Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association

10th Anniversary Report 2017
This Report marks the tenth anniversary of the launch of Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association (WDVTA) in 2007.

It summarises our activities and achievements and shares this milestone with our many supporters, members and the wider Wokingham community. It also outlines how the WDVTA’s core activities and membership will develop to address the environmental challenges facing the Borough of Wokingham.

Full documentation of our town and parish survey, along with more photographs, detailed survey results and maps can be found on our website wdvta.org.uk

We would like to thank our members, all of whom are volunteers, for their dedication and achievements over the past 10 years. Grateful acknowledgements are listed on page 23.

WDVTA looks forward to the next ten years, welcoming new members, helping Wokingham to protect its existing veterans and promoting the planting of saplings to become the veterans of the future.

The Anniversary Report Team
January 2017

What is a veteran tree?
Veteran trees have reached full maturity and show signs of ageing characterised by a number of features such as cavities and bark loss, which provide a good habitat for wildlife. The age at which this occurs varies with species—an oak tree will take many more years to mature than a silver birch. A veteran tree’s status is indicated by its girth; an oak with a girth of 4m could be well over 200 years old.

Master Record Number
Many trees mentioned in this Report are referenced with a Master Record Number (MRN). This is a unique identifier assigned by the survey and can be used to find trees via the map on our website. Please take a look—and if you find your favourite tree is missing, let us know. We always welcome corrections and updates to our records.

As a tree’s girth is an indicator of its age, we have added the girth in metres alongside some of the MRN references.
**HOW WE DEVELOPED**

The sound of a chainsaw and the felling of a fine mature English oak in 2005 provided the impetus for the founding of WDVTA. This marked the loss of yet another well-loved veteran tree in Wokingham Town.

**Wokingham Town survey**

A map of these old trees was needed. The Wokingham Society made a generous grant of £10,000 to commission a database, recruit and train volunteer surveyors and begin a survey.

The first training course was held in St Paul’s Parish Rooms in Wokingham. Recruits learned their skills on a splendid veteran English oak (MRN 177) in the churchyard and oaks in Joel Park. By the end of 2006 over 300 veteran trees had been recorded across the town.

Much was learned in that first year. Recording trees accurately is complex and the technology then was limited. Volunteers need support when surveying but, when teamed up with like-minded people, they enjoy the experience and accomplish more.

**Surveying across the District**

Town and Parish Councils across the District were invited to contribute funds towards the survey. A properly constituted organisation was needed to attract funding for an accurate and comprehensive survey. In September 2006 a public meeting established a steering group to form the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association. The Inaugural General Meeting was held on January 10th 2007 at Dinton Pastures Country Park.

The new committee recruited coordinators for each town and parish, organised training and obtained an award of £9,250 from the National Lottery Fund in September 2007. This enabled the acquisition of technical expertise, equipment and the restructuring of the database. WDVTA was launched.

**Expanding our scope**

In 2012 we joined the Tree Council’s Tree Warden scheme to broaden our concern to include all trees. Tree Warden activities are now a major part of what we do.

**OUR AIMS**

We aim to encourage the community to help protect and conserve Wokingham’s veteran trees and raise awareness of their locations and their environmental and historical importance.

We want to promote the care and nurture of all trees by supporting local projects, working with environmental interest groups and helping to develop biodiversity action plans.

**“To be without trees would, in the most literal way, to be without our roots.”**

Richard Mabey

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**TIMELINE**

- **2005**
  - Manor Road play area oak felled.

- **2006**
  - Survey started in Wokingham Town, then whole District. Steering group appointed at public meeting.

- **2007**
  - Implemented revised database structure.
  - WDVTA Inaugural General Meeting. Awards for All National Lottery grant received.

- **2009**
  - Survey completed in Wokingham Town, Remenham and Ruscombe.

- **2010**
  - Survey completed in Twyford.

- **2011**
  - Survey completed in Barkham.

- **2012**
  - Tree Warden scheme launched.
  - First edition of Tree Watch.
  - Publication of ‘Trees in Wokingham Town’.

- **2013**
  - Jubilee Tree Planting Project completed.

- **2014**
  - Survey completed in Earley and Shinfield.

- **2016**
  - Website Launched.

- **2017**
  - Tenth Anniversary Report published.
WHAT WE DO

SURVEY

The survey of veteran and significant trees is at the heart of the Association. A coordinator in each parish or town organises the survey and collects and collates the results. Our Veteran Tree Survey Handbook describes how we survey trees and the data that we record.

