



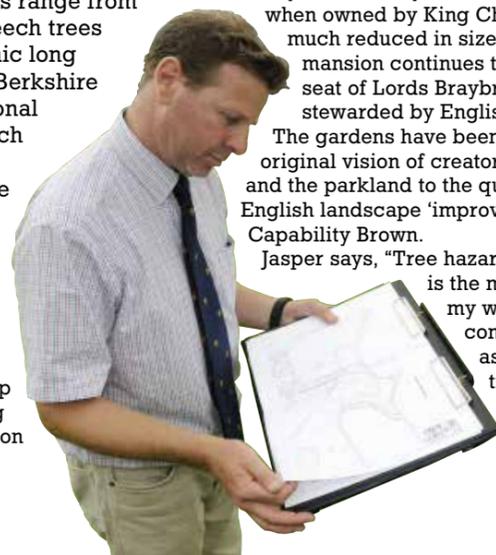
- ◀ The 120-year-old Wych elm in the beech shelterbelt.
- ▶ The giant redwood in conifer clump planting has layered itself from rootstock.
- ▼ Following the aerial micro-drilling with a Resistograph in March, on our last tree, a storm-damaged oak near to the car park, Jasper drew this sketch. "This helps to form my measurement of the remaining solid wood and the area of decay, calculating the loss of strength according to ISA thresholds."

## Finding a niche

**AFTER TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS WORKING WITHIN THE ARBORICULTURAL INDUSTRY, JASPER FULFORD-DOBSON ATTAINED REGISTERED CONSULTANT STATUS WITH THE ARBORICULTURAL ASSOCIATION LAST YEAR. JASPER IS ONE OF 42 REGISTERED CONSULTANTS IN THE UK, AND THE ONLY ONE IN THE BERKS, BUCKS AND OXON REGION. DURING AN AVERAGE WEEK, HE MIGHT BE WRITING REPORTS AND MEETING CLIENTS IN HIS HENLEY OFFICE OR HE MAY BE OUT SURVEYING TREES ON VARIOUS URBAN AND RURAL SITES AROUND THE THAMES VALLEY.**

**M**OST likely, he is out inspecting one of over 100 historic properties in his role as English Heritage's appointed tree inspector. These sites range from a remote copse of beech trees growing on a Neolithic long barrow on the West Berkshire Downs to major national visitor attractions such as Queen Victoria's seaside retreat on the Isle of Wight.

In this role, he travels 10,000 miles across the East Midlands, East of England, London and the South, assessing in excess of 50,000 trees, walking up to 5 miles a day, during each 15-month inspection cycle. He invited



*essentialARB's* writer, Carlyne Locher, to attend a site visit at Audley End in Essex, once the site of a Benedictine monastery. A mansion of palatial proportions was latterly built, briefly becoming a 'palace' when owned by King Charles II. Now much reduced in size, this Jacobean mansion continues to be the family seat of Lords Braybrooke and is stewarded by English Heritage. The gardens have been restored to the original vision of creator Robert Adam, and the parkland to the quintessential English landscape 'improved' by Capability Brown.

Jasper says, "Tree hazard assessment is the main scope of my work. I am also commissioned to assist with wider tree and wooded landscape management and



### JASPER'S OBSERVATIONS

#### On the skills needed to be an independent consultant:

"The three skillsets needed to fill an independent consultant's role are: understanding your client's objectives; attention to detail followed closely by being able to stand back and look at the bigger picture; and then being willing to tell the truth however hard that may be for your client."

#### On cable bracing:

"In America, they use the old techniques – steel wires, drilling holes in trees, j-lags and washers – which stand the test of time. It's a dying art in England, everyone uses polypropylene ropes that last only five years. For me this is a problem."

#### On real-life case study learning experiences:

Jasper's first paid pruning job was on a friend's apple tree in the late 1980s. "I got so carried away that I pruned it to within an inch of its life. I don't think it ever bore fruit again."

