

The Acorn Winter 2009

A Newsletter for Cheshire Parish Tree Wardens



SCORELINE

133 Parishes 174 Wardens

Contributions to next ACORN by February 2010 please

The views expressed in The Acorn are not necessarily
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Cheshire Landscape Trust

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Musings from my tree.....

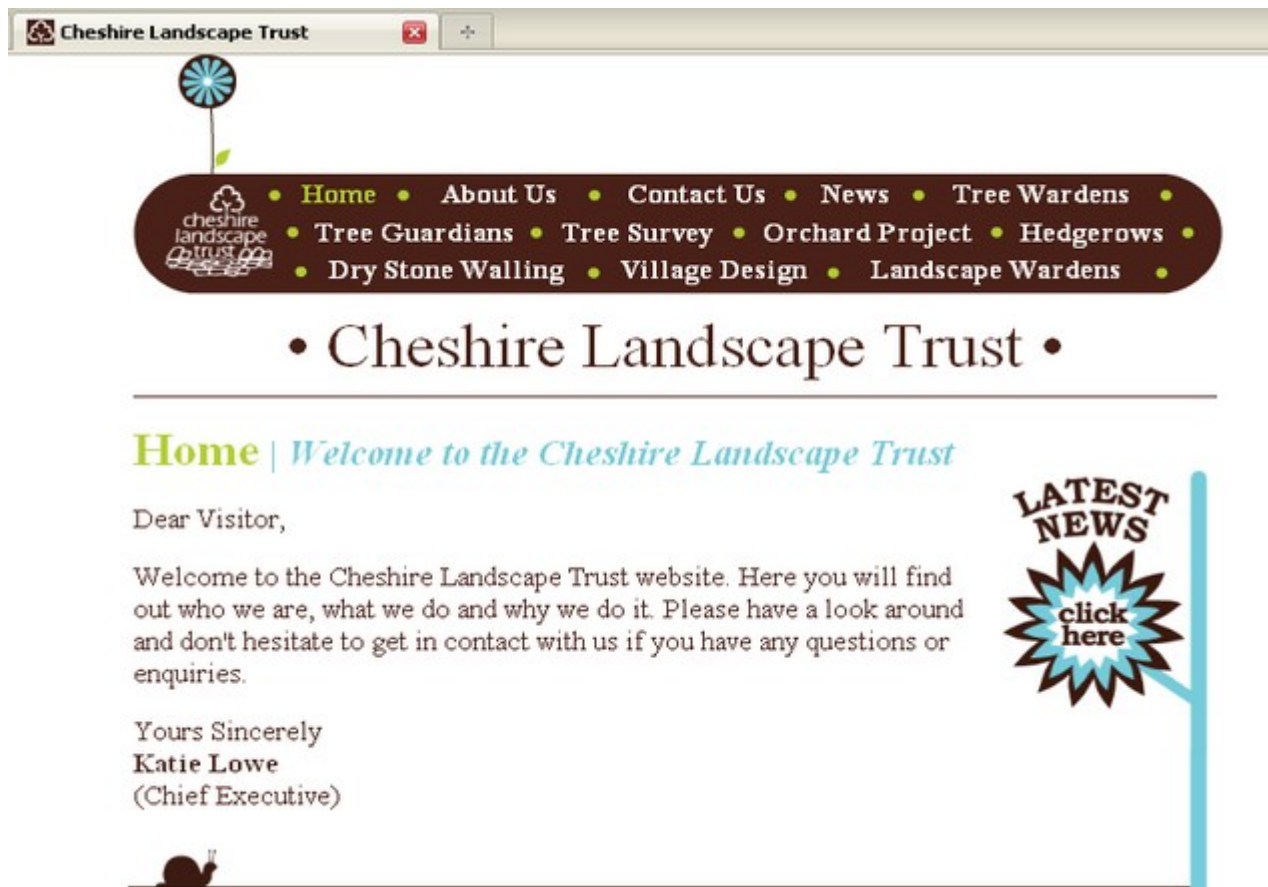
After this particularly cold and snowy winter it is pleasing to see the first signs of spring beginning to appear. The bulbs are pushing their way out of the soil and the buds on the trees are getting bigger by the day. Here at Cheshire Landscape Trust, we also have a new beginning with the arrival of our brand spanking new website!

