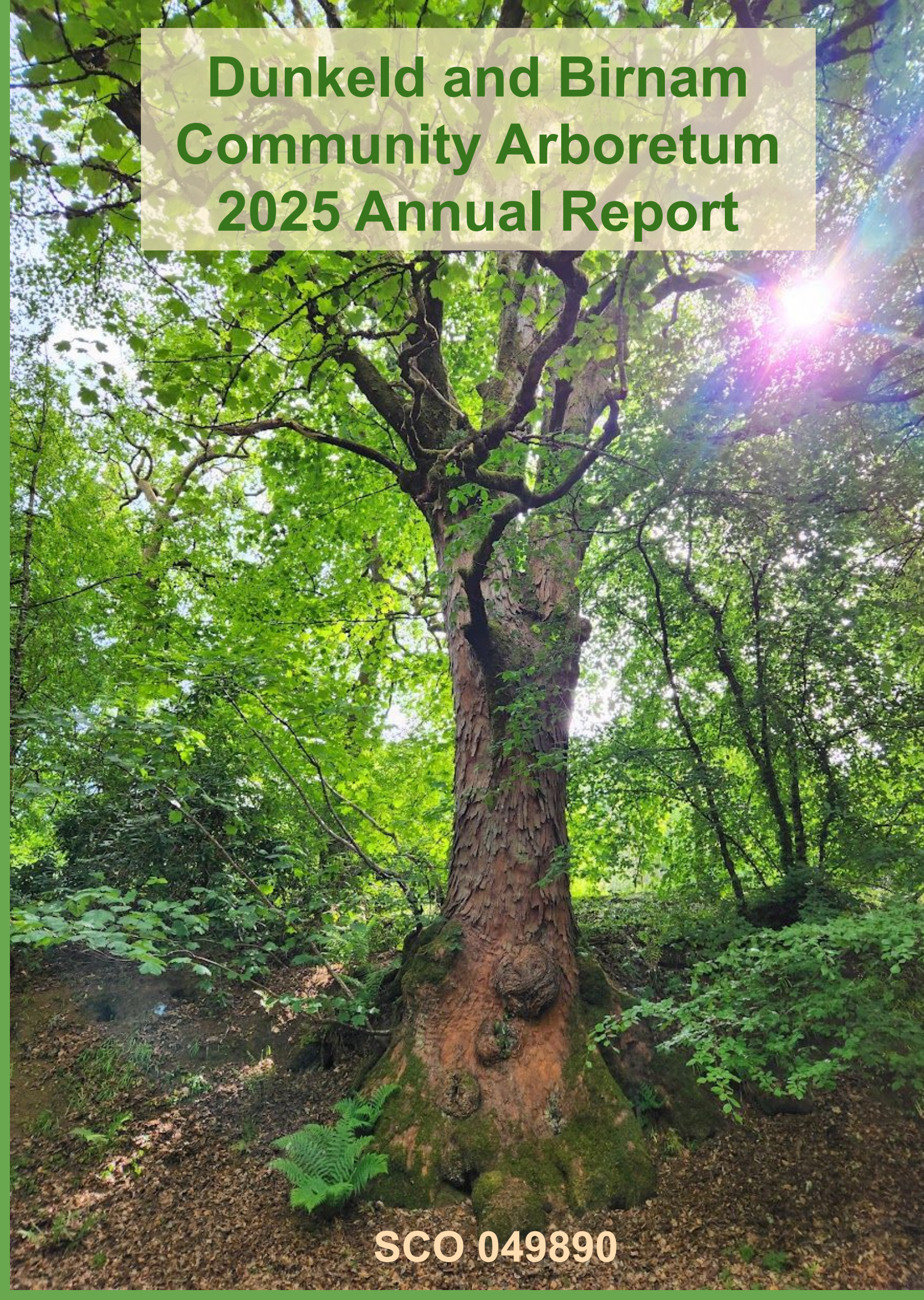




Dunkeld and Birnam Community Arboretum 2025 Annual Report

SCO 049890



Dunkeld and Birnam Community Arboretum

SCO: 049890

www.communityarboretum.scot

Our mission is to remove the **barriers** that prevent people in our local community in playing **active roles** in sustaining **Dunkeld and Birnam** as an **area of exceptional trees, woods and biodiversity**. We will work with **local organisations, funders and stakeholders** to create **new opportunities** to

- connect our diverse community to their arboretum through accessible pathways and inclusive activities
- have fun increasing biodiversity through exploring, learning, growing and planting heritage trees grown from local seeds by local people
- inspire community creativity, support local artisans, traditional crafts and sustainable community enterprises



Come sit 'neath the
branches
of the old oak tree,
What will you find,
Who might you see?

