Chapter 7

# The Cedar of Lebanon in England; the Introduction and Reception of a Sacred Tree.

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## Introduction

Douglas Davies (1988: 33-4) argued in his paper on 'evocative symbolism' that trees had a practical symbolism that derived 'both literally and metaphorically' from their being living entities 'spanning many generations.' He saw trees as 'historical markers' which could provide actual or mythical links with the past and could 'make ideas more realistic and dynamic in the present' and stressed the 'evocative symbolic response of humans to trees'. Trees are frequently worshiped as gods and held to be sacred. On a recent visit to Hayachine Shrine, which combines Buddhist and Shinto traditions, in the mountains of Iwate Prefecture, Japan, for example, I was shown several *Sugi* trees (*Cryptomeria japonica*) which were worshipped, as they are at many shrines, and there were also rare examples of a weeping *Katsura* tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*) whose leaves were dried and used to prepare incense for the Buddhist festival of Bon. Sir James Frazer (1922: 1-2) opens *The Golden Bough* with an analysis of the landscape around the shores of Lake Nemi in the Alban Hills to the south of Rome where 'stood the sacred grove and sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis'. In this wood grew a tree from which no branch might be broken except by a 'runaway slave' who if he succeeded had the right to fight the 'priest in single combat, and if he slew him he reigned in his stead with the title of King of the Wood (*Rex Nemorensis*).'

Trees are also of crucial significance in the Norse myths including the creation of humankind. Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) the rich Icelandic landowner and lawyer describes how 'Bor's sons were walking by the sea-shore and came upon two logs. They picked them up and shaped them into human beings. The first gave them breath and life, the second understanding and motion, the third form, speech, hearing and sight. They gave them clothes and names' (Page 1990: 59). When the logs became human 'The sun shone from the south on the stones of earth; then the ground was grown with green shoots' (Kristjansson 1997: 41). He also tells of the 'the Yggdrasill, tree of fate, upon which the welfare of the universe seems to depend' which is usually identified as an ash tree (Turville-Petre 1964: 277). And, of course, one of the most significant trees in the Christian bible is the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden the home of Adam and Eve in *Genesis*. Many trees were held to be sacred in Anglo-Saxon England and this was a worry for early Christian bishops who were anxious about the worship of trees and other numinous places (Hooke 2010; Walsham 2012). There was particular concern about certain species of trees, such as elders and large single oaks and sacred woods. In the sixteenth century the resurgence of Catholicism created a 'new geography of the sacred' which showed itself, for example, in the great excitement in the discovery of the image of a crucifix in an ash tree which blew down on the estate of Sir Thomas Stradling in Glamorganshire in 1559 (Walsham 2012: 217-8).

In this chapter I examine, using the example of the Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) the extent to which introduced and exotic trees became sacred in England. This tree's frequent occurrence in the bible meant that it had long had sacred associations but following its introduction in the sixteenth century it came to develop a patina of symbolic association and its 'cultural and historical precedents' helped it to become increasingly aligned with memorialisation (Davies 1988: 33).

From the seventeenth century onwards the movement of tree species around the world increased rapidly and dramatically. The enormous growth in world trade allowed many new species to be imported to Europe to be tested for their susceptibility to frost and their marketability as potential ornamental or timber trees. By 1550 it is estimated that there were 36 hardy and woody exotic species cultivated in England: 'by 1600, 103 species; by 1700, 239 species; by 1800, 733 species; and by 1900, 1911 species.' Jarvis (1979: 157). John Claudius Loudon (1854, vol. I: 54) thought that in the seventeenth century the 'taste for foreign plants' was 'confined to a few, and these not the richest persons in the community; but generally medical men, clergymen, persons holding small situations under government, or tradesmen.' In the following century, however, 'the taste for planting foreign trees extended itself among the wealthy landed proprietors.'

Some of the most enthusiastic planters of new varieties of trees were clergymen. Henry Compton, Bishop of London from 1675 until his death in 1713 had 'a great Genius for Botanism' and had the enthusiasm and opportunity to start collecting trees on a very extensive scale at the Bishop of London's summer residence Fulham Palace, which included a fine garden and parkland. Earlier bishops, such as Edmund Grindal (1558-70), who is thought to have planted a *Quercus ilex* which still survives, had already started to collect and plant trees and shrubs at Fulham. In his role as Bishop of London, Compton was also head of the Church in the American Colonies. He was conscientious in looking after clergy in the colonies and was able to appoint some who had a keen interest in botany. In addition he was happy to share his knowledge and enthusiasm and showed 'great Civilities to, and had an Esteem for, all those who were anything curious in this sort of Study.' John Ray in his *Historia Plantarum* of 1686 listed 15 rare trees and shrubs, many from America in Compton's Fulham Palace garden including the tree angelica and the tulip tree. Compton died in his eighties and there 'were few days in the year, before the latter part of his life, but he was actually in his Garden' ordering

the planting and care of his trees and plants. (Coleby 2004; Morris 1991; Ray 1686; Loudon 1838; Watkins 2014).

