

IVY ALERT: Creeper-choked Canonbury trees

By Guill Gil



Trees are an essential feature of Canonbury, particularly around the Alwynes' area. Their health and preservation is a concern widely shared by residents, and endorsed by the Council. Like all living organisms, trees are exposed to attack from fungi or viruses, or squirrels which can seriously damage their bark, and put the tree at risk.

We are particularly concerned about a human-introduced risk, which is the growing of ivy around the trunk of a tree. Although the effect can be pleasing when the ivy is young and covers only the lower section of the trunk, once the creeper takes hold it will extend up the trunk and along the branches of the affected tree. In extreme cases, the shape of the tree becomes distorted or masked by the fully-mature creeper.

The damage is not only to the appearance of the tree. By hiding the trunk and branches, ivy can make it difficult or impossible to notice symptoms of damage or illness in the tree until the damage is so extensive that the tree can't be brought back to health. On the basis of cases around the Alwynes where it was impossible to remove the ivy, so its stems were cut around the base of the tree, it took the ivy 12 to 18 months' to wilt and die, which suggests that it is a parasite of its host to a significant extent.

Although by no means exhaustive, our survey has identified a large number of ivy-covered trunks in New River Walk and some within private gardens.