THE CELEBRATION ISSUE | AUTUMN 2016 | FREE

# LEAF!

Charter for Trees, Woods and People

**THE NEWSPAPER FOR TREES, WOODS AND PEOPLE**

**APPLE DAY, TREE DRESSING, FUNGI, FIREWOOD, TREES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, YOUR TREE STORIES AND MORE!**

A COMMON TREASURY FOR ALL

SAVE OUR ORCHARDS

CATSHEAD
CHIVER'S DELIGHT
BEAUTY of BATH
CHELMSFORD WONDER
BLOODY PLOUGHMAN
D'ARCY SPICE
DISCOVERY

apple day
october
21st

Apple Day by Jonny Hannah

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COMMON GROUND is an arts and environmental charity working both locally and nationally to seek new, imaginative ways to engage people with their local environment and celebrate the intimate connections communities have with the landscape that surrounds them.

THE WOODLAND TRUST is the UK's largest woodland conservation charity, and the leading voice for woods and trees. We inspire people to visit woods, plant trees, treasure wildlife and enjoy the overwhelming benefits that woods and trees offer to our landscape and lives. The Woodland Trust is leading the call for a Charter for Trees, Woods and People. For more information on the Charter visit **treecharter.uk**

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# LEAF!

**THE NEWSPAPER FOR TREES, WOODS AND PEOPLE**

In the autumn, as temperatures cool and the hours of daylight shorten, broadleaf trees prepare for winter by breaking down important nutrients, such as the chlorophyll they use for photosynthesis. This is why leaves turn such wonderful shades of yellow, orange and red before falling; a tapestry of colour announcing a time of dormancy. This change of colour and shedding of leaves slows down the movement of water and nutrients, which is essential if trees are to survive the freezing temperatures.

This transformation in the landscape starts to unfold in us too. Night falls earlier every day. The mornings feel damper and the sun seems to take longer to reach us through the mists. The clocks go back. We eat breakfast in the dark, before that daily school run and scramble to work, and we start lighting fires to keep warm at night.

Trees are often celebrated for their spiritual significance: Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree when he gained enlightenment, Tu BiShvat is the New Year of the Trees in the Jewish tradition, and the Sidra Tree is an important symbol in the Arab world. These cultural associations are at the root of tree festivities across the world. But so too is the utility of trees and the fact that they have always been key to our survival.

Trees grew on this planet long before *Homo sapiens* arrived, and ever since our species came along, strolling upright, we have needed the food, shelter, medicine and oxygen of trees in order to sustain ourselves. This utilitarian relationship with trees is as old as time itself. The Neolithic trackways in the Somerset Levels, after 12 years of excavation, revealed wattle hurdles, posts and planks made from hazel, oak, alder and ash. Before scientists worked out how to bottle salicylic acid, it wasn't aspirin that eased aches and pains, it was the bark of the white willow, *Salix alba*. A century ago, when woodlands were at the heart of the parish economy, trees and hedgerows 'paid their way' by providing woodfuel, woodland-pasture for pigs and cattle, and wild harvests of nuts and fruit for the home. There was also a thriving woodland culture of coppice crafts, charcoal-makers, bodgers, chair-makers, clay quarriers, wheelwrights, boat-builders and cloth-dyers, all of which have their techniques and traditions rooted in pre-history.

The diverse utility of trees continues to feed our imagination and celebrations. May Day (which has ribbon and the maypole tree at its heart) and Christmas are ingrained in our cultural calendar, and both have their rituals of decoration and celebration. Apple Day, which Common Ground initiated in 1990, is also widely celebrated every October, not just here in the UK but in Europe too. This autumn, there are plenty of opportunities to celebrate the trees, starting on 26 November with National Tree Week and Tree Dressing Day on 3 December.

How will you celebrate the trees and woods in your local area?

**Apple Day, 21 October, was launched in 1990 by Common Ground. The aspiration was to create a calendar custom and an autumn holiday. From the start, Apple Day was intended to be both a celebration and a demonstration of the variety we are in danger of losing, not simply in apples, but in the richness and diversity of landscape, ecology and culture too. It has also played a part in raising awareness of the provenance and traceability of food. The success of Apple Day has shown what the apple means to us and how much we need local celebrations in which, year after year, everyone can be involved. In city, town and country, Apple Day events have fostered local pride, celebrated and deepened interest in local distinctiveness.**

Writer and naturalist **Paul Evans** is in the orchard gathering windfalls

## IN PRAISE OF THE APPLE

A nippy morning. I picked a windfall round and red as dawn from under a crisscross of ley lines laid by spiders; bit into the white hill, to the five stones of its soul. I thought of the crazy line in 'The Orchards' by Dylan Thomas, 'He had dreamed that a hundred orchards on the road to the sea village had broken into flame; and all the windless afternoon tongues of fire shot through the blossom.' So I chucked the core as far as I could over the brambles, to grow new trees – a hundred orchards. Too few orchards around here now, burnt in millennial bonfires; one or two scratchy old duffers stooped in the corners of car parks, rotten guts, thatchy heads, chafers in their cubbyholes. Their apples thudded on tarmac to be worried by wasps, cider-pressed by Range Rovers. Survivors of a time when orchards were worked with blades, tar, lime, muck and nous, haunt these lands like those who worked them and took the stories written in the cuts on their hands to the crematorium with them. There's no replacing an old tree. But I have tried. The most worked apple trees I've known are at Powis Castle, Welshpool. Twelve pairs of pyramidal trees were planted in the nineteenth century as a collection of traditional varieties and trained into conical shapes, pruned like topiary so the maximum exposure to air and sunlight produced the highest yield of fruit. Not grafted onto dwarfing rootstock, the trees were ring-barked – a slot cut round two thirds of the trunk's circumference. When one died from honey fungus and we dug it out, I found a great slate under its roots to restrict them. We planted a new tree and pegged strings to its branches to recreate the pyramidal shape. I wonder if anyone in the future will find the silver coins I left for luck under the new tree's roots. I passed a group of men on the roadside wearing the kind of hi-vis jackets that suggested they'd done something for which litter picking was a just penance. They picked plastic from the verge but left a puddle of crab apples. Why? 'Because they're not litter, they're natural, birds eat them or they'll rot into the earth, they're beautiful,' they unspoke. Some of the crabs looked liverish yellow, full of bellyache and spite but they were sweet knots around a pentagram of pips. Most wondrous fruits: at night in the woods the wild trees roll them out across the paths so that in the morning they catch fire and glow golden.

**Fiona Stafford** discovers the long tradition of tree dressing around the UK and the world

# CELEBRATING TREES

On a grey afternoon in early December, I was driving through the narrow streets and red-brick terraces of what was once an old railway town but is now stitched into the miscellaneous urban quilt of Milton Keynes. After a right turn into one of the small squares, a few streets from the main road, instead of the usual starved grass and black silhouetted branches, there was a startling patch of summer colour – scarlet, mauve, saffron, magenta.

It was as if the trees had all been Christmas shopping and come home clad in the brightest knitwear they could find. Trunks were covered in bespoke woolly pullies, twigs were sporting stripy scarves. There were even knitted robins, with oversized heads and cherry-red breasts. The square has never been the same since: for anyone who witnessed this transformation, the trees will always trail colourful memories of the ordinary becoming extraordinary.

> 'Ribbons and remnants and candles in coloured jam jars are hung up in local trees'

Trees feel the cold less keenly than most residents, but their new winter coats were a lift to everyone's chilled spirits. Graffiti knitting, guerrilla knitting, yarn-bombing or yarn-storming, as this practice of silent giving is variously known, has been growing across the world for the past decade. The oxymoronic fusion of violent and homely language is in keeping with the wit of the knitters, who like to link things that don't usually go together. Taking knitting outdoors, domesticating trees: such playful crossing of normal conventions helps boundaries to fall.

The first weekend in December is now the time for community groups and schools to gather for their annual Tree Dressing. Ribbons and remnants and candles in coloured jam jars are hung up in local trees. If it feels like an ancient rural custom, Tree Dressing Day is, in fact, a relatively recent phenomenon. Common Ground launched the festival in 1990, by decorating the plane trees in central London, on the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue and High Holborn. In the wake of the devastating storm of October 1997, in which some 15 million trees crashed to the ground, the idea was to celebrate the survivors and raise awareness of the destruction of so much of the natural world.

But the roots of modern tree dressing run deep and wide. Long before I saw the cosy-knit-clad sycamores in Milton Keynes, I noticed birches in the Scottish Highlands and hawthorns in Ireland festooned with coloured cloth. 'Clootie trees', covered in rags to represent wishes and woes, are as surprising in remote glens or overhanging single track roads as yarn-bombed urban branches. Traditionally, cloths or 'cloots' were offered with prayers for recovering health or happiness – as the rag decayed, so the problem would fade. The nearby spring or well was dedicated to a local saint, perhaps deriving ultimately from pre-Christian beliefs in the spirit of the water; Munlochy Well in the Black Isle is sacred to St Boniface, the Well at Buxton in Derbyshire to St Ann. Abundant natural waters made Derbyshire a centre of the community festival of Well Dressing, which was held not in defiance of the oncoming winter, but in the spring, with play on the season's double meaning (the annual blossom and the bubbling springs all helped the celebrations of Ascension Day). The adornment of trees is ancient and international: in Nepal, the bright red blossom is sometimes hard to distinguish from strips of matching scarlet cloth.

Trees form natural centres and communal calendars, so although Tree Dressing Day may not have found a place in every town, public Christmas trees are very well established. All over Britain, in market places, shopping malls, village greens and city squares, December sees the reassuring return of that sizeable evergreen, decorated with coloured lights. The best known Christmas Tree is the giant Norwegian spruce that towers over the statues and pigeons in Trafalgar Square. It is an annual gift from the people of Oslo for British support during the Nazi onslaught of the Second World War and draws children, students, office workers, shop assistants, pensioners, gallery-goers, tourists, and homeless people together at the heart of the city. Each year, London's vast amorphous population pauses to catch breath under the tall, tufted dark green canopy, as the tree stands still, a beacon of light and hope, and an elongated mirror image of all those small, baubled, belled and tinselled spruces in homes across the land.

