

Brewing Up A Storm



STRANGE old pagan rites and the brewing up of love potions have been revealed by a project to preserve ancient trees such as the Crouch Oak in Addlestone and the Ankerwycke Yew at Runnymede.

The woodsman busy getting us to "spare that tree" is Adam Curtis.

He said: "Surrey's trees are our living history. The stories about them reflect life in our villages of thousands of years ago."

Mr Curtis is the newly-appointed woodlands officer charged with recording and preserving our ancient trees.

One branch of his work is to make people aware of the weird history of trees such as the famous Crouch Oak in Crouch Oak lane, Addlestone. Mr Curtis said:

"This tree is about 1,000 years old. The story goes that women with loose morals would gather round it long ago. They would pull off bits of bark and make a brew to make men want to make love to them."

The stresses suffered by trees in a semi-urban area like this seem to be almost felt by the tree officer himself, worried about the future of these great remnants of the past.

"This great oak has had fires from a waste basket burnt underneath it. Then the path that runs underneath it takes away a great area for the roots to work," said Mr Curtis.

He and his colleague Helen Stanley, the woodlands heritage projects officer, are worried that Surrey's woods are being broken up and lost at "an alarming rate".

Ms Stanley said: "Once areas are lost, they cannot be recreated. Surrey's ancient woodland links us to our distant past, remnants of the great wildwood that covered the British Isles after the last ice age."

Some trees were used in ancient days by preachers who would speak to villagers about Christianity and the Bible under what became known as the Gospel Oaks of Surrey.

Another tree worth preserving is the Ankerwycke Yew on Magna Carta fields, aged 2000 years where pagan rituals still have an echo today. The project would like to hear from people with stories about specific trees or woodlands in Surrey that hold memories for them or stories they have heard.

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