

The Wyre Forest Arboretum and the Wyre Forest Society

STUART LEADLEY



Wyre Forest Arboretum, 1991

Stuart Leadley

The Arboretum is an area of 2 hectares sited in New Parks immediately north and west of the Whitty Pear (True Service Tree) *Sorbus domestica* planted in 1916. It is bounded to the north by a forest road and to the east and west by forest paths from which access is obtained through gates. The waymarked Buzzard Trail passes through the arboretum and the Woodpecker Trail passes the entry gate, so a small diversion gives access.

The idea of an arboretum in Wyre Forest came in the 1970s from Eric Hibberd, who was the Head Forester at the time and a founder member of the Wyre Forest Society (WFS). Unfortunately Eric retired before he was able to progress the idea and he died shortly after and before it became reality. Colin Fruen, Eric's successor as Head Forester was approached with the suggestion of an arboretum as a memorial to Eric. He agreed to this and with great effort obtained permission from the Forestry Commission (FC) for its establishment in the area where there was already a noted specimen tree. An agreement was reached in 1983 that FC would manage and control the area, would clear the paths and planting sites, would dig the holes for the planting

and would supply support stakes and protective material. The WFS would plant the trees and erect any protection and would maintain the area. The priority for planting, which was also agreed, was:

1. Trees native to Wyre Forest,
2. Trees native to the UK,
3. Any other notable specimens.

At the time the area was planted to larch *Larix decidua* which had to be felled, but by early 1984 it was ready for the first trees to be planted. On 1st February 1984 a large group of WFS members planted 63 trees on 21 sites. The intention was to plant 3 specimens of each species and eventually thin to 1 tree, but the thinning has not happened. The trees planted fulfilled all the priorities, including Yew *Taxus baccata*, Field Maple *Acer campestre*, Alder *Alnus glutinosa*, Juniper *Juniperus communis* and, surprisingly, Tulip Tree *Liriodendron tulipifera*. The arboretum was officially opened on 10th November 1984 when Mrs. Hibberd, Eric's widow, planted a Copper Beech *Fagus sylvatica purpurea* which was his favourite tree. Unfortunately the squirrels also took a liking to the bark and ringed the tree, so it no longer survives.

During the initial discussions leading to the planting of the arboretum the link between WFS and FC was Rev. Bill Elliott, but once things were up and running the maintenance of the area was taken over by the Monday Work Group of retired WFS members led by Fred and Cath Jennings. They spent many happy hours 'bracken bashing', clearing the brash from the felled larch to tidy up the site and weeding around the tree protection to give the saplings the best chance to grow. There was a period of consolidation following the 1984 plantings to ensure that the ground was suitable for the young trees to flourish and to build up funds for further planting. FC had provided the specimens from their nurseries, but under the agreement WFS paid for them.

By the Spring of 1990 everything was in place for more planting and a further 14 species were chosen. These were generally smaller hedgerow trees and large shrubs, including Spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, Field Rose *Rosa arvensis*, Guelder Rose *Viburnum opulus*, Elder *Sambucus nigra* and Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus*. At this time some of the protection was removed from the more established trees. Later that year Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, Small Leaved Lime *Tilia cordata* and White Willow *Salix alba* were planted. Maintenance continued, with FC mowing paths through the site and continuing efforts were made to make the area more attractive by keeping bracken in check.

In March 1993 a Whitty Pear was planted which had been grown by Mrs. Pam Thew from seed collected from under the main tree some years earlier. It has grown well and provides some continuity if anything happens to the 1916 tree. Later that year a further 50 larch were felled to provide more space and light around the existing plantings and to create new areas for additional planting. Following this work the 'Red Route' waymarked path was re-routed through the area to increase interest during the walk and to introduce the arboretum to a wider public.

By 1994 the cost of providing new trees and replacing those that had died was becoming a burden to WFS, but help was at hand when Dorothy Bowles donated a Wild Service Tree *Sorbus torminalis* in memory of her husband Bob, a previous Chairman of the Society, who had recently died. This opened up a new source of funding for planting which continued until 2007. Many trees were donated by WFS members and others were planted in memory of the donors. From the beginning it was made clear that donors could express a preference for the tree planted, but it had to fit in with the overall planting plan. There was to be no indication on site of the identity of the donor or of the reason for the donation to avoid the area becoming a memorial park. The donors were given details of the site of their tree and often attended to help plant it. By this means a number of trees in all priorities were planted, including Whitebeam *Sorbus aria*, White Birch *Betula papyrifera*, False Acacia *Robinia pseudoacacia*, Black Pear *Pyrus communis* and Liquidambar *Liquidambar styraciflua*.

