

William Cowper's Oak

There is a well known descendant of Cowper's Oak in the Sutcliffe Baptist Churchyard in Olney, but we may well have a descendant of Cowper's famous oak in the grounds of Turvey Abbey also, as the Turvey Abbey Scrapbook has the following entry on page 100:

'The Oak tree opposite the east end of the pond in the garden at Turvey Abbey was from an acorn grown on the tree at Yardley Chase, known by the name of Cowper's Oak, and was given to the writer when it was a very young plant, (about the year 1816) by Mr.W. Wilson of Olney, who had gathered and sown the acorn.'

The pond is no longer there but there are two quite substantial oaks to the east of where it may have once been. The compiler of the scrapbook, John Higgins, wrote this in about 1825 and was a great recorder of natural history and other items related to Turvey and the surrounding district. He inherited the Abbey from his uncle Charles in 1792. Both John and Charles had hailed from Weston Underwood and John had certainly known William Cowper as a personal friend. There are many references to Cowper in the Scrapbook, including a fine drawing of the Cowper Oak as it was in 1791.

As the accompanying note relates, Cowper believed that it was 'known by the name of Judith ... and is said to have been an Oak at the time of the Conquest.' Elsewhere John notes that 'this oak 'is in a greater state of decay and is much injured by depredations'. Alas, the original Oak is no more having apparently succumbed to lightning in 1949. But it would be good to believe we have our very own link still with the original and of course with William Cowper.



The Oak celebrated by the poet Cowper in Yardley Chase, now called Cowpers Oak.

(From the Turvey Abbey Scrapbook)

Br.John