Why not visit us at www.cheshirelandscapetrust.org.uk and let us know what you think (see below for a sneak preview). We have a news page that we'll keep updated as often as possible with all our up-and-coming events and latest happenings.

It has been a busy planting season over the past few months with lots of you coming over to Marbury to collect trees for your own community planting projects. If any of you have photos from your tree planting days please let us have a copy, preferably via email, and we'll feature them on the news page of our website. This year's tally of over 4,500 trees and shrubs planted takes the total number of plants donated by Cheshire Landscape Trust to community and school projects over the past decade to over 32,000 – not bad for a small charity working with very little funding I think you will all agree!

Katie Lowe

Cheshire Landscape Trust





Diary Dates



Tree Wardens Meeting @ Northwich

16th March 2010

Memorial Hall, Northwich

Please contact CLT if you need more information.

Bluebell Walk @ Norton Priory

25th April 2010

Please contact Norton Priory for more information.

www.nortonpriory.org or 01928 569895

The Cheshire Show @ Tabley Show Ground

22nd-23rd June 2010

www.cheshirecountysshow.org.uk

Quince & Apple Day

17th October 2010

Please contact Norton Priory for more information.

www.nortonpriory.org or 01928 569895

Lower Moss wood



In August last year the Cheshire Tree Wardens joined Ray Jackson MBE for a guided walk around Lower Moss Wood Nature Reserve and Wildlife Hospital. Ray showed us the 17 acre mixed woodland, ponds and a peat bog which provide habitats for a wide variety of plant and animal communities. We were then shown the wildlife hospital which takes in any injured, sick or orphaned wild animal or bird for care, rehabilitation and eventual release back into the wild.

Thanks to Ray and his team for making us all so welcome. If any of you would like to make a donation to Lower Moss Wood and contribute to the work they do you can visit their website www.lowermosswood.org.uk or give them a call on 01565 755082 for further details.

Special Thanks to Archie Miles...

Special thanks and recognition goes to Archie Miles for his photo used in the last edition of The Acorn.

Boost our bogs: less sexy than trees, but better

Those bleak carbon-rich quagmires are our rainforests



It's all very well the Forestry Commission telling us to plant forests across Britain to beat climate change, but where is the standard-bearer for our bogs? Those bleak, windswept quagmires of squelching earth, which thrive on the colossal rainfalls that have made this November so depressing, could be the salvation of Britain's carbon pollution problem.

Their vital statistics are truly impressive. Britain's bogs store 5.5 *billion* tonnes of carbon, more than half the entire country's carbon storage, or 35 years' worth of the UK's carbon pollution. Compare that with our forests, which store 150 *million* tonnes of carbon. That isn't to say we should slash down forests and turn Britain into a giant swamp — for one thing, trees are far better at soaking up carbon. No, this is a hare and tortoise race: the trees race ahead and after a century or so stop growing, while the bogs plod along but can grow for thousands of years, so they lock away staggering amounts of carbon.

That's why boglands across the globe hold about the same amount of carbon as all the world's plants and trees. And Britain has about 8 per cent of the world's bogland, so that's a considerable resource in our own backyard.

And it's all thanks to our appalling wet climate. Because so much rain falls, especially in the North and West, the ground becomes waterlogged, the water turns acid, and only sphagnum moss and other special plants can grow on it. When those plants die they become preserved in the acid waters like a pickled gherkin, holding their carbon in glorious heaps of peat. As long as the bogs remain wet and healthy, the carbon stays locked out of harm's way from the atmosphere — which is why Britain's bogs have sometimes been called our rainforests.

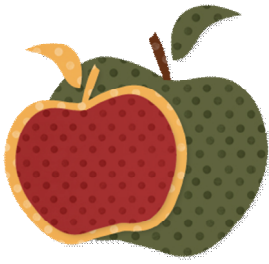
And how do we treat these national treasures? By thoroughly abusing them through drainage, burning, ploughing and overgrazing, in the name of farming, horticulture and development. It is a national disgrace. But we can all do something about it. There's no excuse for buying peat compost that has been ripped out of a bogland when perfectly good peat-free alternatives are available. And the same can be said for buying potted plants in peat compost.

Worse still, as bogs become degraded, they start to release carbon dioxide. So we are sitting on a potential time bomb. It would be far cheaper to lavish our boglands with care, pump them up with water and replant them with their natural sphagnum moss than to plant new forests. They may not be sexy, but bogs have a huge part to play in cleaning up our climate.