For most tree species (e.g. oak, ash) we only record trees with a girth greater than 3m, measured at a height of 1.5m. Some species do not grow to this size (e.g. hawthorn, field maple) so for these we use a smaller girth criterion of 1m. As well as recording data we aim to have a photograph of each tree surveyed.

We can never be sure that we have recorded every eligible tree and surveying is particularly challenging in woodland because of the large number of trees and the difficulty of assigning individual coordinates.

Surveying trees on private land requires permission to survey. The girths of some trees have been estimated where we have been unable to get permission to survey. When a large tree is visible from the road, it is particularly challenging in woodland areas.

In 2011, after the completion of the Wokingham Town survey, we ran a verification exercise on a sample of records to assess the accuracy of our early data and especially to refine grid references when less accurate GPS devices had been used in the early years. For a tree to be verified it must have all its details checked by someone other than the original surveyor. We then refine the data and add a photograph where one is missing from the record. We were gratified to find that the accuracy of our original data was good.

In 2013 we decided to set up a record of all commemorative and memorial trees in the Borough, separate from the veteran tree database. These records are less rigorous and the criteria for inclusion are more informal. Groups of trees as well as individual trees can be recorded.

We currently assign the trees to a number of categories including Commemorative, Memorial, Significant hedges, Significant historically, and Unusual species. The information for these non-veteran but important trees is available through an interactive map on our website.

In some areas we have been unable to get permission to survey. The girths of some trees have been estimated where we couldn’t get access to measure them.

All trees recorded are shown on an interactive map on our website[i]. As well as photos, some of the records have extra information attached as documents or web-links. The database and photos are sent to Wokingham Borough Council (WBHC), Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) and the Woodland Trust for inclusion in their Ancient Tree Hunt surveys.

OUTREACH

WDVTA has been asked to speak to many organisations such as the Campaign to Protect Rural England, The Wokingham Society, a U3A Historic Pathways group, Rotary clubs and local schools. These talks are always mutually beneficial as people tell us about trees in areas they know well, such as their history, issues arising or trees that have been lost.

We regularly put on displays at parish fêtes and Earley Green Fair where we showcase our work and welcome new members.

The Association works with parish and town councils through our network of members who act as coordinators for the survey in their local areas.

In 2014 we spoke at the Bracknell Forest Recorders Day and our Biodiversity Officer asked us to help set up a local group of tree surveyors. Following training sessions in 2015 the Bracknell Forest Veteran Tree Survey was successfully launched and we continue to liaise with them.

PUBLICATIONS

Since May 2009, we have published Tree Watch[i], a quarterly newsletter which includes articles about Association activities and items of interest about trees. This is emailed to members and all issues are available from the website.

Other publications have been produced including 4 Bearwood Tree Walk, Montague House Oriental Plane and Jubilee Avenues of Wokingham Town. When the Wokingham Town team completed their survey, their report Trees in Wokingham Town prompted the Borough’s planting of Jubilee oaks in association with WDVTA. All publications are on the website and some have been printed as leaflets.

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WEBSITE
The website was launched in 2011 to bring WDVTA's activities to a wider audience and raise public awareness of the huge contribution that trees make to Wokingham's natural heritage.

Wokingham Borough Council website has links to WDVTA and visitors often arrive at our site through this route, where the Map and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) pages have proved popular.

The most frequent Google searches bringing users to the WDVTA web pages are queries about estimating the age of trees. The most frequent topics raised via the 'Contact us' page are concerns about trees being damaged or cut down by developers or neighbours.

Through our membership network we try to reply promptly to all enquiries. These requests and responses have helped us create the FAQs.

About 70% of visitors use a desktop or laptop to access the site, with tablet users accounting for about 18% of visits and smartphone users currently about 9%. No doubt these proportions will change.

EVENTS
Events are planned under four main headings: talks, training, walks and visits.

We have appreciated talks from nationally acknowledged experts such as Jill Butler from the Woodland Trust, Ted Green the Founder President of The Ancient Tree Forum, Dr. Helen Read from Burnham Beeches, UCL dendrochronologist Dr Martin Bridge who worked on the Mary Rose and Dr Glynn Percival who updates us annually on current research on tree diseases and pests.

Training workshops have been invaluable in assisting surveyors to identify winter twigs, lichens, fungi associated with specific trees and much more.

We spend time getting to know new parts of the Borough on walks led by local members, when many lasting friendships have been formed. Wandering around Arborfield, Barkham or Wargrave reminds us of how beautiful and important our woodlands are.

Our visits have been to many exceptional places with expert guides tailoring their tour to our interest in veteran trees. Visits have included Windsor Great Park with some of Europe's oldest oaks, and Kew, to see the trees known as the 'Champions and Lions of Kew'. Parkland around our old houses such as Waltham Place locally and Blenheim Palace further afield allow us access to private areas of wonderful trees.