Excerpt from "The Old Oak Tree"
Fiona Ritchie
Tales of Birnam and Dunkeld

Our vision is **Dunkeld and Birnam Community Arboretum** will be more **resilient, growing in size, status and significance** as an **area of exceptional trees and woods** and biodiversity at the heart of Perth and Kinross:

Working in partnership with other organisations, we will:

- enhance and improve our natural environment
- Improve accessibility for local people and visitors
- support and strengthen the local economy

The impact we are seeking to achieve is that Dunkeld and Birnam Community Arboretum, in the heart of "The cradle of Scottish Forestry Renaissance" * benefits **everyone** in our community and **future generations** by supporting the work of our local Climate Cafe in helping prevent climate change.

* *Perth and Kinross Forest Strategy 2022-25*

Reflections from our Patron: Dr Jan Silburn

It has been wonderful to see Dunkeld and Birnam's Community Arboretum projects grow and adapt to the changing environment and voice of the community.

Adaptation is one of the biggest challenges facing our trees and it was heartening to hear recently that saplings have been seen growing from the stump of the first tree in Scotland and the UK to reach 200 feet, which sadly blew down in the Hermitage in 2017. The wood from this fallen Douglas Fir tree has been crafted in collaboration with Dunkeld and Birnam In Bloom by Rumbling Bridge Sawmill and Heritage Wood artisans into a huge table and benches for community use in St Ninian's Garden as well as benches for NTS. Thanks to all those involved!



Huge community table and benches made from the first tree in the UK to reach 200 feet. This Douglas Fir was blown down at the Hermitage in 2017. Donated to the community by local artisans from Heritage Wood and Rumbling Bridge Sawmill. Located in St Ninian's Garden 2026



New Douglas Firs sprouting from roots of the fallen Douglas Fir

2025

Cathedral path made more accessible for all using natural materials thanks to Paths & Nature Group volunteers working collaboratively with HES, NTS, PKCT and many others!



2024



The Paths and Nature Action Group volunteers, working under the umbrella of our local development trust along with NTS, PKCT, HES and others, have also been making a huge difference to the accessibility of the big trees along the Bishops Walk cathedral path using natural materials and methods. The photo here shows one of our members inspecting the path after the recent heavy rainfall and the good news is that it has stood up well to the deluge! There are lots more paths in our community that need attention and the new knowledge and skills gained by the Paths and Nature volunteers working collaboratively with others, has built sustainable capacity for future projects in our community. In a context of rising costs and growing demands on public services, it is great to see communities can find ways to work together to improve accessibility to our big trees for all in sustainable and cost effective ways.

Chair's Report 2025

2025 has been a year of creative research and exploration. We have learnt lots by partnering on projects like thebirnamoak.co.uk project and participating in the fantastic co creative workshops at Birnam Arts led by the University of Birmingham.

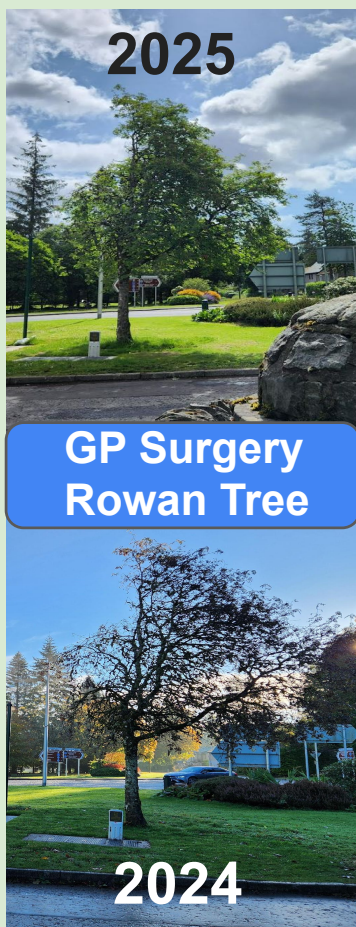
We also got crafting and making so we could trial activities like a fairy door tree identification trail at Torwood House's Open Garden.

