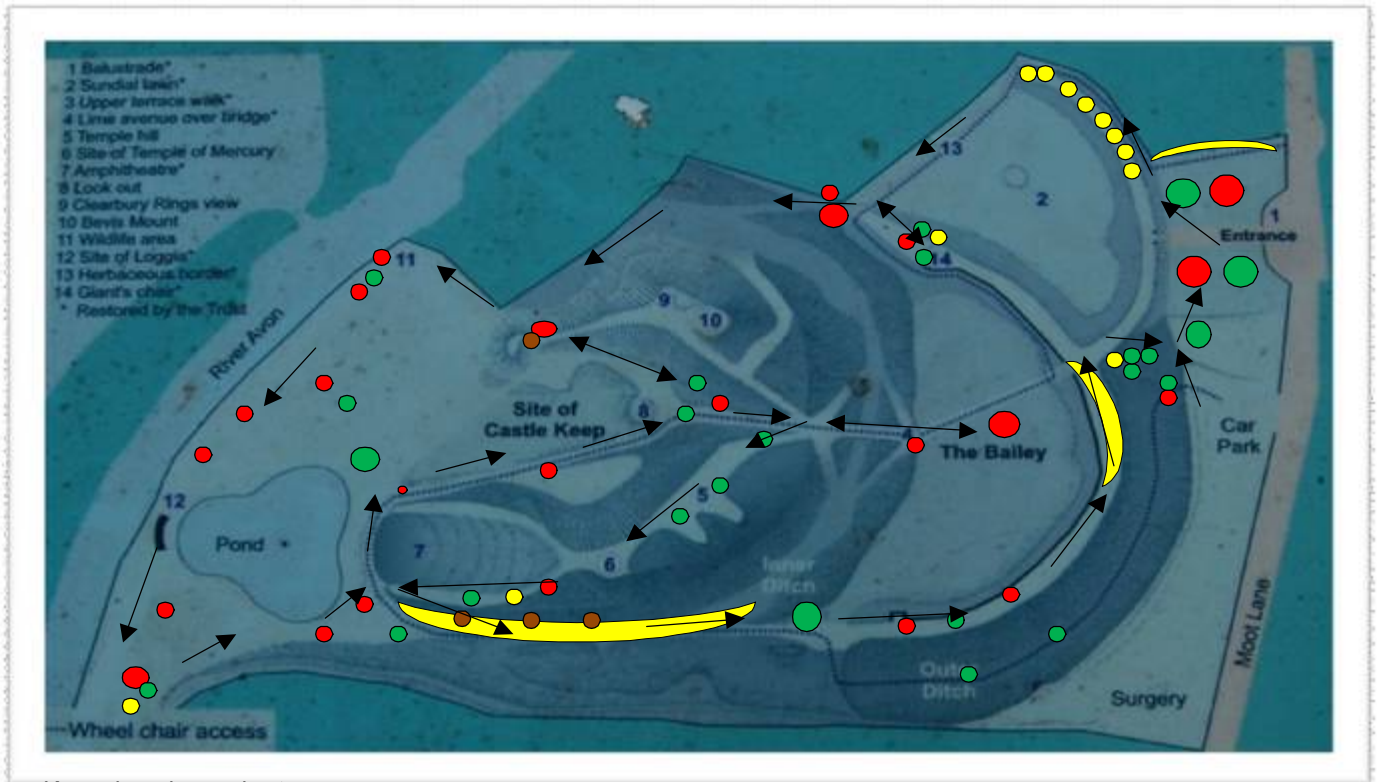


The Moot Garden Yews



Key is dependent on girth.

Female yew	●
Male Yew	●
Sex not recorded	●
Stump	●
Avenue of young Yews	—

Downton Moot, a scheduled Ancient Monument, may have started as a fortified Saxon meeting place, but by 1138 a Norman motte and bailey castle had been built by William the Conqueror's grandson, Henri de Bois, Bishop of Winchester. It was occupied throughout the medieval period but by the mid 17th century had fallen into disrepair.

