors, nevertheless all of these are, or should be, yews of international standing.

**Questions raised**

Various bodies are supporting the planned development of this site as a public amenity. Many questions are raised, but I think the most poignant one concerns the balance between conservation and amenity. Here we have one of the most important ancient woodlands in Britain, containing standing heritage trees which approach 1,000 years in age. Yet I can find no mention of them in the planning, and no amelioration of footfall seems to be planned for the sensitive areas where they grow. Coppice or old-growth non-ancient woodland would be a great place for the public but I find it extremely hard to understand how sensitive ancient woodland is a suitable place to carry out these plans.

**Battleground**

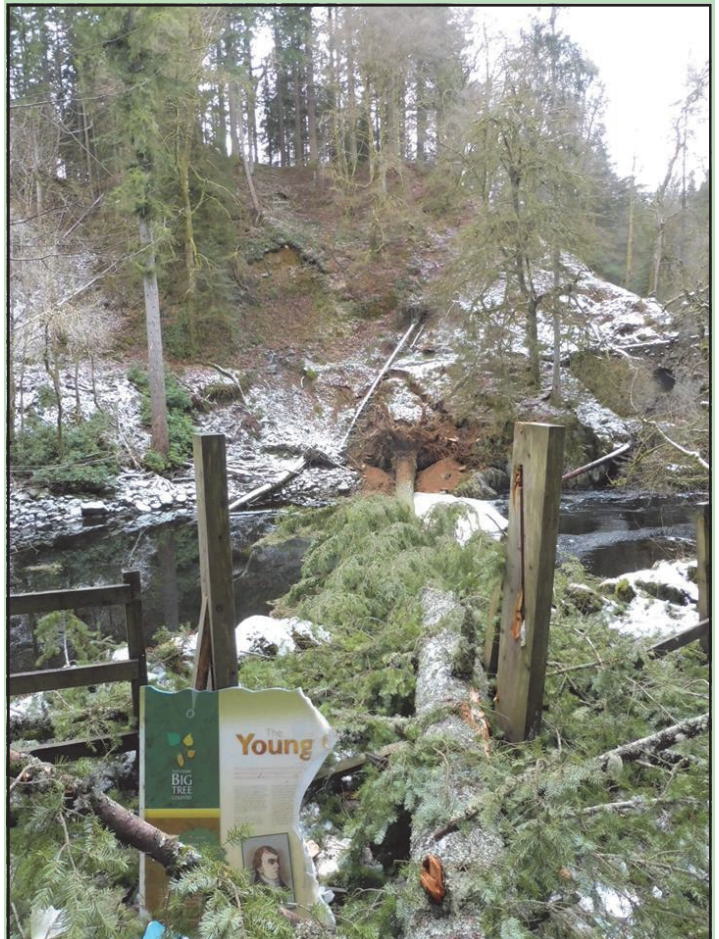
Here the trees cannot win. If they are made famous they may be over visited and damaged, if they are not considered important the same may happen, through ignorance and lack of care. Now that footfall is set to increase and "Health and Safety" has reared its head in this ridiculous fashion, how long before an ancient yew is felled because it is "dangerous". This is where the boundary between conservation and amenity becomes a battleground, and I sincerely hope that steps are taken to ensure that the possible loss of an ancient yew is a fight avoided.



Wood theft - damaged yew at Merrow Downs (Photo: Toby Hindson)

One of our most iconic tall trees, the Douglas Fir at The Hermitage, near Dunkeld, Perth & Kinross, fell on Friday 13th January 2017. North Perthshire Ranger Service reported the following on their Face Book page.

Well, Friday the 13th proved unlucky for the tallest tree at the Hermitage and one of Scotland's tallest trees! Situated on Forestry Commission land across the River Braan, the strong winds in the early hours brought the tall Douglas Fir crashing down, with the top landing on our side of the river. It even managed to crash land right through the middle of the interpretation panel telling visitors all about it!



A perfect fall, straight through the middle of the interpretation board. (Photo: North Perthshire Ranger Service Facebook)

Arguably the most picturesque tree taller than 60m, due to its dramatic location, the Forestry Commission stated the tree was 64.5m tall, by measuring from the very lowest part of the tree on a steep slope by the river. When climbed by Mark Tansley et al (Sparsholt College) in 2009, they recorded 61.31m to ground level on the upper side. Noticeably becoming sparse by 2015 it had not grown measurably. The tree, aged by increment-borer, was believed to have been self sown in 1887.

**Sir Ilay Campbell Bt**

As we went to press it was with great sadness we heard news of the death of founding Tree Register Trustee and Vice President Sir Ilay Campbell of Succoth, 7th (and last) Baronet.



Sir Ilay's garden at Crarae (Photo: National Trust for Scotland)

Sir Ilay died at Crarae, by Inveraray, Argyll, on 2nd January, 2017. He was 89 and leaves a wife and two daughters. Obituary in next newsletter.

