THE VETERAN TREES OF WARWICKSHIRE

Steven Falk, 2011

An ancient oak at Ragley Park

Warwickshire Biological Records Centre

Warwickshire County Council

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Introduction

Traditionally, much fuss has been made of old buildings and other historic man-made structures in our countryside and built environment. Rather neglected amongst all of this until recently has been concern over some of our oldest living features, veteran trees. Through a series of historic circumstances, the British countryside has come to support a far greater density of old trees than most parts of either Europe or lowland North America. They survive in our ancient hedges (which can be of medieval origin or older), former deer parks, and sometimes perched on the sides of steep hills where various potentially damaging agricultural activities have failed to reach them. Many have seen the landscape around them change out of all recognition as they have become swallowed up by urban sprawl or changing land-use. Deer parks may have become replaced by business parks or golf courses but the original trees sometimes survive e.g. at Stoneleigh Park. Rural hedgerows may now be urban property boundaries. This results in an often incongruous modern location for many old trees. However, it also means that such trees furnish valuable clues about the history of an area, firing the imaginations of local people and furnishing a stronger sense of place and local identity. Imagine Baginton without its great oak. Unfortunately changing circumstances also result in much loss and damage and makes veteran tree conservation particularly challenging in a world where health and safety and legal liability carry a lot of sway.

What is veteran tree?

Surprisingly, there is no universal or precise definition of a veteran tree, but the closest one might achieve is ‘a particularly old example of a tree type for a given location’. Bearing in mind that different tree species vary widely in their average life span and rate of growth, it is most sensible to define veteran status for each type of tree, based both on a judgement of its age (based on girth and growth-form) plus the pattern and history of that tree species within the landscape. Veteran trees are not simply important in their own right, they reveal the historical layers of our local landscape, telling us something about the people and processes that helped shape the land. Defining a ‘veteran’ has to acknowledge these broader issues in order to fully acquire meaning and significance.

From a Warwickshire perspective, a particularly meaningful yardstick for defining a veteran tree is the judgement that it predates the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts, which peaked in the period 1760-1840. Much new tree planting took place during this period, so whilst oaks of 250 years or younger are fairly numerous locally, those over 250 years (which generally coincides with those that have girths exceeding 5 metres) are much scarcer and therefore special. Trees that predate 1700 are especially scarce, and are

mostly maidens or pollards of English Oak and Sweet Chestnut, churchyard Yews and Small-leaved Lime coppice stools.

The growth and ageing process of a tree

Trees grow in lots of ways. Variation may be due to the species or variety, the place where it grows, any management it is experiencing, and any damage or stress it has incurred. For many species, the fastest growth is attained under the following circumstances:

- the tree is growing out in the open away from the competition of other trees
- it is growing on soils that are not too infertile, too dry or too polluted
- the location is not too exposed to winds
- no pollarding or crown reduction has taken place
- No significant damage to roots, trunk or canopy has resulted from disease, droughts, floods or storms

The girth of broadleaved species such as English Oak, Sweet Chestnut or Beech will generally expand an inch a year for the first 150-200 years of life under the above circumstances. However, from this point on the loss or death of aerial limbs, death of roots, fungal attack and other changes to the morphology of a tree can start to slow the rate of trunk expansion. This means that a tree approaching one thousand years of age may only be increasing its girth at a fraction of an inch per year. That makes it very difficult to gauge the age of very old trees purely on girth. Morphology can help though. Very stag-headed trees, trees with very hollow trunks, and trunks with a very irregular and untidy form, are all indications of age. Read (2000) and White (1998) provide more information on how a tree grows.

It is important to note that much variation can exist within tree species, even collections of those species from a single planting date at a single site. Avenues or groups of trees are notorious for this. The triangular group of Sweet Chestnuts on Motslow Hill near Stoneleigh (SP33147185) for instance have trunk girths that vary from about 4m to 6.10m. Those at the corners tend to be the largest, probably because they have experienced less root competition, and had greater access to sunlight. A similar situation exists with eighteenth century Common Lime at places like the Edge Hill obelisk (above Radway Grange) and the lime avenue at Charlecote Park. Trees will also grow differently if the trunk splits low down. In a ‘twin trunk’ i.e. a trunk that divides into two at perhaps 1 metre height, the lower girth will usually be significantly larger than the girth of normal trunk of the same age. Low side branches can have a similar impact. Very old trunks can also have lots of bosses and other irregularities that artificially enhance girth. Batch-planting (where several trees are planted close together so that their trunks fuse) can make a Victorian ‘tree’ look 100 years older but can usually be easily spotted with practice. All these factors need to be accounted for when judging the age of a tree based on trunk girth.

The species of a tree is important. Turkey Oak generally grows a little faster than English Oak and can still look very healthy and intact at its 5 metres girth stage when many English Oaks are becoming stag-headed and showing obvious heart rot. Limes, Common Horse Chestnut and Hornbeam less frequently attain a 5 metres girth at 250 years. Many seem to put more of their energy into aerial growth. However, they do start to gain a distinct morphology by 250 years. Common Lime has a strong tendency to develop large and acute trunk buttresses. Hornbeam's trunk (usually so smooth and beech-like in younger trees) can become fantastically fluted. Horse Chestnuts upper limbs can become disproportionately large and pendulous, and their trunks sometimes develop strong buttresses too. It is therefore important to account for the appearance and other features of a tree and note where it is growing, when attempting to judge its age.

As alluded to above, trees of a given species growing in woodland tend to grow much more slowly than they would do in the open. This is due to competition for light and nutrients from other trees. Woodland management also generally acts against trees attaining great age with the exception of coppice stools. Our oldest birches, Common Rowan and some of our larger Wild Cherries may indeed predominate in woods, but few seem to exceed 150 years. Woods are generally poor places to find veteran trees.

Left: an old Crack Willow pollard at Oxhill. Right: a large Small-leaved Lime coppice stool at Piles Coppice, Binley Woods.

Pollarding (the regular cutting of stems at the top of a well-formed trunk) compromises trunk expansion by forcing a tree to put more effort into replacing its crown at regular intervals. Trunk expansion may only be a half that of a maiden, and seems to be exceptionally slow in the very oldest

pollards which are often hollow with the trunk split into several vertical sections (see photo above). However, pollarding can also extend the life of a tree, possibly by several centuries. Many pollards are likely to be much older than their girths suggest, but with the trunks often hollow, it is impossible to count their growth rings.

Coppicing trees (the regular cutting of stems from a 'stool' close to ground level) prevents the formation of a trunk, though the size of the base will expand over time. The rate of expansion is generally faster than a trunk, and coppice stools can seemingly survive for centuries. The oldest Small-leaved Lime coppice stools in Warwickshire may be well over a thousand years old and are still vigorous.

Measuring, recording and ageing veteran trees

Under ideal circumstances, the girth of a trunk is measured at a height of 1.5 metres with a tape measure pulled as tight as possible. This is called a 'GBH' (girth at breast height). Some veteran trees allow this without any problems. Others can be more challenging due to one or more of the following:

- large bosses or other irregularities affecting the girth at 1.5m
- the narrowest point of a trunk (the waist) is well below 1.5m
- a side branch occurs at 1.5m
- a low split in the trunk (a twin trunk) affects the girth at 1.5m
- a trunk that has become hollow and lost part of the trunk 'wall'
- the trunk is strongly leaning
- the tree is growing on a very steep slope so lacking a clear GBH measuring point.
- the tree is overhanging water or a steep drop and is therefore dangerous to measure
- the tree is within exceptionally thick cover such as spiny bushes, a spiny hedge or dense bramble that make access to the trunk difficult
- the trunk is covered with thick ivy
- the tree is on private land
- the tree supports a nesting bird that might be disturbed by the measuring

None of these need to prevent the recording of a veteran tree. Where a waist below 1.5m exists, take this as the measuring point and note the height of your measurement and the year it was taken (e.g. "5.35m @ 50cm waist/2011"). Where a large boss, low fork or low side branch affects the GBH you can note this in a manner such as "5.35m @ 50cm/2011 below a large boss". If the tree is on a very steep slope, it is safest to measure it 1.5m from the lowest part of the trunk. Where a trunk is leaning, it is important to ensure that the tape is angled to give the tightest measurement of the trunk, and not an oblique measurement (which will exaggerate the girth). If a trunk is hollow and partly missing, measure both the absolute girth and an estimate of the girth had the trunk remained cylindrical. If ivy is present, try to get the tape measure under as many of the ivy stems as possible, but if this cannot be fully

achieved, attempt to works out how much extra the ivy is adding to the girth, subtract this figure and make a note of what you have done. If the tree is growing in a spiny hedge or spiny thicket, use heavy duty clothing and gloves to force your way through to the trunk. If nesting birds are present low in a tree, revisit the tree once the young have fledged.

