

Winter Gales – We had some very gusty weather last month which sadly took its toll on some of our trees. The most dramatic of these was a great Oak on Farleigh Border brought down by Storm Eleanor on 3rd January. The tree was entirely blocking the path and was much too big for the FSW to deal with so we reported it to the Council who had the path unblocked the very next day. Thanks to John Zareba for the photographs showing before and after the work. The cut tree is still blocking vehicular access and will be cleared by the Council asap.



There have also been several falls in other parts of the wood but all have been smaller and most within the capabilities of FSW to clear. Many thanks to our Workdays team ☺

Measurements of the girth of the trunk of the fallen Oak suggest that the tree was around 120 years old. A rough rule of thumb when estimating the age of an Oak is that each inch represents a year of growth. At its widest point this tree measured 120 inches. Another of similar size is the Oak behind the seat dedicated to Sarah Purvis in the Great Field. The Oaks in the nearby Centenary Plantation are of known age as they were planted in 1983. Four of the trees along the edge of the field can be seen to be larger than the others. These were planted as heavy standards and were about 10 years old at the time of planting. The others were 2 or 3 year-old whips that took quite some time to become established. Measurement of these trees does conform to the one year per inch rule.

Installation of New Seats – Walkers will have noticed that several new seats are being installed in the field areas. Two of these have been donated by families in memory of loved ones, one is from the National Trust and two have been paid for by FSW. More on this next month.

Signs of Spring – Despite the weather, spring is coming. Bluebell leaves were widespread by mid-January – this must be their earliest ever sighting. Cow Parsley, Clover and many other leaves are showing – and the first flower of the year, a small white Bittercress has also been spotted.



To commemorate the fallen Oak, page 2 this month is all about the Oaks in Selsdon Wood.

The Oaks of Selsdon Wood

English Oak (also known as the Pedunculate Oak) is the principal species in Selsdon Wood and is widely dispersed. It is a long-lived tree and some of the specimens in the wood may be considerably more than 100 years old, including this one in the Great Field behind the Sarah Purvis seat. All species of Oak may be distinguished in winter by the typical ridged grey bark, frequently green with lichen, and the typical rounded profile shown clearly in this photograph.

There are two other species of Oak in Selsdon Wood, Sessile Oak and Turkey Oak. The Sessile Oak is differentiated from the Pedunculate Oak by stalks. The Sessile has leaves on long stalks and acorns with no stalks: the Pedunculate is the other way round - the acorns have stalks but the leaves do not. At this time of year neither leaves nor acorns are showing so making that distinction is a task for summer or autumn. The acorns of the Turkey Oak are also very different as they have hairy cups but all have now gone from the trees.



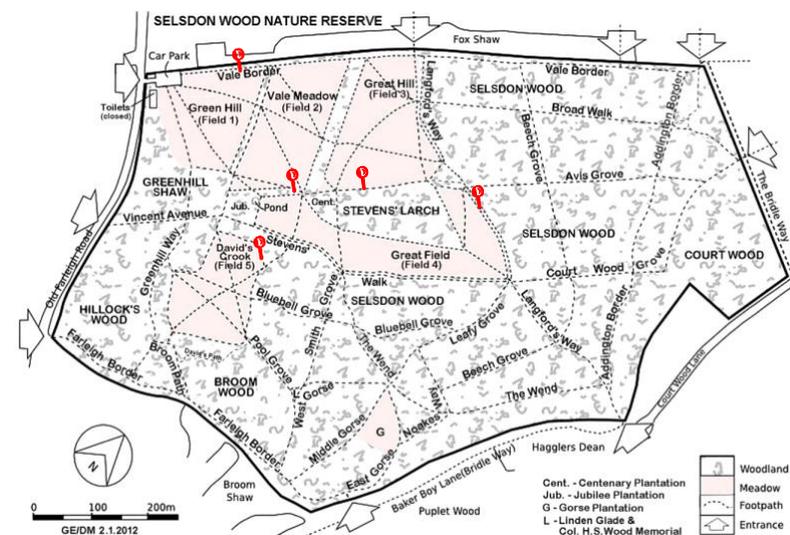
However, the Turkey Oak has two differentiating features that **can** be seen in the winter, the most dramatic of which is the hairy buds. The buds of the Turkey Oak have long twisting whiskers whereas English Oak buds are smooth and brown (see pictures above left).

There are no leaves on the trees at present but there is still much leaf litter on the ground and although they are not green like those in the photograph they still show the characteristic shapes with those of the Turkey Oak being slender and much more jagged (see pictures above right). The map shows the location of 5 of the Turkey Oaks. There is an English Oak almost opposite the Turkey in Great Field (the tree with the rope swing attached) which is good for comparison.

Because Selsdon Wood is predominantly Oak woodland, Oaks have been planted commemoratively. In 1983 Councillor Dudley Mead helped to raise a fund to plant 100 Oaks to celebrate the Centenary of Croydon Council. This was paid for by public subscription by Selsdon residents and in Selsdon library there is a book containing the names of all who subscribed. Over the years, the FSW have worked to clear the seedlings, saplings and plant growth that threaten to overwhelm the original Oaks but Ash seedlings remain troublesome. Our thanks to Peter Underwood, Senior Project Officer for The Conservation Volunteers, who, with a colleague, spent a wet miserable day last February tackling these with a brush-cutter.



In 1986 three oaks were planted by the Mayor of Croydon in the Southern corner of David's Crook to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Official Opening of Selsdon Wood. A plaque on one of them marks the event. There is also an older oak here with wide spreading branches.



We hope you enjoy Oak hunting next time you visit the wood. (If you have not already done so don't forget to renew your membership of FSW for 2018.)