

# DRUIDS GROVE

NORBURY PARK - SURREY

## A Survey of its yews

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## Introduction

Norbury Park, situated in the Mole Valley to the north of Dorking, was acquired for £85,000 by Surrey County Council in 1931. This was their first land purchase and laid the foundation for the Countryside Estate, which is now managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust under a 50 year lease signed in 2002.

The park, believed to be of 10<sup>th</sup> century origin, is noted in the Domesday Book of 1086, while in 1314 it was recorded as 'Le Northbury' (Ekwall, 1960). Including Box Hill, just to the east, it once formed part of the lands of Mickleham Priory. The present Manor House was built in 1774 but is no longer part of the estate.

This land now carries several designations for its importance to nature conservation. Nationally, it forms part of the Mole Gap to Reigate Escarpment, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), as well as being part of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). In addition it is a candidate for the designation Area of Historic Landscape Value (AHLV). It was recorded as Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) by the Nature Conservancy Council, now Natural England. At a European level, it is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA).

Norbury Park is typical of the habitats connected with chalky soils found along the North Downs of the South East of England. The main woodland area is now comprised of profuse young Ash regeneration with Sycamore, following catastrophic wind-blow in October 1987, which threw over most of the mature Beech and about half of the mature Yew. The 1873 OS map records a lineal north-south gap at the top of slope. This remains as a small viewpoint in the north, which provides fine views across the Mole Valley.

On the western side of this former gap, Small Leaved Lime, Wych Elm and Field Maple, all Ancient Woodland Vascular indicator Plants (AWVP's) are present. This wood and the woodland in the north sit on a Clay-with-Flints 'cap' over the chalk hill.

The yew trees grow mainly on the mid-slope of the eastern facing hanger woodland, which had become known as Druid's Grove by Victorian times. They are also found sporadically throughout the site, from isolated trees to small clumps, and so this site is not typical of a uniform yew woodland. Earlier writers and historians have referred to Druids Walk, but this separate wood was not named on any maps until the 1873 OS map called it Druid's Grove.

As well as Ash with Sycamore regeneration in the main woodland, Box has become dominant in some areas, particularly in the shrub layer further down the slope. But it has also taken advantage of the reduced foliage of most of the Yews, an indicator of poor health, allowing regeneration below their canopies.

## IN THE PAST

*FIELD PATHS AND GREEN LANES*: Louis J. Jennings (1878)

“A private path southward of the house leads straight down to the Druids' Walk. It is best to approach it from the upper end, and to go in summer when the oaks and beeches are in full foliage, for then the shade they cast adds much to the mysterious appearance of the grove. I believe that permission to go over the grounds and downwards through the path marked "private" is seldom refused if asked for at the house.

The Druids' walk is long and narrow, with a declivity, in some places rather steep, to the left hand, and rising ground to the right, all densely covered with trees.

The yew begins to make its appearance soon after the little gate is passed, like the advance guard of an army. In certain spots it seems to have successfully driven out all other trees. As the path descends, the shadows deepen, and you arrive at a spot where a mass of yews of great size and vast age stretch up the hill, and beyond to the left as far as the eye can penetrate through the obscurity.

The trees in their long and slow growth have assumed many wild forms, and the visitor who stands there towards evening, and peers into that sombre grove, will sometimes yield to the spell which the scene is sure to exercise on imaginative natures — he will half fancy that these ghostly trees are conscious creatures, and that they have marked with mingled pity and scorn the long processions of mankind come and go like the insects of a day, through the centuries during which they have been stretching out their distorted limbs nearer and nearer to each other.

Thick fibrous shoots spring out from their trunks, awakening in the memory long-forgotten stories of huge hairy giants, enemies of mankind; even as the "double-fatal yew" itself was supposed to be in other days. The bark stands in distinct layers, the outer ridges mouldering away, like the fragments of a wall of some ruined castle. The tops are fresh and green, but all below in that sunless recess seems dead. At the foot of the deepest part of the grove there is a seat beneath a stern old king of the wood, but the genius loci seems to warn the intruder to depart — ancient superstitions are rekindled, and the haggard trees themselves seem to threaten that from a sleep beneath the " baleful yew," the weary mortal will wake no more.”

*YEW TREES OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND*: John Lowe (1897)

In his book, John Lowe describes many of the trees, as well as the damage caused by the storm of 1886.

