

Exotic guide

Whence Our Trees

by Scott Leathart,
Foulsham, Yeovil Road,
Slough, Berkshire SL1 4JH,
1991 pp250, 106 colour
and 11 black and white plates.
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In this work Scott Leathart, former editor and secretary to the Royal Forestry Society, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, provides us with fascinating descriptions and details of the performance of 105 exotics since their arrival in Britain. Not since the great works of Loudon published in 1838 and Elwes and Henry between 1906 and 1913 has there been any attempt to update and consolidate the record of trees.

Scott Leathart gives us a description of the natural distribution and habitat of the trees, their associates in the forests, their life histories, aesthetic merits and timber uses; the dates and means of their introduction to Britain and their subsequent performance. The foreword is by the Prince of Wales and he says that the book will become a substantial reference work for foresters and gardeners. He also nails his colours to the mast on conifers when he says "that many (exotics) we have come to regard as our

own, while others, such as Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) some of us might have wished, on purely aesthetic grounds, would have remained in their own homelands".

In the first chapter, we are taken through the life and times of the plant hunters. The chapter brings to life names like Kaempfer, Cunningham, Douglas, Jeffrey, and others we are familiar with only as latinisms. He also, of course, includes our own Augustine Henry but unfortunately describes him as Professor of Forestry at Trinity College, Dublin when in fact it was the Royal College of Science, later part of University College, Dublin.

The author says in the preface that the book is not a text book, nor is it an aid to identification. What it does is present a picture to those with a knowledge and a love of trees, showing them in their natural habitat, describing how and where they arrived in their adopted homes and how they fared since their arrival.

The book will be of immense help to foresters who lead forest walks because it also gives information on the uses of trees, both commercial and aesthetic, so instead of consulting several texts on different aspects of a particular tree one can get a full picture from this book.

One is left wondering why he chose the 105 trees included out of a possible 600 exotics on these islands. All in all it is a very useful book and deserves a place on any professional forester or interested lay person's bookshelves.