

Hampshire Yews – History of the Queenwood Site

J.C.Loudon (1783/1843) described 'An avenue 414 yards long, consisting of 162 yew trees, which are supposed to be about 200 years old. They average 30 ft. high, with trunks about 2 ft. in diameter at 2 ft. from the ground; and heads about 30 ft. in diameter. Another avenue planted about 160 years ago, and 400 yards long, consists of 120 trees, averaging about 24 ft. high, with trunks about 2 ft. in diameter. The width of both avenues is rather more than 30 ft. There are about 100 more yew trees on the Tytherley estate, but they are of smaller dimensions than those already noticed'.

Edward III gave the Manor of East Tytherley to his wife, Queen Philippa in 1335. She moved her court from London to escape the Black Death and remained there until her death in 1369. In the 15th century the manor was known as Queens Court.

In 1654, the Tytherley Manor was sold to Francis Rolle and remained in the Rolle family until 1801. The park, including traces of a former deer park, was landscaped by Denys Rolle (1746-1797) in the informal manner. In 1801 the estate was sold.

Queenswood Farm as it was known on maps dating from the 19th century sits south of the Roman Road from Old Sarum to Winchester. In 1839 the farm and adjoining land was leased to the social reformer Robert Owen (1771-1858).

Robert Owen was known as the 'Father of Co-operation' and of British socialism. He was born in Newtown, in Wales and worked in London and Manchester before becoming the manager of the mills of the New Lanark Twist Company in 1800. While in New Lanark he developed his theory of character formation, his ideas on the education of children and the improvement of working conditions - such as the reduction of working hours and the introduction of sick pay.

The land was in the north of the Lockerley estate on the site of Queen Wood. Owen built a large H-shaped three-storey building (Fig 1) of brick and flint to the west of the present Queenwood Farm in 1842 and named it Harmony Hall. It was to be a pioneering project in community living.



Figure 1.

Subsequent to the lease being granted one of the first visitors in 1839, G.A.Fleming recorded in the Paper 'New Moral World':

"We again entered the avenue, and after proceeding southward along it for some time, we made a slight turn to the left, and were suddenly brought in view of a scene which far eclipsed all we had hitherto witnessed. It was a natural alley of yew trees — the straight and polished stems of which shoot up to a considerable height, and then throw their branches across the road in such a manner as to form a close resemblance to the aisle of a Cathedral. It is scarcely possible to convey in words a correct idea of that beautiful walk; the perspective effect is most striking. . . . Many aged and picturesque Yews are scattered over the surface of the estate, and will afford, under their ample shade, the most favourable opportunities for erecting seats and other conveniences either for study or recreation."

The following was part of a letter sent to the Morning Chronicle in December 1842 describing a visit from Salisbury to Harmony Hall by one Alexander Somerville:

"There is some fine wood on the ground, and an avenue of fine old yews, which, for beauty and extent, is perhaps not equalled in any other part of England. The community intend converting a portion of that avenue into a summer ball-room. Adjoining, are large numbers of full-grown trees, resembling the shape and size of the main-mast of a man-of-war."

The co-operative project failed and by 1845 the pioneers were bankrupted and the Owenite Socialist movement collapsed. As a final note the Ex-General Secretary of the Owenite Rational Society, William Galpin, set up a small community of 'sacred socialists' on the adjoining Little Bentley Farm, where the mainly ex-colonists lived a vegetarian life. This experiment was also finished by 1846.

The estate was then let to the Society of Friends who set up a Quaker school in 1847 under the headship of George Edmondson. The buildings were renamed Queenwood College.

This too was a pioneering establishment, dedicated to science teaching and including the new school subject of physics. In its heyday up to 1855 the school had several notable scientists on its staff. The college remained in use until 1896 and burnt down in 1902. The buildings were completely demolished in 1904, and the site reverted to permanent agricultural use. Queenwood Farm, which had been converted from the original cottages for schoolmasters, survived while no trace of the college remains.



Miln's map of 1791 (Figure 2) indicates a long avenue of trees stretching south from the Roman Road, through Queens Wood and on to Tytherley Manor.

It could be suggested that during the landscaping most of this avenue was lost and re-routed as can be seen in later OS maps from 1840 (Figure 3).

Interestingly on the 1874 map, the map reference is directly made to Queenwood avenue yew trees.

Figure 2.

