

ATF Summer Forum

Jack of Kent's oak, a 12.8m girth tree at Kentchurch Court

Jim Mullholland, Ancient Tree Forum

July brought the big event in the Ancient Tree Forum's calendar, the Summer Forum. Across two days delegates were kept up to date about the goings-on in the veteran tree world, caught up with old friends and met new people, and had the opportunity to visit a number of veteran tree sites to discuss their management.

2018 was another sell-out year for the forum, the norm in recent times. It's great to see so many people engaged and interested in veteran tree management whether they are arborists, ecologists, academics, land managers, historians or just have an interest in veteran trees. The venue for the daytime lectures was The Courtyard in Hereford, a modern conference centre that met the needs of the forum nicely.

Chris Knapman kicked off proceedings as chair for the first day. With his usual tongue-in-cheek humour, he appeared in his 'ATF' hat and sought to set the scene by reading out the 'ATF' mission statement: 'protects the public from crimes involving firearms, explosives, arson, and the diversion of alcohol and tobacco products.' Chris went on to explain that he must have visited the wrong ATF website, ending up at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms instead.

With the ice firmly broken, Chris handed over to the first speaker, Archie Miles. Archie is

a prominent photographer and author with an abiding passion for the British landscape (see page 40), Archie has a particular interest in trees, having published a number of well-known titles. He gave us a whistle-stop tour of 'The Remarkable Trees of Herefordshire', full of stories and folklore.

From retrenchment pruning to saproxylic beetles

Up next was Reg Harris of Urban Forestry (Bury St Edmunds) Ltd, a heavyweight in veteran tree management in the UK, one of the organisers of the Arboricultural Association's 'thinking arbs' days and all-round nice guy. With experience spanning several decades, including from Hatfield and Sherwood forests, Reg wanted to re-evaluate the effectiveness of retrenchment pruning of lapsed pollards. This technique aims to encourage the tree to 'grow downwards', improving lower crown development and stability. However, in Reg's experience this hasn't always worked. Instead of the work

stimulating lower crown development, a number of the trees re-grow near the cutting point, leading to a thick mass of shoots being produced with the potential to increase wind load in the long term rather than reduce it.

Following Reg was Frits Giellssen, a Dutch arborist with experience of working across northern Europe. Frits shared the results of work and his experiments, including the installation of bolts through weak unions to stabilise them whilst enabling the natural movement of the crown, and the removal of wood tissue colonised by *Armillaria* sp. to prevent the spread of this fungus and encourage the development of Shigo's CODIT Wall 4. A few eyebrows in the room were raised, but it certainly encouraged discussion and that's what the Ancient Tree Forum is all about.

After coffee Megan Gimber of the People's Trust for Endangered Species updated us about the Wood Pasture and Parkland Network, a multi-partner group aiming to increase the awareness of these valuable habitats. The network has produced a number of resources including a series of videos on the value and management of these habitats. For more information see www.ptes.org/wppn.

Kylie Harrison Mellor of the Woodland Trust brought us up to speed with the new and improved Ancient Tree Inventory (ATI) website. Designed for modern technology, the new website makes it even easier to record new



Delegates are informed about the history and management of Kentchurch Court.

veteran trees, update existing records or locate trees in your area. It can be found at ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/. Following Kylie, Victoria Granger, a PhD student from Nottingham University, informed us how the ATI data is being used to improve recording by removing biases and to assess the sustainability of our veteran tree stock in the UK.

Finally Keith Alexander, ATF Trustee and invertebrate specialist, gave us a fascinating update of the Cosnards netwinged beetle in the Wye Valley. Keith has been undertaking work to improve our understanding of this rare and little understood saproxylic invertebrate.

The afternoon saw the delegates bussed to the nearby Kentchurch Court, a stately home that has been in the ownership of the Scudamore family for over 1000 years. After splitting into groups we were shown around the deer park which is home to some magnificent trees, including the Jack of Kent's oak, a 12.8m girth tree (see page 67), as well as a number of beautiful veteran field maples, hawthorns and hazel trees – the latter are unusual and often overlooked veterans.

