

Notable and ancient trees

Overton, Hampshire

Report compiled by Valda Stevens
based on survey work by
John Smith and Jim Stickland

2004 - 2006



Largest Oak: discovered on farm track near Ashe

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Local Heritage *initiative*



**In memory of John Smith 1936-2006
tree surveyor and project photographer**



Oak on footpath from Southington to Lower Whitehill
(SU 510 493, Database number 41)

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Community and Countryside'

Abstract

This report documents the location, girth and condition of 450 trees considered old or ancient recorded between Spring 2004 and 2006 in the Parish of Overton. 27 species were recorded, with Oak the most common (142 trees) followed by Sycamore, Ash, Beech, Horse Chestnut and Lime all with more than 20 specimens. 135 of the 450 recorded trees are greater than 10 feet in girth; thus qualifying as 'ancient' on the basis of their size.

Ancient trees and biodiversity

According to the Woodland Trust (2006):

Ancient trees provide habitat for a huge array of organisms. The special features of ancient trees which make them unique as wildlife habitat are the exceptionally species-rich communities associated with: Wood decay, the bare surfaces of the trunk and boughs and the roots.

There are literally thousands of species which depend on these features, and - because of the general scarcity of ancient trees in the countryside - a very high proportion of these species feature in lists of Red Data and Nationally Scarce species, i.e. our rarest and most threatened species. This is true right across Europe, not just in Britain. Indeed, in Britain we have a special responsibility as we not only have more ancient trees than most other European countries but also larger and more widespread populations of some of the special species.

The types of species are predominantly small and rather obscure - fungi, beetles, flies, lichens, and mosses, but also include cavity nesting and roosting species such as woodpeckers, owls and bats which are some of our most charismatic species of day and night.

All trees provide valuable habitats, not just when they are alive, but once dead and decaying. Dead veteran trees are particularly valuable because of their slow rate of decay. The Veteran Trees Initiative Handbook (Read, 2000) indicates that dead, veteran trees are often greatly undervalued but should be treated with '*almost as much respect as living ancient trees*'. Hence an ancient tree recorded as in a 'poor' condition may sustain biodiversity for many years of its remaining life and after its death.

Methodology

The survey was carried out between Spring 2004 and 2006 by John Smith and Jim Stickland. This was not a systematic survey of all trees but a record of those considered old, ancient or significant in the landscape and notable because of their size or appearance.

Girth as an indication of age

Girth was used as a proxy for age. Size alone may be a poor guide to age as different species may grow to different maximum sizes and at different rates in different conditions. A huge mature Oak and a small, gnarled Crab Apple could be of equivalent age. However girth is a feature that generally can be measured. 'Ancient Trees in Hampshire' (1997) states that '*Tree girth is an imperfect way of identifying ancient trees as trees vary tremendously in their growth patterns and longevity*'. *Trees do increase girth with age, however, and provided it is viewed in combination with other features it is a useful characteristic to measure and compare*'.

Measurement was based on guidance from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust of girth at approximately 4 feet above the ground (or chest height), the method used for recording 'Ancient Trees in Hampshire' (1997). Generally trees with a girth greater than 10 feet are considered ancient.



Crab by water meadow at Ashe
(SU 531 499, Database number 273)

The terms 'ancient' and 'veteran' appear to be used interchangeably in the literature. The Ancient Tree Hunt (2006) uses three guiding principles to identify ancient trees:

- Trees of interest biologically, aesthetically or culturally because of their age
- Trees in the ancient stage of their life
- Trees that are old relative to others of the same species

These are very similar to the definition for veteran trees in Read (2000) where a veteran is 'a tree that is of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of its age, size or condition'.

A categorisation for Oak (Read 2000) based on girth is

- >10 ft – potentially interesting
- >15 ft – valuable for conservation
- >20 ft – truly ancient

For trees native to Britain, data presented in Abbott et al (1997) shows that trees with a girth of 10 feet or more (breast height diameter of more than 1 metre) will be in excess of 100 years old.

The Overton study

For the Overton study trees were chosen, based on their size and estimated at least 100 years old, from over 60 years of local knowledge of the village. A number of trees with a girth of less than 10 feet were recorded, but judged likely to be more than 100 years old. All measurements in this study were made and recorded in imperial units.

The trees were within about a 1 mile radius of the village centre between Turrill Hill to the West, Berrydown to the East, the railway to North and reservoir to the South.

