A TREE WALK THROUGH SIDMOUTH CEMETERY

Sidmouth Cemetery was opened in 1879 after being consecrated by the Bishop of Exeter in 1878. It covers 5 acres of former ancient meadow and is in a tucked away site between Temple St. and Winslade Rd. The Cemetery has spectacular views and a calm and peaceful atmosphere.

There are many beautiful mature trees on the site, from different parts of the world, and this walk is a selection of 15 for you to discover. Many of these are marked with labels provided by Sidmouth Arboretum. The Cemetery is cared for by EDDC and a group of volunteers whose aim is to combine tidiness with biodiversity.

Start the walk by entering the Cemetery next to the Spar Shop in Temple St. There is some parking on the main drive beyond the double yellow lines

The first trees that you see are in a long border on your left. This contains mostly evergreen trees and shrubs with an especially good display of different types of HOLLIES, *Ilex aquifolium*. At the top of the border is a JAPANESE MAPLE, *Acer palmatum*, a small tree with branches spreading horizontally. Like all maples it has palmate leaves i.e.shaped like the palm of a hand with lobes or fingers. This particular cultivar is *A.palmatum* "Dissectum" which has deeply divided, very red leaves. After leaf fall, the splendid coiled branches become more noticeable.

At the top of the drive, on the right hand side of a seat, is a native SILVER BIRCH, *Betula pendula*. Normally an upright tree in the wild, this cultivar has a more horizontal shape, which along with its drooping branches, give the impression of standing in a cave.

As the drive bends to the left, there are two ball shaped YEWS, *Taxus baccata* opposite each other on either side of the road. On the right side of the road is a tree with a prominent grafting line about half a metre up its trunk. This is an AMERICAN YELLOW BUCKEYE, *Aesculus flava*. The graft on to a different rootstock to the tree has given it a waist and different bark patterns above and below the line. It is related to the Horse chestnut but is smaller and so more suited to the Cemetery situation. The upright, candelabra candle like flowers are smaller than the Horse chestnut and a delicate, attractive yellow. Fortunately, pest and diseases that attack the Horse chestnut do not affect this species.

Opposite the Buckeye on the left of the road is a large TULIP TREE, *Liriodendron tulipifera*. This is grown for its distinctive upright yellow flowers, produced in June and tulip like in appearance. They are creamy-yellow with orange in the centre. The leaves are very large with an indent in the apex of the leaf instead of a point. They turn from green to buttery yellow in the autumn.

Walk towards the Chapel and if you look left to the eastern boundary of the Cemetery near to neighbouring gardens, there is a fine example of a BEECH, *Fagus sylvatica*. It has a lot of fungi associated with it in the autumn, appearing at its base, on fallen twigs and in its leaf litter. The rich brown coloured seeds are encased in a rough, spiky capsule. When they fall they are valuable winter food for birds such as the chaffinch and for small mammals such as the wood mouse.

Now go towards the arch of the Chapel and just passed it on your left is a tall COAST REDWOOD, *Sequoia sempervirens*. Notice the deeply fissured, thick, soft and stringy bark. It prefers damp soils and grows particularly well in the South West. A fast growing tree, this specimen is only about 60 years old, planted by EDDC when they took over the Cemetery in the 1970s, and is now the tallest tree on the site.

Opposite on the other side of the road and on the left next to the Chapel is a clump of shoots which are the only remains of a once fine JUDAS TREE, *Cercis siliquastrum*. After previous damage it was given a hard prune in 2022 and is growing back well. It can be identified by its large round leaves.

Go back to the path on the Eastern boundary next to the Beech tree and you enter the "Wild Area", the oldest part of the Cemetery and managed for wildlife conservation as well as grave maintenance. Walk on the grass path until level with another beech tree on your right and if you step off the path here, there is a RED OAK, *Quercus rubra*. This has very large leaves which turn red in autumn and then are yellowish-brown when fallen.

Return to the path and continue to the SE corner. Here stands a SPANISH OAK, *Quercus x hispanica* , a fertile hybrid between the evergreen Cork oak and the deciduous Turkey oak. It is one of the original trees planted in 1879 and displays features of both parents, the semi-evergreen leaves and downward branches are taken from the Cork oak, and it has the tall shape of the Turkey oak.

Take a long walk around the edge of the Wild Area until you come to some steps and when you climb up these you will be on a terrace of SCOTS PINES, *Pinus sylvestris*. These native trees are in a line behind two memorial walls. Their reddish-brown trunks harmonise well in winter with the beech hedge in front as it is at this time of year that the beech retains its brown leaves.

Turn right at the top of the steps and make your way to the top left hand corner of the Cemetery, through an avenue of conifers with the allotments on your left and near where there is an exit into the Knapp Nature Reserve. Here, there is fastigiate ENGLISH OAK, *Quercus pendunculata "Fastigiata",* a statue shaped cultivar of the English oak. Compare the leaves of this with the Red and Spanish oaks. Although the span of the crown is narrow, the roots have the spread of a normal tree. Perhaps the contact of these roots with trees in the woodland, may have caused the tree to grow lop-sided, with fewer branches on the woodland side.

Continue along the top path and rest on a seat to enjoy the fine open views across to Salcombe Hill, as you look down on to the trees that you have recently seen. Then walk down through the slope and to your right is a hornbeam hedge, which also retains its autumn leaves through winter like beech. Also on your right is a large spreading WILD CHERRY, *Prunus avium*. In the spring it is very floriferous as it is a double flowered cultivar. Unfortunately, the flowers have no nectary and so do not attract pollinators with the consequence that the tree never produces any fruit.

To your left is a shrub border and in it partly hidden by a tall bush and a tree fern, is a WINTER`S BARK, *Drimys winterii*. It has oblong, shiny, evergreen leaves and attractive white flowers in June. It`s name comes from the use made of it by Captain Wynter as a source of Vitamin C. It was extracted from the boiled leaves amd bark, and saved the lives of himself and his crew on their voyage back to England from South America. An uncommon tree only to be found in the milder South and South West of Britain.

As you make your way back down the Cemetery slope, it is worth reflecting on the fact that this is a valuable place of calm and peace and part of a connected band of preserved places that pass across Sidmouth from the river Sid, though the Byes, up to the Knapp Nature Reserve, then though the Knowle and on to Bulverton.

CHERISHING SIDMOUTH CEMETERIES

MANAGED BUT NOT MANICURED

The information for this walk has been provided by "Cherishing Sidmouth Cemeteries" volunteers on behalf of the "Vision Group for Sidmouth"

https://cherishing-cemeteries.vgsidmouth.co.uk/