Measuring one of Stoneleigh's veteran oaks at 1.5m - a 'GBH' if you are tall enough!

Measuring coppice stools
These are best measured by placing a tape around all the stems you believe belong to the same base at ground level. Unfortunately, in some circumstances it is quite difficult to know where one coppice stool ends and another one starts, especially with old Small-leaved Lime at sites like Oversley Wood and Piles Coppice.

Trees on private land
It is important that you try to seek permission to visit such trees. The nearest house or farm will probably be able to provide ownership details. Most landowners encountered in Warwickshire have been well-disposed to these surveys and like getting feedback. Only a small number have refused access. If access is refused, but the tree is visible, the location can still be recorded and a girth estimated (but it must be clearly flagged as such in your record).

Completing your record
Having measured your tree as above, note the precise grid reference to 1 metre accuracy. This can either be done using a Geographical Positioning Device (GPS) or by noting a tree on a paper map or printed aerial photo and then using websites like 'Where's The Path' (**wtp2.appspot.com**) to clarify the grid reference using the screen cursor. Old trees in woodlands are generally the hardest to obtain grid references for, because GPS's do not

always work well beneath a canopy, and aerial photographs of woods can be difficult to interpret. You just have to do your best under these circumstances, using any rides, clearings, woodland corners, hedge interceptions or more conspicuous woodland trees (perhaps a conifer that stands out amongst broadleaves) as reference points.

In all instances, it is important to note what you have done on your record entry, the date of the measurement and what factors might have affected the measurement you've taken. Ensure you have noted if the tree is a pollard or maiden and what its state of health was (hollow trunk? stag-horned? lost limbs?). Always take photos of the veteran trees you've recorded, both the overall shape, the general setting of the tree, plus close-ups of the trunk with either a person, or an object such as a camera bag in the image to help give an indication of scale (as you will see in many of the images used here). Your photo is an intrinsic part of your 'record'. A jpeg image of at least 1MB is recommended.

Ageing trees

If trees did not become hollow, and their internal growth rings could be seen, aging would be relatively easy. Occasionally an old tree falls over and gets sawn up which can allow some access to growth rings. I have managed to check cut stumps of 5 metre English Oaks with rings that indicate about 280-300 years. A 2.15 metre Downy Birch in a Kenilworth wood that fell in 2011 seemed to be 120-150 years. There is much scope for further checking of newly fallen trees in Warwickshire to create a graph of girth versus age for different species and growth forms. In terms of published guidelines, White (1998) provides a quite technical methodology which places a heavy emphasis on tree rings.

The Woodland Trust's Ready Reckoner for estimating the age of an unpollarded oak tree growing in the open in SE England is very useful. It gives the following gauge of girth in metres (and age in years): 4.95m (291yrs), 5.58 (358), 6.20 (433), 6.80 (515), 7.43 (606), 8.03 (704), 8.65 (810), 9.28 (924). A pollarded specimen may be significantly older than indicated above. Sessile Oak, Sweet Chestnut, Sycamore, Horse Chestnut, Beech, Native Black Poplar, Grey Poplar, limes, most elms and the larger willow species all seem to grow at a broadly similar rate to English Oak when growing in the open (but not when they are in avenues, tight groups or within wooded settings). Turkey Oak, Red Oak and London Plane seem to grow about 10% faster. Hybrid Black Poplar is about 20-30% faster. Ash and Hornbeam, are somewhat slower, whilst birches, Wild Cherry, Rowan (and other *Sorbus*), Field Maple, Aspen, Holly, sallows and the various fruit trees are all much slower. Yew can be exceptionally slow. More information and examples of aged girths are given in the species accounts below.

Where to send your data

It is important that the Warwickshire Biological Records Centre and associated County Ecology Unit and Habitat Biodiversity Audit Team (currently all based at Warwickshire Museum, Warwick) are aware of veteran trees. At the point of writing, they hold information on some 800 specimens

and these are indicated on the computer-generated (GIS) maps that they use for checking planning applications, environmental stewardship applications, wildlife site assessment and planning consultations. The data also allows the Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull Biodiversity Partnership to monitor the targets for its action plan for '*Wood-pasture, Old Parkland & Veteran Trees*' (Irving & Falk, 2005). The data is also sent to the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Hunt project and their Ancient Tree Forum on a regular basis.

Viewing existing records and the biodiversity action plan

The raw dataset is available from the Warwickshire Biological Records Centre operated by the Warwickshire Ecology Unit (tel: 01926 418060), though ownership information may need to be withheld. The staff can display records as a GIS layer against aerial photos or OS maps. Much of the data can also be viewed on the interactive web-based map of the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Hunt: **www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk**. However, this includes unverified data for Warwickshire and has contained some inaccurate records in respect of location, species and girth. The action plan for Wood-pasture, Old Parkland & Veteran Trees can be viewed at: **www.warwickshire.gov.uk/biodiversity**.

More sources of information and advice on veteran trees

The Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Forum and the associated Ancient Tree Hunt are collating data specifically for veteran trees of Britain to promote conservation and appreciation of Britain's internationally important holding of old trees (perhaps 85% of the entire north European resource). Much useful information can be found at: **www.woodland-trust.org.uk/ancient-tree-forum** and **www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk.** The Conservation Foundation and Ancient Yew Group have been promoting a UK Yew Guardian Project, which aims to record all the larger yews of Britain. More information can be found at: **www.ancient-yew.org**. The Natural England publication '*Veteran Trees: A guide to good management*' (Read, 2000) is also full of information and can be downloaded from the web at: **http://naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop/IN13**.

