



Wokingham Borough Veteran Tree Survey COMPLETION REPORT 2025



This report is a brief summary of the 2006 to 2024 veteran tree survey by Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association (WDVTA)

It is intended to be an addendum to the 10th Anniversary report published in 2017.

There is a more detailed online version of this report on the WDVTA website.

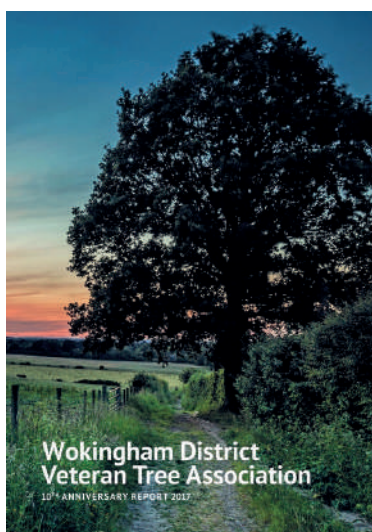
HOW THE SURVEY BEGAN

In 2005 the sound of a chainsaw and the felling of a fine mature English oak marked the loss of yet another well-loved veteran tree in Wokingham Town. It was the impetus for the founding of WDVTA in 2006/7 as a response to a period of increasing threats to old trees in Wokingham.

In 2006 a generous grant from the Wokingham Society allowed the initial organisation of a survey of veteran trees in Wokingham Town. In 2007 this was expanded to a District/Borough-wide survey funded by a National Lottery grant with contributions and support from Wokingham Borough Council and Town and Parish Councils across the borough.



Measuring a maiden oak at 1.5m above ground level



10TH ANNIVERSARY REPORT

Following the publication of a report in 2012 on the veteran trees in Wokingham Town, WDVTA published a further 10th Anniversary Report in 2017 charting the progress of veteran tree surveying by volunteers from across the whole of Wokingham Borough. All 17 towns and parishes in the borough were described individually.

The report highlighted the establishment of a borough-wide database and website, the production of a quarterly e-newsletter 'Tree Watch' and membership of The Tree Council tree warden scheme, as well as a variety of other activities such as talks, training, walks and visits.

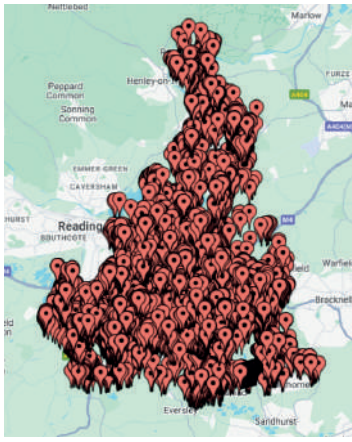
WHAT IS A VETERAN TREE?

Veteran trees have reached full maturity and show signs of ageing, such as cavities and bark loss, all good habitats for wildlife. The age at which this occurs varies with species – an oak will take far more years than a silver birch.

A tree's status is indicated by its girth: an oak with a girth of 4m could be over 200 years old. Our recorded trees are classified by the Ancient Tree Inventory as notable, veteran or ancient.



