

Access to Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area

Walk "A" - By Bus -

127 & S1 alighting at **Mitcham Cricket Green (N)** or **Mitcham Lower Green (L)** **
200 alighting at **Mitcham Lower Green (L or M)**
201 & 280 alighting at **Mitcham Cricket Green (P or Q)** or **Mitcham Lower Green (L)**

Walk "B" - By Bus -

264 alighting at **Madeira Road (M)**, or **Three Kings Pond (N or R)**
270 & 355 alighting at **Three Kings Pond (R)**

By Overhead Rail – 8 minute walk or **127/S1** bus** from **Mitcham Junction Station**

By Tram – 8 minute walk from either **Mitcham** or **Mitcham Junction** tram stops.



Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage is the civic society for Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area and its environs. We take an active interest in the future of the area and membership is open to all.

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DAVE LOFTHOUSE TREE WALK

incorporating

THE LOFTHOUSE CANONS ARBORETUM

This circular walk can be taken from two start points.

Walk "A" starts on Cricket Green, opposite the ornate Mary Tate Cottages.

Walk "B" starts at stop point **11**, on the grass in front of Park Place

Dave Lofthouse

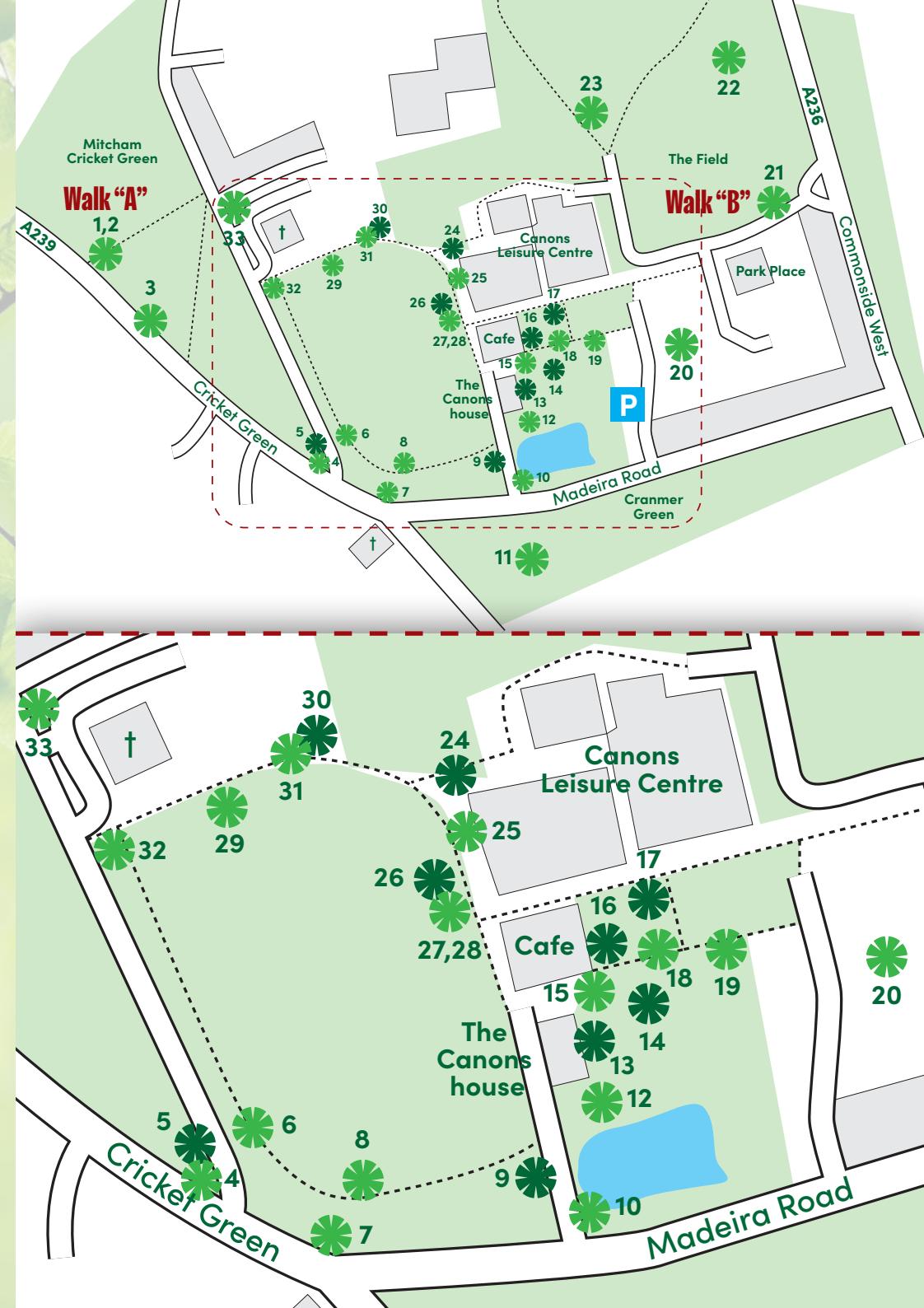
A champion for trees in Merton for 30 years who died in 2022

