

DESCRIPTIONS AND SKETCHES
OF SOME
REMARKABLE OAKS,

IN THE PARK AT WELBECK,
IN THE COUNTY OF NOTTINGHAM,
A SEAT OF
HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF PORTLAND.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,
OBSERVATIONS ON THE AGE AND DURABILITY OF THAT TREE.

WITH
REMARKS ON THE ANNUAL GROWTH OF THE ACORN.

By HAYMAN ROOKE, Esq. F. S. A.

LONDON,
PRINTED BY J. NICHOLS, FOR THE AUTHOR:
AND SOLD BY B. WHITE AND SON, FLEET STREET;
AND J. ROBSON, NEW BOND STREET.

M, DCC, XC.

TO HIS GRACE THE
DUKE OF PORTLAND,

THESE SKETCHES,

TAKEN UNDER FAVOUR OF HIS REPEATED

HOSPITALITY AT WELBECK,

ARE,

WITH ALL RESPECT AND GRATITUDE,

INSCRIBED BY

HIS GRACE'S

MOST OBEDIENT,

AND MOST OBLIGED

HUMBLE SERVANT,

HAYMAN ROOKE.

DESCRIPTIONS AND SKETCHES

OF SOME

REMARKABLE OAKS,

IN THE PARK AT WELBECK.

THE venerable and majestic Oak seems to claim a superiority over all other trees. It was styled by the ancients *Jovis Arbor*; and the Celtic statue of Jupiter was a tall oak. Our ancestors, the ancient Britons, held the oak sacred; and their priests the Druids, who took their name from British *Derw*, an oak, and esteemed the mistletoe of that tree above that of all others, consecrated groves of oaks as one species of temple worthy of their religious ceremonies.

Were we, even now, to enter a grove of stately oaks, seven or eight hundred years old, whose spreading branches
form

form a solemn and gloomy umbrage, I think we could not behold them without some degree of veneration.

Hail, hallow'd oaks;

Hail, British-born, who, last of British race,
Hold your primeval rights by Nature's charter.

Mafon's Caractacus.

The oaks in Welbeck park were reckoned to be the largest in Nottinghamshire, particularly those in Cow-clofe wood; and indeed for height and straightness of growth they may exceed, I presume, most in the kingdom. They were held in such high estimation, that, about twelve years ago, sixty pounds were offered for one of them. Many of these had for some years been upon the decline; the withered branches on their tops, and the decadency of the timber, shewed that their vegetating vigour was gone; it was therefore thought necessary to cut several of them down; and this has been done with so much judgement, that the space which such large trees must necessarily have filled is hardly perceivable from the house. Many of the best are left; one remarkable for its height and straightness of trunk is represented in Plate I. This tree goes by the name of the Duke's walking-stick; its height to the top is 111 feet 6 inches; to the branches (a) 70 feet 6 inches; and

and the circumference at the bottom, taking in some projecting spurs, is 21 feet; and the circumference at one yard high is 14 feet, at two yards high 12 feet; the solid contents 440 feet; and the weight 11 tons. All these circumstances taken together, it may, I think, be doubted, whether this admirable tree can be matched by any other in the kingdom.

At the North side of the park are two noble oaks, which make a most conspicuous figure in every point of view; see Plate II. They are called The Porters, from there having been once a gate between them. The height of N° 1 is 98 feet 6 inches; circumference at the bottom 38 feet, at one yard high 27 feet, at two yards 23 feet; the solid contents 840 feet. The height of N° 2 is 88 feet; circumference at bottom 34 feet, at one yard 23 feet, and at two yards 20 feet, solid contents 744 feet. Plate III. is a view of another remarkable ancient oak near the Duchefs's flower-garden, called the Seven Sisters, from its having had seven stems or trunks issuing out of one stool in a perpendicular direction; they are now reduced to six. Its height is 88 feet 7 inches; the circumference at the bottom is 30 feet; at two yards, taking in the stems, 30 feet 4 inches. The largest stem at two yards is 12 feet 10 inches in circumference; another at the same distance

from its bottom is 11 feet 7 inches in circumference; one 9 feet 10 inches, and the smallest 5 feet 3 inches, in circumference.