Access for investigation was via Public Rights of Way and with the permission of owners or managers for private land.

Size was measured as girth approximately 4 feet above ground or around chest height ('Ancient Trees in Hampshire' guidance leaflet). Descriptive location information and map coordinates using GPS were noted and the condition of tree. For some specimens other remarks such as ivy cover, description of decay, storm damage or difficulties with measurement were recorded. Access with a tape to the 4 feet height for measurement could be hampered by shrubs and brambles, some

specimens with numerous basal shoots or extensive ivy coverage were such that only an estimate of girth could be made.



Field Maples at Polhampton (SU 529 503, Database number 259)

Summary of findings

Species and numbers recorded

27 species were recorded, with Oak the most common (142 trees), followed by Sycamore (57), Ash (47), Beech (41) Horse Chestnut (28) and Lime (25). Information about the full data set including species, girth, location with grid reference and condition of each tree can be found on the Overton Biodiversity Society website.

Figure 1 shows the number of trees of each species recorded.

Figure 1

Number of trees recorded

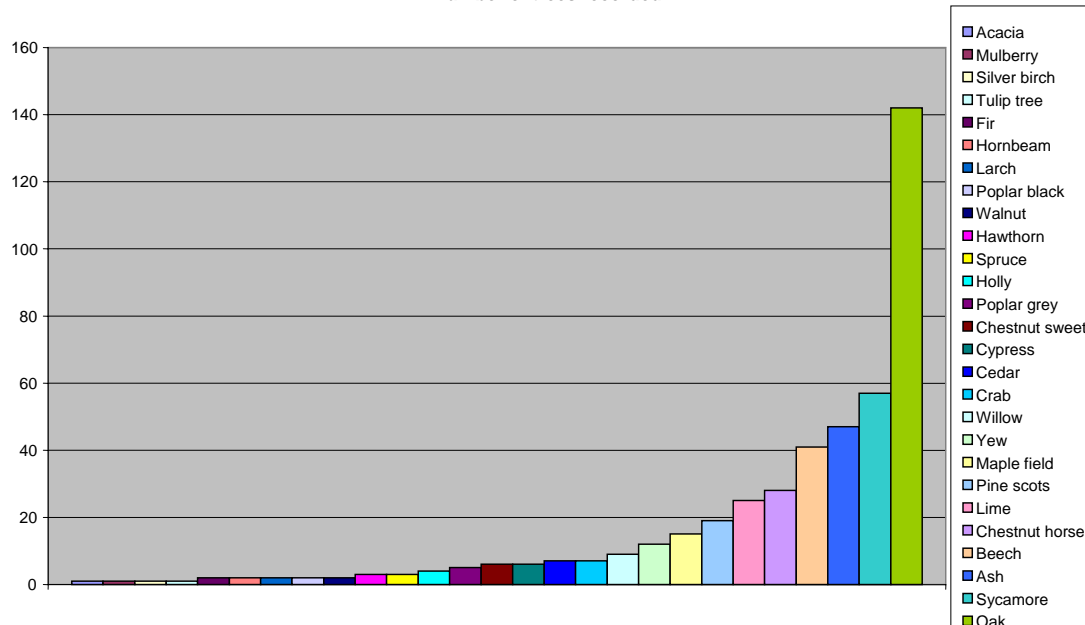
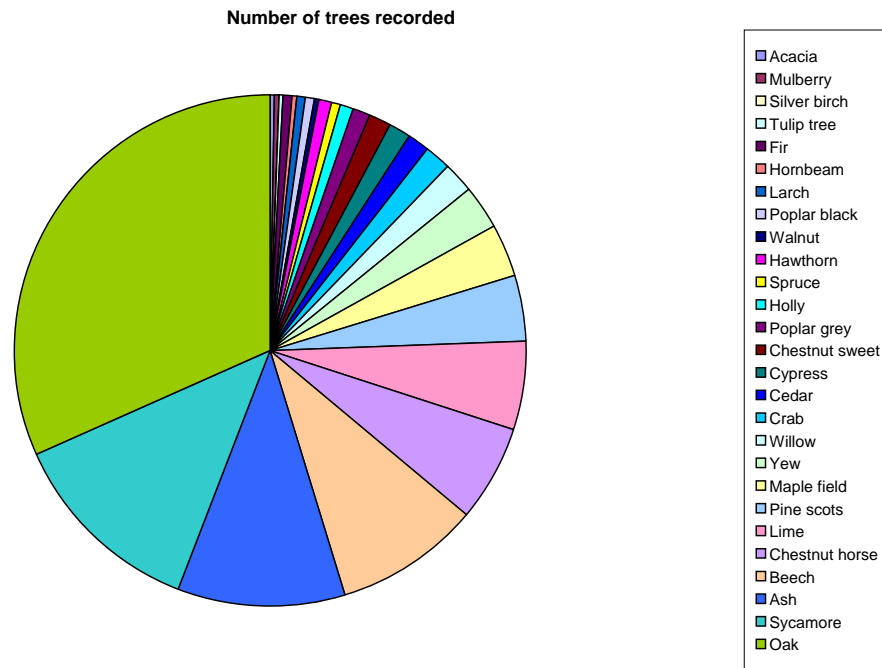