We sometimes arrange special events such as 'Trees in Literature', a collaboration with Wokingham Literary Society.

THE JUBILEE OAKS PROJECT
In June 2012 Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) invited WDVTA to collaborate with the officers of the Trees and Landscape team to organise the planting of 60 standard English oak trees across the Borough to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. This was a wonderful opportunity to plant English oaks in places where they could grow to their full glory and be enjoyed by future generations.

44 attractive sites across the Borough were chosen. They included public open spaces, churchyards, nature reserves, roadside verges and school grounds. Heartwood Tree Surgery was contracted to plant the trees in the winter of 2012/13 and to monitor and maintain them for five years. The trees were between 5 and 7 years old and almost 4m tall when planted. Most have grown very well, and the few that didn't, have been replaced.

Each oak has a numbered memorial plaque and has been recorded in the Woodland Trust's Royal Record. The Jubilee Tree Map on our website shows the locations of all 60 trees.

Local community groups took part in planting ceremonies for every tree during 2012/13. The first was held at WBC offices at Shute End on 24 November 2012. The ceremonies are recorded on the WDVTA website. During October 2013 there was a display at the Council's Shute End offices describing the project with photographs of all the trees and the celebratory events.

The trees have generated considerable community interest among voluntary groups and local residents. In some instances the jubilee tree planting has led to suggestions about further improvements to sites, including additional tree planting. They should give pleasure to local people for decades, perhaps even centuries, and help remind everyone of Wokingham's history as part of Windsor Forest.
The recording of Wokingham’s veteran trees was our original aim and remains at the heart of our Association. Here you can find brief information about each parish and town in the Borough together with descriptions of some of their most notable trees.

### ARBORFIELD AND NEWLAND

**Survey status**: Well underway

**Trees recorded**: 634

- **English oak**: 57%
- **Common lime**: 6%
- **Sweet chestnut**: 5%

The parish is largely rural with areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland such as Hanterton’s Copse, Pound Copse, Long Copse and part of The Coombes, where the trees are included in Tree Preservation Orders. Other wildlife sites include Arborfield Bridge Meadow, the former Bearwood Estate with its woods and lake, part of the Loddon River, Gravel Pit Wood and The Holt. The last of these, The Holt, has two outstanding English oaks (MRN 4900 and MRN 6476).

The parish owns Arborfield Park where in 1998 local groups planted 115 trees. Bearwood College (now Reddam House) has parkland supporting many fine trees including an avenue of Wellingtonia and a number of entries in the Tree Register of the British Isles (TROBI), including a Lucombe Oak (MRN 5611) and the remains of an old orchard.

There are three ancient yews in the churchyard of the ruined St Bartholomew’s Church. Two of these (MRN 2285 and MRN 2296) are in the Ancient Yew Register. Close by is a mighty horse chestnut (MRN 5252, 6.4m), thought to be the largest on Reading University land.

Wokingham Lane (a public right of way) forms a boundary with Swallowfield parish. To the south of this byway is the Bound Oak (MRN 4197), probably more than 650 years old. It has been vandalised but still survives. Details of many of these trees may be found on the Arborfield Local History website.

### BARKHAM

**Survey status**: Complete

**Trees recorded**: 829

- **English oak**: 39%
- **Common lime**: 11%
- **Hawthorn**: 9%

Much of the parish is rural, comprising pasture, meadow and arable land. Some parts are wet and boggy, cut by ditches and a brook. Veteran willow and alder grow here. The largest alder is a multi-stem (MRN 7107, 6.5m). The fields themselves are bordered by ash and field maples. English oaks grow everywhere.

A distinctive four-line avenue of 88 limes about 400m long was planted for John Walter III of Bear Wood in the winter of 1885-6. The largest girth (MRN 4658, 3.5m) is sadly one of the many trees in the avenue that have fallen in high winds.

Veteran sweet chestnut, silver birch, beech and holly grow in the north of the parish and the wooded south-east area. To the north of Barkham Manor are three magnificent maiden English oaks (MRN 7125, 6.3m; MRN 7128, 6.4m and MRN 7666, 5.2m). All are visible from bridleways and the largest is possibly 550 years old. In the grounds of Barkham Manor is an oriental plane (MRN 1887, 6.7m) which could have been planted in the 17th century.

### CHARVIL

**Survey status**: To be verified

**Trees recorded**: 107

- **English oak**: 53%
- **Willow**: 21%
- **Ash**: 9%

Charvil is one of the smallest parishes and stretches from the River Thames in the north to the Loddon in the south. Along the streams and drainage channels are many large willows, for example the crack willow (MRN 3767, 5m). Several of these have been pollarded in the past reflecting an historical osier industry (basket making).