Not far from the Seven Sisters is a tree more remarkable for the hollowness of its trunk and luxuriance of its foliage than for size; see Plate IV. The body of this tree is hollow from the bottom to the top, like a chimney, and is only 5 inches thick, including the bark; where that has been stripped off on the other side there are only 3 inches of wood. In this tree the game-keeper secretes himself when he shoots the deer, and there are small apertures for his gun; on the inside is cut 1711; so that this excavation must have been of the same dimensions 78 years ago as it is now, and the tree must have increased but very little in bulk since that time. For, if you allow it (which is granting too much) to have grown but one inch in thickness in 78 years, there could not have been two inches of solid wood to support the trunk (which is 14 feet high) and projecting branches when the date was cut. The circumference of this tree near the ground is 20 feet 9 inches; at one yard high 14 feet 6 inches. In the year 1711 we may then fairly suppose it could not have been even one inch less in thickness; from whence we may conclude, that a tree of that size must then have been above

two hundred years old, which brings the age of it now to near three hundred years. Setting aside its hollow trunk, it has every appearance of a young flourishing tree. On the North side, to the height of about 9 feet, the bark has been stripped off from within 5 feet of the bottom, which was, most probably, the effect of lightning. However that may be, it is certainly a remarkable instance of the strength of vegetation, in supporting so large a head on so thin, and, to appearance, almost decayed a trunk. See a drawing of the trunk at N° I.

Plate V. is a view of the famous green dale oak, thought to be above seven hundred years old; and, from its appearance, there is every reason to suppose it has attained to that age at least. The circumference of the trunk, above the arch, is 35 feet 3 inches; height of the arch 10 feet 3 inches; width, about the middle, 6 feet 3 inches; height to the top branch, 54 feet. The Countess of Oxford, grandmother of the present Duke, had several cabinets made out of the branches, and ornamented with inlaid representations of the oak, with the following inscriptions:

“ Sæpe sub hâc Dryades festas duxere choreas;

Sæpe etiam manibus nexis ex ordine trunci

Circuere modum mensuraque roboris ulnas

B

Quinque

Quinque ter implebat, nec non et cætera tento
 Silva sub hac, fylva quanto jacet herba sub omni."

Ov. MET.

"Where all the woodland-nymphs their revels play'd,
 And footed sportive rings around its shade;
 Not fifteen cubits could encompass round
 The ample trunk on consecrated ground;
 As much its height the other trees exceeds,
 As they o'ertop the grass and humbler weeds."

"Lo the oake that hath so long a norishing
 Fro the time that it ginnith first to spring,
 And hath so long a life, as we may see,
 Yet, at the last, wasted is the tree." CHAUCER.

The drawing of this tree, and of the Seven Sisters, I took in the year 1779. I must also say, that drawings of the green dale oak, in several views of it, had been made, several years before 1779, by Grim and others.

On the West side of the lake is a fine grove of large oaks, which, one with another, measure from 12 to 22 feet in circumference. One of these trees is worthy of notice, being a singular *lusus naturæ*, (see Plate VI.) which
 represents

represents an ash growing out of the bottom of a large oak, to which it adheres to the height of about 6 feet, as at (*a*); it there separates, and leaves a space of near three feet in height; here, as if unwilling to be disunited, it stretches out an arm, or little protuberance, to coalesce again with the fostering Oak. Circumference near the ground, taking in both trees, 36 feet; at one yard, 18 feet 9 inches; circumference of the oak only at two yards, 15 feet 4 inches; the ash at two yards 6 feet in circumference; height of the oak 92 feet*.

Plate VII. takes in part of this grove of oaks, with a distant view of the house and the north end of the lake, which, when carried on about a quarter of a mile, as is intended, will be near three miles in length.

The plantations on the hills at the east end of the park are upon a great scale, and truly magnificent. The ridings are of various widths, from twelve to a hundred yards, and skirted with a variety of evergreens, forming a pleasing diversity of colours. The trees are chiefly oak and chestnut, with some beach, larch, Weymouth pine, and other kinds of firs. The whole is near four hundred acres, all planted by the present Duke of Portland; and his Grace has every

* In this drawing several oaks are left out in order to take in a more extensive view of the park.

year the pleasure of seeing his noble plantation increase in growth beyond his expectation.

