

TREE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

This guide was written to assist those involved in the management of churchyards. Trees, even if there are only a few, or on adjoining land, form part of management responsibilities. Trees often contribute to the beauty and tranquillity of a place, and to the feeling of longevity and spirituality. As living things they do need care and attention, in order to keep them and the churchyard a healthy place.

This basic guide is intended as a starting point, to provide direction to further information about how to manage trees.

How trees were traditionally managed in churchyards.

We can assume that it is only in recent times that churchyard trees have been increasingly planted. The whole management of churchyards would have been quite different, with much more emphasis on the practical such as grazing to keep the churchyard tidy. Trees would have had a significant role in a spiritual sense, such as the marking of a sacred site, or a boundary.

Problems that maybe encountered today

Management has to change to match the tree population of today. Churchyards often contain ornamental and commemorative trees, as well as large yews. There might be self sown trees if the management has been relaxed. Below are some scenarios, and some suggestions on how to manage them in a positive way.

Overcrowding This is usually caused by over zealous planting or self-sown trees, or a mixture of both. Different species will grow at different rates and respond differently to growing conditions. This can happen to any age of tree, but if it can be dealt with while the trees are young it is obviously advantageous. Do a survey and identify which trees to take out.

Lack of recent management This can result in problems such as overcrowding, cracked or damaged limbs, smothering by ivy or other creepers, which can present a health and safety risk for the trees as well as visitors to the churchyard. It can also result in a feeling of neglect and loss of access to parts of the churchyard, or damage to graves and buildings.

Solution: be bold and decisive. Prioritise which species to keep and which to thin out and thus make room for those you want to keep. Local and native species, trees that are long lived, healthy and well formed and commemorative trees should be the

highest priority. There is rarely a case when it is impossible to choose between trees.

Unsuitable species - How are species chosen in the first place? It might be that certain trees have been requested for commemoration. It often appears that any trees available have been planted and this can include species that are more suited to a forest! It helps the future management of trees in a churchyard if thought and research goes into their planting. It is also important to consider the purpose of the trees - are they needed for landscaping, screening, for remembrance, for a certain village or a national event? When thinking about new trees consider eventual size. It might be important to take time and choose a species from specialist suppliers. Refer to the list of native species.

Lack of care after establishment/looking after young trees Planting trees is the easy bit! Too often young trees fail as the care needed in the first years does not happen. Ideally, trees should get the best start in life through proper planting in well prepared ground; staked if necessary, and most importantly kept weed free. Competition from thick grass for nutrients and water is very damaging. Remove or invert the turf, or mulch to suppress the grass at least one metre square around the base of the tree. Mulches include well-rotted leaf litter, a piece of old carpet, mulch mats, cardboard. The aim is to eliminate competition from other vegetation.

Strimmer damage - not only does the nylon thread take the bark off the tree and threaten its life, but grass responds vigorously to being cut down and grows even more, increasing competition. Attention to detail is the answer, even if it means getting down on hands and knees and hand weeding young trees - it will pay to do so in the long run.

Extra watering - young trees, especially if pot bound when planted may need some extra watering in the first year. Back fill the tree pit with some organic compost when planting to help retain water.

Stakes and ties - check trees that have been staked and remove stakes and ties as needed. Usually a small tree only needs a small stake at the base until the roots have taken hold. (A large stake and the tree 'relies' on the stake and does not develop its own strength.) Should the tree be a fast growing variety then ensure that any ties do not inhibit the growth of the tree, or pull the tree to the stake which could damage it. Remove stakes as soon as possible.

Self seeded trees - Most of our native trees are successful at seed distribution, and there are many cases of churchyards with a tree population that

matches the surrounding countryside. In many cases these self-sown trees can enhance the churchyard. A tree survey can identify the species and whether it is a good idea to retain them. For example, Common ash is an energetic species so not well placed near a wall or between grave stones. But self-seeders can be valuable replacement trees.

