

Marker and boundary yew



A typical countryside marker yew (Photo: Paul Wood)

It is 30 years since the publication of Andrew Morton's *The Trees of Shropshire*. His chapter devoted to the yew not only listed its many remarkable churchyard specimens but also dealt with trees found in the countryside. It spoke of 'remnant lines of yew trees' marking old routes and boundaries and of 'yews growing alone in fields'. Because of the difficulty of access to many of these non-churchyard sites, we know remarkably little about individual trees, their numbers or their possible ages.

Tip of the iceberg

That is until the arrival of Paul Wood in early 2015. Paul lives in the mid Welsh borderlands and has walked and worked in this area for more than 35

years. With a background in both farming and archaeology he has always been aware of the presence of yews in the countryside, whether in a field or the garden of a 17th century cottage. Over the years he has noted down the locations of yews seen on his travels and is now beginning to visit and document them. His first year's contribution to yew tree knowledge is staggering, having documented no fewer than 30 new veterans (yews with a likely age of 500+). These findings he describes as 'the tip of the iceberg'. To date most of his finds appear to either mark long established routes leading to a church or to a lost church site. Here are a few examples of his discoveries.

Marking the route

The ancient yew in Hope Bagot churchyard receives many visitors. Beneath the tree there emerges a spring whose waters have long been reputed to be a cure for eye ailments. It was known that several yews existed on the lane boundary leading towards the church, but when Paul examined these he discovered no fewer than four specimens that have probably been in situ for five or more centuries, marking the route to both church and spring. The Hope Bagot site has long been considered unique in respect of its many marker trees, but this is no longer the case. Ten miles south of Hope Bagot, at Stoke St Milborough in a lane opposite a sacred well, are found three veteran yews, while in a Herefordshire lane leading to Canon Pyon church there is also a line of three veterans.



Left - Yew at Farlow Glebe, Shropshire, marking the site of a Norman church (Photo: Paul Wood)

Right - Yew marking a lane to the church at Canon Pyon, Herefordshire (Photo: Paul Wood)





A marker yew at Hope Bagot, Shropshire (Photo: Paul Wood)

The Pilgrims Way

One of the paths leading to Munslow church is an old bridleway called the 'Munslow Deans'. This path has in the past been referred to as 'The Pilgrims Way', an old route from Wenlock Abbey to Hereford. Two miles north of the church, at a hill called the 'Speller', is the site of a Middle Ages gathering for the local moot or court. Morton suggested that 'further investigating into this area could prove rewarding' and to date Paul Wood has discovered four veterans close to the church, with many more in the area still to be recorded.



Yew trees marking The Pilgrims Way in Munslow Deans, Shropshire (Photo: Paul Wood)



Marking a sunken lane at Birds Holding, Stowe, Shropshire (Photo: Paul Wood)

Hollow ways

At Farlow Glebe is a church built in the 1800s. Since it incorporates masonry from the original Norman church it was perhaps not surprising to find an old yew a short distance down the hill from the present church, no doubt marking the site of the original building. This site is also the focus of many tracks, hollow ways and lanes, and on one of these, Glebe Farm Lane, are found several more old yews.

Sunken lane

In Stowe, a few hundred yards west of the church, is an area known as Birds Holding. Here a veteran yew grows in a sunken lane. Is it a lone marker tree, or will it eventually be discovered to be one of many that lead to this remote church site?

For more information and photographs of these trees and sites, as well as other sites recorded by Paul Wood, go to:

www.ancient-yew.org

Information is found on the 'List of Yew Sites' and 'What's New' webpages.