Paul Simons, The Times, November 30 2009

Growing thirst for cider offers hope of an orchard revival



As apple pickers gather in the harvest from orchards wreathed in autumn mist, the National Trust is spending £536,000 to save a fast-disappearing feature of the landscape.

More than 60 per cent of England's traditional orchards have vanished since the 1950s. In some areas the decline has been greater. Kent, once the "Garden of England", has lost 92 per cent and Devon, a bastion of West Country scrumpy — the traditional still, cloudy cider — 89 per cent.

The trust, alarmed at the rapid decline, is trying to restore 30 of its traditional orchards and to save apple varieties with such names as Hoary Morning, Slap-Ma-Girdle and Pig Snout. A traditional orchard is defined as one where five or more fruit trees grow no more than 20m apart. They are much less closely packed than commercial orchards.

One encouraging sign is that interest in cider and traditional drinks is on the increase. Growing demand for non-alcoholic cloudy apple juice has helped to make the current harvest season one of the busiest in years.

The project has already borne fruit at the Golden Cap estate near Bridport, Dorset, where an ancient cider press is being restored and apples are being gathered to turn into scrumpy.



Because many small orchards were close to an estate's main house, they have been replaced by swimming pools and paddocks by owners with no time to maintain them and no use for their produce. The few large cider producers no longer buy apples in small quantities as they are not costeffective to collect.



Kate Merry, the trust's orchard project manager, said: "There are 2,300 different varieties of English apple and we are in danger of losing them without even knowing it.

In the old days farm workers were paid in cider, so every farmhouse would have had a little cider orchard. Orchards are part of our culture. But they need to be managed, otherwise they quickly become overgrown and the trees die. Fruit trees have a relatively short life span and if they aren't replaced it does not take long for a small orchard to vanish."

The Time Travellers Guide to Medieval England—The Countryside



Contrary to what you might expect, the woodland area is not very much greater than in the modern world—that is to say about seven per cent of the land.



However, almost every inch of the medieval woodland is managed carefully. Some areas are cornered off and coppiced, and then surrounded by high earth banks with hedges on top to stop the deer and other animals from eating the new shoots. The coppiced trees provide poles for charcoal burning, for fences, staves or just for firewood. Other areas of the woodland are managed for timber, with spaces being cleared to encourage the trees to grow tall and straight. Great oaks are prized commodities, allowing wide structural spans to be crossed with a single beam. There is relatively little fallen wood lying on the ground, especially in those woods near villages. The right to gather sticks and fallen timber is one which the manorial lord often grants to his tenants, and they take advantage of every last twig of it. In many areas it is their sole means of keeping warm through the long winter months. Where there is more fallen wood than the local tenants can use, the rights to gather it are sold. When the forest of Leicester is impassable, the lord sets a price of 1d for six cartloads of dead wood. That sees the forest floor quickly cleared.

You might notice something else as you wander through the wood. Where are the conifers? In medieval England there are just three coniferous species—Scots pine, yew and juniper—and juniper is more a bush than a tree. There are very few evergreens at all—holly is the only common one—so the winter skyline is particularly bleak. Every other pine, spruce, larch, cedar, cypress and fir you can think of is absent. In case you see deal or fir boards used in a lord's castle and wonder where the trees are, the answer is that they are in Scandinavia: the timber is imported. Nor will you find holm oaks, red oaks, redwoods, Turkey oaks or horse chestnuts. The trees which cover England are largely those introduced during the Bronze Age and Roman periods mingled with the species which repopulated the British Isles after the last Ice Age: rowan, ash, alder, field maple, hazel, sweet chestnut, whitebeam, aspen, some poplars, silver birch, beech, lime, walnut, willow, elm and hornbeam. And of course the good old oak. Both forms of oak are common: the small sessile variety which thrives in hilly areas, and far more valuable pedunculate sort used for building houses and ships.



