



Trees

The City of Birmingham Tree Lovers League —

Foreword

For the past few years the City of Birmingham Tree Lovers' League has arranged for parties of children from schools affiliated to the League to visit Cannon Hill Park. They are escorted round the Park by members of the Parks Department staff, who talk about some of the beautiful trees to be seen there.

The visits have proved very successful but some schools have to wait a considerable time before their turn comes round.

This little handbook has been produced so that parties may be encouraged to go to the Park without waiting for an "official" invitation.

A suggested walk round the Park is shown on the map and thirty trees which may be seen on the walk are described.

Mary E. Cree.

Councillor Mrs. M. E. Cree.
Chairman of the Tree Lovers League.



Trees of Cannon Hill Park

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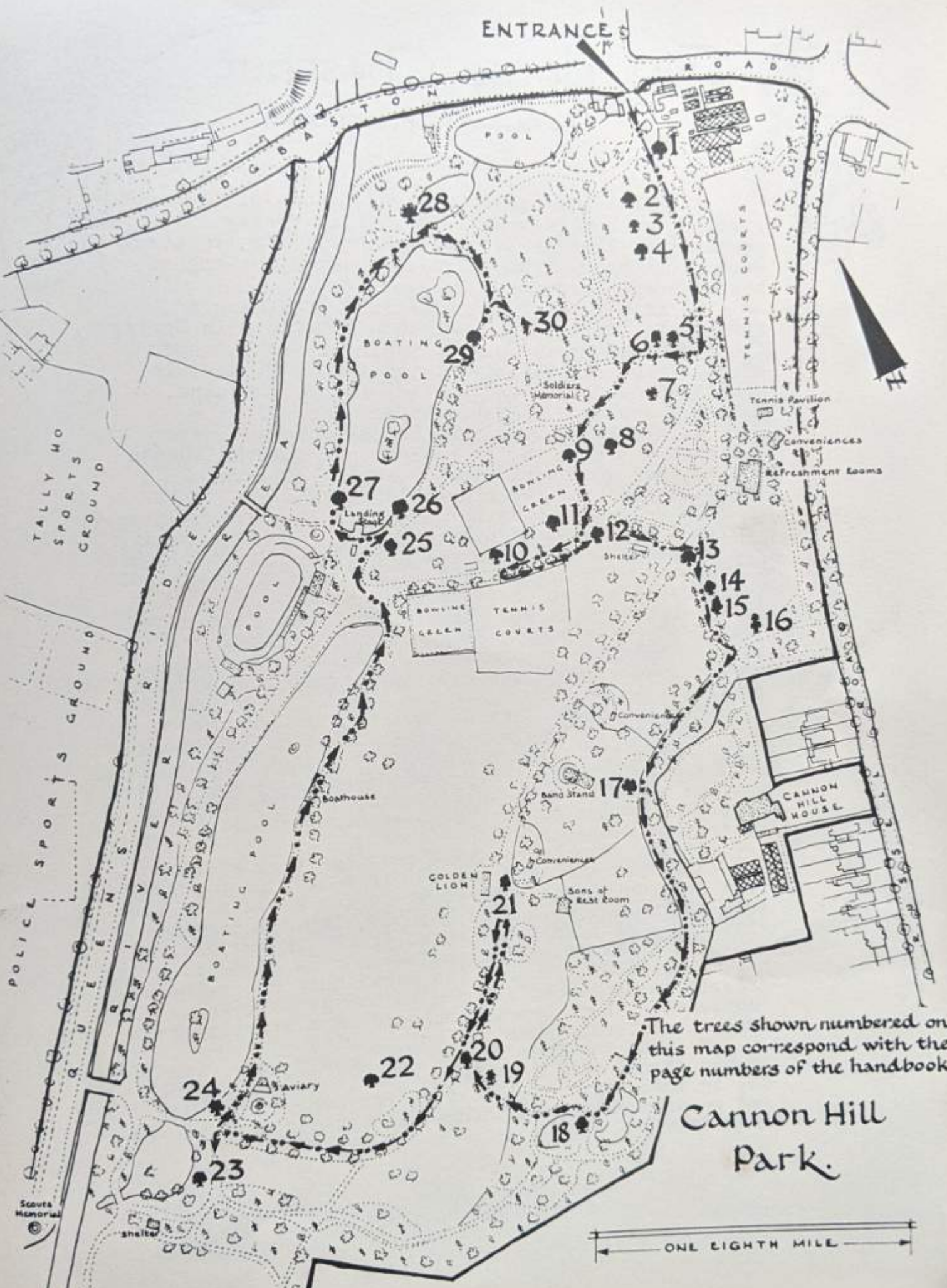
Tree Lovers League.

The idea of the league first occurred to Mr. Alderman D. S. Thomas, Chairman of the City Council's Public Works Committee, when the Committee were considering planting trees in the redevelopment areas of the City. These areas were once the worst slum districts in Birmingham but the old dilapidated buildings are gradually being cleared away and replaced with new dwellings, schools and other amenities. Above all, areas of Public Open Space are being laid out where the people living in these districts can relax and enjoy fresh air and the beauty of grassland, flowers and trees. Mr. Alderman Thomas felt that if the children from local schools were invited to help in planting the trees in these new open spaces, they would become interested in them and, instead of perhaps damaging the trees, they would want to look after them and watch them grow. His idea was enthusiastically supported by the Public Works Committee and also by the Parks Committee. And so, each time trees were planted, a little ceremony was arranged. The Parks Committee's staff brought along the trees and prepared the site but the actual planting was done by the local children. Afterwards Mr. Alderman Thomas presented each child with a badge of membership and gave them a talk about the aims and objects of the League.

Not only sapling trees have been planted in these areas, for the Public Works Committee felt that some older trees should be provided also, so as to give the new open spaces a maturity and sense of tranquillity, so important from a social development point of view. Accordingly a number of trees about 20-25 years old were ordered from a nursery; since then hundreds of these semi-mature trees have been planted by League members.

In order to keep alive the interest of the members during the summer months, competitions are arranged for the best collection of tree leaves, named and mounted on one or more cards. The entries are placed on exhibition at the City of Birmingham Show at Handsworth Park in September. Prizes are awarded for the best entries and, in addition, a party of children who have submitted meritorious entries, not necessarily prizewinners, are taken on a coach trip to the British Forestry Commission's Arboretum near Tetbury in Gloucestershire. Occasional visits are arranged also to tree nurseries and other places of interest, while throughout the summer, on two days each week, parties of children are taken around Cannon Hill Park. In 1964, also, a competition was arranged for displays of flowers and foliage in window boxes, tubs, etc. at the affiliated schools. It proved a great success and will be continued in future. In the winter months the children are encouraged to enter competitions for essays, poems, paintings, etc. on subjects connected with trees and an exhibition of this work is held in the City Centre. Each quarter a magazine called the "Tree Lovers' League Bulletin" is published.

The Tree Lovers' League has already proved itself worth while. Not only have the trees been looked after but it is obvious that there is a genuine interest on the part of the children. In encouraging a love of trees and of nature, it is felt that the League is playing a useful part in creating good and healthy citizens.



ENTRANCE

The trees shown numbered on this map correspond with the page numbers of the handbook.

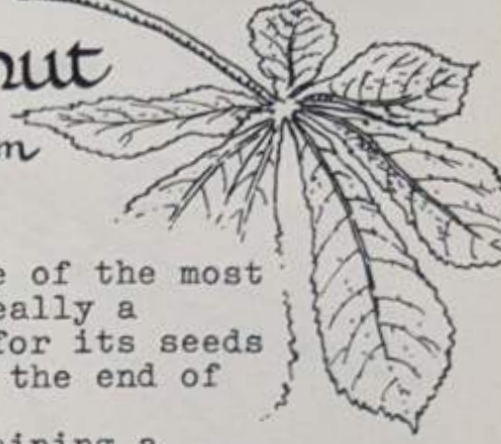
Cannon Hill Park.

ONE EIGHTH MILE



The Horse Chestnut

Aesculus hippocastanum



Although the Horse Chestnut is one of the most striking of our British trees, it is really a comparative newcomer to this country, for its seeds were first brought from Greece towards the end of the Sixteenth Century.

It is a large tree, sometimes attaining a height of 100-ft. with a girth of 20-ft. In Spring its leaf buds are popularly known as "sticky buds" because they are thickly coated with a resin-like substance which gradually melts in the sunshine, giving the buds a polished appearance.

As the buds swell they become more and more polished until the outer scales open and the leaves appear, each one with five or seven leaflets, outstretched like the fingers of a hand.

In May when it is in flower a fully grown Horse Chestnut tree is a magnificent sight. The flowers are shaped like pyramids and are pure white, splashed and dotted with crimson and yellow towards the base. Sometimes one sees what appears to be a Horse Chestnut tree with red flowers, but this is not the true Horse Chestnut. It is *Aesculus carnea*, a smaller and less vigorous tree, believed to be a cross between the Horse Chestnut and another variety of *Aesculus*.