**Every December, more and more people throughout the UK are celebrating the trees in their community by decorating the bare winter branches with coloured yarns and pieces of fabric. This pre-Christian tradition of re-leafing trees, captured beautifully here by the artist Rory Nugent with 'The Rag Tree', has been revived in modern times to express our intimate relationship with trees and woods.**

**Rory Nugent** is a painter of landscape and wildlife. He studied at the Royal College of Art and has exhibited at the Barbican, South Bank Centre and the Royal Academy. He lives and works in Devon.

WILDWOOD 5,000BCE

Trees, trees and more trees! A dynamic patchwork of woodland and areas of grassland in which the grazing of deer and auroch (wild oxen) play an important part. In the fifth millennium BCE, in the late Mesolithic, wildwood is dominated by lime in Lowland England, by oak and hazel in Wales, western England, and south Scotland, by elm and hazel in most of Ireland, and birch and pine in the Scottish Highlands.

WHAT'S YOUR TREE STORY?

VIVIEN TAVENER SHARES HER TREE STORY:

"Back in the 1960s, Mum bought a Bramley tree from Woolworths and planted it in her small back garden. Every autumn, just as school was beginning its new term, we would harvest the apples which were used to make blackberry and apple jam and apple fritters – I can still taste them now. Our best harvest was 88lbs. After many years of joyous picking, in 1987 the famous hurricane arrived and tore our beautiful tree from the ground. I felt sad, losing such an old friend, but it has left wonderful memories of childhood which live on."

Share your tree story: **treecharter.uk/add-your-voice**

**Fiona Stafford** is Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Oxford. She recently broadcast *The Meaning of Trees* on BBC Radio, on which her new book *The Long, Long Life of Trees* (Yale University Press) is based.

NEOLITHIC FARMING 4,000BC

Neolithic people begin slowly converting wildwood, or the open areas within wildwood, into fields, pastures, heaths and moorland. The British Isles passes the stage of being half forest probably at some time in the Bronze or early Iron Age, roughly between 1,300 and 700BCE.

BRONZE AGE HEADACHES 2,000BCE

Tree bark of the white willow contains salicin, a chemical similar to that found in modern aspirin. Making tea from the bark of willow trees is known to release a medicine that is effective against minor aches and pains. The first recorded use of salicin is 2,000BCE, and it was used in the ancient worlds of Sumeria, Egypt and Rome.

**Inspired by the season: the print-maker Tom Frost sent us his wonderful collection of autumn leaves and seeds made especially for this issue of *LEAF!***

Dye your clothes with the autumn colours found by **Flora Arbuthnott** in the woods and hedgerows

# COLOURS OF AUTUMN

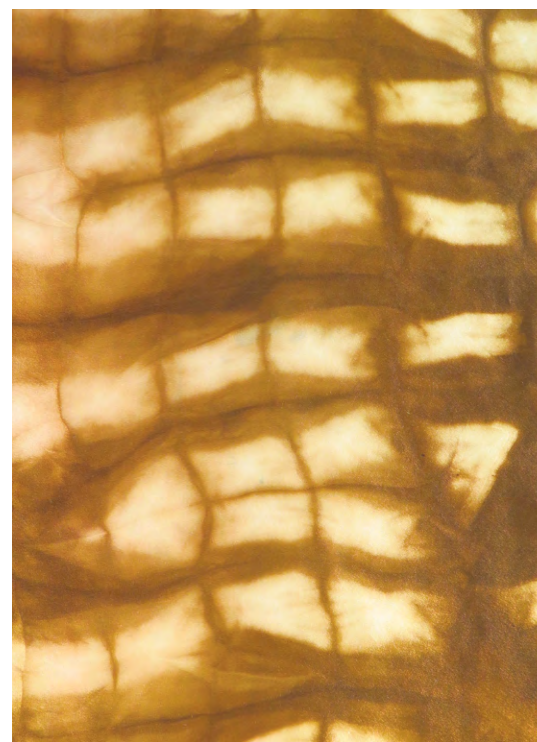
Autumn is the time for gathering the bounty of wild fruits, nuts, roots and barks. Our hedges and woodlands are abundant with native berries: blackberries, elderberries, rowan, guelder rose, and hawthorn berries all fortify our immune systems ready for the winter months. But notice how they also stain your skin. These berries dye fabric pink, purple, orange and grey. Also growing in amongst the hedge is lady's bedstraw, a straggly plant that produces a red dye from the roots. Dig up one-year-old dock roots and dandelion roots for golden-yellow colours.

Along the riverbank you can find meadowsweet roots which produce a black dye, and alder trees which, when cut, turn from white to red as if bleeding – this red dye can be extracted from the bark. In the woods, too, look for trees rich with tannin (that yellowish or brownish bitter-tasting substance), galls, barks and other plant tissues. The mighty oak offers a golden-brown dye from the tannin-filled galls and small pieces of bark, which can also be transformed into a black ink with the addition of iron oxide. All parts of the walnut tree are used for dyeing: the outer green cases of the nuts produce deep browns and black. Apple and cherry tree barks can give us wonderful soft pinks and oranges, while birch bark gives us tan, brown and sometimes pink colours.

Curiously, many natural dye plants also have healing properties for the skin. Meadowsweet and oak can be used as antiseptic. Alder leaves are put in the shoes of those walking great distances to ease their weary feet. Apple is a powerful cleanser of wounds as the juice restores skin tissue. Birch bark can be placed against the skin to relieve muscle pain. Dried lady's bedstraw used to be stuffed in mattresses to repel insects, and the roots are used to dye sheets to prevent bedsores. So by dyeing our clothes with these trees and plants, we are also healing and protecting our skin with a rich array of autumn colours that help us to blend into the season.

### Local colour in the landscape

Learn how to identify, grow and use locally abundant natural dye plants for your own creative projects at Flora's workshops: **floraarbuthnott.com**



**Flora Arbuthnott** is a designer based in Bristol. She runs natural colour workshops and seasonal walks with a variety of people, including children who have been excluded from school, recovering drug addicts and stroke victims.

WHAT'S YOUR TREE STORY ?

PAT PENNINGTON SHARES HER TREE STORY:

"Back in 1986 we bought three acres of sheep pasture in order to plant trees. Some seedlings we obtained free from Devon County Council, some we bought in bulk and many were grown from collected seeds. Those seeds and seedlings are now a wood! With the trees come wildlife: stoats, hares, deer, birds, butterflies and lots of bumblebees. Helleborines pop up in the most unexpected places. If anyone says you can't grow a wood in a lifetime, they don't know trees."

Share your tree story: **treecharter.uk/add-your-voice**

The mycologist and writer **Michael Jordan** introduces the wonderful world of mycelium

# WOOD-WIDE-WEB

Within the memory of most field mycologists there have been some momentous advances in our understanding of fungi. The most recent of these, DNA profiling, has resulted in major re-thinking of taxonomy, and for the field worker a – not always welcome – plethora of new names.

The first of the advances, however, was arguably the discovery of *mycorrhiza*, a word that means literally 'fungus-root'. It refers to the symbiotic (beneficial) relationship that we now know exists between fungi and green plants, including most, if not all, of our woodland trees. Put simply, mycorrhizal associations involve, on one part, the hyphae, the cat's cradle of fine underground threads collectively called the mycelium, which constitute the vegetative part of a fungus. For the other part, it involves the microscopic hairs on the extremities of the roots of a green plant. The hyphae of the fungus penetrate between the cells of the root hairs, creating an exchange 'highway' that is of mutual benefit to both partners. The fungus is able to provide the tree with water and mineral salts in times of shortage, and the tree in return donates carbon-based food to the fungus.

We now know, however, that the mycorrhizal web is more complex, and that trees of different species can be intimately connected via their symbiotic fungal partners. It has been dubbed the 'wood-wide-web'. In scientific terms the 'deal' from tree to fungus, involves a carbon exchange. Trees, like other green plants, produce their nutrients by taking carbon dioxide from the air, and water from the soil, and merging these simple ingredients into carbon-based sugars through the process of photosynthesis. Fungi cannot photosynthesise and so are reliant on 'already-prepared food', which they obtain from other dead, dying, and living plants and animals. In recent laboratory experiments, scientists exposed trees under controlled conditions to amounts of the radioactive isotope, carbon-13. This allowed them to track where the carbon component of the sugars ended up. Unexpectedly, the carbon-13 not only found its way into the roots of the tree to which the isotope had been delivered, but traces were also found in the roots of neighbouring trees. The conclusion is that mycorrhizal fungi not only accept carbon-based nutrients from their green partners, but can also serve as underground transport systems that permit neighbouring trees to share vital materials.

### *Fungus Conservation & Foraging*

You can find out more about mycological conservation by visiting **abfg.org** and get some important mushroom-picking tips at **woodlandtrust.org.uk/wildmushrooms**

*Retold by Martin Maudsley*

# LAZY LAWRENCE

Once, in the wild west of Dorset, there was an old farmer's widow who owned an old apple orchard. It was a wild and wonderful place, filled with rows of tall, twisted trees that each autumn produced an abundance of apples of many different varieties: apples for eating, apples for keeping, apples for cooking and apples for turning into cider. She was a woman who followed the old ways, and was well aware of the spirit of the orchard: *Lazy Lawrence* – a pixie pony who galloped around the apple trees guarding their juicy treasures. Despite his name he was wild and feisty – and woe betide anyone picking other people's apples when Lazy Lawrence was out and about.

Every evening the old widow left a bucket of cool, clear water and a dish of thick, fresh cream among the trees of the orchard for Lazy Lawrence. And sure enough every morning both bucket and bowl were empty. But the old woman had a nasty neighbour – a mean, miserable man, as bitter and twisted as sour cider. Living alone in a dark house he spent all his time studying dark magic from arcane books until he became a powerful magician; always using his sorcery to serve his own selfish desires. Every year he looked out upon the old widow's orchard of ripening fruit with jealous eyes until one autumn he decided to use his malicious magic to steal from the trees. And he was no fool: he knew about Lazy Lawrence, the guardian of the orchard, so the scheming sorcerer carefully laid his plans like a spider spinning a web.

First of all he built a huge wicker basket, as big as a farm cart, onto which he wove magical spells of both protection and levitation. Then one cold, clear night in October he climbed into the basket and magically sailed it across the moonlit sky. He landed the flying basket right in the middle of the old widow's orchard, using his powers of sorcery to remove the apples from the trees and stack them into the basket beneath him.

