



Wolfson College
Cambridge

**WOLFSON
EXPLORES
GROWTH**

Tree Trail

EXPLORE THE TREES OF WOLFSON



@wolfsoncollegedgards

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Trees on the trail

1. *Carpinus betulus* – Hornbeam
2. *Cercis siliquastrum* – Judas Tree
3. *Platanus x hispanica* - London Plane
4. *Tilia tomentosa* – Lime or Silver Lime
5. *Taxus baccata* – European Yew
6. *Juglans regia* – Walnut or Welchnut
7. *Cedrus Atlantica* - Atlas Cedar
8. *Mespilus germanica* – Medlar
9. *Arbutus unedo* – Strawberry Tree
10. *Euonymus europaeus* – Spindle





Carpinus betulus – Hornbeam

Flanking the main drive

One of the hardest timbers grown, *Carpinus betulus* has been likened to animal horn. Some carpenters know it as ironwood due to its destructive effect on woodworking tools.

Hornbeam was traditionally used for yokes - the frame used to join a team of oxen or horses when pulling carts or ploughs - and was the choice material for cog teeth in wind and water mills.

1



2020

2

Cercis siliquastrum – Judas Tree

Front Court

Wolfson's iconic Judas tree, planted in 1977 for the Royal opening of the College, sadly fell in spring 2023. Although Judas trees can live up to 100 years in the wild, rotting at the base of the tree had created structural weakness, and the branches gently collapsed.

As luck would have it, a young tree has been growing from the centre of the Judas tree, and this newbie will take the place of its forebear.



The tree's English name derives from a belief that it was this type of tree which Judas Iscariot hanged himself from after betraying Jesus. However, it could also just be a corruption of the French 'Arbre de Judée' meaning simply, tree of Judea.

Bright rose-purple, pea like flowers emerge from the wood in early to mid-May and there can't be many people who don't stop to take it in when in flower.



3

Platanus x hispanica – London Plane

On the side drive alongside A and B block

London Plane is a hybrid between two other Plane species. The timber is weak and not long-lasting, however it is exceptionally decorative and highly sought after. This timber, called lacewood, is used in carving, inlays, and architectural work.

The London Plane is often seen as a mature tree in city streets, and it has been able to thrive even in areas of industrial pollution: it has an ability to shed patches of bark when dirty and its glossy leaves are easily washed clean in the rain.



Tilia tomentosa – Lime or Silver Lime

Standing between Williams House and A/B-block

4

Lime or Silver Lime is not to be confused with lime fruit which are produced by Citrus trees.

The inner bark of Lime is fibrous and has been used to make ropes and cord from the Mesolithic (9000-3000bc) to the present day.

First the bark is stripped, then soaked, before the outer bark can be removed and the inner is dried, split, and twisted into a naturally waterproof rope.

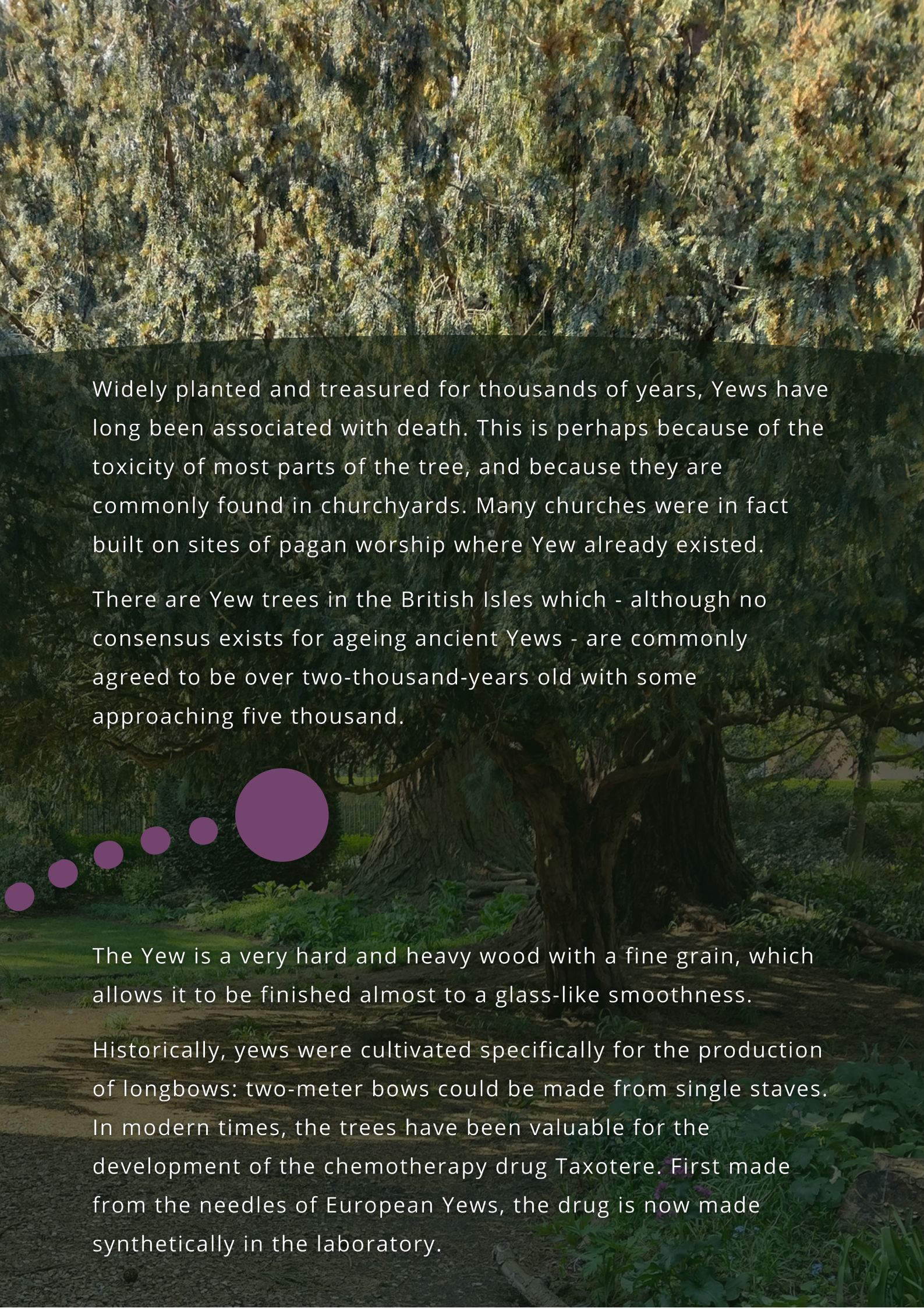
Lime wood is also not known to warp and has been used in the manufacture of organ and piano keys.