How the Horse Chestnut got its name is something of a mystery. Some say that it is so called because at one time the nuts were given to horses as medicine. A more likely explanation is that years ago the word "horse" was often used to denote something rather coarse, such as horse-radish, or horse-mushrooms.

It may even be possible that the tree received its name from its leaf scar. If a leaf is plucked from a Horse Chestnut twig, there can be seen on the twig an impression shaped exactly like a horseshoe, with seven or nine dots placed in it like nails.

The fruit of the Horse Chestnut is known to every boy in the land, for the rich brown nuts are gathered eagerly in September for use in the game known as 'conkers'. Each one is enclosed in a bristly green case which bursts when the nut is ripe.

Because the tree is a quick growing one, its timber is not very durable and so it is not of much use in industry. The wood is very white, however, and occasionally such things as toys and shelves are made from it.





The Horse Chestnut

The Willow Leaved Pear

Pyrus salicifolia



The Willow Leaved Pear is one of the most attractive of our decorative trees. In the Spring its leaves are covered on both sides with a beautiful white down. Later in the year this falls away from the upper surfaces, leaving them a shining green.

As its name implies, the leaves are similar in shape to those of the Willow. Quite often the clusters of white flowers open at the same time as the leaves appear and the tree presents a very charming picture in April and early May.

The Willow Leaved Pear is purely ornamental and the fruits, which are only about an inch long, are very bitter and cannot be eaten.

A native of S.E. Europe and Asia Minor, the tree was introduced to this country in 1780. It does not usually grow to more than about 25-ft. high.





The Willow Leaved Pear

The Catalpa

Catalpa bignonioides
(also known as "Indian Bean")



The Catalpa or Indian Bean was first brought to this country from North America in 1726. Its name comes from the Red Indian word "catawpa", while "Indian Bean" relates to its long slender seed pods, which contain numerous small, hairy seeds.

The Catalpa can always be recognised by its pinkish bark and the unusual arrangement of its large heart-shaped leaves, which are grouped in threes. The showy, trumpet-shaped flowers appear in July and August, a time when few other trees are in bloom. They are white in colour, blotched with shades of yellow, purple and chocolate.

There are not many Catalpas to be seen in the Midlands and North, for the tree is not completely hardy and it flourishes much better in the southern counties of England. Plenty of good specimens can be seen in the streets of London, where it has shown it has a good resistance to town smoke. The best known Catalpas are probably those at the foot of Big Ben in Parliament Square.

The tree reaches maturity at about 50 or 60 years of age and rarely lives to be more than 80 or 90 years old. It grows to a fair size and heights of up to 52-ft. with girths of up to 10-ft. have been recorded in Britain.

In America its hard and durable timber was used to a considerable extent in providing sleepers for the great coast to coast railroads. It is still used for railway sleepers, fencing posts, and other purposes where a tough, weather-resistant wood is required.





The Catalpa (or Indian Bean Tree)

The Red Oak

Quercus rubra



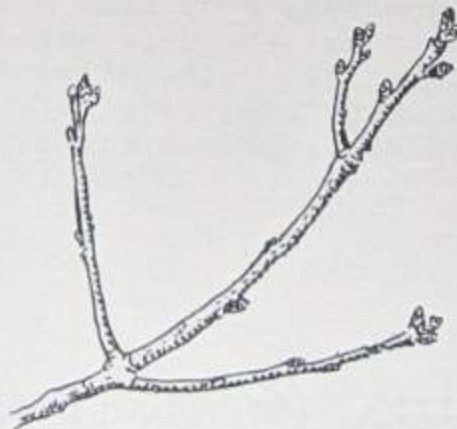
The Red Oak, introduced into this country from America early in the eighteenth century, is undoubtedly the best grower of all the American species established in Britain.

It is a handsome tree, particularly in Autumn when its leaves become a brilliant red colour before they fall.

The main difference between the Red Oak and the English Oak (described on Page 12) is in the leaves. Those of the Red Oak have more pointed lobes, with a few unequal "teeth" each side.

The acorns are nearly as wide as they are long. They are flat at the bottom and set in a shallow, saucer-shaped cup, covered with short broad scales.

The largest Red Oak so far recorded in England is 80-ft. high with a trunk having a circumference of 18-feet.





The Red Oak

The Blue Atlas Cedar

Cedrus atlantica..Glauca.



There are several varieties of true cedars, most of them growing wild in the Syrian mountains, the Himalayas, the Atlas mountains and Cyprus. All of them are evergreens, of pyramid shape when young, but developing massive trunks and large spreading branches as they grow older. The bark is at first smooth and grey but in older trees it is brown, furrowed and scaly.

The cedars produce long erect catkins and small greenish cones which do not reach full size for two years or more. As the cones ripen they turn brown and gradually break up to release the large winged seeds.

As its name implies, the Atlas Cedar is a native of the Atlas mountains of Algeria and Morocco, where it is found at elevations of up to 6,000-ft. It differs from the Cedar of Lebanon in its habit of growth for, whereas the Lebanon Cedar tends to mass its foliage horizontally in great flat planes, the Atlas Cedar's branches rise upwards, making quite a narrow angle with the trunk. The leaves are bluer than those of the Lebanon tree and the cones are rather smaller and less barrel-shaped.

The Atlas Cedar was introduced into this country by Lord Somers of Eastnor, Herefordshire, who raised a number of trees from seed about the middle of the last century. In 1953 one of these seedlings had grown to be 119-ft. high, with a girth of 19-ft.

The wood of the Atlas Cedar is fragrant and durable but, because it is relatively scarce, it is not used much commercially.





The Blue Atlas Cedar

The Irish Yew

Taxus baccata...

Fastigiata.



The Irish Yew is a 'sport' of the Common Yew (described on Page 26), and differs from it chiefly in its habit of growth, which resembles in some respects that of the Lombardy Poplar. Its branches are erect and its leaves stand out all around the twigs. There is a sub-variety with golden young leaves.

It is sometimes called the Florence Court Yew because at one time it was thought that all Irish Yews were derived from two trees discovered by a farmer named Willis in the mountains of Fermanah in Ireland. He gave one to his landlord, the Earl of Enniskillen of Florence Court, who gave away a quantity of cuttings. In 1927, however, a number of other trees were found in Bognor Regis district of Sussex.

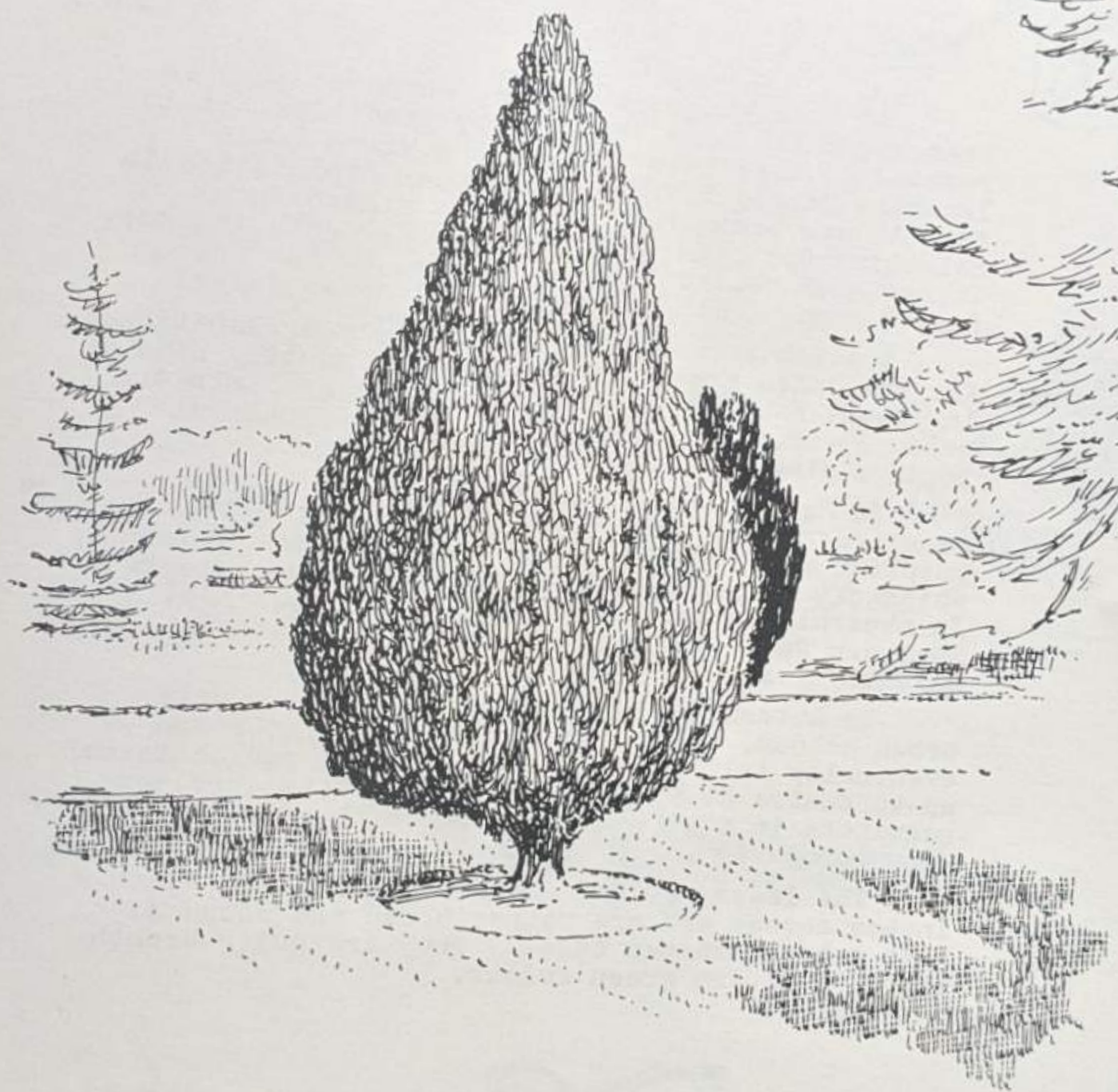
Attempts to grow Irish Yews from seed have all failed, for the seedlings revert to the normal type.