Pests and diseases - Fortunately there is little evidence of tree disease on an epidemic scale, except for Dutch elm disease, which has put paid to most of the elms in our countryside. (Our native elm, the wych elm, is still common, and populations should be maintained where possible). If problems are identified they should be dealt with on an individual basis, see the contacts section for ideas of where to get help and news of recent pests or diseases. However, keep things in proportion. Often the problem looks worse than it is, and if it is not going to kill the tree some tolerance to pests and diseases should be acceptable. A vigorous tree in good growing conditions can withstand some stress.

Ivy - Hotly debated, ivy, a native climber, is found everywhere. It has good points and bad points. The advantages are: ivy provides excellent winter cover for insects and birds; it flowers at a time when all other nectar sources are finished, the berries, another food source, persist through the winter, and it is good for decoration. The main disadvantage is that it creeps up the trunks of trees and forms a heavy mass that can cut out the light to the tree's canopy and add weight which can threaten the stability of a tree. Control is often needed, but not removal of ivy all together. Building up a programme of checking trees, say, every two years, will help to manage ivy before its too late. Once cut, leave ivy to die and disintegrate on the tree. It's hard work pulling it out!

Grass clippings and compost heaps - All churchyards need a place for the grass clipping to go, but the solution is not to put them at the base of a tree or in the hedge. Uncomposted grass is lethal as the run off is too acidic for the vegetation growing around, and roots can be quickly affected and poisoned. Grass clippings can be organised to best advantage. They can make valuable compost and when well rotted provide mulch for the base of trees. Containing it in a compost heap makes it easier to manage.

Basic pruning principles

Why prune trees in churchyards? There are two main reasons:

- Many churchyard trees struggle for space due to over crowding and have a poor shape
- Trees need to be kept in good heart, and pruning

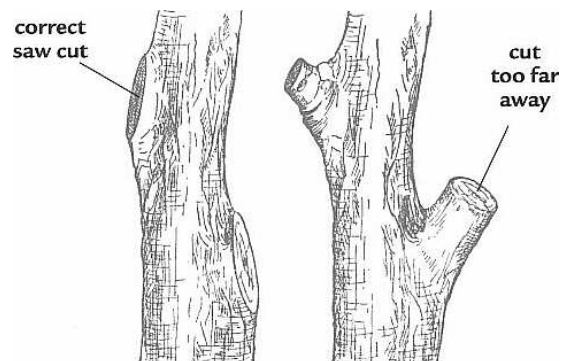
can be very beneficial for this.

Here are some basic guidelines, though it is recommended that a good guide book is followed. One that specialises in tree work rather than garden shrubs.

- Concentrate on the three Ds - removal of the dead, dying and diseased parts of the tree. It might be enough to simply do this, if your purpose for pruning is to reduce and shape the crown.
- Use the correct tools for the job - sharp secateurs, saws and knives to produce clean cuts without jagged edges. Make sure the tool is the right size for the job, and don't attempt tree surgery unless you are qualified and insured. See the contacts list for tree surgeons or look in the yellow pages. As with all contracts ask to see evidence of qualifications and insurance.
- Make a good clean cut along the outside of the bark ridge. This ridge, seen at any junction of two limbs, contains the cells that naturally mend a wound to a tree, and should therefore be retained. Too flush to the trunk and the bark ridge is gone; too far out from the trunk and the stump that is left will rot and might cause problems later on.

This is best done in 3 cuts: - first, an undercut away from the trunk, to stop bark ripping as a limb falls. Next, an over cut to remove the limb, closer into the trunk, and a final cut to finish.

- Do not paint the wound with any substance - nature will heal itself. It is quite usual for a tree to have some damage to its limbs, for example limbs breaking off during a storm. A tree in good health can withstand this treatment. The tree paint in garden centres is just a marketing ploy to make you feel better!



- Make sure that not more than 30% of the crown is removed at any one time, as the leaf area will be too reduced. If necessary split the operation over more than one year.

- Usually tree pruning for formative reasons is done during the winter months, which has the added advantage of you being able to see what you are doing if the tree is not evergreen.
- Secondary pruning may have to be done the following year, as often a tree will respond to being cut back by sending out long whippy shoots, especially if it is a vigorous variety. This is also the case where an ornamental or fruit tree has been grown on a root stock. Look very carefully at the base and make sure you are conserving the correct bit of the tree.
- Young trees and the newly established need special attention. Formative pruning in the early years can save so much trouble later on; it is also easier and quicker to do and can save tree surgery costs. Concentrate on shaping the crown and getting a good clear stem to a good height. Make sure that you don't exceed the rule of taking out more than 30% of the crown, and look out for suckers produced as a result of pruning.

