HASLEMERE'S NOTABLE TREES: TOWN WALK

Distance: 1.75 miles/2.75 kilometres
Estimated time: 2 hours, allowing time to look at the trees.

This walk will guide you to visit some of the most interesting and notable trees in and around Haslemere's town centre.

Start under the **horse chestnut** (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) outside the Georgian House Hotel in the High Street. Although common in towns and villages throughout the country, the horse chestnut is not native. This specimen was planted in 1782. In Spring, look out for its candle-like white flowers – the showiest of any tall tree – or its shiny brown conkers (seeds) in their spiky pods in the autumn.

Walk a little way north alongside the hotel and look across the High Street to see a **liquidamber or sweet gum** (*Liquidambar styricaflua*). Native of the south eastern United States, particularly swamplands, it takes its name from the amber coloured resin it produces when wounded. Cross over the road and have a closer look at the liquidamber's distinctive, almost star-shaped leaves, which turn yellow, crimson and purple in autumn.

Head a short way north up the High Street to a row of three lime trees. The outside two are common limes, also known as linden (*Tilia x europeae*). Common limes are a hybrid of the native **small leaved lime** (*Tilia cordata*) and **broad leaved lime** (*Tilia platyphyllos*). The yellow-white lime flowers are fragrant and tea made from them is said to be calming – limes were often planted around mental institutions. The one in the middle is of particular interest – it is a **Mongolian lime** (*Tilia mongolica*). Compare its flat coarse-toothed leaves with those of the common lime.

The next section takes you into the grounds of the museum, which is open Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm. Outside of these hours, skip the next three paragraphs and go straight down Well Lane to your right.

Continue up the High Street to the Haslemere Museum. Go in through the front door and straight ahead to the door leading to the garden. Turn to the right as you go out the door.

In the corner is a **maidenhair tree** (*Ginko biloba*). Dominant in the Mesozoic Era (252 to 66 million years ago) this is the most ancient species you will see on this walk. Note the unusual fan-shaped leaves with no central vein. The fruit is foul smelling when ripe, although the nut inside is edible. This tree is a male like most ginkos planted in public spaces. Next to the ginko is a pair of **monkey puzzle trees** (*Araucaria araucana*). These evolved long before apes, so would be more appropriately named 'dinosaur puzzle trees'. They are native of the mountains of Chile and Argentina. Cones develop on the tips of branches of female trees and open on the tree to release their shiny brown edible nuts. You can sometimes find the nuts beneath the tree.

Next to the monkey puzzle trees is a **coast redwood** (*Sequioa sempervirens*), native of California

and Oregon where it takes in part of its water requirements from the frequent fogs. Note the spongy red fire-proof bark and the small round cones attached to the tips of the leaf shoots. Now that the biggest Douglas firs and eucalyptus specimens have been felled, the world's tallest living trees are coast redwoods.

Follow the path round the outside of the garden. As you head down the slope on the boardwalk you will see a tree with large trunk with reddish bark on your right. This tall tree is **swamp cypress** (*Taxodium distichum*). It is a native of the swamps of the south eastern United States where it pushes up 'knees' – snorkel-like extensions of its roots to obtain oxygen. If you look carefully under the tree you can see some of small knees protruding through the ground. They grow vewry much bigger in swamps. The tree is deciduous, losing its soft, pale green foliage in the winter – one of the few conifers that does so.

Exit from the museum and head back down the High Street. Just before the lime trees, turn left down Well Lane to the town well and past the Citizens' Advice Bureau. Follow the path ahead next to the wall on the left. This will take you to the well. Turn right and walk along the path above Swan Barn Farm fields. Straight ahead you will see a symmetrically shaped tree with a fan of upward angling branches. This is a 'fastigiated' **hornbeam** (*Carpinus betulus*). Fastigiation, meaning upright, is a genetic variation that occurs naturally but rarely in many trees including oak, beech, tulip and pear. Because they are aesthetically appealing and take up less room, fastigiated specimens are cloned by tree nurseries and widely planted in parks and, increasingly, in urban streets. Hornbeam looks a lot like beech. There is a beech tree just further along in the grass. They can be distinguished in the summer by the leaves, which have more veins (10-13 pairs for hornbeam compared with 5-9 for beech) that are more deeply corrugated, and in the winter by the buds which lie flat on the twigs compared with the beech's buds that sit proud.

