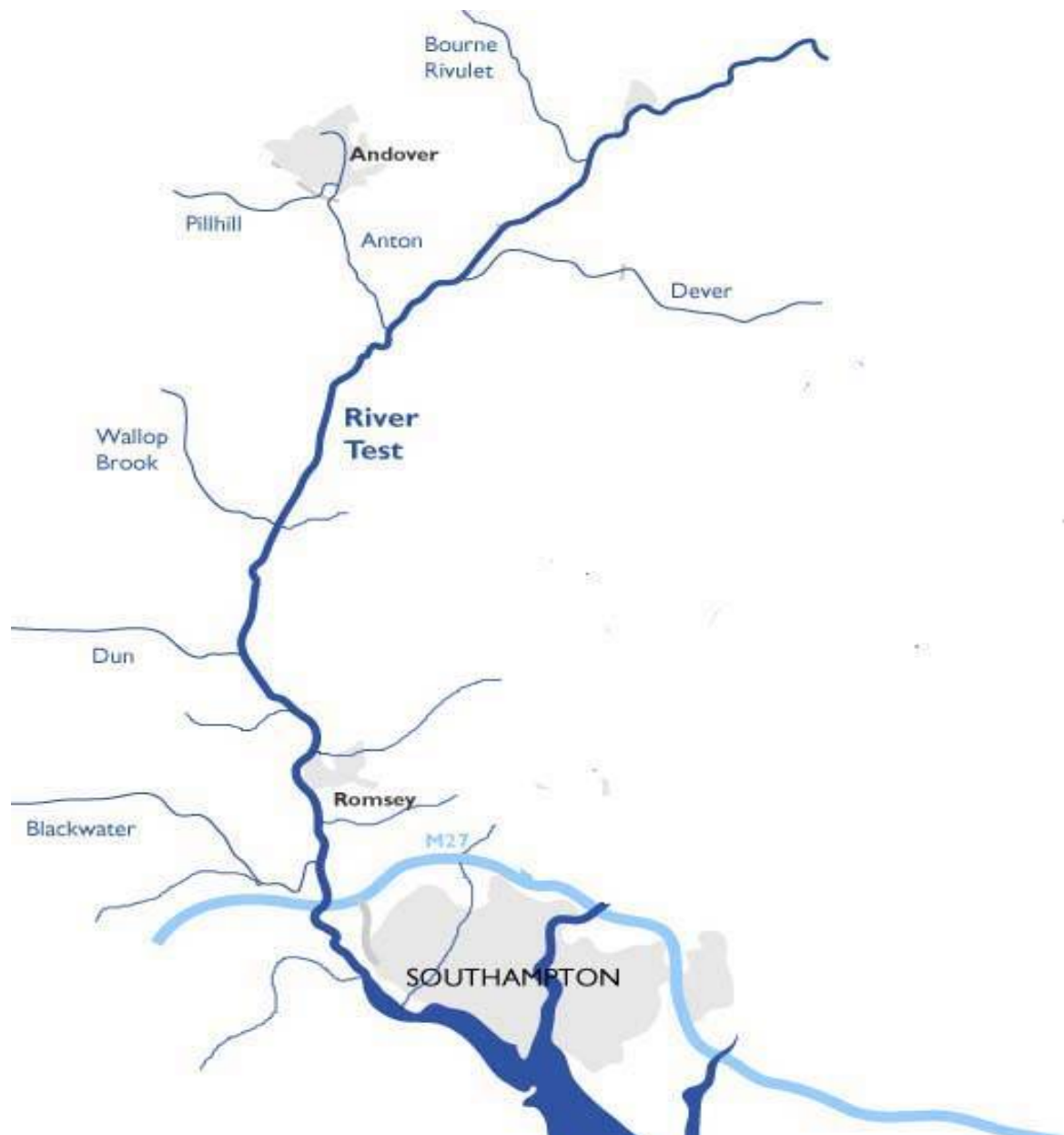


Hampshire Yews

An Inventory of Churchyard Yews along the Hampshire Test and its tributaries

Part 1 – The Upper Test

By Peter Norton



Introduction:

The Test rises at Ashe, just to the west of Basingstoke and on its way through Hampshire is fed from many streams and brooks emanating from the west and one main stream from the east.