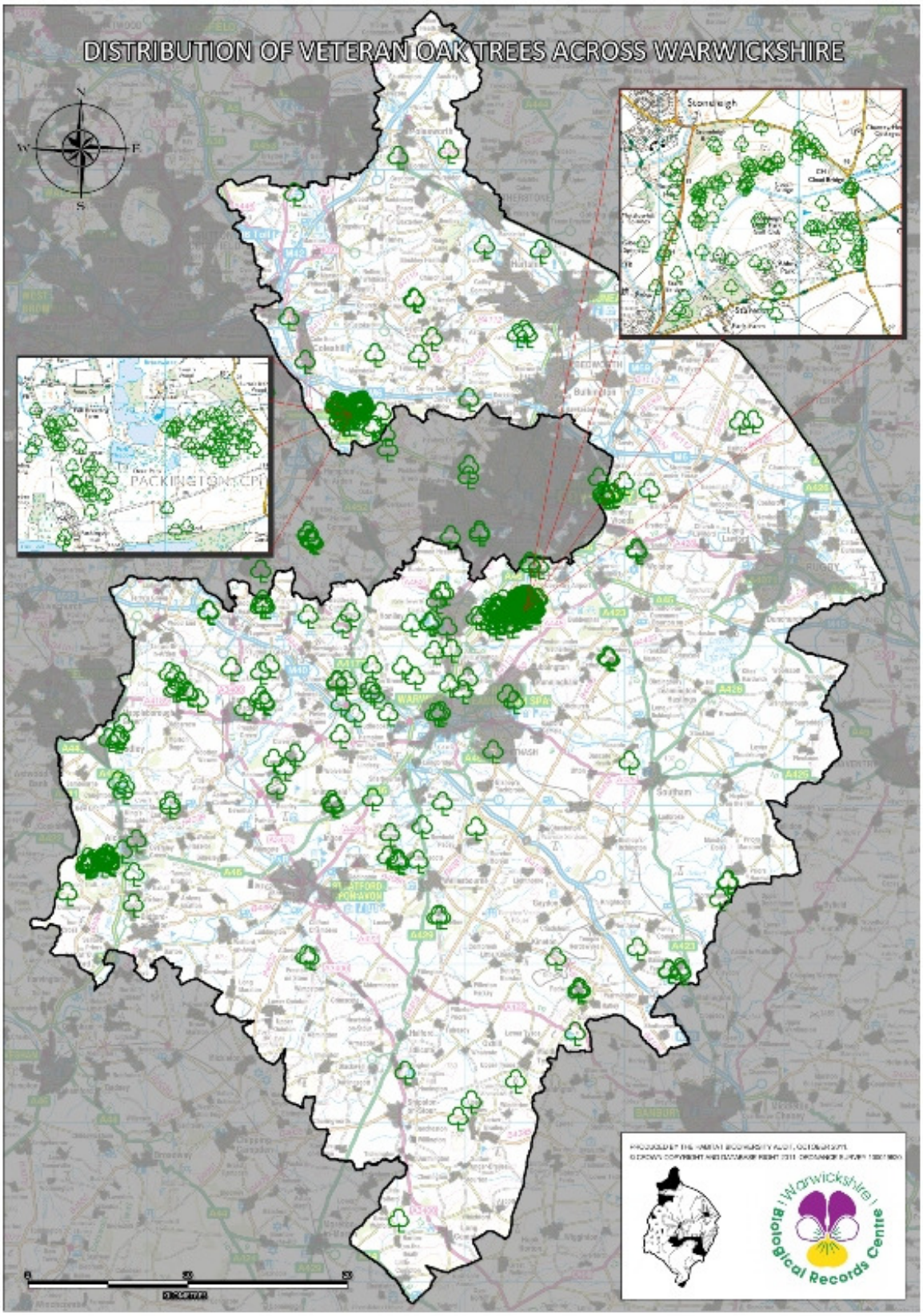
Please note that in the following species accounts, grid references have only been provided for trees that can be accessed or viewed from a public right of way or open access land.

Species accounts

English Oak *Quercus robur*

This species dominates our local listing of veteran trees. We currently know of 382 specimens with girths of 5 metres-plus and judged to be at least 250 years old. Most of these reside in former historic parkland or within ancient hedges, particularly within the Arden zone of north-west Warwickshire (which takes in most of Solihull and Coventry). The largest collections of veteran oaks (115 trees) can be found within the Stoneleigh Park area. This includes the Stoneleigh Deer Park Golf Course, the Royal Showground, the Abbey Business Park, the grounds of Stoneleigh Abbey and some other surrounding areas e.g. Motslow Hill. This holding includes Warwickshire's champion, a tall and surprisingly solid specimen with a girth of 9.2 metres GBH/2007 within the grounds of Stoneleigh Abbey. It has been subject of a special study by Robert Penlington, a tree officer for Coventry City Council, who very kindly introduced me to the many well-hidden veterans of this area back in 2006. He suspects that the tree may be approaching 1000 years in age, and it certainly matches many of the best old oaks of Windsor Great Park and other classic sites, which have been judged to be a similar age. This tree is increasingly known as 'Shakespeare's Oak' in recognition of the fact that the Bard apparently used to visit the area and sit beneath the fine oaks. Many of the old oaks of the Stoneleigh Park area can be seen from the roads that surround the golf course or by exploring the footpath network or open access land near Stare Bridge and Motslow Hill.

Left: the 9.2m/2007 county champion English Oak near Stoneleigh Abbey is reckoned to be almost 1000 years old. Right: the much more degenerate specimen of 9.07m/2011at Monwode Lea, near Arley may be even older.



A map showing the distribution of veteran oak trees in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull. Such trees predominate in the Arden zone, which is the ancient countryside of north and west Warwickshire. Notice the concentrations of trees at Stoneleigh Park (centre of map), Packington Park (top left) and Ragley Park (lower left).

A second collection of significance (seventy-five oaks of 5 metres-plus) occurs at Packington Park, which includes the areas around Packington Hall plus the adjacent Forest of Arden Golf Course. Very little public access exists in this area, though one of the finest vistas of veteran trees can be gained by looking into the golf course through the park pale deer fencing from Maxstoke Lane. What is more, herds of Fallow Deer still exist throughout this area providing a great sense of the medieval history of the landscape here. The oldest oak within the area is a fine one of 8.77m/2007 hidden away in the depths of the estate which I was kindly allowed to survey on several occasions.

Further smaller collections include Ragley Park (largest specimen 8.31/2007 – see cover), Coombe Countryside Park (largest specimen 6.39m/2006) and the Ullenhall area (notably Crowley's Oak 7.12m/2007 at SP1146967807 and another one of 6.7m/2006 at SP1186767667). Notable singletons include the Baginton Oak close to Coventry Airport SP3467974541 (7.25m/2007), the Snitterfield Oak SP2165959753 (8.03m/2007) and a remarkable specimen of 9.07m/2011 at Monwode Lea just south of the B4114 near Arley (SP2690591413) which has the trunk divided onto two sections with a fence passing through the middle (see image above). It may well pre-date Stoneleigh's champion and even the Norman invasion!

One veteran oak tree sadly no longer with us, deserves special mention. The 'Bull Oak' of Wedgenock Park, west of Warwick, was featured in Joseph Strutt's 1826 *Sylva Brittanica*, and captured in photos now at Warwick's County Records Office. It was measured at 11.15m @ 1.8m/1838 by J.C. Loudon but was apparently burnt down by a tramp's bonfire early in the twentieth century. It was said that twenty people could fit into its hollow trunk. Strutt additionally featured a 'Gospel Oak' near Chantry Wood, Baginton, which also seems to be long gone. Both are assumed to be English Oaks. One gospel oak, which has not been measured, still survives at Redfern Manor near Kenilworth and seems to be a similar age to the Monwode Lea tree.

An illustration of the massive Bull Oak of Wedgenock Park from Strutt, 1826 (left), and a rare photo of the tree, presumably from the late 1800s towards the end of its life (right). Photo courtesy of Warwick County Records Office.

Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea*

Sessile Oak may have been the original oak of Warwickshire and today, as a wild tree, is largely confined to ancient woods on acidic soils often in the company of Small-leaved Lime. It is not typically a tree of parkland or ancient hedges here, and perhaps because of this few large specimens exist. It is certainly capable of growing to a great age – some of the largest oaks in Britain are Sessile Oaks. The largest we can boast is a fine tall tree of 6.45m/2010 growing in a spinney of much younger secondary woodland close to Oldbury Reservoir near Hartshill. Only three further Sessile Oaks exceeding 5 metres are known, a specimen on a very steep slope at Corley Rocks SP3029185067 (5.70m/2007), a specimen beside a footpath leading off Brown's Lane, Dordon SK2584300314 (5.65m/2007) and a specimen at the east boundary of Dorridge Park SP1720674239 (5.0m/2011).

Surprisingly few large Sessile Oaks exist in Warwickshire. The county champion of 6.45m/2010 (top left) hides in a spinney near Oldbury Reservoir, but a more accessible veteran of 5.70m/2007 can be found at Corley Rocks (top right).

