# TREE-MENDOUS COLLECTION

**Given the heritage and the significant legacy of our 85-acre estate at The Crichton, The Crichton Trust and neighbours have a legal and moral duty to preserve and enhance the tree collection. They are also responsible for managing any risks associated with public access to the trees on site.**

In 1998, a tree survey was carried out to identify and manually record details of the tree collection. During this past year, a follow up tree survey has been completed by local tree consultant, Mike Caughlin, with the purpose of fully digitising the records, identifying species and accurately recording the location of the trees on site. The survey results have now been fully digitised and it is our intention to include a regular feature about the trees within the magazine and also to develop tree themed trails and walks around The Crichton. In the meantime, we hope you will find this feature of interest.

## MIKE CAUGHLIN

Mike worked for many years as a forester at the nearby Drumlanrig Estate, which sparked his interest in the diversity of tree species. Mike is now an investment forester with Tilhill forestry and also assists The Crichton trust with the management of the tree collection.

Mike has a particular interest and knowledge of worldwide tree conservation and the direct and indirect impact humans have on trees and climate change. Mike has been responsible for carrying out and digitising the 2019/20 Tree Survey on behalf of The Crichton Trust and will continue to distil his findings and knowledge to us through regular features and future Tree Trails.

He is keen to rekindle historic links between The Crichton and the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh and get The Crichton involved in the National Tree Collections of Scotland.

## CONIFERS AT THE CRICHTON

### Monterey Pine (Pinus radiata)

Standing prominently to the left of Crichton Hall, this pine is over 30m tall and one of the tallest trees on the estate. It is commonly grown around the world for its timber but is actually endangered in its native range. These trees can grow very quickly, but their growth is often restricted when trapped within a forest environment. Here at The Crichton, this tree has had space to grow, so it is wider than most and characteristically, it has very dark foliage. These trees also have layers of hard bark.

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**DID YOU KNOW** you can identify a pine tree from its needles and unlike Spruce needles, pine trees have needles joined together in a sheath. The Monterey Pine has three needles in a bundle, other pines have between two and five.

They seem to do well in South West Scotland near the sea, but do less well in very cold climates and although this is the only Monterey Pine on site here at The Crichton, you will find other good examples nearby in the likes of Threave Gardens, Kirroughtree and the Dalswinton Estate.

**DID YOU KNOW** you can identify a Monterey Pine tree by the shape of its cones? They are asymmetric and if you look closely enough they clearly resemble the shape of a hedgehog. The cones on a Monterey Pine gather in a cluster around the branches.

### The Elephant's Foot (Monkey Puzzle - Araucaria araucana)

Have you spotted the elephant's foot at The Crichton? It really stands out once you are aware of it, but I wonder how many of you have missed it! You are perhaps more likely to have been drawn to the great height and curvy branches of the Monkey Puzzle trees, but next time you pass the Monkey Puzzle trees outside Crichton Hall, look down and see if you can spot the elephant's foot!

These trees, from Chile, are also a cause of concern for conservationists, who have had to import seeds from Chile to secure the future of the Monkey Puzzle. These seeds have been grown into small trees at the Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh and planted on different estates and in safe locations throughout the UK in order to reduce the risk of extinction.

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**DID YOU KNOW** you can tell the difference between a male and female Monkey Puzzle tree from its flowers? A female Monkey Puzzle has green globe shaped flowers on the upper branches. The flowers develop yellowy spines and take several years to mature.

The elephant's foot that we have described above, is quite characteristic of Monkey Puzzle trees and helps to support the weight of the tree. They are fairly substantial trees and let's hope we can continue to enjoy them for many years to come.

**QUESTION:** Why are these trees called Monkey Puzzles? Perhaps because their branches look like the tail of a monkey or perhaps, as Mike suggests, they are like a puzzle for monkeys.

**FAMILY CHALLENGE:** Find the Monkey Puzzle trees at The Crichton and send us a drawing or a photograph of the elephant's foot and the monkey's tails!

You may notice that trees feature heavily in many of the photographs published within this issue of The Crichton Magazine and this is just the start of our efforts to acknowledge the significance of our tree collection and to raise public awareness and interest in The Crichton Gardens.

## The Chinese Broadleaf (Acer griseum)

We often admire the bright colours of the leaves on our trees, but when last did you look closely at the colour of the bark?  Very rarely, we suspect, but the self-peeling bark of the Chinese Broadleaf is particularly striking.  Not only is it a stunning colour, but thin layers of the bark also peel off and when caught in the sunlight, creates a striking red colour- it looks like the tree is on fire!  Take a look for yourself the next time you visit The Crichton Gardens, you will find this tree near the bottom entrance to the estate.

The Chinese Broadleaf is a Paper Bark Maple from China and can also be found in the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. It is possible, that this particular tree came from the Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh many years ago.

It is difficult to tell if this is a maple tree by looking at an individual leaf, but if you see three together it becomes more visible.

Mike said:  The Crichton has a significant tree collection from all around the world, quite

possibly due to the fact that The Royal Botanic Gardens were instrumental in the development of The Crichton Gardens in the early 20th Century. The Crichton benefited greatly from the expertise of their gardeners and from gaining access to their seed sources.  I hope to re-establish these links and I am particularly keen to tap into their expertise in rhododendrons to help us identify the varieties we have here.

He added: The tree collection at The Crichton is unique and that's what makes it so special.  We now have a rare opportunity, through digitisation, to make it more accessible. With improved interpretation and promotion, The Crichton Gardens could attract more tourists and visitors to the area."

**We will continue to provide more information about the tree collection, but should you have a particular area of expertise or interest or a question or idea, please feel free to contact The Crichton Trust (hello@crichton.co.uk) or Mike Caughlin (mike@mc-forestry.co.uk)**