There is a very old oak in Clipston park, about five miles south-east of Welbeck, and in the same county, which the common people call the Parliament-oak, from an idea that a parliament was once held under it. I have not found any good authority for this fact; but it is certain that a parliament was held by Edward I. anno 1290, at Clipston palace, the ruins of which are now to be seen, not a mile and a half from the oak. However, as the tree is undoubtedly of very great antiquity, I shall here subjoin a drawing of it; see Plate VIII. The circumference at one yard is 28 feet, 6 inches.

Clipston park is the property of his Grace the Duke of Portland, and is supposed to be the oldest park in England; though Camden says that Woodstock park in Oxfordshire, now called Blenheim, is said to be the first park in England; but these are his words: "Henry the First also adjoin'd to the palace a large park inclosed with a wall of stone, which John Rous affirms to have been the first in England; though we meet with these words, *Parca sylvestris bestiarum*, more than once in Domesday Book;" so that it appears by that ancient record, that there were parks in England before Henry the First's time. "Clypestone, Clipston, or
 3 " Kynges-

“Kyngeſclypeſton, was a conſiderable manſion before the
 “Conqueſt, and belonged to Osborne and Ulfi; and, being
 “taken from them, became the property of Roger de Buſſi;
 “and after the Conqueſt it was a royal demefne; but when
 “or by whom the manſion or palace was built is un-
 “known*.”

There is, about five miles from Welbeck, on Sherwood
 foreſt, and in the Duke of Portland’s manor, a beautiful
 wood, or rather grove, conſiſting of above ten thouſand old
 oaks, with birches intermixed, from whence it is called
 Birchland; the whole occupying a ſpace of about eighteen
 hundred acres. On the north ſide of the great riding is a
 moſt curious antient oak, which, before the depredations
 made by time on its venerable trunk, might almoſt have
 vied with the celebrated Cowthorpe oak †, for ſize. See the
 north-eaſt view of this tree in Plate IX. It meaſures, near
 the ground, 34 feet 4 inches in circumference; at one
 yard, 27 feet 4 inches; at two yards, 31 feet 9 inches. The
 trunk, which is wonderfully diſtorted, plainly appears to
 have been much larger; and the parts from whence large
 pieces have fallen off are diſtinguiſhable; the inſide is

* Supplement to Groſe’s Antiquities, N^o V.

† Mentioned in Evelyn’s Silva.

decayed and hollowed out by age, which, with the assistance of the axe, might be made wide enough to admit a carriage through it. I think no one can behold this majestic ruin without pronouncing it to be of very remote antiquity; and might venture to say, that it cannot be much less than a thousand years old.

ON THE AGES OF OAKS.

IT has generally been thought, that the age of an oak seldom exceeds three hundred years; that is, allowing one hundred in growing, one hundred in its prime, and one hundred years in decaying. But this is certainly a very erroneous calculation. There are now in Welbeck park several fine oaks in full vigour, which are above five hundred years old, the time of their planting being ascertained from some old writings in the Duke of Portland's possession.

A very ingenious, anonymous, author on planting and ornamental gardening*, under the article *Quercus Robur*,

* Published by Doddsley, 1785, p. 313.

the English oak, says, "In contemplating these wonderful productions of nature, we are led to conjecture the period of their existence. Mr. Marsham, in his paper published in the first volume of the Bath Agriculture Society, has given us some very ingenious calculations on the age of trees; and concludes, that the Tortworth chestnut is not less than eleven hundred years old. If it stood in the days of king John, six centuries ago, and was then called the great chestnut (as tradition says it was), we may venture to suppose it not much less than one thousand years of age. And further, if we consider the quick growth of the chestnut, compared with that of the oak, and, at the same time, the inferior bulk of the Tortworth chestnut to the Cowthorp, the Bently, and the Boddington oaks, may we not venture to infer, that the existence of those truly venerable trees commenced some centuries prior to the era of Christianity."

Pliny tells us, that about Heraclea in Pontus there be certain altars erected to the honour of Jupiter, surnamed Stratus, over which there stand two oaks, both set by the hand of Hercules. Now, Hercules lived, according to the general opinion, 1100 years A.C.N. and Pliny died A.D. 79; consequently those oaks must have been about 1200 years old in Pliny's life-time.

