

FAMOUS TREE FELLED AT ABBOTSBURY SUBTROPICAL GARDENS

ONE of the most popular trees in the South West is being chopped down this morning (Thursday 12 January 2012).

The Caucasian Wingnut tree, located at Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens near Weymouth, is listed by the Forestry Commission as a Champion Tree of Great Britain.

The tree, whose Latin name is *Pterocarya fraxinifolia*, was planted in around 1845 and stands between 90 and 100 feet tall. It is believed this was one of the first introductions of the *Pterocarya fraxinifolia* to this country, brought to Dorset by the first Earl of Ilchester, William Fox Strangways, an international diplomat who was very passionate about plant collecting. He collected plants on his travels and almost certainly brought seeds back from the Caucasus Mountains (which give the tree its name - Caucasian Wingnut). The Earl also planted a sister tree, which stood at his family home, Melbury House near Dorchester. Just before Christmas, that tree split right down the middle, sparking fears for the safety of the tree in Abbotsbury.

Using a technique called picus sonic tomography, electronic sensors plugged into the trunk showed that the tree is rotten to the core. A 'well' has been formed at the top of the trunk, where the branches reach out, collecting water which seeps into the trunk. The tree also has its roots in a nearby stream.

M/F

It will probably take about six days for tree surgeons to take the tree down. Once the tree is felled, the timber will be stored and then treated to make firewood, as this type of wood is unsuitable for other uses, such as carving or building.

Stephen Griffith, who has been Curator of Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens for the past 22 years, said: 'We're sad to say farewell to the tree because it has been a landmark for decades and it is part of the great heritage of Abbotsbury village. We are hoping that suckers will spring up from where the tree stood. There is also another, smaller, Caucasian Wingnut tree elsewhere in the gardens, so it's not a total loss for us.'

John Houston, General Manager of Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens, said: 'It is a sad moment for us but the safety of our visitors and staff is paramount so we have no choice but to fell the tree. One silver lining to this cloud is that the tree will make way for stunning views right across to the palm trees of the Victorian Garden. It will also let in a lot more light for the flowering camellias which grow underneath the tree.'

NOTES TO EDITORS

For interview and film opportunities contact Emily Pykett or Jonathan Hudston at Watershed PR on 01308 420785 or 07966 259823, emily@watershedpr.co.uk jonathan@watershedpr.co.uk

NOTES FOR EDITORS

For more information, or to arrange interviews, please contact Emily Pykett or Jonathan Hudston at Watershed PR on 01308-420785, email emily@watershedpr.co.uk or jonathan@watershedpr.co.uk

MF

Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens were established in 1765 by Elizabeth, the first Countess of Ilchester, as a kitchen garden for her nearby castle.

They are now among the best-known and best-loved gardens in Britain, Grade 1 Listed by English Heritage and filled with rare and exotic plants from across the world.

Stephen Griffith has been the curator of Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens for the last 20 years. He has masterminded the garden's renaissance following a great storm in 1990.

It is divided into a series of zones, geographical (eg, Mediterranean, Himalayan) or time-based (eg, the new Jurassic swamp).

Facilities include The Colonial Restaurant, gift shop and plant centre where many of the flowers grown in the garden can be purchased.

Entrance is free to the restaurant, shop and plant centre.

Regular events take place at the garden; it is floodlit from dusk to 8.30pm during the second half of October.

Abbotsbury Subtropical Gardens are open every day except 21 December to 3 January inclusive.

ENDS