# 4. Inspecting and Caring for Trees

CARING FOR GOD'S ACRE

***This sheet gives information and guidelines on trees, keeping them healthy and identifying potential issues, what you can do yourself and when an expert is needed.***

## TREE SURVEY

Site managers have a responsibility to keep the public safe in relation to trees. There may be concern about the risks and the expense associated with mature and veteran trees in particular, but there are things that can be done by volunteers as well as involving a professional with appropriate insurance.

By regular survey, changes in the health and/or condition of the tree will be identified and with the right care and conditions the tree can be appropriately retained and, in many cases, its life prolonged.

### TREE SURVEY: carried out by volunteers

Take your site map produced in step 2 of the 5 steps (see sheet A1, The Five Steps). You will have marked individual trees on to this map and will know where they are in relation to buildings, paths and key monuments.

Now start to fill in additional detail about the trees. If there are several trees it may be helpful to put this information on a separate map.

Check for any wildlife known to use the trees. Are there roosting bats or nesting birds?

### Surveying each tree

Find out which tree species are present:

- Look in an identification book or on a chart, such as the Field Studies Council fold-out tree chart.
- Check previous tree surveys.
- Ask your local tree warden or local authority tree officer.
- If you are not sure of the names of decorative specimen trees growing on your site then identify the family they belong to, e.g. 'decorative cherry with pink blossom'.

Describe any features of the tree and its location:

- Where does the tree grow? Is the ground shady, dry, sloping or grassy?
- Is the tree young, middle years, mature or a veteran?
- What shape does it have? Is it tall and narrow or short and spreading? Has it been pollarded or coppiced in the past? (see sheet A6, Practical Management of Trees and Shrubs).
- Roughly how tall is the tree?

A simple way to estimate this is to ask someone to stand against the tree and then estimate how many times taller the tree is than them. Stand back so you can see the whole tree well.

*Scots Pine*

### Estimating tree height using a stick

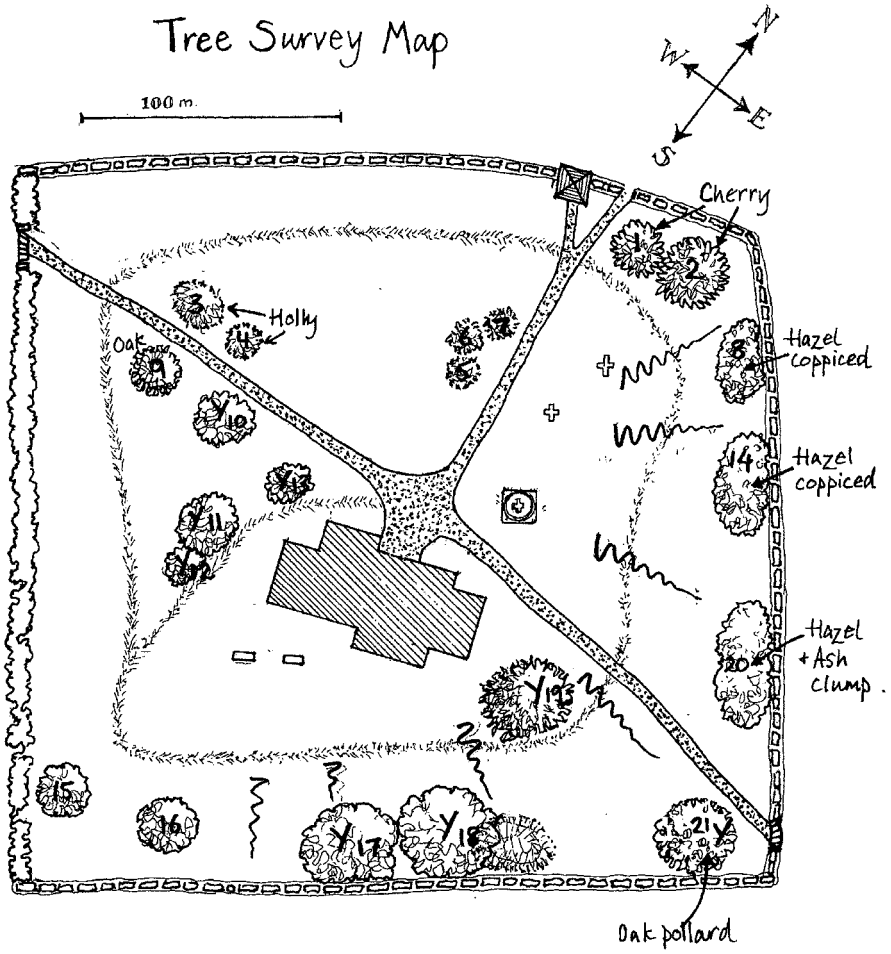
Take a straight stick which is the length of your arm from shoulder to hand. Hold this upright with your arm at a right angle to it. Walk away from the tree until the top of the stick lines up with the top of the tree. Push your stick into the ground at the point where you are standing and measure the distance from your stick to the tree trunk. Add the distance from your eye to the ground (this will be 3 or 4 inches less than your height) and this gives you the height of the tree!