5


Taxus baccata – European Yew

At the West end of Fuchs House



Widely planted and treasured for thousands of years, Yews have long been associated with death. This is perhaps because of the toxicity of most parts of the tree, and because they are commonly found in churchyards. Many churches were in fact built on sites of pagan worship where Yew already existed.

There are Yew trees in the British Isles which - although no consensus exists for ageing ancient Yews - are commonly agreed to be over two-thousand-years old with some approaching five thousand.



The Yew is a very hard and heavy wood with a fine grain, which allows it to be finished almost to a glass-like smoothness.

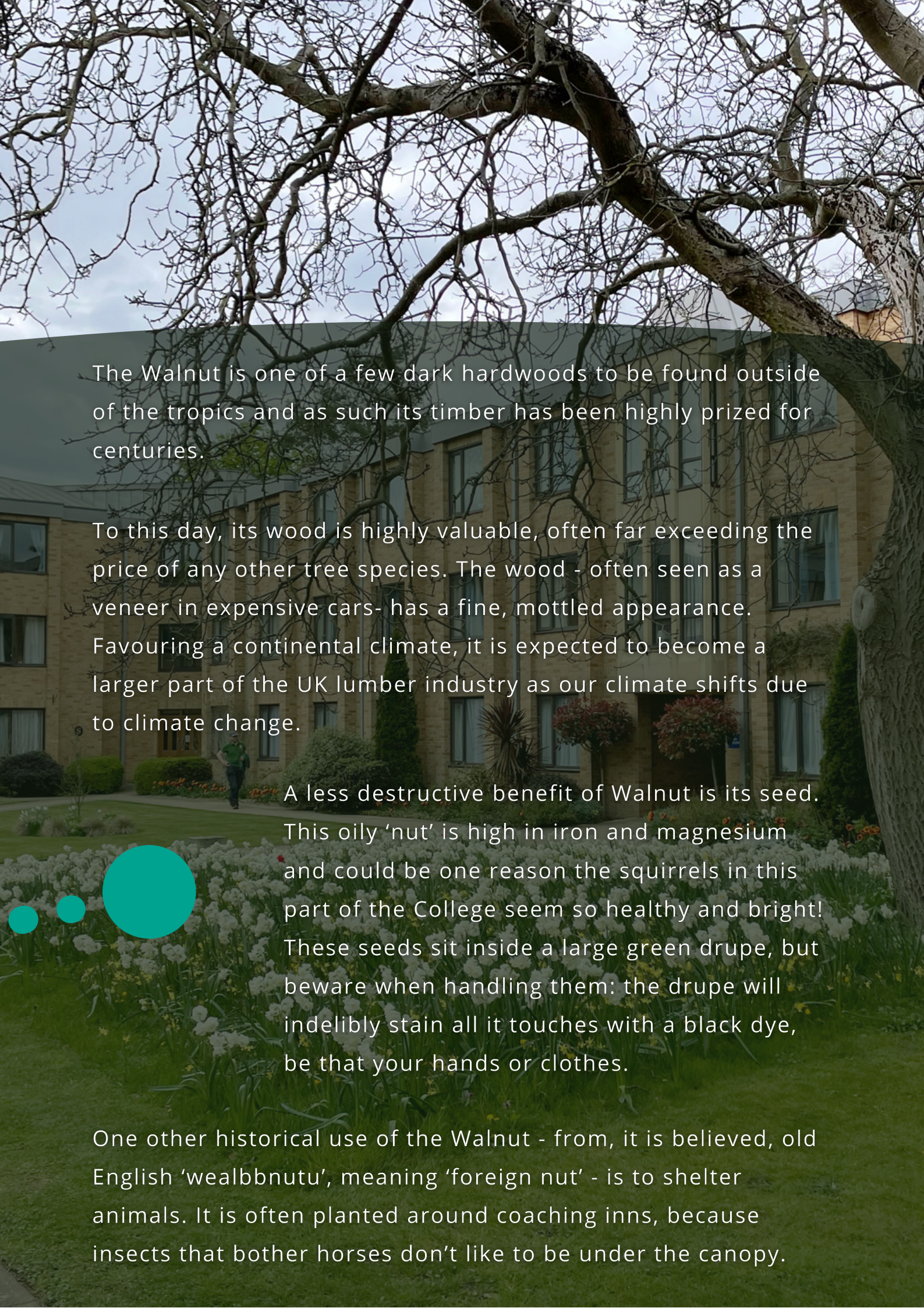
Historically, yews were cultivated specifically for the production of longbows: two-meter bows could be made from single staves. In modern times, the trees have been valuable for the development of the chemotherapy drug Taxotere. First made from the needles of European Yews, the drug is now made synthetically in the laboratory.