After working as a climbing arborist in Bristol, Dave trained in arboriculture and was employed by Merton Council where he worked for over 30 years as Tree Officer and then Arboricultural Manager. He was an active member of the London Tree Officers Association and enjoyed living in the flat above The Canons house in Mitcham.

He had a very strong sense of equality, fairness and social responsibility, and these political beliefs were inevitably integrated into his role as a tree officer. He believed in the right for everyone to enjoy trees and green space, extolling the benefits of each in creating balance within the natural world.

Dave died in 2022. His legacy is all around us in the many thousands of trees he planted, including this eclectic arboretum in The Canons, now named in his honour, and the magnificent park trees around Merton Borough which he managed and protected - a significant achievement. He was a good, principled, and decent man who will not be forgotten.

For further reading Dave would have recommended the Collins Field Guide Trees of Britain and Northern Europe by A Mitchell.



WALK "A"

Start on Cricket Green, opposite the ornate Mary Tate Cottages.



1



2

STOP 1

1 - 2 *Zelkova serrata*, **Keaki** clone, origin – Japan. Introduced into the U.K. in 1862. Broad and graceful with light-limbed domes, these two mature versions inspired Dave and the Tree Warden Group Merton to promote planting this variety in the newly created car park within The Canons. The spreading habit of fresh green foliage lends shade and combats poor air quality in the car park. Late to leaf, fruits form at the base of each leaf which colour well in autumn.

Walk south along Cricket Green road, look over railings to Mitcham Green -

STOP 2

3 **Queen Elizabeth II's Green Canopy Elm** (*Ulmus lutece, nunguen PBR*) This tree nearly 'missed the boat'. One of the disease-resistant elms presented to councils in celebration of the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee, this Merton gift was overlooked for a year but was eventually planted without any consultation in the middle of Mitcham Green, in an area prone to the vagaries of the weather. After much badgering by a ward councillor the tree and its accompanying plaque were moved to its current position along Cricket Green.



3

Walk to the southern end of this green and stop at the obelisk.

Look back to apex of the two Cricket Green roads -



4

STOP 3

4 **Stone Pine** (*Pinus pinea*) Introduced pre-1500, this is a Mediterranean pine, often grown from cones within which are large edible nuts. In Mitcham these nuts are always eaten by squirrels, so making one's own pesto still relies on visiting shops for a supply. Compact crown, often on a leaning stem, this particular tree makes a dramatic focus at the entrance to Cricket Green.



5



5 **Indian Bean Tree** (*Catalpa bignonioides*) Slightly north of the pine, this only comes into leaf during mid-summer, but the wait eventually reveals large soft heart-shaped leaves along with big candles of white flowers. The long thin pods of beans only appear in the UK after a hot summer. A 1726 introduction originally from south-east USA, there is a splendid specimen of a **Golden Bean Tree** (*Catalpa b. 'Aurea'*) in the nearby grounds of Mitcham Methodist Church 100m down this spur of Cricket Green road, beyond the gates to The Canons [see **33** after stop 16].