To your left is a **red oak** (*Quercus rubra*), native to North America. As its name suggests, its leaves turn red in the autumn, although the colouring is generally more pronounced in its native habitat than when it occurs in Britain. Continue straight ahead and you will walk between two large common limes. The sprouting stems (epicormic growth) around the base of the trees is typical of the common lime.

Continue ahead to the gate into Swan Barn Farm, a National Trust property. Go through the gate and on our right you will see the orchard that the Trust has been restoring. There is a gate at the top of the fence. (Note: this area can be very muddy in the winter.) The Trust has planted the orchard with a number of traditional **apple, pear and plum** varieties, including Egremont Russet, Aldwick Beauty and Tydeman's Early Worcester. They are all labelled so you can wander round inspecting them at your leisure. When you are done (5 minutes are allowed for this in the timing of the walk but you could easily spend longer here), leave the orchard and head back up to the gate out of Swan Barn Farm. Take the stairs straight ahead next to the lime trees into the car park. Walk across the car park and back out into the High Street.

Cross over onto the traffic island with the war memorial. You will see a **tulip tree** (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) – a gift from Haslemere's French twin town Bernay in 1985, although it is a native of the Eastern United States. Notice the distinctive leaves that look as if the tips have been cut off. It takes its name from the yellow-green tulip shaped flowers that appear in the Spring. Tulip trees can grow very large, as you will see later in the walk.

Cross over to the far side of the High Street, head down the road towards the car park. In the top right hand corner of the first section of the car park is a small evergreen tree – a **western hemlock**

(*Tsuga heterophylla*). It gets its common name from the fact that the foliage smells a little like the hemlock herb when rubbed, although it is no relation.

Turn right into Charter Walk, the alley that runs through to West Street. At the car park end of the alley is a young **green alder** (*Alnus incarna*). Like our **native alder** (*Alnus glutinosa*), which we will see later on in the walk, the green alder's female catkin flowers turn woody and look like conifer cones.

Head down Charter Walk and turn left into West Street. Carry on down West Street towards the fire station. Turn let at the fire station and go down the dead end that runs alongside it. Just before the fenced-in car compound, take the alley on the right. When you come out of the dog leg of the alley you will see an old **English oak** (*Quercus robur*) on your right that was probably a boundary marker at one time. Ahead you will see another fastigiated hornbeam in the children's play area. Take the left turn on the path before the playground and head up the left hand side of the Town Meadow.

Continue along the path at the top of the meadow, past a **goat willow** (*Salix caprea*) and **yellow-stemmed dogwood** (*Cornus stolonifera Flaviramea*) on your left, and you will find a **swamp cypress** like the one you saw in the museum garden. Behind the swamp cypress are two common alders, which are frequent around Haslemere in damp conditions or next to streams.

Just across the path, in the grass, are a native **common whitebeam** (Sorbus aria) on the left and a **Swedish whitebeam** (Sorbus intermedia) whose leaves are more lobed. Note the white finely-haired underside of the leaves. They produce clusters of the white flowers in May that develop into bright red berries in late summer. The wood is hard and white and was traditionally used for beams and cogs and wheels in machinery.

Continuing along the path you will pass an English oak on the corner, next to which is a young **red oak** (Quercus rubra). Note its large typically-lobed oak leaves, which seldom turn as red as in native setting of the Eastern Coast of the United States. Next to this is a horse chestnut, then a **paperbark birch** (Bestula papyrifera) – this specimen does not look in good health – which Native Americans used to make canoes.

In the corner next to the gate is a large **sycamore** (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). Sycamore is not native, but seeds prolifically so is now common throughout Britain, as well as Europe. Its large leaves are often dotted with tar-spot fungus and crimson galls. Its wood is without taste so used for kitchen items. Although not as loved, sycamore supports almost as much bird and insect life as oak.