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The Irish Yew



The Judas Tree

Cercis siliquastrum



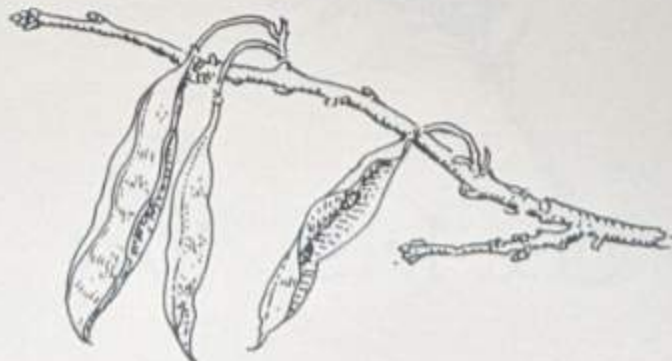
The Judas-tree is usually supposed to have been given its name because, by tradition, it is reputed to have been the tree on which Judas Iscariot hanged himself. Another explanation is that it was brought to Europe by miners from Palestine who came to Provence many centuries ago. It was then called l'arbe de Judse or the tree from Judaea. In English, Judse became Judas.

The latter seems the more likely explanation, for the Judas-tree is a small tree, usually of a low bushy habit with twisted, sprawling limbs and below 25-ft. in height. Occasionally when it forms a single trunk, it may grow higher.

In May, when in bloom, the Judas-tree is a beautiful sight. It bears clusters of bright purplish rose flowers, something like pea blossoms, which often open before the first leaves appear. In some places the flowers are used in salads. They are succulent and crisp with a pleasant, slightly acid flavour.

In Autumn the tree carries pods of a dull brown colour, which turn crimson in Winter and eventually fall to the ground. Each pod contains up to twelve flat, black seeds, but these seldom germinate in this country because they do not ripen properly in our climate.

The leaves of the Judas-tree are from 2½ to 4 inches across and are rather broad and rounded, with a heart-shaped base. They are quite smooth and of a bluish green colour.





The Judas Tree

The Brilliant Sycamore

Acer pseudo-platanus,
Brilliantissimum.



The Brilliant Sycamore is a variety of the Common Sycamore, fully described on Page 21. It differs from the type mainly in the colour of its leaves when young. These are suffused with a beautiful pinkish hue as they unfold and make the tree a handsome sight in Spring. Later the foliage becomes the normal colour.

"Brilliantissimum" is chiefly grown as an ornamental tree, especially in exposed gardens and parks, for which its hardiness makes it especially valuable. It grows more slowly than the common Sycamore.





The Brilliant Sycamore

The Weeping Ash

Fraxinus excelsior.. *Pendula*



Few trees have been the subject of more stories and legends than the Ash. In Scandinavian mythology there was an Ash known as *Igdrasil* - the great tree of the universe. Its branches were believed to support the heavens, while its roots stretched down to hell.

In our own country, until comparatively recent times, there were a number of curious superstitions and practices in rural districts. It was believed, for example, that if a shrewmouse was imprisoned alive within the trunk of a growing Ash tree, the resulting "Shrew Ash" would acquire miraculous healing powers.

Injured infants were passed through a cleft formed in a living Ash trunk in the belief that their tissues would mend, even as the Ash itself healed over the cavity.

The Ash is a tall tree with a slender trunk. Its grey bark is smooth at first, becoming roughened as the tree grows older. It has compound leaves, that is, they consist of a number of separate leaflets which collectively form a leaf. Each leaf has from three to six leaflets each side and a terminal one.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Ash is its large black leaf buds. They do not break until May or even early June, some time after the flowers have appeared. The winged seeds, commonly called "keys", ripen in August but usually remain on the tree until blown off by the Autumn gales. They do not sprout during the following Spring but lie dormant in the soil for another twelve months.

The supple strength of Ash wood has from time immemorial caused it to be used for handles and helms of axes, picks, spades, hammers and every kind of tool and implement. The wood has another valuable characteristic in that when steamed, it can be bent into a curved shape with no loss of strength or toughness. Because of this it has long been used for hockey sticks, tennis racquets, hoops of barrels, and walking sticks.

The Weeping Ash is a strain which is usually grafted on to an upright stock of normal habit. Its branches will then arch downwards to form a bower or arbour. There are few recorded cases of natural weeping trees.

The most remarkable example of a Weeping Ash is reputed to be a tree in the garden of the Earl of Harrington at Elvaston, Derbyshire. This was grafted in 1848 and is now 100-ft. high, with branches falling vertically to within 20-ft. of the ground.

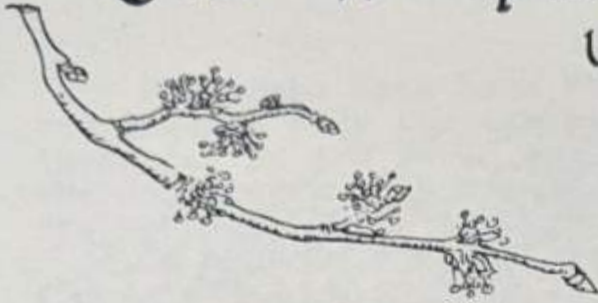




The Weeping Ash

The Weeping Elm

Ulmus glabra .. *Pendula*



There are a number of forms of Weeping Elm, but this kind is a variety of the Wych or Scotch Elm. It is said to have originated in a nursery in Perth early in the 19th Century.

The spreading habit and 'arbour like' form of the tree make it especially suitable for parks and ornamental gardens. To get the best effect, branches of the weeping form are usually grafted high up on the stem of a normal type Wych Elm.

The leaves are rough on top, soft and hairy underneath, and their edges are toothed like a saw. In common with other varieties of Elm, one half of the leaf is higher than the other at the base.

The Weeping Elm carries clusters of small, stalkless, dark red flowers early in the year before the leaves open. The flowers are followed by winged fruits, green in colour and about $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch to 1-inch long, each carrying a seed in the middle. These are dispersed by the wind and, unlike those of other types of Elm, the seeds germinate freely.

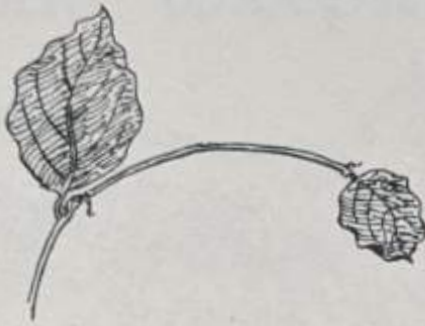




The Weeping Elm

The Purple Beech

Fagus sylvatica ..Purpurea

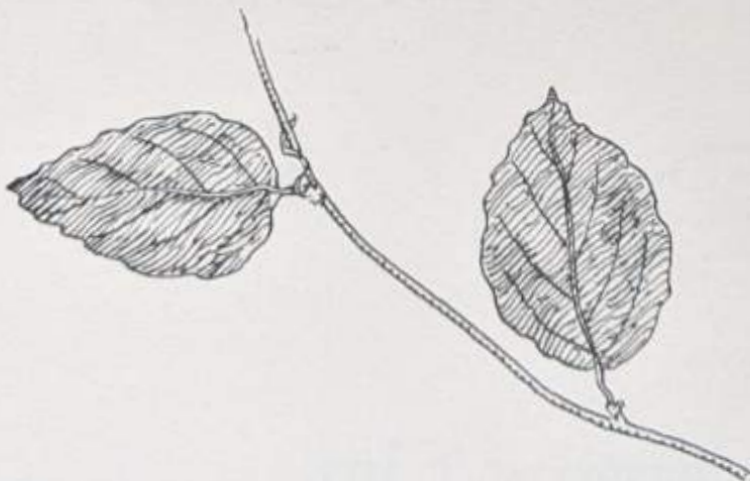


The Purple Beech is said to have been first recorded in Switzerland towards the end of the seventeenth century. Legend has it that a party of brothers quarrelled in a forest near Zurich and, as a result, three of them were slain. It is reputed that, from the bloodstained soil where they fell, the first purple-leaved Beeches grew.