Soon enough he'd stolen every last apple from every last tree in the orchard. All except one: a big Bramley that clung stubbornly to its branch. But the mean magician was so selfish and spiteful he couldn't bear to leave it on the tree. Multiplying his magical enchantments he strained with outstretched fingers until eventually, with a sudden crack, the apple snapped from its stalk. It flew through the air and hit the sorcerer full square in his left eye – so hard that he fell backwards out of the basket, hitting the ground with a loud cry of pain. His cry was answered by a horse's whinny – and there was Lazy Lawrence with flashing eyes and bared teeth.

Before the conjuror could scramble back into the basket he was nipped and kicked by Lazy Lawrence. Turning to face the faerie horse he was caught in the glare of its green eyes and was instantly transfixed, rooted to the spot, unable to move a muscle except his mouth to cry: 'Lazy Lawrence let me go, don't hold me winter and summer too!'

But Lazy Lawrence didn't listen and the mean magician stayed there all night long, as stiff as a scarecrow, until the morning sun crept into the orchard and released the spell. As soon as he was free he ran as fast as he could – out of the orchard, out of the village, right out of Dorset and was never seen there again. But when the old widow went to her orchard that morning she found all her apples already picked and packed in a big wicker basket: apples for eating, apples for keeping, apples for cooking and apples for turning into cider. She also noticed hoof prints underneath the trees and understood, with a smile, that Lazy Lawrence had done his job.

LEAF! STORY-TELLING WORKSHOP:

## TALKING TREES

*"Making a myth from a maple"*

Martin Maudsley gives us the third in a series of his tree-story workshops

Myths are cultural narratives that help us make sense of the material world around us. Sometimes, in the woods at this time of year, I tell a magical myth about why deciduous trees lose their leaves. Then we wander amongst the trees to conjure up our own story connections with leaf-fall.

What autumnal tales would you find?

Just like science, myth-making begins with detailed observations – looking carefully at the natural world with a sense of wonder and asking one question: why? Blending observation with imagination our answers create new tree myths. The characteristics of different tree species provide plentiful raw material for stories:

Why do willows 'weep'?

Why do birches have silver bark?

Why are holly berries red?

Why are hawthorns spiky?

**Zaffar Kunial** recalls how a tree growing in his Birmingham garden taught him about the seasons

# LABURNUM TIME

**Zaffar Kunial** was born in Birmingham. His debut poetry pamphlet, 'Hill Speak', was published by Faber & Faber. Zaffer's laburnum story is from *Arboreal*, a new collection of writing about trees and woods.

A dendrite is a branch in a neuron, a branch that quickens, receiving sparks of life across infinitesimally small distances.

A dendrite is also anything with a tree-like structure – moss comes to mind – which has a canopy look about it from above, close-up. Christian hermits who withdrew into the branches of trees were also known as dendrites, like the sainted holy fool of Thessalonica, David the Dendrite, who lived for three years nested in an almond tree. Likewise, those ascetics who perched on a column, near the sky, were known as stylites, from the Greek *stylos*, 'pillar'.

I wasn't quite a dendrite when I was a kid, but the laburnum tree at the far-end of our little back garden in Birmingham was known as 'my tree' for as long as I can remember. This was partly because I could often be found (or not) sitting about halfway up it. And also because its yellow flowers arrived – like a bright envelope from someone who always remembered – during the week of my birthday. The way early birthdays are hazily memorable and exist in their own candle-measured time, so that old laburnum can be made present again in my head, with its Y-shaped forked trunk – a first rung that was easy enough to step into, from the age of about seven onwards. Whenever I did, my eyes would swell and blur if I touched my face after handling the poisonous powder on the laburnum's bark. Sometimes, like the cats I was also allergic to, my tree would shorten the intervals of my breath, the disturbed dust making the dendritic tubes in my small asthmatic lungs contract and wheeze.

> 'This was my language – the tree, and the absence or presence of its yellow pea-like flowers'

Looking back now, seeing myself climbing again into the odd space of the laburnum's green-grey branches, it feels like it was *time* I was sitting in, and absent-mindedly rubbing my eyes in, as much as a particular tree.

The tree would punctuate my year – and, from the outside, teach me about time. Before I knew about punctuation, the story goes that while my father was away for months, 'back home', visiting his mother, I asked my mother when he'd be back. My English mum was a primary school teacher and my Kashmiri dad was away for the whole of her summer holidays, and even beyond. And, with me not understanding when exactly 'October', or 'autumn' would be – as long as the answer wasn't 'today' or 'tomorrow', she may as well have said 'till forever' – Mum pointed through the window: *When all the leaves fall from your tree.*

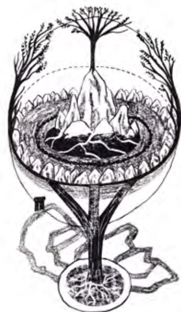
This was my language – the tree, and the absence or presence of its yellow pea-like flowers, was how my mum would answer one of my other questions – showing (not telling) me that it wasn't about to be my birthday any time soon. Or, at the end of May, how she would point out, literally, that it was. The 'laburnum-candles' on my birthday were like the clock hands that I was beginning to get the hang of, or like the calendar in the kitchen, with its columns and illegible months that were more of a mystery than the ticking clock

The next day, after explaining 'autumn' to me in this tree-language I could understand, Mum says that she saw, through the kitchen window, at the far-end of the garden, a strange breeze shaking the laburnum. And then, beneath the tree, she saw a child, his eyes staring up at the branches, his palms on the trunk.

Time on my small hands, I was pushing as hard as I could.

Mum wrote a letter in black ink on pale-blue airmail paper, that summer, posting it – I imagine in a red pillar box – to my dad, telling him this story of me trying to get the leaves off the laburnum, that he knew was my tree, my birthday tree. And how I wanted the tree to bring the day of his return to me, because the tree told the time and could make things arrive.

Like presents.



VIKING BRITAIN 793CE

*Yggdrasil (the World Tree or Tree of Life) plays a prominent role in Norse mythology, which travelled to the British Isles with the Viking invasion, connecting the indigenous Anglo culture with the nine worlds of Norse cosmology. The branches of this ash tree extend into the heavens.*

THE ANKERWYCKE YEW

*Rivers and trees were sacred to the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. Witans, or King's Councils, were often held under important trees. Alfred the Great (Wessex King 871–899 CE) held Witans at Runnymede ('Rune-Mede' or meadow of magical charms), possibly under the branches of the Ankerwycke Yew, which took root at Runnymede around 2,000 years ago. This tree still stands at Runnymede today, rooted by the Thames in Surrey.*

**The artist Stanley Spencer (1891–1959) dedicated his life to painting the people, landscape and wildlife of his parish, Cookham, Berkshire. *Laburnum* was painted, oil on canvas, in 1936. (Courtesy of Bridgeman)**

WHAT'S YOUR TREE STORY?

EILEEN COOPER SHARES HER TREE STORY:

"I have an oak in my garden which my aunt started growing in an egg cup over 39 years ago. She gave it to my mum who grew it in a pot, then gave it to us, and the pots just got bigger and bigger. We decided to give it room to stretch its roots and planted it in the garden – it's now over eight feet tall. I love it! Squirrels, birds and my cat love it too! I'm so proud of my own little oak tree."

Share your tree story: **treecharter.uk/add-your-voice**

The chestnut tree for Niel Svendsen's brother, planted in Exeter, Devon, on a Second World War bombsite.

**Niel Svendsen** tells us about the tree in Exeter that was planted in memory of his brother

# A MEMORY TREE

In 1942, during the Blitz of Exeter, a bomb fell on our field in Argyll Road. I was 13 years old at the time and our house shook, but we were not hit. Next day, while my father started to repair the broken windows, my older brother Jorgen and I went to see the bomb damage. It was a large crater in the middle of our seven-acre field made by a 1,000 lb bomb. It missed the cow but there was a lot of shrapnel near the crater.

A week later we were told that my brother, Axel, had been killed in his Spitfire over France. We were all very upset and it was my older brother, Jorgen, who had the idea that we should plant a tree in the bomb crater in memory of Axel.

Walking in our wood he found a small chestnut tree which he dug up, and we four brothers ceremoniously planted this sapling in the middle of the crater. The years went by. The tree grew. It was always there to remind us of our brother who had died in the war.

In 1989, Jorgen found out that the land where the tree was planted had been sold to a property developer for £250,000. They were going to cut the tree down and build houses. Jorgen would not allow this, and decided to buy the land around the tree from the developers, for £300,000. This he did and formed a trust to maintain it for the family. He built a large stone wall around the property and planted small shrubs, making the area very beautiful. A memorial plaque was erected by the chestnut tree and seats were made.

The tree was by this time very large and bore conkers each year, which have been saved, and now some grow in Spain and Miami. It became an annual tradition for Jorgen to host a tree ceremony at which we all gather by the tree and then have a family lunch.

A long time has passed since then, and my stepfather Sven, as well as Cia, Walter and Jorgen are no longer with us. But the chestnut tree is with us, and the 'Grassway Plantation' is being looked after by Leslie, my younger brother, and Christine.

I visit the plantation every time I am in Devon. The tree is still growing, and thanks to my brother Jorgen and his wife, Christine, we have this wonderful, living memorial.

**Julie Armstrong** tells the story of the apple tree in her garden and explains how it became part of her family

# OUR BRAMLEY

I know the Bramley apple tree that lives in our garden Haslington, Cheshire, intimately: what year it gave the best harvest, when it had powdery mildew, which animals and birds and insects live in its branches. It's a tree that shares our family's history. For our daughter Min, when she was a child, it was a place to hide in, climb up, swing from, build a den in and camp under. With her cousins, she threw sticks to try and get apples down. Then they made pies in the kitchen; the scent of apples and sugar and cinnamon mingling and drifting from the open back door as I chopped wood to burn on the stove.

And now, many years later, early one mellow September morning, I watch a small boy, Callum, my grandson, kicking up leaves, as apples that can't bear their own weight, fall with gentle thuds. Wasps buzz, landing on windfalls. Gingerly, we gather them, taking care not to get stung and put the damaged ones on the compost heap. Then we harvest the ripe fruit, from lower branches, placing our cupped hand under each apple. 'Take a good look to see if it's bruised.' I tell him. 'If not, lift and gently twist. If the apple doesn't come away easily it's not ready to harvest.' He takes the job very seriously. He loves their sweet, spicy scent. I love the round, smooth feel of them in my hands.

