Yew avenue in Chilton Condover, Danebury Hill Fort and Hillier’s Garden

Thomas Scheeder’s account of visits in August 2006 by members of Eibenfreunde is translated by Wim Peeters. Photographs: Christian Wolf and Tim Hills.

Chilton Condover

The excursion guide gives us the following information:

1822 in ‘Hampshire’ written by Cobbett:

... There is a yew avenue, probably one mile long (1600 m). Every tree has a trunk volume of estimated 0.4 to 0.6 cubic meters, which, as the reader will know, means a tree of considerable size. The trees are at least 100 to 200 years old. Yew wood is probably 10 times more durable than other wood we grow.

1897 in ‘The Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland’ by John Lowe

There is also an avenue of yews at Candover, near Alresford, extending for nearly half a mile (800 m); the trees are planted ... about 50 on each side; they are from 20 to 30 feet (6 to 9 m) high; a good deal broken. They vary from 8 to 12 feet (2.4 to 3.75) in girth, the latter having much young spray around the trunk.
In 1970 described as: ... a very aesthetic view, a yew avenue with a length of two thirds of a mile (1050 m). The two rows, 36 m apart, were planted around 1670 or a little earlier, in its form the avenue is probably unique.

In 1987 a lot of yew trees were destroyed in a severe gale. Meanwhile they are replaced by newly planted trees.
Danebury Hill Fort

The site is an iron age hill fort, erected circa 500 BC. From the original fortifications only extensive earthworks remain.

A lot of old yew trees have grown around the earthwork, in particular the earthwall and the slope in front of it. This is a result of a natural succession in the pastureland. Branches have been removed continuously to keep the land available for grazing.
Hillier’s Garden

The arboretum has its roots in the botanical collection of Harold Hillier, later Sir Harold Hillier, and is situated around Jermyn’s house, which Hillier bought in 1952 along with the surrounding land. Hilliers Nurseries Ltd operate their business from here, while in 1977 Sir Harold Hillier Gardens became a non-profit foundation under the management of Hampshire County Council.

More than 12,000 species of trees, shrubs and flowers grow on 180 acres, and so far they have to deal with the problem of being a garden with only young plants. This has recently changed with the addition of an area of forest. It is on this plot that a natural yew stand is to be found.

The Eibenfreunde estimate the age of these yews as between 350 and 500 years. In this way, the age of the oldest plants in Hilliers Gardens has been dramatically raised.

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