

Account of Purley on Thames

Ken Mercer's Oak Tree

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Reproduced from Purley Parish News December 1985

A Venerable Oak by Ken Mercer

Buying land on which grew a 65 foot English Oak merited its conservation by a professional tree surgeon who said ' *Sir, now it will last you another 150 years*'

This stimulated pride in the historical associations of English Oaks. Charles II of course; and the wooden walls of England which fought off invading navies; beamed and framed houses, churches, cathedrals, public buildings solid furniture, pilories and gallows. All were rough shaped by the adze from the king's and other forests. The chips smoke-cured the best fish. It was a responsibility demanding an environmental preservation order.

Our reward is the wildlife which it attracts. Acrobatic squirrel who plays tag around the trunk and bury acorns, inconveniently displacing crocus bulbs in plant tubs. In grass with dexterous forefeet they bury a peeled acorn then stamp it flat in best gardening tradition ready to sprout if they later forget where they put it.

Three kinds of woodpecker, nuthatch, tree creeper, jay, magpie, crow, wood pigeon and ring dove and many small birds use the canteen we and the tree provide but will drink precariously from a lily pad, even shower in the fountain, and splash their bathwater so that it needs continuous refilling. Nesting boxes are not needed but a bat box is being considered in conformity with our reputation for arboreal hospitality.

Note:

The oak tree referred to was in a small triangle of land which was conveyed to Ken Mercer in 1985 by Sulham estate to round off their boundary. It was incorporated into the back garden of 23 Beech Road.

