

THE DEMISE OF MRN 1031

This was a much-loved English oak in a triangular area between Luckmore Drive & Betchworth Road in Earley (SU 74364 71438). When surveyed in 2007, this pollard had a girth of 4.9m (at 1.5m), giving it an estimated age of about 320 years, meaning it germinated around 1700.

It was situated near and to the east of what was, in 1883, Home Farm (the Bowling Club in Beech Lane is a remnant of this). At one time the line of the old Beech Lane, then known as Maiden Erlegh Lane, passed to the east side of the Bowling Club, but this was altered in the 1800s, during the Enclosures, to the present-day route of Beech Lane, exiting at Wilderness Road.

The tree fell in the early hours of Easter Monday, 13th April 2020. Neighbours were woken at 02:30 by 'an almighty thud' and went outside to find that the 'grand old oak' at the end of the road had fallen over. Fortunately there were no people or cars underneath it, but it did completely block the end of Luckmore Drive.

One local resident wrote: "No longer will we be able to give directions into Luckmore Drive from Wilderness Road, by saying 'turn right just before the old oak tree'. Overnight Easter Sunday to Monday, in what was not really a very strong wind, our beloved and well cared for oak tree finally succumbed to its age."



The base was rotten, infected by 'Chicken of the woods' fungus (*Sulphur polypore*) also known as cubical brown rot.

Despite the Covid-19 lockdown the Borough Council emergency services were on the scene early Easter Monday morning. It took nearly 3 hours, but they were able to cut an escape route for trapped residents. They cleared a double path and piled everything up. Residents then cleared up and many a log pile was enhanced!



After much discussion and debate about ownership, the remnant of this venerable oak, weighing nine tonnes, was moved to Dinton Pastures in the early hours of 5th August 2020. It had to be delivered to Dinton before it opened to the public and hence the tree surgeons started work by 6am. No chainsaws were used and noise was kept to a minimum.



At Dinton, it's been erected as a habitat monolith (or habilit) by a path around Black Lake (SU 77837 72086), as shown below.



The other photo (above) shows what's been left behind.

Thanks to David Choppings and Anne Lambert for the information and photos and to Sheila Crowson for the historical perspective.

