

Haslemere Allotments tree assessment by Paul Richens, Blue Dome Synergies.

Ann Tierney [Haslemere Allotment Committee] and Haslemere allotment holders Angela Fenelon and Vinka Reeves invited me to estimate the age of an apple tree on their allotment. [Fig. 1] - I made a visit on Saturday 13th October 2018 where I was shown the tree by Angela Fenelon.

This tree is believed by the allotment holders to have been there since the days of the old Clitherow estate, and therefore maybe the oldest apple tree in the Borough.



Fig.1 View of tree from the south-west.

Description of the tree.

The tree is an apple although the variety is unknowable as there were no fruits available to inspect. It sits dead centre in the middle of the allotment site. The grafting point between the scion and the rootstock is out of sight, below the present soil level and could not be seen. There are three trunks that all spring from the base of the tree. They range in size as follows – 89cm, 86cm and 71cm, measured at 30cm above the soil level. The present height of the tree is 4.5m but I was told that the top branches have been pruned so that is not the true height.



Fig. 2 The 3 trunks from the north-east.

Estimating the age of this tree

Definitely this is an old tree but probably not as old as the oldest Bramley apple tree in Southwell, Nottinghamshire (209 yrs.) or the line of twenty espalier apple trees in the grounds of a ex-nunnery near Hampstead Heath (131 yrs.) These trees were aged by historical record alone.

One indication of the great age of this tree is the very low graft point. Until the East Malling Research Station started to produce standard rootstocks from around 1913 most growers used what was called 'free-stock' literally any apple or crab apple rootstock they could find in the local hedgerows to graft their scion into.

Presently the only truly accurate method of finding the age of a tree is to cut through the trunk and count the annual growth rings. There are also a couple of non-intrusive methods to calculate the age of a tree using measurements taken from around the trunk and the height of the tree. Both these methods proved unsatisfactory – the height calculation showed 18 years old and the trunk measurements yielded an age of 37 years old. Neither of these two ages seems reasonable or realistic.

We do know that the allotments were formed from the Clitherow Estate around 1910/11 and I would say that the tree was probably planted then as it sits centrally in middle of the allotment plot - it's hard to believe that the tree was there before the plots were laid out and by a lucky chance happened to be in the middle of the plot.

This would give the tree an estimated age of **108 years**, which is what I suggest. Whether it's the oldest apple tree in the Borough I could not say.

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16/10/2018