Enter The Canons at the obelisk. View along the perimeter path an avenue of Red Oak, Olives, Cherries and, most noticeable -



STOP 4

6 **Upright English Oak** (*Quercus robur pedunculata Fastigiata*) This is one of a number of this 'fastigiate' (i.e. tightly upright) native Oak variety, and was planted at the end of the last century. They have become a striking feature in this part of The Canons.

7 **Disease Resistant Elm** (*Ulmus 'New Horizon'*) Within the Lofthouse Canons Arboretum there is one remaining Exeter Elm (see 26 at stop 13) and within Bellamy Copse (see 23 at stop 12) several original elms that go through their 20-year cycle before Dutch Elm disease takes its toll. In 2023 the Tree Team from London Borough of Merton applied for a disease resistant Elm to mark their colleague, Dave Lofthouse's contribution to the trees in The Canons. The application was successful leading to this notable addition to the collection. Thanks to Metropolitan Public Gardens Association and Elms4London for the initiative.

8 **Yunnan Poplar** (*Populus yunnanensis*) From this stop, look towards The Canons house. The closest tree within the group in the centre of the field is a rarity in the UK. It bears its glossy dark green leaves into late autumn, so fuelling its own growth when other deciduous trees have long since dropped leaf. This tree had made 15 metres in height and nearly a metre in girth since planted less than 30 years ago. Suited to hot summers and drought.

Walk east along path towards
The Canons house; turn right –



STOP 5

9 **Persian Ironwood** (*Parrotia persica*) Not all trees in this collection are show-stoppers. This unusual small ironwood is variety "Vanessa", unlike most multi-stemmed *Parrotia* varieties, having a straight clear stem. Renowned for the hardness of its wood, regrettably this specimen is overshadowed and overlooked.



10 **London Plane** (*Platanus x hispanica / acerifolia*) on the opposite side of the path is, by comparison, a monster, but has experienced "abuse" since its planting. In the 1950s a small humpbacked folly bridge carried a minor path to the main road at this point. A decision to relocate the main estate gate to its present position involved the creation of the current road, leading to considerable damage to the tree's roots and stem. The work was photographed, the lack of care appearing in local archives. The retaining wall you see today was constructed, but the damage was done. Dave Lofthouse predicted the decay from wounding would kill off the tree, but not, perhaps, for another 200 yrs. A hybrid of Oriental plane and American plane, the London Plane was first introduced in 1680 at Ely where it reached 35mtrs.

Interesting diversion – cross Madeira Road through gates onto Cranmer Green; 30mtrs straight on –



11

STOP 6

11 Montezuma's Cypress (*Taxodium mucronatum*) was the final contribution planted by Dave Lofthouse who professed that this had the largest spread of any tree in the world. A Mexican native it is semi-evergreen, growing to 40m (130 ft) tall and with a trunk of 3m (9.8 ft) diameter - occasionally much more. The Árbol del Tule in Santa María del Tule, Oaxaca, Mexico, is the stoutest tree in the world with a diameter of 11.42m (37.5 ft). Appreciating marshy conditions whilst being drought-tolerant makes this tree ideal on this patch of green which encounters both extremes.

Recross Madeira Road through gates towards The Canons house; turn 2nd right towards the pond -



12



STOP 7

12 Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) Described as "the essential accessory for a mansion lawn since 1740" this species, imported in 1638, is almost extinct in its natural range in the Levant. There is much debate as to when this specimen was planted. Dave thought it likely to be early Victorian, although local historian Eric Montague had a photograph of equal age which showed the Cedar to be of similar size to present. It is still vigorous, though prone to snow damage, hence the limb pruning, but its splendid harvest of cones is testament to its current health.

