

Whittington Tump

Karen Gregor

For years I've been curious about One Tree Hill also known as Crookbarrow Hill or Whittington Tump. I've mused on this unlikely bulge that rises from a flat landscape. I've pondered on the lone tree that survives exposure on the otherwise bare summit. And I've always been grateful when it emerges near Junction 7 of the M5 because it means I'm nearly home.

I first saw the Tump when I moved to Worcester seventeen years ago. A friend called it her dad's hill, her dad's tree. My partner said it was *his* dad's hill, *his* dad's tree. Just as it was a way-marker for me, so it had been for their fathers, and so it continues to be for countless drivers heading home. This landmark has become an everyday part of our culture. But what is its story?

Earlier this year my Editor asked me to make an edition of *Open Country* for BBC Radio 4. It's a programme I first worked on in the late '90s, but not since, and I knew this was my chance to find out more about the Tump. It was also a rare opportunity to pull together a story on my home patch. The series I work on most is Radio 4's walking programme, *Ramblings*, which takes me all over the UK.

When I started my research I heard folklore: Cromwell's soldiers created it using hats-full of soil. I was told more family tales: a memory from 1977 of building a beacon on top to celebrate the Queen's jubilee. And the owner of the Tump, Henry Berkeley of the Spetchley Estate, said it had been a look-out point and gun emplacement manned by the Home Guard during WW2.

The folklore and personal memories give the Tump character, but I wanted to know the hard facts: is it a man-made or a natural feature? If it's man-made, where did the earth come from to construct it? When was it built? And why? Perhaps it was a burial mound, as the

word 'barrow' in its name might suggest, or maybe it had been a Norman motte-and-bailey castle. Oh, and what species of tree is on top?

To try and answer these questions I called on some expert voices: Adam Mindykowski, an Historic Environment Advisor for Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service; Wendy Carter, a former archaeologist, who now works for the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, and Harry Green also of the WWT (Harry and I first met for a stag-beetle recording in the early days of *Open Country*).

As the Tump stands on private land, I arranged permission from the Spetchley Estate to visit, and on one of those clear-sky summer days that become impossible to conjure in the depths of winter, we set off.

It's steeper than you think: no wonder I'd heard stories of sledging adventures. It's not as high as it should be, given its stature in my imagination. There are intriguing horizontal ridges that circle it and make climbing a little easier but the assumption I'd made about their cause was completely wrong. Between them Harry, Wendy and Adam were knowledgeable and enthusiastic guides.

And what did I discover? Well, you'll have to listen to *Open Country* to find out. It was on Radio 4 on Thursday September 5th 2019 at 3pm, and repeated on Saturday 7th September 2019 at 6.07am. If you missed the broadcasts, it's available as a podcast on the BBC Sounds App or on the *Open Country* web-page of the Radio 4 website <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qgft> and should be there for about one year.

Karen Gregor has been a BBC Radio 4 producer for over 25 years. Originally from Edinburgh, she now calls Worcester home. Open Country is Radio 4's long-running programme about all aspects of British landscape and countryside.



01. One Tree Hill or Whittington Tump or Crookbarrow Hill aerial photo 25th February 2019 looking north towards Worcester. Andy Young.



02. One Tree Hill 25 February 2019. Enlarged from picture 01. Andy Young



03. One Tree Hill May 2007 showing the hawthorn in flower. The 'one-tree' is a Horse Chestnut. Google Earth.



04. Panorama looking towards distant Bredon Hill and the south. Harry Green.

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Postscript by Harry Green

I spent my working days in Worcester for over 45 years starting in 1950. On the vast majority of those days I drove past Whittington Tump at least twice a day but I never had an opportunity to climb the hill. So the visit on 15th July 2019 was, for me, a major life-event!

It was a beautiful day with sun and clear skies with wonderful views. Although not high (Trig point 86.615 metres) you can see for miles in all directions – Cotswolds, Bredon Hill, the motorway streaming south, the Malvern Hills, Abberley Hill and more but on the top you feel isolated and part of a tiny bit of Old England. The Tump is rough pasture grazed by sheep but not cultivated and is surrounded by the remnants of an ancient dilapidated hedge of gnarled old hawthorns. To the south is a band of short old trees including Field Maple grown from an old hedge. Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Small Skipper butterflies flitted about and, much to my astonishment the ‘one-tree’ was a horse chestnut.

When I first knew the Hill there were tall elms round the edge (where rooks nested) and several near the top. All were taken by elm disease. I wonder, did somebody plant the conker tree as a replacement?

I must make it clear: The Tump is private land with no footpaths and we thank Henry Berkeley of the Spetchley Estate for allowing access organised by Karen Gregor of BBC Radio 4. Thank you Karen for an enjoyable few hours on One Tree-Hill.



05. Whittington Tump in 1964. Note the elm trees and the new two-lane M5 and the first junction now replaced.



06. The one tree 15th July 2019. Harry Green



07. At the Trig Point. Left to right: Karen Gregor, Adam Mindykowski and Wendy Carter. Harry Green



08. Hedge at base of The Tump and the old hawthorns. Harry Green.



09. Old Field Maple on south boundary of The Tump. Harry Green