Beatrix Potter is another important source of local inspiration for us and it's been great to hear that some of our members have been supporting Birnam Arts efforts to help refresh the Beatrix Potter garden. We hope to see projects like this remove barriers to participation, improve safety and make as much use of natural and locally sourced materials and artisans as possible.

We are keen to support any efforts to improve the accessibility of the paths that guide people from our Grade A train station and other public transport routes to and through the big trees along the Tay. Less cars is better for our trees and our community!



<https://thebirnamoak.co.uk/>



In 2026, we plan to work in partnership with local groups including Birnam library and Birnam Book Festival to encourage learning about trees through literature, creative writing, music and song in ways that also helps nurture literacy and numeracy in fun ways.

These activities are more important than ever in these fast changing times. By doing more to notice, value and protect our trees, we protect our Dunkeld and Birnam's community arboretum for future generations and build our own resilience.

As the Rowan opposite the old surgery below exemplifies, quiet strength and gentle growth is always around us. As this Rowan tree survives and thrives it, in turn, provides shelter for a world of biodiversity. We have so much to learn from trees.

In 2026, we look forward to welcoming new members and enjoying creative activities together that will help protect Dunkeld and Birnam's magical community arboretum with and for future generations. We will also continue our efforts to improve the accessibility of our big trees by working in collaboration with others. And we will continue to seek new sources of inspiration and ideas so, do get in touch, if you want to get involved!



Arboretum Trustees

Bill Muntus (Chair) lives in Dunkeld near the Stanley Hill path. As Chair, he brings a wealth of experience, most recently from his voluntary work for Breadalbane Men's Shed and Tay Valley Connections. An active volunteer for our local repair cafe, Bill is keen to champion improved accessibility of paths, especially for wheelchair users, people with mobility support needs and dog walkers. Bill is skilled and experienced in reusing and repurposing wood that might otherwise be thrown away.

Previously the patron of Dunkeld and Birnam Community Arboretum, **Jan Silburn** has now kindly agreed to be co opted as a trustee and in particular to assist us with partnerships, such as the Development Trust and Birnam Arts. As a retired GP, Jan's knowledge and experience of the importance of outdoor activities for health and we look forward to benefiting from her insight into the barriers that need to be removed to ensure those who might benefit most of our big trees, can access and enjoy them with us.

John Shelley is a passionate cyclist with 2 beautiful greyhound dogs, one of whom is blind - so accessible paths are important for animals too!. We are delighted to be able to co opt John as a trustee as he brings a wealth of experience to help us with improving access to our big trees, having worked for PKC as a surveyor for many years. John lives in Stanley and has family in Perth and will be helping us look more widely at access to our community arboretum for those who have to travel in via bus, train and car. To access our big trees.

George Yates (Secretary) has a degree in Outdoor Leadership and Environmental Management. He has been living and working in Dunkeld and Birnam for over 15 years. George brings a wealth of knowledge working with diverse young people and adults through outdoor activities. His expertise in Health and Safety and risk management will be helpful in to DBCAs future activities. George has also recently signed up as a Community First Responder.

A resident of Birnam, **Nicola Herbertson (Treasurer)** has been fascinated by the lichen abundant in our local woods and forests. When she heard about Community Arboretum she was keen to get involved. Once lockdown restrictions were lifted, Nikki agreed to be co opted by the Trustees to support the Board with SCIO governance, administration, activity development, help recruit new members and volunteers and develop ideas for inclusive engagement activities.

2025 Spring Shoots



The new www.thebirnamoak.co.uk sculpture that was created is now installed near the Birnam Oak tree, carefully located to encourage visitors to take photos a little further away from the tree and give it space and minimise compaction of the soil around it. Three DBCA members participated in the co creative process for this great project led by the University of Birmingham and delivered in partnership with Dunkeld Community Archive, Birnam Book Festival and others.

