

## CARING FOR TREES IN CHURCHARDS

*I think that I shall never see  
A poem as lovely as a tree  
Poems are made by fools like me  
But only God can make a tree*  
JOYCE KILMER (*Trees* 1914)

Trees and churchyards have a long association. Yew trees, for example, may be the oldest living things in Britain and are closely associated with churches.

Trees are important for wildlife and for landscape and history. Trees can not be left to themselves, like all living things they need care and attention. Trees have to be planted, tended, receive surgery and eventually are felled.

It is important for C of E church groups to note the Diocesan guidelines on Trees in Churchyards. Copies can be obtained from the Diocesan Office.

### Tree care – what you can do yourself

A first step to caring for churchyard trees is to carry out a survey of the churchyard and note the trees it contains.

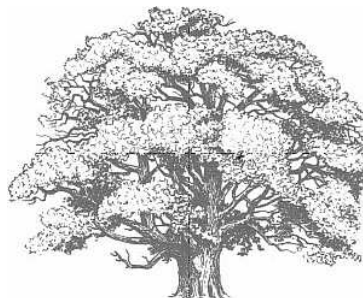


Yew

### Surveying

To survey trees in your churchyard you should:

- Draw a map of the site noting major buildings, paths ways etc.
- Walk round the site and indicate the position of the trees.
- Find out which species it is. Field Guides are available to help with this.
- Include details such as whether a particular spot is shady or dry, sloping or grassy.
- Is the tree young, middle years or mature.
- Roughly how tall is the tree?
- Any other facts that may help - does it tend to produce a good crop of berries? Do the leaves fall off earlier than other trees? This will help you see how well the tree is surviving in



a particular spot.

- Are there any features near the tree, which needs protecting e.g. a window that needs sunlight, a bed of flowers?



Pendunculate oak

Leaflets on surveying and ageing of trees are available from The Tree Council.

### Annual Inspections

Follow up the initial survey with an inspection of each individual tree just before autumn in September or early October. This should be carried out annually, and does not need to be anyone with specialist knowledge as long as anything that causes concern is referred to an expert.

Use binoculars to check detail, unsafe branches etc.

The annual tree inspections will alert the church group to any necessary work to maintain trees in a healthy and safe condition.

It is suggested that a specialist tree consultant carry out a bi-annual survey/inspection of churchyard trees. After the initial inspection future inspections will probably cost less. Any work identified should be prioritised and built into the churchyard management plan.

### Inspection checklist of trees for Volunteers

Check whether:-

- The tree has grown near to existing structures. If so, some pruning may be necessary.
- Saplings have established at the base of walls or monuments/gravestones. These are best removed. Overhead cables are clear of any growth.
- The tree shape has become untidy. Pruning may be necessary.

The tree should then be checked from its leaves and upper branches down to the base looking at:

**Roots** - check for fungi (although they may well be harmless), soil cracks, tree lean.

**Trunk and Branches** - Check for dead branches, lightning or storm damage, cavities or wounds. Oak and ash trees can become 'stag-headed' with age but remain healthy.

**Bark** - Check for fungi, cankers, calluses, and sap seepage, loose or damaged bark.

**Leaves** - Are they unnaturally small, sparse or misshapen? Do they fall early and is the entire tree affected?

These signs and symptoms do not mean *that the tree is dangerous or diseased; however they may indicate that a further inspection is required from an expert.*

A leaflet 'Hazards from Trees' 'Appendix 1 Tree hazards: Recognition & Recommendation' is available from the Forestry Commission.

*When a tree is dying or dead it may be in a suitable position to be left. Standing dead wood is an excellent wildlife habitat and can be aesthetically pleasing especially if they have been part of the churchyard and people's memories for many years. Consider coppicing or pollarding before deciding to get rid of an old tree.*

## Trees and the law

There are laws protecting trees, which go some way to safeguard them.



### Tree preservation orders (TPO)

This is designated by the local planning authority for individual trees, groups and woodland. It makes it an offence to 'cut down, top, lop, uproot or wilfully damage' a tree subject to an order, without the permission of the planning authority.

The tree owner is still responsible for the tree's condition and any damage they may cause. An application is made to the planning authority if work needs to be done. Planning departments can be very helpful regarding advice and where to find arborist and tree surgeons. They hold a register of TPOs.

There are works that are exempt from the planning authority's permission, such as trees that are dying, dead or dangerous, but it is always advisable to check first and you must give notice of your intended work, at least five days. You may need to replace the felled tree.

## Trees in conservation areas

Conservation areas are designated by the local planning authority as well, areas of 'special architectural or historic interest whose character or appearance is worth preserving or enhancing'. This includes features such as trees. Permission is needed before any work or changes are made, therefore any

tree work. Applications are made to the planning authority.

## From the church (Church of England)

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is usually responsible for the trees in the churchyard. Each diocese should provide written guidance to PCCs on the management of their trees. In the past it has been uncertain if PCCs need a faculty to carry out minor works to trees, but their guidance should help. Any of the designations above might apply.

## Felling Licence

A felling licence issued by the Forestry Commission is needed for any felling of trees over a certain volume of timber. However, there are exceptions, which include churchyards, orchards and gardens.

## Routine Tree Maintenance

Church groups can carry out their own routine maintenance, including:

- Pruning small branches to enhance a good shape.
- Cutting back low branches where people walk underneath.
- Cutting dead or broken branches, which are under 50mm diameter and can be reached from standing.
- Check ivy is not hindering trees and cut back/kill if affecting the tree.
- Remove self seeded tree seedlings taking root in the wrong places before they get too big.
- Check stakes and ties on young trees and remove if no longer needed. Keep weed free around the base.



A professional who is fully insured with personal accident and public liability insurance must carry out any other work. The work should be clearly described in a specification.

Refer to the contacts list at the end of advice sheet 11. Tree management