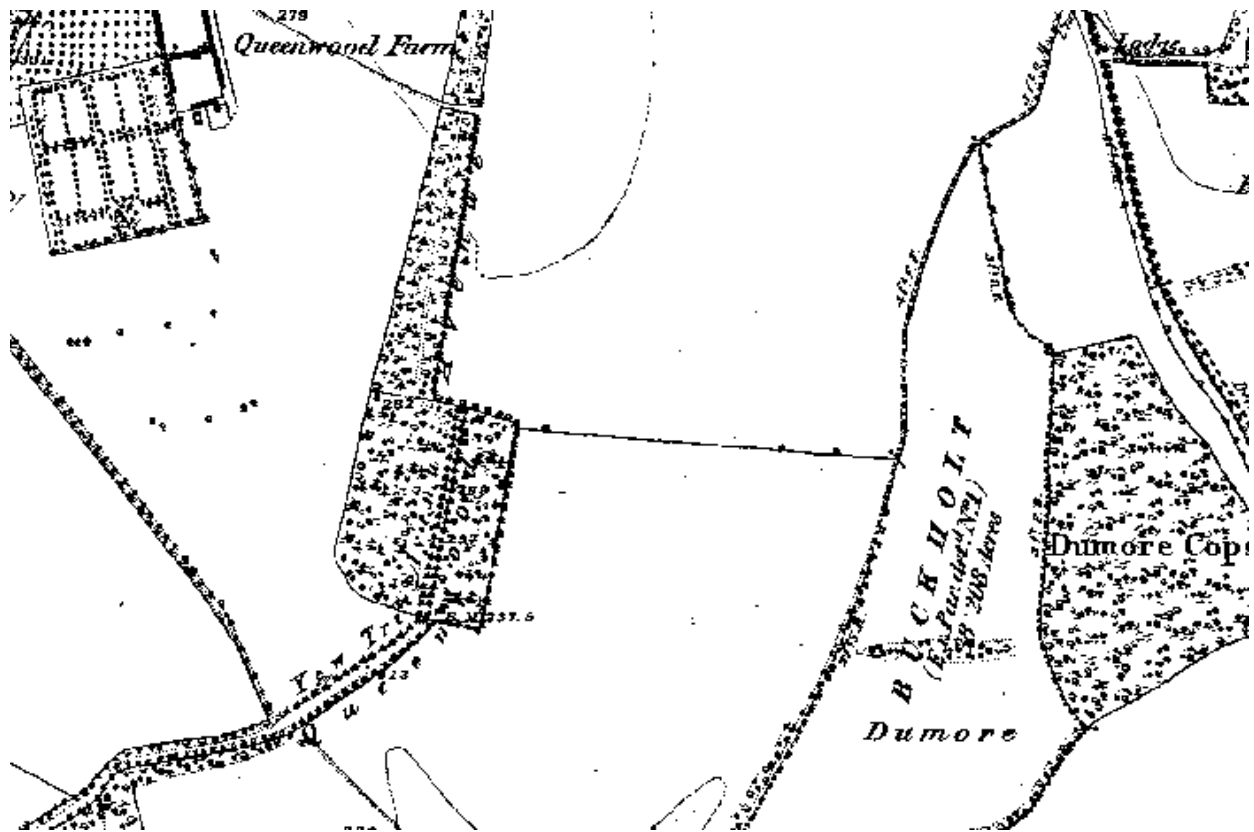


Figure 3.



The remains of this once grand avenue is on private land with no public access. It comprises just 54 trees, equally spaced either side of the track. Almost all are around 9' to 10' in girth with just a few closer to 6' to 7'. This might indicate a replanting of trees that were damaged or died.

The owner explained that in the 1987 hurricane a lot of the yews snapped or were blown over; some of the stumps are still there. He planted over a hundred yews just after the storm and these grow on both sides of the avenue on the outside of the current avenue.



It was also explained to me that the trees were very tall and had the crowns reduced significantly after the storms, but they are all growing well.

At the end of the track he has also planted further yew and cypress trees to replace yew trees that had been cut down over 35 years ago; the stumps are still visible.



On a revisit to the private site I measured the distance between all the yews that were growing. The distance between the stumps and the depressions in the ground where trees had been blown over was six paces in all instances.

The main avenue containing 54 trees also contains 21 stumps and many depressions in the ground. The length of this part of the avenue is 300 paces which would indicate an original figure of 100 yews.



The second part of the avenue that had been cut down has 27 stumps and many gaps. The distance between the stumps is the same six paces. This part of the avenue is 200 paces which would equal 66 trees. Adding the two indicates 166 trees in the original avenue which is close to J.C. Loudon's original count of 162 trees.

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References:

Parks & Gardens UK entry on Queenwood College.

British History on line for East Tytherley.

Figure 1. Robert Owen – a biography (1907) as held by New York Public Library (Status – Not in copyright).

Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium by Edward Royle (1998) – Page 82 shows a sketch by Edward Finch of the yew avenue and is available in Winchester Reference Library – Shelf Location 335.12 search room.

Figure 2. From old Hampshire mapped.

Figure 3. Copyright © 2010 University of London & History of Parliament Trust - All rights reserved.