

May, 2021: Annual Report by Great Bricett Tree Warden David Payne

This is my last report as your local tree warden, having taken on the role twelve years ago, the following year after I was invited to join depleted Great Bricett Parish Council. A lifelong passion for trees was nurtured in boyhood when my playmates and I regularly met at our “secret” camp beneath a holly tree in a blackberry spinney close by my grandmother’s home on the Hertfordshire-Middlesex border on the rural rim of London, unconcerned that we were trespassing on land then owned by the Parker Bowles family at Forty Hall, Enfield, whom Prince Charles’ wife, Camilla, married into with her first husband.

Suffolk pioneered the tree warden scheme to encourage awareness of the importance of trees in our daily lives. So I soon became friendly with local landowner Oliver Cooper, who with his late lord-of-the-manor father, Rupert Cooper, owned 500 acres of farmland around our village -- but now owned by retired insurance underwriter Nicholas Thomson, who lives in nearby Lavenham. Mr Thomson has also purchased Tollemache Hall, which marks the historically important site of the “lost” village of Little Bricett.

It soon dawned on me that being tree warden in Great Bricett was severely restricted as we have no public land on which to plant trees, except our tiny village green, where there is already a magnificent Norway maple tree adjacent to the graveyard, itself dominated by a towering splendid Deodar Himalayan cedar.

I have, however, planted three trees for posterity in the north of our village, two flourishing self-seeded birch trees in the landscaped grounds of Releet Close (where I live) and a magnificent sycamore tree I surreptitiously planted on a neglected piece of Ministry of Defence grassland close by the main entrance to Wattisham airfield as a reminder that nature first invented the Apache helicopter in the form of its twirling winged seed pods. Last year a firm that carefully monitors all MoD trees gave my vigorous sycamore tree an official metal number attached to its thickening trunk, bringing me great comfort knowing that it will be living long after “I’m gorn” as born-and-bred Suffolk folk say.

Our village is lucky to have ex-parish Councillor Charles Horne raising a mini arboretum next to his thatched home at picturesque Riverside Cottage, including a self-seeded horse chestnut tree, complete with a circular seat, which Charles organised after my idea to plant a fragrant lime tree on Colin Carter’s privately-owned sward at the village’s B1078 T-junction entrance failed to win support from my parish council colleagues as a suitable site for planting a tree marking the Queen’s diamond jubilee.

As I relinquish my beloved tree warden post I am delighted that our chair, Sue Burnett, has struck up a friendship with our village’s new landowner Mr Thomson, who has agreed to allow the parish council to transform a field he now owns south of Bricett Hall into a wildflower meadow and woodland, for a peppercorn rent, already accessible via public footpaths that run across the meadow.

The day-to-day running of Mr Thomson’s Great Bricett farmland is now in the capable hands of Barking Tye farmer Henry Ruffle, who tells me that thousands of woodland trees and several kilometers of hedgerows have been planted by his nature-lover employer.

Despite acrimony triggered by the erection of a barn requiring retrospective planning consent behind Riverside Cottage, the eventual outcome of the new residential Woodland Valley estate is the creation of much-needed energy-efficient new homes carefully planned with deciduous hedgerows and country-cottage style front porches that blend well with the pre-existing properties, supporting my anti-nimby stance predicated on the fact that, but for the redevelopment of Releet Farm, I would have settled elsewhere. The village sorely needs new blood, which is why I’m retiring as I approach my 80th birthday.