

STREET TREES ON THE SUBURB

The early photographs of the Suburb demonstrate that while the architectural style of the houses remains constant, everything else changes with the passage of time. The maturing trees have changed more than anything else; even the cars at every kerb do not have the visual impact of the leaf canopy which has softened the hard edges of the streets and closed the long vistas of the master-plan.

In a few fortunate places it was possible for the original forest trees to be retained amongst the new development, and these combined with more recent plantings are marvellously effective.

North Square was obviously cut into the corner of Bigwood, and the mighty oaks remain on either side of the road interspersed with the consciously contrasted thorns. Ingram Avenue is another example, and the oaks here are more widely and irregularly placed, making formal street side planting virtually unnecessary, though again a pleasant contrast is achieved by the tight rows of birches near the junction with Winnington Road.

Clump planting is relatively rare in the Suburb where forest trees post dating the first hours are involved, but wonderful examples are the poplars on Willifield Green and the tulip trees at the junction of Willifield Way and Hampstead Way.



This form of planting needs a significant open space to allow the canopy and root systems to spread unchecked, without threatening anyone's light or foundations. Such space is scarce.

Streetside planting, on the other hand, is virtually general throughout the Suburb. It was carried out originally using relatively few species, probably because few were available in the quantities required, and few were thought suitable. Predominantly these were: hawthorn, birch, flowering cherry and rowans.

Hawthorn has proved particularly effective in the Suburban environment being small growing without appearing unhealthy, and relating well to the thorn trees in the surviving hedgerows from the old farmland divisions. Particularly attractive roads of hawthorns are Brim Hill, the top part of Kingsley Way and Addison Way. A very sophisticated effect is achieved when the catalpa trees enormous fresh green tones along the borders of the Henrietta Barrett School grounds, interleave with the street thorns on Northway and Middleway.

Birch trees, though more romantic and striking in appearance, rarely reach healthy maturity in the confined and starving rooting conditions of a roadside. Exceptions are Thornton Way where the rather jumbled effect of the



individual houses is saved by the strong character of the trees close planted and well grown, and part of Meadway. Maybe the most attractive use of birches is in the hedgerow planted avenues of Constable and Raeburn Closes. These are unique.

Everybody knows the cherry avenues of Heathgate and Brookland Rise. For a fortnight of each year these are breathtaking, and for one day of the year the ground beneath the trees is paved crimson. Many other Suburb streets are lined with similar cherries, but in general they are past their prime and riddled with disease which they cannot overcome as it results from thirst and starvation induced by the restriction of root growth, and age. The contrast between these cherries and those sited in private gardens is most striking.

Rowans are widely planted, but the Suburb does not now contain a single street of well grown and healthy specimens. It may be that the recent dry summers have particularly affected rowan trees; a visit to Howard Walk or, indeed, Rowan Walk clearly demonstrates the importance of renewal.

In addition to the above the Suburb contains more isolated but exceptionally effective avenues of single species planting. The most striking of these are the superb rows of chestnuts in Deans Way and Northway, and the American oaks in Erskine



Hill, the steep part, and in Brookland Hill. Both these species are dense and shady, but create an unforgettable atmosphere, a real sense of locality, very difficult to achieve by purely architectural means. The airy ailantus trees at the summit of Meadway are also characterful in this way, though somewhat prodigal of seedlings if you garden nearby.



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