Enthusiastic botanists such as Samuel Reynardson (who lived at Cedar House, Hillingdon from 1678 until his death in 1721) and Dr Robert Uvedale (1642-1722) of Enfield had large collections of exotic trees. Reynardson 'kept them for the most part confined to pots and tubs, preserving them in green-houses in winter, never attempting to naturalise them to our climate.' Douglas Chambers (1993: 3) has argued that the widespread availability of popular translations of classical authorities in the eighteenth century helped to encourage the planting and nurturing of trees. Virgil's *Georgics* which had become very popular through Dryden's 1697 translation 'provided both a model for silviculture and an encouragement to the sort of botanical experimentation already taking place.' The influence of the publication of John Evelyn's *Sylva* in 1664, and its successive editions in 1670, 1679 and 1706 in extolling the introduction of new trees should not be underestimated. Some later authors such as Loudon considered that Evelyn (1670-1706) was 'more anxious to promote the planting of valuable indigenous trees, than to introduce foreign ones' but he 'had a voracious interest in new species, chiefly trees. Throughout his library any reference to the introduction of new species is marked or annotated.' (Loudon 1854, vol. I: 41; Chambers 1993: 36, 45; Hartley 2010)

Another crucially important source of knowledge about trees was provided by the Bible with its many references and allusions to the growing and felling of trees. Some trees started to acquire sacred associations because of their biblical connections and perhaps the most telling example is the cedar of Lebanon. For over four hundred years enthusiastic botanists, tree planters and scholars have compared biblical descriptions of cedars with accounts by contemporary travellers of the trees growing in Lebanon. In this chapter I first examine the ways in which the cedar of Lebanon became understood through these travellers' accounts and then go on to show how the sacred attributes of the tree encouraged the planting and

establishment of cedars in England. Finally I show how the tree became associated with sacred spaces, such as churchyards, and how drawings and photographs of the tree were used to symbolise sacred landscapes.

**Early written descriptions of the Cedar of Lebanon**

The cedar was associated with some of the most dramatic stories in the Bible. Nebuchadnezzar the powerful young king of Babylon (605-562 BC) celebrated his victories against the Phoenicians and attack on Jerusalem by an inscription at Wadi Brisa in present day Lebanon. Russell Meiggs (1982: 82) noted that the text 'is accompanied by a relief, now very badly worn, of the king killing a lion' and that a second relief shows 'the king cutting down a tree.' Nebuchadnezzar's death was celebrated by the prophet Isaiah (14: 7-8): 'the whole world has rest and is at peace….The pines themselves and the cedars of Lebanon exult over you. Since you have been laid low, they say, no man comes to fell us.' The identification and naming of the Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) as with many trees has a complicated history. Its frequent identification in the bible combined with the occurrence of ancient cedars actually growing on Mount Lebanon gave it strong symbolic veracity: the biblical references indicated that the tree existed in ancient times; the survival of old trees growing on the slopes of Mount Lebanon demonstrated that this was the species mentioned.

Travellers to Syria[1] visited Mount Lebanon and wondered whether the very trees they saw where the same as those described by biblical prophets. Loudon (1854: 2409) noted that 'almost every modern traveller who has visited Syria has ascended Mount Lebanon, and recorded his visit.' He quotes the French naturalist Pierre Belon (1517-1564) who published an account of his travels through the near East (1546-9) in 1553. Belon, like most travellers

[1] During the period of the Ottoman Empire modern Lebanon was usually classed as part of Syria.

was guided to the cedars on Mount Lebanon by the Maronite monks from the monastery of the Virgin Mary. Loudon noted that at this period ‘paying a visit to the cedars of Mount Lebanon seems to have been considered a type of pilgrimage’. This caused problems for the trees as visitors ‘took away some of the wood of the trees, to make crosses and tabernacles’. The damage was so great that ‘the patriarch of the Maronites, fearing that the trees would be destroyed, threatened excommunication to all those that would injure the cedars’ and ‘exhorted all Christians to preserve trees so celebrated’ in the bible. It was reported that ‘the Maronites were only allowed to cut even the branches of these trees once a year: and that was, on the eve of the Transfiguration of our Saviour’ which is in August and ‘a suitable period for visiting the mountain’. At this festival the ‘Maronites and pilgrims’ climbed the mountain and ‘passing the night in the wood’ drank ‘wine made from grapes grown on the mountain, and lighted their fires with branches cut from the cedars. They passed the night in dancing a kind of Pyrrhic dance, and in singing and regaling’ and on the next day ‘the patriarch celebrated high mass on an altar built under one of the largest and oldest cedars.’ John Gerard (1597: 1113) in his famous herbal describes the ‘*Cedrus Libani*… the great Cedar tree of Libanus’ as ‘huge and mightie’ and as having branches ‘so orderly placed by degrees, as that a man may climb up by them to the top as by a ladder’. He provides a woodcut illustration of the foliage and cones and notes that the ‘Cedar trees grow upon the snowie mountains, as in Syria on mount Libanus, on which there remaine some even to this day… planted as it is thought by Salomon himself.’ [Fig 1: *Cedrus Libani*, Gerard]