It

It is said, that the trunk or bough of a tree being cut transversely, plain and smooth, sheweth several circles or rings, more or less orbicular, according to the external figure, in some parallel proportion one without the other, from the centre of the wood to the inside of the bark, dividing the whole into so many circular spaces. It is commonly, and very probably, asserted, that a tree gains a new ring every year.

In the body of a great oak in the New Forest, cut transversely, even (where many of the trees are accounted to be some hundreds of years old) three or four hundred have been distinguished*.

There are now and then opportunities of knowing the ages of oaks almost to a certainty. In cutting down some trees in Birchland (the abovementioned wood), letters have been found cut or stamped in the body of the tree, marking the king's reign, several of which I have in my possession. One piece of wood marked J. R. (James Rex) was given me by the woodman, who cut the tree down in the year 1786. He said, that the letters appeared to be a little above a foot within the tree, and about one foot from the centre; so that this oak must have been near six feet in

* Evelyn's Silva, Book III. p. 584.

circumference when the letters were cut. A tree of that size is judged to be about one hundred and twenty years growth. If we suppose the letters to be cut about the middle of James the First's reign, it is 172 years to the year 1786, which, added to 120, makes the tree 292 years old when it was cut down. The woodman likewise says, that the tree was perfectly sound, and had not arrived to its highest perfection. It was about 12 feet in circumference.

I have been told, that *J^r R.* (John Rex) have been found cut in some of the oaks; one piece, said to be marked with John Rex and a crown, I have in my possession; but it is not sufficiently made out to be inserted here as a fact, though the person from whom I had it assures me, from his having seen others more perfect, that it is marked with *Jo^b Rex*. Others have had *C. R.* and several have been marked with *W. M.* (William and Mary), with a crown.

ON THE DURABILITY OF OAK.

THE timber of the oak is certainly preferable to that of all other trees; and there are some remarkable instances of its durability. About sixty years ago, a stake of oak was taken out of the Thames near Oatlands, supposed to be one of those placed there by Cassivelaun, to oppose the passage of Cæsar's troops. A piece of this stake I have in my possession; it is of a blackish colour, and so hard, that it is very difficult to cut with a sharp saw. Cæsar's second expedition was in the 54th year before the nativity of Christ; so that it is 1843 years since these stakes were placed in the Thames. The density of this wood is evidently owing to its having been so many years inundated without the admission of air, as it has not the least appearance of a petrification; nor is the water of the Thames impregnated with strong particles.

Another instance of the durability of this wood, when kept from air, is mentioned by Mr. Battely, in his Account
of

of the Antiquities of Richborough and Reculver, where he says, "The force of the waves demolishing the cliff
 " has discovered, in particular, several cisterns. Of these
 " the size varies, though the figure of all of them is the
 " same, namely, a square; the length of each side is from
 " ten to twelve feet, the depth the same. As to the method of construction, they consist of posts driven deep
 " into the ground, and the sides are every where closed up
 " by oaken joists fixed to the posts, two inches thick; the
 " bottom is strengthened by the stiffest potter's clay, thrown
 " in and well trodden down, lest the water, oozing out,
 " should be sucked up by the sand; in short, they are not
 " unlike our tan-pits*."

" It would seem incredible, that wooden posts and
 " planks could last above 1400 years, if we were not
 " assured by the prince of architects (Vitruvius), that oak,
 " when buried under ground, will last for ever; that elder,
 " even in a marshy soil, thick set in piles beneath the
 " foundation of buildings, never decays; the truth of
 " which is confirmed by trees that have been dug up in
 " various places, and which not only the vulgar, but even
 " the learned, suppose to have been felled before the

* Antiquities of Richborough, p. 57.

“ Deluge. On handling the posts and planks at Reculver,
 “ I found some of them quite found, and almost as hard
 “ as a stone. Others were so soft and rotten as to be easily
 “ bored with the finger; which, as they were not of the
 “ same kind of wood, I suppose was owing to the differ-
 “ ence of the materials*.”