Turkey Oak *Quercus cerris*

The oldest Turkey Oaks of our area seem to have mid 18th century origins and many are magnificent trees with expansive, shapely crowns when growing out in the open within historic parkland. The term veteran may be a bit generous for them given their relatively intact nature and lack of rot-holes or fungus activity at such an age. The county champion is a specimen of 5.92m/2009 near Brueton Park, Solihull SP1574378492 but my personal favourite is a tree of 5.82m/2007 growing in a field north of Leek Wootton at SP2919069292 which has a wonderful form. Many of the other finest specimens occur between Leek Wootton and Stoneleigh village, notably in the vicinity of Stare Bridge and along the Coventry Road towards Stoneleigh village. Is there a story behind this concentration? A very tall narrow specimen of 5.76m/2006 at

Parliament Piece, Kenilworth SP2873972927 is also noteworthy as it is easily accessible. Fourteen specimens exceeding 5 metres are currently recorded in Warwickshire.

Top left: the county champion Turkey Oak of 5.92m/2009 at Brueton Park and the trunk of a slightly smaller specimen of 5.82m/2007 at Leek Wootton (bottom right). Bottom left: this fine Holm Oak of 5.17m/2007 near Barford is the county champion and is presumed to date from the mid-1700s. However, a specimen at Broom (bottom right) may match this age if it is a single, and not a batch-planted specimen.

Holm Oak *Quercus ilex*
The Victorians loved to plant this large evergreen oak within municipal parks, cemeteries and large properties. They sometimes used the technique of batch-planting to create a large-looking tree (actually several trees) within a few decades. This may be the history behind a very ancient–looking specimen outside the Broom Hall Inn, Broom village SP0921453241 which has what looks like a single solid base of 7.68m/2007 that gives rise to several large stems. With such a growth form it is very difficult to gauge whether it is an eighteenth century, or perhaps even a late seventeenth century specimen with a single ancient rootstock, or an early Victorian batch-planted group fused into a single base. The one tree that does seem to be indisputably eighteenth century in origin is a fine, trunked specimen at Thelsford Farm, near Barford.(5.17m/2007). The owner informed me that in the harshest winters, it loses all its leaves.

Lucombe Oak *Quercus* x *hispanica*
Hybrids between Turkey Oak and Cork Oak *Quercus suber*, which are often collectively known as Lucombe Oaks, have arisen on several occasions resulting in a number of different crosses that vary in various aspects of their appearance and the winter-persistence of their foliage. The most common cultivar locally is 'Crispa' which usually has a broad, mop-headed canopy that is fully evergreen in a typical winter, a very obvious graft line on its trunk, and bark above the graft line that is rather corky. It is often mistaken for Holm Oak. The vast majority of local 'Crispa' specimens found in Leamington Spa or Coventry have an obvious Victorian origin, though a rather larger one found at the Capability Brown designed grounds of Compton Verney (4.22m/2008) may well date from the late 18th century, though it does not seem large enough to be a Brownian specimen. By far the largest Lucombe Oak in Warwickshire is one of 5.79m/2006 which seems to represent the variety 'William Lucombe'. It is found in the main gardens west of Packington Hall and is a magnificent tall, fully deciduous tree with no obvious graft line nor corky bark. It could represent one of the original clones from William Lucombe's Exeter Nursery circa 1762.

Red Oak *Quercus rubra*
Few specimens of this popular tree are of exceptional age locally, though a group of three at Warwick's Priory Park are of sufficient girth to suggest that they may have a late eighteenth century origin – the largest being a specimen of 5.18m/2006 at SP2837565241. Two post-mature False Acacias nearby may be contemporary. At Eathorpe Hall a very fine specimen in a field just south of the Hall SP3910668751 was measured at 5.10m GBH/2007, and is also clearly pre-Victorian and with considerably more heart rot than the healthy-looking Warwick specimens. It can be viewed from the nearby lane.

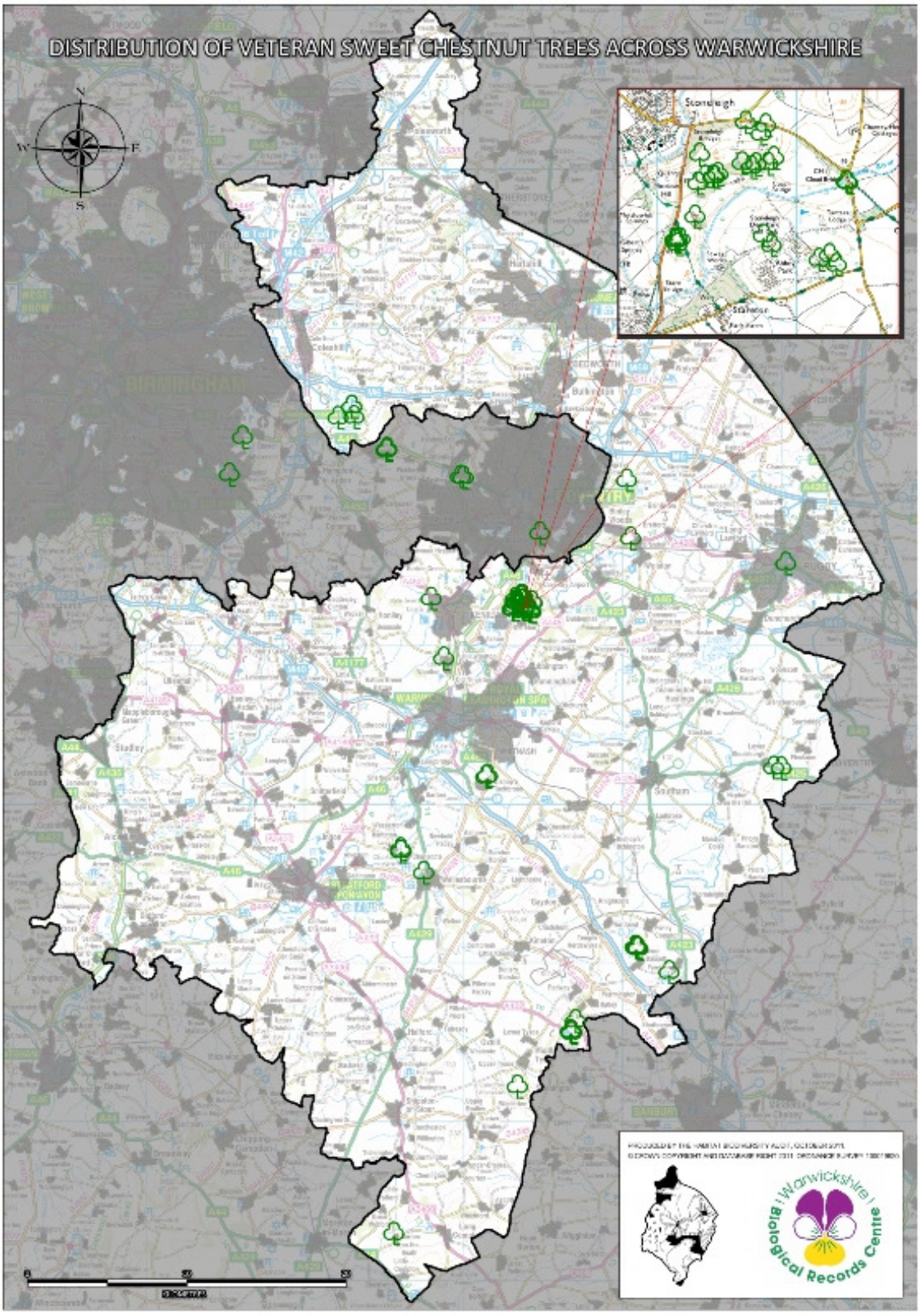
Top left: Warwickshire's largest Lucombe Oak of 5.79m/2006 is a probable 'William Lucombe' at Packington Hall. Notice its fully deciduous habit. Top right: the largest specimen of the evergreen 'Crispa' is a 4.22m/2008 specimen at Compton Verney. Bottom left: Warwickshire's 5.18m/2006 champion Red Oak at Priory Park, Warwick which is probably pre-Victorian but in excellent health. Bottom right: a 5.10m/2007 specimen at Eathorpe Hall has heart rot and may be somewhat older.

Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa*

Sweet Chestnut is the second most numerous veteran tree in Warwickshire (excluding coppice stools) with some sixty-three specimens with girths exceeding 5 metres. The growth rate seems to be broadly similar to English Oak, so that this girth threshold is again taken as an indication of at least 250 years age. However, a number of Sweet Chestnuts in tight avenues or groups are stunted through competition with one-another, even though they will almost certainly attain this age. This includes the very conspicuous group near Stare Bridge, Stoneleigh SP33147185, and a double row in a field near Upton House.

The county champion is a superb stag-horned specimen with a girth of 8.5m/2007 in Stoneleigh Deer Park Golf Course SP3378872686 not far from the champion Common Lime and viewable from the Coventry Road. It may be as much as 800 years old. The Stoneleigh Park area has by far the greatest concentration of veteran Sweet Chestnuts with twenty-five specimens exceeding 5 metres. Other important examples can be found at Packington Park (largest 7.36m/2007), Bitham Hill just west of Avon Dassett village (several fine ones, the largest 6.08m/2007), Meriden House (viewable from a nearby footpath, the largest 7.22m/2011), Solihull's Elmdon Park (a stag-horned veteran of 6.61m/2007 at SP1614682674), also a specimen of 6.76m/2007 close to Solihull town centre at the junction of Lode Lane and Star Road SP1529280325. A tree of 6.37m/2007 at Barton on the Heath is reckoned to have been planted in 1570 (441 years in 2011) providing a useful yardstick by which to assess others.

Sweet Chestnut has given Warwickshire some splendid veterans of medieval origin if not older, including the county champion of 8.5m/2007 at Stoneleigh Deer Park Golf Course (left) and the very over-mature specimen of 6.61m/2007 at Elmdon Park, Solihull (right).



A map showing the distribution of veteran Sweet Chestnuts in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull. Such trees are not concentrated within the Arden zone. As with English Oak, Stoneleigh Park and Packington Park remain important for this species .

Top left: the county champion Horse Chestnut of 6.67m/2007 at Honington Hall. Top right: one of the highly pendulous Horse Chestnuts at Newnham Paddox thought to date from about 1750. Bottom left: the county champion Beech of 6.55m/2007 at Edge Hill. Bottom right: a fine specimen of 5.80m/2007 at Haseley Manor.

Horse Chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*

Like Sweet Chestnut, this is a European introduction that has been planted for several centuries. The oldest ones in Warwickshire seem to date from the early 18th century. The champion hides away within the private grounds of the

Honington Hall estate close to the River Stour. The rather short trunk attains 6.67m/2007 at a low waist but the multi-stemmed form has probably increased the lower girth. It is almost certainly contemporary with other early 18th century trees nearby. A tree of 5.40m/2007 at Radway Grange probably dates from Sanderson Miller's landscaping of the 1740s. Three others about 1kilometre away at woodland edge close to the Edge Hill obelisk had girths in 2009 of 5.05, 4.42 and 3.68 metres but are likely to be the same age as the Radway Grange tree, the smallest particularly stunted through shade and competition. A tree of 5.74m/2007 at Ragley Park and others of about 4.8m/2007 at Newnham Paddox probably all stem from Capability Brown planting schemes of the 1740s and 1750s. The Newnham Paddox trees are of the growth form with massive down-arched side-limbs, a form which seems to put more growth into the upper limbs at the expense of trunk girth, hence the smaller girths. In total, nineteen trees with girths exceeding 4.5 metres are known and are judged to be pre-Victorian. Seven of these exceed 5 metres and are judged to be at least 250 years old. Unfortunately, Horse Chestnut has a habit of collapsing fairly catastrophically once a couple of centuries old, especially those specimens with the heavy, pendulous side limbs.

Beech *Fagus sylvatica*

Another tree that seems to struggle locally after about 250 years, though it is possible that it was not introduced in any numbers until the 18th century (it is not thought to be a native of Warwickshire). The Edge Hill escarpment is one of the best places to see old specimens, and the county champion of 6.55m/2007 occurs along the south edge of the Edge Hill woodlands at SP3711447228 overlooking the village allotments. It can be accessed from the footpath that runs along the top edge of the wood. It is probably another Sanderson Miller specimen from about 1740, and matches some of the best Beech specimens of the New Forest. Several further large ones occur in the Edge Hill woodland east of the village e.g. SP3816948471, though a number of very fine ones just east of Edge Hill village were felled in 2007.

Common Lime *Tilia* x *europaea*

The landscaping of large estates in our area seems to have become particularly fashionable in the early 18th century a couple of decades before Capability Brown came to the fore. One of the finest legacies of this period is scattered collections of very old Common Limes, either within avenues or loose aggregations. They have a wonderful form, with low-waisted, strongly buttressed trunks that usually give rise to a mass of epicornic growth above the browse line, topped by a rather untidy canopy. One of the finest collections is on the Edge Hill escarpment between Radway Grange and the Edge Hill obelisk just below the Castle pub. The trees have a lot in common with the pub, resulting from the activities of the great gothic architect Sanderson Miller in the 1740s. The largest measured is at SP3729647654 (6.02m/2007), but others, like those immediately around the obelisk or within the Edge Hill woodlands, are smaller through competition with other trees.

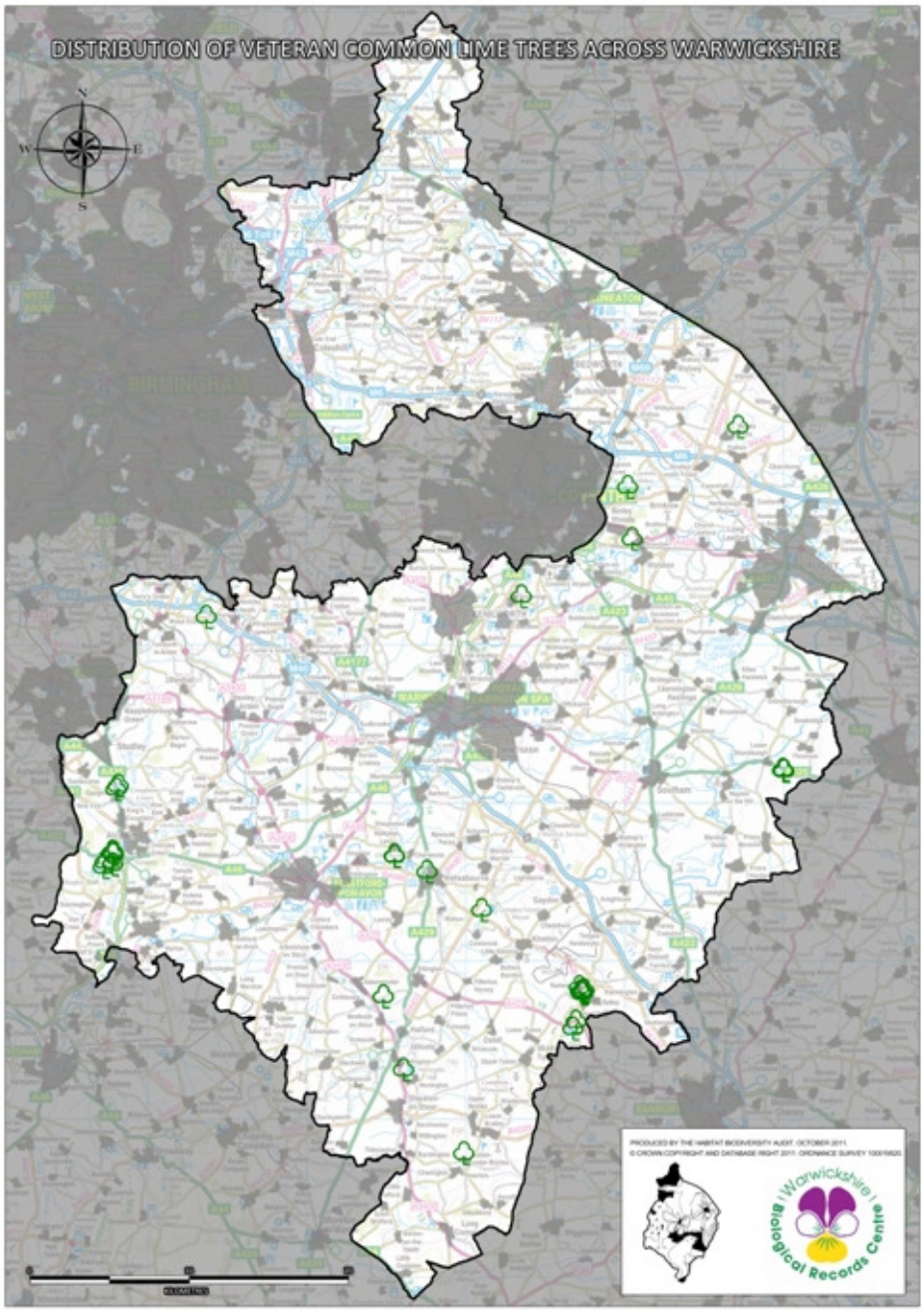
The avenue of Common Limes at Charlecote Park (in the West Park SP2557256184 and visible across the river from the House) is said to be one of the oldest in Britain and seems to have a similar planting date. The largest