Now you are looking more closely at the landscape, you might notice some more subtle differences. That squirrel in the trees above you is a red one—the grey variety has yet to reach Britain. In the fields the cattle are smaller than their modern counterparts: *much* smaller. So too are the sheep. The breeding programmes to produce large farm animals will not take



The Time Travellers Guide contd...

place for several centuries. The lichens hanging from the boughs above the path through the wood are probably unfamiliar, as many more varieties survive in the unpolluted air. With darkness closing in over the trees, and a long way yet to the next town, you might wonder whether there are still wolves in medieval England....Rest assured that there are not. Well, probably not. The modern tradition states that the last English wolf was killed in North Lancashire in the fourteenth century but you are very unlikely to meet it. Ralph Higden, writing at Chester in 1340, comments that there are now 'few wolves' left in England. The last set of instructions to trap and kill wolves is issued in 1289, so if you want to see an indigenous wild wolf, you will have to go to the highlands of Scotland. There are still some wild boar in the aristocratic hunting parks or chases but they too have been brought almost to the point of extinction, so the chances of you being gored by one are remote. The only really dangerous beast to be encountered in the woods and forests of fourteenth century England is – as you have probably guessed – man. Groups of armed men, like the Folville and Coterel gangs, do roam the forest road looking for stragglers to rob.

The Time Travellers Guide to Medieval England, Ian Mortimer, Vintage Books 2008

Using woodlands to cut emissions

The UK is one of the least forested countries in Europe. Although the amount of woodland cover has increased substantially since its nadir after the First World War, growth has slackened in recent years. The growing maturity of UK woodlands means that carbon sequestration is falling rapidly. An independent assessment commissioned by the Forestry Commission has proposed one way forward: a million new hectares devoted to woodland, generating a reduction of up to 15% of the UK emissions in 2050.

The UK's woodland was depleted by the needs of industry, urbanization and agriculture and fell to little more than 6% of national land area in the early 1920s. Wood was virtually absent from many lowland areas in England. A recovery in the area given over to woodland means that about 12% of the UK is now forested but this number is only rising very slowly. Net new forestation is now well below 10,000 hectares (100 sq km) a year, much of which is in Scotland. The UK is significantly behind other countries in Europe.

Percentage of land area under forest and woodland:

- UK 12%
- France 28%
- Germany 32%
- Italy 34%
- Spain 36%
- Sweden 67%
- Finland 74%



Using woodlands to cut emissions contd...

As trees grow, they extract CO₂ from the atmosphere by photosynthesis. Young trees don't capture much as their absolute growth is slow. Old trees have largely ceased to grow and also don't extract much carbon dioxide. The UK's newer woods, mostly planted thirty to fifty years ago, are now just past their peak at sequestering carbon. The 2005 figure was about 16m tonnes CO₂. In 2010, the figure will fall to about 10m tonnes, and by 2020 the figure could be as low as 5m tonnes (less than 1% of national emissions).



Combating Climate Change, a report commissioned by the Forestry Commission, makes a powerful case for a sharp increase in the rate of new planting. It suggests that 1m new hectares, about 4% of total UK land area, should be given over to forest cover by 2050, increasing the planting to almost 25,000 hectares a year, triple today's rate. This would, says the report, reduce UK emissions by about 15m tonnes of CO₂ a year by mid-century. Parliament has legislated to cut UK emissions to about 150m tonnes of CO₂ by this date. New forestry could therefore reduce the national CO₂ total by about 10% below its expected level.

Is a million new woodland hectares possible? Easily. About 4m hectares are given over to rough pastureland in England alone. Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland probably have another 4m hectares. So transferring a million hectares into woodland is perfectly feasible. What about the cost? The report suggests that it strongly depends on what sort of forestry we use. 'Energy forestry' using, for example, coppiced hazel and willow for fuels may well have a net cost below zero per tonne of CO₂ saved (that is, the wood fuel costs less than the fossil energy it replaces. At the other extreme, the creation of new broadleaf woodlands, managed for biodiversity, is estimated to cost about £41 per tonne of carbon dioxide. The Climate Change Committee says that any proposal costing less than £100 per tonne is potentially cost-effective. So although £41 per tonne is almost certainly greater than the cost of, for example, carbon capture at coal power stations by 2050, it is in line with other projects for reducing CO₂.

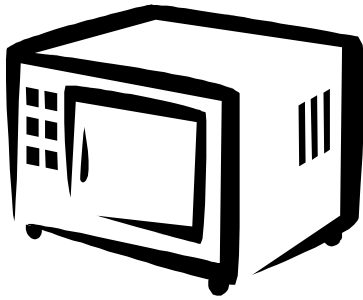


The cheapest form of reforestation – giving over large plantations to single species for frequent harvesting of wood for heating and electricity generation – is broadly unpopular in the UK. Even still, it probably needs to be considered carefully. Using biomass to generate electricity is a very good way of providing 'dispatchable' electric power, electricity that can be provided exactly when needed. The last few weeks of cold, still weather in the UK should remind us that we need huge amounts of biomass as a reliable source of renewable power as a backup for wind.

