

IDENTIFICATION OF TREES AND SHRUBS FOR HEDGE DATING

By Cyril Holden

From the articles on hedge dating in Potters' Field and Ringmer Park in Ringmer History Nos.1 and 2 it will be noted that the number of trees and woody shrubs in our Ringmer hedgerows is limited to about 20 species; of these, only a dozen or so are seen frequently and it is not easy (generally) to identify some kinds, because leaf outlines and growth are similar. To the would be "hedge dater" or casual stroller along our lanes, footpaths or hedges the following descriptions and illustrations may be helpful.

Of the larger native trees which usually escape annual hedge trimming (so necessary but very disfiguring) are the Oak, Ash, Willows and until recent losses, the Elm, which fortunately has survived in several stretches as a shrub in trimmed hedges, resulting in much smaller leaves than those on a tree.



THE COMMON OAK (Quercus robur) is the species we have most in the South and is easily recognised in Summer. In Winter, buds can be seen clustered at the end of twigs. Acorns are borne on long stems and the marble-size hard growths on branches called Oak-apples or Galls are fairly common. These foretold disaster according to Leonard Mascall, a 16th century Squire of Plumpton, as follows - "The larger galls or apples foretell three things - war, dearth and pestilence, for if you open up them which are whole, you shall find either a little flie, spider or worm. If the flie flieth away it betokeneth that there will be warre; if the little worm doe escape it is a sign of dearth that year; if the spider doe run to and fro an infinite number of pestilent diseases" (1).



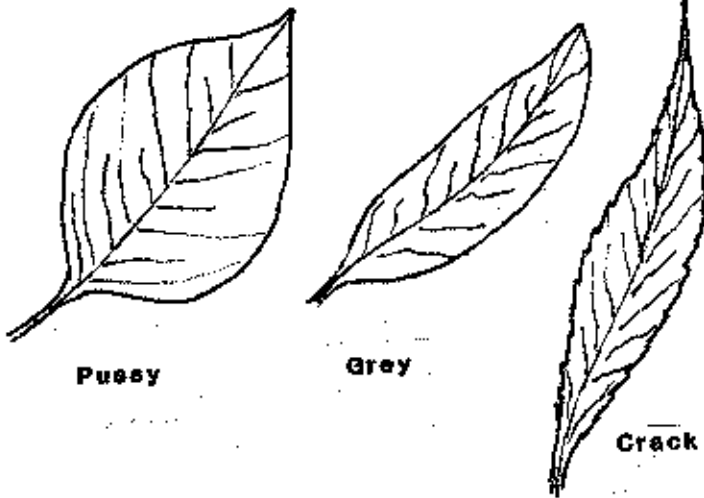
ASH (Frazinus excelsior) belongs to the Olive family and is the last of our native trees to come into leaf. There are 3 - 7 pairs of leaflets, shallow-toothed, which fall when still green. Twigs have distinctive black buds in winter to make identification simpler and when cut back by hedge trimming several branches grow from the base or sometimes from a short trunk. Leonard Mascall says that "a decoction of ash tree taken is good to make fat folk thin" ! (1)

FIELD MAPLE (Acer campestre). Frequently seen locally in older hedgerows as a shrub, rarely with a trunk except in coppices. It has slightly hairy twigs and deep green leaves which have five lobes and are much smaller than the Sycamore (Acer pseudoplatanus) which was introduced into Britain in late medieval times. In autumn its leaves change to a bright yellow, making the shrub easily distinguished in a mixed hedge. A long stretch

can be seen on the East side of Neaves Lane (off Laughton Road) beyond and opposite the Water Treatment Works.

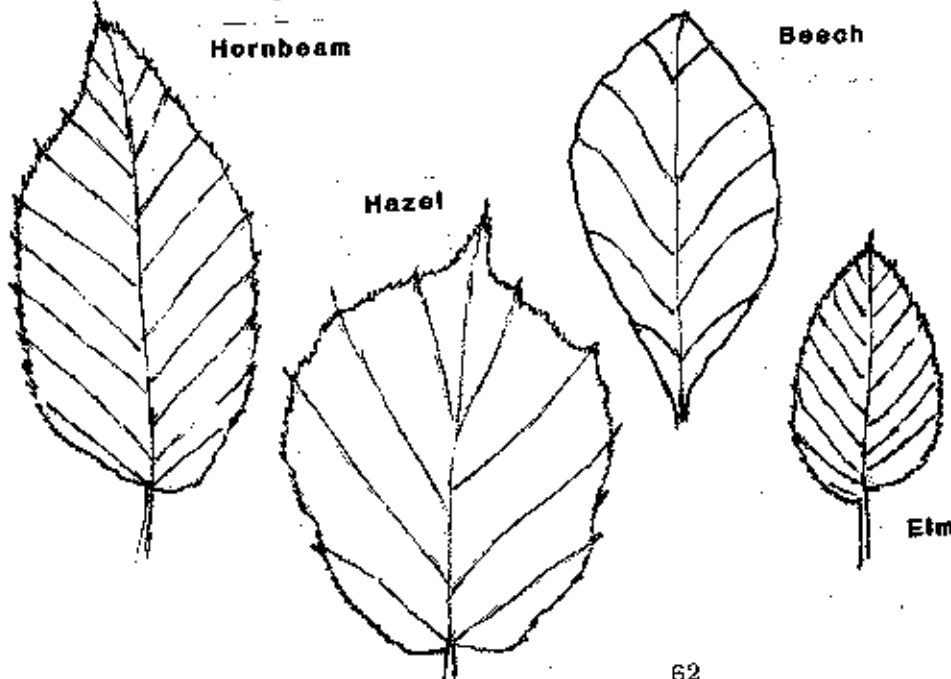


WILLOWS (Salix). The Pussy (or Goat) (caprea), Grey (cinerea) and Crack (fragilis) can be found in moister areas, such as ponds and deep ditches. Leaves of Pussy are rounder, being less than twice as long as broad, whilst the Grey has leaves at least twice as long as broad. Crack Willow leaves are narrow and long and readily break



at the joints with main branches, and can be rooted easily. The "Weeping" species with its long pendulous branches is sometimes seen in the locality and is said to be a native tree of China, introduced into Britain in the 18th Century.

