

Who knows where the time goes?

In memory of Steve Coombes

It seems like only yesterday that Steve and Hilary gave me a 'start' in arboriculture, but in reality, it was over 35 years ago when, as a 17/18 year old, I became Steve's first employee. I cannot recall much about my interview but I suspect I scored highly on the questions relating to my taste in music. Knowledge of the Steely Dan back catalogue should be key to any useful relationship, personal or professional.

After a period of living and working abroad, Steve started a tree surgery company called Raven Tree Services. Initially armed with only a copy of Peter Bridgeman's *Tree Surgery: A Complete Guide* (then the definitive book on the subject), Steve built the business up to a become a significant concern in both amenity and utility arboriculture. After about five years of trading Steve became aware of the Arboricultural Association through a postal flyer. Subsequently this led to the company becoming an Approved Contractor and Steve's long-standing involvement with the Association. Over the years, many people will have crossed Steve's path in his various work guises as a trainer and assessor; however, many will probably not be aware that Steve was one of the individuals very much involved in the development of utility arboriculture, including the development of training and assessment standards.

One of the main reasons that the business was successful was that Steve focused on the fundamentals, providing a professional service and investing in staff training and development. In this latter regard, Steve provided a starting point and catalyst for numerous individuals, many of whom are still active in the industry as practitioners – trainers/assessors, tree officers and consultants.

Those who knew Steve well understand that he did not suffer fools gladly and had an eye for detail, particularly in matters of grammar and punctuation. Whilst at times it could be frustrating for your work to be on the receiving end of such scrutiny, when applied to peer review of industry publications, this approach undoubtedly helped to raise their credibility from that of enthusiastic amateur undertaking to the more professional presentations we expect today.



When it was time for Steve to move on to concentrate on consultancy, training and assessment, he enabled me to purchase the company on very favourable terms. Looking back, what I now realise is that this gave me the final push and confidence to move forward and find my own way in the industry.

It is of considerable regret, that over the years I lost close contact with Steve, but whenever our paths crossed, conversation was increasingly less about work and more about family, grandchildren, holidays and ski trips. When I cast my mind back to those early days, of course, I remember the work, the places and people, but above all I remember that Steve (and Hilary) gave me a 'start' and made me welcome in their home. I will always recall the times we spent together with great fondness: sitting with Steve, playing chess, playing the guitar, putting the world to rights and of course listening to music.

Rest in peace, Steve.

Jez Lawton

Trees, People and the Built Environment 4

Birmingham, 22–23 April

The programme for Trees, People and the Built Environment 4 highlights the critical importance of creating resilient towns and cities with innovative green infrastructure solutions.

More than 50% of the world's population now live in cities which are exposed to a host of challenges that those who design and plan for the future need to take on board.

TPBE4 will address how urban forestry is integral to the development of towns and cities as places where people want to live, work and play and how the use of

trees can bring wellbeing benefits and help to reduce the urban carbon footprint.

The invited speakers will join three keynote speakers. **Yvonne Lynch** is a climate resilience strategist who advises governments internationally on urban greening. She will talk about shifting perspectives on urban design and planning away from the traditional

approaches that have dominated for over a century and how to move them towards a nature-sensitive urban design model. **Ian Bateman**, Professor of Environmental Economics and Director of the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute at the University of Exeter Business School, will give an overview of the natural capital approach to decision making and how it is the ideal framework for capturing the multitude of values generated by trees and woodland.

Suzanne Simard, Professor of Forest Ecology at the University of British Columbia is a biologist known for her pioneering research on symbiotic plant communications and complex networks. Professor Simard has appeared on three TED Talks and in the Dorcon Film documentary *Intelligent Trees*.

TPBE4 is hosted and organised by the Institute of Chartered Foresters on behalf of a group of partner organisations including the Arboricultural Association. For the full programme, further information and booking, visit www.charteredforesters.org/event/trees-people-built-environment-4/