

surrey tree wardens

newsletter

december 2025

How Trees can Help our Health

It seems self-evident: that relaxing under a tree, breathing in fresh air and listening to bird song is good for us. The keynote speaker at the Surrey Tree Warden Network meeting in October gave us the scientific evidence to back the claim that not only is nature good for us, but it can actively aid recovery. Robyn Jarrett from the Frimley Foundation Trust outlined how NHS Trusts in Surrey, including her own, are beginning to harness that power into active treatment.

One study shows that patients who look out of a hospital window onto green space recover on average one day sooner than patients with no view outside, or with a view of concrete. One day may not sound much, but that represents a giant saving overall, just for providing a green view. Another study of the brain using neuro-imaging, shows how pain is reduced when patients are presented with a picture of trees or landscape. It can also lower heart rates and blood pressure, and aid better sleep.



The research is now informing the design of new wards and new hospitals throughout the UK. Patients do better in single room wards with a floor to ceiling view outside. Natural light should be used where possible. Waiting rooms and family rooms are more restful with art works or photos of trees and landscapes. Green social prescribing is also becoming mainstream. Patients are encouraged to join walking groups, go swimming, join a community tree planting project. So sure proof! being a Tree Warden is good for you.

Improving connections

The clue is in the name: Network. The Surrey Tree Warden Network. But it seems as if the networking isn't working as well as it could. Your Committee, all volunteers, organised walks, meetings and training sessions this year, but take-up was not as good as we had hoped. We thought we would ask you what you would like us to do, and ask you in return to tell us the things that you do, and would like to do.

These are our questions:

- What do you do as a Tree Warden in your local patch?
- What would you like to do more of as a TW?
- In what practical ways can the STWN committee support you?

It would help enormously if you could take a few minutes to think about this, and send a reply however brief, to Elaine Griffiths, our Treasurer elaine023@gmail.com As soon as you can: deadline New Year's Eve!

We asked these questions at our October meeting, and got some good responses to the first question: from local seed collection to encouraging more street tree planting and caring for planted trees. On the second, involving children and young people was a common theme. As for the third? Finding others to form a local group was mentioned. Guildford and Leatherhead anyone? And learning from others with Walk My Patch visits. But you may have more ideas, and we would love to hear them. We all of us love and value trees, and there has never been a time when threats to them are as high from development or disease. Yet there has never been a time when tree planting has been so actively encouraged with money and grants available to do it.

News From the Groups: Merrow

Three redwood species and an explosive history all in one afternoon. Those were the highlights of a November guided walk in and around Chilworth led by retiring warden, Simon Harrold, along with Jane and Graham Thorp, Merrow wardens. Nineteen people joined them.

The three species of redwoods were *Sequoiadendron giganteum* (5 of them in one back garden), *Sequoia sempervirens* and *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*. Common oak, Turkey oak and Holm oak were also abundant, and oak knopper galls were found, allowing the life cycle of the tiny wasp, *Andricus quercuscalicis* and its dependence on two hosts, Common and Turkey oak, to be explored. Three 'living fossil' trees were also seen: Monkey puzzle, *Magnolia grandiflora* as well as the *Metasequoia*.



Chilworth: Photo by Becky Swarbrick

All along the walk, Simon drew attention to the historic importance of Chilworth in the manufacture of gunpowder. Why there? First, plenty of water coming by the 'leats' or watercourses to the mills along the River Tillingbourne; then the abundance of common alder. Alder has a low-resin content and high porosity, mixing well to give a steady and efficient burn rate with minimal smoke: perfect for making charcoal for use in industrial processes. The roots also stabilise the river banks.

The gunpowder industry in Chilworth supplied the East India Company and continued until the 20th C. Ruins of the more recent mills and millstones are still visible in the woods, along with the wooden (no sparks!) trackways that took away the finished product. It's hard to believe that this tranquil woodland was once the site of such immense activity - and several catastrophic explosions.