Veteran oak in The Coombes, Barkham - Record 7666



Map data © 2025 Google

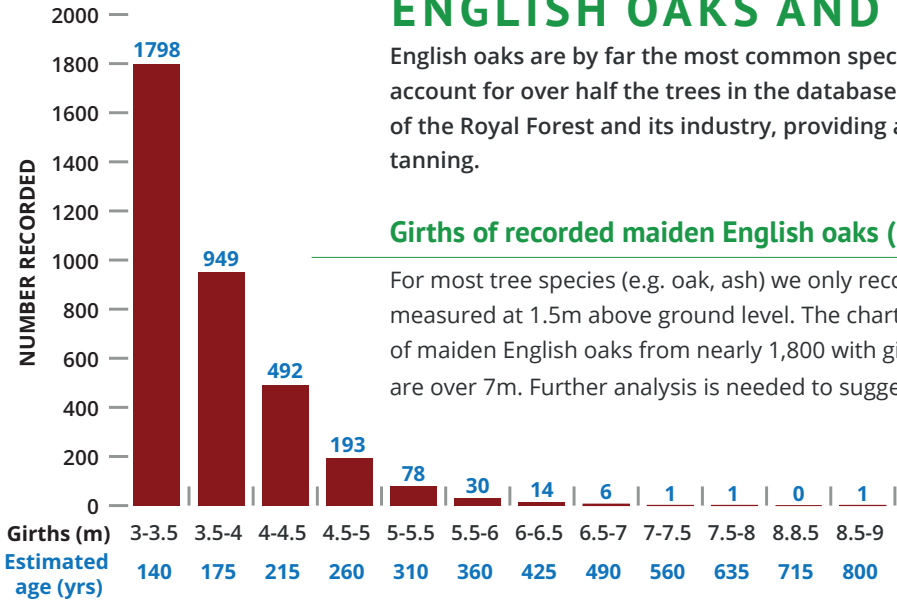
WEBSITE MAP OF ALL RECORDED TREES

By 2025 more than 140 volunteers had surveyed, recorded and photographed over 8,500 notable, veteran and ancient trees. These are mapped and detailed on our website.

Every recorded tree in all the borough's 17 towns and parishes appear on this map and further details about each tree can be accessed by clicking on the relevant icon.

The information includes when the tree was recorded, its grid reference, girth and condition when recorded, as well as photographs and any subsequent updates.

Our data has been sent to Wokingham Borough Council, the Ancient Tree Inventory via the Woodland Trust, the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre and the National Biodiversity Network.



ENGLISH OAKS AND SURVEY SUMMARY

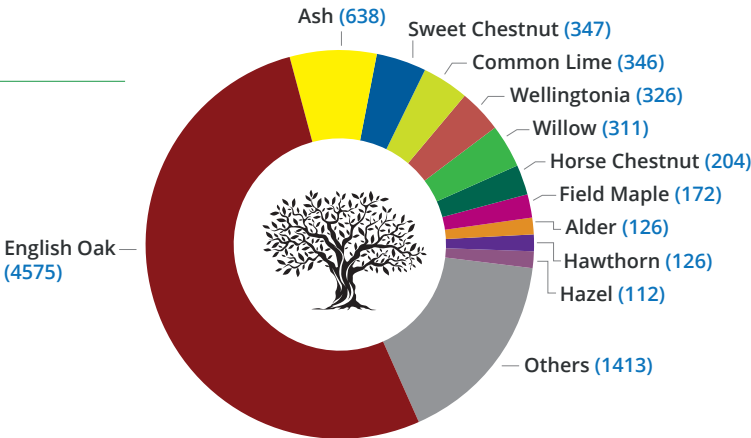
English oaks are by far the most common species of veteran tree found across the borough. They account for over half the trees in the database and may reflect the history of Wokingham as part of the Royal Forest and its industry, providing a source of wood for building and oak bark for tanning.

Girths of recorded maiden English oaks (3m – 9m)

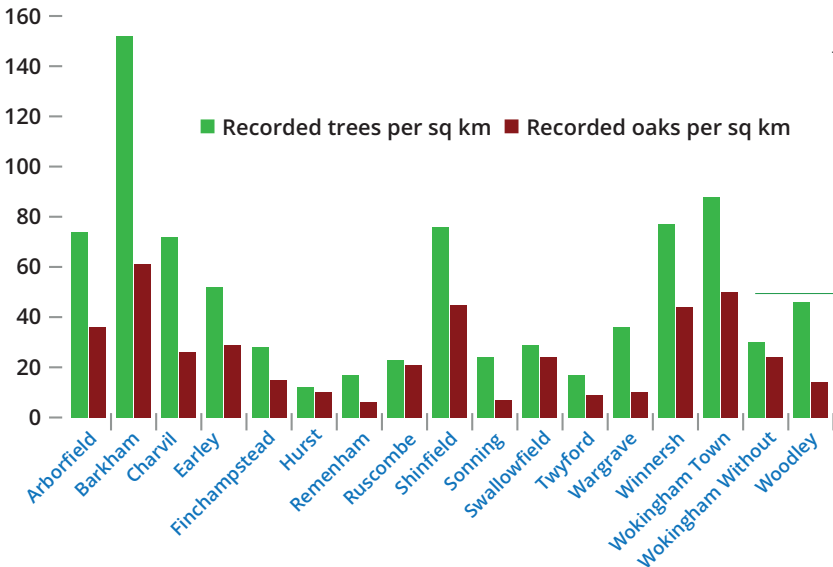
For most tree species (e.g. oak, ash) we only recorded trees with a girth greater than 3m, measured at 1.5m above ground level. The chart shows there is a sharp decline in the numbers of maiden English oaks from nearly 1,800 with girths between 3.0 and 3.5m to just 3 oaks that are over 7m. Further analysis is needed to suggest reasons for this decline.