In fact, however, most of the trees in present cultivation came from some other Purple Beeches which were discovered in a German wood about a century ago. These, like the Swiss trees, were undoubtedly sports of the common Beech.

The tree is similar to the common Beech (described on Page 19), except for the colour of its leaves, which are a pale red in Spring, becoming a deep purple when mature.

The Purple Beech is often mistakenly called 'Copper Beech' but the true Copper Beech is *Fagus sylvatica* - variety *rubra* which probably originated as a seedling from the Purple Beech. Its leaves are paler and are more of a coppery-red than purple.

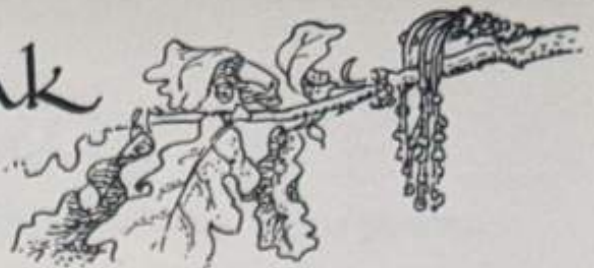




The Purple Beech

The English Oak

Quercus robur



Although there may be a number of British trees more graceful and beautiful than the Oak, none of them is more beloved or more famous in the stories and legends of this country. The Oak indeed, even more than the rose, is the emblem of England.

From the gnarled and massive trunk of a fully grown tree are thrust out tortuous boughs with branches that spread out to form a rounded crown which is often wider than the tree is high.

The broad leaves have a wavy outline and rounded lobes. When they first appear in Spring they are yellow, but turn to a dark green in Summer and to a warm brown in Autumn. The flowers come out in April, the male ones in short catkins of a yellowish green colour; the female flowers, few and inconspicuous, appearing in groups of one to five on twigs of the current year's growth.

One of the most distinctive features of the tree is its fruit, the acorn, which consists of a small egg-shaped nut, the lower end of which is encased in a greenish cup.

Sometimes one sees also on an Oak tree what are known as Oak apples. These are sometimes mistakenly thought to be fruits of the Oak but, in fact, are little balls of protective covering set up by the tree around the irritation caused by tiny grubs boring into its bark. This covering in time completely encloses the grub and hangs detached from the tree like a miniature apple.

The Oak is renowned for its tough and durable timber which has played a great part in our history. The ships of Drake and Nelson were made of English Oak; ancient beams still support some fine old buildings from stately manor house to humble cottage. This durability is not surprising, for the Oak is one of the slowest to mature of all our trees. It does not produce an acorn until it is 60 to 70 years old and it does not reach full growth for about 150 years. Until then its timber is not considered fit for use.

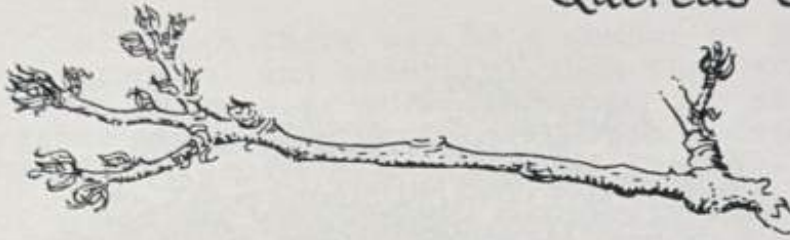
There are countless stories about individual Oak trees, but one of the most famous of all time must have been the Golyos Oak which was felled at Bassaleg near Newport, Monmouthshire in 1810. Four hundred years old, it contained 2,426 cubic feet of sound timber, worth at that time £675; its six tons of bark fetched a further £200. Five men toiled for twenty days to strip the bark and fell the tree, then two sawyers took five months to cut up its great trunk and branches into planks.



The English Oak

The Turkey Oak

Quercus cerris

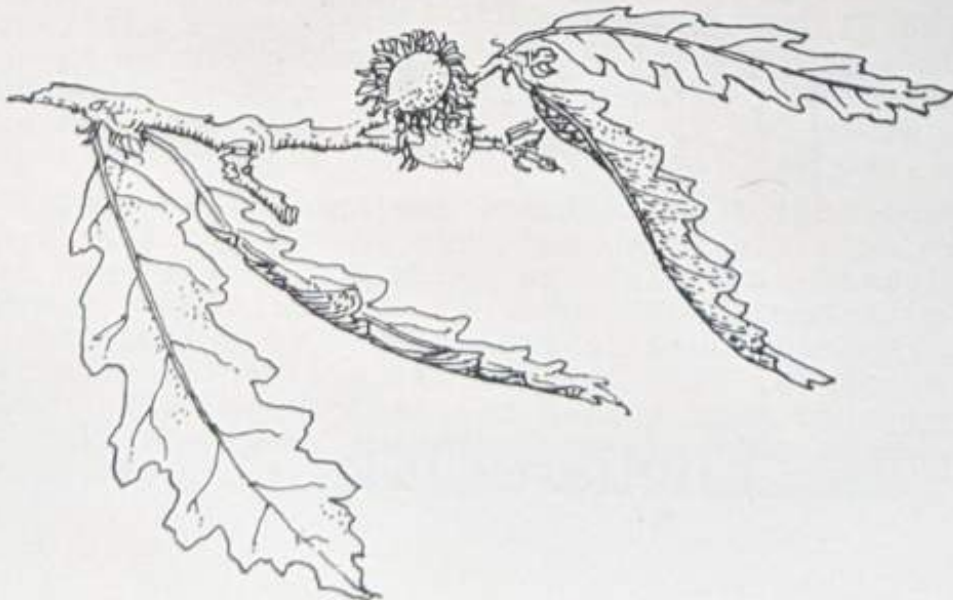


As a purely ornamental tree, the Turkey Oak has some advantages over the common Oak (described on Page 12), for it is quicker growing and is more elegant in appearance; it does not have the twisted branches of *quercus robur*.

As a timber tree, however, it is much inferior. John Evelyn, sometimes called the father of British forestry, had a poor opinion of it. "We shall say little", he remarked, "of the *cerris*, goodly to look on, but for little else".

The Turkey Oak will grow to be a tall tree, often over 120-ft. high, with a trunk reaching as much as 6-feet in diameter. It has rather slender leaves, with pointed lobes; its acorns are dark brown and stalkless, with cups that are covered with bristly, moss-like scales.

A native of Southern Europe and Asia Minor, the tree abounds in the Turkish Peninsular and is common in Italy. It was introduced here about 1735.





The Turkey Oak

The Hornbeam

Carpinus betulus.



The Hornbeam is usually supposed to have got its name from the toughness of its wood which is, indeed, almost as hard as horn. Another theory, however, links it with the days when oxen were used for ploughing and the yokes fitted to their horns were made of this wood.

In appearance the Hornbeam is something like the Beech but it is smaller, seldom reaching a height of more than 60-feet. It differs from the Beech also in that its trunk, though grey, is often ridged and beautifully fluted, while its leaves are duller and more conspicuously toothed.

The flowers appear with the leaves; the male ones hang in catkins but the female ones are erect until they bear their tiny, nut-like fruits, when they hang in sprays below the branches in a distinctive way. When in flower, the tree looks as though it is illuminated with tassels of silver and gold tinsel.

In the past many Hornbeams were pollarded, which accounts for some of the quaint "golliwog" trees seen in Epping Forest and elsewhere. The trees were lopped in this way because after being so treated they send up bushy tufts of small branches which were used as firewood by the cottagers. The stouter stems were used to make charcoal.

Because Hornbeam is the hardest of all our native woods, it was used for the wooden cog wheels in windmills and watermills, butchers' chopping blocks, mallets and other things which had to undergo a lot of hard wear. In the making of pianos, Hornbeam is still used for the hammers and other parts of the instruments' action, giving a long life without distortion.





The Hornbeam



The English Elm

Ulmus procera.



One of the tallest and most graceful of our native trees is the English Elm, with its great trunk soaring up to 140-ft. or more and a billowing cloud of foliage, rising to its summit. It is of singular beauty in Winter when its finely fretted leafless branches are outlined in delicate tracery against the sky.

As with all other kinds of Elm, the leaves of the English Elm are unequally sided at the base and toothed round the edges. They are narrower than those of the Wych Elm, however, and are dark green in colour, turning to a rich yellow in the Autumn. They linger on the branches longer, perhaps, than any of our other deciduous trees.