- How wide is the tree canopy? Try and put the canopy width on to your map; draw a shape which represents the size of the canopy. This will help you plan management of the site as a whole.

## 4. Inspecting and Caring for Trees

- Are there any features near to the tree which need consideration? Arborists call these 'targets' and they affect management and risk. Targets might be; paths, buildings, benches for example. When you have veteran or ancient trees, you may need to think about moving targets such as paths or benches away from the tree.

**This first survey will give you a baseline tree plan**




Y Yew trees

Sloping ground

Top of slope

Bottom of slope

TREE SURVEY TABLE

| Tree no. | Type | Estimated Height | Canopy width | Tree Features | Site Features/ Targets | Action |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Wild Cherry | 7m | 2·2m N, 1·5m S 2·3m E, 1·7m W | Mature + Healthy | Path beneath | None |
| 2. | Wild Cherry | 1·5m | 0·2m N, 0·1m S 0·3m E, 0·1m W | young sucker | overcrowded area | Remove |
| 3. | Holly | | | | | |
| 4. | | | | | | |
| 5. | | | | | | |

*You may prefer to write text about each tree rather than a table. Find a system that suits you and stick to it.*

Follow up this initial survey with:

### Annual inspections carried out by volunteers

Inspect each tree in the summer or autumn. Alternating autumn and summer surveys gives an opportunity to better assess tree health. The surveyor does not need specialist knowledge, qualifications or insurance as long as anything that causes concern is referred to a professional. If the survey is carried out by the same people each year then this gives continuity as you get to know your trees.

***Take photos which can be included in your survey.***

# 4. Inspecting and Caring for Trees

## Inspection checklist

Record whether:

- The tree has grown nearer to existing structures such as buildings, walls, monuments. If so, some pruning may be necessary.
- Saplings have established at the base of walls or monuments. These are best removed.
- Overhead cables are clear of any growth. This would need to be dealt with by a tree surgeon or the power company tree team.

*Oak*

- The tree shape has become untidy or noticeably one sided. Perhaps a limb has been lost during a storm. Pruning may be necessary or further advice sought.
- Has the ground level changed or soil under or near to the tree been disturbed by either digging down or mounding up?
- Does the tree have a stake or ties, in which case do they need loosening or removing?
- Has any tree work such as pruning taken place since the last survey?
- Does the trunk have holes, cavities or visible fungi at the base? These may require a professional survey.

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

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

If a tree has small leaves, loses them early in the autumn and then fruits heavily it may be under stress from age, conditions or disease.

**Branches:** check for dead branches, lightning or storm damage, cavities or wounds. Are there hanging branches over paths or car parks? Oak and ash trees can become 'stag-headed' with age but remain healthy. (A stag-headed tree has dead branches near the top looking like a stag's antlers). Are there abrupt bends or rubbing branches? Look carefully at large forks or points where many branches sprout from one point. Large forks in the main stem need careful inspection.

*Beech*

**Bark:** check for fungi, cankers, calluses, and sap seepage, loose or damaged bark.

**Roots:** check for fungi, soil cracks, tree lean.

**Ivy:** if the tree has ivy growing on it has this increased in quantity since the last survey and is it within the crown of the tree? Is the ivy making it impossible to carry out a proper tree assessment?

