

## Sycamore Gap

Nothing 'light-hearted' can be said about the recent news that the 300-year-old Sycamore on Hadrian's Wall was cut down during the dead of night.



Perhaps the most photographed, filmed and painted tree in Britain, it has become for so many people a symbol of the tenacity and a parable of the wonder of life. The image of its shape against the changing skies is legendary.

A natural seedling, it grew in a bleak landscape where few trees survive beyond a few years. Sheltered in its hollow it withstood the storms of 3 centuries, including Storm Arwen, which felled thousands of mature trees two years ago. Millions of walkers and animals over generations have sheltered and rested under its branches (including me). This tree was a 'friend' to all and asked nothing of us beyond respect and the right to live and grow.

It is not the only well-loved tree in the nation to be cut down. Others have been cut in the name of 'development' or 'progress'. We have no idea what motive compelled a man to wield a chain saw against our Sycamore. It was a strong and healthy tree and its seeds are being collected to grow elsewhere. No doubt a tree sculptor will create a monument from its felled trunk to honour its silent centuries, straddling the wall which once divided our land. And no doubt its strong healthy stump will produce its own response to the tragedy – growing new shoots in triumph over death; a silent witness to the power of resurrection.

Some speak of a 'spiritual' loss. For us Northumbrians, the loss is also woven into our history. We have another tree woven into our spiritual history. Isaiah wrote of the promised Messiah as the 'Shoot from the stump of Jesse': a descendant of King David's father, Jesse. Jesus too was 'cut-down' in mindless ignorance – but the life which grew from his death changed the world.

Let us pray for something good and lasting to come from our Sycamore's demise – a deeper awareness of the natural world and our relationship to it.