The flowers of the English Elm are small and reddish, clustered closely round the twig. The fruits are like small round discs, bearing the seed close to a notch at the top. The seeds are rarely fertile, however, and even when they do germinate, the resultant seedlings do not often survive for long, for they are voraciously eaten by cattle, sheep, rabbits and all kinds of grazing animals. Fortunately, the Elm produces quantities of suckers and so freely propagates itself, especially in hedgerows.

In the midlands the Elm is especially prolific; indeed, it has been called the 'Warwickshire Weed'. In the eastern counties also there are many Elms and in some of Constable's famous paintings of Suffolk landscapes these graceful trees are beautifully depicted.

The Elm has a disconcerting habit of unexpectedly shedding a limb. A bough will snap off without warning and when examined, there appears to be no cause for the breakage. This makes it rather unsuitable for planting near a public highway. For the same reason it is unwise to camp under an Elm tree.

The timber is very durable and is especially useful because it has no tendency to split. Before earthenware and iron pipes were introduced, Elm trees were often used as water pipes. Great trunks were patiently hollowed out and driven together to form a continuous pipe. Lengths of these old water pipes are still unearthed occasionally in old towns and villages.

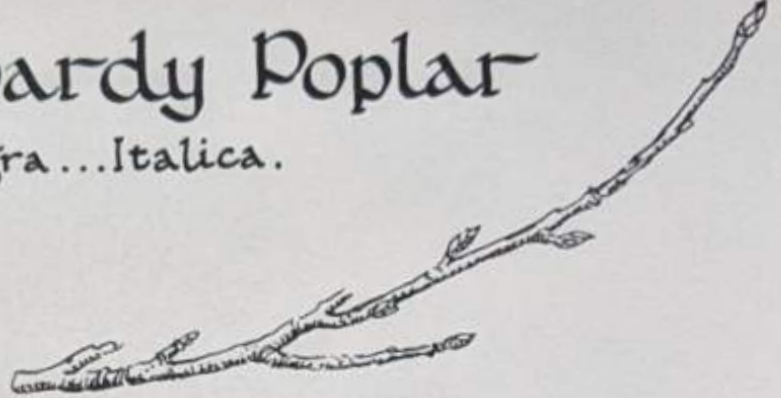
In the spacious days of the eighteenth century great avenues of Elms were sometimes laid out on country estates. One of the grandest ever must have been in Windsor Great Park which had four rows of Elms running for two miles from the Castle towards a hill top statue. This succumbed some years ago to the ravages of time and disease and the Elms are now replaced by planes and horse chestnuts.



The English Elm

The Lombardy Poplar

Populus nigra...*Italica*.



The Lombardy Poplar is a sport or freak variety of the Black Poplar, differing from it only in its habit of growth.

It is slender and tapering, the branches rising gracefully upwards, looking from a distance almost like a church steeple.

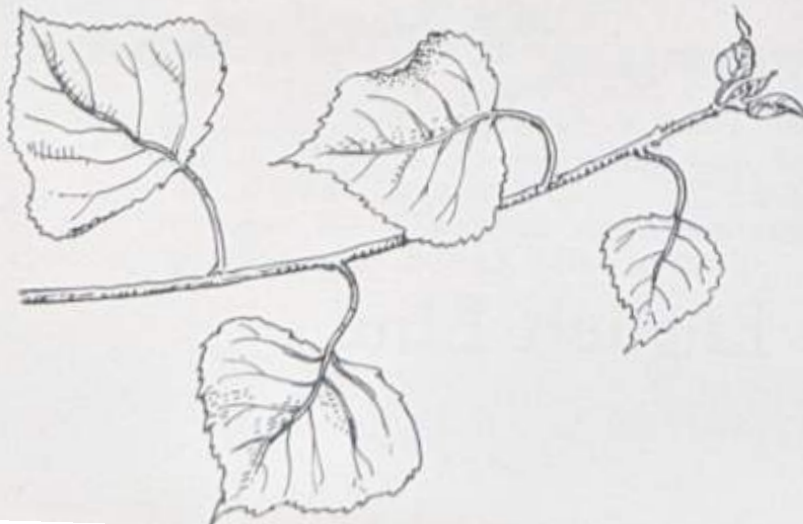
Like the other Poplars, the Lombardy bears its flowers in catkins. Its leaves are smooth and heart-shaped, with dainty little teeth cut evenly all round.

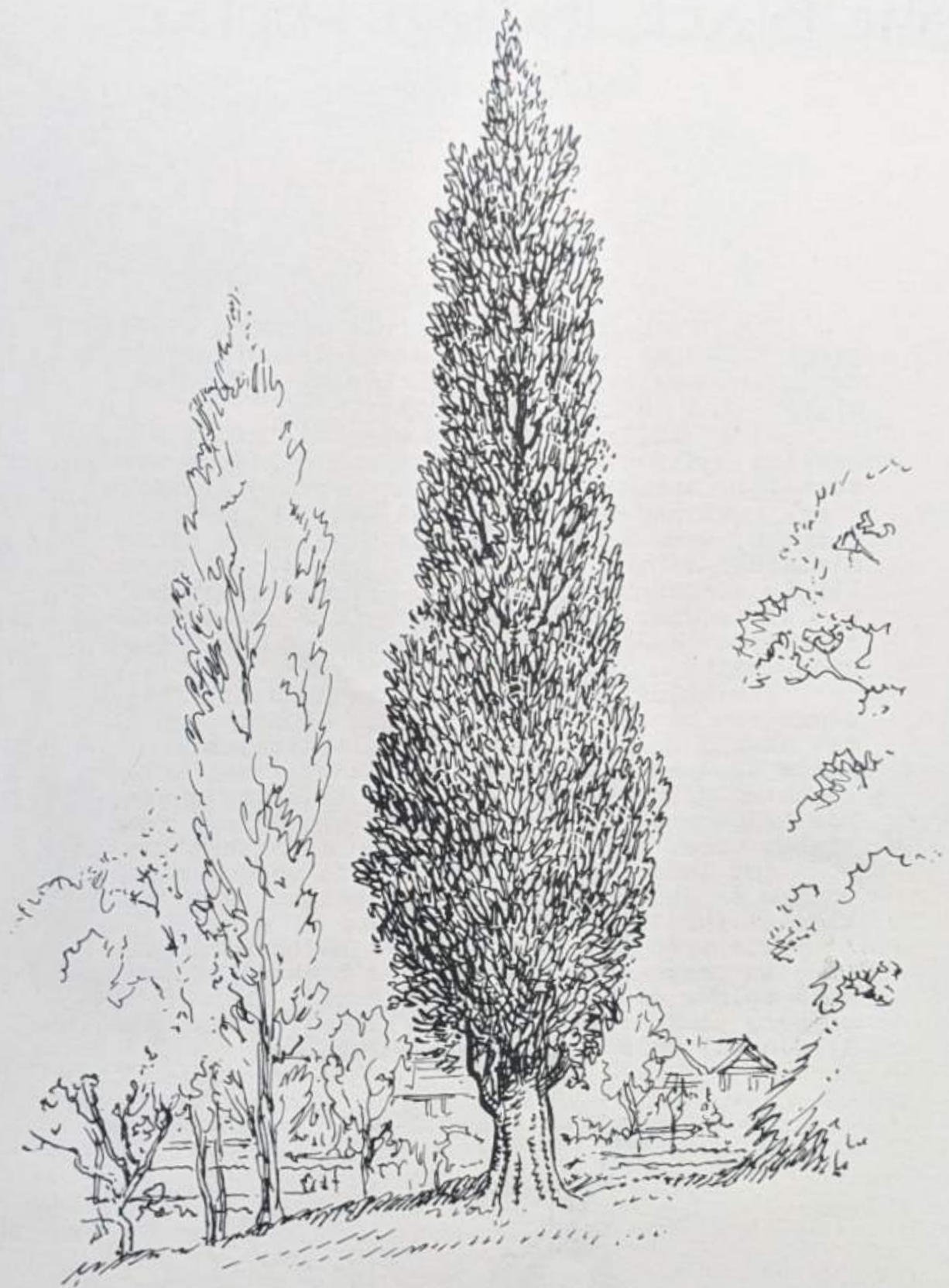
The tree received its name because it was first found on the plains of the Po Valley in Italy; it was brought to England about the middle of the nineteenth century by Lord Rochford.

As little over a century has elapsed since the Lombardy Poplar's introduction to this country, it is rather remarkable that so many excellent specimens can now be seen in such a wide variety of places. Its popularity can no doubt be attributed to its rapid growth and graceful shape, which make it excellent as a landscape ornament or as a screen.

Nearly all the Lombardy Poplars in cultivation are male trees, for the females are not so attractive. It is easily propagated by cuttings. Unfortunately the timber is almost useless because the stem is invariably full of knots formed by the many side branches.

So far as is known, the tallest Lombardy Poplar in this country is in Golders Hill Park, London: it is 108-feet high.





The Lombardy Poplar

The Black Italian Poplar

Populus serotina.