Figure 2 illustrates the number of trees in their relative proportions. Oak comprises well over a quarter of the trees recorded. 6 species comprise three quarters of the sample; 21 species are in small proportions, totalling about a quarter of all the trees recorded.

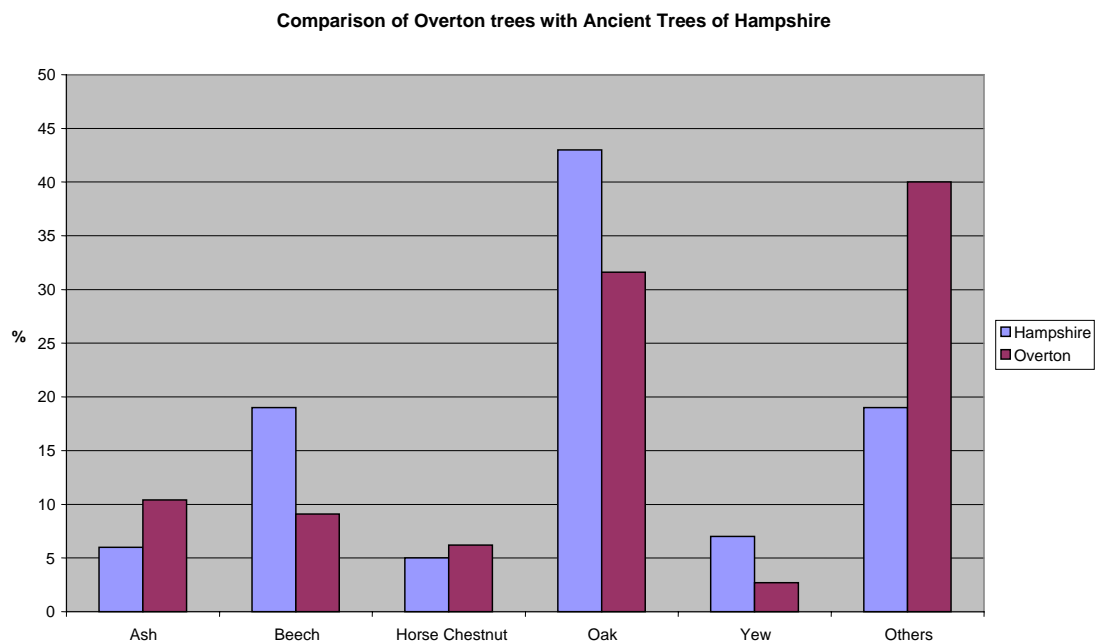
Figure 2



Comparison with Ancient Trees of Hampshire

Figure 3 compares the percentage of trees with the distribution found in the tree species in the *Ancient Trees of Hampshire* Survey Report (1997).

Figure 3



Oak is the most common tree species in the Hampshire survey, as in Overton. The Overton tree sample includes the 4 other most commonly recorded species for Hampshire, but differs in Sycamore being more common than these 4, contributing 13% to the 'other' category in Figure 3. However this comparison includes many Overton trees that may not be considered ancient, on the basis of girth, so a more appropriate comparison may be with the Overton trees of greater than 10 feet in girth.

Trees considered ancient

135 of the 450 recorded trees are greater than 10 feet in girth; thus qualifying as 'ancient' in terms of the 'Ancient Trees in Hampshire' report. Figure 4 shows the number of these trees. Clearly Oak predominates with Ash the next most frequent ancient tree.