By 2003 many of the trees had grown into maturing specimens which looked odd with the heavy protection around them, so the post and wires were removed from the earlier ones. Within weeks a Black Pear and some other trees had been frayed by deer, making it obvious that some protection would be required long term. The cost and effort of maintaining individual post and wire around each tree would be excessive as well as spoiling the view and atmosphere of the area, so in Spring 2004 FC undertook the task of fencing the perimeter of the whole area with 2 gravity closing gates to allow access, following which all internal protection was removed. This had a positive effect, allowing mowers to keep the ground vegetation in check and to form mown paths around more areas.

In 2000 WFS members made a visit to Ness Botanical Gardens on the Wirral, part of the University of Liverpool, which holds the National collection of *Sorbus* trees. After having a guided tour the Society was given a large number of seeds of various varieties of *Sorbus*. These were distributed amongst volunteer members to grow on into viable saplings, with the intention of



Betty George planting a White Birch, 11 November 2002, watched by from left: Fred Jennings, Abbie Garbett, Alonza Garbett and Eileen Carter
Stuart Leadley

planting a selection in the arboretum. This took place in 2007 when an avenue of 41 trees of *Sorbus* varieties was planted close to the 1916 Whitty Pear.

By 2007 the number of volunteers in the work party was reducing due to time and age and they no longer felt up to the physical needs of clearing the vegetation, although this had become easier without the tree guards. The problem was discussed with FC, who agreed to take on full responsibility for the arboretum, using their own volunteers as needed. So the formal link between the arboretum and WFS came to an end although current members join the work parties and still take a keen interest in how it is developing and maturing.

References

- Edwin George (1987) *The Forest is my Life*: Countryside Publications Ltd.
- The Wyre Forest Society (1984 – 2007) *Forest Wyre – The Newsletter of the Wyre Forest Society*.
- Phil Rudlin (2014) Personal comments.



Wyre Forest Society members from left: Gary Farlowe (Betty George's son-in-law)?, Eileen Bayliss, Pam Thew, Cath Jennings, Betty George (Edwins widow), the head and shoulders behind Betty is Heather, her daughter, Maureen Leadley, Fred Jennings, Sandra Pugh (Betty's niece), Judy Pagett, Peter Burrows (Betty's neighbour), Brian Yapp, Carol Rudlin, Mike Powell, 11 November 2002
Stuart Leadley

Plantings by Wyre Forest Society in the Wyre Forest Arboretum, 1984 – 2007

This list is of the species planted. In a number of cases there are differing cultivars (e.g. *Acer* sp.) which have not been listed.

Hornbeam	<i>Carpinus betulus</i>	Guelder Rose	<i>Viburnum opulus</i>
London Plane	<i>Platanus x acerifolia</i>	Pussy Willow	<i>Salix caprea</i>
Almond	<i>Prunus dulcis</i>	Common Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>
Horse Chestnut	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>
Walnut	<i>Juglans regia</i>	Wych Elm	<i>Ulmus glabra</i>
Red Oak	<i>Quercus rubra</i>	Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>
Juniper	<i>Juniperus communis</i>	Dog Rose	<i>Rosa canina</i>
Bird Cherry	<i>Prunus padus</i>	Gorse	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>
Whitebeam	<i>Sorbus aria</i>	Broom	<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>
Crab Apple	<i>Malus sylvestris</i>	Alder Buckthorn	<i>Fragula alnus</i>
Tulip Tree	<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>	Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Downy Birch	<i>Betula pubescens</i>	Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>
Yew	<i>Taxus baccata</i>	Small Leaved Lime	<i>Tilia cordata</i>
Pedunculate Oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>	White Willow	<i>Salix alba</i>
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	True Service Tree	<i>Sorbus domestica</i>
Field Maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>	Wild Service Tree	<i>Sorbus torminalis</i>
Witch Hazel	<i>Hamamelis mollis</i>	Black Poplar	<i>Populus nigra</i>
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Worcester Black Pear	<i>Pyrus nigra</i>
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Sweet Chestnut	<i>Castanea sativa</i>
Southern Beech	<i>Nothofagus procera</i>	Service Tree of Fontainebleau	<i>Sorbus latifolia</i>
Copper Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica purpurea</i>	False Acacia	<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>
Snowy Mespil	<i>Amelanchier lamarckii</i>	Handkerchief Tree	<i>Davidia involucrata</i>
Spindle	<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>	Judas Tree	<i>Cercis siliquastrum</i>
		Black Birch	<i>Betula nigra</i>
		Paper Bark Maple	<i>Acer griseum</i>
		Liquidambar	<i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i>
		Plum	<i>Prunus domestica</i>