From un-noticed veterans to tree architecture

Day two was chaired by Saul Herbert of the Woodland Trust. Carrying on the theme of day one, Saul showed good humour and kept the day on course. The first speaker was Rob Jarmin, a PhD researcher at the University of Gloucestershire. Rob has been researching the origins of sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) in the UK and Ireland. Recent advances in technology have allowed for the

re-examination of old data, putting some old myths to bed, and new techniques used to establish the species' origin on our island.

Professor Ian Rotherham from Sheffield Hallam University opened our eyes to the 'lost woods, shadow woods, and un-noticed veterans' that exist in our countryside. We know the UK hosts a large number of wonderful veteran trees. However, Ian suggests that we are missing veterans of smaller tree species or in environments where growth rates are reduced.

From un-noticed veterans to ancient oaks. Aljos Farjon provided a number of possible explanations why the UK is home to so many ancient oak trees. The continuity of land ownership and management is the main driving factor, with many royal hunting forests, medieval deer parks, wooded commons and estates containing such trees.

After coffee, Tom Joye gave us a fascinating crash course in tree architecture and its implications for veteran tree management. A largely French concept, tree architecture hasn't reached the mainstream UK consciousness yet. However, Tom was able to give us a tantalising peak at what will, no doubt, be a major advancement for UK arboriculture in the coming years; best start working on your French language skills! The concepts Tom spoke about shed light on some of the difficulties Reg Harris had been talking about the previous day regarding trees that don't 'want' to grow downwards. Tom explained that this was due to their life stage, which has little to do with the age of the tree.

David Lovelace, a mapping specialist, stunned us with his skills in utilising historic records and modern technology to help assess the state of Herefordshire's veteran tree-scape; a great deal can be learnt from historic records if we just know how to find it and utilise it effectively.

Finally Russell Miller, ATF chair, provided an update of the forum's activity over the last year. This includes changes to staffing, work on a number of projects such as VETcert and the production of a new ATF clothing range.

Getting out among the trees

After the lectures were drawn to a close, delegates were offered the chance to visit one of four local sites: Moccas Park, Croft Estate, Holme Lacy Park or Moor Abbey Farm.

Moccas Park is a National Nature Reserve well known for its veteran trees and intensely studied invertebrates, including the Moccas beetle found only in the decaying heart of oak trees at this site. The site is not open to the public. However, special access was arranged for the ATF visit, with Bob Silverwood, site manager for Natural England, providing a guided tour.

The Croft Estate, left to the National Trust in the 1950s, extends to over 200 hectares comprising a large area of historic parkland. The site is famous for its sweet chestnut avenue and many other veteran trees. Iain Carter from the trust provided delegates with an introduction to the veteran trees of the site.



A veteran hawthorn, an often overlooked species.

Holme Lacy Park was the seat of the Scudamore family from Tudor times. It is now owned by Herefordshire and Ludlow College and has a variety of trees from various planting epochs. Managed by the college to a recent Higher Level Stewardship restoration plan, the site has many issues involving grazing and tree management including the evident stresses felt by some veteran oaks.

Moor Abbey Farm is a working farm that contains a large population of old ash trees, many pollarded, as is characteristic of the north-east Herefordshire landscape. David Lovelace provided delegates with the rare opportunity to tour this private farm not normally open to the public. In addition to the ash pollards, the site also contains some fine veteran oaks over 8m in girth.

All-in-all, it was an action-packed two days enjoyed by everyone I spoke to. Thanks go to David Lovelace for hosting and helping with so much of the organisation, the speakers for providing a wide range of great talks, the group leaders for the site visits for showing us round their sites and the site owners for allowing us to visit. Here's hoping the 2019 forum measures up!

The articles on pages 67–70 have been provided by the Ancient Tree Forum, which champions the biological, cultural and heritage value of Britain's ancient and veteran trees.