“In the same snowstorm some fine trees in the Druids' Grove at Norbury were much injured. In one instance all the upper boughs of a large tree were broken off, while the lower ones were all bent down to the ground, and remained permanently in that position. The trunks of these trees are now densely covered with young spray.”

From: *'PARISHES: MICKLEHAM', A HISTORY OF THE COUNTY OF SURREY: Volume 3 (1911)*

“In Norbury Park is a famous grove of giant yews of great age, known as the Druid's Walk, which no doubt mark part of the track which, leaving the main east and west road, called in modern times 'The Pilgrim's Way,' near Bagden Farm, crossed the river near the Priory, and thence led over Letherhead Downs to Epsom and London.”

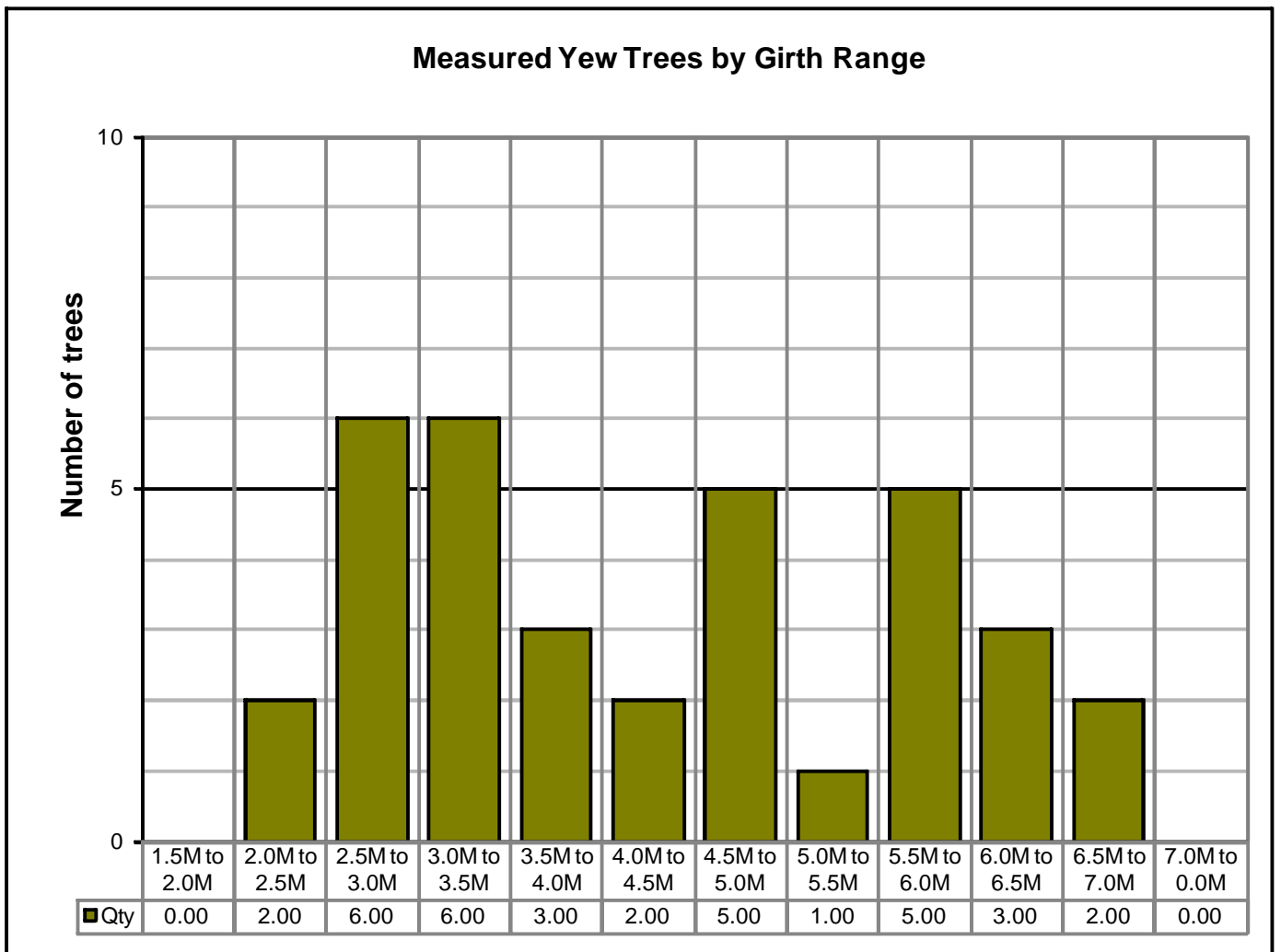
## Table of Recordings

One hundred and thirty four years after the account in *Field Paths and Green Lanes*, the same north to south route was followed, and this table features the most significant yews found either side of the path in 2012.

