

Whitewebbs Park Enfield 1937 report

I visited this park on April 15th and in company with Mr Handy and spent several hours inspecting it. I have to offer the following observations

With regard to the report on the number of fungi discovered in the woods by Mr. L.G. Johnson I would say it is unwise to be unduly disturbed about it. Mycologists are generally alarmists. In every old wood in the country probably an approximate number of species of fungi exist and always have existed but nearly all of them live on wood already dead. The only practicable measures that can be taken are to remove diseased trees; also diseased limbs as far as possible, covering the wounds made by their removals with a thick coat of coal tar.

Felled trees

I was shown a considerable number of felled trees and was told that some local complaints had been made about this felling. But I did not see a single instance in which the removal was not fully justified. Mr Handy seems to be using excellent judgement in this matter and should not be hampered by local sentimentalists who are quite ignorant of the issues involved. There are many dead trees, the majority of small size which should be removed as soon as circumstances permit.

I consider the greater part of Whitewebbs Park to be very beautiful woodland. The inferior parts, judging by the number of tree stumps, appears to have been deprived of their best trees several years ago and this has left them thinly furnished and unattractive. Replanting and time will put this right in some places, on the other hand, the trees through lack of proper attention to thinning are so thick on the ground that they are spoiling each other

In places brambles are super abundant and prevent visitors from enjoying the full intimacies of the more beautiful sections. Possibly the cutting out of more pathways could improve matters in this respect

Thinning

There is a good deal of this that requires to be done. In many places masses of birch seedlings have sprung up which are so crowded that they can never become more than spindly poles. they should be drastically reduced so that those that are left 6 to 10 feet apart. Then in places the ground is occupied by tall slender hornbeams far too close together ever to make good trees. Their thinning has been much too long neglected but as I pointed out to Mr handy, the present thinning must not be overdone for fear of letting in the wind too much. A commencement may be made by removal of the weaklings of which there is a large number. West of the main drive there is a plantation very badly in need of thinning it consists of ash, birch, hornbeam etc. growing so close together that they can never make much more than scaffold pole calibre and at present have neither beauty nor prospective timber value. this thing should not be deferred because the trees get more spindly in proportion to their height every year and thinning becomes at last dangerous on account of letting in wind. At the North End of the lake there is a plantation of larch which also requires attending to in this respect. There are conspicuous instances, but all through the woods there are ill shaped trees crowding on and spoiling the shape of better ones. I feel sure that Mr Handy, if given a free hand and necessary help, may be left to deal with this important matter.



Stag head oaks

One of the unhappy features of the Whitewebbs woodland is the failing condition of many oaks which is shown by dead branches at the summit of the trees. It is due of course to the lack of nutrition from the roots and attributable largely to the droughty 1933 to 1935 summer. Some are past redemption but many have a furnishing of twiggy growth below, back to which the branches can be cut. Such a pruning reduces the drain on the root system and tends to equalise supply and demand of SAP oaks so treated frequently recover. The forester has already pruned several and may be encouraged to continue.

Replanting

This is a very important matter and the continuance of the wood in its present beautiful condition depends on it. There are considerable sections which are now and likely to remain for many years sufficiently furnished with trees in a general sense. Of course gaps made by windfalls or natural decay will from time to time occur which will need, as a matter of course, to be made good.

But then there are other sections which through filling and other causes have become so thinly furnished that replanting is essential for the maintenance of the woods in the future I suggest the following oak, hornbeam, beach, lime, ash, Norway Maple, Turkey oak, horse chestnut and Spanish chestnut. Sycamores and poplars of the "Black Italian" or "Canadian" types should be avoided. In damp fairly open spaces the cricket bat willow and the weeping salix vitellina are recommended.

These all conform more or less with the ordinary English woodland and I should be averse from introducing very distinct exotic into the middle of these woods. But near the entrance land near the public road I think flowering and autumnal colouring trees might appropriately be introduced. This is one place where a group of eight or 10 double flowering gear (a type of british tree) would give a charming display seen near the highway. And autumn tinted trees like Schwedller Maple, scarlet oak, prunus sanjentii, liquidambar styraciflua, Amelanchier Canadensis and Tulip trees may also be used.

Near the entrance and bordering the broad gravel path several garden types of trees and shrubs such as rhododendrons have rightly been planted I suggest they may be augmented by Japanese cherries, flowering crabs like Pyrus purpurea, Pyrus Lemoine lemon see and Pyrus Theifera; Paul's double scarlet hawthorn and double white hawthorn, prunus Blireana map etc.

Having written this much on replanting I may observe that there are places in these Woodlands where empty spaces occur and it would be undesirable to fill up because they are surrounded by

fine trees in full vigour whose further development should not be interfered with by introducing rivals this is a matter to be settled on the spot and may safely be left to the management of Mr Handy of whose capabilities I formed a high opinion.

W J Bean

April the 19th 1937

Biographical note

William Jackson Bean was born in Yorkshire in 1863, the son of a tree nurseryman. His first appointment was to the garden staff at Belvoir Castle, Leicester. In 1883 he was accepted at Kew as a student-gardener, and there he remained. Eventually he became Curator of the Royal Botanic Gardens and in all he served for forty-six years.

During this long period he acquired an exceptionally wide experience of living plants, travelling extensively to increase his knowledge. For some forty years he made a particular study of woody plants in cultivation and became the foremost specialist whose advice was constantly sought. He was caught up in the prolific tide of plant exploration in the first half of this century, when new material of unusual horticultural merit poured into the country, particularly from S.W. China, due to the unrelenting labours of collectors such as Farrer, Forrest, Rock, Kingdon Ward and Wilson. Bean was admirably equipped to keep abreast of these introductions and he was in close touch with the collectors, the botanists and the growers to ensure that his records were as complete as possible.

His great work, *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles*, was a labour of love; having worked in the Gardens all day he would settle to his writing in the evenings, going out from time to time to check whether his descriptions were accurate. The First Edition was published in the autumn of 1914 in two volumes. It was an event of outstanding importance in the chronology of horticultural literature. The volumes in their original form were the product of constant observation, massive correspondence and immense industry and bore a more personal imprint than is usual in a comprehensive manual of reference. In addition to the botanical descriptions and other basic information of the kind to be expected in works of this nature, there are the personal assessments of the plants, the references to particular specimens, the reminiscing and all the other enlivening touches that give to the book its highly individual character. It soon acquired an enduring popularity and five further editions were issued in Bean's lifetime; the seventh edition, in three volumes, appeared in 1950, three years after Bean's death, but nearly all the preparatory work for the revision had been done by him.