The Black Italian Poplar is another of the group known as 'Black' Poplars and is probably a cross between the true Black Poplar - *Populus nigra* - and an American variety.

It is difficult to see why this group of Poplars was so called because their leaves are certainly not black, while the bark is a sombre grey. It has been suggested that it may be because, when felled, a black circle can be discerned at the centre of the trunk. A more likely explanation, however, is that the name was given simply to distinguish the trees from the White Poplar group, whose leaves are white underneath.

The Black Italian Poplar is probably the commonest of all Poplars in this country and is one of the quickest growing. It attains a large size in a comparatively short time, reaching perhaps a hundred feet in sixty years. For this reason it can profitably be grown as a timber tree. Although the wood is rather too soft for long and hard wear, it is used for such things as packing cases, toys, cotton reels and kitchen furniture.

The tree is often grown as an ornamental tree in parks and large gardens because of the rich colour of the catkins in March, the coppery pink of the opening foliage in May, and its lovely golden colour in Autumn.





The Black Italian Poplar

The Beech

Fagus sylvatica



Gilbert White, the famous old naturalist of Selborne, said of the Beech: "It is the most lovely of all forest trees, whether we consider its smooth rind or bark, its glossy foliage or graceful pendulous boughs". Of all our native trees, perhaps only the Oak is held in more regard.

The Beech is especially prized by foresters because its abundant leaves carpet the ground in Autumn and rot down to form a rich leaf mould in which other forest trees flourish. It grows well in shade and is often used to underplant other trees. The Beech's own shade keeps the ground moist and causes the other trees to grow taller in their search for light.

A well grown Beech has a straight stem, smooth and grey, rising sometimes to 100-ft. or more. The leaves, before opening, are folded fanwise in the bud. When they emerge they are a beautiful golden green colour, oval, smooth, with slightly toothed edges and a most delicate fringe of gossamer which falls off later. It has been truly said that the young foliage of the Beech in May is one of the most beautiful sights in nature. The leaves change to an orange brown in Autumn and often cling fast to the tree long into Winter, sometimes right until the sap rises again in Spring.

The flowers of the Beech appear in April and May, the male blossoms hanging together in a purplish, rounded tassel with yellow anthers. The female flowers are clustered in a little cup which hardens and becomes a small bristly container, enclosing the seed. Again after a time this splits and reveals the three-sided chestnut coloured nuts. These are often called "mast". In former times Beech mast was looked on as an extremely valuable food for animals; herds of pigs were turned into Beech woods to feed upon it.

The Chiltern Hills in Buckinghamshire and the neighbouring counties to the north-west of London have the greatest concentration of Beech woods in Britain. It is thought that many of them were planted about 300 years ago, to provide firewood for London. The wood was used also in the furniture industry which grew up in the High Wycombe district. It is still used extensively in furniture making, especially for chair legs and the framework of wardrobes and tables.

A rather strange thing about Beech timber is that, although it is a perishable wood, it will last almost indefinitely in water. This is probably because the fungi which destroy it cannot exist without air. The piles that supported Old Waterloo Bridge over the Thames were made of Beech wood.



The Beech

The Corsican Pine

Pinus laricio.



The Pines constitute the most important group of all the cone bearing trees. They are evergreen and can be distinguished by their needle-like leaves which are nearly always produced in clusters or bundles of from two to five. The base of each bundle is held in a thin grey sheath which looks like paper. In the Corsican Pine the leaves are in pairs about four to seven inches long; the sheath has a length of about half-an-inch.

The cones appear in pairs or threes and take about eighteen months to grow to maturity. When they are ripe the scales of the cones unclose and curl up, showing thick wooden lips. At the base of each scale lie two brown seeds and each seed has a thin filmy wing. When the seeds fall from the cone they float on these wings for long distances.

The Corsican Pine is found over a great part of Europe but, as its name implies, it is seen at its finest in Corsica where it grows to a height of 140 to 150 feet. Elsewhere it seldom reaches much more than about 120-feet with a girth of four or five feet.

The Forestry Commission has planted a large number of Corsican Pines in Britain in recent years for it is of considerable value as a timber tree. Its wood is used for fencing, telegraph poles, pit props and railway sleepers.

A curious thing has been discovered about the Corsican Pine in the tree nurseries where seedlings are grown. Rabbits simply will not touch the Corsican seedlings, although they will feed voraciously on those of the Austrian Pine, which is a close relative.



The Corsican Pine

The Sycamore

Acer pseudo-platanus



Although not a native of this country, the Sycamore was introduced to Britain many centuries ago; some think in Roman times. It is a member of the great family of acers or maples, all of which are distinguished by their winged fruits and by the fact that their leaves are always in opposite pairs.

The Sycamore is a large handsome tree of rapid growth, often reaching a height of 80-ft in 60-years. Its bark is of a greyish colour, smooth in youth, becoming rough and flaky as the tree ages.

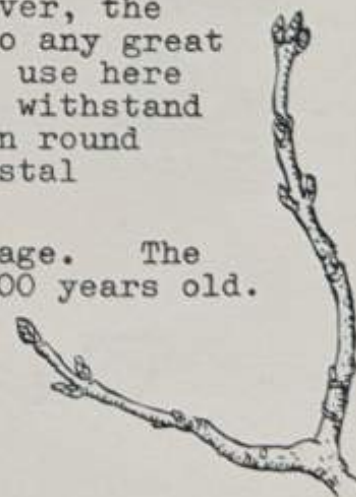
The leaves of the Sycamore usually have five pointed and indented lobes, four to seven inches across. They are glossy and of a dark green colour on top, but dull and greyish underneath. In early Summer appear the long hanging tassels of small yellowish green flowers which are pollinated by bees and other insects which come seeking nectar.

The flowers are followed by the familiar brown fruits or "keys" consisting of two seeds attached to each other by their bases at an angle of about 60° , each covered by a large thin membranous wing. These spin and flutter in the breeze and are carried over a wide area.

The timber is creamy white and has a clean, attractive appearance. Although hard and enduring, it is easily worked and polished and is often used for making furniture and kitchen utensils.

In spite of these qualities, however, the Sycamore is not grown for its timber to any great extent in this country. Its greatest use here has been as a shelter tree, for it will withstand the strongest gales. It is well known round mountain farmsteads and in exposed coastal regions.

Not many Sycamores reach a great age. The oldest in Britain are probably about 300 years old.

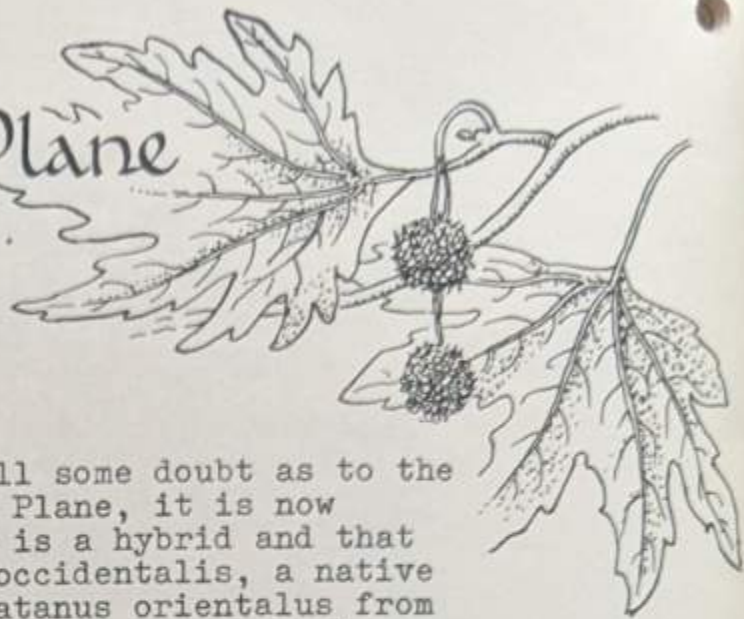




The Sycamore

The London Plane

Platanus acerifolia.



Although there is still some doubt as to the exact origin of the London Plane, it is now generally accepted that it is a hybrid and that its parents were *Platanus occidentalis*, a native of eastern America, and *Platanus orientalis* from S.E. Europe and Asia Minor. It has never been found growing wild and was first observed in England at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Whatever its history, the London Plane quickly adapted itself to conditions in this country, particularly to those in London and other big cities. Indeed, in London there are more of these trees than all other sorts put together. It thrives in the dust and smoke polluted streets of industrial towns and, in spite of bad conditions of soil and atmosphere, will grow into a fine looking tree, frequently over a hundred feet high, with a smooth, erect trunk.

A remarkable characteristic of the tree is its habit of shedding its bark each year. This does not come off all at once but flakes off in large and small plates, leaving smooth yellow patches behind.

The leaves of the London Plane are sometimes confused with those of the Sycamore because they are lobed into five divisions. They are more pointed than the Sycamore's, however, and instead of being attached to the stem in pairs, as in the Sycamore, they are alternate on opposite sides of the shoot.

