

Paperbark Mulberry Fruits:

Brian Livingstone

There are two paperbark mulberry trees (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) beside the path that enters the woodland between the lakeside lavender bed on the left and the border beside the Pump House on the right.



Both are multi-stemmed trees with heart shaped or oval leaves that are quite woolly underneath but with an upper surface like fine sandpaper.



Some leaves can be quite lobed and resemble the leaves of figs, to which they are related. In August 2018, they produced some fruit. This is an unusual occurrence in the UK, so these notes may be of interest.

The species is dioecious (trees are either male or female) and both our trees are female. Earlier in 2018, they produced flower clusters which looked like fuzzy green balls on short stems coming straight off the twigs.



If you slice a ball in two, you can see that there is a central solid portion (the receptacle) onto which are attached ranks of pale green flowers with dark tops.



Flower cluster in late summer. The section shows the close-packed flowers on the central receptacle. These flowers have not been fertilised. The hairs on the surface of the cluster are the flowers' pistils

In mid-August, the flower clusters dropped, covering the path and the grass beneath. They did not look at all like the mulberries, to which they are also related. The vast majority had not set seed.

They depend on wind-borne pollen from a male tree and as far as I know we do not have one in the Park. That is just as well because the pollen is a potent cause of allergic reactions like asthma.



Catkin male flowers from Wikimedia Commons

However there must be a male tree within reach, perhaps across the river, because in 2018, a few flowers produced fruits. These are fruits as botanically defined rather those which would be sold by a greengrocer. My photographs show some bright red projections from the flower

cluster ball and the actual fruit is the red spot at the tip which is about 2-3mm across.



This shows fruit bearing flower cluster balls on the tree. And the next photo shows such a cluster ball. The fruit is at the tip of the extruded stalk.



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an Unusual Event in Battersea Park

The fruit has the appearance of a miniature strawberry but the tiny spots on the surface are not seeds but dimples. The fruit contains a single seed. It has a thin, heart shaped fruit wall or pericarp with the seed enclosed. Such a fruit is technically called a drupe.



In fact this was a rather feeble production of fruit. When pollen is plentiful and the growing conditions are ideal the balls are

completely covered in fruits. Apparently they are very sweet to eat.



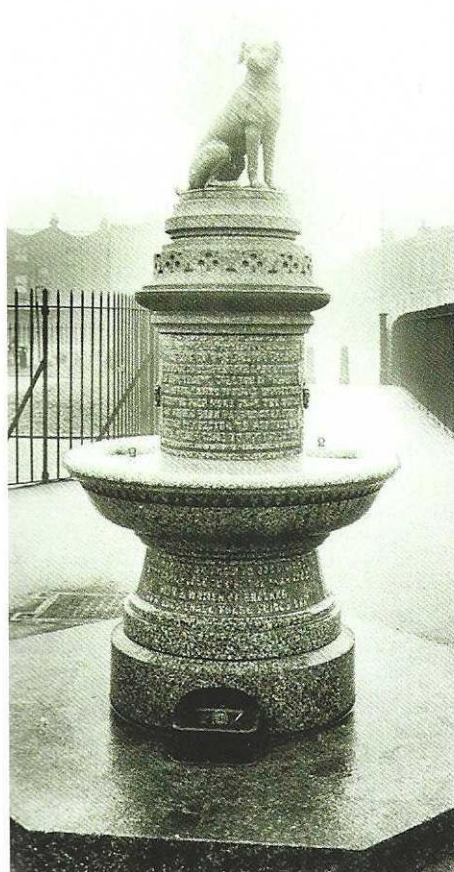
Fully fruiting flower cluster photographed in Taiwan, from Wikimedia Commons

On the whole it is a good thing that our trees do not produce much fruit. In countries where the tree has naturalized away

from its home in Eastern Asia, it has apparently become a pernicious weed e.g. in Pakistan, Uganda and Argentina. Some seeds from ours must have germinated in 2017 because there were some saplings growing in the grass under the tree before they were cut down by strimmers. The leaves of these young plants were lobed and had toothed margins which may be seen on the mature trees in some years.

If any reader finds the male tree please contact the author. There is a grove of these trees at Kew and pollen could blow over from there. The distance might account for the sparse fruit production of our specimens.

Letters



Dear Editor of the Review,

Can I say that I liked your review article on the Brown Dog Statue in the summer edition? However, I was surprised that you did not see fit to show a picture of the original statue that used to grace the Latchmere Estate. Can it be that neither the Friends nor Ian Mursell have access to the original? If so then see the attached. Personally I much prefer the traditional, but long lost, version of a small dog sitting atop the drinking fountain in a very recognisable canine pose to the rather unheroic dog now represented in the modern statue—even if perhaps that is more suitable for an animal about to be murdered in the name of science and human progress!

Yours sincerely,

Tony Belton,
Latchmere Labour Councillor

With thanks to Councillor Tony Belton, the Editor is delighted to publish this photograph of the original brown dog statue. The statue was by Joseph Whitehead and stood in Battersea from 1906 until 1910.