In the shed, we mindfully clean each one with a cloth and wrap them in newspaper, as if they are bone china or semi-precious stones. After, we store some in wooden crates to last us through the winter months, others we put in wicker baskets and distribute amongst neighbours and friends in the village, a gift from our apple tree, fruit to share.

**Neil Mapes** explains why trees are so fundamental to his life

# HOPE WOOD

I went through some quite severe depressions over the years, and if it wasn't for the trees I don't know if I'd be here. It's as simple as that. There's something fundamental about trees and the symbiotic relationship that we have with trees. I don't know what it is but it's there.

I'm self-employed now – I teach, and actually make a lot of stuff myself out of timber, and timber has really been my life since I was a child. My partner and I worked with the Small Woods Association. We were working with people who had very little in their lives, no hope or anything. But to see some of them bounce back, especially the young people, was amazing. Teaching them how to manage woodlands, enjoy cooking, spending time among trees. They blossomed. And one of the things I most enjoyed about it was getting a tap on the shoulder a few months later and someone saying 'If it hadn't been for your course I wouldn't have a job today'.

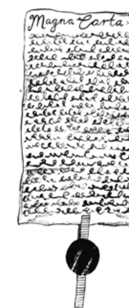
There were two ex-army guys who had been through Afghanistan and Iraq. They came to me on a lathe-turning course. They were both quite shattered, mentally and physically. Both had split up from their partners, lost their homes. And within ten minutes I knew something was up – having been through what I have, I knew they were in a bad place. So I sat them down and said, 'This is what happened to me. I know something's happened to you. But just leave that all to one side and whatever you do, even if you do nothing, just enjoy it.' One of the guys kept in regular contact, and 12 months later we met up and he said, 'I got a job thanks to you.'

These guys are going through what I went through, and I'm now passing on what I've learned. That's what it's all about for me. We went in among the trees, my experiences were passed on. We helped each other. Trees and woodland, and working with the timber they produce, I think is very fundamental to life. That's why it's so important that we have public spaces that we can all gravitate to – even if it's just to go away for half an hour and sit among the trees and just switch off. Without that, I don't really know how a lot of people would be able to function.

Neil Mapes at work, sharing his skills and passing on what he's learned about life and wood.

ROBIN HOOD

Nobody knows who this thirteenth-century figure really was. Maybe his Lincoln Green clothes stood for the Green Man. Maybe 'Hood' meant 'wood', or the name 'Robin' a nature spirit. He has entered our culture as a free man fighting over the rights to woodland. The Major Oak in Sherwood Forest is said to have hidden Robin Hood from his enemies.




THE MAGNA CARTA & CHARTER OF THE FOREST

English Barons force King John to sign the Magna Carta at Runnymede in 1215, a fundamental Charter of Liberties.

In 1217 John's heir, Henry III, signs a Charter of the Forest at Runnymede. Clauses of the Magna Carta relating to the forests are expanded and made into their own Charter, setting out freedoms and liberties of all those living in forest areas. It re-establishes rights of access to the Royal Forests for free men.

ENCLOSURE ACTS 1773–1882

A legal process in English Parliament begins enclosing small landholdings and commons to create larger farms. Land – including woodland – becomes restricted to the owner and is no longer available for communal use. In England and Wales this process ends an ancient system of agriculture, becoming a widespread feature of the English landscape.

Daniel Keech explains why community orchards are healthier for us and local wildlife

# COMMUNITY ORCHARDS

**Dan Keech** is a Research Fellow at the Countryside and Community Research Institute, a partnership of the University of Gloucestershire, the Royal Agricultural University and Hartpury College.

Agricultural specialisation and consumer expectations make it commercially unattractive to retain orchards on many farms. This means the disappearance of orchards from counties which might previously have identified themselves as orchard landscapes, and the consequences of loss of seasonal fruit varieties, customs, produce and distinctive wildlife. Recent surveys in England and Wales by the People's Trust for Endangered Species confirm that most surviving orchards are in bad shape.

Even so, the cultural vibrancy of orchards – especially so-called traditional orchards with tall-stemmed and widely-spaced trees – remains indefatigable. A recent increase in cider drinking has led to the re-planting of commercial orchards in Somerset, Herefordshire and parts of Ireland, while the idea of community orchards has proved to have great traction.

Orchards are precious, green spaces for communities with many different social and conservation benefits.

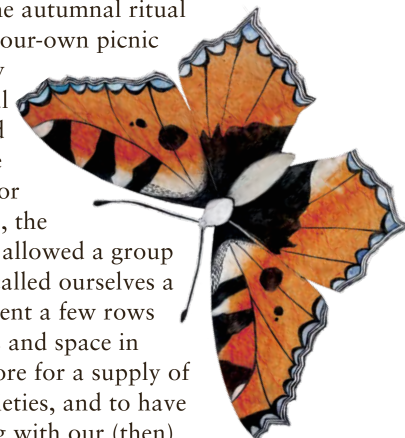
The objective of all community orchards is to protect, plant and renew orchards within a format of community organisation that captures and sustains the many functions and cultural meanings of these evocative places. Some orchards have been in public ownership or use for years. In other cases, parish councils, heritage associations or 'Millennium Greens' have offered devices for community ownership.

In southern Germany, large tracts of fruit trees become de facto community orchards with open access when locals own just a few trees each. In Sheffield, pickers gather surplus garden fruit to make juice, to be shared with the tree owners as a type of tithe. The Urban Orchard Project supports the initiation of community orchards in many cities, including the capital (where other campaigners argue that London's biodiversity and green spaces should qualify it for National Park status). The idea is that orchards should be accessible and provide healthy fruit, spaces for leisure and contemplation, convivial work and natural habitats.

The richness of orchards to wildlife is scientifically well documented, thanks to Natural England, the National Trust and PTES, among others. Communities of tree sparrows, woodpeckers, flycatchers, bats, bugs and lichens are systematically or anecdotally recorded by hundreds of amateurs who are more able to notice visiting and resident creatures, thanks to broader, shared priorities offered through community orcharding.

> 'The idea is that orchards should be accessible and provide healthy fruit'

Some farmers are also blurring boundaries between private ownership and community involvement. Last weekend, my family and I renewed the autumnal ritual of a pick-your-own picnic in a nearby commercial dessert and cider-apple orchard. For three years, the owner has allowed a group of us (we called ourselves a co-op) to rent a few rows of his trees and space in his cold store for a supply of decent varieties, and to have fun picking with our (then) young children. This year, a scatter and hand press appeared, reminding me that these tools are ubiquitous at the hundreds of Apple Day celebrations on 21 October. We had to queue for the press. I suggested that next year the owner should invest in six more presses. 'Good idea!' he grinned.



### WASSAIL THE ORCHARD

'Wassailing' the trees in the orchard is a community gathering that celebrates the trees and encourages a good crop of apples. The Anglo-Saxon 'waes haeil' means 'to be healthy'. Traditionally taking place after dark on Old Twelfth Night (January 17), it is now sometimes held near Christmas or New Year.

### BRING IN YOUR WINTER GREENS

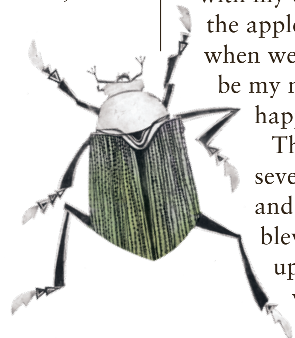
Decorating homes with native evergreens is an ancient tradition. Since pagan times plants like holly, ivy and laurel have been gathered from the hedges and brought inside to decorate homes, reminding us that life in the landscape continues through the days of frost and snow.

Ron Jeffries tells us about the restoration of a community orchard project near his local pub

# DICK TURPIN'S ORCHARD

**Ron Jeffries** is a retired Justice of the Peace who lives in Aldborough Hatch, Essex.

The orchard beside the Dick Turpin pub in Ilford, Essex, is almost 100 years old. Local residents of Aldborough Hatch, near Newbury Park, have memories of the orchard in its prime. As a boy in the 1930s, I went scrumping there with my elder brother. My recollection is that the apples were under-ripe and a bit sour when we picked them! But that might just be my mind not recollecting exactly what happened.



The Dick Turpin Orchard is home to several different fruit trees: plum, pear and apple, including a 'phoenix' tree that blew over last winter and has since sent up new shoots. These veteran trees are a wonderful habitat for wildlife, like the shaggy polypore bracket fungus, where a rare beetle was found that has not been recorded in London since 1928.

The 'phoenix' tree at the Dick Turpin orchard, fallen but not forgotten – and still full of life.

We have had help restoring and learning about Dick Turpin's trees thanks to the Orchard Project, which has brought specialist expertise to help us – this has proved invaluable with the clearance work and helping volunteers to understand the trees and wildlife.

We hope our work ensures that this place will become a community area for local folk – families, schoolchildren, students – to enjoy and learn from.

Chris Gannaway, a retired mechanical engineer who has also lived near the orchard for over 30 years, says: 'These old fruit trees are worth restoring because, besides being part of the heritage of the local area, they are an important habitat for wildlife especially the smaller forms of life.'

As well as restoring many other 'lost orchards', The Orchard Project is introducing training for adults and schoolchildren to help build skills for orchard care in the community, which also includes a juice and craft cider enterprise.

### The Orchard Project

The Orchard Project is the UK's only charity focused on creation, restoration and celebration of community orchards. Find out more at **theorchardproject.org.uk**

Neil Sinden takes inspiration from around the world while planning a tree dressing event for his own community in the Wyre Forest

# OUR TREE DRESSING WORLD

**The simplicity of tying strips of cloth or yarn to a tree is universal. The act of dressing a tree binds us to it and celebrates the unique role that trees have in our local neighbourhoods. The old Celtic custom of the 'clootie tree' *(bottom left)* echoes the practice in Japan of decorating trees (*bottom right*) with strips of white paper, or *tanzaku*, with wishes and poems written on them. While the Buddhist tradition of tying colourful ribbons around the trunk of the Bodhi tree (*middle right*) is as wonderful as the modern fashion of 'yarn bombing', which the knitting communities of Devon decided to do last year at Killerton (*top left and right*), covering an apple tree in 400 knitted leaves and woolly wildlife to celebrate Apple Day.**

When was the last time you celebrated the presence of trees in your neighbourhood? How often do you wonder at the benefits they bring to our daily lives and the beauty they quietly provide? As a society we take trees and woodlands for granted most of the time. But there is a long tradition of celebrating trees and giving thanks for their existence. And pleasingly there is a growing number of events and activities which enable us to appreciate them and celebrate their life-sustaining gifts. They might provide inspiration for you to do more with your community to draw attention to the value of your woody neighbours.