Species choice/Tree planting

Putting the right tree in the right place will be a great boost for the generations to come. Consider carefully before adding more trees to a churchyard.

- Scale - Think about the size of the site in relation to the eventual size of the tree. This applies to both ends of the spectrum - a small flowering cherry is going to look as out of place in a big space as a massive cedar squeezed into a tiny churchyard.
- Evergreen or deciduous? Is it important that the churchyard is sheltered from the elements, or screened in some way?
- Native versus non native species - native species have the advantage that they generally benefit wildlife more than non native, as sources of cover and food - consider the huge range of life associated with the English oak. They very often flourish in their natural surroundings too, so local can be as important as native. A list is provided at the end of this section. However, introduced species are often colourful and add contrast.

It is often fitting to buy from a source as local as possible, or even to grow your own replacement trees from locally collected seed. When in doubt keep it simple.

Native tree species list

(Ref: Forestry Commission)

Common juniper	<i>Juniperus communis</i>
Downy birch	<i>Betula pubescens</i>
Silver birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>
Aspen	<i>Populus tremula</i>
Scots pine	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>
Bay willow	<i>Salix pentandra</i>
Common alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>
Small leaved lime	<i>Tilia cordata</i>
Bird cherry	<i>Prunus padus</i>
Goat willow	<i>Salix caprea</i>
Wych elm	<i>Ulmus glabra</i>
Rowan	<i>Sorbus acuparia</i>
Sessile oak	<i>Quercus petraea</i>
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
Common oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>
Crack willow	<i>Salix fragilis</i>
Black poplar	<i>Populus nigra var betulifolia</i>
Yew	<i>Taxus baccata</i>
Whitebeam	<i>Sorbus aria</i>
Midland thorn	<i>Crataegus laevigata</i>
Crab apple	<i>Malus sylvestris</i>
Wild cherry	<i>Prunus avium</i>
Strawberry tree	<i>Arbutus unedo</i>
White willow	<i>Salix alba</i>
Field maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>
Wild service tree	<i>Sorbus torminalis</i>
Large leaved lime	<i>Tilia platyphyllos</i>
Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>
Hornbeam	<i>Carpinus betulus</i>
Box	<i>Buxus sempervirens</i>

Useful references

Flora Britannica Richard Mabey, 1996
A Field Guide to Trees of Britain and Northern Europe Alan Mitchell, 1986

Trees in Britain, Europe and North America
Roger Phillips, 1978

Yew: A History, Fred Hagender

Contacts

Arboricultural Association

Ampfield House, Romsey, Hampshire SO51 9PA.
01794 368717. Can supply list of approved contractors, tree surgeons and surveyors, they also have a web site www.trees.org.uk

Institute of Chartered Foresters

7A St Colne Street, Edinburgh EH3 6AA.
Also supply a list of practitioners including those who specialise in tree inspections.
Website: www.charteredforesters.org

The Tree Council - 51 Catherine Place, London SW1 6DY. 0207 828 9928.

The Organisation that run the Tree Warden Scheme, volunteers who act as 'eyes and ears' for the trees in the parish. They produce information leaflets.
www.treecouncil.org.uk

Conservation Foundation

Information on grants for environmental projects and the "Yew Tree Campaign" project:
www.conservationfoundation.co.uk

Forestry Commission

Extensive website information providing both local and national news, publications including research papers, and grants information: www.forestry.gov.uk

Ancient Tree Forum

To protect and raise awareness of UK ancient trees both individually and within woodland:
www.woodland-trust.org.uk/ancient-tree-forum

Ancient Yew Group

Invaluable information on the care, management and history of yew trees. www.ancient.yew.org

Natural England

Protect and improve England's natural environment. Provides information on veteran trees in their publication section. www.naturalengland.org.uk

Look in the Yellow Pages for local tree surgeons