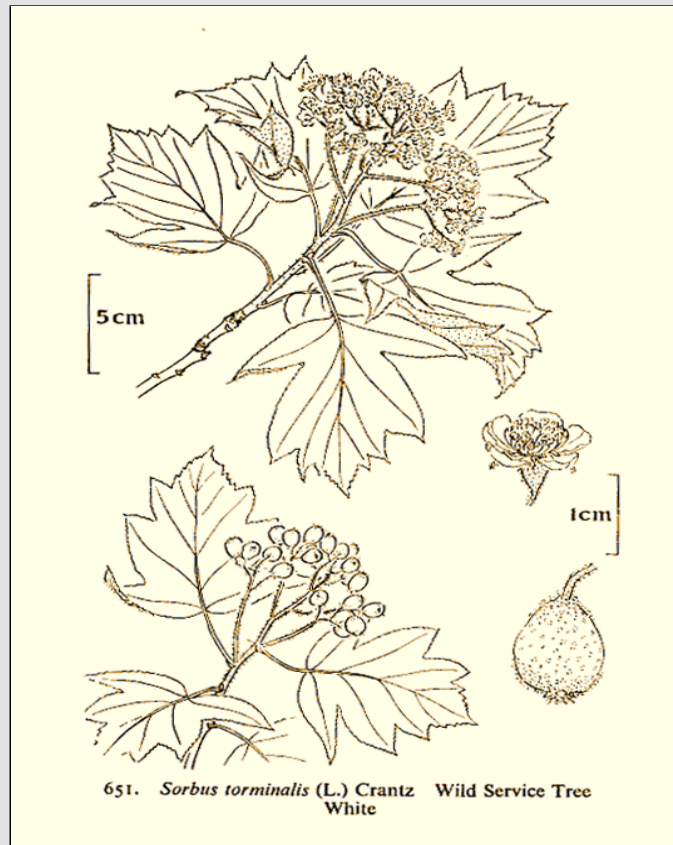


### Wild Service Tree (*Sorbus torminalis*)



*This beautiful, small tree is a definite rarity, although it is native to a large area of England and the Welsh Borders, south of the Mersey and the Humber. It is seldom planted and seldom recognized, and is most likely to be found in patches of old woodland on rough ground that has never been cleared. The flowers and fruit follow the Sorbus pattern, but the leaves are distinct, being five-lobed like those of a maple but you can easily tell the Wild service from maple. Winter buds are oval and blunt, and show several round scales each with a narrow brown edge. Wild service bark is blue-grey and smooth at first, but later breaks into rough squares and looks just like that of hawthorn. The trunk has a whitish sapwood and a red-brown heart; it is tough, but too small for use. Occasional trees grow seventy feet tall by eight feet round.*

*Wild service flowers in May and ripens its fruits in August. They are soft, dull crimson-brown and sweet enough to eat, but with a gritty texture. They were once sold in Kentish markets as 'chequers berries' from the 'chequers tree', a name that may have arisen from the 'chequerboard' appearance of the square-flaked bark. The seeds are spread by birds; if gathered they rest for eighteen months before sprouting. The seedling has two blunt, oblong seed-leaves, then oval leaves with toothed edges before the lobed form appears.*

*'Wild service' is a botanist's name, based on a slight re-semblance to the True service tree, *Sorbus domestica*, which grows in France (where it is called cormier) and bears edible berries. 'Service' comes from cerevisia, a Roman alcoholic drink made by fermenting grain and Sorbus berries. The Latin name, *S. torminalis*, and the Danish and Swedish tarmvrid (literally 'tummy-writhe') are based on the use of the berries to cure colic. The German name is Elsbeere and the French alisier terminal. This tree is found over Central Europe and in southern Scandinavia. In Wales it is called cerddinen wyllt, or 'strange rowan'.*

**From Wayside and Woodland Trees by Herbert L. Edlin Published by Frederick Warne.**

In the 70s I knew of only two wild service trees in Dagnam Park. Peter Adams has recently undertaken a search and established that the trees I knew are still in place and he has also uncovered several more including one at the northern end of the Fir Wood. Peter Adams has taken all of the pictures below especially for this web page. They were taken in September 2019. There is another more common tree in the park with superficially similar leaves, this is the field maple (*Acer campestre*) Peter has set out the two leaves side by side for comparison, the lower of the two, figured below on the left is the wild service tree.

Locally in the past I knew of at least one tree in Duck Wood and one in the small remnant of woodland in Dagnam Park Drive backing on to Tamworth Road.

The 1919 map below shows Hatters wood with all the known wild service tree locations marked.

In August 2020 Peter Adams had a detailed look at the wild service trees along the ridge in Hatters wood all six of them, (marked red) and he came to the

conclusion that they were planted by the Neave estate. They are all of similar age and evenly spaced, except for the most southerly one. He suggests that the two outliers (marked yellow) could have self seeded.

In addition to these eight trees Peter states that there was one next to the Green pond some years ago that was vandalised and subsequently fell over.

In his opinion the only naturally occurring wild service tree of the nine known in the park is the one on an old ditch line in the north corner of Fir wood. It is old twisted and gnarled and on the edge of an old field boundary. The evidence is compelling.

Further reading; Botanical Society of Great Britain paper on the British distribution. <https://archive.bsbi.org.uk/Wats19p209.pdf>

Del Smith.