News From the Tree Council

The South East Tree Warden Forum took place in Victoria Park in Portsmouth in October. On the agenda: a thoughtful look at Britain's treescape in 2025 and beyond by Jon Stokes. Richard Pollard gave a presentation about the work of The Tree Council's Young Tree Champions and the new Growing Together programme which aims to bring nature and communities together by growing trees. And of course, there was a guided walk around the park in its autumn splendour.



Patricia Brookwick, co-ordinator of Surrey Tree Wardens, said about the day: "It was great spending time with other Tree Wardens and The Tree Council - there's ALWAYS something new to learn and observe at these meetings. I really enjoyed seeing the community tree nursery that the Portsmouth Tree Wardens had created. And Jon's 'which tree would you save?' game got us all thinking."

You will find lots of information about all The Tree Council's projects on <https://treecouncil.org.uk/>

Diary Date

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Pop the date in your diary now. The Wisley Tree Walk, with Jonathan Newell, Wisley tree expert extraordinaire, had to be cancelled this autumn because of continuing traffic disruption around the Garden entrance off the A3. It has been rearranged for:

Saturday 11 April 2026 Details to come nearer the time.

What is a tree?

There's a new tree book out – another tree identification book? Do we need another? This one surely yes. It has had fulsome reviews. It has been six years in the making, and is by one of Britain's foremost tree experts – our own Jon Stokes, who formed the national Tree Warden network over thirty years ago, and continues to work for The Tree Council as Director of Trees, Science and Research. Calling it a “passion project” and “the book I've always wanted”, Jon put his 35 years' experience in tree conservation towards personally finding and documenting characteristics of all UK and Irish tree species – wherever they are located.

Every native tree? it sounds easy. Britain after all has a very low number of natives. Not true it turns out. There are 56 species of whitebeam alone in the UK - most of them extremely rare and they are found clinging high up on precipitous outcrops in the Bristol Gorge or the Mendips. Willows? there are several very rare, very remote species, some only centimetres high in the alpine plateaux of the Highlands. Then there are Excruciating Elms, Jon's words, which hybridise so readily with each other, that the 'native' population is in constant flux.

Photographing a tree? It sounds easy, until you realise that it was not enough to photograph it in its green summer finery. A winter photo was needed. What about the flowers: that's likely to be spring: when in spring? Fruit: that's late summer or autumn. Each tree had to be visited at least four times to get the photos needed.



Describing a tree accurately? You have only to look at one oak tree to realise the multitude of leaf shapes on view. So it was that a project planned to take two years took six. The book came out this summer, providing detailed information and imagery of every native tree and shrub species across these islands. And to answer the question what is a tree? Jon took as his definition anything with a woody stem – but even then there are exceptions. Heathers have woody stems but are not included. That would need another book.

WildGuides Trees of Britain and Ireland by Jon Stokes

Dave Pope



Dave Pope, a long serving tree warden in Spelthorne, and a tree warden for nearly thirty years died peacefully in hospital last month. He had been a key member of the STWN committee for many years and contributed enormously. Trees were his absolute passion. He photographed and measured many ancient and veteran trees throughout the country, making journeys especially to see them, and had a deep knowledge in particular of Surrey's finest specimens. He collected old postcards of landmark trees. But above all he planted them: street trees, park trees, playground trees, churchyard trees, roadside trees - probably thousands over his lifetime. He planted them in Runnymede, Egham, Sunbury and throughout Spelthorne. His wife Andrea said We could not go anywhere without Dave remarking “I planted that one, and that one”

The true meaning of life is to plant trees whose shade you do not expect to sit under.

Contact Us

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www.surreytreewardens.org.uk

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SurreyTreeWardens>

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Printer Ink Cartridges. The Surrey TW Network receives a modest amount of funds each year from collecting used ink cartridges for recycling. If you have any please contact Sue Henderson

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