



Above: West Melbury Oak (1903) Ink, watercolour and charcoal
 Below: Working on Wardour Castle Oak (1318) Ink, watercolour and charcoal

From little acorns

Gary Cook shares his deep admiration for oak trees



It's a bright morning, closer to the crispness of autumn than the haze of summer. I'm in a field on the Dorset/Wiltshire border and I've got my arms wrapped around a tree. The chances of me being the first person to hug this ancient oak are pretty remote. It's clearly been here hundreds of years and I imagine many people have felt drawn to embrace its gnarled, fissured trunk. There's just something about oaks that resonates with us.

I'm not your common or garden tree-hugger, though. I'm actually measuring its girth. It is a solid seven metres round. The basic calculation is that one metre equals 100 years, which makes this leafy giant a mind-boggling 700 years old. Its size, its sturdiness, the sense of centuries passing – no wonder the oak has

March/April 2019