Ancient trees are often celebrated for their spiritual significance. The tree of life, or world tree, is a symbol of immortality and fertility across all faiths and the focus of many religious festivals. Buddha sat under the Bodhi (a fig) tree when he gained enlightenment. Tu BiShvat is the New Year of the Trees in the Jewish tradition, when trees are planted and celebrated, and the Sidra Tree is an important symbol in the Arab world frequently depicted in Islamic art. These deep and diverse cultural associations provide a rich basis for tree festivities across the globe.

In Japan, the arrival of the cherry blossom in the spring – *sakura zensen* – is monitored, mapped and eagerly anticipated for weeks. People also celebrate Tanabata, known as the Star Festival, by writing wishes and poetry on *tanzaku* (small pieces of paper) and hanging them from trees. The cherry blossom celebrations in Washington DC are an annual event that attracts thousands of participants. On a slightly smaller scale, this year at Ruskin Land we organised a blossom walk through remnant and restored orchards which once formed what was the second largest cherry producing area in England. This was followed by a talk by the chair of a local beekeeping group on the importance of bees and other pollinating insects.

The decoration of trees on festive days such as May Day, which has the maypole tree symbol at its heart, and, of course, at Christmas, is an old tradition in many parts of the world. The Arbor Tree, a black poplar in the centre of the village of Aston-on-Clun, in Shropshire, is permanently adorned with flags which are renewed in May each year in a ceremony whose origins have largely been forgotten. In Appleton in Cheshire, late June sees the 'bawming of the thorn', an old custom involving the decoration of a hawthorn tree, said to be a descendant of the Glastonbury thorn, by local children with ribbons and garlands. Other tree dressing rituals, such as the shoe tree near Studley Green in the Chilterns, are not so ancient and perhaps less aesthetically pleasing! Tree Dressing Day, which was initiated by Common Ground in 1990, falls on the first weekend of December and has become a powerful expression of our relationship with trees and an important part of the community calendar.

> 'There is a long tradition of celebrating trees and giving thanks for their existence'

Community orchards and community woodlands now provide many opportunities for celebrating the value of trees. The thriving community woodland movement in Scotland has hosted numerous public events, including the successful 'Giants in the Forest' interactive arts projects which have enticed local people with storytelling, theatre and craft activities. Music and song, including theatre performances involving 'hero trees', were central to the Woodland Festival which took place earlier this year at Harlow Carr in Harrogate.

Here at Ruskin Land, in the heart of the Wyre Forest, one of the country's finest and largest woodland nature reserves, we are currently planning the last in a series of seasonal community events, each drawing attention to the diverse beauty of the trees, mainly former oak coppice, that surround us. The first is a community wassail to mark the replanting of a 151-tree orchard on the site of one originally established in 1880, shortly after John Ruskin was given the land to pursue his utopian aspirations. Wassailing orchards, a centuries old fertility ritual, was not so long ago confined mainly to the West Country but has undergone a renaissance in recent years. It usually takes place around Twelfth Night, celebrating the crop of the previous autumn and wishing for a fruitful harvest in the coming year.

## Tree Dressing Day

This year Tree Dressing Day falls on the weekend of 3–4 December. Why not join many others, in schools, community groups, hospitals, parish councils and communities across the UK in reinventing this ancient tradition of decorating and celebrating the special trees in your neighbourhood. For more ideas and information: **commonground.org.uk/tree-dressing-day**

YULE LOG

In the medieval period, the bough of an oak tree was ceremoniously carried into the house on Christmas Eve. It would be decorated and placed in the fireplace, then lit with the end of the previous year's log. The bough was burnt continuously for the twelve days of Christmas.

In Cornwall the yule log is called 'The Mock' and is dried out and stripped of bark before being taken into the house to be burnt. Across the UK, barrel makers (coopers) gave old logs, that could not be used for making barrels, to their customers as yule logs.

KISSING BOUGHS

In the Middle Ages kissing boughs were a popular year-round decoration to bring blessings to a house. Bundles of twigs and greenery would be decorated with seasonal fruit, such as apples or berries. They became associated with Christmas festivities and can still be seen today.

CRACKERS 1840s

Tom Smith, inventor of the Christmas cracker, iss inspired by the crackle and pop of the logs on a fire.

**Neil Sinden** is based at Ruskin Land, the Wyre Forest, working with the Wyre Community Land Trust to restore and promote the cultural landscape. He also helped Common Ground organise the first national Apple Day in 1990.

An ash hedge in Dorset, no longer maintained as a field boundary. Once, the horizontal stems were *plashed* or laid, after which their branches grew vertically.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE 1848

The German tradition of a decorated fir tree was introduced to Britain by the Royal Family, as early as the 1790s, but does not become public practice until The London Illustrated News publishes a woodcut print of the Christmas tree at Windsor Castle in 1848. Within two years it becomes very fashionable to display an evergreen tree festooned with decorations in December.

MISTLETOE

When Christmas trees became more popular mistletoe became the focus for the traditional Christmas kiss. Mistletoe was sacred to Druids and was once called 'All Heal'. It was thought to bring good luck and fertility, and to offer protection from witchcraft. In some traditions a berry would be removed for each kiss given until there were none left.

**Tom Williamson** examines the history of farmland trees.

# TREES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

We often think of the trees growing in our fields and hedges as in some sense 'natural' features, but of course they are not. Most were deliberately planted and, even if they were not, a conscious decision was often made to allow them to grow, not least because in many contexts trees interfere with crop growth and the routines of farming.

Trees in the countryside were, until the middle of the nineteenth century, regarded in primarily economic and practical terms and managed accordingly. In districts lying at a distance from coalfields, or other fuel sources, a high proportion were managed as 'pollards' – that is, cropped for wood at a height of around two or three metres on a rotation of ten or twelve years or so. In old-enclosed districts like Hertfordshire or Norfolk pollards usually made up at least 60 per cent of farmland trees, commonly 70 per cent and in some areas 80 per cent or more. In such areas, the numbers of farmland trees was also incredibly high, frequently more than 20 trees per hectare and sometimes reaching 40, 50 or more.

Where alternative supplies of fuel were available – from peat fens, moors and heaths, or from the coalfields – both total tree numbers and the proportion of trees managed as pollards were lower, although still often high by modern standards. One feature of farmland tree management did not display much variation, however. Most timber trees were felled relatively young, usually before (and often long before) they were 70 years old. Trees were selected for felling based on the size of timber required, for in the absence of industrial saw mills sawing up large trees to make smaller timbers was an arduous task. Large old oak trees provided less bark, of poorer quality than that of young trees which could grow faster. This was an important consideration before 1850, when oak bark was an important product, vital for the tanning industry. Moreover, large trees shaded outcrops and grew slowly. For all these reasons, it made more sense to fell trees early, and get replacements growing in their place.

Before the second half of the nineteenth century, when intensive management began to decline, the countryside was thus filled with young or regenerating trees – with vigorous populations. But similar practical, economic management also determined the kinds of trees growing in farmland. In most areas, away from commons and meadows, between 85 and 100 per cent comprised oak, ash and elm – trees with the most practical uses, and most tolerant of a range of conditions. Even species which seeded easily in hedges, such as maple, were usually plashed or laid with the other shrubs there, and not allowed to grow into trees.

> 'Trees in the countryside were, until the middle of the nineteenth century, regarded in primarily economic and practical terms'

Looked at in historical perspective, we can perhaps see some of the reasons why our modern tree populations are so vulnerable to disease. Many trees are over-mature: indeed, some 'diseases' may really be symptoms of natural old age, and early writers on forestry, such as Moses Cook, describe the symptoms of what we label 'oak decline' simply as a sign that a tree was ready for felling. More importantly, not only in the intensively-managed 'traditional' countryside, but still in most areas today, the range of species present is very limited. This is an important consideration: for such populations are particularly vulnerable to new pathogens. Yet in all districts, trees other than ash, elm and oak were also present at low levels in the past, often displaying a strong measure of regional diversity. In Hertfordshire, for example, the 'minority' trees in the west of the county included aspen and cherry; in the east, maple, hornbeam and black poplar. We no longer need to plant with economic considerations in mind and, in the face of a rising tide of threat to our trees, we should diversify our planting. But rather than plant an indiscriminate range, including (as some suggest) foreign species, we should concentrate instead on increasing the representation of the 'minority' trees historically present in particular districts. These trees are 'tried and true' and they help to maintain that degree of regional distinctiveness which is so important an aspect of our rural landscape.

Perhaps the more important lesson we can learn from history is that farmland trees do not grow exclusively as objects of natural beauty, to be preserved in all circumstances. This attitude does not benefit the health of the tree. Indeed, the most rigorously and unnaturally managed tree populations can be the healthiest.

**Tom Williamson** is Professor of History at East Anglia University. He also heads up the Landscape Group – a collection of academics, researchers and students studying different aspects of the English landscape, from later prehistory to the present.

## National Tree Week (26 Nov–4 Dec)

First mounted in 1975, National Tree Week is the UK's largest tree celebration and annual launch of the start of the tree-planting season. It is also a good excuse for communities to do something positive for their local treescape.

Every year, The Tree Council's member organisations, which includes up to 200 schools and community groups, some 8,000 Tree Wardens and many others, organise events which encourage 250,000 people to get their hands dirty. The campaign has its roots in the national response to the Dutch Elm Disease crisis of the 1960s, which destroyed millions of trees. You can find out more at **treecouncil.org.uk/Take-Part/**

**Thomasin Sage,** a student of the Boat Building Academy in Lyme Regis, tells us about the traditional and modern craft of boat building

# THE ART OF BOAT BUILDING

When I arrived to look around the Boat Building Academy, the day after my university graduation ceremony, I knew that it was the right place for me – I stepped through the blue door to smell fresh sawdust and the sight of half-finished boats being worked on across the airy workshop floor. It may seem like an odd choice.

If my university experience taught me anything, it was that I had to make a decision about my future life: should I work at a desk or find a new path by the sea? Arriving in Lyme Regis, the decision was suddenly obvious – and it was like breathing out for the first time in years.