Grid Loc (TQ)	Sex	Girth			Height measured	Comments
		Ft	Ins	Mtrs		
1580653419						Fallen tree, not measured, has interesting upright growth
1580753390	Female	10	11	3.327	1' 6"	Very sparse foliage
1581353354	Female	21	6	6.553	Root crown	Tape slightly angled to obtain min girth. Tree has two basal cavities through which internal stems can be viewed. Short bole.
1581453343	Male	18	8	5.690	1'	Tape was angled from the root crown at the top of the slope so as to obtain the min girth, if measured at 90deg the girth increased to 19'. New growth over dead wood.
Following a faint trail down hill where the following yew can be found.						
1584553383	Female			0.000		Fallen tree, not measured, at least 15 upright branches.
	Female	7	9	2.362	1'	Close to the above
1585853374	Male	8	11	2.718	1'	Much of the outer bole missing, some fine arial roots
1585853367	Female	15	7	4.750	1'	Measured just below the bulge and using 4 embedded nails as a guide. 6 stems emerge from a 15' break of crown. Hollow bole with one basal cavity and a large internal stem of 2' +
View towards Box Hill as you emerge down through dense scrub and box, The following yews are found either side of this cl						
1588253399	Male	18	7	5.664	Root crown	On the north side and hidden amongst a stand of box this hollow yew and with much white wood, major badger sett amongst the root structure with two embedded nails. One of a few yews that has not been 'dressed' or tidied up.
1587853332	Female	15	3	4.648	Root crown	On the south side completely hidden within a stand of box this yew with a bulbous bole with 5 main stems.
1588953258	Male	11	3	3.429	1'	Two yew close together and measured at 1' from the top of the slope which was also the root crown. The larger of the two was hollowing and evidence of new wood starting to cover the old
		8	2	2.489	1'	Second of the two yews
1584053328	Male	18	5	5.613	2'	3 remaining stems with 4 on the ground plus large side limb missing, evidence of hollowing. Privett Hawk moth observed on the lower bole.
1583253324		15	10	4.826	Root crown	This tree grows close to a very large fallen yew which had a 6' 6" dia (20' plus). Much bulbous white wood with new growth evident, Unable to determine sex
Heading back up the slope to the main path						
1579953317	Male	13	8	4.166	1'	These trees were recorded separately as during the visit evidence of seeds were found close to the smaller tree and evidence of pollen sacs were found close to the larger which in turn had much of the outer bole missing.
	Female	10	10	3.302	6"	It could be the seeds found where from bird droppings so another visit late in the year may be required to check for arils, or not.
1581853303						Not measured
1581753271	Female	21	4	6.502	Ground	Hollow and with two basal cavities, 10 stems
1579253259	Female	10	2	3.099	1' 6"	Group of 3 with similar girths
1578953243	Male	12	1	3.683	Ground	Measured from the top of the slope.
1580753205	Female	18	9	5.715	Root crown	Impressive maiden with the height recorded as 94% of 18M (17Mtrs). 6 embedded nails starting at the root crown (top of slope). Large basal cavity but no internal stem noted.
1579153161	Male	18	6	5.639	Root crown	Two main areas of growth, much decay
1579453152		9	8	2.946	1'	Grows close to the above
1580953156	Female	20	11	6.375	Ground	Measured level with the path so to miss various side branches and protrusions
1580353135	Female	11	9	3.581	1'	New wood starting to cover the white wood flow
1578653124	Male	15	4	4.674	1'	Twiggy lower growth
1581553125	Male	11	4	3.454	Root crown	Hollow and with some fine arial roots
1582053124	Female	20	11	6.375	6"	Tape followed the angle of the slope where 3 nails mark the height.
1582053124	Female	14		4.267	Root crown	One large basal cavity and some internal growth
1581653103	Female	15	5	4.699	6"	
1582353091	Male	21		6.401	Ground	Two large cavities reveal some fine internal growth. A bulbous 4' bole with at least 13 stems emerging.
1581353081	Male	12	6	3.810	Root crown	5 main stems from a 10' break of crown. At least 12 succesful layerings noted although host branches have withered
1507152954	Female	8	11	2.718	Root crown	The last yew of note to be found on this visit.