Top left: the county champion Common Lime of 6.72m/2007 at Stoneleigh Deer Park Golf Course (left) which does not have a very typical morphology for an old specimen and has also lost its crown. The smaller specimen at Shuckburgh Park (top right) is more typical with a deeply fluted lower trunk and a mass of epicornic growth above the browsing line. Bottom: part of the early 18th century Common Lime avenue at Charlecote Park.

was 5.15m/2006. There is some indication from old sketches that the row of trees at Honington Hall beside the parish church (largest 5.58m/2006) is about the same age. Further examples at Ragley Park (largest 5.67m/2007) and Shuckburgh Park (largest 5.22m/2007) may also pre-date Capability Brown. Where 18th century Common Limes have been stunted by competition with

other trees, a strongly buttresses trunk seems to be a very good indication of 250 years-plus.

Thirty-six Common Limes with girths exceeding 4 metres are currently known in Warwickshire and are thought to predate 1750. The county champion of 6.72m/2007 can be found within Stoneleigh Deer Park Golf Course, close to the track that leads to Deer Keeper's Lodge SP3356572638. It has lost its crown and is regenerating from the top of the remaining trunk. It can be viewed from the nearby Coventry Road.



Distribution of veteran Common Limes in Warwickshire. There is no particular association with the Arden, and concentrations can be seen at Ragley Park (lower left) and Radway Grange (lower right).

Veteran Small-leaved Limes come in two very different forms, maidens like the superb 5.72m/2006 specimen at Baddesley Clinton (top left) and huge coppice stools like this 15 metres example at Oversley Wood (top right).Bottom left: this massive Broad-leaved Lime of 8.3m/2007 in the depths of Ragley Park is one of several claimants of national champion status and is probably over 500 years old. Bottom right: this ancient pollard of 5.30m/2006 was one of several lost at Berkswell Church in 2008, and was probably over 300 years old.

Small-leaved Lime *Tilia cordata*

Many of the oldest trees in Warwickshire are Small-leaved limes, though these are huge coppice stools in ancient woods as opposed to trunked

specimens. Large trunked specimens are actually very scarce – we only know of eight trees with girths exceeding 4 metres. Two such trees vie for position as the county champion. One is hidden in a spinney beside Wolston Grange and has a girth of 5.75m/2008 but this is slightly influenced by bosses. A much more spectacular specimen of great height and impressive form occurs in a field beside the entrance drive to Baddesley Clinton SP1993971762 and has a waist of 5.72m/2006.

Of the coppice stools, the largest indisputably single one I've seen is at Oversley Wood at approximately SP10285621, with a ring of stems 15 metres in circumference. However, even older ones may occur elsewhere in this wood, and also at Ryton Wood, with the coppice stools now so dispersed that it is impossible to tell if you have one large one or a cluster of smaller ones. It is very likely that these largest stools represent Warwickshire's oldest trees and well over a thousand years old. Other good places to see very old lime coppice stools include Piles Coppice just east of the Coventry Eastern By-pass SP385769 (a Woodland Trust wood with open access) and Hartshill Hayes Country Park SP321943 (a mix of Small-leaved and Broad-leaved Lime coppice).

Broad-leaved (or Large-leaved) Lime *Tilia platyphyllos*
The Warwickshire's Oldest Tree Project of the 1990s highlighted the presence of a huge old lime hidden away in the depths of Ragley Park that was stated to be a Small-leaved Lime. When the author eventually checked the tree in 2007, the velvety texture of the new leaves revealed it was actually a Broad-leaved Lime, which gave it considerably greater significance. It is an enormous pollard with a partly collapsed trunk that has an unadjusted girth of 10.20m at the base/2007, which can be roughly adjusted to 8.3m if the split is compensated for. The relatively short trunk gives rise to about ten large stems creating a fabulous medusa-like form. It vies with several other non-Warwickshire specimens for national champion status, having the greater girth, but not the long trunk of its rivals. It is probably at least 500 years old. A total of ten Broad-leaved Limes in Warwickshire have girths exceeding 4 metres and are judged to exceed 250 years, though the second largest (in a field close to Bourton Hall) only attained 5.12m/2008, so the Ragley specimen is very much is a class of its own. Sadly, three superb pollards at Berkswell Church, the largest of which was 5.30m/2006, were felled in 2008 through one of those bizarre decisions that so often condemn trees of great age and importance.

Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*
It has been a surprise to discover how few really old ashes exist in Warwickshire. In early life they grow almost as fast an oak, but by 150 years many are already hollow in the middle due to *Daldinia* fungal attack and prone to wind-blow of their crowns. They seem to be particularly brittle trees. The oldest local specimens are generally those that have lost their top crown but retained enough lower crown for the main trunk to survive. Some local pollards are also quite old. Many of the finest specimens grow on the western slope of Brailes Hill. This includes the county champion (6.0m/2011) which has lost its original crown and is very hollow, but otherwise healthy. A

specimen at Honington Hall close the River Stour has a larger lower base (6.9m/2009) but does not form a proper trunk. Further fine specimen can be found at Lighthorne (footpath off Moreton Morrell Lane SP3347955817, 5.71m/2010) and tree of 5.72m/2008 in a remarkably urbanised location at Shirley (alleyway behind Newborough Road SP1115779309). Twenty-six specimens have girths exceeding 4 metres, but only eleven of these exceed 5 metres. However, I suspect there is great scope for discovering new veteran Ashes as they tend to be widely dispersed in the countryside, often away from public rights of way.

The oldest Ashes tend to be those that have lost their crowns and then survived to form a secondary crown, e.g. the 6.0m/2011 county champion at Brailes Hill (left) and another fine example of 5.71m/2010 at Lighthorne (right).

Poplars *Populus* species

The Native Black Poplar *Populus nigra betulifolia* is subject to another book by the author which gives more information on old specimens and growth forms. It suffices to say here that the county champion can be found on private land at Kite Green, near Henley-in-Arden and has an impressive girth of 5.75m/2010 and is reckoned to be 250-300 years old from its form. Only four trees with girths exceeding 5 metres are known locally, though it is suspected that some trees are growing from much older bases and rootstocks, especially those in damper locations.