Taken from: www.guardian.co.uk Monday 25th January 2010

For a copy of 'Combating Climate Change – A Role For UK Forests' go to www.tsoshop.co.uk to order your copy or download the document.

Zap the trees to reduce carbon



How do you save the planet? Chop down a tree and put it in a microwave. That's not a joke. It's the proposition of at least two dozen companies developing "biochar" technology that they say will suck carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and help curb global warming. The idea is straightforward. Trees spend their lives pulling carbon dioxide out of the air. When they die, though, they release it back into the environment. To ensure the carbon contained in the leaves and branches never escapes, trees will be chopped, chipped and put into high-tech "cookers" to reduce them to charcoal, which can then be buried.

In theory the process could be repeated over and over again, fed by giant plantations of fast-growing trees, sucking millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. Chris Goodall, the Green party candidate and author of *Ten Technologies to Save the Planet*, suggested the world should set aside 200m hectares, an area equivalent to about nine UKs, for such farms. The charcoal could be put down old mine shafts for storage or mixed into soil to enrich it. The idea is catching on and has the backing of a growing roster of green heavy-hitters, including Nobel peace prize winner Al Gore. James Lovelock, the influential environmentalist, supports its use if limited to plant matter that would otherwise be left to decay. Several firms will test prototypes this year.

Johannes Lehmann, professor of soil fertility management at Cornell University, New York, said it had the potential to remove "a few billion tonnes" of carbon from the atmosphere a year. "This could be one of the top 10 solutions to climate change. It would be irresponsible to not probe its possibilities," he said. The world generates about 29 billion tonnes of carbon each year. Some argue the excitement has raced ahead of the science. Almuth Ernsting, who runs the Biofuelwatch blog, said: "There have been no large-scale trials and certainly nothing to prove this actually works." Some studies suggest that adding it to soils may activate microbes that break down existing charcoal in the soil, leading to a net increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide.

Doug Parr, chief scientist at Greenpeace, argues that it remains unclear how long CO₂ stays contained in biochar and raised concerns over land-use change. He said: "We need to see further research that's disconnected from the commercial interests gathering round this. What we don't want is clear-cutting of old-growth forest." Nobody has proposed that. Most speak about using land that is unused or degraded, or feeding in other waste streams such as sewage or agricultural leftovers.





Zap the trees to reduce carbon contd...

The basic science that holds up charcoal as a stable and reliable carbon sink is, Lehmann said, “absolutely proven”. He added: “Charcoal has been used and produced for millennia by humanity. We need to get away from ideology and let science speak.” The difference today is how it can be made. The companies developing the technology all rely on the same basic approach. Called pyrolysis, it heats organic material to between 300C and 600C in an oxygen-starved environment. The result is gas, which can be used in a turbine to generate electricity. Depending on the process, the other products are liquids that can be used for fuels or solids like charcoal.

Carbonscape, a New Zealand group, has come up with a variation that uses a patented microwave-assisted pyrolysis process that can zap organic material such as trees and weeds in a matter of minutes. Chris Turney, the geology professor at Exeter University who invented the system, envisions machines being rolled out all over the world, especially in the tropics, where deforestation is rife. They are made to fit into a standard shipping container and even if powered by coal-fired electricity, Turney said, the machine removes twice the carbon released by the process. “The whole reason this works is that we could reforest land, harvest it and then reforest again,” he added.

The hard fact remains, however, that there is no intrinsic value in incinerating trees and shrubs. None of these biochar pioneers will get far without public money. The most logical way would be to make biochar eligible for the credits that are traded in Europe’s £70 billion carbon trading system. Politicians at the climate summit in Copenhagen proposed its inclusion, as have American legislators.

Taken from: The Sunday Times, January 24th 2010

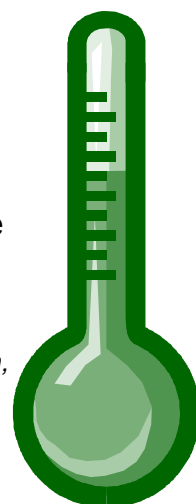


Donations from 15/133 parishes!

