



**MINUTES of meeting held by the Ancient Yew Group at Westonbirt Great Hall
2pm/6pm 16th March 2008**

From Information to Protection

Those attending:

Peter Andrews, Hugh Angus, Russell Ball, Jill Butler, Russell Cleaver,
Caroline Davis, Lesley Elphick, Phi Evans, Ted Green, Paul Greenwood,
Fred Hageneder, Tim Hills, Toby Hindson, Mark Hinsley, Ros Jones,
Fergus Kinmonth, Chris Knapman, Andy McGeeney (chair), John Scudamore,
David Shreeve, Jon Stokes, Libby Symon
Apologies: David Alderman, David Bellamy, Cliff Hansford, Martin Palmer

Introduction: Tim Hills

The Ancient Yew Group has achieved several of its major targets, including the setting up of a website, the publication of Fred Hageneder's *Yew: A History*, and raising awareness of our yew heritage throughout the United Kingdom and Europe. The information on old and ancient yews gathered by enthusiasts is now in the public domain. It is now time to use this information as one of the tools that will ensure proper protection for these trees.

It was noted that in some instances even legal protection fails, illustrated by the illegal felling of a protected yew in a Conservation Area churchyard at Llangathen, Carmarthenshire in 2006.

Russell Ball spoke on the advantages and disadvantages of seeking Tree Preservation Orders on all ancient yew trees.

One of the problems still to be resolved is establishing who is responsible for the management of an individual tree. An old yew can still be felled on the whim of an individual with influence over a churchyard e.g. a vicar.

We were reminded that every cut should be seen as damage and that we are dealing with a tree and habitat that is unique not only in the UK, but also in the world.

The main advantages of a TPO are:

- 1 when a church body wishes to work on an ancient yew, it will effectively be receiving free advice from the visiting Tree Officer
- 2 Tree Officers can direct people to a list of accredited tree contractors (the best ones)

The main disadvantage is that the legal language in which the TPO is framed can be off-putting and suggest that a tree cannot even be touched without permission.

We were warned of the high costs that such a move would incur, and that employers of Tree Officers had to operate within tight budgets.

.1.

Libby Symon spoke on behalf of the Conservation Foundation. Their Yew Tree Campaign and involvement with the yew dates back to 1988.

Building on successful campaigns like Yews for the Millennium and the work of the Ancient Yew Group, a Yew Guardianship Scheme was launched - the response to questionnaires sent out has however not been overwhelming.

Since we are 2 years away from the 10th anniversary of the Millennium Yew plantings, 2010 might be an opportune time to revisit the celebration. At the same time it might be worth considering the benefits of a community celebration at ancient yew sites. (We need look no further than the events at Beltingham, Northumberland as an excellent example of community involvement).

The Conservation Foundation's involvement in protecting ancient trees was noted, particularly those at Staunton, Linton and Much Marcle.

Phi Evans spoke on the role of the Caring For God's Acre project. A small independent charity initially set up to work in the Herefordshire Area, it can now work anywhere, including Wales. While struggling for funds (as is everybody because of the forthcoming Olympics), it is confident of setting up a national network of advice, and would hope to be open to anybody seeking such advice. It will be known as "The living churchyard and cemeteries network".

Jill Butler gave a presentation about the proposed changes in Tree Protection legislation, for which the Woodland Trust and other tree organisations are lobbying Parliament for improvements. Information from the Ancient Yew Group has been used in the lobbying process. This legislation, which will affect all of the organisations represented at the meeting, is in the first instance applicable only to England, but it is hoped that it will also be applied in Wales, and eventually in Scotland.

If the new legislation, suitably amended, passes successfully through both houses and becomes law in the autumn, there will be noticeable differences. For instance minor works to a tree will be more clearly defined and there will be size thresholds to determine which trees can be felled/worked on without consulting the local planning department. A new Blue Book will be published, outlining the major points of the act and how it will affect all interested parties.

We need to be aware that there are still hundreds of thousands of unprotected trees at this point in time. The TPO is a reactive document that is resource-intensive and it is to be hoped that the final wording of the legislation removes the need to pursue TPOs for all old yews.

"Trees of Special Interest" are not part of this bill. We were made aware of good practice in many other European countries, which are far more active about protecting their trees. Local authorities do need to be made aware of trees of special interest on their patch.

Dead trees also have value.

.2.

David Shreeve spoke in his role as advisor to the Archbishop's Council.

