

Compton Hangers

at

Old Idsworth

A Survey of the yews

Peter Norton – July 2014



History

The old, now deserted, Saxon settlement of Idsworth sat at the southern foot of the Chalk Downs of Chalton and originally formed part of Chalton.

Idsworth village was settled in about the 9th century and although in earlier times it was a chaplaincy of the Manor of Chalton, it had, by the 12th century become an independent and the dominant settlement of the two Anglo Saxon settlements. It was recorded as a manor in its own right by 1271 when it was given as a gift by Queen Eleanor to the Tarrant Nunnery (Dorset).

All trace of the village has now gone. It was deserted sometime at the end of the 14th century, quite possibly as a result of the plague wiping out the population. All that remains is the part Saxon chapel of St Hubert which still stands alone in the middle of a field and to the south are the remains of a once great manor house.

Earl Godwin, head of one of the grandest and most powerful families of Anglo Saxon England and father of King Harold, is believed to have had the chapel built sometime around 1030AD. He personally held the adjoining manor of Chalton.

The old parish of Idsworth is bounded to the east and south by Compton and East Marden parishes (West Sussex) and the county borders of Hampshire and Sussex follows the same delineation.

On Milnes 1791 map of Hampshire this county border is indicated as Markwell. Mark comes from the Old English 'Mearc' and means boundary or march. The use of 'Mark' in Hampshire place names always denotes a boundary. The name is seen today in Markwells Wood, a young Norway spruce plantation that abuts the Sussex boundary.



Running east from Old Idsworth towards Compton Downs is a steeply rising (100meters) hanger woodland composed mainly of beech, yew and conifer of varying ages and known as Compton Hangers. The hanger yews on the West Sussex side are mainly young and have grown since the cessation of the sheep walk era circa 1860's. Those growing on the Hampshire side contain some young specimens amongst others of much greater age, which in some places give the impression of having been planted.

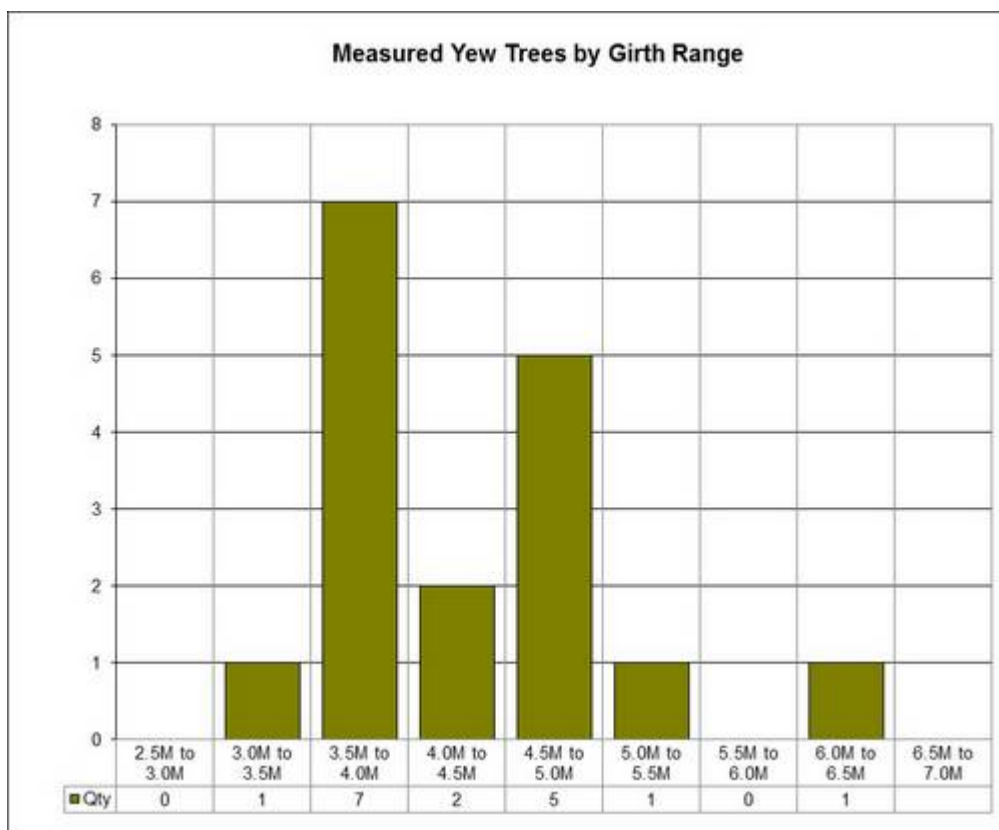
Yew Survey

A complete count of yew numbers was not attempted. However, this survey, carried out over two visits during April 2014, is thought to represent a census of all yews over 3.5 metres in girth. 17 trees had girths recorded (Fig. 1) of which 10 are featured, along with photographs within this article. A complete listing can be found in Appendix 1.

Observations into the sex of the trees was carried out by looking at the ground close to the tree for both seeds (female) or the remains of the pollen sacs (male). Where the evidence was inconclusive no sex was recorded.

During this survey the minimum measurement was mostly taken where the root growth meets the main trunk (root crown) unless otherwise stated. In so doing a more realistic age band could be realised.

The earliest yew measurements, from centuries ago, were in feet and inches, as was the height at which the tree was measured. This latest survey continues that tradition and also converts into the modern metric system.



Photographs

Tree 1 SU7590114471 M 15' 10"



Tree 2 SU7549214240 F 12' 0"



Tree 3 SU7540614188 F 16' 1"



Tree 4 SU7532914174 F 12' 5"



Tree 5 SU7538314231 M 12' 3"



Tree 6 SU7554114335 M 20' 2"



Tree 7 SU7556814366 Male 14' 11"



Tree 9 SU7561414394 F 14' 7"



Tree 11 SU7564814397 M 16' 7"



Tree 12 SU7572714279 M 14' 8"



General photographs along the main path



Appendix 1

No	Grid Loc (SU)	Sex	Girth			Height measured	Comments
			Ft	Ins	Mtrs		
1	7590114471	Male	15	10	4.826		Eastern edge, largest amongst young trees
2	7549214240	Female	12		3.658	Root crown	
3	7540614188	Female	16	1	4.902	Root crown	Three leaders from a 2' bole, three layering branches
4	7532914174	Female	12	5	3.785		
5	7538314231	Male	12	3	3.734	Ground	Soil from active badger sett has buried lower bole
6	7554114335	Male	20	2	6.147	Root crown	4' break of crown, three smal basal cavities, with 1' dia internal stem.
7	7556814366	Male	14	11	4.547		One lower limb affecting girth, one large branch layer
8	7558214392	Female	10	9	3.277		Measured above the sprawling lower limbs
9	7561414394	Female	14	7	4.445	Root crown	Nice flow of fluted wood
10	7561414412	Female	12	6	3.810	Root crown	
11	7564814397	Male	16	7	5.055	Top of slope	Mammal activity beneath the root
12	7572714279	Male	14	8	4.470	1ft	
13	7574314273	Male	15		4.572	1ft	May be two trees. Photo 9888 shows position of the last two yews
14	7535614259	Male	14	11	4.547	Root crown	
15	7543514297	Male	12	7	3.835	Root crown	Excludes small tree
16					0.000		General photo
17	7556814362	Male	11	8	3.556	2ft	
18	7594614622	Male	12	4	3.759	Root crown	Amongst the eastern side of the footpath (west Sussex)