

Hinchingbrooke School, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire.

We used this competition to launch our new Gardening Club and involved students, staff and a parent helper. When devising our plan for the Olympic Wreath, we thought about the rich history of the Olympics and looked at the date of the first known Olympic Competition – 776BC. We thought about the landscape of the UK and how it would have looked during that historical period. The last glaciers retreated from Great Britain around 11 000BC and Britain thawed enough to allow trees to return from Western Europe. The first trees to do so were Aspen, Birch and Willow. Pine, Hazel, Alder and Oak followed, before being joined by Elm, Lime, Ash, Holly, Hornbeam and Maple. These species now comprise what we call ancient woodland, which is defined as land that has been continually wooded since at least 1600AD. It was at this point in our history that the planting of woodland became more common, so woodland that occurred before then is more likely to have grown naturally. Some of our existing ancient woods may even date back to the original woodland that covered Britain after the last Ice Age.

Our remaining ancient woodland is a real conservation priority and that is why we chose it as the basis for our wreath design. In the last 100 years 46 species of broadleaved woodland trees have become extinct and only 2% of Britain is covered in ancient woodland. Yet, they remain our richest sites for wildlife, are full of cultural heritage and are some of our prettiest and most beautiful woodland with bluebells and celandine flowering in spring.

Taking into account the season and the fact that many of our trees have not yet experienced bud burst, we chose the yew tree *Taxus baccata* to represent our ancient woodland and the conservation message that it carries. The Yew tree is the most ancient of trees with some specimens being thousands of years old. The Yew has been the subject of myths, legends and Acts of Parliament. It has become part of religious beliefs and is featured in a wealth of literary material. It is also of great importance because of its exceptional longevity. We also used ivy *Hedera helix helix* which is found in most of our woodland in Britain.

In addition to the historical and environmental message we also wanted to use species which would represent our sporting history and culture. Yew was traditionally used to make bows for archery and this weekend our archers are competing for the 6 places to represent the UK at London 2012.

To add some colour we used thistle, daffodils and roses to represent England, Scotland and Wales and we talked about shamrock representing Northern Ireland and its association with St Patrick.

Finally we also used the Red flowering currant *Ribes sanguineum glutinosum* as we thought it had a beautiful flower and it represented how non-native species have become a common sight in our gardens and natural habitats.

The UK's ancient woodland is irreplaceable and the rate at which we are losing it, is one of the highest in the world, making it comparable with the Amazon rainforest - however while most school children will have heard of the Amazon, they may not have heard of ancient woodland. Yet it is one of our most valuable natural habitats, being home to many endangered species including plants, insects, birds and mammals: we want to spread the message that we must protect this amazing habitat as it is integral to our heritage and our wildlife

We believe we have made a beautiful Olympic wreath which combines our rich biodiversity, cultural heritage and sporting prowess. We hope you agree.

Year 7, 8 and 9 students and staff from Hinchingbrooke School