

## **Veteran Trees at Homend Park**

Many members must have noticed that The Woodland Trust is currently engaged in trying to map out all the big old trees in the country. It has a project called The Ancient Tree Hunt and is asking for help from landowners and the general public, both individuals and groups, in locating interesting trees. The project started in 2004 and has a target of recording 100,000 trees by 2011. So far they have got about 30,000 records though this changes daily. Recently, the National Trust has pledged to add the records of another 40,000 of its own trees. Several members of the club have already been involved in measuring the outstanding trees in the Wye Valley area and other parts of the county, as reported in the 2006 club newsletter, so we thought it would be a good idea if the Club had a field trip to see some good trees in our area and contribute further to the project by recording them.

Our chairman, Brian Willder, farmed the Homend Estate at Stretton Grandison for many years so knows it well and asked permission for the club to measure some of the trees in the parkland area which contains many handsome specimens. The Enclosure Award of 1813 shows the area of the present park and the adjacent woodland as open pasture. This was when the Poole family created their new grand home "Homend House" and engaged Robert Smirke, who was working on Eastnor Castle, to design the front. The park was also laid out by a professional landscape gardener, possibly the same one who laid out Homme House at Much Marcle. Subsequently, the 1880 25" OS map shows the park planted with trees. The public road which runs through the park today, replaces an ancient road, probably of roman origin as Stretton Grandison has a large roman site close by. Edward Poole stopped up this road in 1816 as he did not want the public passing too close to his house.

On September 6<sup>th</sup>, 17 of us met at Stretton Grandison church and after a short briefing, set off in three teams, with our tapes, GPS devices, cameras and record sheets, to find big trees in the parkland beyond. We were aiming to measure the girth of each tree and any over 3.70m circumference at 1.50m above the ground were included in the survey, this being the standard set by Woodland Trust. Each tree was located by GPS and photographed. Its species was noted, its form and its state of health, whether it was carrying any epiphytes or was home to any wildlife.

In the time we spent, 32 trees were measured though there were several other candidates we did not reach. They were mainly Pedunculate Oaks (25), though there were 2 Horse Chestnuts, 2 Sweet Chestnuts, 2 Limes and a Turkey Oak. They were not of great age or size but the largest oak measured was 6.70m girth, most were about 4.30m. They were all maidens, i.e. had not been cut for regrowth and harvesting wood, but planted as specimen trees to enhance the park. They were all in good condition, though some older ones had lost a few limbs over the years. Several had started to go hollow, which is a natural process in older oaks as it makes the trunk more flexible and more able to resist damage in high winds. Most had a light covering of lichen and some moss but they were mainly very clean. We did find Beefsteak fungus, Ganoderma and Jew's Ear on some trees. Two had Elder seedlings growing out of them, and one of the Lime trees hosted some Mistletoe.

Insect holes were noted on many trees and Harvestmen, Sheild Bugs and many spiders seen. An interesting larva from a wingless moth was found on two of the trunks. Several of the larger trees had holes in the root structure which rabbits and other mammals had exploited. The holes in the trees may be home to bats and insects unseen. There were squirrel scrape marks on several trunks. A Spotted Flycatcher was seen by some of the group.

Most of the trees will be about 200 years old though a few predate the park planting. Now they are reaching maturity they are beginning to develop their own personalities and provide a valuable habitat for many forms of wildlife as well as enhancing the landscape.

Thank you to Homend Estate for allowing us to measure the trees and to all the team who did the work especially Brian and Felicity, the other team leaders. It is hoped that the trees we recorded will soon appear on the Woodland Trust website. Meanwhile if you want to find out more about the Ancient Tree Hunt, go to [www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk](http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk) and follow the link to "Discoveries", then "Interactive Map" to see all the trees recorded so far for the project.

Janet Parry 15/11/09  
(historical notes – Brian Willder)