"As an inexperienced and over-enthusiastic tree officer I was guilty on occasion of box-ticking and cynically interpreting policy and best practice to suit. Anyone who claims never to have done that is not being very honest with themselves. Austerity measures have not helped the public sector, but an experienced and pragmatic tree officer is worth their weight in gold."

restoration projects."

Last here in March 2017, Jasper is back to examine four trees being monitored beyond the scheduled ground level inspections.

"An elm in the parkland, a veteran cedar by the house, an oriental plane in the Elysian Garden and an old oak being monitored for the development of decay in its trunk."

Assessing risk comprises three factors: the likelihood of failure (virtually impossible to accurately predict); the value of any property under or within falling distance of the tree (i.e. an old garden shed or a Tudor mansion) or frequency of users within the target area; and the size of the part or impact that is going to occur. "If one of these values is negligible, it has a considerable effect on the calculated risk factor."

A quarter-mile expanse of grass rising above the east side of the estate ends in a beech shelterbelt along the parkland boundary. "Note the elm," Jasper comments. "It is a 120-year-old Wych elm that lost its top long ago, most probably in the 1987 storm, and has since recreated a decent crown in its own right. It is mid-August and there are areas of defoliation, which could be early signs of Dutch elm disease, so we are keeping a watching brief. Special events with large numbers of visitors are held in the parkland on some weekends. To manage risk, we temporarily restrict visitor movement and access to this area, using the principle of target management rather than invasively and unnecessarily pruning these older trees."

Jasper grew up on a smallholding in South Oxfordshire. Leaving school, he booked a one-way ticket to Australia, where he worked on a flower farm. Returning home a year later, first he studied horticulture and then (age 26) enrolled on the BTEC National Diploma in Arboriculture at Merrist Wood, where visiting lecturer and consultant Jeremy Barrell inspired him to aim high.

Walking back down towards the house past the C18th neoclassical Temple of Concord, trees surrounding the Temple of Victory on the opposite hilltop have been cleared in the last couple of years, restoring the vista to its original glory. On the south side of the house, a cedar of Lebanon planted in 1760, during Capability Brown's 'improvements', has the bulk of its target zone fenced off. There is evidence of numerous pruning events and the remaining lower branches are cable-braced or propped. "Over the last three years the overall physiological condition of the tree has declined – a thinning crown and complete defoliation on some small branches – but no obvious fungal pathogens in terms of root or butt decay. This tree still provides a hugely important landscape and architectural function. The evergreen structure provides a stable, year-round framework around the house, setting off the architecture beautifully. English Heritage values it. We monitor it. It's all good for the moment."

"Historically, there was a craze for



**A** The cedar of Lebanon, planted in 1760, has the bulk of its target zone fenced off.



**A** There is evidence of numerous pruning events and the remaining lower branches are cable-braced or propped.

planting cedar of Lebanon in England in large parks and gardens during the late 17th and 18th centuries, followed by more conifers brought over from America's west coast during the 19th century. During the post-war period, there was a craze for planting all manner of varieties of these conifers in smaller urban gardens. Then they fell out of fashion. It's a great shame. Evergreens provide a stable structure to landscapes all year round and make a fine backdrop to the seasonal displays of their deciduous cousins. For nearly seven months of the year, when deciduous trees are out of leaf, evergreens maintain many of the canopy-dependent benefits trees have to offer."

Jasper spent his 'year in industry' in California with mentor/employer Blair Glenn, a rock climber turned ISA-certified

arborist. He learned to climb in redwoods, to thin 40-metre high eucalyptus and to install steel cable braces the old-fashioned way (the subject of his dissertation). From running a small tree surgery business, with two vans and up to three self-employed arborists, Jasper joined Beechwood Tree Care in Berkshire as their contracts manager, overseeing the teams and helping the firm to gain Arboricultural Association Approved Contractor status. He learned the importance of good office systems and record-keeping.

