

## UNUSUAL TREES OF MORAY

by  
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It has been my good fortune that since 1957 a vast number of trees, both as individuals and as populations, have come to my attention. This is a brief account of a few of the more interesting.

### Pinus Coulteri D. Don. Big Cone Pine

Growing in an Elgin garden, this tree when measured in 1999 was found to be 23 feet (6 metres) in height and 2 feet 9 inches (26 centimetres) in diameter. The tree is native to California and the species was discovered by Dr Coulter in 1832 and was introduced to this country by David Douglas in the same year. This is a very rare tree to find so far north and of added interest is the production of cones which are very large, with formidable spines, making the collection without thick leather gloves unwise. It is a tree similar to the *Pinus Sabiniana* in some respects, which also comes from California.

### Pinus Sylvestris L. Scots Pine

A tree native in Scotland and widely planted. It has the widest distribution of any pine and is found growing naturally from the Atlantic seaboard in the west, across Europe and Asia to the vicinity of the Pacific Ocean in the east and from beyond the Arctic Circle in Scandinavia to the Mediterranean. Its altitudinal range is from sea level to 8,000 feet (2,400 metres). (*Steven & Carlisle 1959*)

The timber is of great value, especially when slow grown as from native natural sources such as Scandinavia, from where it is imported as red or yellow deal. Although not a living entity, a stump cut by the author from an eroded peat hag above the village of Archiestown was subjected to radio carbon analysis (14c) by the Scottish Universities Research and Reactor Centre at East Kilbride, and gave a radio carbon age BP of 6110 years  $\pm$  60.

An individual Scots Pine discovered growing at Pluscarden Abbey was drawn to my attention in recent times (2001) by a member of the order, Brother Michael. The tree was obviously very old, based on size and bark plating, so a core sample was taken which indicated an age of approx 300 years. The reason for approximation was due to rot occurring near the centre of the stem, which made an accurate ring count impossible. An interesting feature of this tree is the oval (flattened) stem due to the many years of growth into the 6 feet thick massive and ancient sandstone wall, which surrounds the precincts of the Abbey grounds.

It is intended to write a paper on the subject of the tree relative to local meteorological data, which could be plotted against the growth pattern shown on the core. The paper would include, therefore, the tree and its history, the meteorological data and the architecture and history of the wall relative to Pluscarden Abbey.

At the Winding Walks of Speymouth, adjacent to and east of Fochabers, there are groups of remnant Scots pine of between 198 and 249 years of age, which were planted by Gordon Castle Estate. Research of the old estate records in Edinburgh suggests that the seed, which produced these ancient relics, came from adjacent local sources and could in all probability be native in origin – the ancient forest of Enzie (Ainze-Awne). (*Phillips 1996*)

### Quercus Petraea Liebl. Sessile Oak

At Darnaway Estate alongside the River Findhorn at the Meads of St John, there is a narrow strip of 151 ancient sessile oaks. The oldest range from 236 to 727 years (from core samples and stump counts). However, many of the trees have been coppiced (*RSAS 1881, Phillips*

2001) which suggests an even greater age. It is postulated that these trees are remnants of the once great oak forest of Tarnwa-Tarnua-Tarnanaich. (Phillips 1998 - 2001)

Pistacia Chinensis Bunge. Chinese Pistachio (Mastic tree)

A very rare tree in Britain, introduced to Kew in 1897 and Ernest Henry Wilson in 1908-10 from Central and West China. (Bean 1949).

This tree is located at Johnstons of Elgin at Newmill and believed to be a "wool escape". The autumn leaf colour is the most beautiful to behold.

Prunus Serrula Var Thibetica, Koehne. Tibetan Cherry

This beautiful tree is also at Johnstons and is also believed to be a "wool escape". Seed was introduced by Wilson in 1908 and is similar to *P. Serrula* introduced by George Forrest in 1913 from Szechwan N.E. of the Yangtze Bend in N. China at 10,000 feet. (Bean 1949)

Aesculus Hippocastanum L. Horse Chestnut

Once again at Johnstons and although a common tree *per se*, a very beautiful individual of large dimensions. A very difficult core sample reading gave a very approximate age of 149 to 200 years. However, it is thought to be a coppice tree and therefore could well be one of the introductions in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, which came from the mountains of N. Greece and Albania. Seed was sent to the botanist Clusius to Vienna in 1576 and thence to England. (Bean 1949)

Arbutus Menziesii Pursh. Pacific Madrona

A native of British Columbia to California and introduced by David Douglas in 1827. One of the most beautiful trees seldom seen in Moray. (One tree at Innes and three at Newton). In the spring the trees are covered with white bell-like flowers and in the autumn bunches of red berries, but the most attractive element in late summer is the orange/red bark which peels away to reveal a wonderful contrasting soft green stem.