Subterraneous trees have frequently been found in this country perfectly found. Dr. Plot, in his Natural History of Oxfordshire, mentions “ divers subterraneous oaks, black
 “ as ebony, and of a mineral substance for hardness, quite
 “ through the whole substance of the timber, caused, as he
 “ supposes and learnedly evinces, by vitriolic humour of
 “ the earth, of affinity to the nature of the ink-galls which
 “ that kind of tree produces. Of these, he speaks of some
 “ found sunk under the ground in an upright and growing
 “ posture, to the perpendicular depth of sixty feet; of
 “ which one was three feet diameter, of a hardness emu-
 “ lating the politest ebony; but these trees had none of
 “ them their roots, but were found plainly to have been
 “ cut off by the kerf †.”

* Antiquities of Richborough, p. 59.

† Evelyn's Silva, Book II. p. 287.

Trees that have been equally exposed to air and submersion become flexible, and are easily perforated with a stick. There are now to be seen in the river Severn, at low water, a number of oak trees, all lying with their roots to the north-east, in the state above-mentioned. Traditional accounts say, that, about two hundred years ago, this was a large wood called Count-wood; and that the Severn then was not one fourth of its present breadth, so that the people at harvest-work could talk to each other from the opposite shores. The soil on which these trees grew is supposed to have been washed away by the encroachment of the river.

It may not be amiss to mention here an instance of oak being preserved by air, when secured from moisture. Among the curiosities belonging to King's College, in the University of Cambridge, is reckoned, not the least worthy of attention, the wooden roof, which supports the lead of the truly magnificent chapel. Above the stupendous stone roof is the wooden one just mentioned, made entirely of oak; which, though it has been erected above three hundred years (the chapel being founded by King Henry VI. A. D. 1444), has not a worm or insect in it, nor is it in the least decayed, and, withal, looks as fresh as it could have

have done within twenty years after its first erection. The timber is reported to have been brought from Ireland, and is a striking instance of the durability of this species of wood, when kept dry and covered from the vicissitudes of weather. A thousand years hence, if it is the fate of the wonderful building to stand so long, the roof, we may fairly conjecture, will have resisted the usual depredations of time, and still be found and perfect.

The following curious remarks on acorns were sent me by the ingenious Mr. Speechly (gardener to the Duke of Portland), whose literary and practical abilities in planting and gardening are well known*.

Remarks on the Annual Progress in Growth of variously-sized Acorns. See Plate X.

| | First Year. | Second Year. |
|------|-------------|--------------|
| N° 1 | 14 Inches | 8 Inches |
| 2 | 15 | 9 |
| 3 | 6½ | 4 |
| 4 | 13 | 9 |
| 5 | 9 | 6 |
| 6 | 16 | 9 |

* He is now publishing a Treatise on the Culture of the Vine, a curious and interesting work.

N. B. The acorns were sown in good land (in the kitchen garden), and removed at the end of the second year.

Hence it appears that the annual growth of the acorn is not in proportion to its size. The short, thick acorn, N° 6, made a greater progress in its growth than the largest acorn, N° 2.

N° 1. Green Dale Oak Acorn.

N° 2. Largest-sized Acorn; one of which exceeded in weight twenty of N° 3.

N° 3. Remarkable-formed Acorn, uncommonly small.

N° 4. Acorn from the large oak on the bank near the pleasure ground.

N° 5. Long small Acorn.

N° 6. Short thick Acorn.





Designed by W. Wood

Engraved by W. Ellis

A tree in Carolina Wood called the *Indians' Walking-stick*.

Published by S. & A. 1790.



The Seven Sisters

London, 1840



A remarkable Tree near the Seven Sisters.

Engraved Dec 15 1779



Engraved by H. Rowley.

Original by Mr. H.

The Green Gate Oak.

Printed by J. W. & Co. 1840



Engraved by J. B. White.

Printed by R. D. White.

The Oak 500 Years Old

Published Dec. 31st 1790



Engraved by R. B. Smith

Designed by W. H. Miller

View of Wellesley with part of the Lake

Wellesley, Mass.



The Parliament Oak in Clarendon Park.

Published Dec. 27, 1870.



Engraved by H. Heath.

Printed by G. & C.

An ancient Oak in Biscobland Wood.

Printed in 1771