Please speak to your local parish council to see if they would be willing to make a donation to CLT. See below for a list of those who have already donated.

Little Leigh, Odd Rose, Friends of Willaston, Great Broughton, Guilden Sutton, Frodsham, Willaston, Helsby, Saughall and Shotwick, Northwich Barrow, Ollerton with Marthall, Adlington, CHALC, Henbury.

BIG THANKS to all those who have donated...we couldn't do what we do without your support!





Porton Down scientists in mission to protect juniper

Government scientists involved in military research in Wiltshire have a new mission - to protect juniper. The Porton Down range, where defence experiments are carried out, is home to about 20% of the UK's juniper bushes.

No new plants have taken root for the past 50 years because rabbits eat the seedlings. Now the scientists are working with the Salisbury-based charity, Plantlife, to save juniper from extinction.

Natural lifespan

The project is being led by Carl Mayers, a scientist at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory [DSTL], whose work involves developing body and vehicle armour for the army. Mr Mayers said: "At Porton Down the juniper plays an important part in the ecology of our site. "Unusually we have two age groups of juniper here - one 100 years old that was well established before the growth in the rabbit population, and the second, 50 years old, that was able to get a footing during the myxomatosis outbreak of the 1950s and 60s.

Collecting berries

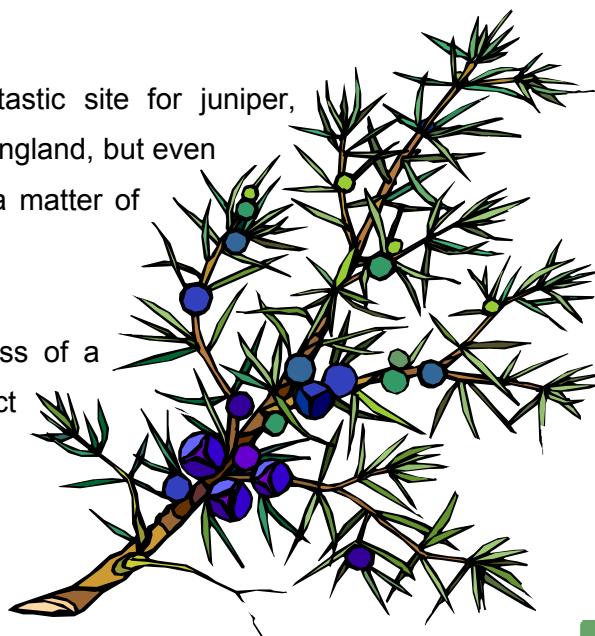
"At all other times the rabbits, who particularly enjoy juniper, have kept any new plants at bay. "Junipers have a natural lifespan of around 100 years so DSTL is now working with Plantlife because, if we don't do something now, the juniper on our range will be extinct in 50 years."

The project includes collecting berries, checking seed fertility, processing seeds and storing for planting later in the year. Some of the 32,000 seeds which have been collected by crushing berries will be sown on the range and protected during germination using cages to keep rabbits and voles away. The project has more than 70 volunteer supporters including staff at DSTL and people living nearby.

Tim Wilkins of Plantlife said: "Porton Down is a fantastic site for juniper, supporting the largest population of bushes in southern England, but even here there is an acute lack of seedlings and it is only a matter of time before bushes die through old age.

"The loss of juniper would represent more than the loss of a single species. It supports more than 40 species of insect and fungus that cannot survive without it."

15th January 2010, By Paul Deal, BBC News



TREE O CLOCK



As part of National Tree Week 2009, BBC's Breathing Places organised 'Tree O'Clock', an attempt to smash the world record for the most trees planted by hand by any number of people within a single hour. Every tree planted between 11am and 12 noon on Saturday 5 December 2009 counted towards the attempt at breaking this record.

Events took place all over the country, including right here in Cheshire. Cheshire Landscape Trust donated trees to the Tree O'Clock event in Westminster Park in Chester, which was attended by Tree Wardens, Friends of Westminster Park, local residents....and me!



The world record stood at 653,143 and, unfortunately still stands at 653,143 as the record wasn't broken this year. However, a new world record was set for the most trees planted by 100 people in a single hour. This honour goes to Gransha Park alongside the River Foyle in Northern Ireland where 26,422 native trees were planted including 4,000 oaks.

Katie Lowe, Cheshire Landscape Trust

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