One of the earliest first-hand English descriptions of the cedars was provided by Henry Maundrell, a Church of England Clergyman and chaplain to the Levant Company's factory at Aleppo in his *A journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem: at Easter, AD 1697.* Maundrell travelled to the cedars on 9 May 1697 and found the ‘noble trees’ growing ‘amongst the snow, near the highest part of Lebanon.’ He thought the trees ‘remarkable as well for their own age and

largeness, as for the frequent allusions made to them in the Word of God.' He found only 16 'very old trees, of a prodigious bulk' but there were 'numerous' younger trees. He measured 'one of the largest, and found it 12 yards 6 in. in girt, and yet sound; and 37 yards in the spread of its boughs.' (Maundrell 1749: 142). About forty years later the trees were visited by Richard Pococke (1704–1765), Bishop of Ossory, in his *A Description of the East* (Vol 2 1745) in which he described his travels 1737 to 1740. 'From the Convent of St. Sergius (Latin Carmelite Friars), there is a gentle ascent, for about an hour, to a large plain between the highest parts of the Mount Lebanon.' The 'famous cedars of Lebanon… form a grove about a mile in circumference, which consists of some large cedars that are near to one another, a great number of small cedars, and some young pines. The great cedars, at some distance, look like very large spreading oaks; the bodies of the trees are short, dividing at bottom into three or four limbs, some of which, growing up together for about 10 ft., appear like those Gothic columns which seem to be composed of several pillars…' He reported on the quality of the wood noting that it 'does not differ from white deal in appearance, nor does it seem to be harder.' He also notes, 200 years after Pierre Belon's account, that 'Christians of several denominations near this place come here to celebrate the festival of the Transfiguration, and have built altars against several of the large trees, where they administer the sacrament.' (Pococke 1745:105)

If we turn to early editions of John Evelyn's *Sylva* some considerable uncertainty as to what constitutes a cedar is apparent. In the 1670 edition he uses the reported small number of surviving cedars on Mount Lebanon as evidence for a general call for his readers to plant trees and manage them carefully. He notes that the 'Cedar in Judea was first planted by Solomon, who doubtless try'd many rare *Experiments* of this nature, and none more *Kingly* than that of *Planting* to *Posterity*.' (Evelyn 1670: 116) He then refers to travellers' descriptions which indicate that only a few of these biblical trees survive and argues that this is 'a pregnant *Example* of what *Time*, and *Neglect* will bring to *ruine*, if due, and continual care be not taken

to propagate *Timber*.' (116) This clear link between cedars and Lebanon becomes blurred however when he considers the quality of cedar wood. He notes that the cedar 'grows in all extreams: In the moist *Barbados*, the hot *Bermudas*, the cold *New-England*; even where the Snow lies as (I am assur'd) almost half the year.' (Evelyn 1670: 120-1) And although he hopes fancifully that the use of timber by merchants in the London in their shops might 'preserve the whole *City* as if it stood amongst…the prospects of *Mount Libanus'* it is clear that he is using the term 'cedar' for many different timbers and indeed considers some juniper wood as *'sweet as Cedar* whereof it is accounted a *spurious* kind' (Evelyn 1670: 130).

But in the third edition of his book of 1679 he mentions that he has obtained seeds from Mount Lebanon and he is therefore able to describe at first-hand what the cones looked like (Evelyn 1679: 125). He reports that he has 'received Cones and Seeds of those few remaining Trees' from 'on the Mountains of Libanus' and as they grew there, he questions 'Why then should they not thrive in Old England ?' and argues 'I know not, save for want of Industry and Trial.' He describes the form of the trees from travellers' accounts noting that the cedars are 'of the greatest Antiquity,' and are 'indeed majestical' and their 'sturdy Arms…, grow in Time so weighty, as often to bend the very Stem, and main Shaft.' The most remarkable thing to him was 'the Structure of the Cones and Seeds Receptacles, tack'd and ranged between the Branch-leaves, in such order, as nothing appears more curious and artificial, and, at a little Distance, exceedingly beautiful.' His enthusiasm for the tree is clear in his precise description of the cones, which he handled himself: 'These Cones have the Bases rounder, shorter, or rather thicker, and with blunter Points, the whole circum-zoned, as it were, with pretty broad thick Scales, which adhere together in exact Series to the very Top and Summit, where they are somewhat smaller….' But he also reports continued uncertainty about the status of the tree: 'Botanists are not fully agreed to what Species many noble and stately Trees, passing under the Names of Cedar, are to be reckoned' (Evelyn 1679: 135; 139).

**Planting Cedars of Lebanon in England**

It is not known who first planted and successfully established a cedar of Lebanon in England, but there have been many contenders for the honour. It is quite possible that John Evelyn was the person and Loudon argues that 'It is extremely improbable that a man so fond of trees as Evelyn, and so anxious to introduce new and valuable sorts into his native country, should have suffered "cones and seeds" of such a tree in his possession, without trying to raise young plants from them; particularly as he was a man of leisure, residing in the country, and fond of trying experiments…'. As further evidence he notes that 'Evelyn had doubtless planted some cedars at Sayes court because in a letter to the Royal Society detailing the effects of a bad winter dated Sayes Court, Deptford, April 16 1684 he states 'As for exotics, my cedars, I think, are dead.' (Loudon 1854: 2412-4) Another strong contender is the oriental scholar Edward Pococke (1604–1691) who visited Syria in 1638/39 while chaplain to the Levant Company. It is reported that 'Several noble trees planted from seeds that Pococke brought back from the east commemorated him long after his death.' These included a 'great plane tree' which 'was at the end of the twentieth century in 'Pococke's garden' at Christ Church, and a large fig tree known as the 'arbor Pocockiana' which was still 'producing fruit in the garden of the Hebrew professor in 1911.' Edward Pococke was appointed rector of Childrey in Hampshire by Christ Church College in 1642 and 'according to unbroken tradition' a tree there 'which is still healthy and producing viable seed, was planted by Edward Pococke on the rectory lawn in 1646'. If so, this would be the oldest cedar of Lebanon in England, and 'one of the few to survive the harsh winter of 1740, which destroyed most of the other cedar trees growing in Britain' (Toomer 2004).[2]

