

WDVTS record 554: Mill Lane, Earley; SU 76280 70720; OAK - *Quercus* sp.

## THE "STARLING TREE" OF EARLEY

It seemed to make sense to wander down and take a photo or two of the so-called Starling tree in Mill Lane, so herewith are a couple that I took this afternoon. And yes, there was actually a starling roosting in it (!), but a far cry from the days when there

would be literally hundreds of them gathered in late afternoon, ready to all take off at once to join the gargantuan flock that formed at dusk and flew off to the north. The racket from the tree was tremendous, and it was of course a bit risky walking underneath! It's hard to believe that this was once such a



lovely peaceful rural spot, and the tree was part of a hedgerow by a ditch that formed the boundary of the adjacent field. A hundred yards or so before the tree, (behind where I was standing when I took the photo), was a sort of lay-by on the

left where gypsies would sometimes park up for a few days. On the next big tree on the left, roughly opposite the parked car, was fixed a sign saying "Danger - Cattle crossing"! On the right of where I'm standing was a dense, often marshy thicket beloved of birds such as wrens, whitethroats and blackcaps. It was near here that I had what was probably my best ever boyhood day for ornithological discoveries - a whitethroat's nest with three eggs, which was about a foot off the ground in the low bramble adjacent to the ditch that was on the left of the lane, and further on towards the mill a spotted flycatcher's nest with five eggs, in a crevice in the remains of an old retaining wall, also in the ditch. In the distance in the photo, roughly where that house is, was a barn in which a number of swallows nested every year. It burnt down after, I strongly suspect, some delinquent threw a firework inside - I'd heard children playing with bangers as I walked along side the river about a quarter of a mile away.



*Alan Broodbank ~ June 2008*

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