



Caldwell's Nurseries Project

Oral history

<http://www.caldwellarchives.org.uk/>

Alan Lane interviewed by Gordon Darlington

Alan Lane, Managing Director Lanes Landscapes/Brentwood Moss Nurseries, was a regular customer of Caldwell's Nurseries from the mid 1970's until they closed.

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Interview summary

00.00.00	<p>"I am Alan Lane and was born in November, 1945. My early school years were with at Worthington Road Primary School in Sale, where we had a school garden and that in conjunction with my uncle being a keen gardener prompted my interest in gardening. I then went to Altrincham Grammar School and in the school holidays I used to work on various nurseries. When I left Altrincham Grammar School at 16, I went to Flintshire Horticultural College in Northop, North Wales for a 12 month course. When I left there I started working at Fishers Nurseries on Dane Road, Sale, where they use to grow geraniums and bedding plants. I worked there for 12 months and whilst I was working there also started up my own business and I have been Managing Director of Lane Landscapes and Brentwood Moss Nurseries every since. Brentwood Moss Nurseries started in business in 1970, which is roughly six years after starting Lane Landscapes and have been in and around the north west every since."</p>
00.01.40	<p>"My first encounter with Caldwell's probably was in the mid-1970s when I was getting the nursery established and I was looking for suppliers of plants. Caldwell's were a fairly traditional nursery with fairly long established ties with local authorities and I think the thought of having to deal with me might not have come very easy at the time didn't go down very well but after a few conversations with Bill Caldwell getting him to work with my prices we had a very long and happy relationship until his business folded in the late 80's early 90's."</p>
00.02.30	<p>"I started buying in the mid-70's as I have already mentioned. I think we started buying trees like <i>Alnus glutinosa</i>, <i>Acer platanoides</i> for reclamation sites as they were an ideal tree Caldwell's had an abundance of that sort of tree along with things like Hornbeam, different sort of Cherries, Sorbus we used to buy all that sort of material. Most of the trees were from the Ollerton Nursery on the right hand side as you go</p>

	<p>down (into Chelford) and most of the stuff grown in that particular spot. There were some trees on the left hand side of the road but that part of the nursery was very heavy clay soil and only suitable for Poplars, Salix, so we used to buy from other nurseries including Barnshaw Nursery on the A50 near Mangoletsi. That was a nursery where they use to grow lots of beech trees, Fagus (sylvatica) Dawych and Fagus sylvatica Dawych Purple and quite a number of items, which were easily obtained so we use to buy quite a few. One or two specimen trees were actually bought from that nursery and I actually bought them for my own house at the time when we lived in Mobberley before moving them down to the nursery here and planting them as specimen trees down the drive here.”</p>
00.04.18	<p>“Characters: I remember Peter Acton who was involved on the main Nursery in Knutsford and I have known Peter him for many years and he actually did some gardening for me at home, when I lived in Mobberley. I remember Syd the tractor driver. He was a very helpful guy and used to help me load trees from the nursery and when the nursery folded Syd went to work at S E Matthews Nurseries at the Alderley Park Nurseries. Beyond that I don’t have any recollection where Syd is now. I can vaguely remember the Accountant, Frank and obviously I remember Bill Caldwell very well. Don Leaman was the main contact. I used to phone Don up in the morning and give a list of what I wanted to pick up that day or in the evening and the stuff would be left out at Ollerton and I would either send the wagon in or pick them up myself late at night. Quite often it was dark when I got there about 10.00 pm in order to load up the Landover and trailer or the truck and bring it back to work in the morning. That relationship carried on until the last few years of the nursery. Towards the end because of the lack of staff and the lack of husbandry and a lot of the trees were becoming too tall and or too congested to make decent specimens so the trade possibly faded away to some extent”</p>
00.05.55	<p>“It was probably like dealing with a Victorian Mill owner, unfortunately their attitudes to their staff was very Dickensian everybody was referred to as “Mr Caldwell” or the Mr Leaman” no Christian names and I am not sure people respected them for that or whether they loathed them I could never quite make my mind up you wouldn’t say it was a team effort as there was such a big division between management and the staff, although it probably worked because people had been there for such a long time. There were no young rebellious members of staff there they had served there a long term and just grew up with that way of life, but as people they were perfectly charming and I didn’t have any problems with dealing with them whatsoever.”</p>
00.07.12	<p>“I think it was, but it was then sort of the end of an era wasn’t it and I probably came in close to the end of that era certainly within last ten years of it closing down, but I would say that at one time it was a well run nursery and it had been that way for three or four generations, but because no new family members were coming into it there was no new management structure there and it just slipped and sort of died with the firm if you like. They did expend there obviously was some capital expenditure at one time because they had one of the first spading machines in the country for turning over the ground, they bought a tree lift but didn’t know how to use it and then it was back to a spade. I think Graham Tuke bought the tree lift off them but they didn’t have a lot of machinery – an old Ford Dexter Tractor and a couple of trailers that is about my recollection of machinery and truck wise they had a small seven and half ton truck that was the sum of their equipment.”</p>
00.08.30	<p>“I always remember going into Bill’s office and he had a fine old desk there which was probably teak or mahogany desk probably mahogany with drawers on the side and a fall back lid – a beautiful piece of furniture don’t know quite what happened to that piece of furniture. I did make a comment it would fit nicely into my house, but it fell</p>

	on deaf ears! If you wanted to see Bill Caldwell it was probably like having an audience with the Pope I suppose in some ways. In the end I used to walk down to his office and knock on his door, which other people daren't do that but that was the sort of relationship with him I had in the end and as I said before I found them perfectly charming people and very straight people to deal with in business.”
00.09.19	“There were a couple of plants which he named or introduced - one was an Acer campestre ‘William Caldwell’ it was fairly similar to Acer carpinus fastigiata which is still grown, but never very much and occasionally you see it in the Dutch List and I think Hillier’s may still grow it. It was a nice tree we had a few here but never managed to sell many of them, why I have no idea.”
00.09.46	“Another thing he actually named Eleagnus x ebbingei ‘Limelight’. It was a Dutch plant from Boskoop and brought to England and Bill Caldwell put a name to it. So there were a couple of things there which were put down to Bill Caldwell which was quite nice.”