



News Release

[EMBARGOED until 20th January 2010]

One oak tree tells an extraordinary story

A single oak tree was felled at the Blenheim Estate in Oxfordshire today. While not normally a newsworthy event, the story of this tree is extraordinary. The 'OneOak' tree has become one of the most studied trees in Britain and is the focus of an environmental education project run by the Sylva Foundation that is aiming to revive a wood culture in Britain.

- Timber is the United Kingdom's sixth biggest import and over a million tonnes of hardwoods alone are imported every year. The Sylva Foundation believe that much more timber could be grown locally; reducing 'wood miles' and supporting the local rural economy. However, Sylva believes that the general public often object to woodland management and to the felling of trees because Britain has lost its wood culture.
- The OneOak tree is believed to have been planted in the 1850s. It was felled on January 20th 2010 in front of 140 invited guests, many of whom were future users of the tree's wood, and 250 primary school children. VIPs included the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, owners of the Blenheim Estate, and Sir Martin and Lady Wood, trustees of the Sylva Foundation.
- During the autumn of 2009 the 160 year old tree was visited by 250 primary school children who have measured, drawn and written about it. Artists have been painting and photographing the tree through the seasons and in all weathers. Researchers have been measuring every part of the tree and calculating its carbon content, and will unravel its history by study of its growth rings.
- Every part of the OneOak tree will now be used: in buildings, to produce furniture, for everyday items such as doors and windows, heat and energy, and even to smoke food. The final products cannot be made for another two years when the largest diameter timber is fully dry and stable.
- The life story of the tree is being followed over the next three years via the project website (www.OneOak.info), in various shows and events, and a book is being prepared.
- A new generation of 'OneOak' trees will be planted in autumn 2010.

Primary school children from five Oxfordshire schools visited the tree during autumn 2009 and were forest scientists for the day. Back in school they completed arts projects, debated and voted whether the OneOak

should be felled, and even blogged about it on the project website. All 250 children were there to watch the tree felled.

The OneOak has become one of Britain's most studied trees. Scientists from the Government research agency *Forest Research* have measured every aspect of the tree. Forest-measuring company *Treemetrics* have completed a laser scan to produce a millimetre-accurate 3D tree model using equipment normally used to measure civil engineering projects and crime scenes. All this data is being used to create an accurate map of the tree so that every part of the tree will be followed as it is turned into fifty of more different products. Scientists will also be estimating the carbon content of the tree and Oxford-based carbon footprint company *Best Foot Forward* will calculate the carbon footprint of some of the products. Now that the tree has been felled, dendrologists will be working out the exact age of the tree and how it grew during its 160 year lifespan.

The tree's timber has been taken to local sawmill *Deep in Wood* where it will soon be processed into different sized lengths and stored until used. Some wood will be used when wet or 'green' to produce traditional wooden items such as tool handles and bowls by local craftspeople. One branch will be donated to a local timber framing project to extend the museum in Wallingford. Craftspeople and users who require dry timber will have to wait for the oak to season, which takes one year for every one inch of wood thickness. Many furniture designer-makers are looking forward to working with the OneOak wood, including students at Oxford & Cherwell College, as are local Oxford-based builders Symm.

Chief Executive of the **Sylva Foundation**, *Dr Gabriel Hemery*, explained that the project came about because he believes Britain has lost its wood culture: "Although wood is in most of our homes and offices, providing beauty, practicality or heat, most of us have never wondered where this wood has come from. Also, people don't realise that the woodlands we all cherish look that way because they are managed working woods." Dr Hemery added "It would be better if we substituted some of the huge quantity of timber we import each year with home-grown timber – particularly as this will also improve the condition of our woodlands for wildlife, reduce wood miles, and support our rural economy." He continued "We have to re-establish a cultural understanding of woodland management in a modern context – helping the public understand that the management of woodlands will contribute to sustainable development and 'one planet living. This is a huge task that requires new approaches – hence our OneOak project."

"Growing and using trees can help reduce our fossil-fuel use", noted *Dr James Morison*, from **Forest Research**, "but there are many important questions about the best trees to grow, how to grow them in a changing climate and how much carbon they can lock-up. Measuring a tree this old, in such detail, is a rare opportunity, and will provide a wealth of important information."

Rural Enterprise Manager of the **Blenheim Estate**, *Paul Orsi*, said "Blenheim Estate is excited to be involved with the One Oak Project. It is a great opportunity to promote the environmental benefits of sustainable woodland management. As a country we have lost touch with our woodlands and our wood-using heritage even though every day we use wood products. Growing and sourcing wood from the UK will help to reduce wood imports and our carbon footprint. We were particularly keen to get involved as one focus of the project has been to connect with local children. It has been wonderful to see them discovering the tree, watching it being felled and we look forward to replanting new trees in its place next winter."