[2] http://www.treecouncil.org.uk/community-action/green-monuments/ancient-trees

By the mid eighteenth century the fashion for planting cedars of Lebanon was well established among the aristocracy. When Linnaeus's pupil Pehr Kalm visited the Duke of Argyll in May 1747 at Whitton on Hounslow Heath he found him to be particularly interested in 'Dendrologie' and noted that 'there was a collection of all kinds of trees, which grow in different parts of the world, and can stand the climate of England out in the open air, summer and winter.' He pointed out that the Duke had 'planted very many of these trees with his own hand' and that 'there was here a very large number of Cedars of Lebanon.' (Murdoch 2004; Symes et al 1986). The pleasures of planting were celebrated by George Sinclair, head gardener at the Duke of Bedford's Woburn Abbey, who thought that the 'interest arising from the adoption of foreign trees into domestic scenery' was 'not confined to their picturesque effects', but reminded all 'of the climes whence they come' and the 'scenes with which they were associated'. In exploring 'a well-selected arboretum', the 'eternal snows of the Himalaya', the 'savannahs of the Missouri… untrodden forests of Patagonia…vallies of Lebanon, pass in review before us: we seem to wander in other climes, to converse with other nations (Sinclair 1832: 129). Cedars were planted with enthusiasm by both Capability Brown, as at his first major commission at Croome Park, Worcestershire in the 1750s and by his picturesque critic Uvedale Price at Foxley, Herefordshire (Brown 2011; Watkins and Cowell 2012).

One of the most influential writers on trees at the end of the eighteenth century was the Reverend William Gilpin, vicar of Boldre in the New Forest, who published his *Remarks on Forest Scenery* in 1791. Gilpin was well known as a schoolmaster and wrote extensively on picturesque scenery. Gilpin argued that the cedar of Lebanon was preeminent among all evergreens not only because of its own 'dignity' but also 'on account of the respectable

It seems Edward Pococke was not related to Richard Pococke. Sir Thomas Hanmer (1612–1678) MP for Flint has been 'credited with being the first English author to mention the cedar of Lebanon, predicting its future importance' (Martin 2004).

mention, which is everywhere made of it in scripture'. He emphasises that 'Solomon spake of trees from the cedar of Lebanon, to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: that is from the greatest to the least.' (Gilpin 1791: 73) He considered that 'The eastern writers are indeed the principal sources, from which we are to obtain the true character of the cedar; as it is an eastern tree…It is generally employed by the prophets to express strength, power, and longevity. The strength of the cedar is used as an emblem to express the power even of Jehovah.' Gilpin (1791: 74-6) argued that two of the principal characteristics of the cedar, the 'multiplicity and length of its branches and its dense canopy of leaves are identified: 'His boughs are multiplied, as Ezekiel says, and his branches become long; which David calls spreading abroad.' He thought that Ezekiel identified 'with great beauty, and aptness' the 'shadowing shroud' as 'no tree in the forest is more remarkable than the cedar, for it's close-woven, leafy canopy.' Gilpin considered that it was the 'mantling foliage' of the cedar which is its 'greatest beauty; which arises from the horizontal growth' of branches which 'forms a kind of sweeping, irregular penthouse.' Moreover, when to this 'idea of beauty' is added 'that of strength' from 'the piramidal form of the stem, and the robustness of the limbs, the tree is complete in all it's beauty, and majesty.' (76)

But Gilpin did not have much optimism for the successful establishment of large numbers of trees in England. In the British climate, he argued, 'we cannot expect to see the cedar in such perfection. The forest of Lebanon is perhaps the only part of the world, where it's growth is perfect.' He thought that young trees were 'often with us a vigorous thriving plant' but that in its 'maturer age, the beauty of the cedar is generally gone, it becomes shrivelled, deformed, and stunted.' There were exceptions however, including the famous tree at Hillingdon, near Uxbridge which when he saw it in 1776 'was about one hundred and eighteen years of age: and being then completely clump-headed, it was a very noble and picturesque tree.' This cedar tree at Hillingdon near Uxbridge had become one of the most

famous in England, clearly visible from the main road. It had been planted by Samuel Reynardson who lived there from 1678-1721. Gilpin thought it the 'best specimen' of a cedar 'I ever saw in England' and measured it: the 'perpendicular height of it was fifty three feet; it's horizontal expanse ninety six; and it's girth fifteen and a half.' This 'noble cedar' was blown down in 'the high winds about the beginning of the year 1790' and its trunk was five feet in diameter. John Claudius Loudon noted that Sir Joseph Banks had a table made from its timber (Gilpin 1791: 77-8, Victoria County History 1971: 62; Loudon, 1854, vol. IV: 2417).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries stories circulated about the origin of some of the largest cedars. Loudon wondered, for example, whether 'Supposing Evelyn to have raised plants from his cone, the great cedar at Enfield may have been given to him to Dr Uvedale'; as Evelyn's *Sylva* was written in 1664, and Dr Uvedale lived there 1665-1670 and the alternative story that the Enfield Cedar 'had been brought by one of the doctor's pupils from Mount Lebanon rests solely on tradition.' Dr Uvedale was 'famous for his curious gardens and choice collection of exotics. The Cedar, which is now perhaps the largest in the kingdom, was put in the ground by him, a plant brought direct from Mount Libanus.' It became so well-known and liked that when it was threatened with felling in the early nineteenth century 'the contemplation of its loss excited so much regret and discontent among several of the most respectable inhabitants in the place' that the owner 'was obliged to relinquish the barbarous design, even after the trench was dug around it, the saw-pit prepared, and the axe almost lifted up for its destruction.' (Strutt 1830: 104)