After flowing through Stockbridge and Romsey, it converges in Southampton with the Itchen some 40 miles from its source. At this point it becomes Southampton Water which flows into the Solent before reaching the open sea.

The west tributaries include the Bourne Rivulet, Anton, Wallop Brook, Dun, Blackwater and Bartley Water.

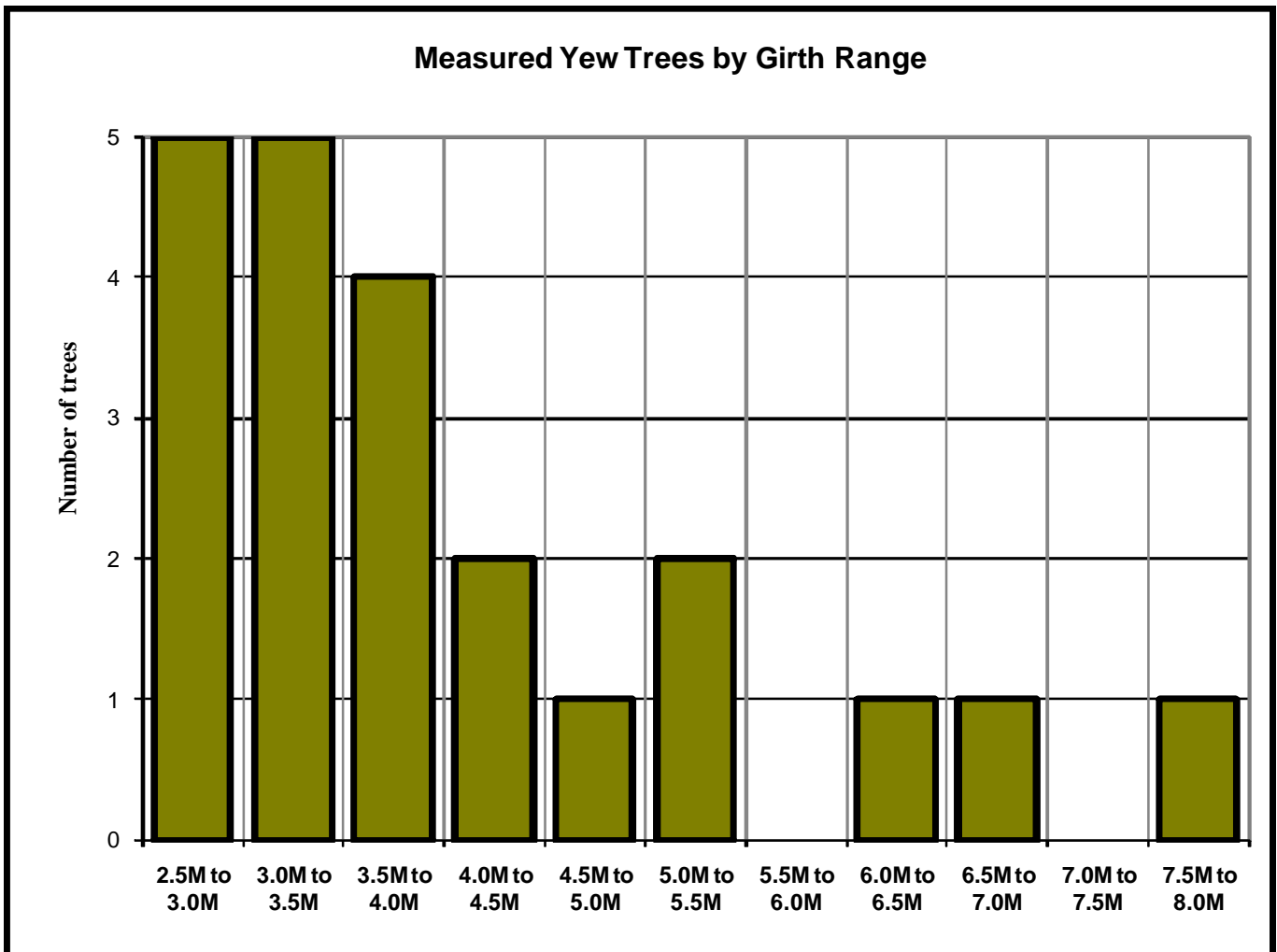
The east tributaries include the Dever, Tadburn and Tanners Brook.

