The Natural History of Bromsgrove Cemetery

In addition to its man-made monuments, Bromsgrove Cemetery is a haven for small mammals and insects and also boasts one of the finest tree collections in Worcestershire. Some native species, such as the mighty English Oak, ancient Yew and sumptuous Lime, were probably already here before the Cemetery was created. The establishment of the Cemetery in the 1830s saw the addition of more yews, this time in stately avenues, and a number of more exotic species from far off shores. Towering pines from Austria, Macedonia & Corsica now rub shoulders with great cedars from Africa and Lebanon, sinuous Sweet Chestnuts from Spain, Southern Beech from New Zealand, a fantastic Monkey Puzzle Tree from South America and majestic Giant Redwoods from California. These trees are coming into their prime after 150 years, but most of them are still some way from their full size and majesty.

The John Adams Memorial, which is in the area marked G on the Cemetery plan inside, was created in 1858. In 2007, some of the stone was showing the effect of decayed and rusted metal inserts, so the High-Victorian style memorial was taken down on safety grounds. Avoncroft Museum of Buildings, The Bromsgrove Society, The Housman Society, The Victorian Society, and the District Council, began working together in 2011 to restore the Memorial, when the Heritage Lottery Fund gave a grant towards the costs of restoration and the publication of a heritage trail as well as this tree trail. Generous donations to the funds were also made by the Len Giles Trust, the Edward & Dorothy Cadbury Trust, Bromsgrove Court Leet, The Bromsgrove Society, The Housman Society, and many individuals. The Memorial was re-erected in its original position in May 2013.

www.bsoc.co.uk/cemetery-walk.html

The Giant Redwood tree in Bromsgrove Cemetery

The Giant Redwood (Sequoiadendron giganteum), which you can see in the centre of the circular area marked P on the Cemetery plan, occurs naturally on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada mountains of California. It grows to an average height of 50 to 85 metres (160 to 279 feet), with a trunk diameter of 6 to 8 metres (20 to 26 feet).

The first seeds of the Giant Redwood arrived in England in 1853, just five years before Bromsgrove Cemetery opened.
1. Small-leaved Lime - Tilia cordata
Planted in streets since ancient times for shade and shelter and as a holy tree to protect against ‘evil spirits’. Its soft, pale wood is fine grained and resistant to splitting, making it ideal for turning and carving. Native to UK

2. Cedar of Lebanon – Cedrus libani
A tree of the ancient world, often used for building temples and palaces. Oils distilled from its wood were used for embalming in ancient Egypt. Examples first appeared in Britain in 1683, many were planted in the great parks and gardens in England in the 1700s, where their slow growth rate and longevity mean they are still growing well today. Native to Lebanon

3. Common Yew – Taxus baccata
Growing extremely slowly gives Yew wood great strength, whilst toxins in the wood make it extremely resistant to decay, allowing some trees to reach more than 3,000 years of age. Yew is reputed to protect against ‘evil spirits’ and so is often found ‘standing guard’ at the entrance to churches and graveyards. More recently, extracts from Yew bark are used in the treatment of cancer. Native to UK

4. Monkey Puzzle – Araucaria araucana
A tree that would puzzle a monkey! Also known as the Chilean Pine, this tree was widely planted in Britain in the past for ornament, but is now becoming rare in its native Chile and western Argentina owing to logging and forest fires. Native to Chile

5. Giant Redwood – Sequoiadendron giganteum
A mighty tree of many names! Known as the Sierra Redwood and Giant Sequoia but in Britain was named the Wellingtonia in 1853 in homage to the Duke of Wellington who died the previous year.
Examples of Giant Redwood in California hold the record as the largest living things on earth - except for the underground Honey Fungus that is about two miles long. Native to California, USA

6. Corsican Pine – Pinus nigra var. maritima
A fast growing, straight-trunked form of Black Pine, introduced to Britain from the Mediterranean in the late 1700s. Although not naturally durable, it absorbs preservatives well and so is commonly used for large straight timbers such as railway sleepers, pit props and telegraph poles. Native to Corsica

7. Sweet Chestnut – Castanea sativa
Sweet or Spanish Chestnut was introduced by the Romans for its tasty and nutritious nuts but in Britain is now most commonly used for its timber for joinery and cabinet making. Although strong and durable, it splits lengthwise easily when green, making it ideal for fence posts and rolls of wire-bound ‘chestnut pale’ fencing. Native to Mediterranean region

8. English Oak – Quercus robur
Held sacred by druids, English Oaks have always been important trees. Historically, the strong and durable timber was ideal for the frames of buildings and ships. Its acorns were once an important food for pigs and tannin in its bark is still used for tanning leather. Native to UK

9. Atlas Cedar – Cedrus atlantica
A hardy tree that can grow to a height of more than 30 metres, its ascending branches distinguish it from other cedars and unlike other conifers it flowers in the autumn. Native to Atlas Mountains, northern Africa

10. Silver Birch – Betula pendula
Despite its graceful appearance, it’s one of Britain’s hardiest trees, often the first to colonise open ground. Considered a ‘holy’ tree by druids, its twigs were used to drive out ‘evil spirits’. Its smooth timber is ideal for a variety of uses, from tool handles to plywood. Native to UK