Other famous old cedars were drawn and described by the artist Jacob George Strutt (1784–1867) who produced a set of etchings: *'Sylva Britannica', or, Portraits of Forest Trees Distinguished for their Antiquity* in 1822. His wife Elizabeth was a prolific author of devotional works and travel guides. Strutt thought that owing to its origin in 'elevated situations in the Levant' the cedar 'is so hardy, that it can easily adapt itself to any climate. It has not

been cultivated in England till of late years; although its quick growth, and its capability of thriving in a meagre soil, render it peculiarly desirable for those bleak and barren situations which have hitherto been principally devoted to the fir.' He noted that 'The frequent and solemn allusions to the Cedar of Holy Writ, seem to give it something of a sacred character' which was reinforced by 'knowledge of the esteem in which it was held by the ancients.' Some individual trees, such as the great cedar of Hammersmith when 'in the full prime of its summer foliage, waving its rich green arms to the gentle breezes, and hiding the small birds innumerable in its boughs' afforded 'a fine exemplification of the sublime description of the Prophet Ezekiel, in his comparison of the glory of Assyria, in her "most high and palmy state".' Others were growing less well, including those in the apothecaries' garden at Chelsea, apparently planted in 1683, whose branches have 'of late years altogether drooped and languished' owing to the 'pestiferous vapour of the numerous gas-works by which it is surrounded.' (Strutt 1830: 103; 106; 108-9). [Fig. 2 Hammersmith Cedar, Strutt]

It was soon realised that timber produced by the Cedar of Lebanon in England was not of a particularly high quality. Loudon (1854: 2417) summarised its commercial value 'The wood of the cedar is of a reddish white, light and spongy, easily worked, but very apt to shrink and warp, and by no means durable.' Authors found it difficult to equate the quality of the wood grown in France and England with the qualities described by classical authors and in the Bible. Loudon noted that the table Sir Joseph Banks had made from the Hillingdon cedar 'was soft, without scent (except that of common deal), and possessed little variety of veining.' Moreover cedar wood 'burns quickly, throwing out many sparks, though but little heat in comparison with that of the oak or the beech; though the flame of the cedar wood is more lively and brilliant, on account of the resin it contains.' Earlier Walter Nicol (1803: 50-1) had noted that 'This celebrated tree is found in the highest perfection in the bleakest and most mountainous sites of the East; but whether it shall be found so on the mountains of Britain,

remains to be known.' He compared it unfavourably to the European Larch, which was one of the most profitable timber trees in this period: 'It is much slower in growth, and also less docile than the Larch; nor need we ever expect to see it become so great and acquisition to the nation.' But he agreed with many other authors that as 'an ornamental plant, it ought to be admitted in all extensive designs' pointing out airily that of 'its mighty stature, of the durability of its timber; of its property, in resisting worms;... with a hundred more of its *properties*, famed and celebrated for ages, might volumes be filled.' John Elwes and Augustine Henry, writing in 1908, confirmed the low value of cedar wood in Britain: 'Its value in commerce is, however, low, because neither the supply nor the demand is regular; and the cost of removing and sawing up large cedar trees is so great, that I was offered a tree containing 300 cubic feet for nothing if I could get it away…' (Elwes and Henry 1908: 467).

But the leading foresters and tree enthusiasts all tended to agree that the cedar of Lebanon was one of the most attractive trees to plant. Loudon enthused that 'As an ornamental object, the cedar is one of the most magnificent of trees; uniting the grand with the picturesque, in a manner not equalled by any tree in Britain, either indigenous or introduced.' (Loudon 1854: 2418) He argued that the tree should be given plenty of space to spread its branches: 'On a lawn, where the soil is good, the situation sheltered, and the space ample, it forms a gigantic pyramid, and confers dignity on the park and mansion to which it belongs; and it makes an avenue of unrivalled grandeur, if the trees are so far apart as to allow their branches to expand on every side.' However, if it was 'planted in masses' it would be 'like any other species of the pine and fir tribe, drawn up with a straight naked trunk' and in this case it 'scarcely differs in appearance from the larch, except in being evergreen.' If large numbers were to be planted and 'a distance of 50ft. or 60ft. allowed between each tree' then 'nothing in the way of sylvan majesty can be more sublime than such a forest of living pyramids.' Other Victorian commentators agreed: Augustus Mongredien (1870: 60) thought it to be 'of unrivalled majesty

and grandeur when old, and beautiful even in the earlier stages of its growth'; William Ablett (1880: 35) noted that the 'elegant grandeur of the cedar was often used as a type and illustration by the Hebrew prophets, to express the beautiful steadfastness and comely aspects of the spiritual condition of the righteous, which earthly storms, though they might shake, could not remove' while the laconic J Blenkarn (1859: 72) noted that the 'beauty of this tree is so well known and acknowledged, that any comment here is unnecessary.' The status of the cedar as an ornamental tree by the early twentieth century was almost unrivalled and W J Bean, Curator at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew thought that 'Irrespective of its sacred and historical associations, no tree ever introduced to our islands has added more for the charm of gardens than the cedar of Lebanon. Its thick, stately trunk and noble crown of wide-spreading, horizontal branches give to it an air of distinction no other tree at present can rival.' However the impact of industrial and domestic pollution and the intensity and frequency of smog meant that he was concerned that trees the suburbs of London were 'becoming fewer and less vigorous' and thought that 'until there is a revolution in the methods of consuming coal in the metropolis, the gaps will never be filled.' (Bean 1950: 394)

