

Mayer Park and the Atlas Cedar

Wirral Parks, Coast and Countryside

Mayer Park

Mayer Park and its neighboring free library were created by Joseph Mayer a local philanthropist and opened to the public in 1869. Ten years later he had added Mayer Hall, a museum and art gallery and a public hall. On his death in 1886 he bequeathed these facilities in the form of the Joseph Mayer Trust who managed them until the 1930's when they were passed into the hands of Bebington District Council. The Park was designed as a showcase for a number of exotic trees and shrubs. The main avenue has a number of spectacular Horse Chestnut (or conker trees) and elsewhere in the park are a fabulous Atlas Cedar and a very special Ginkgo Biloba.

Mayer Park and Mayer Hall were used to billet troops during The Great War. In 1917 the parks flower beds were replaced with vegetables, beetroot, parsnips, cabbage and potatoes. The potatoes were particularly successful with one year producing 1219.25Kg (24cwt) in one season, the food was used to feed hungry locals as well as to raise funds for the trust. During this time the park lost at least two of its 'parksmen' to the War one (Dillon) *enlisted* in February 1916 and one was eventually *conscripted* (Royle) (after two previous successful appeals) in June 1918. After Royle was conscripted the park was forced to concede that it needed help in order to maintain the park and women were finally allowed to help with park management.

Atlas cedar

Mayer Park is home to a fabulous Atlas Cedar, growing to 100ft (30m) this tree is native to North Africa. It has distinctive blue-green leaves which are seldom bigger than 2.5cm long and the cones are 7.5cm long. Atlas cedar have been aged at 600 years old.

The Cedar provides some of the most sought after timber as it resists rot and insects and has a pleasant scent and polishes beautifully. The wood has a close short grain which makes it easy to work. The cedars found in parks today tend to be shorter and broader than their wilder relatives, this is due to their use as specimens and a lack of competition.



Folklore and Uses



Snefru, a Pharaoh of Egypt's 4th dynasty imported cedar to create the doors of their royal palaces and was the first choice of monumental doorways in the Near East and in Classical Greece and Rome. King Solomon used cedar to create roof beams in his temple in Jerusalem.

Although the Deodar Cedar and Cedar of Lebanon have medical uses the Atlas Cedar does not appear to have any particular medicinal value, however it is thought that the smell encourages a deeper and clearer flow of thoughts.

Unsurprisingly, with its mind calming scent the cedar seems to be held as a tree of wisdom, and in southern Mesopotamia was the home of Ea (or Enki) the god of wisdom and Lord of the Earth. The Babylonians had similar beliefs and used the burning of branches to restore strength and life to the body. Cedar was also used by Hebrew's to purify and restoration after contact with the dead. In fact our word Cedar comes from the Hebrew Qatar or 'to smudge'.

Ginkgo Biloba

Also known as the maiden hair tree is a unique tree and exists inside its own grouping (genus). The Ginkgo is the sole survivor of an ancient family of trees that occurred globally including Europe about 160 million years ago. The Ginkgo is deciduous, resinous and grows to heights of 120ft (36m), although this is reduced in cooler climates. The tree has males and female parts on separate trees (dioecious). It has clustered fan shaped leaves (like a ducks foot), are divided in the middle. The plum like fruit has a fleshy rind which encloses an edible white nut which is commonly eaten in Asia; although they should be handled with care as the oils from the nut can cause skin irritation called dermatitis in some people. The tree takes an enormous amount of time to mature often three human generations.



Folklore and Uses

The Ginkgo is a sacred tree in Asia and often seen near temples. Used as a food source the trees were always rare and the nuts are an occasional delicacy. In the 11th century the Ginkgo was known as the Yin Hsing 'Silver Apricot'. It was also known as the kung sun shu or 'Granfather-Grandchild Tree'. They are immensely hardy, in the wake of the atom bomb dropped in 1945 on Hiroshima in Japan every living thing was destroyed except four Ginkgo trees that survived and by the following spring had started to blossom again. All four trees are STILL thriving today! Ever since the Japanese has named these trees the 'bearer of hope' and prayers for world peace are traditionally left near the trees.

