

## ARISING FROM THE ASHES

A few years ago I planted around one hundred and fifty young trees as 'sticks' in the land behind our house at Grove Farm . The intention was that in addition to being attractive in themselves they would, in later years, provide a source of fuel for our voracious wood stoves. On the advice of the nursery I chose a 50/50 mixture of wild cherry and English ash and the planting was easy enough. We were then awaiting the onset of a massive growth in the young ones but unfortunately in that year and the next virtual drought conditions appeared and most householders were seeking extra water storing facilities by installing large plastic cubes to fill from the uncertain rainfall. What a difference from the current situation (Do you want a large plastic container for free? ).

The young trees had a very hard time with many losses and a general failure to thrive however we hoped that more rain would help to rescue sufficient of them . Nature is cruel for the drought was followed by a new bubonic plague designed from on high to wipe out the ash tree . This disease rapidly took hold and any progress made by the trees in Spring was cancelled out by the shrivelling sepsis in late summer and Autumn.

Around this time I picked up the phone and spoke to a helpful scientist at John Innes and in the belief that nothing would be achieved by ripping out the trees, which seemed to be the national advice at the time, and accordingly we retained the ailing ash trees just to watch the progress and hope that some miracle might occur. The trees had originally been imported from Holland and it therefore seemed logical to suggest that they would all have the same genetic constitution and thus would all respond to disease in the same way. Interestingly we noticed that one or two of the ashes remained intact amidst a sea of disease. I reported this to the scientist at John Innes by the name of Anne Edwards who was extremely interested in the possible resistance elements in these individual ash trees and suggested that it might be helpful to carry out genetic studies of them and make comparison with the same factors in the diseased trees. The scientists came here some weeks ago and Frank Mitchell accompanied them in taking leaf samples and plunging them into liquid nitrogen prior to laboratory analysis. We are hopeful that a resistant brand of ash tree will emerge but the worst outcome will be if these previously healthy trees are attained and succumb to the plague this year.

At this time there are three proud trees bearing blue identity bracelets distinguishing them from their less auspicious relatives.

Walter Jackson. 7 July 1916