

The Wind Doth Blow

No doubt every modern thinking arborist and many experienced foresters, that are now calling themselves arborists, would agree that a great wind or a hurricane is by far the best test for trees. A good blow is a natural and real test and surely should save a lot of time instead of running around with a rubber hammer, a Picus or any other gadget used to detect decay and hollowing.

Presumably some people do not agree. When a Picus test was used on a beautiful sycamore in Coniston in the Lake District, the interpretation of the extent of decay led them to decide to fell it. Two independent arboricultural consultants disagreed and suggested work to reduce the sail and prolong the trees life. However the decision to fell remained unchanged and by chance before it was cut down a great wind blew and blew. So called 'healthy' trees with their solid inflexible trunks fell down all over the place. In fact some sizeable trees blew over less than 100 metres from the venerable 'dangerous' sycamore, but, guess what, this so called high risk tree remained unscathed. So would you, just after a great wind, have felled the sycamore?

If so why? Surely in this case whatever decay was shown on the Picus, it was insufficient to affect the tree. Perhaps instead it was telling us that the decay was allowing the tree as a hollow tube to be flexible enough to absorb the force of the wind. The decision to fell the tree is comparable to some medics declaring a man dead. However, as they lift him into the coffin he recovers, but because the decision has been made, the funeral arranged, they push him back and nail him down.

As a layman I have argued for many years that arboriculture is a profession that hasn't stood still and new information and technology arrives daily. So the time has long passed when there should be a new qualification to weed out the poorly trained or people who haven't changed their attitudes for 30 years or more. Today, you meet so many people in the profession whose face remains a blank when you mention Alan Rayner and only play lipservice to Alex Shigo and Claus Mattek. Those people who have had a good education in arboriculture would welcome and not fear a new examination because the new qualification would command more recognition and would result in far fewer trees condemned.

Every few weeks the Ancient Tree Forum Woodland Trust partnership receives another horror story about a tree or avenue declared unsafe and recommended for felling. Our first questions always are: who has made the decision? was the local Tree Officer involved? was a decision other than felling considered?

I remember reading an article about the wholesale removal of the great avenue at Hampton Court. It involved taking out four lines of mature limes of different ages, including some of the original ancient trees. The writer never mentioned whether he tried to persuade management to change their decision of wholesale removal by offering alternative approaches. My comments at the time were that if they had looked at the aftercare of other young replacement avenues nearby they would have seen that the trees were suffering primarily from deer damage. What was the

point of felling and replanting this great avenue and wasting thousands of pounds when new trees are not being protected?

Recently two arborist in the Ancient Tree Forum have saved a couple of avenues by recommending tree work and the trees look really excellent - even to gardeners. The climbers that did the work got paid and the trees remained. In a few years the tree climbers will return again and be paid. Hampton Court will not see a tree climber for perhaps the next 50 years unless he has got a spade!

Your profession means the care of trees and the trees need your advice that will keep them standing.