

One of world's oldest elm trees saved from incinerator

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An artist's impression of the final creation (Image: PR)

By **Forestry Journal staff**

Staff writers

ONE of the oldest English Elm trees in the world that was destined for the incinerator is being lovingly transformed into an amazing work of art.

The beautiful gilded tree sculpture will be unveiled in Preston Park, Brighton, this spring and reunited with its surviving "twin" elm.

The pair, known locally as the Preston Twins, stood side-by-side at the city park for over 400 years after being planted in 1613 during the reign of King James 1.



Forestry Journal: Artist Elpis
has spent two years working

Artist Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva has spent two years working on the project (Image: Supplied)

Fast forward to 2019 and one of the huge trees succumbed to Elm disease – a blight that has decimated the elm population over the past 40 years, including in its strongholds of Brighton & Hove, home to the National Elm Collection, and the neighbouring South Downs.

Like many elms, the diseased tree was destined for incineration, but a big community effort has now turned tragedy into thought-provoking art.

Working with a range of organisations, groups and businesses, artist Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva has spent the past two years working on a plan to preserve the tree.

Elpida proposed turning the felled tree into a memorial, preserving what remained and adding a gilded interior surface to symbolise how much local people value the tree.

Elpida has donated much of her time pro bono for the creative work because she believes so passionately in the project.

She said: “The tree may be lost, but it needs to live in our memory, knowledge, and experience. This project is a final opportunity to hold and celebrate this disappearing past.”

When Elpida began to work on the project, it became clear the tree required considerable treatments to preserve it. As well as rigorous conservation treatments, with materials generously provided by Brewers Decorator Centres, the tree required structural interventions to maintain its shape and ensure its safety.

The work, to date, has been funded by Brighton & Hove City Council, Arts Council England, South Downs National Park Authority, and a wide range of local business, individuals and charity supporters including Brewers Decorator Centres, Repair Care, Amazon Access Solutions, Pride Social Impact Fund, and Connick Tree Care.

Councillor Elaine Hills, co-chair of Brighton & Hove City Council's Environment committee, said: "Losing one of our precious Preston Elms was a huge blow for the city and marked the end of an era for Preston Park.

"So, I am thrilled that, through working with our partners at the Arts Council and South Downs National Park Authority, it will return home and live on in such a unique and creative way. I can't wait to welcome its arrival to Preston Park."

Later in the year, the South Downs National Park will be donating two disease-resistant elms to Preston Park for future generations to enjoy. This is part of the Trees for the Downs initiative which aims to replace trees lost due to pests and diseases.

If you would like to donate to the Gilded Elm project, visit:
www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/elpida-hadzi-vasileva-brighton-gilded-tree