



SOMERSET BONSAI SOCIETY

Bonsai Newsletter February 2024



The auction lots are starting to arrive

Welcome to our February meeting report. No guest speakers or workshops this time, instead, a brief summary of our annual auction. If you have read last year's report, you may remember that we had a downturn in the number of items put up for auction.

Unfortunately, this year followed the same trend with around 50 items going under the hammer.

Our President and resident auctioneer, John Trott, made short work of sorting through the items and where required, bundling up individual lots in order to increase their attraction to potential buyers and thus wringing every last penny out of bidders. John was assisted by our Treasurer, Roger and auction runners, Richard and Dave. Thank you all for making it such a smooth operation.

As usual, the doors opened at 18:45 for sellers to register their items and after a bit of a slow start, the lots started to appear.

As in previous years, there was quite a variety of trees, ranging from basic starter material and pre-bonsai, to a few mature specimens. There were also a couple of trees that would look good after a bit of wiring and some pruning, maybe worth a bid or two!



Satsuki Azaleas and a wooden Jiita



Lot 490 a Downey Birch, nice!

There were also quite a few pots; mame, shohin and chuhin, including a couple of English and Japanese signed pots. Most of these have been donated to the Society by retiring bonsai growers and it is nice to think that they will continue to be used for their intended purpose. As I have previously mentioned, 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!

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 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!



Checking out the lots!

If you have never been to an auction before then it is well worth going to one. You won't 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.

So how do you go about getting the best out of an auction? Firstly, it is important to look at all the lots and have a rummage around. Check items that you think you want to bid on. Is there anything that would devalue the item, cracks in pots, damaged or dead branches on trees, wire damage etc. A less than perfect lot doesn't



Eager bidders or interested onlookers

mean that you won't bid on it, but it will affect the price. It may also stop other bidders and leave you to grab a bargain. All part of the excitement! Try not to get caught up in bidding fever. Set your limit for each item, plus 10% or 15% and stick to it. If you are lucky and get your chosen items, all is good and you can then relax and enjoy everyone else getting outbid. If, however you are 'pipped at the post' by other bidders, consider bidding on some of your reserve lots, providing they are going cheap.



Next lot, not your standard Buxus!

This year I had my eye on a few lots; a nice shohin Portuguese Oak, a small Scots Pine styled as a "Broom" but identifying as a semi cascade and a mature Alder that has appeared in our summer show several years running. I don't have either an Alder or a Portuguese Oak in my collection so those were my

main lots and the Pine? I would do my best to rescue it, if I have any money left over.



A large Japanese Maple and 'My Oak'

The lots of the auction flowed across the auctioneer's table. However, prices were down on last year and many members came away with a bargain, particularly pots.

The Portuguese Oak arrived on the block but attracted fierce bidding and I pulled out once it passed my limit plus 20%! Guess I will have to wait for another one. I continued to make the odd bid on lots as they caught my eye, and I managed to win one of John's

handcrafted wooden "Jiita" for a bargain price. This will be perfect for displaying a small accent plant or bronze on, at a show.

Lot 490, a Downey Birch, attracted spirited bidding as did a selection of small Japanese Maples and a copy of Dan Barton's "The Bonsai Book" which exceeded everyone's expectations but went to a good home.



A nice little Cotoneaster? Anyone?



An interesting group of English Oaks

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.



And, that concludes the bidding.

Once again, we raised enough money to pay for a couple of guest speakers or to pay for the hire of the hall for six months. 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 seeing what they do with them.

Well, that's all for now. Next meeting is on the 13 March and will be a Spring workshop, so lots of repotting, pruning and maybe a bit of wiring!

The tree of the month will be back, with "Spring tree" as the topic.

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

Alistair

P.S. We will be restarting our weekend workshops in April at the Monkton Elm Garden Centre – see website for more details [here](#).