***These signs and symptoms do not mean that the tree is hazardous or diseased. However, they may indicate that a further inspection is required from a professional. Take photos of trees and features that concern you.***

## TREE SURVEY: when you need a professional

As well as annual inspections by volunteers it is prudent to have regular surveys by a qualified arborist or tree contractor with experience and indeminity insurance. Always ask for evidence of qualifications and insurance; a professional person will expect this. Seek advice from the **Arboricultural Association** or local authority when selecting an arborist or tree contractor.

***In general these professional surveys can be done every other year or even every 5 years, but check the terms of your insurance.***

Discuss the volunteer survey with the arborist and ask if there are any particular features you need to keep an eye on. The information from your annual surveys can then be used to keep the arborist informed about any changes that take place between visits, sending digital photos or copies of your survey sheets.

If your site is large, the site manager and arborist may divide the site into zones. These will reflect the amount of use by the public, the closeness of buildings and other potential targets. Ask your arborist whether zones are appropriate and if so, whether to carry out the volunteer survey more frequently in significant target areas, and less often in other zones.

Make sure that you follow up works identified in the professional survey in a timely manner and that a record is kept of all surveys and also of tree work carried out.

## TREE MANAGEMENT WORK

### Trees and the law

Prior to undertaking any work, it is essential to find out if a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) is in place or if the tree is in a Conservation Area. Should either be the case, seek permission from your local authority before beginning work. Potentially dangerous limbs and trees can, in theory, be removed without permission but the onus is on you to prove that there was a hazard prior to removal. Take digital photos and keep the felled section for any subsequent inspection. Penalties for breaching the legislations, inadvertently or not, can be severe. It is sensible to check, giving at least five days' notice of planned work. Digital photos can be helpful if work is urgent.

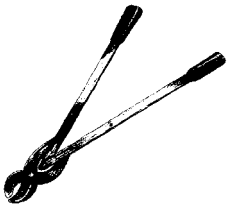
Local authority planning officers will advise you and may be helpful about tree work generally: choosing a tree contractor, managing public safety and planting replacements.

# 4. Inspecting and Caring for Trees

The legal responsibility for trees will vary across different areas and different types of burial site. In a Church of England site for instance the **Parochial Church Council** is usually responsible for trees and will have guidelines as to when to inform the Diocesan Advisory Committee before starting work.

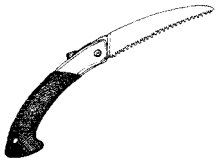
A **Felling Licence** issued by the Forestry Commission is needed for any felling of trees over a certain volume of timber. However, there are exceptions, which include 'churchyards, orchards and gardens'. If your burial site is not a churchyard you may need to check this with your local Forestry Commission office.

Once you know if permission for work is required and have gained any necessary permission then the work can be planned.



## Tree work that is suitable for volunteers

As with tree surveys there are some maintenance jobs which can be done by volunteers and some which will need a professional.



## Routine tree maintenance suitable for volunteers

- Pruning small branches and small trees.
- Cutting back low branches where they are in the way or dead and broken branches which can be reached from the ground.
- Management of ivy, if it is impeding surveying, (see sheet A9, Pesky Plants and Animals).
- If you have a veteran yew then do not prune or cut, but do remove ivy.
- Remove tree seedlings which have taken root in the wrong places.
- Check stakes and ties on young trees, loosen or remove if needed.
- Make a stack of deadwood and let it slowly rot (see sheet A8, Helping Wildlife).

## Tree work that is NOT suitable for volunteers

- Use of a chainsaw in a public place such as a burial ground.
- Use of any saw when off the ground (when climbing the tree or a ladder).
- Removing large limbs which could cause injury to people or damage buildings as they fall.
- Felling of entire trees other than seedlings or small saplings.

Unless you have a trained volunteer with personal accident and professional liability insurance for tree work then a tree contractor will be needed.

