



According to Barrell... Heritage trees

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"Tree and landscape professionals are failing to understand and conserve the cultural capital the UK's rich heritage of old trees contains."

It seems common for professionals from most disciplines to be so focused on the intricacies of their specialism that they become oblivious to how their decisions affect ordinary people. Take our office; new in 2006, it boasted full air conditioning, but none of the windows opened. The designers were so engrossed with modern technology that they forgot people don't like sitting in sealed boxes, they like access to fresh air! Last year, we installed opening windows and switched off the air conditioning. A simple and old-fashioned solution that the designers dismissed, but one that met universal approval from our occupants.

Tree and landscape professionals are no different; an obsession with perfection of shape, colour and texture is creating academic designs that don't work on the human level. This fixation with visual order is most damaging when applied to old trees, which rarely meet those idealistic and superficial demands, frequently falling foul of this manicure mind-set.

Old trees may look unbalanced, sometimes half-dead and often worse for wear, but there is much, much more to this than appearance. No matter how poorly presented, such trees are often the only remaining living link with departed ancestors, which is of profound psychological importance to ordinary people, and yet frequently ignored by professionals engrossed in the rigor of their enterprise.

Of course, 'fell-for-safety' is the simple response, but that is not the only way. Severe crown reduction may offend the purists, but it significantly reduces risk, and controlling access through fencing is often a feasible alternative to felling. These measures buy time for cuttings to be grown as replacements. Eventually the original tree will die, but the trunk can be retained for many years as a physical link to the past. Planting a genetically identical individual adds a powerful psychological dimension that completes the cultural connection for generations to come.

The UK has a rich heritage of old trees, but that asset is rapidly depleting because of a failure to understand and conserve the cultural capital it contains. This shambles is unfolding daily, and it is tree and landscape professionals who are driving it.