Starting in about 1720 the earthworks were remodelled into an ornamental garden as an amenity for the nearby Moot house, and contained a terraced amphitheatre, the lime walk and a sunken lawn amongst other points of interest.

The gardens became separated from Moot House in the early 1970s and fell into a neglected, overgrown and ruinous state. In 1988 local residents formed a charitable trust to acquire the site and set about restoring the main features as recorded in Country Life during 1909.

Moot Gardens are open to the public without charge and are very well maintained by volunteers. There are several interesting yews scattered around the gardens and their approximate positions and relative girths are shown on the map. The largest yews, seen on page 2, would appear to date from the time the ornamental gardens were created in 1720.

Taking an anti-clockwise walk around the perimeter from the car park you can observe over fifty individual trees and three separate avenues of younger trees.

The Moot Garden Yews



As you head towards the entrance (1) from the car park, passing a group of young yew, the first of the garden's four largest yews comes into view (above left). It is female and measures 11' 2" at 1' and 10' 11" at 3'.

The male, above right, measures 12' 8" at 1' and 3', while on the opposite side of the main path a female, (below right) measures 9' 8" at 1' and 9' 10" at 3'. The last of the four (below left) is found growing near to the raised earthwork. It is a male measuring 9' 2" at 1' and 8' 11" at 3'.



Height measurements were taken from the top of the root crown.



Keeping the raised earthwork on your left, head north and observe some 23 young trees along the perimeter wall. Of these 20 appear to be dead, probably caused by severe crown reduction. As you continue along the pathway towards the herbaceous border (13) a further 8 yews are seen growing up on the earthwork.

This photo looks back at the Sundial lawn (2) from the herbaceous border, showing the yews growing along the top.

The Moot Garden Yews



When reaching the far side of the border the feature known as the Giant's Chair (14) is on top of the earthwork. Here are three yews, two males and one female, along with some young growth. The female yew hangs over a brick wall, where some interesting new growth is beginning to cover some of its burrs.



The herbaceous border perimeter wall now turns 90° (west) so follow the pathway between two columnar female yews (above left) and down to the next level.



The photograph on the right looks back up the path you have descended.

Follow the perimeter path round and down to the River Avon (11) where three yews, two female and one male, grow close to the river. Observe the root structure as it holds the tree back from a watery end.



The Moot Garden Yews



Follow the river bank towards the site of the Loggia (12), passing five young yews on the way. Note the recent growth on the pollard female.

The Amphitheatre with its tiers of grass seating makes a dramatic statement.



Continue to follow the riverbank and near to the exit gate see a male and female yew beginning to fuse together at the base of their trunks. Turn back and head east to the front of the pond. By the ivy clad male yew at the south edge turn to the east and head up the path that runs alongside the Amphitheatre and past a female yew. At the top of this climb, overlooking the site of the Castle Keep (8) are a further three yews, two male and one female.



Looking to the west another female yew grows up on the bank and has an interesting root formation linked with a nearby stump. Near to the root crown there appears to be wire embedded in the trunk.



The Moot Garden Yews



Retrace your steps and head east, crossing the lime avenue bridge to observe the shaped female yew that grows within the Bailey.

Head west and back over the bridge and almost immediately follow a faint trail up the slope on the left, passing three yews on the way to the Temple site (6) where the views across the Amphitheatre and the pond are again quite stunning.

Carefully walk down the left slope of the Amphitheatre and at the bottom turn left and walk east, following the path through an avenue of 28 young yews and the remains of stumps of the trees they are replacing.

At the edge of the Outer Ditch, at the foot of the steps that lead to the Upper Terrace Walk (3) grows a male yew whose crown has been substantially reduced.



A yew hedge leads to another avenue of younger yews where you emerge at the top of the Sundial lawn near to the start of this walk.

Directions

Downton is five miles south of Salisbury on the A338. At Downton traffic lights turn into the village and after approximately one mile turn right into Moot Lane. The car park is just beyond the ornate Moot entrance.