Learning how to work with wood is at the core of the course. We start out with a 12-week joinery course covering all aspects of woodwork and part of that is learning all about the different qualities of wood, so that we know what will be the best fit for any type of boat we build in the future. For example, we learn that elm is full of energy and can be mischievous – a plank needs to be fitted pretty soon after it is cut, otherwise it will probably have changed shape by the morning.

> 'The life of the trees is transferred into the flexibility of the boat'

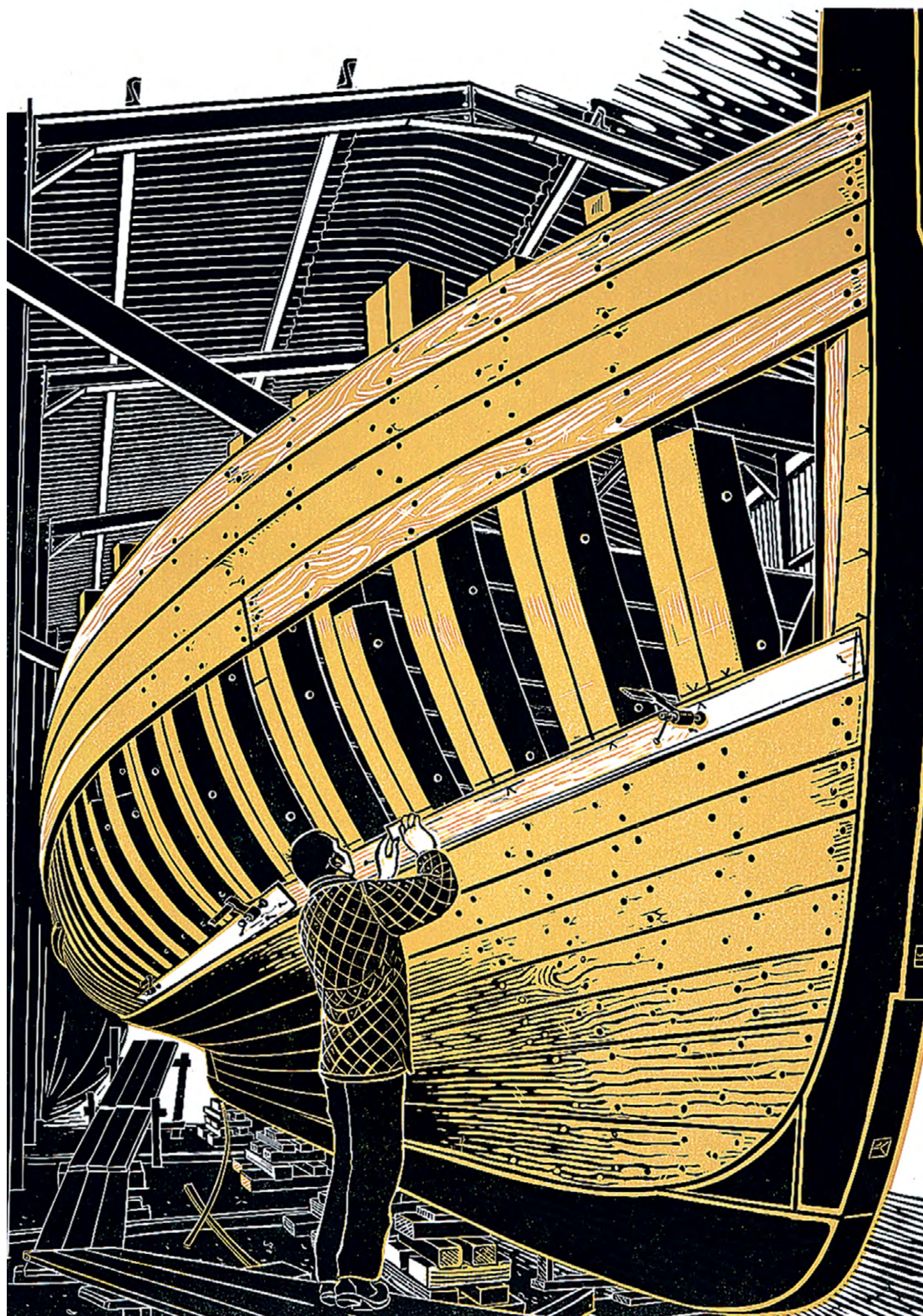
By choosing the course students are put in the driving seat of their own learning experience. This is why it feels more like we are one cohesive group of individuals working towards common goals, rather that students and instructors. Through our instructors' skilled teaching, encouragement and their boundless faith in our nascent boat building skills our confidence as boat builders is built one plank at a time.

Traditional boat building starts with the tree. In fact, building a boat feels very much like you are continuing the life of that same tree, making a living, breathing creature that takes on the movement of the sea. The life of the trees is transferred into the flexibility of the boat.

On the 38-week course the boats built by the students are also chosen and commissioned by the students. As a commissioner myself, I have found it to be an incredible experience to take a design from *lofting* (drawing the boat out to scale) right through to building and finishing. Seeing a boat that you drew later appear before your eyes, through your own hard work, has an indefinable magic. It is one of the most incredible experiences of my life.

### Boat Building Academy, Lyme Regis

A not-for-profit company providing full-time, highly practical skills training with the emphasis on 'hands-on' learning: **boatbuildingacademy.com**



**This linocut by James Dodds, inspired by the boatyards of Essex, is entitled 'Pioneer Planking'.**

**James Dodds** was an apprentice shipwright before becoming an artist

# WOOD TO WATER

James Dodds was born among the estuaries and saltings of Essex, in the east coast fishing town of Brightlingsea. After leaving school aged 15 in the early 1970s, a four-year shipwright's apprenticeship in Maldon, Essex, gave James Dodds a profound feel and respect for the craft of the boat builder. 'They called me the artist in residence when I worked at the yard,' he recalls.

James' paintings illustrate the anatomy of boats, revealing the materials and curves that underwrite the finished vessel. His paintings go beyond retracing the shipwright's logic. Rich in colour, tone and texture, they move beyond the literal and evoke sailing's mythic and historic dimensions. Ethereal in light and tone, his paintings of restored boats evoke a lifetime at sea, unearthing the layers of memory that shroud every vessel.

The mind-set of a boat builder and that of an artist is something that started to interest James when he started to train as an artist in London. 'Boat builders know exactly what they want and strip away all else in order to achieve it. The artist has a less formed idea and adds to it as he goes.'

The linocuts are another strand of James's work that are instantly recognisable, with their highly detailed landscapes with wild skies and seas.

### A SIGN OF PEACE 1947

The huge Christmas tree installed annually in Trafalgar Square is donated to the people of Britain by the city of Oslo in Norway. This has happened every year since 1947 as a token of gratitude for British support to Norway during the Second World War. The tree remains in place until just before the Twelfth Night when it is taken down for recycling. The tree is chipped and composted, to make mulch.

### THE GREAT STORM 1987

A powerful storm ravages the UK in the middle of October. Winds gust up to 100mph, 18 people lose their lives, and of the 15 million trees said to have blown over in the night, most are chainsawed and removed, even if they are still rooted and alive. This reaction in the aftermath of the storm reveals our estranged relationship with trees.

### WHAT'S YOUR TREE STORY ?

SUE HUNT SHARES HER TREE STORY:

"My Great Grandad was a carpenter and the only item we have that he made is a box. It was a dark box, dirty and grubby, when I inherited it. But I could tell it had a pattern on the lid and spent many hours cleaning it, revealing inlaid wooden marquetry in the lid making a picture of Dover Castle in Kent (as seen from his house). I love this box! It used to have ink bottles in for a fountain pen as well as space for paper envelopes and the pens."

Share your tree story: **treecharter.uk/add-your-story**

WOODLAND
TRUST

*THE WOODLAND TRUST 1972*

*Spiralling threats to our precious woods and trees leads to the founding of the Woodland Trust, which remains at the forefront of the fight to protect, restore and create UK woodland. The Woodland Trust now owns and manages more than 1,000 wildlife-rich native woods across the UK, including many ancient woodlands and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.*

*COMMON GROUND 1983*

*Common Ground is founded and its first major project is 'Trees, Woods and the Green Man' – from 1986 to 1989 it explores the cultural relationship between trees and people, publishing various books and initiating several art exhibitions, including 'The Tree of Life' with the South Bank Centre, 'Out of the Wood' with the Crafts Council, and Andy Goldsworthy's 'Leaves' show at the Natural History Museum.*

**'A hedge fulfils many important roles,' explains the artist Claire Morris-Wright. 'In and around our landscapes they enclose and act as perimeters. They are cut into shape or skilfully laid to form stronger growth. A hedge is also witness to life, death, growth and is subjected to all weather and all seasons.'**

*LEAF!* storyteller-in-residence, **Martin Maudsley,** walks along the hedge picking fruit and folklore along the way

# FRUIT AND FOLKLORE

Autumn is a fruit-filled season. A rummaging ramble along woodland edge or roadside hedge at this time of year reveals a ripe harvest of both tasty treats and rich folklore.

Scrambling brambles that suckled a host of nectar-sipping insects throughout summer now glisten temptingly with succulent blackberries, ready to stain fingers and tongues. Early in autumn they offer a pick-and-mix of sweet and sour, maturing from the tip of the shoot backwards as the season proceeds. But don't delay too long as time-honoured tradition states that blackberries should never be eaten after Old Michaelmas Day (10 October) when the Devil spits on them – an act of petulant despoiling resulting from Old Scratch having landed in a patch of brambles when he was expelled from Heaven.

Elderberries, mercifully un-bedevilled throughout October, hang in dangling clusters of petite purple globules – light and refreshing when eaten straight from the branch, becoming deep and intense when turned into cordial and wine and packing a punch of vitamins to stave off winter's ills and chills. According to legend, witches can magically turn themselves into elder trees. Thickets of blackthorn bushes also harbour gluts of hidden fruit. Sloes, secretly ripened amongst protective spines, have become the colour of bruises – tart to the taste but ready to be picked and pricked and transformed into intoxicating tipples.

> 'Autumnal yields of hazelnuts have nourished humans since we first walked this land'

Autumnal yields of hazelnuts have nourished humans since we first walked this land, but each year, as soon as they turn from insipid green to alluring gold, there's a ruthless rush of beak and claw amongst the turning leaves to grab the nutritious feast. Once gathered, the nuts can be safely squirreled away for later leisurely consumption, roasted on the fire as the wild weather blows outside. In some parts of the country, 31 October was known as Nut Crack Night, where hazelnuts had amorous applications in foretelling future lovers. The Anglo-Saxon word 'haesel' translates as hat or bonnet and refers to the frilly fringe of leaves neatly fitted around the base of the hardening husks.