There is a row of large limes alongside the public park next to the village primary school. Oak and ash grow in field hedge boundaries, around the edge of Charvil Meadows and along the older roads of the village such as Park Lane and Waingels Road.

Large veterans include a beech just on the edge of a golf-course (MRN 7666, 5.7m), a significant holly with eight stems (MRN 7044, 5.2m) and a sweet chestnut on the fringe of the woodland at Foxhill (MRN 3347, 5.8m).

Roadside veteran English oaks are an important feature of the parish and we have found three relic orchards.
The Loddon floodplain forms part of the southern fringe of Earley and has several veteran trees, mainly English oaks in remnant hedgerows.

**FINCHAMPEAHD**

Survey status: Well underway

Trees recorded: 351

- English oak: 50%
- Wellingtonia: 31%
- Beech: 5%

Finchampstead is a largely rural parish with areas of natural heath and woodland including The Ridges, Simms Wood, Wellingtonia Avenue and California Country Park, populated with oak, beech, ash, Scots pine and birch.

The Blackwater River is the southern boundary. The extensive gravel extraction here is nearly complete and is a new landscape of lakes, grassland and trees is being created.

The Conservation Area around St James’ Church is home to oak, red oak and yew, including the very large English oak in the churchyard (MRN 2298, 7.9m). The common yew (MRN 2291) is recorded in the Ancient Yew Register. Some of the trees near the church have been planted to commemorate special events such as Queen Victoria’s Jubilee. These include a red oak (MRN 3963) planted in 1933 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George V.

**HURST**

Survey status: Well underway

Trees recorded: 182

- English oak: 80%
- Ash: 9%
- Willow: 6%

The parish of St. Nicholas Hurst is the largest in the Wokingham Borough. Once part of Windsor Forest, a large proportion of the parish is now open farmland. The River Loddon forms the western parish boundary where old gravel workings are now the lakes of Dinton Pastures Country Park. The wooded areas of the parish are traversed by watercourses, some delineated by large oaks marking ancient field boundaries.

The majority of our surveyed trees are English oaks and relatively few are ash. Many are within the Country Park. The largest English Oak found there (MRN 361, 8.2m) is an impressive multi-stem. The rest of the trees are mainly English oaks in hedges and ditches marking present day field boundaries. Many of these are over 5m girth, but the largest maiden (MRN 2762) on the borders with Twyford was re-measured in 2016 with a girth of 6.3m, so is possibly 500 years old.

**REMEMHAM**

Survey status: Well underway

Trees recorded: 145

- English oak: 54%
- Horse Chestnut: 16%
- Plane: 13%

Remenham has many fine trees, for example, the English oak near Axton (MRN 2781). Another veteran English Oak (MRN 1369) growing near a footpath in parkland, has a large amount of burling around the base of the trunk enlarging its girth to 7.2m.

Among Dunt Lane, seven large pollarded white willows have been surveyed (e.g. MRN 2277). Hurst village society website has a very comprehensive illustrated history of the village which records that as well as making willows, basket was used for equipment for catching fish.

The churchyard has a large yew (MRN 2681, 4.9m) which is on the Ancient Yew Register. It was estimated to be 370 years old in 1988 by the Conservation Foundation Yew Tree Campaign.

More veteran trees have been recorded in Shinfold than in any other parish. Two sets of trees in particular define the parish. The first is the eighteen pairs of Wellingtonias which form a tall landmark avenue west of Basingstoke Road. They were planted when the Duke of Wellington was given the estate at nearby Stratfield Saye and can be seen from Arborfield, from the M4 west of Reading and from across the Thames valley at Tilthurst. The second is an avenue of four rows of oaks on the hillytop in Spencer Wood. The Wellingtonias were planted within this established avenue and together with the oaks are a significant ecological habitat for insects and birds. The ‘Henry VIII’ oak tree (MRN 432) is the most celebrated veteran English oak in Shinfold. It was specifically protected during the development of the Shinfold Park estate and featured in a Woodland Trust leaflet on protecting trees during development. The Ancient Tree Hunt has classified it as ‘ancient’ and from its girth it was probably growing on the western edge of Windsor Forest at the end of the 15th century.

The largest and finest English Oak (MRN 2278) on the private Northbury Farm is clearly visible from the road and is probably two merged trees. Stanlake Park is historic parkland with fine scattered veteran oaks (e.g. MRN 2462) and an avenue of lines leading to the house.

