

THE FARRINGDON YEW - 2012 to 2026

Peter Norton

The Farringdon yew is one of only 50+ yews given the status of Ancient-Exceptional. It is seen here in 2012 and 2016 from an angle that hides its fragmented nature and gives an insight into its appearance centuries ago. It was recorded as having a 30ft girth as long ago as 1768 when it was noted by Gilbert White. One source from the past apparently noted the tree as having a 'twisted core', but I have been unable to find this source. The yew is now completely hollow.



Before the snowstorm of 2019 it consisted of 4 leaning sections held together in places by various bits of cabling and tie rods. New growth occurred on the outer edges of the tree and the crown looking green and healthy.

The weight of snow from the January storm caused one of the smaller sections of the outer shell to collapse across the main path. To stabilize this, a temporary wooden X structure was erected under this section, successfully supporting the branch.



During a visit in May 2020 I noted three wooden poles supporting the various sections of upright growth along with the temporary X section which was continuing to support the one fallen section of the outer trunk.



Meetings were held by interested and concerned parties during 2020 to raise funds in order that suitably qualified arboricultural consultants and engineers could be employed. They would devise a program of work that could be agreed upon by all to ensure the continued safety and health of this important yew.

Yew Tree Campaign hits its target



The campaign, to raise funds for the construction of a support for our Ancient Yew Tree has been a huge success. In July 2022, the fund raising campaign achieved its target and work on the construction of a bespoke support structure is now underway and expected to be installed in September.

Over the past two and a half years we have raised over £13,000.00 thanks to the generosity of Farringdon residents, friends of the village, The Woodland Trust, East Hampshire District Council, the Syder Foundation Trust, The South Downs national Park, the Parochial Church Council, Farringdon Parish Council and visitors to the church.

Arriving at a design of structure that will have the minimum of impact on the tree has been challenging. Several proposals were submitted during the period of the campaign, not all of which were considered to be suitable. We have had to strike a balance between supporting the existing boughs and hollow trunk and ensuring the future growth will not be impeded. In addition we have had to take into account the beauty of the churchyard and the proximity of graves surrounding the tree. The design is intended to be both functional and sympathetic to its location.

The proposed installation had to blend in with the intrinsic beauty of the churchyard along with the closeness of the graves and the future growth of the yew plus the continuous support of the various yew segments. By Sept 2022 the final design had been agreed upon and was described as being both functional and sympathetic to the location and ready to be installed.

I visited during January and March 2023 to photograph the highly complex series of cables, cradles, and tubular props all designed to be self-supporting from a central tubular fixing point. The three wooden poles from 2020 had been removed but the wooden X section from 2019 was still in place.





It is evident that some serious time went into the thought behind the design. It is a recognition that our most ancient trees represent a natural living cultural heritage, a heritage that is equivalent to our great churches and castles, and should be protected for all as long as possible.



2026: Just over three years since my last visit, and the tree does not look in good health. The crown appears thin, and one of the four main sections of this ancient tree, which splits into two main branches, appears dead, with the skeletal remains highly visible in the photographs. This was also noted in 2023 but now appears more pronounced.



The notice board

The Farringdon Yew Tree is classified as “Ancient-Exceptional” and at over 3,000 years old, is regarded as one of the ten oldest trees in the United Kingdom. This tree pre-dates Christianity and the Roman Invasion of Britain by several hundred years. Its place in the history of this county cannot be underestimated.

In 2019 a campaign was set up to raise funds for a scientific study of the tree and to maintain its stability and its continued growth for generations to come. In July 2022 the campaign reached its target of £13,000 and in October 2022 a bracing system was installed to support the tree.

The Parochial Church Council would like to thank the following for their generous contributions: The Woodland Trust, East Hampshire District Council, The Syder Foundation Trust, The South Downs National Park, Farringdon Parish Council, visitors to the village and the residents of Farringdon, to whom this tree means so much.

Please consider making a donation for the future maintenance of this unique tree.

In France, most of the significant churchyard yews have a descriptive notice board acknowledging the presence of a unique and significant tree. In England and Wales it is rare to find such recognition. While there is no evidence to support an age of 3,000 years or proof that it pre-dates Christianity, it is one of only 20 + yews in the UK with a girth above 10 metres.

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