In order to become a good consultant, Jasper knew that he needed public sector experience. He worked first at the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, then South Oxfordshire District Council, learning the importance of respect between tree officers, consultants and contractors,

and gaining further technical qualifications and professional memberships with the Arboricultural Association.

He joined Jim Unwin as an aspiring consultant in 2008 working with all manner of clients. "As a Chartered Forester and Arboricultural Association Registered Consultant who started his career in the mid-1970s, Jim's experience was valuable and he was a fantastic mentor. I had acquired the knowledge base but not the all-round experience of operating at a senior consultant level. When he took me on, he provided a car, laptop, mobile phone, and a whole lot of work and said 'off you go'. We spoke several times a week and met twice a month to catch up on projects and share experiences. He ran a good model for a small independent practice and, starting my own business Fulford-Dobson Associates in 2012, I tried to do the same but finding the right staff is not easy."

Jasper's practice manager Neil Harrison manages business administration, client relationships and an ever-growing list of associate consultants. "He is gaining a good understanding of our work which includes the planning system - a whole other world in itself - and where we, in arboriculture, fit in."

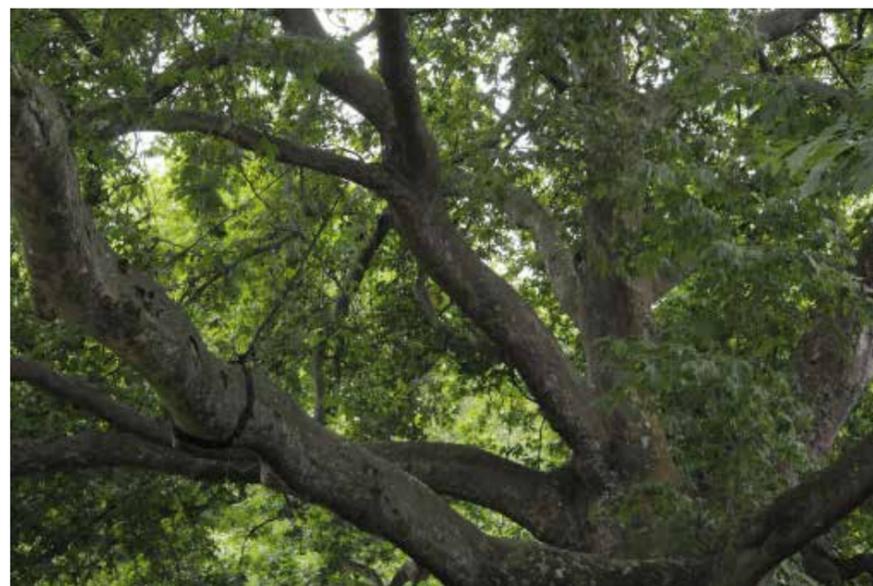
For public sector clients, Fulford-Dobson Associates undertakes pre-development tree surveys, impact assessments and the ongoing protection of trees on regeneration project development sites. Jasper recently completed a two-year, borough-wide subsidence investigation project - looking at ten years' worth of past and current cases of claims against council-owned trees - for a borough local council.

Audley End's Elysian Garden is an area of high visitor use filled with notable and veteran plane trees. An Oriental plane overhanging the stream stands 20 metres in height with a crown spreading well over 17 metres in all directions from the stem. "Look at the size of those ribbed, gravity-defying lateral boughs taking the strain. In previous years, we sensitively reduced the larger limbs, but I felt that we had not taken enough to manage that risk sufficiently."

Last spring, Jasper arranged a pre-work meeting with English Heritage's regional landscape manager, Audley End's head gardener and the appointed tree surgeon. What followed was a carefully orchestrated lateral reduction of the whole tree. Cable braces were used to provide additional support for the (up to) four-tonne weight of each limb. "We found a balance, a reasonable demonstration of risk management over benefit for this impressive notable tree."