Both male and female flowers appear on the same tree but they are in separate groups. They are followed by ball-like fruits, something like old fashioned buttons in appearance. Because of this, the tree is known in some parts of America as 'the buttonwood'.

The timber of the Plane is fine grained and hard and is extensively used by coach builders and cabinet makers.



The London Plane

The Alder

Alnus glutinosa.



Although the Alder is often seen in Parks and Open Spaces, it is a moisture loving tree and is happiest when growing by the side of a pool or stream. Under these conditions it may reach a height of eighty or ninety feet. Elsewhere it seldom attains more than half that size.

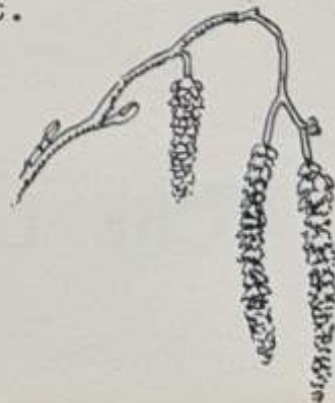
The bark of the Alder is rough and black and the leaves are from two to four inches long, with toothed and wavy edges. When young, the leaves are covered with hair and are sticky to the touch. They remain on the tree and continue green long after the leaves of most other trees have changed colour and fallen.

Like the Birch and the Hazel, the Alder is a catkin bearing tree. The male catkins are of a reddish tint and first appear in Autumn, drooping as they open in Spring. In Spring there may be seen also, groups of little cone-like seed catkins. These are covered with green scales which open as the days grow warmer. After pollination, the scales become brown and woody and the seeds, when ripe, are shaken on to the ground below.

The empty seed catkins may continue for a long time on the trees and in Autumn it is possible to see catkins of three seasons on one tree; the black and empty seed catkins of the previous year; the green catkins of the present year, and the tiny little caterpillar catkins just beginning to form in readiness for next Spring.

The wood of the Alder is soft but it has the merit of lasting for a long time when submerged in water. In the past it was often used for piles, pumps and water pipes. It was also used extensively in Lancashire for making the clogs which were worn by workers in the cotton mills.

A peculiarity of the wood is that although it is white when the tree is alive, it becomes red when cut and exposed to the air and finally, after drying, it changes to a pinkish tint.





The Alder

The White Poplar or Abele...

Populus alba.



In an old Greek legend it is said that Hercules, to celebrate a victory, twined a spray of Poplar leaves around his forehead. Soon afterwards he descended into Hades and when he returned to earth the smoke and grime of those infernal regions had blackened the upper side of his leafy garland. The undersides of the leaves, however, were washed white with the sweat that had poured from his brow in that terrible heat. Ever since then, says the story, the leaves of that kind of Poplar have been white underneath.

This contrasting colouring of its leaves is the easiest way to distinguish the White Poplar from the other members of the Poplar family. When the wind rustles through its branches, the tree has a charming silvery white and green appearance.

Like other Poplars, the White Poplar is a catkin bearing tree, the male catkins being almost invariably on separate trees to the female ones. In fact, male catkins are hardly ever seen in this country. The female catkins are about an inch long with yellow stigmas; they develop into slender egg shaped seed capsules. In mid-summer, when the seeds are shed, the ground beneath the tree is strewn with the white cottony filaments attached to the seeds.

Probably because of the speed of its growth, the wood of the white Poplar is not very strong and has no outstanding value as timber. However, it is light and smooth and does not split easily and so is sometimes used for flooring and for packing cases which have lids fastened down by nails.





The White Poplar (or Abele)

The False Acacia

Robinia pseudacacia.



Often known as the 'Locust Tree' the False Acacia was first brought to this country from eastern America at the beginning of the Seventeenth Century. After being grown as an ornamental tree for two hundred years, it suddenly achieved tremendous popularity when William Cobbett, the well known Radical leader and author of 'Rural Rides' and other works, returned from a visit to America in 1820.

Cobbett was convinced that the timber of this tree was extremely valuable and that it would greatly benefit the country if it were grown here on a large scale. To this end he started a tree nursery and imported tons of seeds from America.

Unfortunately the wood, though strong and durable, proved liable to crack and so its usefulness was very limited. Nevertheless, it was found to be very resistant to decay when in contact with the soil, so it was and, in fact, still is used for making fence posts.

Whatever its merits as a timber tree, there is no doubt that the False Acacia, with its graceful feathery foliage and fragrant white flowers has much to recommend it as an ornamental tree.

It grows very fast when young and will reach a height of 70 or 80 feet, with a trunk of two to four feet in diameter. The flowers are similar to those of the Laburnum, hanging down in racemes, 3" to 7" long, in Spring. As they die, seed pods are formed, each containing from four to ten seeds. The leaves are pinnate, from 6 to 12 inches long and contain from five and a half to eleven and a half pairs of oval leaflets.

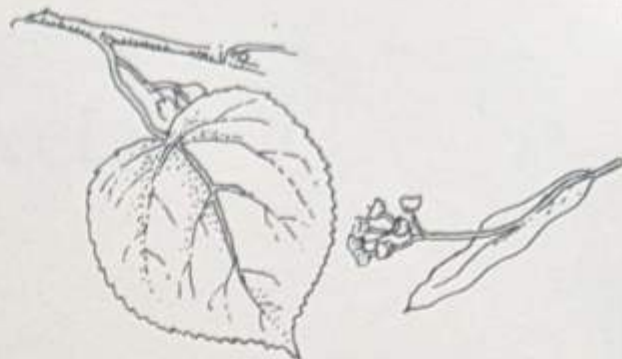
The tree is still known in America as the 'Locust Tree', a name it was given because it was reputed to be the tree on whose fruit, with wild honey, John the Baptist supported himself in the wilderness. The Latin name Robinia was given in honour of the French botanist, Jean Robin, and the first plant of the False Acacia sent to France was planted by his son Vespasien Robin in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. The ancient stump of this tree still remains.



The False Acacia

The Lime

Tilia vulgaris



One of the best known of all our British trees is the common Lime or Linden. Beloved by city dwellers especially, because it thrives in a polluted industrial atmosphere, it adorns our streets, parks and gardens with its tall, straight stems and heart-shaped leaves.

In Summer its small yellowish white flowers are fragrant with something like a honeysuckle perfume. One must look carefully for these flowers because they are not produced until the boughs are well covered with leaves and they are almost hidden.

Innumerable bees visit them, for they are rich in nectar which the bees make into honey. Sometimes the bees appear to become intoxicated and numbers of them may be found lying about under the trees. The flowers are succeeded by little globular fruits which seldom seem to ripen.

Perhaps the best known avenue of Limes in the world is the Unter den Linden in Berlin, but there are many better specimens in England. Some of the best are those in St. James' Park in London, which are supposed to have been planted at the suggestion of John Evelyn about the year 1660. There is also a famous avenue of Limes in Bushey Park, Hertfordshire.

Birmingham, too, has some good Limes, although they are not as old as those in Bushey Park. The Bristol Road from Pebble Mill to Selly Oak is lined with 30-year old trees and they abound also in the Hall Green and Yardley Wood areas.

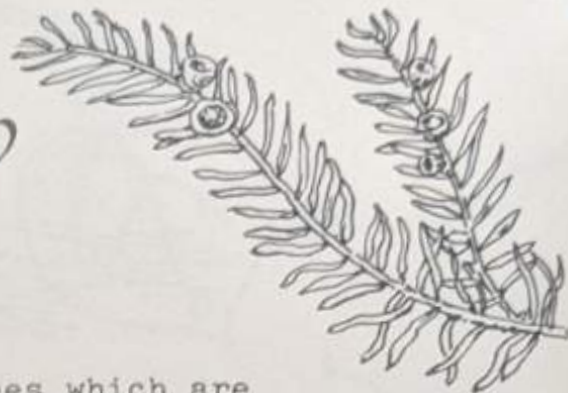
The timber of the Lime is white and soft and is often used in making musical instruments and in wood carving. The inner bark is very tough and from it comes the material known as 'bast' or 'bass' used for making mats and baskets.



The Lime

The Common Yew

Taxus baccato.



One of the few evergreen trees which are native to the British Isles, the Yew is often found growing in Churchyards and ornamental gardens. It is seldom or never seen in fields, however, because its leaves are poisonous to cattle.

The trunk is short and of a reddish brown colour, smooth when young, but becoming rugged and gnarled as the tree ages. Its leaves are a dense mass of needle-like spikes, arranged spirally around the shoots.

Some Yew trees are entirely male and their dull green leaves are enlivened in Spring by the bright golden stamens and pollen of the flowers. The pollen is carried by the air to the female trees whose tiny flowers are of a greenish yellow colour. Later the female trees bear bright crimson fruits. Occasionally a male tree will carry a branch or two bearing female flowers and, very rarely, a tree carrying numerous flowers of both sexes has been noted.

