

TALES FROM THE HILLS

(Ashmansworth & Crux Easton)



The first person to point out the landscape importance of the great lime avenue in Crux Easton was an auctioneer from London. In his advertisement announcing the sale of the whole Crux Easton estate in 1831 he says:

“ .. On the most interesting part of the estate, there formerly stood a Mansion of considerable pretensions; and the stately Avenue of Limes .. gives it a park-like appearance ..”

At the time of the auction the mansion had gone, leaving only the ‘stately Avenue of Limes’ which the auctioneer made his selling point. Planners today should note that even back in 1831 we find an auctioneer putting a high economic value on a beautiful landscape.

In 1905 WH Hudson also admired the avenue on its hilltop, like the birdwatcher he was: “ .. the hill has a noble avenue, which it wears like a comb or crest.” (Combs and crests are the headgear of birds.) You can still see the ‘comb or crest’ from the footpath from Cross Lane to the City, and even from Cross Lane itself.

More recently, Basingstoke Borough Council refused an application to fell the avenue. The planning officer, Mr Keith Chapman, commented, “That was a beautiful avenue of trees and I couldn’t see any reason for cutting it down.” Today they still stand in the middle of the village like a great cathedral in somewhat romantic decay.

It was probably Edward Lisle who planted them. He wrote 300 years ago that he’d planted a ‘walk’ beside his house in Crux Easton. If we add his words to those we find in the tithe map (1843), naming this avenue as ‘The Walk’, seems to clinch it.

Dr Hans Molisch in *The Longevity of Plants* says that 300 years is only middle age for a lime tree. Many, he says, are 800 years old, so we may assume that Lisle was also planting the avenue for posterity, and even for us.

Experts say we should take time to look at ancient trees, as doing so reduces our stress. They also say ancient trees are essential for wildlife. As someone else once put it, old trees need a little care, not euthanasia.

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