Rear of the house -

Ex Tree - The BeeBee Tree (*Tetradium daniellii*) (*Euodia*) This rare tree, in the UK since 1907, was Dave Lofthouse's pride and joy. Unsurpassed as a pollinator, with a lengthy flowering period. Dave's August birthday celebration showcased this - blossom smothered in bees, hoverflies, dipterans, beetles and other invertebrates. Sadly, both Dave and his beloved tree were removed as part of the refurbishment of The Canons house and landscape, the tree considered to be "too close to the house". A baby replacement has been planted - 31 at stop 15 - a fitting memorial, with more promised by Merton Council.



31



13



13 Pineapple Guava (*Acca / Feijoa sellowiana*) A relatively small, rare tree, widespread in South America from Colombia to Argentina, this is a member of the myrtle family. Attractive for twelve months of the year with its silvered, evergreen foliage, it is the showy flowers, with four red petals, white on the outside, appearing in the leaf axils, that are a real attraction in summer. It produces edible, red-flushed green fruit, deliciously perfumed though an acquired taste.

Rear of the house, left side of east lawn -



14



14 Swamp Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) A 1640 introduction to the country heralding from the Everglades, this is the champion tree of The Canons, and 2010 winner of Merton's Favourite Tree. Not actually requiring damp conditions this long-lived tree is a "shedder". When subject to high wind loading, the tree copes by deliberately dropping some major limbs with a result that the main stem survives. Requires regular judicious pruning to lessen the risk. Reduced compaction is aided by the wide semi-circular edging. It is a frequent pre-roost for daily returning jackdaws and ring-necked parakeets at dusk. What is the secret of the tree door?



15 Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) This individual is a prolific fruiter, a native species, and the only female holly in the Lofthouse Canons Arboretum. An amazing colour scheme of grey, white and red with the dark green foliage, it produces a massive food resource for the local population of wood pigeons and blackbirds in autumn, bringing the tree alive. Holly is dioecious - there are separate male & female plants.

Follow the yew hedge, right of the café, to the Walled Garden. Enter the gate -



STOP 8

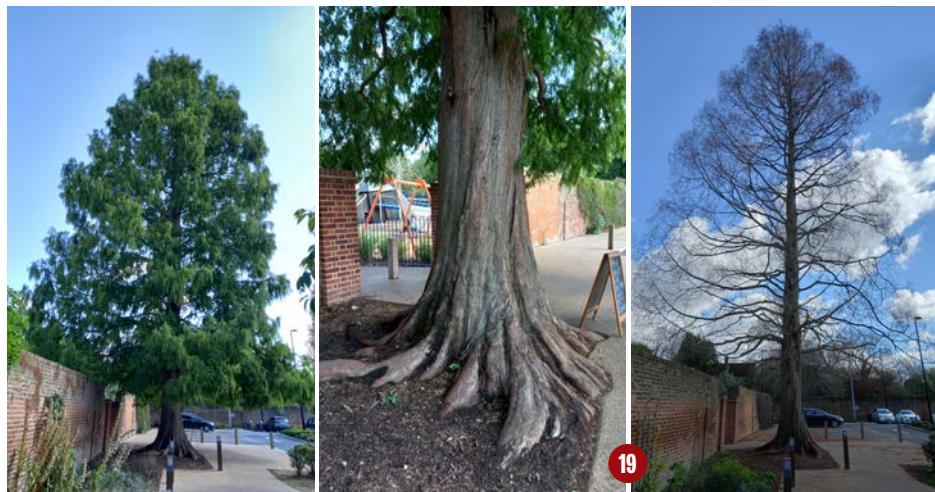
16 Medlar (*Mespilus germanica*) A popular tree in south-east English gardens this spreading example is a prolific fruiter although the distinctively shaped brown husked fruits have to be "bletted", a process that softens the flesh to a "sleepy" and less astringent state. The sweeter flesh is delicious when creating medlar jelly.