Eucalyptus Urnigera Hooker. Urn Gum

Blown down in storm force wind 12/1/2005  
Coppice shoots 2005-2006  
Native of alpine districts in Tasmania, sometimes confused with *E. Gunnii*, both species reasonably hardy. The above tree has been grown in my garden since 1967 and is now in April 2002, 80 feet (24.38 metres) in height and 6 feet 6 inches (63.06 centimetres) BHD. Seed was imported from Collinavale, Tasmania in 1949 and grown at the R.B.G. Edinburgh, thence planted as a series of *Eucalyptus* plots at the Kilmun research area in Argyll. The Newton tree is a natural seedling from the *urnigera* plot and may therefore be of hybrid nature resulting from the adjacent different species of *Eucalyptus*. The Newton tree escaped the -15° C in 1996, but a large tree (*E. gunnii*) at the quarry gardens at Gordon Castle was killed by the same frost which went down to -20° C in places.

Fraxinus Excelsior L. Common Ash

In the grounds of Gordon Castle there is growing an ash tree of exceptional size and probably age. The stem is extremely gnarled and with four massive limbs which rise from only 2.5 metres of stem suggesting a pollard tree. The dimensions are as follows:

- Girth - 25.5 feet - this is a mean figure with a top girth well above this.
- Diameter - 247.4 centimetres
- Height - 75 feet (23 metres)
- Crown width - 78.74 (24 metres)

A core sample did not give accurate data due to rot. This is a wonderful old tree, which could be one of the largest and oldest ash trees in Scotland.

#### Innes

The following trees constitute a small portion of the wealth of old rare and interesting specimen trees and shrubs, which the author is currently cataloguing.

Update on pamphlet by Alistair Scott 1980.

#### Betula Albo-sinensis. Burkill. Chinese Red Barked Birch.

A native of West China in Hupeh, Szechuen and Kansu. Introduced by Wilson in 1901. A beautiful tree having orange-red bark. Rare.

#### Davidia Involucrata. Baillon. Chinese Dove Tree.

A native of central and west China. Discovered near Moupin in 1869 by Abbe David. Wilson first sent seeds for Messrs Veitch in 1899-1902. The flowers are quite extraordinary consisting of 2 (rarely 3) enormous bracts of pure white, sometimes known as the handkerchief tree.

#### Stuartia Malacodendron L. (S. sinensis. Rehder & Wilson).

A native of—S.E. USA.—Deciduous Camellia. Very rare. There is some doubt over the correct identification of this tree mainly due to the fact that it has never flowered. Reported in a Fulham garden in 1742.

#### Trachycarpus Fortunei. Wendland. Chusan Palm.

A native of Central China. Seed sent to Kew in 1836. Rare to be found so far north.

#### Fagus Egleriana. Seemen. Chinese Beech.

A native of Central China and introduced by Wilson to Kew in 1911. Rare.

#### Arbutus Menziesii. Pursh. Pacific Madrona.

A native of California to B.C. introduced by David Douglas in 1827.

One of the most beautiful of evergreen trees for pure white flowers and bunches of red berries, even more so for its thin shedding red bark in late summer to reveal a pure green smooth stem.

#### Acer Griseum. Pax. Chinese Paper Bark Maple.

Native of Central China and introduced by Wilson for Messrs Veitch in 1901.

A trifoliate maple with the most lovely papery bark with orange coloured bark beneath.

#### Fraxinus Ornus L. Manna Ash.

Native to Southern Europe and Asia Minor. Cultivated since the early 18th century.

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#### Newton Larch Seed Orchard and Scots Pine Clone Bank

A most interesting and valuable legacy of the early pioneering work carried out by the Genetics Branch of the Forestry Commission Research Division can still be found at Newton and in which the author was deeply involved from 1957 to 1987. In 1952 the very first experimental clonal seed orchard was established for the production of hybrid larch seed under J.D. Matthews, later Professor of Forestry at Aberdeen University. Following on from this in 1957 the first clonal tree bank of Scots pine was established as a reserve (as many of the original "plus trees" had been lost – particularly in the 1953 gale) and a means of undertaking controlled crossing between individual clones. Many of these clones are of native origin. (Phillips, Matthews and Dewar 2000)(Samuel, John and Lee 2000).

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