The Upper Test

This is first of three reports that split the River Test into three sections; Upper, Middle and Lower. The Upper Test is described as from its source at Ashe to just south of Wherwell at Fullerton, a distance of sixteen miles by road. Along this section it is joined by the Bourne Rivulet and the Dever.

All of the towns and villages along this part of the Test and its tributaries have been included, and of the 24 churchyards visited 18 contained yews. All churches are in Hampshire unless otherwise stated.

Of the 74 yews noted at these sites, 22 had measurements recorded. The graph below groups the measured yews according to their girth, presented here in metric form. It does not include yews whose girth was estimated*. Where a tree has been measured at different heights, the measurement taken closest to the root/ground is used for this graph.



Ashe – Holy Trinity – SU534500

The church, overlooking the source of the Test, was rebuilt in 1878 on the site of the old one, which dated back to the 12th century. Four young yews are found in the church grounds, two to the west and two to the north of the church. Girths were not recorded.

Deane – All Saints – SU546502



The present church, built in 1818, is located just east of Ashe. Little is known of the earlier church mentioned in the Domesday survey.

This female yew grows on a small mound south of the porch. Its girth was 11' 9" at 1'.

Steventon – St Nicholas – SU551471

This 12th century church is found just south of Ashe. It is remarkably untouched apart from minor alterations in the 13th, 15th and 19th centuries. At the time of Domesday there is no mention of a church at Steventon although churches were recorded at the nearby villages of Ashe and Deane. It is thought there may have been a Saxon cross here, around which the villagers would have buried their dead and travelling priests would have held religious services. Part of the shaft of a sandstone Saxon cross, thought to be 9th Century, was discovered in a wall at Steventon manor, and this can now be seen inside the church near to the pulpit.

In a nearby field is a natural spring, marked by railings around an iron pump. This would have replaced the wooden pump which served the Austens' house, for it was in the rectory that Jane Austen wrote the first drafts of her novels *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*.



This female yew grows NW of the church. It has a large basal cavity and three internal stems can be seen in its hollow. Its branches sweep to the ground and the foliage is healthy. A girth of 20' 2" at 1' was recorded. Towards the south of the church a healthy millennium male yew is protected behind chicken wire.

Laverstoke – St Mary the Virgin – SU487488

The ruined church of St Mary is found in Laverstoke Park. A new church was built in 1896 to the west of the original and outside of the grounds of Laverstoke House.

Seven young yews grow around the churchyard perimeter, with a further four of slightly larger girth outside of the churchyard. These may have once formed part of the approach to the house.

Whitchurch – All Hallows – SU459477



This church was largely rebuilt in 1866, but retains some of its Norman past.

Two yews grow along the south perimeter, of which the larger male grows to the south east. This ancient specimen has a girth of 25' at the top of the mound.

Tufton – St Mary – SU457467

This is a 12th/13th century church, altered in the 18th.

One male tree with a girth of 9'10" at 1' grows to the south.