17 Osage Orange or Bow-wood (*Maclura pomifera*) of the mid-west plains of the USA, is now very rare in the UK though imported in 1818. This is one of the specimen fruit trees grown here. The massive, gummy, non-edible ball (the size of a large orange) has the appearance of a brain but has never been seen here. The trunk has a habit of tight forking making it unstable and requiring artificial support. The wood is used for bow-making, originally by indigenous Americans. It is still used for producing Welsh laminated longbows.



18 Paper Mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) is originally a mainland Asian tree but is one of the most exported plantings in history having been taken across much of the Pacific and Australasia for its paper, fibre for cloth, fruit and medicinal uses.

Exit through gate; then left along the yew hedge -



19 Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) Critically endangered in the wilds of S.W. China where it was only discovered in 1941. This tree has grown spectacularly, although suffered damage when an adjoining tree toppled on it during a storm. During the refurbishment of The Canons, extreme care was taken to protect the roots of this tree, involving expandable membrane guards and permeable surfacing.

Cross the car park diagonally to the gap in the historic brick wall -



STOP 9

20 Pagoda Tree (*Styphnolobium japonicum*) Formerly, and still commonly known as *Sophora japonica*, this splendid tree won Merton's Favourite Tree competition in 2019. It started life in a nursery pot in its current position. When this site of the Council's plant nursery closed, the tree had put down substantial roots making it too large to move. A retaining wall was built to showcase what had become a strikingly beautiful tree. It blooms profusely in late summer with white pea shaped flowers in panicles. Rather than Japan it originates in China where the flowers are prized for medicines and has long been grown in Korea. The first UK import in 1753 is still thriving, albeit horizontally, at Kew. Merton Council development of the site for housing threatens this tree's existence.

From the gate head left along path to road; turn right towards Park Place –

STOP 10

21 Trojan Oak (*Quercus trojana*) Introduced in 1890, this rare oak has its origins around the Anatolian coast where the city of Troy once stood. Like Holm Oak, it is salt spray tolerant, and suited to coastal life. Often referred to as Macedonian Oak, it has a dense and spiky habit. Its leaves stay green until Christmas, and do not fall until spring. Can grow to 20 metres.



WALK “B”

Begin at stop point #11, on the grass in front of Park Place.



Cross onto the grass and meadow from Park Place towards the track –

STOP 11

22 Tree islands, to your right you'll notice clumps or islands of trees surrounded by bramble and dog rose. Tree planting in parks was frequently unsuccessful due to vandalism and poor watering maintenance. One answer was to “plant small” then surround young trees with spiny material such as hawthorn and rose, thus protecting trees until they were safely independent. This ethic mirrors the natural savannah-type landscape that forest historian Franz Vera suggests was prevalent in Europe (rather than the endless forests some suggest) before human intervention.

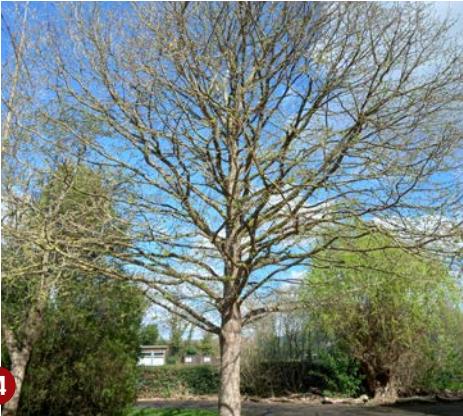
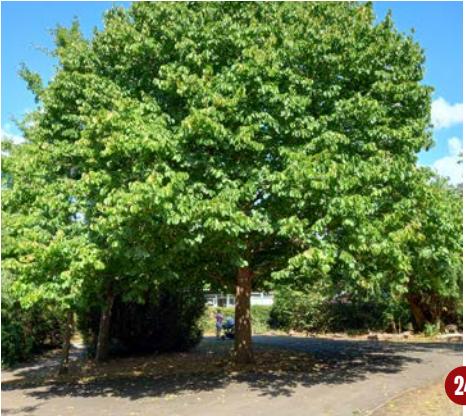
At the track turn left, walk the track length to the bend, turn left through Bellamy Copse –



STOP 12

23 Bellamy Copse, Previously the site of tennis courts Bellamy Copse, was created to mask the bulk of the Leisure Centre. Today it is managed to keep its natural state, a haven for many species, and officially protected for its wildlife value.

