

Country Notes for November 2020

In the Meadows in Hollingbourne, sitting halfway along the hedge that separates Windmill Meadow from Hasteds Meadow, there stands an oak tree which sits proud and stands sentinel from far off, owing to its position on the ridge. There are several oaks growing from this hedge, but this is the only one which stands alone. I am no expert, but judging by its size I imagine that it is at least 150 years old.

It is difficult to say when it is at its best. I walk past it nearly every day with Bracken and I look for the first signs of leaf in spring. Oaks are by no means the first to show some green in spring, but what a magnificent day it is when this oak has a tinge of green about it. In summer it sits there in all its glory, resplendent in its dense clothing of beautiful sculpted leaves. In the autumn oaks are one of the last to produce colour and lose their leaves and how wonderful the tree looks when it does. However, for me it is at its grandest in winter when, devoid of its leaves, we can see the full architectural splendour of its shape.

As I walk past it, I often see a Spitfire flying overhead and it reminds me that perhaps people stood under its boughs watching Spitfires battle it out in the sky during the Battle of Britain. Maybe a young man sat under it, perhaps having a last picnic with his family, prior to leaving for the trenches of the First World War; and maybe as he sat out the horrors which awaited him, he thought back to the splendour and tranquillity of that tree and meadow. I wonder too what this mighty oak will witness in years to come.

The oak is apparently one of the very best trees in terms of the wildlife, both mammals, birds and insects which it supports. What a very special tree this, and others like it, is.

There is no doubt that not only is this my favourite tree in Hollingbourne, but probably in the world. It will long outlive me, and all of us, and what continuity that gives in an ever changing and uncertain world.

Andrew G Snowdon