- *At Testbourne the Test is joined by the Bourne Rivulet, a seasonal stream which starts life in the Swift Valley at Upton and is known as the river Swift. Its name is changed to the Bourne where they converge at Hurstbourne Tarrant, some nine miles from its source.*

Vernham Dean – St Mary the Virgin - SU349569

To the north west of the Swift Valley, this church is sited well away from the village between Vernham Manor and Vernham Street. It burnt down in the 19th century and was rebuilt in 1851, and while it contains an 11th century Norman doorway, this is thought to have come from St Mary's in Andover, which was demolished by the Victorians around the same time.



Three large yews are recorded here. The male, left, grows near to the porch. Its root structure was covered with headstones and earth was piled high against its trunk. Girth was 13' 7" at about 2' 6".

South of the church is a female yew (below left) with headstones resting on the root structure. Girth was 17' 1" at about 3' from the top of the bank (just above the root crown and the embedded flint).

The third (below right) grows near to the south perimeter and is in line with the other two. It is female with a girth of 16' 3" at about 2'.

A further 3 smaller yews grow in the churchyard.



Linkenholt – St Peter – SU363580

The original 12th century church was situated near to the manor house. This church contains some masonry from the original building, and was constructed on the new site in 1871.

Its four yews are all male and they grow south of the church. None could be measured due to the thick lower growth.



Hurstbourne Tarrant – St Peter – SU385530

The origins of the church are 12th century, with alterations in the 14th century and major rebuilding in 1890.

Eleven yews are found in the churchyard, of which nine grow to the north of the church and around the perimeter. All are relatively small girthed.

The two largest are found on the south side. The male, shown below, had a girth of 9' 11" measured near to the top of the mound that has built up around its trunk. There is a large dead section on the north side of the tree from which many aerial roots could be seen. A female yew with a girth of 10' 5" at 1' and 9' 10" at 2' grows just south west of the church. It was being used as a shelter for a maintenance shed.



St Mary Bourne – St Peter – SU422503

A mostly 12th century church, built as a chapel of rest, with additions and rebuilding between the 14th and 17th centuries. It is thought that there might have been a pre-Norman church on the site.

The following is taken from the church website:

“The south entrance is dominated by the ancient yew tree, measured in 1993 as having a girth of 20' 7" at 3'. It is hollow and, although yew trees are difficult to date, must be at least as old as the church itself. The nearby large yew tree was planted in 1759 (with a present girth of 8').”



During my visit in March 2011 I counted at least nine yews. This most impressive (left) is this male growing to the south of the church. A girth of about 22' at the ground was recorded in 1998. It is suffering with die back and its foliage was sparse and brown.

Close by is the male yew whose known planting date of 1759 makes it an important tree. A girth of 8' 9" at 1' was recorded in 2006.



Also of note is this yew growing east of the church in a group with 3 others. It is female, with a girth of 10' 3" at the root crown. Massive branches stem from its short bole, but it too was suffering with sparse foliage and die back. Last year's seeds were still firmly attached although the fleshy arils had long gone.

The remaining yews are scattered around the churchyard.

Hurstbourne Priors – St Andrew the Apostle – SU439466



This was the original manorial church of the ancient manor of Hurstbourne Priors, consecrated in 820 by the Bishop of Winchester. It was rebuilt on the same site by the Normans in the 12th century. The oldest remaining features are 13th century. The church was added to in the 16th and 18th centuries and partially rebuilt in 1870.

Two yews grow here. The largest is this female south of the church. Girth at the root crown was 17' 1".

A smaller male grows north east of the church. Its girth could only be estimated* at 9', due to thick stemmed ivy.

- *The Test now turns south*

Longparish – St Nicholas – SU426439

The church, found at the western end of Longparish in the heart of the old settlement of Middleton, dates from the early 13th century.

Four male yews grow in the churchyard. The largest, seen here, is east of the church and girthed 11' 10" at 1' and 11' 6" at 2'.

The remaining three, found near the north west corner, are much younger.



Wherwell – St Peter and Holy Cross – SU391408



The Saxon Church of the Holy Cross at Wherwell was founded by Queen Elfrida in AD 986 and replaced by the Normans in the 12th century. It was completely rebuilt in 1856.