Turn right passing the football cage, skirting the leisure centre –



24

STOP 13

24 Turkish Hazel (*Corylus colurna*) This attractive tree has pride of place in this particular island bed. Its straight trunk and level branches are covered in luxuriant hanging foliage in summer. Neat conic form growing to 25m, introduced to the country in 1582, rough bark & coarse textured leaf. The abundant fruits are larger than common hazel, with attractive soft bristle cases.



25

25 Henry's Lime (*Tilia henryana*) Originally introduced from Hubei province, W. China, by collector Augustine Henry. A slow-growing, medium-sized tree with a rounded crown, that could reach up to 25m in height. The broadly ovate leaves are softly downy on both surfaces and edged with delicate bristle-like teeth. The foliage often emerges red-tinged. Clusters of fragrant, creamy-white flowers are borne in summer. Planted to act as a foil to the bulk of the Leisure Centre.



26

26 Exeter Elm (*Ulmus glabra Exoniensis*) Now rare, this Wych Elm cultivar was discovered in 1826 and propagated by the Ford & Please nursery in Exeter. Noted for its twisting erect branches and quirky balloon shape, it is chiefly distinguished by its contorted leaves.

Continue on path towards The Canons house -



27



28



STOP 14

27 - 28 Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) Known as American Sycamore it is native to S.E. USA, Mexico, and, found by Dave Lofthouse, on the Pine Ridge of Belize and in the Segovias of Nicaragua. Often mistaken for a maple (note – leaves are alternate on the twig, not opposite), the balsam in its sap is medicinal. Splendid for autumn colour and notable for the spiky 3cm fruit balls freely shed here. Grows to 28m, crushed leaves are fragrant. Introduced to the country in 1681.

Turn right diagonally across the west lawn, skirting the island beds -



STOP 15

29 Golden Rain Tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*) Also called Pride of India although originating from China, Korea and Japan. This is a very decorative tree with leaves emerging red to 45cm then turning amber-pink in autumn. The flowers are even more dramatic with yellow panicles 30-40cm long in high summer giving way to pink papery bladders, like Chinese lanterns, each containing three pea-sized seeds. Slender high dome to 16m. this was first introduced to the country in 1763.



30 Blue Atlas Cedar (*Cedrus atlantica f. glauca*) This is one of two striking blue cedars in The Canons. Its position here has allowed full natural growth. Notable for the pink-tinged pollen shower in autumn, its silver-grey foliage is a perfect backdrop under which to sit and relax. The abundant cones produced annually attract a wealth of wildlife and children.

31 BeeBee Tree (*Tetradium daniellii*) (*Euodia*) Replacement, noted at stop 7

Continue west along the path to the exit gates –



STOP 16

32 Kentucky Coffee Tree (*Gymnocladus dioicus*) This has one of the largest leaves of any temperate climate tree – not immediately apparent until noting it is a double pinnate leaf. The central stalk of the leaf (rachis) branches out, and these likewise branch again to leaflets, the whole leaf being as much as a metre long on a mature tree. Providing yellow autumn colour it was first introduced into the country in 1743. This specimen was planted in 1998 and may reach 18m. The seeds, poisonous when raw but rarely seen in UK trees, were once roasted to make substitute coffee in USA.

Through the exit gates, turn right passing the Methodist Church



33 Golden Bean Tree (*Catalpa b. 'Aurea'*) noted at stop 3.

Cross the road to the path to complete the circuit of Walk "A", or to continue Walk "B" at Stop 1.