A further site visit recorded these additional yews growing close to the path at the bottom of the slope, on the edge of fields.

Grid Loc (TQ)	Sex	Girth			Height measured	Comments
		Ft	Ins	Mtrs		
<b>The following yews can be found close to the bottom path that runs close to the field edge</b>						
1593453163	Female	9	10	2.997	14"	A heaved yew alongside the path, 2 nails embedded at this height
<b>All remaining yews are found on the upward slope as you head south</b>						
15890652947	Male	17	9	5.410	Root crown	The largest yew found with 5 stems emerging from a short bole. Hollow with a large internal root, at least two of the stems have rotted.
1587852937	Female	11		3.353	Root crown	Maiden, with a similar yew growing close
1586052951	Female	8	4	2.540	Root crown	Nice root system
1584552910	Female	9	4	2.845	Root crown	One succesful healthy layer, host branch has died away.
				0.000		Twin trunk and not measured



TQ1581353354 F 21' 6" at root crown  
Short bole with two basal cavities through which internal stems can be viewed.



TQ1581453343 M 18' 8" at 1'  
New growth over dead wood.



TQ1585853374 M 8' 11" at 1'



TQ1585853367      F      15' 7" at 1' or root crown  
6 stems emerge from a 15' break of crown. Hollow bole with one basal cavity and a large internal stem of over 2' girth.



View towards Box Hill as you emerge down through dense scrub and box. The following yews are found either side of this clearing.



TQ1588253399      M      18' 7" at root crown  
On the north side and hidden amongst a stand of box this hollow yew with much white wood.



TQ1587853332 F 15' 3" at root crown  
On the south side, completely hidden within a stand of box. A bulbous bole and 5 main stems.



TQ1588953258 M 11' 3" and 8' 2" at 1'  
Two yews close together and measured at 1' from the top of the slope which was also the root crown. The larger of the two was hollowing with evidence of new wood starting to cover the old.



TQ1584053328 M 18' 5" at 2'  
3 remaining stems with 4 on the ground plus large side limb missing, evidence of hollowing. Privet Hawk moth observed on the lower bole.





TQ1583253324 15' 10" at root crown

This tree grows close to a very large fallen yew which had a 6' 6" dia (20' plus). Much bulbous white wood with new growth evident. Unable to determine sex.



TQ1579953317 13' 8" and 10' 10" at 1'

Back on the top path these yews where measured as two individuals. The larger at the top of the slope was hollowing.



TQ1581753271 F 21' 4" at ground  
Hollow and with two basal cavities, 10 stems



TQ1578953243 M 12' 1" top of slope



TQ1580753205 F 18' 9" at root crown  
Impressive maiden with its height recorded (Sunto Clinometer) as 94% of 18M (17Mtrs). basal cavity but no internal stem noted.



TQ1579153161 M 18' 6" at root crown  
Two main areas of growth, much decay



1580953156 F 20' 11" at the ground  
Measured level with the path so to miss various side branches and protrusions



TQ1580353135

F

11' 9" at 1'



TQ1581553125

M

11' 4" at root crown



TQ1578653124

M

15' 4" at 1'



TQ1582053124

F

20' 11" at 6"

Tape followed the angle of the slope



TQ1582053124 F 14' at root crown  
Close to the above, one large basal cavity and some internal growth



TQ1581653103 F 15' 5" at 6"



TQ1582353091 M 21' at ground  
Two large cavities reveal some fine internal growth. A bulbous 4' bole with at least 13 stems emerging.



TQ1581353081 M 12' 6" at root crown

5 main stems from a 10' break of crown. At least 12 successful layering's noted although most branches have withered. Last of the larger yews that grow near or close to the path although there are a few that are less in girth.



The following yews grow near the base of the slope, close to the fields and can be reached by the lower path. Apart from the yew below all are much less in girth.

TQ15890652947 M 17' 9" at root crown

The largest yew found with 5 stems emerging from a short bole. Hollow with a large internal root, at least two of the stems have rotted.



TQ1587852937

F

11' at root crown



TQ1586052951

F 8' 4" at root crown



TQ1584552910

F

9' 4" at root crown

One successful healthy layer, host branch has died away.





Trees in a Wood, Norbury Park. Amelia Long (Lady Farnborough 1772-1837) date unknown.  
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