## Useful contacts

Ancient Yew Group, www.ancient-yew.org

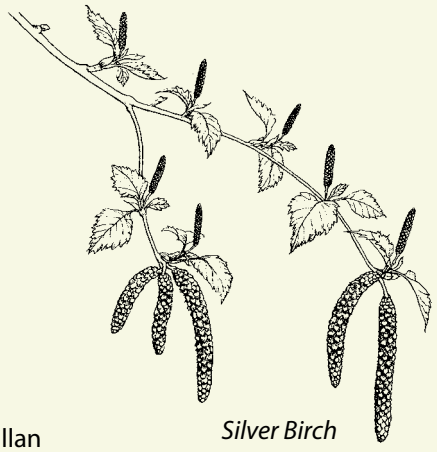
Arboricultural Association, www.trees.org.uk

Caring for God's Acre, www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

International Society of Arboriculture, www.treesaregood.org

Local Authority Tree Officers

Tree Council, www.treecouncil.org.uk



*Silver Birch*

## Useful reading

Collins Tree Guide – David More & Owen Johnson

Forestry Commission – leaflets including Hazards from Trees

Trees in Britain, Europe and North America – Roger Phillips, Macmillan

Tree Name Trail – Field Studies Council fold-out chart

Veteran Trees: A Guide to Good Management – Natural England publication

# 5. Yews and Other Veteran Trees

CARING FOR GOD'S ACRE

***This sheet explains the importance of yews, our partnership to promote them and guidelines on how to manage ancient yews and other veteran trees.***

## FLAGSHIP SPECIES

*'A small country full of ancient yew trees, such as Britain, is becoming a true Noah's Ark. Such tree stands are becoming (if they have not always been) far more significant than local or regional places of interest, and should be – as the equivalent of architectural World Heritage Sites – legally protected as Green Monuments.'*

Fred Hageneder – Yew: A History

Globally veteran and ancient yews are threatened. On a world stage the most significant refuge for these trees is English and Welsh churchyards, where around three-quarters of Britain's oldest yews are found (numbering around 800).

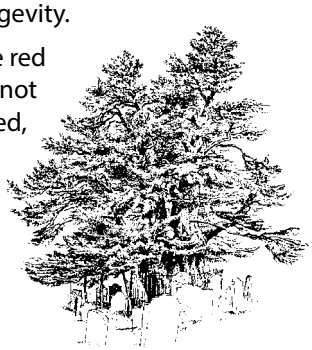
These ancient yews are one of the distinctive features of the British landscape.

***The yew tree is a flagship species of Caring for God's Acre, and we are working with the* Ancient Yew Group *to protect and promote them.***

## KNOW YOUR YEW TREE

There will always be speculation about yews and why so many are found in churchyards. Poisonous to livestock? Welcome decoration for the midwinter and Palm Sunday? To Celtic people yews were sacred trees and symbolic of everlasting life. There are thought to be many sites where the yew tree predates the Christian church.

- The common yew *Taxus baccata* is the most widely found with the Irish yew *Taxus baccata 'Fastigiata'* planted more recently.
- Yew trees tend to grow in a 'normal' tree shape until about 600 years old when they often hollow out and thicken around the base and trunk in an uneven, lumpy way.
- Boughs which bend or partially snap and then rest on to the ground will take root and act as stabilisers for the tree. Boughs can also send down 'aerial roots' which take root or fuse with the main trunk. This regeneration followed by new, young growth makes a yew tree virtually immortal. It also makes it difficult to predict age accurately.
- Experts estimate age using a variety of ways including investigating old maps, looking up tree records, measuring tree girth and looking at the growth form. Several yew trees are believed to be well over 2000 years old and there is no known limit to how old they could live.
- Yew wood is particularly strong and yews are resistant to disease, aiding their longevity.
- Most of a yew tree is poisonous. The red flesh or 'aril' of the berry however is not and, provided the seed is not crushed, berries can be eaten and passed through some animals causing no harm.
- Yew bark and foliage have current medicinal uses and an alkaloid extracted from yew called Taxol is used in cancer treatment.
- Male and female flowers are found on separate trees (dioecious) so they maximise fertilisation opportunities.



