

I wanted to make an Olympic wreath which summed up the wonderful opportunity of having the Games held in London. I tried to achieve a victory crown which would incorporate happiness, strength, contrast and unity.

The oak leaves were chosen first because the oak has always been a revered tree. It was sacred to Zeus amongst other gods, and to Druids who practised their rites beneath oak branches. The Olympic flame passes through the London Borough of Bexley and, situated in Danson Park, Bexley, is the Charter Oak. This tree is 200 years old and under this oak on 30 September 1937 Lord Cornwallis presented the Charter which changed Bexley from an Urban District Council to a Municipal Borough. In the Ancient Olympics the wreaths were made from Zeus' sacred Olive tree; the branches being cut using golden scissors. Perhaps Boris Johnson could cut the first oak branch from the Charter Oak, using secateurs made from Welsh gold. Apart from this tree, there are other famous oaks in Britain; in Sherwood Forest there is the Major Oak which is where Robin Hood and his merry men are believed to have made their plans. The ancient oaks of Gog and Magog can be found in Somerset – symbolising the last British male and female giants.

The next tree to be chosen was the willow. This wood is traditionally used for weaving because of the flexibility and strength of the young branches. I have used it because of the colour of the leaves and the twigs make a pleasant shape for a crown. Its ability to regrow quickly symbolises vitality – an obvious quality needed for Olympic athletes. It is also known for its healing properties; in the country young twigs were chewed to relieve pain.

The third tree I used was the Ash tree. It was known as the Tree of the World in Scandinavian mythology. They believed the trunk stretched up to the heavens and the branches reached out to all the countries in the world. This symbolism is so appropriate for the Olympics where the Games reach out to all corners of the Earth. In Britain it was thought to be a healing tree. I thought the characteristic black buds at the end of each twig would make an interesting contrast with the other branches in my wreath.

Bexley Council has already taken steps with regard to the conservation of the Charter Oak; it has been fenced off to help shield it from vandalism, moreover this protects the delicate root system of the tree.

The reason I chose these leaves for my wreath is because I wanted an aesthetic yet durable crown. The oak has a simple lobed leaf, the ash a compound leaf and they connect well with the willow. They symbolise strength and vitality, combined with healing properties, moreover they have strong British connections. I am sure any athlete would be proud to receive one.

Plants chosen:-

Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Oak (*Quercus petraea*), Willow (*Salix alba*)