

Basic Tree Survey and Inspection: the thin end of the wedge?

I'm motivated by the offering of the Basic Tree Survey and Inspection course to make the points below and ask the Association a question in terms of its position on the same.

To make clear at the outset, I'm aware of the perceived need for, and reasoning behind, this course: my concerns are more about what it represents. To my mind it is the thin end of the wedge (subliminally and overtly) in terms of our continued failure to raise the professional profile and status of arboriculture, particularly to society at large.

The fact that there may be a perceived demand does not solely justify running a course, particularly in the context of the broader membership's needs, which I suggest it ultimately undermines. I myself have benefited from taking part in many useful courses that

the Association has provided, but my core reason for membership is because I align myself to the core charitable values of the Association as 'the voice of arboriculture' not as a 'training provider for arboriculture'. Unfortunately, I increasingly perceive a blurred line between these positions.

As an organisation, we present a strange juxtaposition where on one hand, trees are very important – we consider ourselves to be professionals (with expensive membership designations etc.) – yet on the other hand, promoting and endorsing a position that, at a basic level, trees can be inspected by

anyone with minimal capability (in this case one day of online training). We further perpetuate this ethos in our support of framework guidance (National Tree Safety Group – NTSG) and the ever-growing training arm of the Association clearly benefits from delivering this type of product.

Considering the above, my question (to 'the voice of arboriculture') is this: Is it in the best interests of the membership and our development as a profession, to support a position that an individual (with no arb experience, perhaps looking at large trees adjacent a busy road) with 1 day's training is capable of recognising and interpreting those features in trees (i.e. significant defects) which need reporting to their line manager?

Jez Lawton

Response from the Arboricultural Association

Dear Jez

Thank you for this relevant and thought-provoking question. You are right that there is inevitably a blurred distinction between the range of services that the Association offers; the voice of arboriculture is not one individual voice, it has to represent a broad variety of perspectives, with the care of trees at its centre.

Trees are hugely important for the whole of human society and for the natural world. Society's relationship with them takes place on many different levels, and the arboricultural

profession, i.e. those who earn their living caring for and managing trees, does not have the exclusive right, nor the resource, to claim overriding responsibility and control of them. In a healthy society there should not be a hard line between those who claim to understand trees and are paid to manage them, and those who blithely 'enjoy' them.

The national conversation that the NTSG introduced highlighted this issue and recognised that there are many non-professional individuals who have their own legitimate relationship with trees on a day-to-day basis and that it is highly beneficial to encourage general awareness of both the value that trees offer to society and also the (generally low) potential for harm that may be caused if trees, or parts of trees, were to fail and cause damage or injury.

The Association's stated aims include engaging with, and educating, the general public about such issues so it is entirely appropriate that we offer this kind of basic training, which consistently reiterates the message that professional arboricultural expertise should be sought if a basic inspection finds anything beyond the most obvious hazard features.

Rather than seeing the education of non-arborists in basic tree inspection as a threat to existing commercial arboricultural services, would it not be more positive to see the expanding recognition of the importance of trees and their care among the general population as a constructive step towards inclusive appreciation of trees and the natural world, for the benefit of all?

Simon Richmond, Senior Technical Officer

Arthur Arbon

I was sad to learn in the winter 2020 edition of *ARB Magazine* of the passing of Arthur Arbon.

I have fond memories of working closely with Arthur whilst employed in local government in Lincolnshire in the 1980s. He was always ready to pass on his extensive knowledge of arboriculture and forestry, whilst remaining open to new ideas and techniques for amenity tree establishment. He deserves great credit for improving the landscape of Lincolnshire after the ravages of Dutch elm disease and the mania for agricultural 'improvements'.

Also not to be forgotten is his assistant Harry Dickinson who sadly has also passed away. Harry was easily recognised for not only his considerable stature but also his distinctive Morris Minor convertible which he used to identify suitable planting sites on the Lincolnshire byways.

Arthur and Harry formed a true partnership whose legacy is there for all to see.

The same edition of the magazine included an article on Rodney Helliwell. Whilst mainly remembered for his innovative amenity tree valuation scheme, he was also highly influential in both forestry and nature conservation.

I have been privileged to work with these pioneers of arboriculture.