Delegates at the ATF Summer Forum.

ATF clothing

The ATF is pleased to be able to offer a range of Ancient Tree Forum clothing in partnership with Teemill. All items are made of 100% organic cotton, sustainably sourced and ethically produced. Each item can be fully traced through the company's website, providing peace of mind: www.atf.teemill.com.



Training the trainers

Delegates beneath a 'giraffe' pollard at Cwm Byddog.

Jim Mullholland, Ancient Tree Forum

Developed as part of the VETree project, which ran between 2012 and 2014, the three-day valuing and managing veteran trees course was designed to give the delegates the information, skills and experience to enable them to deliver a one-day course on valuing and managing veteran trees.

The 2018 course was held in Hereford, hot on the heels of the ATF Summer Forum. The Wednesday morning comprised an introduction to veteran trees, discussion around the ageing process, and consideration of the wide range of values veteran trees offer. During this session, delegates were treated to a brief 'tree-yoga' session which is used to explain the natural strategies trees have for coping with external forces, i.e. a small crown that has 'grown downwards' and a wide, hollow trunk for secure anchorage to the earth.

After lunch we had an outdoor exercise which introduced the topic of surveying veteran trees, primarily for wildlife value. The grounds of the training venue contained a number of great veteran trees, perfect for this task. Following discussion, we headed back to the classroom for a session on the importance of tree roots and soil ecology to finish off the classroom sessions for the day.

The evening offered a guided walk around Cwm Byddog, a Radnorshire Wildlife Trust site just over the border in Wales. Jonathan Stone, site manager, explained the history and introduced us to the 'giraffe' pollards on the site. Notably the site supports a community of rare invertebrates such as *Dorcatoma substriata* (a beetle found living in a *Pseudoinonotus dryadeus* bracket), *Cresponea premnea* (an internationally scarce lichen) and *Piptoporus quercinus* (oak polypore, a rare and protected fungus).

Thursday brought an introduction to how different people learn, with delegates asked to complete a questionnaire and share the results with the group. Activist, reflector, pragmatist and theorist are the categories

used as part of this exercise. However, whilst some strongly aligned with a particular category, some were split between two and others showed no strong preference for any. The exercise is useful to help understand the needs of people you are training, to ensure they get the most from a course.

Following on from this, we tackled management planning by first considering whether anything needs doing, secondly whether the land around the tree needs management, and finally whether pruning needs to be undertaken. A field visit to nearby Weir Garden led to some healthy discussion over the management needs of a range of veteran trees.

After dinner, there was opportunity to discuss special management techniques, such as propping and bracing, as well as a chance for delegates to ask any questions which had arisen over the past two days. We explored the difference between 'vitality' and 'vigour' and how these are assessed on a tree.

On Friday morning we once again delved into the world of adult learning and how to deal with difficult behaviours. Luckily we didn't have to employ any of these techniques as all of the delegates enjoyed the course and behaved themselves! Then there was an opportunity to discuss and explain the contents of the one-day course. As our delegates will be delivering the course, it is essential to ensure they are familiar with it; the three-day course is designed in such a way that the content and exercises for the one-day course are all covered during the three days.



Julian measuring a veteran hornbeam for the Ancient Tree Inventory.

The remainder of the day provided an opportunity to discuss some more in-depth topics including how different species respond to management, fungi and decay in trees, and populations for veteran trees. When considering how different tree species respond to management, delegates were asked to split into groups and provide a brief presentation for their selected tree species. We had some interesting presentations, including delegates acting out various roles and scenarios to help get their message across. The talks highlighted how different delivery techniques and approaches are valuable when providing training.

As the course came to a close, we were able to discuss what delegates plan to do going forward. It was encouraging to hear from so many that they plan to run the course in the future. A big thank you to all of the delegates for joining us for the course; you made it a pleasure to teach. It's always great to meet new people, catch up with old friends, but most importantly to look at and discuss old trees and continue our learning.