

# AN ELM TREE IN OAK TREES' CLOTHING

## Overview and some of the techniques used

By David Wager

Why the title?

Well, I had made the assumption that the tree photographed when walking part of the Nitherdale Way in Yorkshire, was an Oak tree. It was only when I had a return visit to the very same tree (to show my appreciation), that I checked out the leaves and to my surprise realised the overall structure and shape I had used for the 'Oak Tree' build, was in fact an English Elm.

Fortunately, I had studied genuine Oak trees and photographed them at a closer range before commencing the build, so finer details of the branch formation, bark details and colours were at least the genuine article. The final result does look like an Oak, and in fact the lower branches were given a more a more pronounced drooping aspect which is typical.

This article will give some background, a new technique learned, and some detail of the painting and weathering.

First, a look at the finished tree





And the 'living' original





## Background

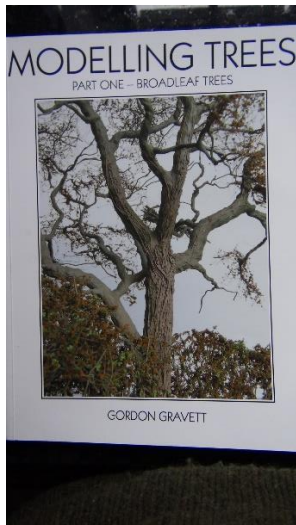
It all started with a course at Pendon Museum, 'Making Trees the Pendon Way' with instructors Stuart Holt and Mick Bonwick. This is highly recommended, great fun, and so much was learnt in a short time, with quite amazing outputs by all participants as shown below.



Basic construction consists of groups of twisted wires (range 24 – 30 gauge), that are combined, and then coated with a mix of PVA, Artex and Artists Acrylic Paint colours.



Before commencing with the 'Oak' tree, I had a good read of the superb book 'Modelling Trees Part One – Broadleaf Trees' by Gordon Gravett, and went out to look at and photograph some of the finer details.

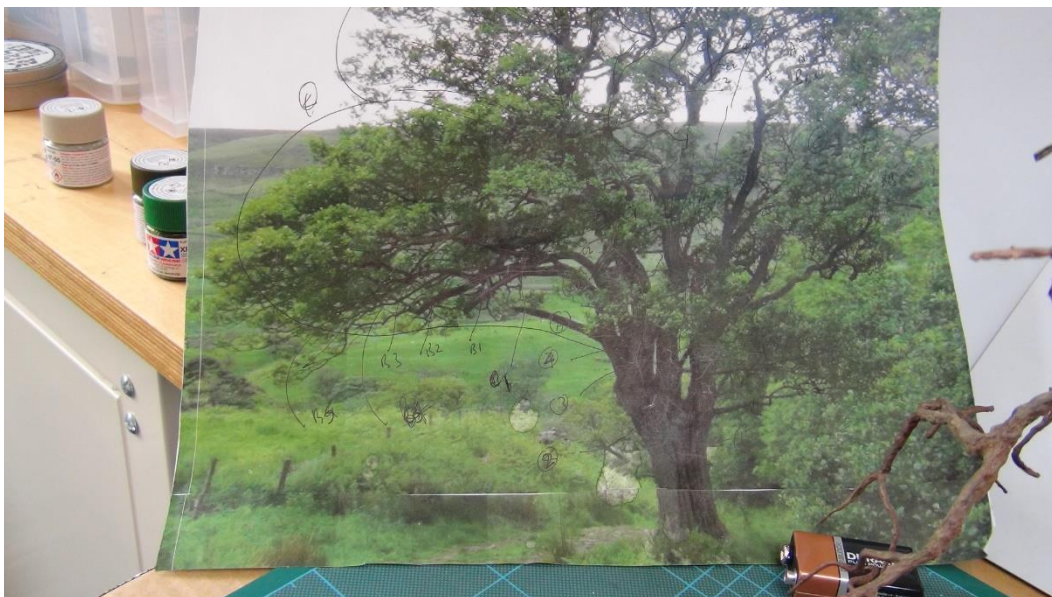






The construction, coating and initial painting was done at Missenden Summer retreat 2019.