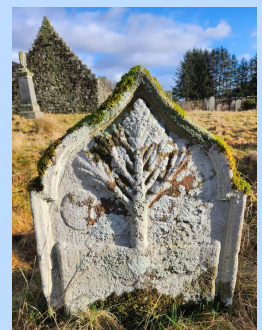
Birnam's Oak: History and Heritage

Aged between 500 – 600 years old, the Birnam Oak is now the oldest living tree from the ancient Birnam Wood referenced at the end of Shakespeare's Macbeth. As Malcolm's army advances toward Dunsinane under the cover provided by the wood's branches, they fulfil the witch's prophecy that Macbeth's demise will be signalled when the Birnam Wood moves.

This sculpture by Lewis Morrison is inspired both by this living representative of the moving forest made famous by Shakespeare, and its real-life history and legacy in Birnam and Dunkeld. You can learn more by visiting any of the topic pages below:



Please help us grow the project by taking a short survey [here](#)



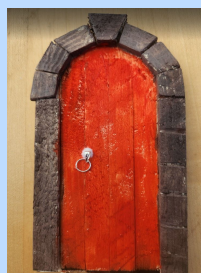
As well as being a beautiful and engaging artwork in its own right, the new sculpture continues a long tradition in our community: our members have been noticing stone sculptures and carvings of trees in all sorts of different places - on walks by the river in Blairgowrie to graveyards in Little Dunkeld and St Fillans, the importance of trees as a symbol of life are there for all to see. If you spot any, let us know!

Can you spot the fairy doors and identify the tree species?

Our chair, Bill Muntus, also designed a lovely fairy door making kit and made some fairy doors to trial an intergenerational tree identification and learning activity with 18 adults and children at Torwood House Open Garden. Fun was had by all but the species of one tree still remains a mystery! Can you help?

Do you know any tree related games?

If you have any ideas or would like to help co design one, do get in touch!.



Can you spot the fairy doors and identify the tree species?



2025 Summer Highlights

We partnered with 2 New Zealand artists from <https://ainin.org/>, part of the Artists in Nature International Network, one of whom had volunteered with In Bloom during a previous visit. Together, they designed and delivered a participatory art installation called Forest Dreams - Woven Dreams in Jubilee Park, one of our less well used local parks that has many old and beautiful big trees as well as saplings planted by local children and young people..The artists' work was funded by <https://www.nuitsdesforets.com/> in France which aims to reinvent communities' relationship with the natural world and to bring citizens closer to the forests as well as to forestry, cultural and scientific communities. In spite of weather disruption, and other challenges we have learnt from, the artists created some wonderful pieces and we are looking forward developing links to other international projects in 2026



A big thank you to PKCT and the Greenspaces team for mowing a path through Jubilee park to help reduce the risk of ticks and other health and safety risks to the artists and those who engaged with them..

On the subject of paths, congratulations to all those involved in improving the accessibility of the station through investment in raising the platforms, creating step free access to the Northbound platform and improving the accessibility of the route to Dunkeld via Birnam Glen road. All that is left to do now is

- step free access from the Birnam Glen road to the station building
- step free access via the Station Cottage footpath to station road and Birnam Arts main entrance,
- improve the accessibility of Oak Road and the paths along the Tay
- create step free access from the Tay riverbank via the Community Orchard to Dunkeld
- create safe wheelchair and buggy access to the GP, MUGA, hermitage and recreation ground
- improve the accessibility of the paths around Stanley Hill and along the Tay to Dunkeld House Hotel

Whilst that sounds like a daunting list, the progress made in the last 12 months and volunteer skills and capacity that has been built, shows that anything is possible!

An unexpected outcome of the Les Nuits des Forets project was that we bumped into a troupe of Shakespearian actors and musicians called The Barden Party <https://thebardenparty.com/> who were visiting the Birnam Oak and rehearsing in Jubilee Park as part of their preparations for performing Macbeth at Edinburgh's Fringe Festival. Their Fringe Show was a great success with 5 star reviews across the board and we have just learnt that they are back at the Fringe at a bigger venue - and in 2026, will be performing Macbeth at Birnam Arts!! Authentic to the original script, their interpretation of Macbeth is a fantastically innovative gender flipped, bluegrass folk music version which is very engaging and funny - and they specialise in performing it outdoors! Many years ago, there was a performance of Macbeth around the Birnam Oak - whilst that might not now be appropriate given it's age, perhaps Jubilee park, close to the Birnam Oak and its sapling, could be an option for the future.

