

Danebury Hill

in

Hampshire

A survey of the yews

Peter Norton December 2013



Danebury is an impressive ovoid Iron Age hill fort probably built around 2500 years ago and then occupied for about 500 years. In the 16th century a charter was granted for a rural fair to be held on the site. It has also been used as rabbit warren, complete with resident warrener, but by the 17th century the site was no longer in use.

It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) and is surrounded by a highly valuable chalk downland habitat of which 12.8 hectares has been classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It was purchased in 1958 by Hampshire County Council who now maintain the area.

The upper slopes of the SSSI are home to extensive juniper scrub while the hill fort supports a planted beech wood, although this has been drastically cut back to the upper ramparts. The lower slopes, especially those to the north and east, support three main stands of yew.

All the yews are of a medium age range, with none ancient or hollow and none younger than perhaps mid-Victorian.

The general habit of these yews is multi-stemmed with low-domed canopies no more than 12m high. When the yews were more or less alone on the hill, they would have responded to the relative exposure by spreading horizontally much more than vertically.



Consequently there is little apical dominance to be found in the groups.

Clear evidence of horizontal spread is seen in some yews that have produced boughs at or close to ground level. Some time between approximately 40 and 150 years ago these succeeded in self-layering. This would have occurred in an open pasture situation without competition from other trees. However, recent tree maintenance on a few of the yews has involved removal of the parent branches, while leaving the successful rooting still intact. No recent successful layering or seedlings were observed during this visit.

Observations of the sex of the trees was carried out by examining the ground close to the tree for either seeds (female) or the remains of pollen sacs (male).

The ten most significant yews are featured below with grid references, measurements and photographs. Recording was carried out by starting close to the east entrance of the outer ramparts and walking anti-clockwise through the three stands of yew (A,B,C) and returning along the footpath. A total of 11 yews were counted in group A, 30 in group B, and there may be as many as 100 individuals in group C, sections of which consist of small clumps made impenetrable by low branches. This survey includes all the yews with a girth of around 3.5m and greater. All measurements were taken at the root crown.

GROUP A

SU3260537820 12' 2" female



SU3258937756 16' 4" female

Here was evidence of the successful layering of 4 branches where the host boughs had been cut back.



SU3257437754 14' 7" female



GROUP B

SU3253437880 12' 2" female



GROUP C

SU3251137885 11' 7" female



SU3235737886 11' 7" male



SU3233737900 14' male



SU3234337921 15' 11" male



SU3227137846 12' 3" male



SU3222137842 11' 7" female