The yew (MRN 2277) by the church porch features in a book on ‘champion trees’. It is on the Ancient Yew Register, is classified as ‘ancient’ in the Ancient Tree Hunt and is a TROBI 'Country Heritage Champion'. A young yew in the churchyard was planted by the Conservation Foundation to commemorate the Millennium.

There has been succession planting of future veterans on the village green, including the young oak next to a stag-headed specimen (MRN 2273).

**SHINFOLD**

Survey status: Complete

Trees recorded: 1306

- English oak: 59%
- Ash: 13%
- Willow: 5%

Shinfold has many significant old coppiced trees including an ash coppice (MRN 2199) in Pearmain’s Coppice which must be well over 600 years old.
Many veteran willows have been recorded along the banks of ditches and streams. A large number have been pollarded, such as MRN 7394 in Langley Mead, or coppiced, indicating historic use of the young shoots. Alder grows well in damp land and several, including MRN 4616, have been recorded along the banks of the River Loddon. Other major veteran oak, ash and willow trees survive along ancient routes leading south across the parish toward the River Loddon and the Froudy Brook. They now border footpaths, lanes and the two main roads leading south from Reading, Shinfield Road and Basingstoke Road. Several parish walks leaflets have been published on the parish website and will be revised to include more references to prominent trees. There are also plans to produce tree trails across all areas of the parish showing special trees of importance to the residential areas.

**SONNING**

Survey status: To be verified
Trees recorded: 113
English oak: 28%
Horse chestnut: 24%
Common lime: 16%

Sonning is situated on a gentle slope towards the River Thames which forms the long north-west border of the parish. There are veteran trees in the Reading Blue Coat School grounds and the area of woodland called the Dell alongside the river. Most of the veteran trees surveyed are around the village, many in private gardens.

**Swallowfield**

Survey status: Hardly started
Trees recorded: 238
English oak: 78%
Horse chestnut: 4%
Willow: 4%

The parish of Swallowfield includes the villages of Risley and Farley Hill. For centuries it has been an area of agricultural and rural life with some large private estates, the most notable of which is Swallowfield Park. Within the Park we have recorded over 200 trees. Most of these are English oaks but there are some large old alders and willows along the banks of the Blackwater and Loddon rivers, for example, the crack willow (MRN 4953, 7m).

A significant tree is the large common beech by the porch of All Saints’ Church (MRN 2248), recorded in the Ancient Tree Register®. Also notable is a very large black poplar hybrid (MRN 5271, 6.9m) in the field close to the entrance to the Park.

**Twyford**

Survey status: Complete
Trees recorded: 35
English oak: 63%
Ash: 11%
Horse chestnut: 11%

The Parish of Twyford has very little open countryside. The main features are the River Loddon, fed by the Broadwater, and the gravel pits. Fine old oaks survive in the housing estates built during the 1960s and 1970s, including MRN 3527 and MRN 3524, and in an area of woodland close to the south-east parish boundary, MRN 4611 is the largest with a girth of 4.7m and is probably over 250 years old. Veteran trees can also be found alongside the main railway line including two oaks (MRN 3520 and MRN 4604) inside a woodland belt which may have been planted in the mid-eighteenth century and a multi-stem ash (MRN 3522).

The floodplain has veteran hybrid black poplars and in the churchyard of St Mary’s there are three large horse chestnuts and a yew (MRN 3518, 4.4m).

WDVTA Tree Wardens planted disease-resistant elm saplings in Staniak Meadow and in the park off Malvern Way: both are doing well.

**Wargrave**

Survey status: Well underwa
Trees recorded: 516
English oak: 28%
Ash: 17%
Wellingtonia: 11%

The parish lies at the meeting point of the old Windsor Forest on clay soils and the Chiltern beechn woods on chalk. The River Thames forms the western boundary of the parish, with willow, ash, poplar and alder growing on the low lying marshy area. Ash, sycamore and limes are widespread.

**Winnersh**

Survey status: Well underwa
Trees recorded: 324
English oak: 63%
Ash: 12%
Field maple: 5%

The River Loddon is a major feature of Winnersh. Now very little remains of the old fields although the hedgerows and trees have been quite well protected.

WDVTA’s leaflet Bearwood Recreation Ground Tree Walk, describes ten trees on a walk around the park at the Winnersh Community Centre. The trees include a coppiced sweet chestnut, a magnificent oak and felled beech trees which are now a habitat for fungi, possibly stag beetles and other wood decomposers. The walk includes two of the largest trees in the parish, an English oak (MRN 5297) which is possibly 350 years old and a multi-stem sweet chestnut (MRN 5578, 8.3m).

