



THE BEALE ARBORETUM

An autumnal must. **Melanie Wand** is taken aback by this unique arboretum and garden

THE DICTIONARY DEFINITION of Arboretum is: “a botanical garden for the rearing and exhibition of rare trees”. In essence I agree, but note that they should include *all* types of trees – young to old, from the familiar to the unusual. And yes, arboretums are for the specialist but they should also be areas that are inviting to the amateur, providing a fascinating and pleasurable experience. This, in my mind, is only really accomplished when thought is given to the space and design of the intended area; incorporating the trees into groups, allocating areas of glades, paths, vistas and absorbing the surrounding landscape. This then turns a mere collection into an enticing landscaped composition. Kew is the obvious example of how landscape can be adapted for an arboretum, however much closer to home – on an admittedly smaller but perhaps less daunting scale – can be found the Beale Arboretum in Hadley Wood.

Set in the grounds of West Lodge Park, the Beale Arboretum stretches across thirty-five acres. Situated on a hill, overlooking a

surprisingly rural landscape of arable and pasture, it's hard to believe one is only half an hour away from central London. As John Evelyn wrote in his diary in 1676 on visiting West Lodge “That which I most wondered at was, that in the compass of 25 miles, yet within 14 miles of London, there is not an house, barne, church, or building besides three lodges... These are pretty retreats for gentlemen, especially for those who are studious and lovers of privacy.”

This is as true today as it was in 1676.

The passion with which this arboretum has been put together is palpable for all who walk around

Not everyone will be so fortunate as myself to be taken round the Beale Arboretum by such an engaged and enthusiastic guide as Andrew Beale, but the passion with which this arboretum has been put together is palpable for all who

walk around. Andrew's grandfather Edward Beale started the arboretum in 1963. He had bought West Lodge Park in 1945, slowly turning it into the hotel that we see today. There had been a history of tree collecting – a previous owner John White Cater, a distinguished banker, had planted some fine specimen trees, including the sequoias which still dominate the view from the terrace. However, it was Edward Beale's friendship with Derek Honour, tree advisor to the Greater London Council, that changed the course of the thirty-five acres of West Lodge. He suggested creating an arboretum.

Edward Beale, always an interested amateur, took up the challenge with the same vitality and enthusiasm he had pursued in the establishment of his hotel. He invited Frank Knight, the former Director of RHS Wisley to help with the design of the area. Initially an empty field, together they laid out the first ten acres. Different zones were created for each chosen genus of tree, linked by two main grass rides and several paths. The work started by Edward Beale is being carried



Edward Beale with his grandson Andrew, photographed in the late 1990s

on today with the same ardour by his grandson, Andrew.

On entering the arboretum, one is immediately enticed by a glorious vista down to the classical folly erected to the memory of Edward Beale. Flanked by large Incense Cedars, it has become the focal point for the first ride that Edward Beale laid down. To the left is the Pinetum. Here, as everywhere there are trees of all ages. Every tree has a history and each is lovingly cared for. Personally I have never had much time for pines, but my feelings changed as I realised that I had no idea how many cultivars the Pine family includes. I fell in love with the Bhutan Pine which was beautiful, light, airy, and delicate – qualities I had not associated before with pines.

And to my further delight each zone has a discreet but clearly visible and very informative noticeboard. For those like myself that enjoy trees but have a limited knowledge, the Beale Arboretum is special indeed. Along with the noticeboard the trees themselves are labelled. And all around there are new trees being planted alongside the old, thus replacing or updating the collection.

And the collection is taken very seriously. The Beale Arboretum has National Collection status for *Carpinus* (Hornbeam). National Collection status is only conferred when you have at least 75% of the genus. They are currently applying for National Collection status for their *Taxodium*. Other zones include *Sorbus* (Mountain Ash), *Acer* (Maple), *Fraxinus* (Ash) and a simply wonderful trove of *Quercus* (Oak). There are also some fine and fascinating single specimen trees. Along with the 30-metre high *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* (Dawn Redwood) which up until 1941, when it was discovered in China, was known only from its fossil records, is a comparatively recent find, *Wollemia nobilis* (Pine). So new, it's not listed in my admittedly old RHS encyclopedia, this



From top: West Lodge Park in autumn. Photographed by the eminent garden photographer, Michael Boys

pine was discovered in 1994 by David Noble in Australia. The first went to Kew in 2004 and the second to Beale in 2006. I loved the 200-year old *Arbutus unedo* (Strawberry tree) and the late flowering *Magnolia Exmouth*. Trees for all tastes fill the Beale Arboretum, all in they have over 800 varieties.

And so keen are the Beale family to share their love for trees, they provide guided tours (for groups of ten or more) free of charge during the

week, or alternatively they are just delighted if you want to wander around on your own. This from a hotel that is fully booked all year long. But one last thing to add, you must refresh yourself with one of West Lodge Park's cream teas! Not free but worth every penny. ■

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On an autumn day some firm favourites at the Beale Arboretum to look out for...

Clockwise from top left: the *Quercus palustris*, which was already showing signs of turning the most wonderful shade of scarlet when I was there, is a definite must. The *Liquidambar* zone should now be a medley of purple, pink and gold. The *Nyssa sylvatica* which normally goes a strong yellow, in a good season turns cerise and this year suggests it will do so. And, of course, the *Fraxinus angustifolia* **Raywood** is always a marvellous autumnal delight with its unique rich claret hue.



HISTORY OF WEST LODGE PARK

WEST LODGE WAS originally a residence for the Bailiff on the Enfield Chase. His duty was to stop poaching of the deer and cutting down of the trees. The Chase was a royal hunting ground and West Lodge was visited by both Elizabeth I and James I. In 1673 Henry Coventry, Secretary of State to Charles II, bought West Lodge as his country residence. He replanted many trees which had been cut down during the Civil War.

HISTORICAL COINCIDENCE

In 1677 Coventry had his portrait painted by Mary Beale. Mary Beale was the first woman in England to establish herself as a professional painter. Extremely successful, she painted many of the leading figures at Charles II's court. Edward Beale, on acquiring West Lodge, was keen to research its history. He discovered that a portrait of Henry Coventry, a relative of the Marquis of Bath, hung at Longleat House. Imagine the astonishment of Edward Beale when he found the portrait to be painted by his namesake Mary Beale! There are no records that can prove Edward's ancestry to Mary but it is known that ancestors of Mary's husband Charles Beale lived in Hertfordshire so that it seems likely that there is some connection.

Edward Beale was so delighted by his discovery that, along with the hotel and the arboretum, he made it his lifelong mission to collect Mary Beale's work. Consequently, West Lodge Park now has the finest collection of Mary Beale paintings.



Portrait of an unidentified lady, painted by Mary Beale