



Barrett Tree Service

FOUR YEARS AGO, after more than 10 years working in the world of high finance, Andrew Barrett decided to return to his roots and join his uncle, Mike Barrett, working in the world of arboriculture. They formed Barrett Tree Service Limited in 2010.

Robyn Sheppard visited to find out more.



Mike Barrett still enjoys lending a hand when the need arises.

Mike was the original founder of the company in 1970. Based in the hamlet of Long Green near Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, Andrew grew up visiting here as a child, and he spent a year working for his uncle before going to university.

Even as a small boy he was interested in trees and woodlands. "I remember my uncle gave me a saw with a little red plastic handle, and I used it to cut up small pieces of firewood," he remembers. "I was always interested in the work that he was doing."

Mike Barrett had started doing forestry in the early 1960s but found arboriculture more interesting. When the first courses in tree surgery were set up at Merrist Wood, Mike enrolled on a three-week course on tree surgery for foremen, in 1971.

For most of the time he kept his staff to just one or two employees, bringing in other people as necessary when the volume of work required more men on the job. In the early years he did a lot of work on behalf of local authorities then progressed to spending more time working for private clients.

It was in 1994, at the age of 19, that Andrew spent a year working for his uncle. He then moved away from the Cotswolds to begin his studies at university, returning during the holidays to lend a hand in his uncle's business.

"From university I went to work in corporate finance and then as a stock analyst, and I also wrote for magazines on financial analysis."

After several years of the pressure of high finances in the City, Andrew decided to return to the Cotswolds and to tree surgery – work which he had always enjoyed, and with which he had never lost touch.

Leaving behind the high-flying world of financial institutions for that of high climbing, he initially had concerns that he might not be able to cope with the physical demands – he had previously hurt his back. "But it seems to have sorted itself out," he is pleased to be able to say, and he was soon back into the swing of things in the arboricultural world.

His uncle by then was going into semi-retirement, although was still climbing well into his 70s. He had been working on his own since

2000 and instead of having full-time employees took on people on an occasional basis as he needed them. He and Andrew continue to follow this policy. "We employ people on a day-rate which makes for a good flexible arrangement, according to the different jobs we have on hand at any particular time," says Andrew.

Mike, now aged 78, had to start to take things more easily when he had a hip replacement operation in 2012. "He still likes to come down and do what he can to help when we have a big job on," says his nephew. "He will help by doing jobs like sharpening the chainsaws. He enjoys still working, and being involved in the work that is going on."

For Andrew, his career change also brought a new phase of learning. He began taking a series of courses, including in 2012 a nine-week course on tree surgery for craftsmen. He has great admiration for one of his tutors, Jack Kenyon, at Merrist Wood.

"He is so well known in the industry. I have found that all the courses he has run have been excellent," says Andrew. "I am sorry that he has retired. His teaching is not just academic; he also has a very strong practical input. He was still doing his own demonstrations of climbing. When I was on one of his courses, it was remarked that I asked more questions than all the others in the class put together – that is what comes of having a really good teacher, one from whom you know that you can learn a great deal."

"I would also like to do the more advanced courses that lead to qualification for consultancy work. You can't avoid having to give advice when a client asks you to look at a particular situation for him and give your opinion on what needs to be done to deal with a problem about a tree, so qualifications are the thing to have."

Andrew commented that all the information he has gained, about biomechanics and about pests and diseases, has been very helpful and proved very useful – especially in one particular situation he related.

Andrew had stopped at a big, five-way road junction in Cheltenham when he noticed that a tree there was seriously diseased.

"I noticed that there was a beech affected by a type of fungus that



The challenge: removing a large Lawson cypress, brought down by high winds. Andrew was amazed that the summerhouse escaped with little more than a dent in its roof.



Almost done...



Andrew rigging a Thuja.

can lead to sudden catastrophic failure, *Kretzschmaria deusta*," he said. "I immediately reported it to the town council's tree officer, who passed the information to Gloucestershire County Council highways department. It had probably not been noticed before because it didn't really look like a fungus, but has an appearance like black charcoal dust."

A decision was made that the tree had to be felled almost immediately. The job went out to tender, but unfortunately Andrew's was not the best price so they didn't get the job.

However, within some three or four weeks of Andrew spotting it, the hazard was removed and he received an email from the tree officer thanking him for his rapid report of danger.

"This is something I would not have known about before I went on this course," says Andrew. "It is another example of the value of Jack Kenyon's methods of teaching; you realise that you can learn from everything you see on a tree, such as the branch structure and fungal bodies."

One challenging job he had to undertake was when Barrett Tree Service Limited was asked to visit a private house in the Ullenwood area of Cheltenham, to remove a large Lawson cypress that had been brought down by high winds and landed on the roof of both the main house and the summerhouse.

The tree had landed in a position so that it was pivoting on the roof and, in working out how to deal with the job, Andrew had to go against what is considered one of the most basic rules of safety.

"I was well aware that you should always work with two ropes attached to the tree when working with a chainsaw," he says. "Unfortunately this was a situation where I just couldn't comply with the safety rule; because of the danger of the tree collapsing I had to attach just one top rope to an adjacent tree."

"It was certainly an interesting job; the weather was still quite windy and the wind lifted me up and down. It reminded me of wind surfing

with a harness!" However, despite this the job was safely and successfully completed.

Andrew estimated the total weight of the tree at about 5.5 tonnes and was amazed that the summerhouse escaped with just a small dent in the roof.

Another interesting job in Cheltenham involved Andrew dealing with the problem of a Turkey oak affected by the *Ganoderma* fungus.

Mike still likes to come out and lend a hand whenever he can – although his hip operation obviously rules out hard physical work. "You could say that he is winding down and I am winding up," says Andrew. "I am pleased to say that we have had twice as much work this year as two years ago, but we are still pretty small."

Andrew aims to build the business up, but not so that it gets too big. "I enjoy growing the business and looking at the marketing aspect but I wouldn't want to get to the stage where I worked in the office all day. I want to spend at least half my time outside."

"I am certainly putting a lot of effort into getting more work, and we have the capacity to do more. It seems to me that it can be quite difficult to scale up; to do this you need bigger contracts, doing site clearance, utility work or for councils. All that type of job is much more routine, I don't fancy having to work on lines of 30 trees at a time."

But these thoughts do not mean that Andrew is regretting his move from the City to the country. "Very occasionally I have a nightmare where I am still working in the City," he says. "And I am extremely relieved when I wake up."

"Very occasionally I have a nightmare where I am still working in the City," he says. "And I am extremely relieved when I wake up."

www.barrettreeservice.co.uk
01684 833645