Eight specimens of Hybrid Black Poplar *Populus* x *canadensis* with girths exceeding 5 metres have been found to date and are mostly specimens of the hybrid 'Serotina' which is the 'Black Italian Poplar' which arose in 1750 and was the first Hybrid Black Poplar introduced to Britain. The county champion is a magnificent tall tree of 6.5 metres/2009 growing in a field beside Duke Bridge near Maxstoke SP2167688139. However, these hybrids are such fast-

growing trees that it may only have a Victorian origin. It is certainly very healthy-looking. Further fine hybrids can be found at Knowle Park SP1762476773 (largest 6.0m/2006), Coughton Court SP0854360545 (5.41m/2006), Elmdon Park SP1578782894 (5.15m/2006) and the parkland around Coton House near Churchover SP522797 (largest 5.25m/2007).

The only other poplar that makes any size locally is the Grey Poplar *Populus* x *canescens*. The county champion has a girth of 5.0 metres/2008 but has lost its upper crown through wind-blow. It is growing within a spinney on the Compton Scorpion Estate near Holt Farm SP2338640520. At Honington Hall Grey Poplar has suckered to form a belt of woodland along the banks of the Rover Stour towards Tredington. Some fine trees exist within this, the largest measured being 4.13m/2006 with coarse black bark over the entire lower trunk that contrasts strongly with the striking cream bark with black spots higher up. One gains the impression that Grey Poplar was introduced to this area a long time ago, possibly during the 18th century, and has since spread downstream as detached, waterborne twigs embedded themselves in the river banks and suckers spread out from existing trees.

Left: Warwickshire's champion Native Black Poplar, a specimen of 5.75m/2010 at Kite Green. Right: the largest Hybrid Black Poplar, a very tall specimen of 6.5m/2009 at Duke Bridge near Maxstoke which may only be half the age of the previous tree.

Elms *Ulmus*

Large elm trees once abounded in Warwickshire. They are responsible for the term 'Leafy Warwickshire' and the English Elm *Ulmus minor* var *vulgaris* was apparently termed the Warwickshire Weed. But virtually every local tree was lost to Dutch elm disease (DED) from the mid-1970s onwards. There is documentary evidence for some very old local elm specimens prior DED,

notably an enormous English Elm that grew outside Whitnash Church. The girth was said to be 30 feet in 1959 but it was removed by order of the Parish Council in 1960 despite a vigorous campaign that included local TV coverage. Like many large village trees, it had historically served as a meeting place, and there is a fine engraving of Joseph Arch addressing farm labourers beside the tree in 1872 (see Field, 1993). Some of the older locals I've met still recall the tree.

Today, only about twenty trees that were mature when DED arrived in our area still survive. Most of these are Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra*. This includes the current county champion, a fine, full-crowned specimen of 4.10m/2009 at Rowington SP2054069176 overhanging the Old Warwick Road just east of the parish church. It probably has a mid to late eighteenth century origin Another notable specimen (2.59m/2006) grows beside the A429 between Barford and Wellesbourne SP2743457241 and appears to a hybrid of some sort, possibly of Victorian origin. A former employee of the Wellesbourne Horticultural Research International Building nearby, Joe Hardman, described how staff there attempted to inoculate the many large English Elms of this area when DED arrived, sadly in vain. The fact that the surviving tree is not an English Elm shows the influence that genetics can have in resisting death by DED. Another fine and easily viewed Wych Elm specimen of 3.80m/2011 occurs in a Coleshill front garden along the Coventry Road near Woodlands School SP2004087466. A Wych Elm of 3.72m/2011 is also known from a private spinney near Ansley Hall.

Large elms once abounded in Warwickshire giving rise to the term 'Leafy Warwickshire' but were decimated by Dutch elm disease. Two of the few surviving large trees are the county champion at Rowington (left) and the majestic 'Wellesbourne Elm' on the A429 (right).

Common Alder *Alnus glutinosa*
Alder coppice stools abound along our river local systems, and some attain impressive size, though their location often makes them difficult to measure. Actual trunks of any size are pretty hard to find though. Like birches and Rowan, they seem to fall over once they approach a 2 metre girth. The best trunked specimen found to date is one of 3.07m/2009 near the River Stour just south of Honington Hall. Nearby, a recently windblown specimen of 4.5 metres was found that would have been the county champion by a country mile had it been alive. Several further specimens with particularly large bases are present in this area too.

Some of the largest Common Alders grow in the Stour Valley near Honington Hall, including a live specimen of 3.07m/2009 (left) and a recently fallen one of 4.50m/2009 (right).

Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*
This is a much maligned tree being an introduced species that can become highly invasive in local ancient woods. However, it can form a magnificent parkland specimen when allowed to grow out in the open, perhaps best exemplified by a tree of 5.68m/2007 growing at SP3337441918 beside the public footpath that runs path Compton Wynyates north to Tysoe. However, it is not the county champion, and indeed some confusion surrounds which of two trees actually is. In terms of hard girth, a tree overhanging the Tamworth Road at Keresley House SP3050784249 would seem to be an easy winner. It has an incredible girth of 6.18m/2007. However, the nature of that trunk is strongly suggestive of batch planting. It would be lovely to think it was genuinely ancient, but as a batch-planted specimen, it may only have a late 18th century origin. If the Keresley tree is disqualified on this basis, the county champion becomes a tree of 5.85m/2007 at the National Trust's Upton House, hidden within the north spinney of the main entrance drive SP3701145875 (you can see the crown rising above the other trees but need to enter the

spinney to see the fine trunk). Further fine specimens can be found at Shuckburgh Park (5.67m/2007) and Farnborough Park near the obelisk (5.26m/2007). Twenty-one specimens with girths exceeding 4 metres are known, and six of these are over 5 metres and judged to have a pre-Victorian origin.

Top left: a magnificent 18th century Sycamore of 5.68m/2007 at Compton Wynyates. Top right: the massively trunked specimen of 6.18m/2007 at Keresley House may be batch planted and therefore younger than it appears. Bottom left: a multi-stemmed Field Maple with a solid lower base of 6.6m/2007 at Clopton Park, near Stratford. Bottom right: a very large leaning Field Maple photographed beside the River Stour near Halford in the late 1990s has since been lost but probably exceeded 3 metres in girth (right).

Field Maple *Acer campestre*

Field Maples are much slower-growing than Sycamore and rarely attain any size. Indeed, only nine specimens are known with girths exceeding 2 metres. However, one exceptional specimen clearly of great antiquity is known from Clopton Hill near Stratford-on-Avon SP2033456758. It has a solid base of 6.60m/2007 giving rise to four stems. It must surely be several centuries old and may be a former coppice stool. The largest concentration of old 'trunked' Field Maples is at Ragley Park, and the finest of these (2.9m/2007) occurs

close to Park Cottage SP0651755928 and can be seen from the adjacent right of way. Another very impressive trunked specimen that seems to have exceeded 3 metres used to grown on the east banks of the River Stour about 1km west of Halford. I took a photo of it in the late 1990s when it was leaning heavily, but could not trace of it by 2010 and suspect it collapsed across the river and required clearance.

Birches *Betula*

Birches rarely attain great size. Those in woods generally disintegrate or fall over once their girths approach 2 metres which is estimated to represent about one hundred years. But two specimens stand out as older. At The Warwickshire Golf Course, Leek Wootton, beside a public footpath within Terrace Hill Wood, one can find a superb specimen of Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* of 3.12m GBH/2007 at SP2831968782. There is also a record of a 3.48m specimen in Claverdon parish from the Warwickshire's Oldest Tree Survey of the 1990s, though this might relate to the base of a multi-stemmed or coppiced specimen. A very fine specimen of Silver Birch *Betula pendula* can be found at Wiglands Wood, near Ashorne. The trunk is 2.43m GBH/2008 and features the roughened black bark that is usually confined to the base of a trunk, for a considerable height. It is very difficult to gauge how old many birches are, though a fine specimen of Downy Birch (2.15m) that recently blew over in Thickthorn Wood, Kenilworth had growth rings that suggest about 120-150 years.