Under the sycamore, is a **field maple** (*Acer campestre*), the only maple native to Britain. Modest in size, rarely above 20 metres, it often grows in this sort of position, in the under-storey, or in hedgerows. There is another specimen along the path under a large ash tree now suffering from ash die-back.

Head out of the Town Meadow gate and cross the road, which is called Tanners Lane, indicating the location of a bygone industry that probably got its tannin from local oaks. Immediately across the road is the entrance to Redwood Manor in whose garden you will see a magnificent **cedar of the Lebanon** (*Cedrus libani*) and, to its left, an equally magnificent **Wellingtonia or giant redwood** (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*). Cedar of the Lebanon is native of the eastern Mediterranean and was introduced to Britain in the 17th Century, when it became status symbol so is often found in the gardens of stately homes. This specimen is said to be 250 years old. The Wellingtonia, native of the

west coast of the United States, is around 150 years old. Redwood Manor is a private retirement home – they are very proud of their trees, but you need permission to go into grounds. The three smallish trees on the right at the entrance are **box elders** (*Acer negundo*). Don't be fooled by their common name – they are in fact maples, and can be tapped for their syrup.

Head north along Tanners Lane for a few hundred metres. On your left you will see a pair of trees with pale grey bark either side of a driveway. These are immature **walnut trees** (*Juglans regia*). Continue along Tanners' Lane and turn left across the bridge over the railway line. Head up Church Road. Turn left at the corner into Derby Road. A short way along on the left is a private residence, Tulip Tree House. It takes its name from the magnificent tulip tree at the end of the garden furthest from you. This is the size the immature tree you saw on the green in the High Street earlier could eventually become. Next to the tulip tree is fine red oak. At the Church Road end is a **pecan** (*Carya illinoinensis*) and next to that, a maple.

Turn around and head back along Derby Road, but instead of turning back down Church Road continue straight ahead. In a garden on your left you will see some tall airy **aspens** *(Populus tremula*). Note how the leaves tremble if there is a breeze. This is because they have a flat petiole (leaf stalk) rather than the usual round shape which is more rigid.

Continue along Derby Road and turn into the Derby Road Cemetry on your left. There are a number of **Irish yews**, a fastigiated variety of yew (*Taxus baccata*), **Western red cedars** (*Thuja plicata*) and **Lawson cypresses** (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*). The tall conifer to the left of the path is a **Norway spruce** (*Picea abies*) and there is a lovely common lime in the central courtyard of the graveyard. Just before the entrance to this courtyard on the right is the grave of Manley and Kate Hopkins, parents of Gerard Manley Hopkins who wrote one of the loveliest and most poignant tree poems. It is about the felling of a row of aspens, like the ones you have just seen, and is titled *Brinsey Poplars* ('O if we but knew what we do/When we delve or hew – /Hack and rack the growing green! ...'). There is a stained glass window in his memory in St Barthlomew's church, next to one for Alfred Lord Tennyson, a former Haslemere resident, who wrote several poems devoted to trees.

Exit from the graveyard and cross over into the churchyard. If the church is open, you can go in and see the memorial windows to Gerard Manley Hopkins and Alfred Lord Tennyson towards the back. Continue through the churchyard and out into Church Hill. Turn right and then immediately right again into Tanners Lane. Cross over the railway bridge and continue for a short way down Tanners Lane until you reach the carpark on your left. Walk through the car park and you will see a **Monterey cypress** (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) before you. As you get up close, you will see that the two stems leaning over the car park are braced off the main trunk to keep them from splitting and falling. Monterey cypress will hybridise with the **Nootka cypress** (*Xanthocyparis nootkatensis*) to give us the **leylandi** (*x Cypressocyparis leylandii*), the fast growing, densely foliaged tree favoured, often controversially, as a hedge.

Continue straight ahead along West Street until you reach the High Street once more.

The walk was devised by Clive Davidson for Transition Haslemere. He would welcome any feedback: cdavidson@cix.co.uk.

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