HORNBEAM, HAZEL, BEECH AND ENGLISH ELM. Although usually looked upon as trees these seldom grow to maturity with a large trunk; they have leaves similar in



outline as will be seen from the illustrations. HORNBEAM (Carpinus betulus) is frequently found in some stretches of hedgerow and has leaves which are longer and narrower than Hazel or Beech, being prominently veined and marginally double-toothed; its

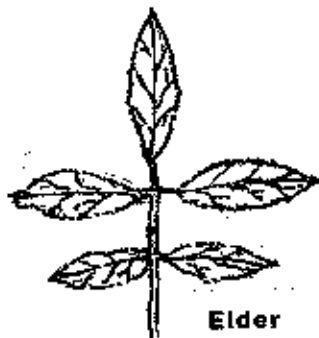
leaves remain brown in winter and drop when new growth appears. Although there was no evidence of this shrub in the Potters' Field survey, it is fairly widespread along Ringmer lanes, including the eastern hedge of Broyle Lane and occasionally on the northern side of Norlington Lane. The Elizabethans maintained that Hornbeam "has least moisture and maketh best coale" (1).

HAZEL (*Corylus avellana*) if left uncut produces a trunk but is generally a mass of long branches. Leaves are almost round with toothed margins and pointed tips, with a silky sheen on uppermost side. In November and December catkins hang from the upper branches of untrimmed trees, to yield nuts during the following autumn. It is one of the rarer trees or shrubs but there are several in Hedges numbers A5 and A17 in Potters' Field (Fig.1 in the No.1 issue). **BEECH** (*Fagus sylvatica*) is seen locally more as a garden hedge than a tree, and rarely in hedgerows. Its leaves are pointed and oval with wavy margins, not toothed, with a shiny uppermost surface. It was said in the 16th Century "to heal chapped lips if chewed" (1). **ENGLISH ELM** (*Ulmus procera*) has coarsely toothed leaves which are unequal-sided at the base. Terminal buds fall in the autumn and growth restarts in spring from the topmost side branches which are short and go out at a wide angle. There is a long stretch of this in a trimmed hedge along the west side of Broyle Lane at the northern end, and round into Norlington Lane.

Hawthorn



COMMON HAWTHORN (*Crataegus monogyna*) is the shrub most used for hedging because of its quick growth (hence the name "Quickthorn" of earlier times) and ability to form a fairly impenetrable barrier for enclosing livestock. The leaves are lobed and toothed growing on spine topped lateral branches of varying lengths. Flowers are white or pink turning to bright red or orange berries in the autumn.



Elder

ELDER (*Sambucus nigra*) is fast growing and can quickly become a tree if conditions allow. A leaf has 2-3 pairs of lateral leaflets with a terminal one and are long pointed, slightly toothed, with rather an unpleasant smell. Flat-topped flower clusters ripen into the well-known elderberries on red stalks.

Spindle

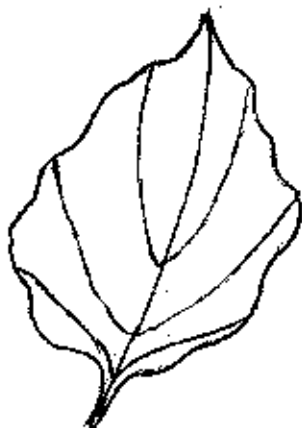


SPINDLE (*Euonymus europaeus*) . Although called a tree, this is usually found in hedgerows as a shrub, with long squarish twigs. Its bright

distinctive four-lobed pink fruits hang from long stalks in early autumn. Underneath the bark on its branches the wood is very smooth and round, in earlier years used for wool-spinning bobbins and butchers' skewers. It also yields fine charcoal for artists' drawings. A good example is in the front garden of a house adjacent to the lane leading up to Lower Barn East, opposite Ringmer School. Also there are several in the locality of the Bridge in Green Lane and here and there in Norlington Lane.



BLACKTHORN (*Prunus spinosa*). This is another popular shrub for creating a good barrier and is often planted together with Hawthorn in the Hedgerows. Its dark, almost black, branches and lateral spiny twigs have leaves which are elliptical and easily distinguished from Quickthorn. In spring, the shrub is covered with small white flowers which develop into sloes where the hedge is untrimmed.



DOGWOOD (*Cornus sanguinea*). In our area this deciduous shrub is found in hedgerows, especially the older ones, but generally thrives in woods and scrub. Having an elliptical outline with rounded base and dimpled surface, its leaves have long pointed tips, and turn reddish purple in the autumn. When facing south its branches turn reddish and bear clusters of black berries at the tips. An alternative name was 'gadtree' or 'goadtree' as it yielded branches to prod oxen when ploughing. Also 'Dog' is the term used by lumbermen for a sharp spike.

A long hedge of this colourful shrub is mixed in with Field Maple in Neaves Lane, beyond and opposite the Water Treatment Works.

COMMON PRIVET (*Ligustrum vulgare*). This is similar to the broader leaves species used for garden hedges, but has narrower, short-stalked leaves which are evergreen and oval with smooth margins. Its poisonous purple berries are borne in clusters at the tips of branches in early autumn.



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REFERENCE (1) The Countryman's Jewel by W.A.Woodward, published by Chapman and Hall, 1930.