By the Victorian period cedars of Lebanon had become a key emblem of country house gardens and parks. At Elvaston Castle an extraordinarily diverse and intricately designed formal pinetum was established by William Barron for the Earl of Harrington. The pinetum was planted exclusively with evergreens from 1835 around what had formerly been the central drive, the eastern side with pines and the west with firs and spruces. The northern and southern ends of the avenues were planted with cedars of Lebanon and deodars. Other avenues were planted with yews and *Araucarias.* Barron devised a successful tree transplanting machine and in November 1831 moved 43 foot tall and 48 foot diameter Cedar of Lebanon into the gardens at Elvaston which had grown by the 1870s from having a trunk of 2 feet in circumference to one of ten feet (Elliott, Watkins and Daniels 2011: 171-72). John Ruskin celebrated trees for

their ‘unerring uprightness’ like temple pillars and ‘mighty resistances of rigid arm and limb to the storms of ages’ and he felt they deserved ‘boundless affection and admiration from us’ serving as ‘a nearly perfect test of our being in right temper of mind and way of life’ and no one ‘can be far wrong in either who loves the trees enough and every one is assuredly wrong in both, who does not love them’. And it was to Ruskin that the English Arboricultural Society, founded in 1881, later to become the Royal Forestry Society, turned for ideas for a suitable motto in 1887. One of his suggestions was ‘*Saturabuntur ligna campi et cedri Libani quas plantavil*’ (The trees of the Lord are satisfied – the cedars of Lebanon which He hath planted) (Ruskin 1907: 79-81; Ruskin 1887: 156-7).

**The cedar in sacred spaces**

In the nineteenth century the Cedar of Lebanon became associated with sacred spaces such as churchyards and cemeteries. John Claudius Loudon wrote his influential treatise *On the laying out, planting, and managing of cemeteries; and on the improvement of churchyards* in 1843. Key issues for him were that cemeteries should be open to the sun and that trees should not be closely planted. He stressed that ‘too many trees and shrubs impede the free circulation of the air and the drying effect of the sun, and therefore they ought to be introduced in moderation.’ Another important consideration was that burial grounds should be visually clearly identifiable places of contemplation and hence that ‘Every mode of introducing trees and shrubs which is identical with that practised in planting parks and pleasure-grounds is to be avoided, as tending to confound the character and expression of scenes which are, or ought to be, essentially distinct.’ In general evergreen trees with dark foliage were recommended as ‘the variety produced by deciduous and flowering trees is not favourable to the expression either of solemnity or grandeur.’ Moreover coniferous tree had the practical advantage of producing

'much less litter than that of broad-leaved trees.' (Loudon 1843: 20) One of the principal trees he recommended in his design for a cemetery at Cambridge was the Cedar of Lebanon which he thought should be 'planted along the walks at regular distances'. He also recommended the cedar for country churchyards but recognised that, as with many other conifers, its habit of surface rooting could cause problems. Indeed, he thought that if it were not for this 'the cedar of Lebanon would be one of the most fitting of all trees for a churchyard, from the sombre hue of its foliage, and its grand and yet picturesque form; from the horizontal lines of its spreading branches contrasting strongly with the perpendicular lines of a Gothic church; and above all, from the associations connected with it, on account of its frequent mentions in Holy Writ.' To get over this problem he recommended that in all new churchyards 'two or three spots (each about 30 ft. in diameter) were set apart, not to be broken up by interments, and each planted with a cedar of Lebanon.' In addition he felt that in many old churchyards across the country 'a spot sufficiently large for at least one cedar might easily be spared; and the clergyman or the churchwardens who should plant a cedar on such a spot, and fence it sufficiently while young, would confer a grand and appropriate ornament on the church, and would deserve the gratitude of the parishioners.'[3] (Loudon, 1843: 89)

The publication of Loudon's book was part of a general move to improve burial conditions in the nineteenth century. One of the most famous examples of a new cemetery was at Abney Park, Stoke Newington in north London. This was laid out in 1840 with the help of the leading nurseryman George Loddiges and an immense collection of trees and shrubs was planted (Joyce 1994). George Collison, one of its promoters, published a guidebook which

[3] He also recommended Douglas Davies's favourite tree the *Araucaria* 'A very singular tree, of slow growth, and, as it is certain of attracting general attention, when planted in a cemetery, it ought to be surrounded by a wire fence for five or six years to protect it from accidental injury.' (Loudon 1843: 97)

