

April 2020. The tree stands at the top of a hill near the south-west corner of South Cubbington Wood and looking over the Leam valley. This is directly on the line of the proposed HS2 railway, which will also destroy 13% of the neighbouring wood.

In December 2010 I mentioned the tree to Steven Falk, the Senior Curator of Natural History at Warwickshire Museum, who assessed it and reported to Owen Johnson of the Tree Register. It was at that time (January 2011) the largest (and therefore probably oldest) wild pear tree in Britain, measuring 3.78 m at 1 m high, rather than the usual 1m50, as the trunk then splits into 3. The trunk is partially hollow. Steven thought the tree could be 200-250 years old, though the HS2 survey estimated 170 + or – 20 years.

A larger pear tree was later reported in Gloucestershire. Both trees feature on the National Champion Tree Register here

<https://www.treeregister.org/pdf/Champion%20Trees%20native%20species%20May%202011.pdf>

The tree is officially classified as a **pyrus communis var. communis**. The crown has a characteristic mop-head shape and the new basal growth has spines. The tree flowers any time from the first to the last week in April, depending on weather conditions. The fruit resembles a small comice pear and does not fully ripen and become edible until the end of October. It makes excellent jelly, but the fruit is better eaten cooked than raw. 2013 was an especially good year for fruit.

The significance of the tree and its impending fate were reported nationally in 2011 and it became a symbol of the fight to prevent extensive environmental damage by HS2. It figured in petitions to the Parliamentary Select Committee on HS2 and was viewed by a number of members of the Committee when they visited the area. Petitions were presented asking for a tunnel from the viaduct over the Leam to the other side of Cubbington Wood, saving both South Cubbington Wood and the pear tree. These were denied on the grounds of cost and the need to move extra soil. HS2 Ltd's stated plan was to fell the tree and put its remains in a surviving area of Cubbington Wood as a habitat for wildlife.

In 2015 the pear tree was voted English Tree of the Year, after much canvassing by members of Cubbington Action Group against HS2 and Stop HS2. In 2016 it was entered in the European Tree of the Year competition and took 8th place.

Following this publicity, John Hayes, a Minister of State at the Dept of Transport, announced that he was ordering an arboricultural report on the tree to see whether it could be moved. The report stated that the tree is in good health, not senescent, but because of the hollow trunk it might well not survive a move. In any case, root and crown pruning would need to begin at least 5 years before an attempt to move it, and it was presumed at the time that construction of HS2 would start earlier than 2020.

In 2015, following the Tree of the Year publicity, Cubbington Action Group was contacted by Paul Labous, a horticultural lecturer at Shuttleworth College in Bedfordshire. Paul had successfully grafted another old variety of pear and offered to attempt the same with the Cubbington Pear. After 3 multiple attempts, a single graft was obtained. Since then, propagation has continued, mostly by means of bud chipping, and in January 2019 15 maiden saplings were brought back to Cubbington to be planted locally. Both schools in the village have a sapling, one is planted in the churchyard and others have been offered to sites where they will be safe and cared for.

Cubbington Parish Council has requested the gift of some wood from the felled tree to create a memento of some kind: a local woodworker has offered to make a bench (indoor) for the parish. Horizontal slices have also been requested to enable the creation of a timeline. A positive response was eventually obtained from our HS2 Ltd Community Engagement Manager who has written an instruction for this.

Photos of the tree and its fruit.



Spring 2011



Pear blossom 23.4.16



Autumn 2013



Largest pear, Nov 2013