Even when ripe, crab apples, as their name suggests, are generally hard and sour to the taste (as in 'crabby' – also referring to persons of bitter disposition). They were once widely harvested and used in fermented form as 'verjuice': a home-grown, hedgerow alternative to lemon juice, and are still sometimes roasted as an accompaniment for cooked meat as well as a key component of mid-winter Wassailing drinks.

Alongside native crab apple, assorted 'wildings' from discarded domestic apples serendipitously sprout along the hedgerows and in neglected pockets of countryside, their branches brimming with profuse fruit. It's easy to understand how the apple tree has become such a striking symbol of abundance and generosity in folklore. Furthermore apples are perhaps the most 'storied' of all our autumn fruits: featuring heavily in a crop of tales from magical myths to local legends; especially in the West Country where apple growing has a deep-rooted tradition.

**Rob Wolton** is Chairman of the Devon Hedge Group and the author of *Woodfuel from Hedges*, a guide to managing hedges for fuel, which includes harvesting techniques and information on biomass yields.

**Rob Wolton** on the importance of hedges for wildlife and woodfuel

# LIFE IN THE HEDGE

The 1995 UK Biodiversity Action Plan for hedges states that over 600 plant species, 1,500 insects, 65 birds and 20 mammals have been recorded at some time living or feeding in hedgerows: it's now obvious that this is a considerable underestimate (at least of invertebrate numbers). If a single hedge can provide resources for over 2,000 species, perhaps 3,000, think about the number that a network of hedges may be able to support. Set in farmed landscapes with close-set and varied patches of wildlife habitat, hedges can, it's evident, help to maintain populations of a great many species. If any reader were prepared to carry out a similar study in an area of intensive farmland, where habitat patches are fewer and less well connected, I suspect the results would be most illuminating.

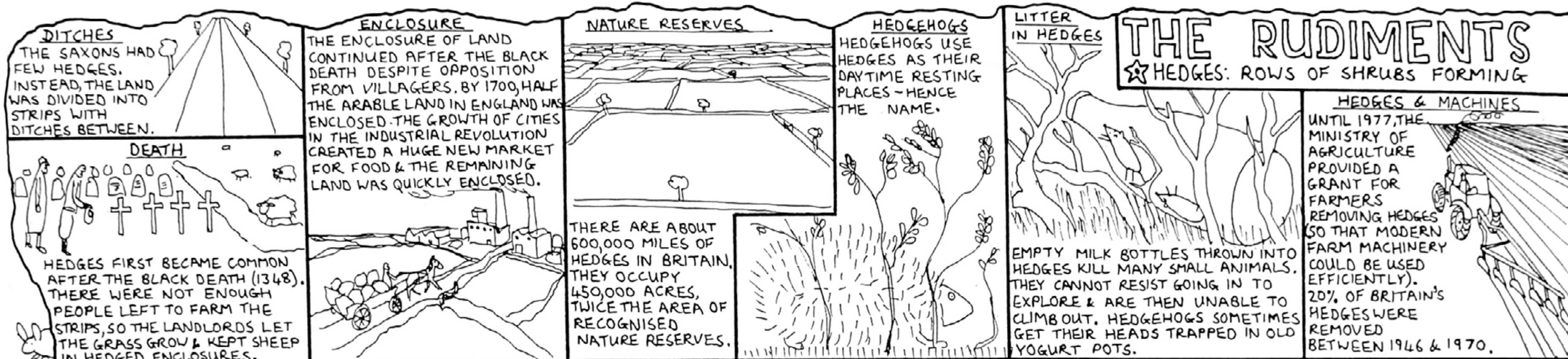
While the number of species involved may be surprising, the value of hedges for farmland wildlife should not be. A number of studies have shown just how important they can be. For example, researchers from Bristol University have found that the majority of biodiversity on a Somerset farm could be conserved by retaining and appropriately managing uncultivated habitats such as hedges.

Hedges are also a source of renewable energy that can be cropped efficiently and economically. Many farms, probably the majority, could heat at least their farmhouse from just their hedges and save money in the process! Others will be able to generate an income through selling the wood, as logs or chips, to local communities. Better still, if done well, management to provide a fuel crop will help to secure a brighter future for the region's hedges, alongside reducing greenhouse gas emissions, farm fuel costs and even rural fuel poverty.

## Work Together For Hedgerows

Everyone interested in hedgerows should get involved with Hedgelink, to share knowledge and ideas which enhance our hedgerow heritage.
**hedgelink.org.uk**

**Tim Hunkin** is an engineer, cartoonist, writer and artist living in Suffolk. His *Rudiments of Wisdom* series of cartoons were featured in *The Observer* and are now published by Prion Books.



**Daniel Winter** makes the case for firewood and timber that is sustainable and locally sourced

# LOCAL FIREWOOD

Our consumption of fossil fuels is putting increasing strain on our natural environment, as well as advancing climate change; this is something that needs to be combated at every level of industry.

Most of the firewood and timber supplies in the UK are imported from unsustainably managed forests in Northern Europe, South East Asia or the Americas. In fact, walk into any major British chain of DIY stores in Britain and, in most cases, there is little or no local hardwood on offer

> 'Using local wood as opposed to overseas supplies benefits the local environment'

and, in the majority of chains, there isn't even commonly a British hardwood available. Not only do these overseas hardwoods generate substantial carbon emissions from the long distances they are transported, but they also deprive the local economy of the boost that would be provided if they were locally sourced. According to the Forestry Commission, in 2014 alone, around 6.4 million cubic metres of sawn wood and 3.3 million cubic metres of wood-based panels were imported into the UK. Along with paper and woodpellets, this equated to about £7.2 billion spent on importing wood products. If even a small percentage of this had been diverted to British companies producing similar commodities, it could have had a huge impact on local economies.

James Ravilious photographed this 'Wood Pile' in Cawseys, Devon, in November 1973 (© Beaford Arts).

Monitoring how sustainable a wood supply is, what the damage is to the local environment, and where biodiversity can be increased are all factors that can be measured when the firewood and timber supply is local. When purchasing items sourced from overseas it is near impossible to measure the impacts.

A fantastic example of our local wood supply benefiting the local community is our work with Start in Salford. Start use creativity to help vulnerable people from all walks of life improve their skills and gain in confidence and use our locally sourced wood supplies to create sustainable chopping boards that are now retailed locally. Start in Salford is a wonderful example of what can be achieved locally by sharing knowledge and skills as well as resources. In a wider community context, in the Greater Manchester area, other contractors can drop their arisings off at our yard, providing a local, unique and innovative green solution to wood waste for the Manchester area.

Local wood fuel and timber supply undoubtedly greatly benefits not just the local economy and community but also the local environment.

**Daniel Winter** works at TreeStation in Greater Manchester and is a researcher for Exploration Architecture, a firm that specialises in biomimicry.

**James Ravilious** (1939–1999) was a photographer who lived and worked in Devon, where he created an 'endless tapestry' of rural life.

TREE DRESSING DAY 1990

Tree Dressing Day is initiated by Common Ground by decorating a group of London plane trees in Covent Garden with 150 large numbers, showing that EVERY TREE COUNTS!

SELL THE FOREST! 2010

The Conservative Government announces proposals to sell the Public Forest Estate, including ancient woodland, into private hands. A twenty-first century revolt ensues: over half a million people sign one online petition alone, and in 2011 the Government abandons the plan.

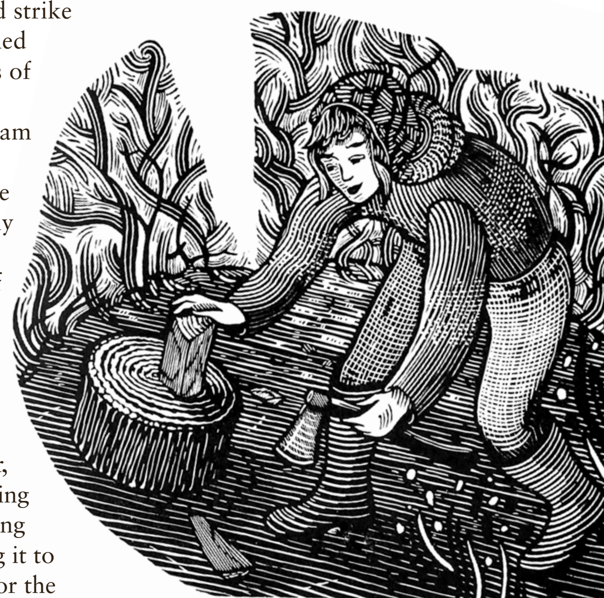
**Rob Penn** enjoys the simple pleasure of chopping wood

# WITH THE GRAIN

I'm not entirely sure why I enjoy splitting firewood with an axe so much, but I am not alone in this. Leo Tolstoy regarded axe-work as a religious discipline. George Bernard Shaw declared it kept him sane. One obvious attraction is the sheer physical exertion: 'The wood warmed me twice, once while I was splitting them, and again when they were on the fire, so that no fuel could give out more heat,' Henry David Thoreau wrote in *Walden; or, Life in the Woods.*

The exercise uses several muscle groups in the body while the effort produces endorphins and adrenaline. There is also the basic pleasure of standing up and being outside, of feeling the rain on my face and an ache in my lower back, which is important if, like me, you sit at a desk for much of the day. Chopping firewood can be done in short bursts – in fact, little and often is the best way to approach a large pile – yet, as the logs mount in a stack around your chopping block, there is an obvious and pleasing sense of progress after just half an hour. If I keep at it for longer, I can fall into a trance chopping wood: it is a form of meditation, albeit with a lethal weapon. Somehow my capacity to concentrate, and strike the log precisely where I want, is heightened in this state; meanwhile the general debris of daily life empties from my head, leaving a void. Paradoxically, in this void, I sense I am exercising my judgement and sharpening my cognitive attentiveness, a human virtue that degenerates in many other parts of my daily life.

Firewood is also a form of do-it-yourself fuel – a matter of importance to anyone who wishes to limit their exposure to the bewildering forces of the global economy by bringing the provenance of things closer to home. I have come to enjoy the annual cycle of cutting back trees in winter, splitting and stacking wood in spring, leaving it to season through the summer, transferring it to the woodshed in autumn, and burning it to keep the tribe warm the following winter, or the winter after that. This cycle is now a cardinal component of my existence. It makes me part of an ancient tradition and gives me a role in the landscape. Sometimes I wonder how I ever knew domestic contentment without it.