A favourite veteran tree is the one saved by the local community (MRN 6105) in Watmore Lane. A new road would have gone right through this 6m girth English oak, which is possibly over 400 years old, but the plans were changed and the tree saved.
The town has a high density of trees for an urban area. Especially noteworthy are the tree-lined roads into the town. Milton Road and Reading Road have oaks with girths of over 5m (MRN 55 and MRN 177) which could be over 300 years old. Barkham Road and Finchampstead Road are oak-lined with trees 3 to 4.5m in girth. Chestnut Avenue has veteran sweet chestnuts as well as oaks.

On former agricultural land there are many old lanes, public footpaths and bridleways such as Doles Lane. Along these grow hedges of hawthorn, hazel, holly, field maple and cherry plum, as well as substantial hedge trees, mostly of oak or ash. Some farmland remains on the outskirts of the town and here there are isolated oaks as well as old field hedges, again with hedge trees.

There are several old estates with notable trees, such as St Anne’s Manor, Luckley House School and Cantley Park. There are a number of small parks within the town, many with attractive specimen trees. Langborough Recreation Ground, created in the late 19th century, was planted with lines which still flourish. The largest of these is MRN 600. In Joel Park, adjoining Holt Copse, there are two avenues, one of red oaks and the other of English oaks. Both avenues were planted to celebrate the silver jubilee of King George V in 1935. The more recently created Riverside Walk in Wooseshill runs alongside the Emn Brook and a number of large pollarded crack willows, for example MRN 265, grow along the banks of the stream.

Some woodland remains, including Keech Hatch Wood with a mix of tree species including a coastal redwood (MRN 1468), Holt Copse with many oaks, and Fox Hill woods with over 40 large sweet chestnuts.

The survey was completed in 2011 and in the following year WDVTA published the report Trees in Wokingham Town.1

There is an oriental plane (MRN 76), about 250 years old, visible from Waitrose car park. It features in a book of champion trees, and also as a TROB1 county champion for girth and height.

There are a number of veteran English oaks including two important pollarded examples at Ravenswood Village (MRN 1134 and MRN 1136). The former has a girth of 6.3m and is recorded as ‘ancient’ by the Ancient Tree Hunt and was probably planted in the late fifteenth century. The latter is 5.8m in girth and may well have started growing in the mid-sixteenth century.

Other distinctive veteran trees at Ravenswood include two veteran sweet chestnuts (MRN 1144 and MRN 1145). The latter is 6.6m in girth, probably over 450 years old, and recorded as an ‘ancient’ tree by the Ancient Tree Hunt. Finally, there is one less common veteran, a purple sycamore (MRN 1142).

Elsewhere, on the edge of a three square mile block of heath and bog around Heath Pool is a multi-stem sweet chestnut (MRN 2804, 4.4m). Trees in the Edgcumbe Park estate were covered by a Tree Preservation Order prior to development so many trees were retained. They include a red oak in Heathmount Drive (MRN 1993).

There are many highly visible roadside trees in Lodden Bridge Road, Butts Hill Road, Crockhamwell Road and Colemans Moor Road, for example MRN 7853. Many are too young to have been recorded.

There are ‘near veterans’ along Waingels Road and Western Avenue, as well as a group on Beechwood Avenue, the trees around the industrial area by the Just Tiles roundabout and the lines outside the church. Let’s hope these all survive to become veterans in the next decade or two.

As well as the English oaks, we have also recorded a number of ash, alders, willows and redwoods. The 30 narrow-leaved ash trees along Mohawk Way were an inspired planting giving a glorious autumn display of maroon leaves with golden undertones which will give pleasure to residents for decades to come.
WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

DATABASE

Over 7000 trees are now recorded in our database. Surveys of all accessible areas in six parishes are complete, and records continue to be updated as trees are reported lost or new areas become open to survey. Another two parishes have completed their survey but their data needs to be verified, and eight parish surveys are well underway and should be completed in the next year or two. In Swallowfield the majority of veteran trees remain unsurveyed.

We are aware that we have under-recorded smaller species such as hawthorn, orchard remnants and coppice stools hidden in dense undergrowth.

We can already draw the following conclusions from our survey, and further analyses will be possible when the survey is complete.

English oaks

We knew we would find a lot of veteran oaks, but we never expected English oaks to be the most common species in every parish, nor that they would account for over half the trees in the database. So far, 3900 (55%) recorded trees are English oaks.

Figure 1 shows the number of recorded maiden English oaks with girths of 3m and over, together with their likely ages. The youngest of these trees was growing before the end of the 19th century and the oldest ones, with girths around 7m, are probably 550 years old and germinated in the second half of the 15th century.

