

## Sonnets for the Woodland Trust / Charter for Trees, Woods and People 2017

### January: Bend with the wind

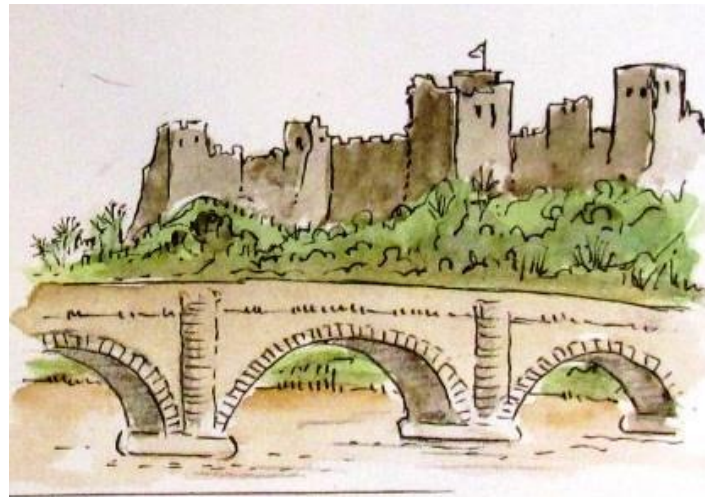
The birches on the ridge are sleeping now,  
Though hibernation is a better word.  
They need their rest as much as you or I,  
Conserving strength so with spring the growth  
Begins again, inexorable and slow -  
But powerful. Leaves that were jettisoned  
Months ago still showing here and there on  
Cold soil. However hard the storms of winter blow,  
The wind will find no purchase. It's like a ship  
Whose captain knows what's coming, furls the sails  
And weathers out the worst. Alike with snow  
Which finds no leaves to rest on - and so  
The birches are prepared for winter gales;  
They bend with the wind, not to give in  
But to spring back again: worth remembering,

### March: Together we walked by the banks of the Teme

Together we walked by the banks of the Teme  
And the water *did* teem and dash by our side!  
The last day's rain when the heavens had cried  
Like a child, unable to pause, fed the streams,  
Caused the river to rush on as if late  
For a pressing engagement. We nearly missed  
On our right, the sight of the trunk, the twists  
Of its roots, gnarled hands grasping like a great  
Giant's claws the rock and the stone of the cliff.  
We were awed by the sheer strength of its grip:  
How it held on like a sailor to the ship's  
Rail in a storm, sure of its hold as if  
Nothing could shock it or rock it. So seemed  
This ancient tree on the banks of the Teme.

### February: Offa's Land

Offa's land, the country of the Marches  
Is rich in hillside, field and tree,  
The landscape stitched together quietly  
By lines of hedgerows and the odd stretch  
Of wooden fence, and hemmed by ditch and track.  
Over the next rise, this garment's torn:  
The fabric's lost its sheen, is all worn  
Out - punctured by agricultural sheds and shacks.  
But beyond, there on the hillside just above,  
A stand of leafless trees rescues the scene:  
Leafless but by no means lifeless. Though green  
Shoots are some way off, there's love  
Of life regrouping here, ready to show  
Itself as soon as Spring says, 'OK! Green for Go!'





#### **April: The Tranby Oaks**

This is the story of the Tranby Oaks,  
Which grew from the seeds they took from their trees:  
With acorns in their baggage as they went to sea,  
The young and the old, York and Lincoln folks  
With hope in their pockets and a shilling or two.

In Australia, the 'Tranby' set them ashore  
Where they planted their seeds and acorns galore  
Which fell on good ground and prospered and grew.

And great oaks thrived as the decades went past;  
So its acorns were gathered and then were sent out  
Back to England where seedlings could once again sprout  
Until saplings were ready to plant out at last.

Now the grandchildren of those original trees  
Can shiver once more in a chill North Sea breeze!

#### **May: A Cruel kind of love**

In France, the love affair is clear to see:  
Visible from highway or from lane,  
There is a strong relationship with trees.  
From the beech and cypress to the plane  
Trees of the South, roads become avenues  
And city streets transformed to boulevards.  
These spinneys, woods and forests all form views  
Which could be custom-made for our postcards.  
But in many a town, along the streets,  
The branches have been pruned back to the trunks,  
Limbs lopped off, resulting in some neat  
But amputated stumps. All beauty shrunk  
To regulated columns – few leaves above...  
Mes amis, this seems a cruel kind of love.







