

Beech scientific name *Fagus Sylvatica*

The beech is a magnificent large tree with a broad crown, and very smooth greyish bark. There are typically many branches, which may arch downwards. The dark green leaves are oval to elliptical in shape, terminating in a point; they have wavy edges, which are fringed with hairs in young leaves. The nuts (known as 'mast') occur in pairs, in a spiny husk consisting of four lobes. The nuts are edible but bitter with a high tannin content. The nuts were often used to feed livestock, pigs and cattle were released into beech woodlands to allow them to feed on the "mast".

Although often said to have been introduced to Britain by the Romans, the discovery of beech pollen dating from 6000 BC in Hampshire proves that this tree is indeed a native; it was present in Britain when the country became an island after the Ice Age. It spread naturally northwards to a line drawn between the Wash and the Bristol Channel, and was planted further north. This tree is known throughout much of Europe.

Chips of beech wood are used in the brewing of Budweiser beer as a fining agent. Beech logs are burned to dry the malts used in some German smoked beers, giving the beers their typical flavour. Beech is also used to smoke Westphalian ham, various sausages and some cheeses.

The beech trees at Conyngham Hall are all believed to have been planted over 100 years ago.

Information provided by www.arkive.org, Wikipedia and Harrogate Borough Council