*Yew*

## HELPING YEWS

- Never assume that a yew is dying or dead. Many can carry a lot of deadwood, can look 'untidy' or have discoloured needles but will still recover and regenerate.
- If a yew has been regularly trimmed then you can continue to do this, if not DO NOT start pruning, trimming or pollarding yews. Leaving them alone is the best management unless a tree expert specifies otherwise.
- If boughs are collapsing remember that they are able to then take root and regenerate. If they are causing a problem and cannot be allowed to collapse then prop them up. Do not prune them off. A good tree contractor or arborist will be able to help and advise.
- Ivy can smother the crown, adding weight and cutting out the light. It can also hide tree defects, the identification of which are important when assessing tress. Although ivy has wildlife benefits (see sheet A8, Creating a Wildflower Meadow and Helping Wildlife) remove it from yews. Do this work cautiously with hand tools so as not to damage the tree, using a tree contractor if climbing is involved. N.B. there can be bats and nesting birds within yews, particularly those with a thick growth of ivy; see sheet B3, Bats in the Belfry before doing anything which may disturb them.

# 5. Yews and Other Veteran Trees

- Keep the ground clear beneath a yew, removing railings, grass cutting piles and shrubs like holly, elder or hazel. One of the best things you can do is to mulch under yew trees. Use wood chip or leaf mulch and spread it canopy wide. Make sure that the mulch is not touching the trunk however. Mulch can be a few inches thick, replenish it every few years. Never fill the cavity of a veteran yew with rubbish, grass cuttings or use it as a storage space.
- Tell people how amazing a tree it is! NB If you have a famous yew with a lot of visitors try to discourage them from compacting the soil beneath the canopy.

## OTHER VETERAN TREES

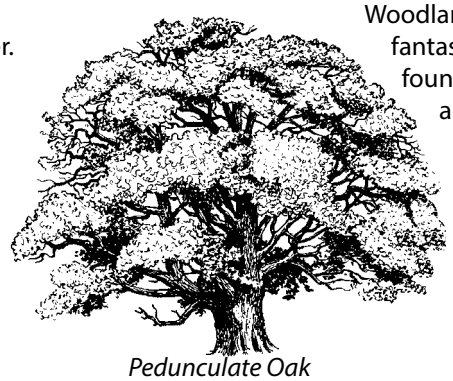
Burial grounds often have other species of veteran tree. Whilst these won't be as old as the oldest yews they may well be many hundreds of years old and magnificent specimens in their own right. They are likely to have a whole range of other plants, lichens, birds and other animals living in and on them.

Veteran trees may have:

Deadwood within the crown of the tree plus holes, flaking bark and crevices containing a range of fungi, beetles, bats and birds.

Epiphytes growing on them – these are plants such as ferns, mosses and lichens which grow on the tree with no connection to the ground.

Hollowing of the trunk to give a cylinder. Like yews, many other tree species hollow out as they become ancient. This is a natural process and does not weaken the tree, in fact it may strengthen it; a cylinder is a strong shape.



*Pedunculate Oak*

***None of these features are a problem; they are part of the natural aging process and give character and interest to a tree.***

If you have veteran trees in your burial ground then work closely with your tree contractor or arborist.

### Deadwood

Deadwood within a tree is excellent wildlife habitat. Invertebrates live in or on deadwood, as do fungi, as well as more visible creatures such as woodpeckers. There may be areas within your site where deadwood within a tree is quite acceptable and other areas where it is hazardous, such as over a path.

Consider deadwood carefully, seek advice from a tree surgeon or arborist and only remove if necessary from a safety point of view.

If you do identify problems with a tree, maybe there are signs of stress or disease – it does not mean that the tree will have to be felled. A good arborist or tree contractor can advise you and should explore all other options before deciding to fell a tree. It may be possible to simply remove the dead parts, or reduce the size of the crown, (see sheet A6, Practical Management of Trees and Shrubs).

### Recording Veteran and Ancient Trees

The Ancient Yew Group, Ancient Tree Forum and Woodland Trust keep records of these fantastic trees and these records can be found on the Church Heritage Record and Church Heritage Cymru. Have a look on the Churchyard page to see where they are known to occur.

### Useful contacts

Ancient Tree Forum, www.ancient-tree-forum.org.uk

Ancient Yew Group, www.ancient-yew.org

Arboricultural Association, www.trees.org.uk

Caring for God's Acre, www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

Church Heritage Record www.facultyonline.churchofengland.org/churches

Church Heritage Cymru www.churchheritagecymru.org.uk/

The Woodland Trust, www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

*Alder*

### Useful reading

Veteran Trees: A Guide to Good Management – Natural England publication

Yew: A History – Fred Hageneder, The History Press Ltd