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THE DAILY

THE GRAPHIC

MAGAZINE



burden of proof that lies upon them.

IAIN MACLEOD, 54, Conservative MP for Enfield West, is a former Minister of Health. From 1963 to 1965 he was Editor of The Spectator.

country is not of any great importance to Messrs. Wilson, Heath and their supporters. No one dreams of questioning their right to preach and practise their beliefs. It is on behalf of the Communist Party, of Colin Jordan, of all

them state their case through a public inquiry and then, if justified, by an open alteration of the law. If not, let them bow out of an absurd position and realise that the British people are quite capable of thinking for themselves. **T**

An ideal state?

It took four months for **Nicholas Monsarrat** and **Christian Bonington** to obtain permission from the Pakistan Government to visit the remote Himalayan state of Hunza, near the Chinese border. They had been told that life in Hunza is, by Western standards, idyllic. On page 16 they record their first-hand impressions, in words and pictures, in the second of our new series of "Journeys of Discovery". Monsarrat, 58, sums up: "Our journey was 5,064 miles, but I was halted at 5,044 miles. It needed an energetic, youngish mountaineer to follow through. Luckily, I had one with me." Monsarrat's first book appeared

in 1934, and he has since published 25 others. His latest novel, *Richer than all his Tribe*, was published by Cassell only two months ago. **Ian Ribbons**, author and illustrator of the feature about Trafalgar Day on page 34, spent two years working on the new book for children upon which his article is based. The book sprang from a suggestion by Oxford University Press that Ribbons should write a children's history of a particular period. Ribbons later decided, however, to narrow the scope of his book down to a single day, and to show what was happening elsewhere in the world on the day of the Battle of Trafalgar, October 21, 1805.

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H. E. BATES tells of a young man's dream of nature creating a spectacle of colour and beauty and how that dream is still realised now, almost a century and a half after its conception

THEATRE OF A VISIONARY

GENERALS sit on cold bottoms on bronze horses in town and city squares, more than half forgotten; poets rest in eternal and invisible slumber at Westminster; lords of the Middle Ages lie coldly enmarbled, side by side with their spouses, in remote village churches, for ever eyelessly gazing heavenward; soldiers lie unmarked or under white regiments of crosses in foreign fields: everywhere, it would seem, memorials to the dead are inclined to be deader than the dead themselves.

It is therefore a wonderful thing, to my mind, to discover a young man who, with an eye fixed far into the future, started to create his own memorial and ended up, a century and a half later, not with a dead one, but with a living, working arena; an arena of great, mature and often rare trees, in parts majestic and quite theatrical in design which now belongs to all of us and whose dramatics, more especially in spring and autumn, draw audiences by the hundred thousand.

Robert Stayner Holford began to design, as long ago as 1829, the spectacular theatre of trees that is now the Weston Birt Arboretum near Tetbury in Gloucestershire.

He appears to have been shy and retiring, finding publicity distasteful, and left few records of his activities after his succession, at the age of 31, to his father's estate and its vast fortune: a fortune derived in part from the phenomenal rise in the value of shares of the New River Company, of which his grandfather had been Governor, and also in part from a dramatic recovery of a certain quantity of bullion buried by an uncle on the Isle of Wight during the threat of the Napoleonic wars.

Hedgehogs, we have lately been told, can talk; so can hens, as anyone who has kept them must know; and I only wish trees could. I have on my own land a Turkey Oak of 22 feet girth at the base to which I have longed often to talk.

Have trees the power of memory? It is a no more fantastic thought than that of the world of computers. My Turkey oak might well cast its memory back to the days of Handel's *Where'er you Walk* and would certainly have been a decent-sized tree at the time of the French Revolution. By contrast, in 1829, Holford's first tree, a Scots pine, would have been a mere newly planted stripling. It is still and flourishing today, 140 years later, and since Holford can't talk, and probably wouldn't talk



SELECTED for the brilliant and varied colours of their leaves, the Weston Birt maples are at their best in October.