The tree height was estimated from the original photograph, and then the tree split into sections and sub-sections to determine the wire grouping and numbering.



Each of the wire groups that were twisted and formed, were labelled with the numbers as per the plan on the printed photograph. This is absolutely essential when a few hundred wires are used! Getting the 3D shape from a 2D photograph is not easy. More photos at different angles would have been better, but some artistic licence is not a problem if the tree is well proportioned.



To achieve the relatively thicker trunk, a thin piece of wood was combined with the lower ends of the groups of the wires, and tied with fuse wire prior to coating. To achieve the recesses the coating was applied in layers and formed in much the same way as sculpting with clay. The bark effect of oak was tried a number of different ways, with the most pleasing result obtained by applying impressions via a mini bottle brush.

### *Painting*

The coating mix had provided the base colour, and when this was dry, painting commenced. This was done using a mixture of **Tamiya acrylics** which was airbrushed.



### **Paint coat 1** - All over

Khaki FK-49 + Flat Earth FK-52 + a spot of Olive Green FK-58

### **Paint coat 2** - Middle of branches

Khaki + Flat Earth + Neutral Grey FK-53

### **Paint coat 3** – Middle to upper parts of branches

Khaki + Neutral Grey + Flat Brown FK-10 + Olive Green



## Weathering

The application of paints, washes and pigments that follows, was developed progressively and gave the desired final result. It might be modified in the future to reduce the number of steps needed.



- a) Track Wash AK083 Interactive AK083 **wash** applied to recesses (medium strength over the trunk, getting thicker towards the branch ends). This will give better definition & shadow
- b) Track Wash AK083 + Slimy Grime Light AK027 **wash mixed**, applied over upper parts of branches and in hidden recesses replicating a base level of moss and lichen
- c) Pink Enamel Humbrol matt 61 **paint** and a little Track Wash AK083 **wash mixed**, hand painted using 00 fine brush to replicate old wood under flaking bark
- d) 50/50 Neutral grey XF-53 and Flat Earth XF-52 acrylic **paints**. Dry brush over trunk and mid branches to highlight raised detail
- e) Track Wash AK083 + Black Night AMIG PLW A.MIG 1611 **washes mixed**. Apply towards branch extremities and in deeper recesses of trunk
- f) Slimy Grime Light AK027 **wash**. Add a little to tops of thicker branches especially where there would be reduced sunlight
- g) Ashes Grey Abteilung 502 ABTP035 **pigment** sparingly over the bark and to dull down branch ends
- h) Dark Earth MIG AMIG 3007 **pigment** applied in areas to help blend existing
- i) Black Smoke Abteilung 502 ABTP023 **pigment**. A little to represent those areas that are diseased. This needs to be planned from the start, as part of the coating mix sculpting as the tree is often deformed in those areas
- j) Life Colour Acrylics Warm Wood mix (shades UA715 and UA716) **paint**. Thinned and hand painted to represent areas where bark covering has recently been lost
- k) Abteilung **pigments mixed**. Manne blue ABTF616 + Light Moss Green ABTP051 + Ashes White ABTP022). Combined to give a copper blue tinge representing lichen on lower parts of trunk

- l) Light Moss Green ABTP051 **pigment** to represent deeper tones of moss in selected areas
- m) Factory Dirt Ground MIG A.MIG 3030 used sparingly to blend colours on outer parts of branches

The result



More detail views







### *Finer branches*

As the tree has an open aspect there was a need to add extra small branch detail on the structure before applying the foliage mat.

This was done using horse hair which was dyed in **wash mix** of Track Wash AK083 + Black Night AMIG PLW A.MIG 1611.



When dry, the horse hair was teased out so make small clumps which were glued to the existing branch ends using PVA. When attached the horse hair was trimmed with small scissors to get the small branch / twig effect.

This was done for each area in turn just prior to the foliage mat being applied.





## Foliage



Heki foliage matt was used. Medium green for the majority, with small patches of light green representing the period of growth for May and June.

It was important to continuously check against the original photograph to replicate the coverage



Finally hair spray was used to 'fix' the foliage

Plus a lesson on how to glue Perspex sheets together to make a cover, so the tree could be transported back to Missenden Autumn 2019