The reduction in numbers as girth increases shows a loss of half the oaks of any given age every 40 years or so. Further research and analysis is needed to understand this potentially significant conclusion.

Tree numbers and species distribution

Many other species have been recorded: natives such as ash and hawthorn, naturalised trees such as sweet chestnut, and exotic species, including Wellingtonia, planted in parkland and gardens. Only these eleven species have more than 100 trees recorded.

Sweet chestnut is the second most common tree in Wokingham Town and yet no veterans have been recorded in 5 parishes. Significantly, 46% of the recorded trees are coppice or multi-stem, probably a remnant of the managing and coppicing of sweet chestnuts for timber, historically widely used as a building material.

Willows are the fifth most common species with 75% of the recorded trees being pollarded, coppiced or multi-stem. The Ruscombe and Hurst parish reports link their willows to a local osier industry but this was probably more widespread as half of the Borough’s parishes have recorded willows with this historic tree management.

In parishes with significant parkland and large gardens early landowners planted ornamental species. These include horse chestnut, plane trees and avenues of limes and Wellingtonias. Not surprisingly Finchampstead’s second most common tree is the Wellingtonia, with 111 in the famous avenue. However, there are three other significant avenues of Wellingtonias – in Wargrave, Shinfield and Arborfield.

Apart from oaks the distribution of species varies from parish to parish. Ash is the second or third most common tree in over half of the parishes, but in five, including Wokingham Town, they are much less frequent at under 4%. Beech has an uneven distribution with no veterans recorded in 4 of the 17 parishes and accounts for only 2 of Shinfield’s 1300 trees, yet Arborfield, Finchampstead, Remberham, Sonning and Wokingham Without have all recorded significant numbers. Limes, too, are unevenly distributed.

Trees lost

Records are updated when we become aware of trees being lost through felling, disease or old age but data on lost trees is understated as we often do not get to know about these changes.

250 veteran trees were initially recorded as already dead and a further 108 have been updated as lost since they were surveyed (5% of all the records). There is no significant variation in the percentage of lost trees reported across the parishes.

We know the reason for about half of the tree losses and the numbers are approximately the same for those that have fallen, were diseased, were causing health and safety issues and those felled for development.

Tree density across the parishes

For the eight parishes which have finished their survey we can calculate the density of recorded trees. Figure 2 shows this for all recorded trees and English oaks for these parishes. We may be able to understand the reasons for the density variations once we have more data for the whole Borough.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

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External reporting of the Borough's trees

Trees in the Borough appear in books and on-line sources of data for important trees within the UK.

Two of our veterans appear in the book Champion Trees of Britain; the Ruscombe yew (MRN 2277) and the oriental plane in Wokingham Without, the MRN 2277. Our data is sent to the Ancient Yew Register for this 'ancient' status, especially the sweet chestnut (MRN 3366) in Wargrave. The Ancient Yew Register has recorded trees in a number of categories, mostly champions for height or girth. The May 2013 TROBI data lists 71 trees within the Borough, of which 34 are in our database. 32 do not meet our database criteria (most are champions for height) and 5 meet our criteria but we have not yet located them as these TROBI records have no grid reference. TROBI trees occur in 13 of the 17 parishes, the University grounds have 28 in Earley and there are also a number in the Bearwood estate in Arborfield and Newland. Most of our TROBI trees are 'County Champions for Girth', but 3 are 'Britain & Ireland Champions for Girth'. Two are on the University campus: a Cypress Oak in the Harris Gardens (MRN 3366) and a Lucembe Oak in the Wilderness (MRN 5744) the third is a True Service Tree in Park Place, Remenham (MRN 2138).

THREATS

Over the ten years of our survey we have seen many trees lost. The causes are age, weather, pests, diseases and the impact of developments.

Trees age and may suddenly die or decline over many years. Ageing oaks stop putting spring growth on high branches leaving a 'stag headed' crown, although many of them will still live for decades.3

Trees weakened by disease or previous damage are susceptible to storm damage which can uproot trees and remove branches. Many Wokingham trees were lost in the storms of 1987 and 1993.

Pests and diseases threaten our trees, largely because of infected tree imports. The Forestry Commission website gives information on the main pests and diseases and how to report them. Of these, seven could pose a major threat to Wokingham's trees. Up to January 2017 just three of these have been reported here but all could arrive in the next few years: horse chestnut leaf miner, horse chestnut bleeding canker, ash die-back, oak processionary moth, acute oak decline, sweet chestnut blight and sweet chestnut gall wasp.

