

Footnotes to a Notice Board on Church Path

'St John's should have a notice board outside it telling the story of conservation there', Barbara Webb told me that again, the last time we met. Botanical evidence is appearing, about the sign that gave Malden its name. If she herself had seen the elm tree growing out of the top of Lady Walter's monument that we saw this year, she might have had the fun of weaving it into the wonderful talks she gave on her Heritage Week walks. How valuable her views would be about how and whether the monument can be conserved - and the elm tree destroying it.

The elm theory was given a test-drive on the Heritage Days. Valuable advice came in from Kingston ecologist, Alison Fure. Elm is now being grown from seed. She reminded me, Barbara fashion, what matters is to cut and clear the grass properly, rather than "micro-manage" projects (like this?). But so much interest has come from this Elm project, this will do as a sequel to last year's notice board featuring the Spring underneath St John's Church. This article is the footnote to the noticeboard in Church Path. By using the QR code there, any passer-by will be able to read it.

Engravings of the church, starting in 1799 show no sign of any tree near the church's east window at all, in spite of much new evidence of elm roots still underneath the grass there. The prints probably just tell us that elm roots can be kept out of sight by very conscientious mowing.

In Heritage week, this lithograph of St John's was re-discovered. It is thought to have been drawn about 1825. It shows a tree stump outside a very rough wooden church fence. The stump is about 70 cm wide, judging by the height of the man. He is posed, displaying a bill-hook, the tool used to cut brushwood and narrow branches. Several branches growing out of the stump have been chopped short. On the grass verge outside the fence, debris has been piled ready for carting away. The artist's view-point places the stump immediately in front the east window. The fence may even be built into the stump. If so, the man has completed the work on his side, leaving the work outside until later - deliberately also leaving one 5 metre high branch growing out of the top of the stump (showing how much he's removed?) This will no longer be blocking the view of the church. The stump will be neatly pollarded again.



C Burton, del^t

Printed by P. Simonau.

MALDEN CHURCH, N.Z.

Workmen today take photos on their phones to show they turned up at a job, and completed it. Mr. C. T. Cracklow a Surveyor (named at the bottom of the print) commissioned this, latest copying method, lithography, to keep an eye on his workforce. He has got C. Burton to sketch a 'snapshot'. P. Simonau then printed enough lithographic copies to satisfy the P.C.C., the Vicar, Merton College, whoever is paying to have the stump sorted out. Surplus prints from this surveillance exercise amused print collectors, who bought them as a quaint village scene, produced with the latest technology from Paris. (Amazingly, copies can still be bought on the net today!)

Robin Gill kindly sent us this postcard issued in the 1900s showing “The Oldest tree in Old Malden”. It is in a large, level, well-cut field. Five clearly distinguishable English elms mark the boundary at the horizon on the right. So it is likely to be an elm. Can you tell us where this field is, or was? Are the elms now at the end of someone’s garden?



The largest known English Elm in Europe was in the news recently, being removed on a lorry, because it had Dutch elm disease. Also hollow, also with a stump two metres in diameter, it dated back 400 years and confirms that before the disease, elms might stand for that length of time but would then tend to collapse. It was in Preston Park, Brighton.

A good tree would probably decline in vigour in 300 years. It would be replaced by a sucker as leaf cover allowed more sunlight in. Four generations of 300 hundred years could take the generations back 1200 years to the Saxon era. Each ‘new tree’ would begin a few metres away from the site of the first tree. Are they one, single, Saxon, tree?

Chris Beales