extolled the beauty of the existing well established trees on the site which young plantations in other new cemeteries did not have. And while he likened the welcome recurrence and beauties of the new foliage of deciduous trees to the 'strong probabilities and the opening glories of a physical resurrection!' he also admired the old Cedars of Lebanon (Collison 1840: 297).The most famous of these trees were those surrounding the former residence of the famous Congregationalist hymnologist Isaac Watts (1674-1748). In about 1712 the prominent dissenting Whig Sir Thomas Abney invited Watts to stay with him 'for what was initially a week's stay' but 'Watts was to spend the rest of his life in considerable comfort with the Abneys' at their various homes and from 1733 he stayed 'with Lady Abney and her two surviving daughters' who 'represented for him the ideal dissenting household' at Abney Park (Rivers 2004). By the nineteenth century it was repeatedly claimed that some of the older trees at Abney had been planted by Watts and his friends especially 'the magnificent cedar of Lebanon' therefore providing a direct link with Watts and the past. The 'health and vigour' of the cedar which was 'surprising when its age is considered' was celebrated, and when some of the old and decaying trees and underwood had been removed in converting the site for scientific reasons, to allow 'the free circulation of air', it was claimed that this had benefited the cedar. A story was told that a mower's scythe had been suspended in the trunk of the Cedar and having been forgotten about had become surrounded by wood covering the blade except for a small portion of the iron heel. (Collison 1840: 205-7) As Isaac Watts had spent much of his life enjoying the grounds, park and trees at Abney House and had written some of his famous works there, the old trees were strongly associated, especially in the minds of dissenters, with his works. For promoters like Collison, these specific religious associations was merely part of the general appeal of the contemplation of trees at Abney and 'there needed to be no reminder of the pleasure gained from the contemplation of trees which were 'remarkable either for size or

longevity' and offered 'quiet eloquent' testimony to the 'passage of the ages with their numerous and rich pagan and Christian associations.' (Collison 1840: 305-7)

As well as being planted to make particular places more sacred, representations of the trees were used by artists to characterise historical religious paintings, and representations of the tree were used to illustrate sacred books. John Martin used the characteristic form of the cedar in several of his paintings including his very popular mezzotint 'The Fall of Man' which was published in 1831 in which Adam and Eve are depicted having eaten of the tree of knowledge. A contemporary critic, quoting Milton, thought that this was 'a perfect picture of landscape beauty – "clear spring, and shady grove…" the dark thick foliage of the foreground… melts away into the distance, where a lake sleeps in all the quiet of paradise…bounded by woods and mountains, and above and beyond all rises the "verdrous wall" in the sublime grandeur of Alpine scenery' (Campbell 1992: 126). Line engraved copies of this mezzotint were very popular in the Victorian period and frequently used as illustrations to sacred works such as *The Home Preacher or Church in the House* (1868-69) and as the frontispiece to *The Imperial Family Bible* (1844) (Campbell 1992: 126). Loudon noted how the 'great artist' Martin had 'introduced the flat head of the aged cedar into his imaginary view of the Garden of Eden' and had also used them in another famous mezzotint, 'The Fall of Babylon' (1831) where he shows them growing in the 'terraces of the gardens of Babylon.' Cedars also appear in his 'The Plains of Heaven' which formed part of his 'Last Judgement' triptych (c 1845-53) which 'effectively tapped into vernacular Christian culture'. (Loudon 1854: 2423; Myron and Austen 2012: 182) [Fig. 3 John Martin, *The Fall of Man*].

With the increasing popularity of landscape photography yet more possibilities opened up for the celebration of the Cedar of Lebanon, photographs of the cedars actually growing in Lebanon began to be used as illustrations for books, including the bible. One of the most important landscape photographers was Francis Frith (1822–1898), who turned his early

amateur enthusiasm in photography into a profitable business. Frith was a Quaker who had published an influential tract *A Reasonable Faith: Short Religious Essays for the Times* in 1844. He made his reputation with the photographs he took on journeys to the Near East including Palestine and Syria in the 1850s 'where he took pioneering photographs of the landscape and of monuments, often under dangerous and difficult conditions.' (Sackett 2004) Photographs sold by the company included general views of the cedar groves and photographs of individual trees. One of the images was used to illustrate *The Holy Bible … Illustrated with Photographs by [Francis] Frith* published by William Mackenzie, 1862-1863. [Fig. 4 Frith photograph, V & A]

The increase of visitors and photographers brought about increasing interest in the fate of the cedars of Lebanon. One concern was that the heavy grazing by sheep and goats meant that there was hardly any natural regeneration of the cedars. Elwes and Henry (1908: 454) reported that a 'detailed survey of the basin where the cedars grow' at the head of the Kedisha valley at 6,000 ft. had been made by two Royal Navy surveyors with Sir Joseph Hooker in 1860. Hooker 'believed that the wood used by Solomon and by Nebuchadnezzar in buildings was the Lebanon cedar.' (Elwes and Henry 1908: 454, fn 2). The age of the cedars was estimated by making ring counts from a branch of an old tree. The youngest trees were about 100 years old and the oldest 2,500 years old. They noted that one small grove appears 'as a black speck in the great area of the corie and its moraines, which contain no other arboreous vegetation, nor any vegetation nor any shrubs but a few small barberry and rose bushes.' The 'most remarkable and significant fact connected with their size, and consequently with the age of the grove, is that there is no tree of less than 18 inches girth, and that no young trees, seedlings, or even bushes of a second year's growth were found.' (454) They noted that S R Oliver wrote in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* xii 204 (1879) that 'for want of proper protection against the goats and thoughtless tourists, the present grove is dwindling away, and another

generation will exclaim against our supineness in thus allowing a relic of the past to die out prematurely.' (454) In addition Dr A. E. Day wrote in November 1903 that a grove he had visited 'suffers much from being cut' and he noticed that 'Local people obtain from it roof-beams and wood for fuel…I have failed to find a single large tree … which has not been cut off, with the result that several branches have taken the place of the principal stem.' (454) Elwes and Henry (1908: 457) provide a remarkable photograph taken Cornelius Van Alen Van Dyck (1818-95) the American doctor and Protestant missionary and translator showing a splendidly isolated cedar sheltering a sheep and goats, in a scene which temptingly takes us back to Old Testament times. [Fig. 5 Cornelius Van Alen Van Dyck, Cedar c. 1890]