Photographs by Dimitri Kasterine



A RESEARCH forester prepares to measure the height of a tree at Weston Birt

anyway, it might well be of the utmost fascination to hold a conversation with that now venerable pine.

"I understand Holford didn't keep many records. But in fact we have records and somebody must have kept them. Who did?"

"Jonah."

"Who was Jonah, may I ask?"

"Jonah Neale, head gardener."

"And what exactly did Jonah do?"

"He kept a very careful diary of all work done and all trees planted at that time."

"In 1840 and again in 1850 the kitchen gardens were laid out. In

1852 two new lodges were built. In 1854 the old farmhouse was pulled down. Then in that same year the avenue from Weston Birt to Larchborough was planted. It still stands."

"But wasn't this all rather rash? Holford was only 21 or so at the time and the land didn't even belong to him."

"He acquired it later."

"And then what?"

"He acquired more."

"And then?"

"He proceeded with the grand design. Planting trees everywhere. Oaks, pines, conifers, dogwoods,

maples, rhododendrons, Parrotias, berberis, viburnums, cotoneasters, eleagnus, magnolias, camellias, white-beams and heaven knows what."

"All in the grand manner."

"All in the grand manner and all here today. Bigger and grander than ever."

All in the grand manner, as the venerable Scots pine might say, in a system of broad rides, giving great vistas, over approximately 116 acres.

The range of soils is great. The underlying formation is Jurassic limestone; in parts the top soil is shallow but of heavy texture; in others, where the soil is lighter it is also deeper, containing little free lime. The exploitation of these wide differences, at an average elevation of 400 feet, with an annual rainfall of about 35 inches, has not only been boldly and skilfully done, but has been further enhanced by the work of hybridising, first carried out by Robert Holford's son, Sir George Holford, his nephew Lord Morley and his curator, W. J. Mitchell.

The result of this is that Weston Birt carries its own special imprint and style, as exclusive and recognisable, most notably in its vast collection of maples, as the bonnet of a Rolls-Royce.

Although you cannot buy trees and shrubs at Weston Birt, as you can at a nursery centre, a number of Weston Birt hybrids can be found in commercial catalogues. And you may safely bet that with the name Weston Birt you are in the realm of vintage champagne.

Of all the Weston Birt products the maples, raised from seed and then rigorously selected and re-selected for brilliance of colour, are the most spectacular, probably unmatched anywhere in Europe, the winter golds and sealing wax reds of the dogwoods hardly less so.

The result is that Weston Birt

puts on what is probably its top gala performance in October, when the acer glade is a vast forest fire, great bonfires of scarlet and crimson and gold burning away at the feet of dark dominating conifers, each bush thrown into spectacular relief.

Many of these conifers are giants, old, gnarled, patriarchal: great towering groups of wellingtonias, Californian redwoods, incense cedars, Himalayan pines and spruces, among which much hybridisation has been done. And with the Stewartia and dogwoods putting on a further fiery display after the fall of leaf - it is the young, summer-made wood of the dogwoods that gives the most singular brilliance of colour - Weston Birt puts on yet another drama of colour even in winter.

I must here temper this applause by confessing that though I have seen the fires of autumn more than once I have yet to see those of spring, when azaleas, magnolias and rhododendrons, among which there are also numbers of notable hybrids, are at their best. But such is the Weston Birt imprint that I take it as read that spring surely matches the scintillating challenge of autumn.

A last, pleasant thought. The price of your seat in a West End theatre is today a pretty stiff one. Not so at Robert Holford's theatre of Weston Birt, where there is no charge for admission.

It does, however, cost two shillings to park your car, though the Forestry Commission is gracious enough to point out that "when no attendant is on duty at the car park, visitors are requested to deposit fees in the box provided".

I rather like that touch. It seems to me very much in the spirit of Robert Stayner Holford, planning his great tree theatre when Victoria was still a child: surely among the most unselfish of visionaries. T