Four yews are found in the churchyard. Starting at the north east gate is a young male. Next, to the east of the church and growing on a mound, is this female with a girth of 10' 7" at 1' and 10' 10" at 2'.

To the south of the church and on the perimeter is a male of similar girth that could not be measured due to ivy, and lastly to the west another female of smaller girth.

- *The river Dever rises west of East Stratton and flows west some 13 miles to converge with the Test just south of Wherwell and Chilbolton*

East Stratton – All Saints – SU541403

The old church was situated in Stratton Park and was first mentioned in 1308. Further reference to it was made in 1677 as a chapel of St Bartholomew. It was rebuilt in 1810, enlarged in 1841 and then razed to the ground after the new church of All Saints was consecrated in 1888.

A cross marks the site of the old church and the stumps of several old yew trees on the approach to what would have been its west end entrance can still be seen today.



Stoke Charity – St Mary and St Michael – SU488392

The building, dating back to the 12th/13th centuries, was altered in the 14th century and partially rebuilt in the 15th. It escaped the restorations of the Victorian era but major conservation work was carried out in the 1990s.

One yew grows here, south west of the church. It is one of those rare specimens with a single male branch on a female tree. This is found on the west side of the tree. At the time of my visit pollen sacs were in evidence as well as seeds from the previous year's growth. Girth was recorded as 14' 9" at 1', 14' at 2' and 13' 9" at 3'.



Hunton – St John – SU481396

The 13th century church stands alone in a field close to the river's north bank. The building contains elements of the 13th and 15th centuries, while major repairs were carried out in 1834.

Two yews are found here, a young female just south west of the church and this male with sparse foliage girthing 10' 4" at 1' to the east of the church.



Wonston – Holy Trinity – SU477395

The church is thought to date back to 901. It was enlarged in 1150 and rebuilt following a fire in 1714. It was repaired in 1829 and restoration was carried out in 1871-2. Another fire in 1908 caused much of the roof to be destroyed and repairs were carried out the following year.



The four female yews noted here grow south of the church, while many younger yews are found against the west perimeter.

The yew shown here is on the east side of the south lychgate. Four main leaders emerge from its short bole, with a girth of 12' 3" at 1'.

The yew on the west side of the lychgate girthed 8' 6" at 1'.

The two remaining are on the east side, the largest of these growing on a small mound and girthed 9' 1" near the top of the mound.

Barton Stacey – All Saints – SU434411

All Saints Church stands on one of the oldest sites of continuous Christian worship in this country. The exact date of the building of the original church is unknown, but it was certainly standing in the 10th Century. It was then called St Victor's, a rare dedication. St Victor was an African bishop raised to the see of Vita about 477 but banished in 484 to Sardinia. There is no record of when the dedication was changed to All Saints. The church was rebuilt by the Normans in the 12th century and this was followed by a major rebuild in the mid 13th century. Other additions and alterations followed in the 15th and 16th centuries, with further restoration between 1848 and 1902 and between 1989 and 1992.



There are nine yews in the church grounds. To the west of the church are three female and three male trees, the largest of these (male) girthed 9' 7".

The remaining three are all female, the tree shown here grows south of the church and had a girth of 12' at 1' and 12' 2" at 2'. The others grow south west and south east.

Historical references have been obtained but not directly copied from:

University of London and History of Parliament Trust <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/>

The Churches of Hampshire <http://southernlife.org.uk/churchin.htm>

Hampshire churches <http://www.baxian.org.uk/churches/hants.htm>

The following sites were also visited. None had any yews.

Overton – St Mary – SU514499

Freefolk – St Nicholas – SU487486

East Stratton – All Saints – SU541400

Micheldever – St Mary the Virgin – SU512391

Lower Bullington – St Michael and All Angels – SU455412

Chilbolton - St Mary-the-Less – SU394401