

We had great fun in this January meeting, along with the usual banter and jokes there was of course the delectable cakes and drinks always served with a smile by Ali.

We met at our usual venue that was beautifully warm being Ali and Tony's Venn Valley Vineyard (between Landkey and Swimbridge) EX32 0NN.

Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday, 7 February** at the vineyard, at 2:00 pm. Jill brought in a rather pleasantly shaped Fig. Informally, called the Weeping Fig, or properly the *Ficus benjamina*. The Ficus is an indoor tree that does not endure frosty conditions. It can be kept outside in the summer as long as temperatures are above 60°F (15°C). It requires a lot of light, preferably full sunlight, so be sure not to place it in a shady location. The temperature should be kept relatively constant. Figs can endure low humidity due to their thick, waxy leaves,

A Ficus does not need watering every day, just water on observation. The Ficus should be watered generously whenever the soil gets slightly dry. The Bonsai Ficus prefers room temperature soft water and it can tolerate occasional over, or under-watering.

All fig species share a milky latex sap which leaks from wounds or cuts. This can affect the skin in some cases, but tools need to be cleaned immediately after use when pruning a Ficus.



Just after Christmas a good friend offered me (free), one of Sainsbury's finest that he and his wife were done with. In the bonsai world there is a whiff of snobbery over making Christmas tree (Norway spruce) bonsai.

Personally I feel they provide a superb opportunity to practice techniques on trees with some age that folk are just chucking out! Hence, my bringing in 'Graham's Tree' so we could discuss this readily available source of practice material.



The tree was about 60 cm tall with abundant growth for about 2/3 of the height.



The top was unspeakably odd. It was speedily removed.



This presented the need for much furling in the lower undergrowth to discover what we actually had. The first job when encountering new material is to find the front of the tree so all the subsequent styling can flow from that. With a tree as bushy as this spruce, the primary branch was sought

which would give the first inkling of the side that could be the front.



A pencil marks the strongest and lowest branch which will be the starting point. The next stage of thinning out the trunk debris to find usable branches will be done at home.



The Christmas tree on the left was done about 18 months ago and is now covered in buds for new growth into a 'Literati' style tree.

Whilst poking about on the interweb, I came across a rather good video where in about 15 minutes a fire-burnt tree is shown, creating the example on the right. I found by stopping the video at salient points, much can be learnt from this. We could all start a new trend in disposal of Christmas trees that still have their roots of course!

www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIGixNRgOn4



The two images to the left are of a *Chamaecyparis* False Cypress that has been badly neglected due to our house move. The pads have become overgrown; so much so that the inner sections were starting to die back leaving only the tips of each branch growing enthusiastically.

The trunk-long Shari shows the use of lime-sulphur which is painted on, ideally damp wood to absorb the very smelly fluid. There are three coats here to create a depth of paint. The brightness of the lime-sulphur is often 'knocked-back' by rubbing a little soot into the fibres of the Shari.

The work was started on the lowest pad, but this makes rather boring viewing for the folk gathered. The remainder of the tree was trimmed heavily back at home and rewired for the placement of the branches. This took over two hours to fully complete. A repot will be done this coming autumn.



Juniperus horizontalis



This Shohin (usually 5" – 8" high) example is about 12 years old with a lovely curling trunk and decent pads. After consideration, the group felt the 'front' was the wrong way round so the old 'back' was deigned to become the new 'front' – if that makes sense!

Again badly overgrown and a new top needs to be fashioned, leaning forwards towards the viewer.

This tree was also pruned and wired at home, with a much needed repot again done in the autumn.



Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday, 7 February** at the vineyard, at 2:00 pm.

It is planned for Jill to bring in a tree and pot to be replanted and I have a small Scot's pine that can also be repotted. The steps will be taken slowly to emphasise the importance of each task. If time allows we can discuss the merits, or otherwise, of buying material from the DIY sheds or garden centres.

Please bring along any tree that we could discuss as a group; this process gives a broader insight to possibilities across a wider range of material and is also a lot of fun of course.

We started the u3a Bonsai Group last March and counting the number of attendees this last year, we are up to 90! So, 10 or more folk in February, would break the 100. Thank you all for your support and interest. And, that will done with only 10 meetings!

Further details of bonsai help can be found at www.bonsaiforeveryone.com

Any queries or help needed please email or phone me:

E: nigel@nysys.co.uk

T: 07974 998032

Nigel