



SOMERSET BONSAI SOCIETY

Bonsai Newsletter February 2023



The hall is starting to fill up with cash laden members, eager to fill those gaps on their benches.

Welcome to our February meeting report. No guest speakers or workshops this time. Instead, a brief summary of our annual auction. Last year, in a departure from previous times, we held our annual auction in February, rather than the usual autumn date. It proved so successful that we decided to do the same this year. Most bonsai clubs now hold at least one auction per year and alongside the national events, such as the Bonsai Boot Sale at the Botanical Gardens and the Staverton Boot Sale, there are plenty of opportunities for enthusiasts to move on trees and other accoutrements and then replace them with new stuff. The circle of life!

As I previously mentioned, last year's auction saw a bumper number of lots, probably due to the Pandemic (remember that?) and subsequent lock-down preventing enthusiasts from buying and selling. Unfortunately, this year's numbers were somewhat down on previous years and we had fewer items donated to the Society. I guess we are all thinking about those fuel bills, lurking around the corner!



The first lots though the door. I have my eye on 397!

So on to the auction. The doors opened at 18:45 for sellers to register their items and after a slow start, the lots started to appear. Our President and auctioneer for the night John Trott, has perfected the auction process over many years, and the whole event now runs so smoothly that people often forget how much effort goes into ensuring that both buyers and sellers get what they are owed. So, I would like to once again thank John for his time and effort and his uncanny knack of being able to wring every last penny out of bidders. It's a pleasure to watch. So much so that I often forgot to take photos of the action, sorry about that!

My bonsai apprentice, Pam, likes this Shohin Larch (403). An early birthday present, me thinks!



As in previous years, there was a wide variety of trees, ranging from basic starter material and pre-bonsai, to more mature specimens. There were also a couple of trees that would look good in a show and a couple of “sleepers” awaiting the touch of a good stylist to bring out their hidden beauty. A lot of pots; mame, shohin and chuhin, including a couple of English and Japanese signed pots that should make good money. As previously mentioned in our November 2022 meeting report, pots are becoming more expensive to produce and therefore to purchase. So, buy them when you can as they aren’t going to drop in value.

There were also a few display stands, which are always a good thing to purchase providing the price is right!



Richard doing his bit as auction runner, no time to bid on lots!

The clock, metaphorically, struck 19:30 and it was time to draw the first lot. As I previously mentioned, John has refined the auction process over a number of years to make it both easy to manage and fair to both sellers and bidders. When a seller brings in their items, each lot is given a ticket, the item number is recorded by our treasurer along with any reserve and a duplicate of the ticket is placed in a “hat”. Once the auction begins, numbers are drawn from the “hat” and auctioned off until all the lots are sold. Doing it this way ensures that lots are random and that you avoid having one seller having all their lots sold quickly. It also keeps the interest of the bidders as you have to be on your toes for your next potential new acquisition! This year John was ably assisted by our Treasurer Roger, keeping an eye on the figures and auction runners, Richard and Richard, keeping the lots coming.

If you have never been to an auction before then it is well worth going to one. You will not end up buying something because you scratched your nose at the wrong moment, auctioneers always check if new bidders are actually joining in, but you might catch the bug and end up with some bargains you never knew you needed!

If, on the other hand, you are a seasoned bidder then you will know all about the "Highs and Lows" of auction fever.



Let's start at £20. Who will give me £20?

You have your pot of money, unless you are one of the lucky people who don't worry about how much things cost. You have your list of lots that you want to purchase, your "Must haves" and your "I can find space for that". If you are lucky and get your chosen items, all is good and you can then relax and enjoy the rest of the show, but when you are 'pipped at the post' or downright thrashed by other bidders then the panic starts. You can't go home with nothing to show for your time and anyway you can always put it in next year's auction. But you need to be strong. Set sensible limits, plus a reasonable margin in case you get caught up in the bidding. Know when to give in and always be prepared to bid on an unexpected item, if it is going cheap.



A very nice shoin half- moon pot and a lot of drip trays. I want the pot!

But I digress. How is the auction going? The lots flowed across the auctioneer's table and prices were good. Several pots made appreciable figures, helped no doubt by having several bidders intent on getting them, whilst other items went for more modest sums. A nice half-moon style pot, crying out for a semi cascade style tree like my Japanese Larch, was found hiding in a box amongst a number of drip trays. I wanted that pot but sadly so did others.

The same thing happened with lot 397. A nice little Chinese Elm, in what turned out to be a signed English pot, rapidly passed my £60 limit and eventually made over double that figure. But it went to a good home so that's OK, isn't it?

Several more trees came and went, then the little Larch was up for grabs. Only two of us bidding on it, which is not always a good thing but I did manage to win it within my £60 limit. A little bit of wiring, remove the long upright branch, put it in a more suitable pot and Pam has a new tree to show. Simples.

I continued to make the odd bid on lots as they caught my eye, but nothing really exciting until a late entry lot that I had missed when perusing the entries. In my younger days I saw a Tamarisk bonsai at a show and was struck by the simplicity of the weeping style and delicate foliage. Over the ensuing years I have tried several times to get my hands on a donor tree to work on but never succeeded. Suddenly here was a nice little tree crying out to be wired and repotted. I had to have it!



"Now this is a nice little Spruce".

Luckily everyone else decided to drop out very quickly and my "Holy grail" was finally within my grasp and all for the cost of a pub lunch and a few glasses of wine. Roll on the spring so I can get started on wiring those branches into their gentle weeping curves and as luck would have it, I do have a suitable pot for it.

Eventually all the lots had been sold and it was time for a coffee, a biscuit and to settle up with the "money man". Buyers first, so we have all the money in, then settle with the sellers, commiserate with those who had been out bid and chat about what could be done with some of the "work in progress" trees.



Once again, we raised enough money to pay for a couple of guest speakers or to pay for the hire of the hall for a few meetings. It was also good to see some of our newer members leaving with material that they can bring to future workshops. I look forward to see what they do with them.

The happy winners, line up to claim their lots and replenish the Society coffers.

Well, that's all for now. Next meeting is on the 8th March and will be a talk by John on Literati style bonsai and the tree of the month will be back, with "Literati style trees" as the topic. I look forward to that report.

Till the next time, stay safe and "keep doing bonsai".

Alistair