

Earley trees are all special

Once a small hamlet of narrow country lanes and farms, Earley has been



transformed into a busy, residential area with little evidence remaining of its rural origins. What can be found, like skeletal remains, are mature trees, which once lined quiet country roads or were part of woodland belts. When you next pass down an old Earley road, look for trees, particularly oaks, which may silently line it. Sometimes they may be in an avenue,

sometimes in a remnant of hedgerow or perhaps isolated and ending up beached in a street shrubbery or someone's garden. These may have been youngsters when your great-great-grandparents, were babes in arms. A few of them predate the oldest occupant of Earley by perhaps three hundred years, real old timers.

These were trees that for some reason had been left or neglected to continue growing year by year. They are now hardly given a second glance by passers-by. But what if they could talk?

Imagine all the thousands of living things they have provided over the years with shelter and food, the great storms they have weathered, the changes in history they have witnessed.

We can ill afford to lose our trees which add much needed character, both from an historic and aesthetic point of view to the urban landscape, as well as providing invaluable habitats for wildlife communities.

“Every community has its special trees. Some are widely appreciated and much visited, others are local landmarks, known only to a few people, but all are worthy of celebration”

Old Timer 1 - The Gemini Oak, Laurel Park

Possibly over 300 years old and still going strong

Are they two trees, which have joined together, or one tree that's split in two? Perhaps a good tree to continue the very early tradition when couples, having just been joined together in marriage, danced round an oak tree 3 times, 'as ancient custom decreed'.



The 'Go Between'



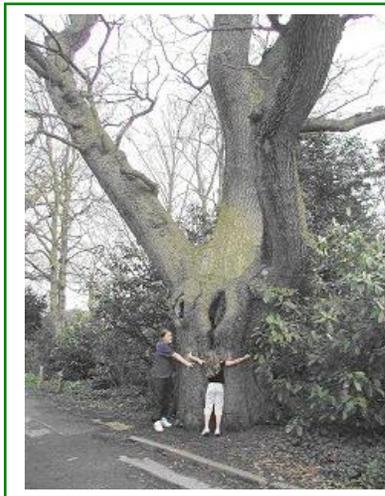
'Heavenly Twins'?

Does anyone have early memories of climbing or playing on the Gemini Oak?
Post your comment on our forum.

Old Timer 2 - The Soly Joel Oak?

Another oak, a little messed about, but providing a good habitat for wildlife and an impressive sight for passers-by (Girth approx. 5.5 metres)

It's in Maiden Erlegh Drive, which would once have been the drive to Maiden Erlegh House. It's still lined with some big oaks including our Old Timer,



which is the biggest. This tree must have seen many comings and goings over a period of 350 years, and was perhaps a sprouting acorn when William of Orange and his wife Mary came to the throne.

If only it could talk. No doubt it might remember the fantastic parties Soly Joel (the owner of Maiden Erlegh Hse in the early part of

the 20th century, and a keen race-horse owner) held in Ascot Week; or the showgirls arriving from the West End theatre owned by Soly, who came to swim in the magnificent Pompeian pool. It would have been a sapling in the time of George I, and may once have stood just outside the entrance to the big house, in what was Earley Heath. This was later enclosed and the owner of the House at the time extended the drive out to Forest Road (Wokingham Road).

It probably doesn't appreciate the graffiti and the litter it endures now.

Old Timer 3 - The Luckmore/Betchworth Oak

This Old Timer is stranded on an island between Luckmore Drive and Betchworth Avenue (Girth approx 4.93m)

Giving an age for a tree is an approximate, informed guess, but this one may have clocked up 300 years, or will do so in the near future. It was situated near and to the east of what was, in 1883, Home Farm (the Bowling Club in Beech Lane is a remnant of this); at one time the line of the old Beech Lane, then known as Maiden Erlegh Lane, passed on the east side of the Bowling Club, but this was altered during the Enclosures some time in the 1800s to the present-day route of Beech Lane, exiting at Wilderness Road.

It may look rather the worse for wear, but it still sports a canopy, and gives a home to a sizeable number of creatures, large and small. The tree shows signs of becoming a veteran by losing its bark, and the bore holes of small invertebrates may be seen. It may have been pollarded, which would make increase its age. Old trees are now considered of great importance to wildlife.



Old Timer 4 - Sibley Hall Lane Oak

This is growing next to a small stream, which skirts along the grounds of Sibley Hall. (approx Girth 4.9m)



Looking at a 1756 map, the stream appears to come from a very large pond on the west side of Elm Lane, flowing through the fields to the Maiden Erlegh Lake. A small part of this stream can still be seen on the latest Ordnance Survey Map. Pity that at one point someone had dumped their household rubbish, and a supermarket trolley!

The Crawford Close Hold Oak

There are more than just English oaks amongst Earley's notable trees.

The Holm Oak. A giant among trees, this is in Crawford Close, a stranded colossus from the old Maiden Erlegh estate. (Girth approx. 6.9m but hard to measure))



You can just see two tiny figures under

The Evergreen, Holm or Holly Oak (*quercus ilex*) is member of the oak family, but is sometime mistaken for a large holly tree. This tree was once in the landscaped estate of old Maiden Erlegh House. With its large girth, it's as big as some of the trees which are thought worthy of being recorded on the Tree Register website database. First introduced into this country in the 16th century, it is really a native of the Mediterranean area, but this area is affected by an increasing desertification and soil degradation. The main cause is the climate, but also the impact of forest fires.

It has catkins and acorns just like the Common Oak. When cut green, the wood is heavier than water. Before the advent of plastic, its acorns, like the other oaks, were once used for packaging for fragile and delicate objects. Although the ground below may be bare, birds can nest in its large canopy and long-tailed tits, woodpeckers, nuthatches and goldcrests may eat its catkins and acorns.

There is (was?) a famous avenue called Ilex Avenue in Worthing that once boasted 245 of these trees, but the area is very much coveted by developers. Wonder if it's still there?

The Beautiful Lime Tree in Laurel Park (also known as the Linden Tree.)

Trees in the Laurel Park area are shown on the 1883 OS Map and this may well be one of them. It's near the children's play area.

This tree favours the Northern Temperate Zone, and especially the British Isles. It can grow to 130 feet, and will perfume the surrounding area with its scent when in flower. Greatly loved by bees, its honey is one of the most



popular in the world. Linden tea is enjoyed on the continent, made from a diffusion of the dried flowers. Another interesting feature of limewood is that it never becomes worm-eaten. One of its uses in the past was as fodder, and perhaps our lime tree fed some of the local cattle.

The Laurel Park Lime, a sizeable trunk

Wood carvers love it for its ease in working, being white, close-grained, smooth and allowing carving of fine detail. One of the most famous woodcarvers in the 17th century was Grinling Gibbons, who worked mostly in limewood. Examples of his exquisite work can be seen in many grand houses, including Hampton Court Palace. He carved cascades of fruit, leaves, flowers, foliage, fish, and birds. He even produced a cravat made of limewood in a perfect imitation of Venetian needlepoint. The "cravat" was so lifelike that a foreign visitor was fooled into thinking it the standard dress of the English country gentleman!

Sheila Crowson