

## Brighton: Preston Park Elm tree which was cut down to become sculpture

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Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva, inset, has been designing sculpture made from the fallen tree. The Elm tree fell in 2019. Picture by David McHugh (Image: BHCC/David McHugh)



By **George Carden**

Reporter

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**One of the oldest English Elm trees in the world that was destined for the incinerator after being cut down is set to be unveiled as a sculpture.**

People mourned the felling of the 400-year-old Elm tree in Preston Park, **Brighton**, which was **cut down after succumbing to Dutch Elm disease in 2019.**

The tree was one of two Elms which stood side-by-side in the park after being planted in 1613 during the reign of King James I.

Now, thanks to a huge community effort, the tree will be preserved in the form of a sculpture.



**The tree after it was cut down in 2019. Picture by David McHugh/Brighton Pictures**

Artist Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva has spent years working on a plan to make use of the felled tree.

It is set to be unveiled in its original location in the park next month.

The tree has been gilded with gold on its interior.

She said: 'This new preserved gilded Elm provides a major new focal point for the many people who visit the park, throughout the year, as well as at signature **events** such as the Brighton Festival, the fireworks display, Pride, comedy garden and the Brighton Marathon.'

"The final work will keep the shape, form and size of the elm with a new interior to create a jewel for Preston Park, transforming the tree into a celebration of the Preston Twins history and honouring their cultural significance.



**Elpida working on the tree sculpture which will be unveiled in Preston Park next month (Image: BHCC)**

"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, she said that it became clear the tree required considerable treatments to preserve it.

As well as rigorous conservation treatments, with materials donated 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 and Hove City Council, Arts Council England, South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), and a wide range of local **business**, individuals and charities.



Elpida has spent years working on the sculpture (*Image: BHCC*)

Councillor Elaine Hills, co-chair of the 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 next month."

Later in the year, the SDNPA 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.

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Claire Kerr, countryside and policy manager for the Eastern Downs of the National Park, added: "This beautiful work of art has turned a negative into a positive and highlights the devastating impacts of pest and diseases like Elm Disease on our landscape and in our local parks.

"This elm has been saved using art as a way to preserve its essence and it underlines just how important trees are to communities, both human and wildlife."