Jonathan Ashworth's 'Girls That Axe'

**Rob Penn** presented the television series *Tales from the Wild Wood* and recently published *The Man Who Made Things Out of Trees*. He is also a Champion of the **Charter for Trees, Wood and People.**

Robin Baker, Head Curator at the British Film Institute, selects a season of films inspired by the trees,

## VISION OF THE TREES

THE APPLE (1998)
Samira Makhmalbaf

WASSAILING THE CIDER ORCHARD (1960)
BFI Archive

THE PLEASURE GARDEN (1925)
Alfred Hitchcock

THE WOODLANDERS (1997)
Phil Aglund

FOREST HERITAGE (1952)
BFI Archive

BLAIR WITCH PROJECT (1999)
Daniel Myrick/Eduardo Sanchez

DAYS AND NIGHTS IN THE FOREST (1970)
Satyajit Ray

H IS FOR HOUSE (1973)
Peter Greenaway

## APPLE HARVEST

### Crab Apple Jelly

Make six jars of delicious crab apple jelly

4kg Crab apples

1kg Caster sugar

1 x Lemon (juiced)

Wash the apples, removing any bruised fruit. Put in a saucepan, fill with water to just cover the apples.

Bring to the boil and simmer until the fruit is soft (about 30 minutes).

Pour the pulp into a jelly bag or several layers of muslin and let drip overnight into a pan. Do NOT squeeze the bag or it will make the juice cloudy.

The next day, measure the juice, and add sugar in the ratio of 10 parts juice to 7 parts sugar. Add some lemon juice, bring to the boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar.

Keep at a rolling boil for 40 minutes, skimming off the froth. To test the set, chill a dessert spoon in the refrigerator.

When the jelly is set, it will solidify on the back of the spoon. Pour into warm, sterilised preserving jars and tightly seal while still slightly warm. Store in a cool dark place.

CUT

COLLECT

DECORATE

Illustrator **Britta Tackentrup**'s wonderful step-by-step guide to making decorations for Tree Dressing Day

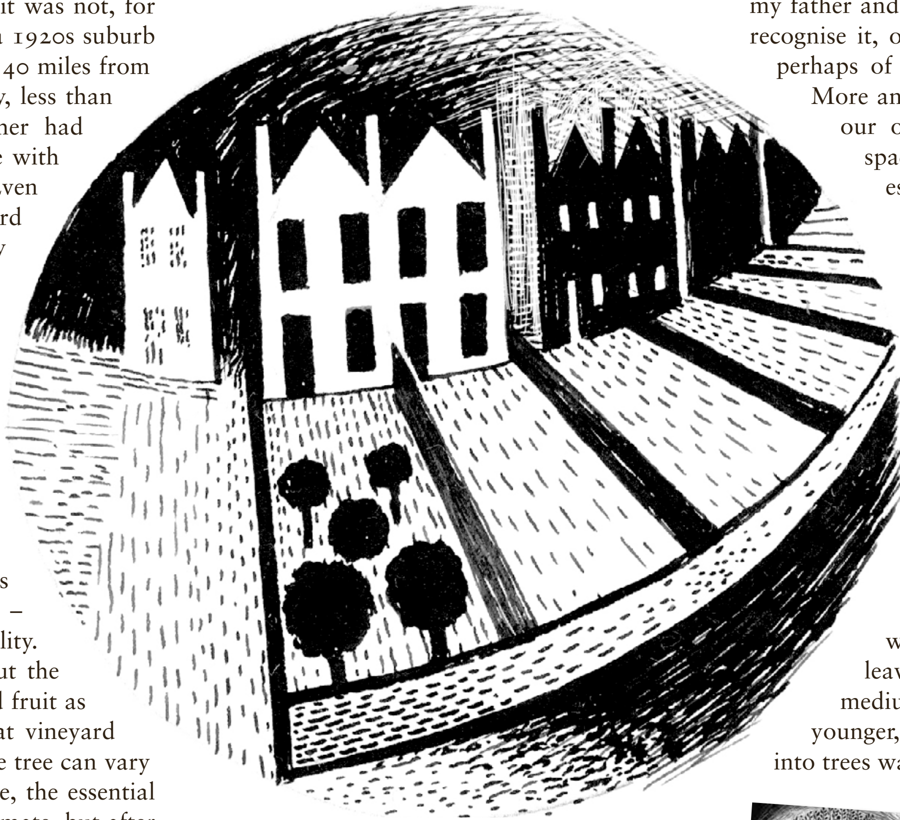
# HOW TO MAKE YOUR AUTUMN LEAVES

The acclaimed novelist **John Fowles** had a life-long fascination and love of trees and woods

# THE TREE

The first trees I knew well were the apples and pears in the garden of my childhood home. This may sound rural and bucolic, but it was not, for the house was a semi-detached in a 1920s suburb at the mouth of the Thames, some 40 miles from London. The back garden was tiny, less than a tenth of an acre, but my father had crammed one end and a side-fence with grid-iron espaliers and cordons. Even the minute lawn had five orchard apple trees, kept manageable only by constant de-branching and pruning. It was an anomaly among our neighbours' more conventional patches, even a touch absurd, as if it were trying to be a fragment of the kitchen garden of some great country house. No one in fact thought of it as a folly, because of the fruit those trees yielded.

The names of apples and pears are rather like the names of wines – no sure guide in themselves to quality. Two labels may read the same; but the two trees that wear them may yield fruit as different as a middling and a great vineyard from the same slope. Even the same tree can vary from year to year. As with the vine, the essential things are soil, situation, annual climate; but after those chance factors, human care. My father's trees, already happy in the alluvial clay of the area, must have been among the most closely pruned, cosseted and prayed for in the whole of England, and regularly won him prizes at local shows. They were certainly the finest-flavoured of their varieties – many increasingly rare, these supermarket days, because of their commercial disadvantages, such as tender flesh or the mysterious need to be 'eaten from the tree' – that I have ever tasted. Memories of them, of their names and flavours, Charles Ross and Lady Sudeley, Peasgood's Nonsuch and King of the Pippins, haunt me still. Even the more popular kinds he grew, such as the Cornice, or the Mozart and Beethoven of English pomology, James Grieve and Cox's Orange, acquired on his cunningly stunted trees a richness and subtlety I



have rarely met since. This may have been partly because he knew exactly when they should be eaten. A Cornice pear may take many weeks to ripen in store, but it is at its peak for only a day. Perfection in the Grieve is almost as transient.

These trees had a far greater influence on our lives than I ever realised when I was young. I took them as my father presented them to the world, as merely his hobby; as unexceptional, or inevitable, as his constant financial worries, his disappearing every day to London, his duodenal ulcer – or on a happier side his weekend golf, his tennis, his fondness for watching county cricket. But they were already more than trees, their names and habits and characters on an emotional parity with those of family.

There was already one clear difference between my father and myself, but the child I was did not recognise it, or saw it only as a matter of taste, perhaps of age, mere choice of hobby again. More and more I secretly craved everything our own environment did not possess: space, wildness, hills, woods … I think especially woodland, 'real' trees. With one or two exceptions – the Essex marshlands, Arctic tundra – I have always loathed flat and treeless country. Time there seems to dominate, it ticks remorselessly like a clock. But trees warp time, or rather create a variety of times: here dense and abrupt, there calm and sinuous – never plodding, mechanical, inescapably monotonous. I still feel this as soon as I enter one of the countless secret little woods in the Devon-Dorset border country where I now live; it is almost like leaving land to go into water, another medium, another dimension. When I was younger, this sensation was acute. Slinking into trees was always slinking into heaven.

*Read the book*

Extract from *The Tree* by John Fowles republished in November 2016, with a foreword by Woodland Trust ambassador William Fiennes.
**littletoller.co.uk**

Peel your apple in a spiral & try to keep the peel in a piece

You will need these
3oz butter
6oz caster sugar
Grated orange rind
8oz self-raising flour
1lb cooking apples, cored & cubed
2 tbs milk
2 beaten eggs
1 tbs sugar

here's what you do

Hot or cold, Aquila's Apple Cake keeps moist & squidgy: yum!

Eat it hot, split & buttered

Grease a 9" baking tin, cream butter, sugar & orange rind. Mix 1 tbs flour with the apples in a bowl. Put eggs & milk into creamed butter. Blend in the flour & the apples. Turn into the tin and bake it for 40-50 minutes. Sprinkle with sugar.

for an apple Adam left Paradise & Eve

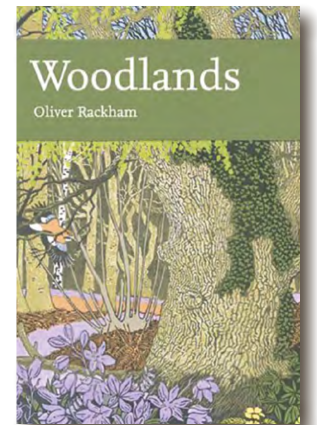
An apple was the first fruit in the world

Add a pinch of cinnemon and of raisins, a handful.

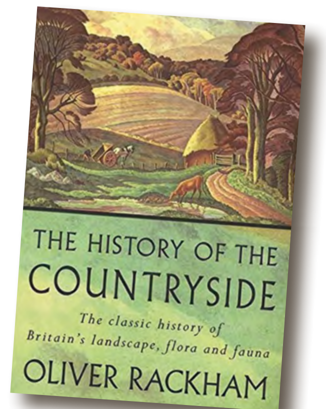
windfalls & early picked fruit are sharper & cook more easily than those in their proper season.

By Dunford Wood

## THE OLIVER RACKHAM SHELF




WOODLANDS
Published by Harper Collins

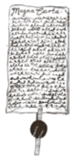



THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTRYSIDE
Published by Harper Collins

THE ASH TREE
Published by Little Toller Books

OLIVER RACKHAM

Oliver Rackham, the leading historian and ecologist of British woodlands, dies in February 2014, aged 75. He set new standards for research linking ecology with history and archaeology. Considered a genius by his peers, he was able to combine original thinking with an encyclopedic knowledge, and was often outspoken on important issues such as tree disease, gloablisation, forestry and government policy.



# AN ALMANAC

## for Trees, Woods and People

## Autumn 2016