

The Continued Search for the Relics of the Old Whitty Pear Tree

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In the Wyre Forest Study Group Review 2017 Vol 18 you may recall reading about the two Goblets made from the remains of the original Whitty Pear Tree (*Sorbus domestica*) that grew in the Wyre Forest. These cups were part of a selection of items made from the old tree and they, because of the iconic status of the old tree in Wyre, have their own interest. Apart from these two goblets, we know about other items that were made thanks to a paper by Augusta Paton (Paton, 1967). In this are described two more cups which have yet to be traced, a bench was which presented to The Hastings Museum, Worcester Victoria Institute and two boxes which were made by local foresters. There is now no record of the bench, but one of the boxes has surfaced and this article is about that box.

Just to remind ourselves how these items came about we have to go back to what must have been the last stages of the tree. At the time the Whitty Pear was thought to have been the only one of its kind to be known other than on the continent, so had acquired quite a bit of interest and even attracted some folklore. In 1858 a large party of naturalists exploring the forest had met for lunch under the tree, at the time it was described as a withered wreck, not knowing that just four years later it would be destroyed by fire. This act of arson was carried out by a poacher who burned it to the ground in an attempt to spite the squire who had sentenced him for another crime, burned it to the ground. The miscreant got his just rewards and following further attempts at arson locally, he was sentenced to deportation to Botany Bay. After that there wasn't much left of the tree but various pieces were gathered by local naturalist George Jorden and it was out of these that the relics were made.

There was always the hope that the two boxes mentioned might be hidden away in a collection somewhere but prior to 2020 nothing had been found. Paton describes the two boxes made by the foresters, one had an inscription 'Box made by John Simmonds out of the old Witty Pear Tree, Wyre Forest'; and on the other, 'This box was made of wood out of the old Witty Pear Tree (*Pyrus sorbus*), Alton Woods, Wyre Forest by Francis Bent and given to me in June 1912. After many years of storage at Hartlebury, this second box has now been identified by Jim Parker and Mike Averill. The find is part of a collection gathered by James Frederick and Alice Parker at their Tickenhill home between 1930 and 1960 and passed to the County Museum service in the 1960's as the Tickenhill Trust. It is appropriate that Jim Parker is helping to preserve this unique collection of county life and industry as he is the grandson of James and Alice. Knowing that Jim was involved with the collection, Mike Averill had primed him to be on the

lookout for any relics from the old Whitty Pear tree. This is how the second box mentioned by Paton came to light in March 2020. (Photos), as it was being examined and conserved by Jim. The box has the patina of age and polishing but it is fair to say it is somewhat crudely made and not particularly square. However, it has a label just as Paton described and says 'This box was made out of wood from the old Witty Pear tree (*Pyrus sorbus*), Alton Woods, Wyre Forest, by Francis Bent (looks like Birt) and given to me in June 1912'. According to Paton the 'me' was John Slade Lea. John Lea was the son of the Rev. Josiah Lea (1822-1899) who was an original member of the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club. John Lea died in 1962, aged 92. Paton goes on to say that the two boxes were presented to the Folk Museum at Hartlebury Castle by his niece.

So another relic from the Old Whitty Pear tree has been tracked down and hopefully the other box will also be found. It is possible that the re-discovered box and other interesting items from the collection might be seen if they are brought out for display sometime in the future at the Worcestershire County Museum at Hartlebury.

Reference

Paton, A. (1967) True Service Trees of Worcestershire. *Proceedings of the Botanical Society of the British Isles*. 7, 9-13.



Inscription inside box made from Whitty Pear Tree

Mike Averill

Inscription reads -

'This box was made out of wood from the old Witty Pear tree (*Pyrus sorbus*), Alton Woods, Wyre Forest, by Francis Bent and given to me in June 1912'

Wyre Forest Study Group



Box made from the Whitty Pear Tree.

Mike Averill



Box made from the Whitty Pear Tree.

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