Big Tree Country 2026 Autumn Colours

GATEWAY TO THE HIGHLANDS

Step outside and discover Birnam & Dunkeld, a historic haven where nature and culture meet. Wander riverside paths, climb wooded slopes, explore historic gems, enjoy the homegrown arts scene and experience the rhythm of village life. Every turn brings a new reason to linger.



The cultural, social and economic importance of our big trees to local community enterprises, charities and start ups - and of course to visitors to our local community - has become more visible than ever this year.

Birnam Arts community consultation became a colourful arboreal feast for the eyes as leaves of ideas and community input (in the form of colourful post it notes) “grew” on the tree and helped our community share ideas creatively. We are delighted to learn that the Birnam Arts team intend to retain Mat Dugard’s vibrant tree painting on the wall of the cafe. Birnam Art’s new programme of events will include nature talks, films and activities including things specifically about trees - which we are hoping to help raise funding to support. So watch this space and sign up as a friend of Birnam Arts. You can support in lots of different ways and different levels - some of which are named in honour of our local big trees!.

BA

WHAT'S ON

EVERYTHING ELSE

LOGIN | TEL: 01350 727 674

LARCHES OF DUNKELD CATHEDRAL PARENT LARCH TO MORE THAN 14 MILLION TREES

The Mother or Parent Larch by Dunkeld Cathedral stands as a reminder of the more than 14 million trees that were planted by successive Dukes of Atholl for more than a century. Planted over hilly ground that had been washed by rain and were useless for farming, the trees stabilised the ground and provided habitat for wildlife, which still thrives today.

The tree canopy provides a light shade on a forest floor which is suitable for deer and capercaillie. Larch seeds are eaten by red squirrels and several species of bird including the siskin, treecreeper, and redwing. Black grouse are fond of young cones and buds, and many species of moths hatch their larvae on the nutritious leaves. The sparrowhawk and the goshawk both favour the larch for nest building.

The large-scale plantings on the hillsides around Dunkeld were instrumental in transforming the Perthshire landscape during the 18th and 19th centuries. The trees were harvested for the rot-proof qualities, making them highly suitable for marine uses.

* Notes compiled from reliable sources such as VisitScotland.

It has been great to see the Chattan Tea Room regrow as the Birnam Oak Cafe. The cafe’s logo is a beautiful wood carving of the silhouette of the oak with colours behind it that, like the stain glassed windows of St Mary’s Church, hint of the Tay, sunsets and swathes of green leaves. The timber clad cafe building, calls to mind the seasonal summer sawmills that a Dunkeld resident described her grandfather using Clydesdale Horses to build in estate woodlands and forests- we are trying to track down the documentary made about him and this lost trade. It is wonderful to see the Birnam Oak Cafe continuing to sustain a vibrant community of local people, cyclists and walkers basking in its sunny setting on the Perth Road before heading off to explore our big tree country.

The Birnam Hotel’s new website makes it clear how important big trees are to it Scottish social and cultural heritage and sense of place. Their design aesthetic has prioritised working with local artisans and traditional skills and materials to create something is a homage to the past but with a modern twist and will contribute something new to Birnam as a place and a community. The great hall has vast amounts of wood in it, both to hold up the huge vaulted ceiling and often reported as the best sprung dance floor in Scotland!

One question that has come up from looking at the heritage wood in all our local building is, where did the wood come from? Was it locally sourced and milled or was it brought in from elsewhere? If it came from elsewhere, how did it get here - using the station and coal and timber yard of Alexander Robertson? Did they use the Dunkeld Sloop to bring timber up the Tay from Dundee before putting it on the train? What type of wood is it and how old were the trees from which the wood came?

This is where the science of dendrology comes in. Scotland has relatively limited dendrology research records compared to other parts of the UK and Europe - and our community could learn lots from the science of dendrology about our past and future needs and how we balance these. It also reminds us of the importance of our local Dunkeld Community Archive!