Yew trees have been known to live to a prodigious age. The great Yew at Crowhurst in Surrey is reputed to be well over a thousand years old. It is now a hollow shell, 33-feet round, with a door in its side. Sixteen people once sat down to dine at a table set inside it. The oldest Yew of all, however, is said to be that in the graveyard of the Perthshire village of Fortingall. It is thought to be over 3,000 years old.

The Yew bears clipping exceedingly well and because of this, it is often used for evergreen hedges and for topiary work, i.e. training and clipping into formal and fantastic shapes.

The wood of the Yew is not much used for timber, chiefly because its trunk is so short and furrowed that it is difficult to work up into planks. In ancient times, however, the wood was much esteemed for bow staves and the famous archers of Agincourt and Crecy used bows of English Yew.



The Common Yew

The Hawthorn

Crataegus monogyna.



One of the most beautiful sights in the English countryside in Spring is a Hawthorn hedge in full bloom. In olden times the country people held gay festivities in the month of May and village boys and girls danced and sang round a maypole garlanded with Hawthorn blossom. The blossom is never out on May Day these days, but it should be remembered that when these May festivities originated the old style calendar was used and May Day fell a fortnight later then.

Although from time immemorial the Hawthorn has been used for hedges, it makes a very nice tree when grown naturally. It forms a comparatively slender trunk, rising to thirty-feet or more, and has a rounded head of branches which droop gracefully at the ends.

The leaves are lobed into three or five divisions and are a favourite food of horses and cattle. It is as well that nature has provided the Hawthorn with a formidable array of thorns as a protection for otherwise many field hedges would soon be eaten away. The white flowers are usually sweetly scented, although occasionally they give off a rather unpleasant odour.

In late Autumn and Winter the Hawthorn looks almost as attractive as in Spring, for its leafless branches are covered with scarlet berries, or haws. Beneath the soft fleshy outside covering of these berries there is a hard core which protects the seeds so that they remain undigested when swallowed by birds. In this way the seeds are dispersed.

The wood of the Hawthorn is hard and tough, but its use is naturally rather restricted because of its limited size. It polishes well and is a famous wood for walking sticks.





The Hawthorn

The Birch

Betula verrucosa



The poet Coleridge happily described the Birch Tree as:

"..... most beautiful of forest trees,
the Lady of the Woods."

and it is true to say that few other trees can match it for the delicacy and grace of its branches and the beauty of its silvery trunk.

Yet, in spite of its daintiness, the Birch is extremely hardy and will survive in places where the sturdy Oak would succumb. It has penetrated further north than any other tree and its presence is of great benefit to the natives of Lapland and North America. In these desolate places Birch bark is used for making canoes, ropes, torches, sandals and boots; for roofing huts, tanning leather and countless other things. The timber is used for building huts, making furniture and kitchen utensils, while even the sap of the tree is utilised; it is tapped and made into a pleasant tasting wine.

The silvery bark of the Birch is a remarkable substance. Although when peeled off the tree it looks almost as fragile as tissue paper, it is astonishingly tough and enduring. There have been instances where a Birch tree has been blown down and, after lying on the ground for many years, the wood inside the bark has been found to be decayed but the silvery outside of the tree has remained unchanged. When stood upon, the apparently solid tree has proved to be nothing but a hollow tube.

The remains of Birch trees have been found in peat bogs after being there for thousands of years. The wood had turned to stone but the bark was found to be virtually unchanged.

The Birch is usually from 40 to 60 feet high but occasionally it reaches 100-feet. It is a short lived tree, maturing in about fifty years and not living much longer than a hundred. The small, glossy leaves flutter constantly in every light breeze: they have toothed edges and vary in shape from triangular to a pointed oval.

Tiny green catkins appear on the tree in Summer. They grow and turn purple in Autumn, hanging loosely on the tree all the Winter. In the following Spring the catkins grow longer and become a reddish brown or crimson colour. The female or seed catkins are also green at first but they are fatter and rounder. They droop as they develop and later release their tiny winged seeds.

In Spring before the leaves appear one may sometimes see curious bunches of twigs that look like crows' nests high up in the branches. These are known as "witches' brooms" and are caused by the attacks of mites. For some reason this makes the twigs mass together in this peculiar way.



The Birch

The Weeping Willow

Salix babylonica.



The Weeping Willow was given the name 'Babylonica' because it was believed to be a native of Palestine and was the Willow referred to in Psalm 137. However, although there have been Willows in the Euphrates region from an early period it is more probable that the tree originated in China.

The Weeping Willow was introduced into Western Europe towards the end of the 17th Century and reached England about 1730 when a merchant brought a sapling from the Middle East and planted it at Twickenham Park.

Another story credits Alexander Pope, the author, with growing the first Weeping Willow in England. It is said that he was with Lady Suffolk one day when she received a parcel from Spain tied up with Willow twigs. Noticing that one of the twigs had buds upon it, thus showing it to be alive, he begged it from Her Ladyship and planted it in his garden at Twickenham.

Whatever its origin, the Weeping Willow has since become a popular waterside tree, looking especially attractive on riverside lawns. Much of the beauty of the upper reaches of the Thames is due to the many beautiful Willows on its banks.

The tree does not grow tall - it is usually from 30 to 50 feet high - and has a rugged trunk which branches low down. The long slender twigs droop gracefully from the branches.

The Weeping Willow is perhaps at its loveliest in early Spring when the opening leaf buds appear like golden tassels. The leaves are smooth, slender and lance-shaped, with tiny teeth cut all round the edges. They are dark green above and a bluish-grey beneath. On the female trees slender catkins about two inches long appear at the same time as the leaves; on the male trees, which are not so common, the catkins are rather shorter.

Because of the tree's habit of growth, the timber of the Weeping Willow is not much used commercially (cricket bats are usually made from *Salix coerulea* - the Cricket Bat Willow) though its twigs are very tough and can be used for wicker work and basket making.

Rather curious circumstances gave an impetus to the cultivation of the tree in this country in the year 1823. Apparently there was a Weeping Willow on the island of St. Helena which was so much loved by the Emperor Napoleon that he was buried beneath it. Numerous cuttings from the tree were rooted and sent to England as souvenirs: and so today there are many Weeping Willows, purporting to be descendants of the St. Helena tree, scattered all over this country.

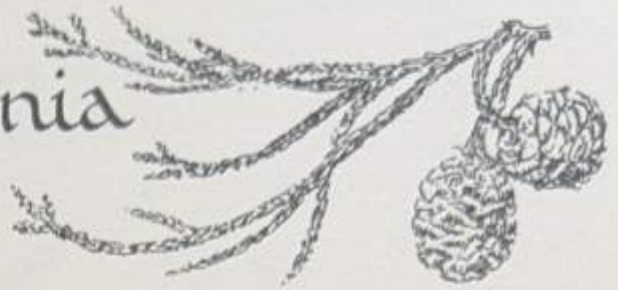
There is, in fact, at least one descendent of the St. Helena Willow growing in Birmingham at the present time. It was a cutting from one of the cuttings taken from the original tree and was presented to the City by Mrs. Massey of Kingstanding. The tree was planted on the traffic island at the junction of Kingstanding Road and College Road and it has done very well there.



The Weeping Willow.

The Wellingtonia

Sequoia gigantea



Although the Wellingtonia is thought to be one of the most ancient species of trees in existence, it had apparently disappeared from the face of the earth until, in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was dramatically rediscovered in the Sierra Nevada region of California.

Here, two travellers, climbing the western slopes of those hills, came across what must have been an amazing sight. It was the famous Calaveras Grove in which were over a hundred of these giant trees. The tallest of them was said to have been 430-feet in height - higher, in fact, than St. Paul's Cathedral. Its trunk was 110-feet in circumference. When the tree was cut down it was found to be hollow. It was possible for a man to ride on horseback for 200-feet inside the trunk.

After the discovery of the Calaveras Grove, several other groves of these monster trees were found and there now seems no fear of them ever becoming extinct.

News of this colossal tree aroused great interest over the whole of the civilised world, especially in England, where seeds were first received in 1853. The tree was named Wellingtonia after the famous general, the Duke of Wellington.

So far there have been no trees in this country to approach the stature of the California monsters but the Wellingtonia does quite well here and has been used fairly extensively as an ornamental tree. The one in Cannon Hill Park is not a very good example; there is a better one at Westonbirt; while quite an imposing avenue may be seen at Linton Park in Kent.

The Wellingtonia is sometimes confused with the Californian Redwood (*Sequoia sempervivens*) which also has huge dimensions. There is a difference in the leaves, however; those of the Wellingtonia are curved and rigid, while the Redwood's flat needles are like combs placed back to back, something similar to the Yew. Both are cone bearing trees but the Wellingtonia's cones are larger.

The bark of the Wellingtonia is often from one to two feet thick. It is a rich brown-red colour and has a fibrous, spongy texture. Children call the tree the "punching tree" because it is possible to punch the trunk quite hard without damaging one's knuckles.



The Wellingtonia

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