



BRANCH LINE

New Elms for Clevedon

by Angela Slotte

In the 1970s, Dutch elm disease, having arrived in Britain in 1967 on a shipment of elm logs from North America, wiped out 28 million elms in the UK, radically changing our landscape forever.



Britain's response to this disaster was the launch in 1982 of The Conservation Foundation. A number of mature elm trees had survived – and survive to this day –, appearing to be resistant to the disease, and from these parent trees new elm saplings were produced, first from cuttings and more recently by the speedier method of micro-propagation. It is not yet known whether these are permanently immune to the disease.

trees in various parts of the UK, have been distributed to over 700 schools, as well as to community groups, local authorities and private landowners. Over the last 4 years more than 2,000 elms have been sent out and are growing across the UK as part of the experiment.

Dutch elm disease is one of the most serious tree diseases in the world. The cause, first identified by scientists in the Netherlands (hence the name), is two related species of fungi in the genus *Ophiostoma*, which are spread by various elm bark beetles. Elms only become fully susceptible to the disease after 10-20 years of growth, when they develop a cork-like bark that can be attacked by the beetles.



It remains to be seen whether our two Woodcutter elms will survive and grow into tall majestic trees.

Angela Slotte



The Clevedon Woodcutters for Wildlife are proud to be taking part in the Great British Elm Experiment, having in autumn 2013 taken delivery of two small saplings of the species Smooth-leaved Elm (*Ulmus minor*) raised from mother trees in Essex and Suffolk. These were grown on for a year and have now, at over 5 feet tall, been planted out. Beames' Elm and Shaw's Elm have been named in honour of, and planted by, two veteran Woodcutters, one in Quinney's Wood, Davis Lane, and the other in woodland on Poets' Walk. The experiment requires data on these saplings, such as height, girth and signs of pests and diseases, to be recorded for a period of at least 15 years. Locations of the trees and other information on all the elms in the experiment can be found on an on-line map.



During the UN's International Year of Biodiversity in 2010 the Conservation Foundation launched their Great British Elm Experiment, in which they are attempting to unlock the mystery of why some trees survived Dutch elm disease. Small potted saplings, raised from mature, apparently resistant

Interestingly, despite the disappearance of mature trees, we now have a great many elm hedges around Clevedon, as well as stands of tall saplings, as on Poets' Walk! This is due to the fact that our local elms freely produce suckers from their roots, even after the main tree has been killed. Sadly though, the saplings will inevitably become infected by the fungus and die back to ground level.