6

Juglans regia – Walnut or Welchnut

In the rectangular lawn between R block & the gym



The Walnut is one of a few dark hardwoods to be found outside of the tropics and as such its timber has been highly prized for centuries.

To this day, its wood is highly valuable, often far exceeding the price of any other tree species. The wood - often seen as a veneer in expensive cars- has a fine, mottled appearance. Favouring a continental climate, it is expected to become a larger part of the UK lumber industry as our climate shifts due to climate change.

A less destructive benefit of Walnut is its seed. This oily 'nut' is high in iron and magnesium and could be one reason the squirrels in this part of the College seem so healthy and bright! These seeds sit inside a large green drupe, but beware when handling them: the drupe will indelibly stain all it touches with a black dye, be that your hands or clothes.

One other historical use of the Walnut - from, it is believed, old English 'wealbbnutu', meaning 'foreign nut' - is to shelter animals. It is often planted around coaching inns, because insects that bother horses don't like to be under the canopy.



7

Cedrus Atlantica – Atlas Cedar

In the Betty Wu Lee Garden

Hailing from the Atlas Mountains in North Africa this large coniferous evergreen tree was first brought to Britain in the nineteenth century.

An important timber tree, Cedar produces a fragrant and durable wood used for construction, carpentry, and furniture. Its wood is also the source of cedarwood oil, an essential oil sold and used for medicinal purposes as well as in fragrances.



Mespilus germanica – Medlar

8

Two trees in a bed between Lee Hall & Toda House.

Introduced to Britain by the Romans, this tree bears unlovely looking brown fruits which nonetheless have been a staple of the winter diet throughout history.

You may be disappointed if you taste these fruits, however, as the fruit must be bletted before eating. To blet the fruit, you pick after leaf-fall and store it in a cool, dark place, stem downwards for about three weeks. This allows the fleshy centres to rot and turn into a sweet pulp. Having done this, you may still be disappointed, but try to remember how little access people had to sweets in mediaeval times!



9

Arbutus unedo – Strawberry Tree

A low tree with multiple stems standing in paving on the centre path of Lee Court.

A pioneer tree, a plant which can grow at the margins too hostile for many other plants, a Strawberry Tree also regenerates strongly from fire. This native of the Mediterranean also has an historic population up the west coast of Ireland.

Don't be fooled by the diminutive training of our tree. This, let loose, would tower above our court – comfortably reaching 12m.

An evergreen (old leaves drop in early summer from among the new), flowers and spherical red fruit can be seen together at the end of summer. The fruit are edible but utterly uninteresting, hence 'unedo' - a contraction of 'unum edo', eat one.

Euonymus europaeus – Spindle

*Overhanging the path between
Lee Court & the car park.*

10

A scrubby looking tree with inconspicuous white spring flowers, Spindle gives a wonderful display in autumn as the bright pink berry-like fruits split open in four sections displaying the orange aril (a fleshy seed covering) inside. Although they're certainly not to be eaten.

Long attacked by farmers, because the tree is the winter host of the black bean aphid, it's one of the reasons behind the decimation of England's hedgerows in the latter half of the twentieth century.

The wood of the tree is hard and dense with a very fine grain, and it gets its name from a long history of being made into spindles for spinning wool. The twigs are reputed to produce the finest artist's charcoal.



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