

9 Hybrid Black Poplar *Populus x canadensis* Also Black Italian Poplar

From the gate halfway across the Prior Park playing fields you can see 3 tall Poplar trees by the Tennis Club fence; these were planted to commemorate boys from the Grammar School who died during the First World War and are 100 years old. Mature trees grow to 30m and can live for 200 years. The bark is dark brown and twigs have a distinct knobbly appearance. Black poplar is dioecious, meaning male and female flowers are found on separate trees. Flowers are catkins (male are red and female are yellow-green), and are pollinated by the wind.

Did you know?

The true Black Poplar is the UK's rarest native tree with only around 7,000 left of which only 600 are female. The female tree was very unpopular near houses as it drops thick white "cotton wool" from the seeds in summer. You can see a hybrid version of the female tree outside Holy Trinity Church.

Value to Wildlife

Black Poplar is the food plant for the caterpillars of many moths. The catkins provide an early source of pollen and nectar for bees and other insects, and the seeds are eaten by birds.

Mythology and Symbolism.

According to Greek mythology, the black poplar was created after Phaeton's fatal attempt to drive Apollo's chariot. Phaeton's sisters made such a fuss mourning his death that the gods transformed them into black poplars. It is also said that fallen red male catkins are Devil's fingers, and bring bad luck if picked up.

Uses of Black Poplar

Black poplar wood is fine textured, soft and almost white in colour. It is naturally springy and resistant to shock. Traditional uses included cart wheels and wagon bottoms. Because of its natural fire resistance, it was often used for floorboards, especially in the days of paraffin lamps. Black poplar can be coppiced or pollarded and was therefore a popular source for thatching spars, bean sticks, clothes pegs and woven fruit baskets. Today, hybrid black poplar timber is used to make artificial limbs, wine cases, pallets, shelving, bowls and toys.