***Someone once asked me what my favourite place was.
I replied, I don't have a favourite place, I have a favourite tree
and whenever I spend time near my favourite tree, that becomes my favourite place.
I have so many favourite trees and trees are my place, my home. ANON***

2025 Winter Warmers

A long dark, and very wet winter, has made it difficult for our members to spend as much time outdoors enjoying our big trees as they would have liked.

Before the worst of the weather set in, one of our members made the most of this year's Mast Year to encourage us all to grow local heritage trees from seed:

"Every few years, some species of trees and shrubs produce a bumper crop of their fruits or nuts. The collective term for these fruits and nuts is 'mast', so we call this a mast year." **Woodland Trust** This is a useful resource for those interested in growing trees from local seeds:

<https://treecouncil.org.uk/guidance-resources/watch-seed-gathering-season-masterclass/?portfolioCats=192>

Others have been appreciating the art and poetry of trees in lots of different ways that have reduced isolation, improved community connections and promoted creativity and mental health.

We have continued to use playing cards with different tree species on them to chat to members about the trees they most associate with our local area, those that may be at threat from climate change and which species may help build our woodlands and forests resilience to climate change.

Basi Studio has played host to local people practising painting trees for relaxation and recovery. The Scottish Poetry Library have shared information about their "Poet Tree" activity with us which recycles old books to create a tree that people can have their leaves of poetry on. A tree theme is central to some of Murray Royal hospital's recovery programmes

Last, but not least, we have continued to share and appreciate heritage tree themed discoveries as well as the artistry of those who understand the unique characteristics of different woods and craft and design with these to stunning effect. The tea cup shown here was tourist memorabilia from the early 1900s and the tree bookshelf was exhibited at Birnam Arts in the last month.

Look out for tree themed poetry and literature, music and song and arts and crafts workshops for members in the Birnam Arts Community Education Room 2026!



Current plans and ideas for making a difference in 2026

More ideas and activities welcome!

- Make use of Table in St Ninian's Garden for intergenerational learning about trees and creative activities connected to trees.
- Encourage use of refreshed Beatrix Potter garden.
- Participate in tree warden scheme and help record special trees in tree registry - especially updating <https://www.ancient-yew.org/find-a-yew>.
- Collaborate with Birnam Arts, the Birnam Book Festival and Birnam Library to do tree related poetry and writing sessions.
- Collaborate with Birnam Arts and local artists to create a Dunkeld and Birnam Community Arboretum tree calendar.
- Collaborate with Birnam Art, the Trad Youth Group and Just Singin' to research and perform tree related songs.
- Participate in local Climate Cafe and connect to local tree / forest projects eg Tayside Woodland Partnership, tree planting and protection
- Support Artisan village project and path improvement projects especially around Stanley Hill.
- Develop more international tree related collaborations and events like Forest of Dreams especially through partnership working with BA.
- Research and start a local dendrology project working in partnership with those responsible for oldest buildings in Dunkeld and Birnam including the Three Churches, the Station and Duchess Anne.
- Encourage more use of Jubilee Park for tree identification, creative and learning activities about trees
- Continue to support the Birnam Oak project and creative activities that explore the relationship between trees and rivers eg. River of Words.
- Follow up on birnam oak sapling grown from Mask Year acorns.
- Continue to support work of the paths and nature and station groups.

Sustainability and Impact

**Thank you to all our local partners, funders,
supporters and volunteers !**

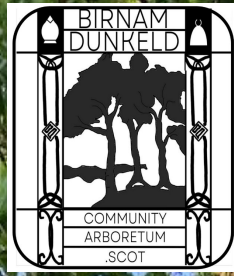
***Your connection to and care for our big trees and their
biodiversity is our Community Arboretum***

***2026 Regenerative Tourism Goal:
support local charities, enterprises
visitors, artisans & crafters in
protecting our big trees for future
generations through how they
work as well as what they do***

**Community
Volunteers
Members
Trustees
Experts
Crafts & Trades**



We are committed to learning from best practise to quantify our impact.



Dunkeld and Birnam Community Arboretum

www.communityarboretum.scot

SCO49890

Annual General Meeting

30th March 2026 4pm

**Birnam Arts
Library Reading Room**

NEW MEMBERS WELCOME!