Pursuing 'Registered' status with the Arboricultural Association is not something to be undertaken lightly. When Jasper first embarked on the process (2014), he realised that he needed to invest in more training as a certified Expert Witness (Bond Salon) to consolidate his report-writing skills before resuming work on producing six reports covering the full range of arboricultural topics: hazard

**A** Oriental plane in Elysian Garden.



**A** Cable braces were used to provide additional support for the (up to) four-tonne weight of each limb.

assessment; subsidence; tree preservation orders; planning and development; an expert report (appeal or witness report put before a primary decision maker); and one additional report from an area of personal interest.

All reports are reviewed by an independent panel of consultants, followed by a two-hour interview with the panel. "Report writing is an essential skillset and takes up half of my working week. I doubt anyone could claim to write a perfect report, but it took me years of experience to reach a level I was finally happy with."

Jasper has advised English Heritage on tree restoration works within wider landscape conservation projects. "A consultant should be a bit of a generalist but, within that, follow an interest and find a niche." Combining his expertise as a tree

specialist with his interest in researching historical landscapes, an ageing and unusual avenue of Holm oaks at Walmer Castle in Kent provided the subject of his 'area of personal interest' report.

"Many trees had been lost over time and the remaining veterans were hazardous. The Department of Works had carried out some succession planting in the 1980s but these were never formatively pruned. Following a full survey and an evaluation of its historical and landscape context, I recommended formative pruning on any 1980s plantings worth holding on to and ripping out the rest which had no future, emphasising that any replacement plantings should come from the right provenance. English Heritage takes hardwood cuttings from important trees within their properties (such as the

Mulberry growing at Charles Darwin's Down House in Kent) for growing on at Kew. I steered the general principles of the project, directing them to the specialists within each area."

Jasper has just completed work with a church committee tree succession team in Wokingham, helping them to decide which new evergreen ornamental species will replace those reaching the mature stage of their lives. "The clients had no funding at the start and were not sure how to go about achieving their objectives. One element of my job, before charging, is to spend time helping the client decide exactly what I will do for them, assisting them to best achieve their objectives in the most efficient way." Grant funding was subsequently secured.

The churchyard inventory found predominantly oak and ornamental conifers (Lawson cypress, Irish yew, cedar of Lebanon). "We created management plans and talked about succession planting with special reference to trees from the Bible. Attending a 'Trees in Churchyards' conference with two committee members, for me the most inspirational talk came from a landscape historian. With the book 'God's Trees' and further research of my own, I created a list of evergreen and deciduous trees for planting. We selected cedar of Lebanon, Japanese Incense cedar and Italian cypress. For the broadleaves, we are looking at Pride of India. It has no biblical connotations, but is a fantastic flowering ornamental tree, which the churchyard was lacking."

As a Berks, Bucks and Oxon RFS member, Jasper enjoys the estate visits and seeing how their trees are managed. "It helps with my work and keeps me in touch - I see arboriculture as the natural link between forestry and horticulture."

The last tree, a storm-damaged oak near to the car park, was subject to aerial micro-drilling with a Resistograph in March. "Often experience, knowing the fungi and how it interacts with the tree, can suffice. Here, we wanted to quantify the extent of decay and establish the integrity of the residual wall. An oak's bark is so thick it can be hard to hear a difference with a sounding hammer. Following investigations, we found complete removal was premature and pruning would suffice."

While others have provided inspiration, Jim Unwin taught Jasper what is now most important. "He taught me how to conduct myself as a consultant, to look at the bigger picture, be pragmatic, and when to keep my mouth shut. Collect the data, take in the information in front of you, go back to the office, collate, disseminate, do any desktop investigations you need to do and then sleep on it. The following day you are then ready to start preparing your advice."

"I don't think you can claim to be an expert in anything until you are well into your '40s. You need that wider life experience, of making mistakes along the way, and learning from a variety of real-life case studies."

[www.fulford-dobson.com](http://www.fulford-dobson.com)