Figure 4

Number of trees > 10 feet in girth

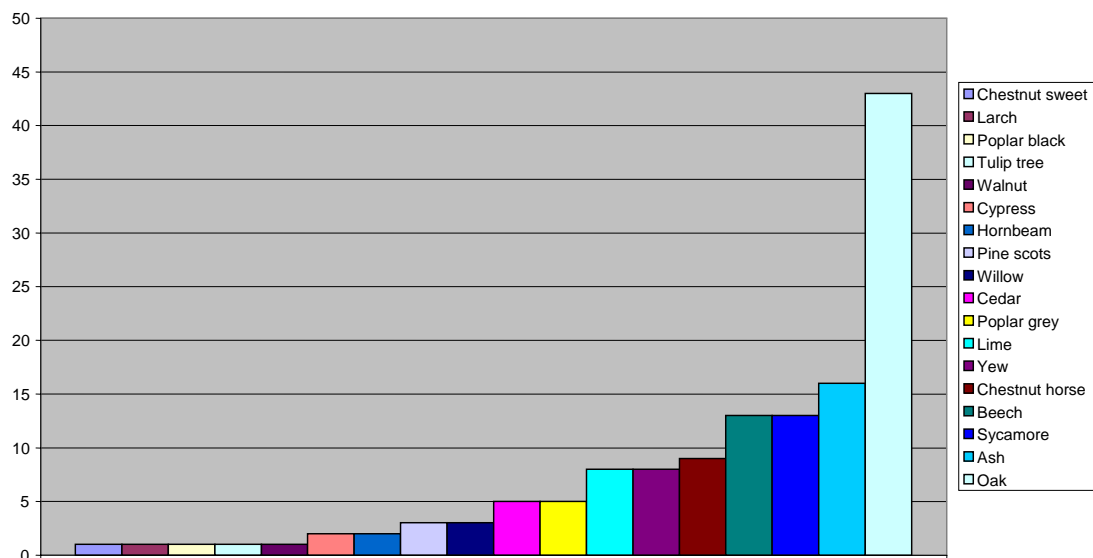
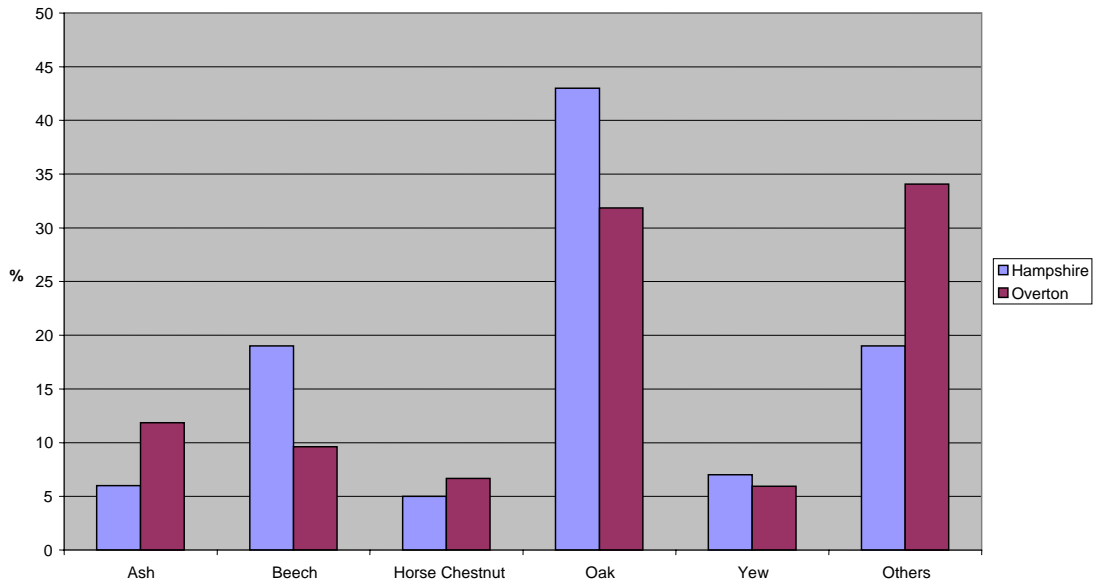


Figure 5 compares the percentage of such trees with those for the 1997 Hampshire report. The relative proportions remain very similar to the total trees recorded, despite the total containing many smaller trees. Oak remains the most frequent 'ancient' tree, as for Hampshire, with Sycamore still contributing substantially to the 'other' category at the same percentage (9%) as Beech.

