

Yews of the Ranscombe Farm Reserve

by Cliff Hansford

This is located at Cuxton in Kent. TQ707678 is the approximate centre of the reserve.

The report is in 3 parts. Part 1 documents the yews at The Toe Monument and at sites I and II.

Part 2 documents yews at the storm damaged boundary, at Mill Hill, and at 3 sites managed by the West Kent Downs Conservation Trust.

Part 3 looks at stump and ring counts carried out at these locations.

Ranscombe Farm Reserve is situated on the North Downs and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The reserve was established thanks to generous financial support from the Department of Communities and Local Government, The Tubney Charitable Trust and Plantlife – The Wild Plant Conservation Charity. The whole area is now managed in partnership with Plantlife, the UK's leading wild flower conservation charity.

The 560 acre site comprises ancient farmland, pockets of chalk grassland and coppice woods. The landscape is very similar today to what it was 200 years ago in terms of its pattern of woodland, hedgerows and fields. The woodlands in particular have been significantly influenced by the need for Sweet Chestnut wood for the hop-growing trade. This may have been the impetus behind the conversion of much of the woodland at Ranscombe from ancient mixed woodlands to Sweet Chestnut plantations probably around 200 years ago. It is amongst the existing Sweet Chestnut woodland that the yews are to be found, the most significant of which are recorded here.

Compiled from extracts taken from various websites.

The Toe Monument: TQ6988268397 (public access)

The Toe Monument was erected to commemorate the death in 1835 of Edward, 5th Earl of Darnley: the Earl accidentally cut one of his small toes whilst demonstrating his 'skill' with an axe. It is said lock-jaw set in and within the week the Earl was dead.

The photographs feature the four yews, planted at the corners of what remains of the Toe Monument. The yews are believed to have been planted at the time of the erection of the monument in 1835. The average girth of the trees, at 7ft 3ins, suggests that this might well be the case.

The two yews nearest the camera in photo one are female, the other two are male. The canopies look sorry for themselves, seemingly in keeping with the monument. Considerable adventitious growth is apparent. None of the yews appear to have been interfered with in any way. The whole site is on a slope which itself is in the middle of the woodland plantation.



Site I: TQ7072968730

The following 3 (or 4) yews are all within a few metres of each other, located within dense chestnut woodland. My guide, David May, believes the yews to be at or close to a croft habitation site which ceased to exist sometime well before 1640.

The yews are identified as being in northerly, southern and westerly locations.

Southerly (1) and westerly (2) yews



The southerly yew is male. Girth of the standing section is 13ft 8ins at 3ft from ground. Girth around both sections at the ground is estimated to be 17ft. Height is approximately 40ft. The canopy is healthy. The fallen limb is dead and the yew is now split in two, partially exposing the root system.



Standing section looking north



Looking into the exposed root section. Signs of fire damage.

The westerly yew is male. Girth: 11ft 6ins at 3ft from ground. Height: 40ft approximately. The lower limb in the foreground is dead. Quite a number of lower limbs have been removed for no apparent reason.



Looking east



Looking north

Northerly yew. One tree or two? Male with a combined girth of 18ft at 3ft from ground. Height: 40ft approximately. Again a number of lower limbs have been removed.



Looking north



Looking in a south-westerly direction it begins to look like two trees



Looking in a westerly direction. Girth of the smaller trunk measures 11ft 6ins at 3ft from the ground. Whether one tree or two, each section is full of character.

Site II: TQ7032768714

Of three yews at this site two are recorded here. They grow within a few metres of each other in dense chestnut woodland. Only one yew remains standing, the other two having fallen victim to the 1987 storm. Though now on their sides they are still alive.



The one recorded fallen yew. Obscured from view by localised underwood and bramble. No additional data collected.



Though just a fraction of the root system remains in the ground the yew is still thriving.



The one remaining standing yew is female with a girth of 10ft 6ins and a height of approximately 40ft.

There is an abundance of branches on all parts of the tree, but so many have been cropped that it has resulted in a sparse canopy.

Also note the absence of bark on the yew's western face, as well as signs of fire damage.



View showing the profusion of upper branches, yet the absence of any canopy to speak of. I am puzzled as to why so many lower branches have been removed since they do not appear to be obstructing anything in the immediate vicinity. Note: soil here is damp.



View showing the area of removed bark and low level foliage.

This record has been created by Clifford Hansford
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