

THE ANCIENT TREE COLUMN

Each month we feature an ancient British tree.
This month the Ancient Tree Forum introduces us to...

THE COVENANTER'S OAK, NORTH LANARKSHIRE

The Covenanter's Oak may be more than 800 years old. The tree is said to have been planted by a Scottish king, David I, as part of a royal hunting park. Its name is taken from a religious group from the 17th century known as the Covenanters, who had signed the National Covenant in 1638 in opposition to the Stuart King's interference in the affairs of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The group received permission from the Hamilton family to hold religious services under the tree, which many people attended despite this being punishable by death.

The present canopy is relatively young, having developed following a dramatic crown reduction around 25 years ago. The pruning wounds resulting from the tree surgery work are quite large, some greater than 25cm in diameter, indicating that the canopy at the time of its reduction was broad and spreading.

In August 2008, after heavy rain, one of the tree's limbs split away, tearing a large wound in the main stem. The remaining four stems, which are evenly distributed, two to either side of the north-south split in the stem, were cable braced and propped. Their associated canopies have been reduced to minimise gravitational end loading and wind resistance. Following further gentle crown reduction in 2010, the tree is now approaching 12m high.

The four stems all have features you would expect to see in an ancient tree, including cavities, cracks, splits, and large areas of decaying wood exposed through lost bark, as well as large, old pruning wounds.

The tree continues to thrive, and it is hoped that – with regular care – it will live for many more years. Since the late Nineties, local people have also been looking after trees grown from acorns from the Covenanter's Oak. In 2000, some of these were planted on the estate, and seven have grown into healthy young trees.

The Ancient Tree Forum champions the biological, cultural and heritage value of Britain's ancient and veteran trees, and provides advice on their value and management at www.ancienttreeforum.co.uk ©Ancient Tree Forum

