

April 2026 meeting - "FROM MIGHTY ACORNS, THE STORY OF THE BRITISH OAK" BY JIM PAINE

This was Jim's first visit to Ardleigh and was welcomed warmly by the society members.

For 25 years until 2023 he had a specialist garden centre with a stock of over 1,000 plants. He also worked as part of the UN Conservation team at Cambridge.

Oaks are a big part of the British Woodlands being hardy, deciduous and temperate. Their rounded shape is defined by the wind and can grow up to 40ft. If they are grown with other trees they will grow narrower and up to 70ft.

Jim explained that there are around 600 species of oak in the northern hemisphere (90 in USA, 190 in Mexico and 100 in China). No oak trees grow in the southern hemisphere due to weather conditions.

The Oak tree has been in the British Isles for around 100 million years. Oak trees have been in decline since the reign of Julius Caesar to the present day. Lots of historical buildings still standing are built from Oak including Ely Cathedral with its beautiful oak beams as oak is very strong. Lots of Tudor buildings are built from oak.

The famous Mary Rose ship was built from 600 oak trees and parts of it are still on display to this day. Lots of ships were made from oak including the ships that beat the Spanish Armada. HMS Victory which was built in 1759 is still standing proud in Portsmouth.

In 1919 after WW1 when the forest cover was reduced to 5%, the Forestry Commission was formed to help replenish the forests lost. In 2026 there is now 13% forest cover in the world and the UK has 10%. By 2050 it is hoped to be 15% in the world.

Jim explained that there is only 2% of Ancient woodland left that have been around since the 1600 this could be due to environmental changes and climate changes.

Jim also explained that why oaks are so spread out, is because the acorns are taken by Jays and then dropped to the ground once they have taken what they require the rest is left to propagate.

The oak can be damaged by certain beetles and grey squirrels and the disease Acute Oak Decline but the oak is otherwise doing okay.

This was a very good talk by Jim Paine with lots of amazing information and lots of questions asked at the end and a good round of applause.