In a speech to the 140 guests and 250 children *His Grace the Duke of Marlborough* explained that "About 160 years ago one of our foresters would have been working where we all stand now, planting this tree and

many more thousands of oak seedlings. He would have had no idea that this tree, which would have grown into a teenager in his lifetime, would become the focus for a national project about what we now term 'sustainable forestry'. But the story does not stop with the felling of the OneOak tree. Today is just another chapter in the story. We will soon be replanting this woodland with the next generation of oak trees for future generations. After all, we don't plant trees for ourselves but for posterity. I am pleased that our tree is the focus for inspiring a renewed interest in growing trees for wood, particularly as I understand that most of the wood will be used within Oxfordshire."

Mrs Carolyn Thorne, teacher of Years 3 and 4 at nearby **Bladon Church of England Primary School** said "The children and I are thoroughly enjoying this project. It is truly cross-curricular, encompassing science, maths, literacy, art, geography and history. They have also enjoyed the ICT aspect – seeing their work on the website, adding to the Blog, as well as finding out what other schools working on the project have been up to. The children have been learning how important trees are to our lives, from giving us oxygen to the various uses of their wood. It is very rewarding for the children to meet and work with different experts, and they are learning the best way – having real life, meaningful experiences". Mrs Thorne continued "Seeing the tree cut down was an event that all of us will never forget. Being able to follow the journey of the tree to the sawmill and to help design what is made from it will help them realise that trees are valuable crops as well as beautiful living things."

end of News Release

Notes for editors

Contacts

For media enquiries and to interview Sylva staff, please contact:

Gabriel Hemery, Chief Executive, Tel. 01865 408018 or 07759 141438, email info@sylva.org.uk

Press attendance of the event

Press are invited to the event on Wednesday 20th January from 1000 until 1400. The main activities are taking place between 1130 and 1230. For the programme and directions to the event please see:

<http://www.sylva.org.uk/media.php> .

Images

Press images for download (reproduction free for editorial use):

<http://www.sylva.org.uk/media.php>

All images are ©copyright Sylva Foundation.

OneOak project rationale

The UK imports over 9 million m³ of roundwood every year, and timber is the 6th largest import into the country.

Paradoxically, our woodlands have been neglected in recent decades, timber prices have been low, and our domestic woodchain has become increasingly disjointed. A lack of interest by owners has meant that woodland management has been of low priority, and in many cases strong evidence suggests that biodiversity has declined as a result.

Britain is the second-least wooded country in Europe with 12% woodland cover. For comparison, France's forested area exceeds 40%. English woodland cover is even less at 9%, whilst Oxfordshire is below average for England with only 6% woodland cover.

It is estimated that there are 63,000 woodland owners in England, who own 82% of our woodlands. We know little about these owners or their motivations. We do know that over half a million hectares (649,000ha) of woodland in England are potentially under-managed.

All those who manage or care for trees will have an unprecedented role in the 21st Century as the importance of our tree resource is fully realised. Trees provides habitat for wildlife today, and will be crucially important as biodiversity adapts to climate change in the future. Trees and woodlands also provide environmental services, such as protection from flooding, maintaining drinking water quality and soil protection. Wood is the greenest material of use to mankind, providing alternatives to fossil fuel and carbon-lean products for construction, heat and energy.

There are therefore strong arguments for improving our ability in the UK to produce wood – both to substitute for imported wood, and to substitute for other materials to reduce our carbon footprint. As an added bonus our woodlands will tend to have a higher value for biodiversity and be more robust to climate change.

The Sylva Foundation believes that one of the important steps in making our forests more sustainable is to raise the profile of forestry and increase public understanding about forest management. In other words, to revive Britain's wood culture.

More information about the Sylva Foundation and partners

The **Sylva Foundation** is a tree and forestry charity, working to revive Britain's wood culture. Sylva works in three main areas, covering science, education and forestry. It runs an independent think-tank *Forestry Horizons* (www.ForestryHorizons.eu). Sylva's *myForest* project (www.myForest.org.uk) is aimed at supporting Britain's 100,000 woodland owners and encouraging the use of locally grown wood. Sylva supports *Forest School* in Oxfordshire; introducing young children to the outdoors and, in particular, to woodlands. Further information: www.Sylva.org.uk

Blenheim Palace, Britain's Greatest Palace is situated in the heart of the Oxfordshire Cotswolds, is a masterpiece of English baroque architecture. Famed as the birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill, the Palace is home to the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, set in 2,100 acres of 'Capability' Brown parkland and Formal Gardens. Visit the magnificent State Rooms and the fascinating visitor experience 'Blenheim Palace: The Untold Story'. Enjoy the award-winning Formal Gardens and ride the train for family fun in the Pleasure Gardens including a giant Maze, Adventure Play Area and Butterfly House. For more information call 0800 849 6500 (24 hour information) or visit www.blenheimpalace.com

Forest Research is Forest Research is the research agency of the Forestry Commission, the UK government department responsible for forestry. It aims to support and enhance the role of trees, woodlands and forests in sustainable development, by providing high-quality applied research, development and knowledge transfer. It does this by working in partnership with a wide range of partners including forestry and research organisations, land owners, land managers and businesses, to inform and support delivery of the policies of the UK government. Key research themes include adapting and mitigating climate change, tree health and protection, urban regeneration and greenspace, biomass energy, timber quality, and human health and well-being. Further information: www.forestresearch.gov.uk