Housing developments in Wokingham bring serious threats. The direct threats occur when building and road plans propose felling. We review planning applications and assess the impact on the affected trees but we do not have resources to cover all developments.

Indirect threats arise where roads or buildings are situated too close to trees where ground compaction and lack of space for root systems damage their health. Branches die and pruning becomes necessary for safety reasons. The trees then become stressed and may die.

Poor maintenance standards can damage trees through over-zealous pruning. In some parks the grass is cut too close to the trees damaging the bark and allowing infections to take hold.

OPPORTUNITIES

We keep our members aware of pest and disease symptoms and how to report anything they are concerned about. Prompt reporting means faster treatment.

In Wokingham, young elms are growing from residual rootstock and, monitored by our Tree Wardens, could return mature elms to our landscape. Ash, too, can regrow from root stock and should ash die-back arrive here, this could be the basis for regeneration.

Planning controls can be used to minimise tree loss. Planning applications should be examined for their impact on trees with new roads and buildings positioned to avoid damage. Over the last ten years the standards used for tree protection have improved. Robust barriers should be placed around the root protection area to prevent ground compaction, damage to roots and vehicle impact. Local people are crucial to watching developments and should report any concerns to WBC Trees & Landscape.

Under Tree Protection Order (TPO) legislation, trees with protection orders that have been felled MUST be replaced and we try to ensure that this happens. It is very important that the historic, environmental and aesthetic reasons for the original tree order are recognised with the planting of a successor even though it may take decades to mature.

At The Hawthorns School, our committee member Steve Radford created a Storytelling Chair (MRN 151) from a diseased oak. In Earley, the Duck & the World Chair was carved from a storm damaged tree. In Shinfield, tree trunks salvaged from roundabout construction have been resited near Pearman's Copse to provide a wildlife habitat. We particularly welcome and actively support these innovative uses of lost trees. For too many years, we have lost trees faster than we have been planting them. Now, more than ever, we should encourage councils, landowners and developers to redress this imbalance.
LOOKING FORWARD

SURVEY

Our survey will continue in those towns and parishes which have not yet been completed. We plan to attract new members and set up local surveying groups in the parishes where we have no coordinator and we will continue to improve our records by verification, additional surveys and by monitoring tree loss. Photographs will be added where missing, aiming for a coverage of at least 90% of the database.

We are planning to correct the under-recording of smaller species such as hawthorn and field maple, as well as those species, including willows, that were frequently pollarded. Trees that are currently too small to be recorded will be surveyed when they qualify as veterans.

EVENTS

Our events will continue to be open to both members and non-members and will include training for new surveyors and talks by specialists on a wide range of tree-related topics. Regular sociable walks will be organised with opportunities to discover and enjoy our local woodlands and countryside.

We will continue building links with local societies and groups and increase our participation in community events bringing the importance of trees and woodland to a wider audience. New members will be warmly welcomed at all our events.

PUBLICATIONS

Our quarterly newsletter Tree Watch is widely read and keeps us in touch with our members as well as providing tree-related material to a wider audience.

Parish and town councils will continue to be encouraged to use our survey data in their publications including leaflets on local walks. We will also continue to publish our own walking guides.

TREE WARDENS

We plan to have at least one Tree Warden in each parish and town helping to assess the impact of development plans on neighbourhood trees and taking part in projects such as the planting of specimen trees, hedges and community orchards.

We will identify and nurture saplings in existing hedges, encouraging owners to allow these to become mature trees. We will also campaign for the planting of new trees in existing and new hedges.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all who have contributed in their different ways to the Association and this Report. In particular we wish to include all the surveyors who have recorded the data in our database, our Data and Systems Managers and Webmaster, those Wokingham Borough Council councillors, officers and their teams, Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre and Woodland Trust officials who have given us support without which the survey would not have been possible.

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The map on page 10 is adapted from OpenStreetMap (openstreetmap.org) images © OpenStreetMap contributors, cartography licensed as CC BY-SA.

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“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is now.”

Chinese proverb
WHY TREES MATTER

Trees give us oxygen, store carbon, absorb pollutants and are hosts to wildlife. They provide an invaluable quality to the environment in which we live, as well as help reduce stress levels and blood pressure. They are part of our history and culture and strengthen the distinctive character of places. Wooded areas can encourage a feeling of community, enabling people to come together for activities such as walking and bird-watching. They provide space for children to play and discover their sense of adventure.

This Report marks the tenth anniversary of the launch of Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association (WDVTA) in 2007. It summarises our activities and achievements and shares this milestone with our many supporters, members and the wider Wokingham community. It also outlines how the WDVTA core activities and membership will develop to help address the environmental challenges facing the Borough of Wokingham.