

THE TREE SCENE IN GREAT BRITAIN¹

by W.E. Matthews

It is a great pleasure and privilege for me to be asked to address you today. Some of you with good memories will remember the last time I addressed a conference of the I.S.A. was back in 1973 at Boston. At that time I outlined the renaissance that was taking place in British arboriculture. Today's talk is something of a progress report.

I am pleased to be able to tell you that a great deal has been achieved, a measure of which is the degree to which we in England are now exporting tree men and expertise to the rest of Europe. This has been due largely to the success of training establishments, some of which have now been going for upwards of 10 years. The problems of the Continental tree companies are very much the same as those in England, i.e., finding the people to actually *do* the work. Education has a great aptitude to produce Chiefs at the expense of Indians. This has meant, in England, that a large number of people leaving the colleges take up municipal work usually in some sort of supervisory capacity. The need for tough tree men is still great especially in the private companies. You might be interested to know that an increasing number of young women are taking up arboriculture, and very good they are, too. We have lady tree surgeons as well as a lady Prime Minister.

As we in Britain seem to have an obsession about broadcasting our problems, I am sure you are aware that the business climate over there has not been particularly brilliant especially over the last year. Our new lady leader has cracked down on municipal spending in particular which has led to a great fall off in tree work coming to private companies. Equally a lot of cities have, as a result of the college trained student being available, formed their own tree crews. One of the latest Government directives is that all municipal work must be open to private bid as well. This instruction, like several others I could mention, is being resisted by the municipal people who know only too well what the outcome is likely to be.

In the private sector people are apprehensive of spending money, even if they have it, as doom and disaster is being preached at them from all angles. My company, as with many others, has had to tighten up and streamline to cope with this challenge. I was inspired by a comment in the N.A.A. Newsletter which stated that it was no coincidence that efficient companies did well in adversity. There has certainly been a drastic comb out of those who are not on the ball. Most companies of any size have (usually reluctantly) been forced to use sub-contract labor. Whilst forestry contracting companies in England have always worked this way, tree care companies have avoided doing so largely due to the very personal nature of our business and the dangers and difficulties involved. In my Company we compromised by offering a new deal to veteran and trusted employees whereby they worked on a set percentage of our price, but were responsible for their own vehicles and equipment. This has been very successful. It has enabled a good man to earn better money and has obviously relieved us of a lot of vehicle and equipment expenses.

In spite of all the learned studies of labor relations, vehicle running, crew production and so on, this scheme provided an instant answer. Even elderly vehicles took on a new lease of life when they *belonged* to the driver. Production went up on average nearly 50%. All the years of agonizing over these things and suddenly the answer — personal involvement. Obviously any scheme of this kind calls for absolute trust between the company and all its people. That is why we confined it to men we knew, some of whom had been with us fifteen years or more. Ironically they do not work that much harder. The increased production is due to them thinking about the job in hand constructively. One foreman was felling elms on a difficult bank by a road. He saw some engineers inspecting a rail bridge nearby. He learned that in order to do their repairs the road was being closed on Sunday. He immediately stopped work, went

¹ Presented at the annual conference of the International Society of Arboriculture at Boyne Falls, Michigan in August 1981.

to another job, came back on Sunday and flopped the lot straight into the road. Positive thinking.

Finding enough work is another major problem. Our main weapon is direct mail with a very limited amount of other advertising. We exhibit at special shows where 'our sort' of people go, the top garden shows, environmental conferences, etc. The British public is notoriously difficult to sell to. Salesmen are not nice people. We certainly do not want our daughters to marry them. Business is regarded as a kind of refined prostitution not the sort of occupation a gentleman would choose. Therefore we have to be very delicate indeed in how we approach people. If, for example, we did as some of you do, rang them at home in the evening, we would get a very angry response. An enquiry begins a kind of ritual courtship, a delicate 'getting to you know' process, but on no account must you 'push' or 'sell.' Succeeding without appearing to try is the art we have to cultivate. As regards clients the old axiom of indulging the pleasures of the rich still seems valid. They are awfully good survivors and seem to float above the aggravations and privations of ordinary mortals. Certainly our cities are a waste of time even for 'hospital' jobs. We do not have private electricity or telephones therefore line clearing as you

know it is non-existent. The State clears their own lines even if it does take twice as long. Neither do we spray and I know how important this business is in the States. The reasons — mainly no plagues of insects such as yours and a great abhorrence of the whole business anyway.

Our elms are nearly gone and we are working on our Tree Council to learn as much as we can from this awful business in order that we prevent other epidemics entering our country. Equally we need to know what we are going to do and where the money is coming from if we do have to cope with another major pest or disease.

Tree care on the continent is expanding rapidly. They are still very taken with the elaborate reclamation of very old trees, but it is nice to see the more modern ideas of preventative tree care becoming accepted. And all of us are grateful to all of you. For inviting us here, being so friendly and helpful and for all the encouragement and valuable information you so generously share with us. Tree people are fantastic.

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ABSTRACT

CROSS, R.D. 1981. **Trees and integrated pest management.** *Arbor Age* 1(2): 15-16.

Integrated Pest Management can be broadly defined as the utilization of methods, techniques and research which strive to keep pest populations at acceptable levels, while emphasizing the use of biological and cultural controls and minimizing the use of chemicals (insecticides, fungicides, etc.). The continued and increased use of pesticides has resulted in some very real problems which cannot be overlooked; problems dealing with resistance, secondary pest outbreaks, resurgence and environmental pollution. The outlook now is on lowering costs, protecting the environment and implementing more efficient methods of tree management. Because of this and new methods developed through research, IPM is becoming extremely popular in ornamental horticulture.