# Champion Tree of the Year is a tall order

Alison Evershed

With all the media coverage for Tree of the Year at the end of 2016, I wondered whether the Tree Register had recorded an exceptional champion tree that we could promote as our Champion Tree of the Year. The national competitions were won following a public vote from a selected list of nominated trees. Winners were, for England, a Sycamore on Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland, one of the most photographed trees in Britain, a Copper Beech called the 'Ding Dong' Tree in a school in Scotland, a Holm Oak in Northern Ireland and the Brimmon Oak, in Wales, a tree at the centre of a new road realignment scheme. The oak was voted the UK's Tree of the Year by experts, on a Channel 4 TV programme, hosted by comedian Ardal O'Hanlon. All four national winners will go through to the European Tree of the Year, a competition in which, like the Eurovision Song Contest, we will do incredibly badly, but at least will help to highlight trees of local importance.



The Woodland Trust's Tree of the Year 2016. Clockwise: The 'Ding Dong' Tree, Scotland; The Holm Oak, N. Ireland; The Sycamore Gap, England and the Brimmon Oak, Wales. (Photos: Woodland Trust Media Library [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/tree-of-the-year](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/tree-of-the-year))



The tallest Coast Redwood at Longleat - tree shown full-height in the centre of this picture - at 57m is the tallest known growing outside the USA (Photo: Owen Johnson)

## Longleat's Coast Redwood

So, who else should I ask about our Champion tree of the Year than Owen and David. Owen said; "Probably the tree that impressed me most was the champion Coast Redwood in Buckler's Wood at Longleat, Wiltshire, which was climbed in around 2010 but which I'd missed on my previous visit to the woods here. At 57m, it's easily the tallest in Britain now but seems to have reached a stage of adding height faster than ever: in Californian terms, of course, it's still a baby."

This tree is currently the tallest known of its species in Europe, a title that applies to a 58m tall Giant Sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), also on the Longleat estate, within the Center Parcs complex.

David also nominated a tall tree for his Champion Tree of the Year. Our new tallest tree at 68m was discovered in Argyll by Tree Register member Graham Alcorn (see Registrars Report Page 5). This interest that many have with the tallest trees, made me wonder what our tallest tree was 100 years ago and which trees have continued growing to these record breaking heights. Using Tree Register data and with thanks again to Owen and David, we have produced the following, which I hope you will find as interesting as I have.

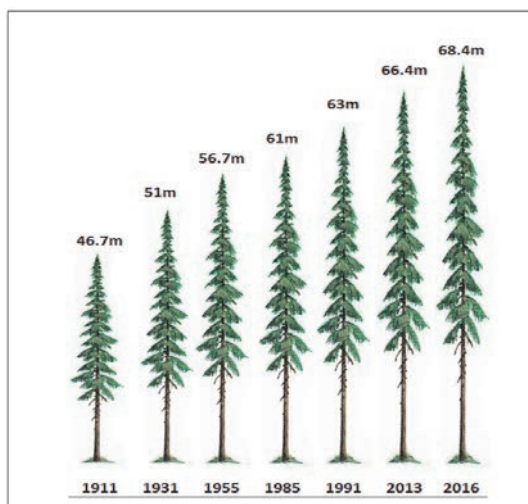
## Maximum height

100 years ago the tallest tree known was a 46.7m Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*) in Oaters Wood on the Cowdray Park estate in West Sussex, a tree blown down by 1930. 20 years later two trees had reached 51m, a European Silver Fir (*Abies alba*), at Inveraray, Argyll and a Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), planted in 1850, near Welshpool, Powys, Wales. By the mid 1950s the Inveraray tree had grown to its maximum recorded height of 56.7m, whilst the Welsh Douglas peaked around 53.5m. Into the 1970s and a 57m Grand Fir (*Abies grandis*), planted in 1888 at Leighton Hall, Powys, became our tallest tree. However, hot on its heels was another Grand Fir, at Ardkinglas Woodland Garden, Argyll and a number of Douglas Fir in both Scotland and Wales.

## Scotland v Wales

However, it was the Ardkinglas tree that was first to be recorded at over 200ft at 63m in 1991, before it suffered a series of set-backs, due to storm damage. By the early 2000's there were several Douglas Fir being regularly measured between 64-65m; at Lake Vernwy, Powys; Reelig Glen, Highlands and Dunans Castle, Argyll. These trees were all planted in the late Victorian period but by the 2010's it was clear that younger trees planted in the early years of the Forestry Commission would soon become our tallest trees. The 1921 plantation of Douglas Fir in the Gwydyr Forest (Waterloo Bridge), Conwy, was predicted, by Owen, to produce the next tallest trees and, in 2016, the first tree to reach 68m was recorded here. A few months later, an even taller Douglas Fir of 68.4m was recorded in the Laird's Grave, Ardentinnny, Argyll. And so the title for tallest tree continues to ping-pong between Wales and Scotland. Both of these 68m trees are currently the tallest conifers known in Europe but the search for a 70m tree continues in many countries.

## How long until our trees reach 70m?



This graph shows how the height of our tallest recorded trees has increased over the past 100 years