Figure 5

Comparison of Overton trees > 10 feet in diameter with Ancient Trees of Hampshire



The largest trees recorded

Table 1 shows the largest tree of each species, based on its girth. (Mulberry is omitted from this table as the one specimen examined could not be measured.)

Table 1. Girth of the largest tree of each species

SPECIES	GIRTH	TYPE	GIRTH
Acacia (type)	8' 0"	Lime	20' 0"
Ash	14' 0"	Maple (Field)	8' 0"
Beech	16' 0"	Oak	18' 3"
Cedar of Lebanon	16' 10"	Pine Scots	10' 2"
Chestnut horse	19' 0" approx	Poplar black	18' 0"
Chestnut sweet	12' 6"	Poplar grey	20' 6"
Crab	9' 6"	Silver Birch	6' 6"
Cypress Lawson	13' 0"	Spruce Norway	7' 0"
Fir Douglas	9' 3"	Sycamore	19' 0"
Hawthorn	9' 5"	Tulip tree	13' 6"
Holly	4' 6"	Walnut	10' 0"
Hornbeam	10' 3"	Willow	13' 6"
Larch	11' 6"	Yew	13' 6"



From Table 1 it can be seen that there is considerable variation in the size of the largest tree of each species – all of these are judged to be more than 100 years old, but a number of species are less than 10 feet in girth. This will be a consequence of species growing at different rates in different conditions - a gnarled crab at 9' 6" could be much older than a Larch at 11' 6".

Largest tree: Grey Poplar at Polhampton (SU 522 504, Database number 174)

Trees with girth greater than 15 feet

Trees that are greater than 15 feet in girth are likely to be the oldest specimens and 13 of these were measured. These are recorded in Table 2.

Table 2. Trees with girth greater than 15 feet

SPECIES	GIRTH	LOCATION	GRID REF	CONDITION
Beech	16' 0"	Straight Lane	SU 524 502	Good
Cedar of Lebanon	16' 10"	Berrydown Court	SU 526 494	Very poor
Cedar Western Red	15' 3"	Southington House	SU 509 496	Good
Chestnut horse	19' 0"	The Lynch	SU 504 497	Good
Lime	16' 0"	Southington House	SU 509 497	Perfect
Lime	20' 0"	Southington House	SU 509 498	Good
Oak	15' 0"	Berrydown	SU 528 497	Good
Oak	15' 6"	Quidhampton	SU 522 502	Fair/good
Oak	18' 3"	Farm track near Ashe	SU 531 499	Good
Poplar black	18' 0"	Polhampton	SU 528 505	Good
Poplar grey	19' 6"	Polhampton Lane	SU 521 504	Good
Poplar grey	20' 6"	Polhampton Lane	SU 522 504	Good
Sycamore	19' 0"	The Lynch	SU 503 498	Good

The three Oak trees are certainly within Read's (2000) categorisation of trees 'valuable for conservation' and ancient. Whilst the other species in Table 2 may grow at different rates and differ in age from the Oak, all are very large trees and of significance in the local landscape.

Trees in the Overton Hedgerow Survey

In the Overton Hedgerow Survey (Overton Biodiversity Society, 2005) Ash, Sycamore and Oak were the most frequently recorded trees within hedgerows. Nearly 12% of hedgerows contained Oak within the 30m length sampled and Oak was the 3rd most abundant tree in all the hedgerows surveyed (after Ash and Sycamore). Many of the old and ancient trees in this report were located in hedgerows. Whilst the proportion of these tree species within hedgerows differs from those considered ancient in the current report, Oak, Ash and Sycamore are the most frequently recorded tree species in both studies and must therefore contribute significantly to habitat within the Parish of Overton.



Sycamores at Southington
(SU 505 494, Database numbers 7 - 11)



Ash at Dellands Lane
(SU 510 494, Database number 57)

Ancient tree database

With funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Woodland Trust is in the process of building a website and recording system for ancient trees. An interactive map is available showing where trees are recorded and basic information about them. The nearest tree to Overton in the database is a Yew in the churchyard at Steventon. Data from the Overton study will be submitted to the Woodland Trust for consideration of suitability for inclusion of some of the largest specimens.

Access to full dataset

Information about the full data set including species, girth, location with grid reference and condition of each tree can be found on the Overton Biodiversity Society website at: <http://www.overton-biodiversity.org>



Rare Black Poplar at Polhampton
(SU 528 505, Database number 197)

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