While the cedar of Lebanon was increasingly threatened in its homeland, in England and many other countries it had become a very fashionable ornamental tree. While it was not a commercially important tree, like other exotic conifers such as the European larch and Norway spruce, it had become a common specimen tree in large gardens and parks. But more than this, there was an explicit and overt attempt to establish the tree as sacred through planting in churchyards and cemeteries. This sacredness showed itself also through its use by the painter John Martin in his enormously popular biblical scenes. The strength of the biblical connections was reinforced by the popularity of photographs of cedars of Lebanon, such as those by Francis Frith, in the later nineteenth century. Here photographs of ancient cedars, which were interpreted as direct, living, connections with Old Testament characters, were used both to ground and place the bible in the landscape.

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**Figures**

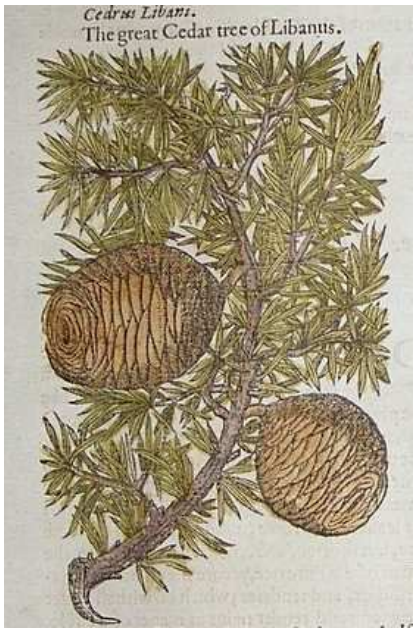


Fig 1 *Cedrus Libani*. Woodcut, from John Gerard, *The Herball, or, Generall historie of plantes* (London, 1597).

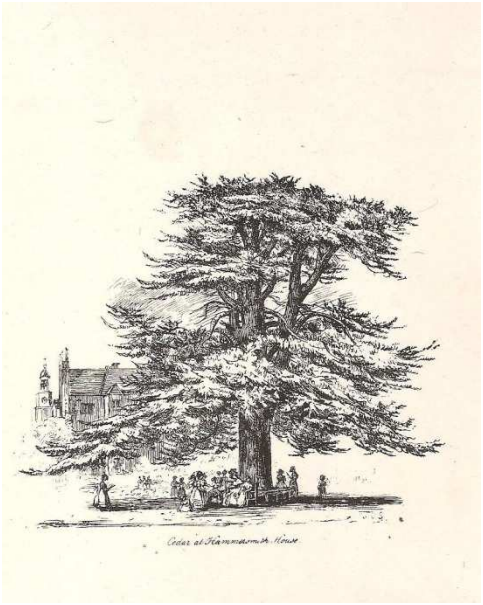

Fig 2 Jacob George Strutt. ‘Cedar at Hammersmith House’ *Sylva Britannica* (London, 1830). Facing page 106. Private Collection.

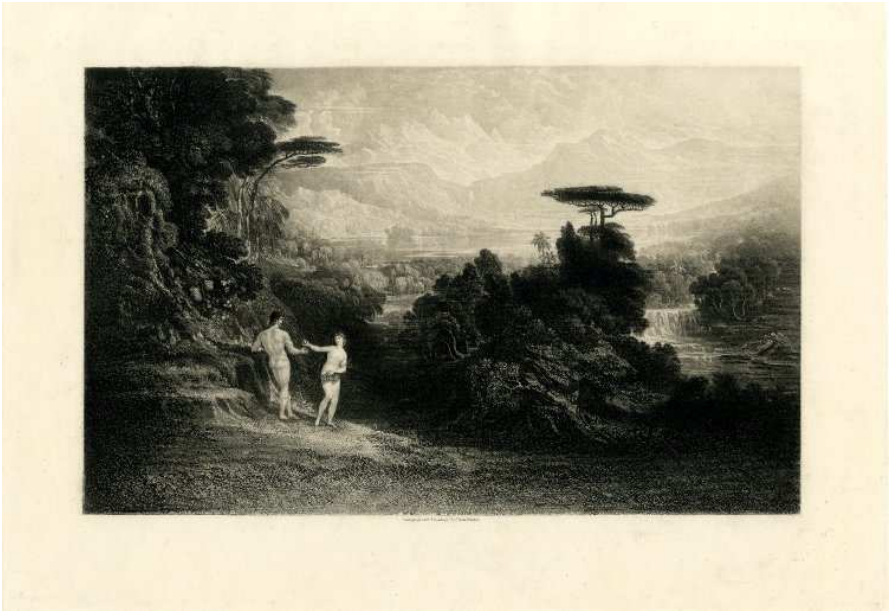

Fig 3 John Martin, *The Fall of Man* Genesis 3:6; Eve offering Adam an apple from the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, covering herself with branch; lush landscape with river and waterfall spread out beyond; proof with some lettering; from a series of prints illustrating the Bible. 1831 © The Trustees of the British Museum.


Fig 4 Francis Frith. Cedars of Lebanon (615), c 1860. © V & A Images E.208:1888-1994


Fig 5 Cornelius Van Alen Van Dyck, ‘Cedar on Mount Lebanon’ Plate 127 in Elwes, John Henry and Henry, Augustine *The trees of Great Britain and Ireland*, Volume III (Edinburgh, 1908)