One of the problems the yew faces is that churchyards are such a haven for wildlife and other trees that a yew can easily be overlooked.

A possible route to alerting large numbers of churches to the significance of their ancient yews might be through the Dioceses. Since there are only 43 in England and each has an environmental officer, we might consider selecting a few of these and present to them all of the gathered research and information about their ancient yews, as well as guidance about their care.

Vicars and Church wardens do not have the authority to fell yews, or any other trees, without raising a Faculty. This involves either an Arch-deacon or Bishop, and we would be best advised to lobby at this level in the hierarchy rather than to contact individual churches.

Good practice was noted in the work carried out by the Great Trees of East Devon project. It is a fine model of what can be achieved at a local level. At Uplyme, postcards of their yew are sold to create a fund for its care.

ACTION

Tim Hills to work with the **Conservation Foundation** in presenting the Yew as a Special Case to a few diocesan managers.

The **Conservation Foundation** and Living Churchyards network was suggested as an avenue worth exploring.

The **Ancient Tree Forum** is producing a management guide and will involve **Russell Ball** in the drafting of a YEW section to go in this.

We should also consider a guide booklet for each church with an ancient yew: "How to manage your yew". This would be part of the package that goes to a diocese with all the information **Tim Hills** publishes about the individual churchyard trees within that diocese.

With regard to fundraising, **Russell Cleaver** stated that the presentation of any bid to a funding body needs to emphasise the public benefits in order to unlock funding. He considered that for the Ancient Yew Group to improve the likelihood of attracting grant aid it first needed to revisit its original vision statement. Any subsequent grant application should then demonstrate our intent to achieve a clear set of measurable targets. Targets to be set should:

- (1) outline the main goals of the group for, say, the next 5 years
- (2) demonstrate what public benefits our work would bring
- (3) broaden the range of audiences, and increase the numbers of people who access our activities.

One such target might be, for example: to create a Yew Centre in a public library; this would be one way in which the public could more easily access the website and database of the Ancient Yew Group; the funding of which could be sought from a Lottery grant.

Another target suggested was to promote, and obtain, wide public acceptance that no yew above 30ft should be killed in the next 5 years.

It was also suggested that a possible source of funds worth investigation was sponsorship from the drug companies that benefited from Taxol.

Tim/Russell would welcome from anybody input/possible targets on this subject.

It was suggested that www.ancient-yew.org should create a web page that directs people to Yew Tree Advice services. **Tim Hills can arrange for this page to be incorporated into the web site, but needs to be advised by tree professionals as to what/who should be included in it.**

.4.

Toby Hindson will soon present how we measure all yew trees to a standard. Over a period of 15 years this would show accurately if a tree was increasing in girth. It could serve as a way of including yew guardians/tree wardens in a definite activity and a need to report back on an annual basis. This 'standard' could also be included in guidance notes to churches.

We should establish an index of 'listed trees' as we have an index of 'listed buildings'. **Tim Hills** will create this initial list for discussion at the next meeting.

Other points raised that individuals might wish to consider further:

How could the protection of trees become part of the National Curriculum? Where do trees currently fit into the National Curriculum?

We have created an unparalleled knowledge base – how now do we create a structure that allows for wider membership eg inviting Tree Officers and Yew Guardians to join? What then do we offer members?

Should we be considering a regional strategy, so that there is a Yew contact in each region of the country?

We are grateful to Hugh Angus, Head of Collections at Westonbirt Arboretum, and to the generosity of the Forestry Commission who made the Great Hall available to us free of charge, and hope that it might be possible to use this splendid venue again.

Mark Hinsley would also be able to provide a working space in Dorset, and we could consider combining a meeting with a visit to a yew site, for example Kentchurch Court in Herefordshire.

Jon Stokes suggested that each person's presence at the meeting and participation in the discussions made them members of the Ancient yew Group "by default" and proposed that we should maintain the impetus with twice yearly meetings.

Those present stated what they hoped to achieve before the next meeting – earmarked for September 2008.

These ranged from tree measuring and recording, the review of the Good Practice guide, development of a new vision statement, considering libraries as a place for archiving AYG work, liaison between the various groups attending, arranging visits to see yews, yew lectures, adding a yew element to tree warden training, supporting each other.

Toby Hindson will gather items for the agenda and act as convenor for the next meeting. A new e-mail address is being created for this purpose and will be forwarded to you all in due course.

.5.