Species recorded

Other species recorded include natives (such as ash, field maple and hawthorn), trees used for agricultural and industrial purposes (such as sweet chestnut and crack willow), and decorative and exotic species (including common limes and Wellingtonias planted in parklands and gardens.



This chart shows the numbers of recorded trees by species. 'Others' represents species with fewer than 100 recorded trees.



Density of recorded trees by Parish/Town

With the completion of the survey we are able to calculate the density of all recorded trees and all recorded oaks for each parish and town. The variation across the seventeen parishes/towns is significant and further analysis would be useful to identify the reasons for the marked differences.

REFLECTIONS ON VOLUNTEER TREE SURVEYING

In responses to a questionnaire in 2025 on their tree surveying experiences, many volunteers reported great pleasure in having spent time in the countryside in the company of like-minded people.

They enjoyed learning more about old trees and how to identify and record them using modern technology. Many were fascinated to discover the connections between veteran trees and local history.

In spite of obstacles such as scrambling through brambles, nettles and ditches, and the occasional refusal of access, they found most local people were interested in, and supportive of, what they were doing.

Surveyors reported that their experiences significantly increased their awareness of the aesthetic, cultural and environmental importance of veteran trees in local communities.

As with all sections, there is a more detailed review of the survey responses in the online version of this report.



Surveying sweet chestnuts in Fox Hill woods, Wokingham Town

SOME KEY OBSERVATIONS



The Walter Oak in Winnersh – Record 5297 – the 5,000th tree recorded

- Veteran trees, and especially oaks, are very significant in the local economic and social history and contribute significantly to the borough's attractive environment.
- There are many contemporary pressures on old trees including development projects, proximity of roads and houses, diseases and public ignorance, as well as from the storms, floods, droughts and increased temperatures from climate change.
- Surveying veteran trees is a powerful tool for promoting interest in, and understanding of, the ecology and biology of trees.

- Veteran trees are significantly important hosts to a wide variety of flora and fauna - both the visible and the microscopic.
- Trees are invaluable for community health and well-being. They give us oxygen, store carbon, absorb pollutants and help reduce stress levels and blood pressure.
- Wooded areas encourage a feeling of community, so people can come together for activities such as walking, bird watching and nature conservation.
- Woodlands provide space for children to play and find interest and a sense of adventure in natural settings.



Fox in a crack willow by the Emm Brook, Wokingham Town - Record 264



Felled tree near Ye Olde Leathern Bottel in Wokingham Town - Record 3207

THE LOSS OF VETERAN TREES

We noticed the continual loss of veteran trees throughout the 20 years of the survey. Of the 8,696 trees recorded, 273 were dead when surveyed. Most of these were stumps, but 13 were recorded as dead and standing, with 2 being dead and fallen.

A further 258 trees, living when recorded, have been lost since the surveying began in 2006. Reasons include natural decline, storm damage, disease, safety concerns and development, both legal and illegal.

These lost trees are just those we have been informed about. Sadly there will be others lost across the borough that we don't know about because we have not systematically checked all recorded trees.

Graffiti on the stump after felling, written by a concerned resident, not a WDVTA member: "This took c380 years to grow, hours to fell, a home to many RIP"

ACTION NEEDED TO FOSTER THE VETERAN TREES OF THE FUTURE

The loss of so many old trees over the last 20 years from Wokingham Borough is a warning that future generations will not be able to enjoy all of the many health and environmental benefits which such trees bring - unless action is taken urgently. It will take at least 150 years for any newly planted trees to reach veteran status, but there are trees growing today which could become veterans in much shorter time if they were identified and protected.



A young tree rescued from a Cantley Park hedge, Wokingham Town

Volunteers saw many of these younger notable trees across the borough in hedges, woodlands and parks, but they did not record them as their girth was a little less than 3m. A project to nurture these trees to become the veterans of the future would bring many benefits to the borough.

In the last 50 years many hedges as well as trees within hedges have been lost. The Tree Council encourages us to advocate for the planting of new trees in hedges as well as rescuing potential trees from within existing hedges.



An early mature oak on a footpath off White Horse Lane, Finchampstead

THE FUTURE OF THE SURVEY

Whilst the veteran tree survey was closed in 2024, the information will continue to be accessible on the WDVTA website. The data can be used to support the protection of old trees and inform planning decisions. It also provides information for environmental research in the area.

WDVTA is now linked with The Tree Council tree warden scheme and voluntary tree-related activities will continue. The WDVTA quarterly newsletter '**Tree Watch**' is sent to all WDVTA members and all issues are on the website.

For more information, general enquires or to join the association go to our website:



wdvta.org.uk