### June: Pear and Rose

Of all our garden trees the pear is oldest  
And though the fruits are usually small and hard,  
They fall with brutal force. Their brown scarred  
Shapes litter the lawn until they're swept  
Onto the borders, there to decompose  
And plough some goodness back into the earth.  
It's a playground for the sparrows, and its girth  
Supports something of greater worth: a rose.

Beside the ancient trunk, now fully grown,  
A rambling rose, American Pillar,  
Is established well, its tendrils clambering far  
Up through the staid old tree - and now, in June,  
Its glowing polkadot blossoms seem  
Like crimson constellations in a sky of green.

### July: Thoughts from a garden hammock

My hammock hangs between aspen and holly;  
The holly has been here for many years,  
Who knows the number? But the aspen tree,  
Planted some 30 years ago: I fear  
We knew so little about trees back then.  
It was just a lucky choice. It survived  
Both drought and flood – and our ignorance  
And with roots well set, it thickened up and thrived.  
There it is. The sound of its leaves like rain  
As summer breezes lift and leave its boughs,  
And is "The brustling noise that oft deceives,  
The sound so mimics fast approaching showers."\*  
And in autumn, the colours of those fallen leaves  
Make a mosaic that I try to paint in vain.

\* from John Clare's 'Summer Images'



### August: Wind, Rain and Sun

It's not just the willow that is weeping  
Now that the Scottish rain seems to be set in  
The birch, the hazel and the pine are getting  
Their share of the downpour. They're keeping  
Quiet, though, with just a wet dog shake  
Now and then, surprising us with weightier,  
Wetter drops – as if they lay in wait for  
Unsuspecting townsfolk they could make  
Fun of.

Then, as suddenly as it began,  
It stops. For a moment all is still.  
And then, as if sounding the 'all clear',  
A blackbird trills, and just above, quite near,  
Another song we think must be a robin, till  
The air is full of farewells to the rain.



### September: Crab apple tree

Spring's the time for the crab apple's finery:  
It covers itself in a frock of pink  
That heralds lighter mornings, makes you think  
Of warmer days. Then as the flowers decline  
And fall upon the path, it takes a back seat  
To other burgeoning bushes, trees and plants,  
Biding its time, drawing strength and sustenance  
In preparation for September's treat.  
It seems each year we're taken by surprise  
As, looking up, we see those once small dots  
Have become full round red fruit – and lots  
Of them! A crimson firework in a green sky  
Caught freeze-frame. Enjoy them while you may  
Before October's winds enter the fray!

### October: Ode to an Arboralist

The elder is surveyed with practised eyes  
Likewise the old pear tree, now ivy clad,  
And the bay that's getting out of hand.  
The ornamental cherry wasn't wisely  
Pruned last time. We need a better man;  
Someone with a sympathy for trees,  
Not just a lopper with a saw who sees  
The easiest way, who doesn't understand  
There's more to it than letting in some light  
Or cutting back from cables overhead.  
So, now the elder and the pear have shed  
Some surplus boughs, the bay tree seems right  
And all the rest are trimmed harmoniously.  
If this were Wales we'd call him Lee the Tree.





### November: Autumn Colour

Rising and falling like a quiet fairground ride  
Vistas to both east and west, each side  
A panorama constantly renewed,  
The highway bends and winds, each view  
A fresh photo opportunity  
Taken or resisted. Close up, each tree  
A kind of flower, a red hot poker,  
Or a frozen firework, showering orange ochre.  
No photograph does justice to these scenes  
Which need a Turner or a Monet, keen  
To fix, however fleetingly, the hues  
Which subtly alter as clouds close or part; scenes whose  
Images we'll return to, try to retain,  
Knowing we're unlikely to be here again.



### December: Burton Agnes Hall

The tree at Burton Agnes sure is big:  
A giant of a fir, it reaches from floor  
Almost to the ceiling of the hall,  
Making our tree look more like a twig.  
To bring it from the woods indoors  
Needs many hands to lift and haul. They all  
Put their shoulders to the wheel: sixteen  
Of them, in fact, avoiding ancient  
Panelling and doorcases, they bent  
Their backs with a will. It would be a scene  
To remember well into cold New Year.  
Now, decked with decorations high and low  
And beaming out its message loud and clear,  
It greets as you enter, cheers you as you go.

<https://tinyurl.com/y759h8ts>

All sonnets © Trevor Millum 2017-18

We raised £1,700 for the Charter thanks to the support of over fifty sponsors.

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