Birches rarely attain any size in Warwickshire. The champion Downy Birch of 3.12m/2007 (left) grows within the Warwickshire Golf Course, Leek Wootton. The champion Silver Birch of 2.43m/2008 is in a wood near Ashorne Hill.

Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*
Relatively few large Hornbeams exist locally but an exceptional specimen with a girth of 5.27m/2006 grows on the southern boundary of the Abbey Business Park at Stareton within the historic footprint of Stoneleigh Park. The bark is wonderfully fluted, though David Alderman of TROBI, who visited the tree with me in 2007 senses it might be a 'twin' with two trunks fused together. This has significant implications for its age, as it would place it nearer to perhaps 250 years rather than 400 (they do not grow as fast as English Oak). However, the exceptionally deep fluting of the trunk speaks to me of an exceptionally old tree, as it takes several centuries for this character to develop so strongly.

Holly *Ilex aquifolium*
Holly is a native of our local woods, especially ancient woods on more acidic soils. Most specimens are young – it would have been selected against in many regularly coppiced woods. However, some sizeable 'trunked' specimens can turn up non-coppiced woods such as the spinneys associated with historic properties and also within ancient hedges of the Arden. Some of the largest specimens found to date (largest 2.50m/2007 for a straight trunk) are at Shuckburgh Park, just behind the house, though this area is strictly private. Unusually large specimens of a more accessible nature can be seen in the pets cemetery area of Stoneleigh Abbey, the largest of which is 3.03m/2010 at the base, forking at 1 metre (which results in the base being larger than a single trunked specimen).

Warwickshire's champion Hornbeam of 5.27m/2006 at Stareton near Stoneleigh (left) showing the very deep fluting of the trunk. A fine trunked Holly of 2.50m/2007 at Shuckburgh Hall (right).




Top: the national champion Wild Pear of 3.78m/2010 near Cubbington. At the time of writing it is threatened by the proposed route of the High Speed 2 railway link between London and Birmingham. Bottom left: the trunk of a Wild Crab of 2.87m/2011 near Brailes Hill. Bottom right: a pair of very old Crabs with trunks of 2.69m & 2.54m/2006 with a connecting stem between the two.

Wild Pear *Pyrus communis* subspecies *communis*

In Warwickshire, we are still trying to define what constitutes a true Wild Pear as they are rather variable in appearance and fruit shape. However, we do

have a couple of thousand 'feral' pears in hedgerows and at woodland edge which have spiny lower growth and small roundish fruit. Some of these seem to be very old, possibly dating back to the 18th century Enclosure Acts. A specimen of 3.78m/2010 in a hedge close to Cubbington Wood SP3530668259 is an exceptional tree currently regarded as the national champion. It made the national press in early 2011 as it stands on the route of the proposed High Speed 2 railway link. Scarcely 2 kilometres away, another large Wild Pear of 2.8m /2011 beside the Welsh Road near Welsh Road Farm SP3765864556 (the third largest in the county) is equally threatened by the same proposal. Another very fine specimen of 3.14m/2008 grows beside the A46 close to the roundabout junction with A439 at Upper Fulbrook SP2394660601 and can be easily seen from the road on your left as you approach the roundabout from the north.

Crab Apple *Malus sylvestris*
Few large Wild Crabs are known in Warwickshire. The current champion of 2.87m/2011 grows on the edge of a private wood near Brailes Hill. An impressive pair with girths of 2.69m & 2.54m/2006 also grow at the edge of a private woodland spinney, near Ashorne Hill. They are even more interesting for the fact that a low stem seems to connect the two suggesting that they are one organism. At Shuckburgh Park a Crab of 2.59m/2007 is said to have been planted in 1825 but is in an exposed location so may have grown at a slower rate then the previous specimens.

Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*
Rowans are natives of our ancient woods, especially on poorer more acid soils where trees like Sessile Oak and Downy Birch are present. They generally fail to attain any size but at Bunson's Wood, Keresley one can find a surprising number of specimens that are much larger than average, with a morphology that speaks of considerable age. The largest measured is 2.48m/2010 but several others come close to this. However, it looks like this is close to their age limit in Warwickshire as they clearly tend to collapse and die at this stage, much like the birches they grow alongside. How old they are is uncertain, though as a slow-growing species and within a shaded woodland community, 150 years might well be feasible for some of them.

Wild Service Tree *Sorbus torminalis*
Like its relative the Rowan, this is (as a wild tree) predominantly a feature of our ancient woods, though it is clearly more tolerant of lime-rich soils. Few trees attain any size and many are multi-stemmed, possibly from a very ancient root system. The largest found to date is located on the county boundary within Poole Wood (the Ling Ground) SP0445254570 near Morton Spirt. The lower trunk is 2.64m/2007 but it forks at 1 metre, so is really a 'twin'. Further specimens of reasonable size occur in Oversley Woods (a multi-stemmed specimen close the central ride junction SP1043456217) and along the west edge of Bush Wood, near Lowsonford at SP1759368818.

True Service Tree *Sorbus domestica*
Four specimens at Coombe Countryside Park just west of the visitor centre are said to have been planted in 1765 and represent some of the largest

examples in Britain. Indeed, the biggest of 3.46m/2006 at SP4004979597 is the national champion, but all four look reasonably healthy and could easily be passed over as Victorian specimens.

Top left: one of the larger Common Rowans at Bunsons Wood, Keresley. Top right: the county champion Wild Service Tree of 2.64m/2007 at Poole Wood. Bottom left: the national champion True Service Tree of 3.46m/2006 at Coombe Countryside Park. Bottom right: Warwickshire's largest Common Hawthorn of 3.9m/2011 near Brailes Hill.

Common Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*
Hawthorns with solid lower trunks exceeding 2 metres in girth are relatively scarce in our area. Those that are known tend to lurk in secondary woodland, pasture and historic parkland and can be easily overlooked. The most significant concentration of them to date was shown to me by Caroline Warren of the Compton Scorpion Estate in a private wood close to Brailes Hill. This contains a magnificent specimen with a solid lower base of 3.9m/2011 which soon gives rise to several large stems. Several other specimens with trunks exceeding 2 metres occur nearby. No ancient Midland Hawthorns *C. laevigata* are currently known in Warwickshire.

Willows *Salix*
Ancient-looking pollards of Crack Willow *Salix fragilis* and White Willow *Salix alba* abound along Warwickshire's watercourses and sometimes in damper meadows. It has always been a struggle to age these (they are usually hollow), and age does not seem as strictly correlated to girth as with some other pollards. Recording has therefore concentrated on noting the specimens with exceptional girths. One of the best places to see such trees is the Avon Valley north of Hampton Lucy towards Copdock Hill. The largest White Willow pollard here has a trunk of 6.02/2006 and several others exceed 5 metres. They must be several centuries old. Two fine multi-stemmed specimens which may be outgrown coppice stools occur beside the River Blythe at Temple Balsall just north of Springfield House. The largest has a basal girth of 8.79m/2007. The largest local Weeping Willows seem to have a Victorian origin.

Left: a White Willow pollard of 6.02m/2006 near Hampton Lucy. Right: a particularly large multi-stemmed example of 8.79m/2007 at Temple Balsall

Sallows are the smaller shrubbier willows with rounder leaves, and one species, Goat Willow *Salix caprea* can attain 2 metres. Some of the largest occur near the entrance of the Forest of Arden Golf Course near Maxstoke. One trunked specimen in the Scouts camp there attained 3.10m @ 50cm/2007 below a fork and a pollard nearby was 2.53m/2007.

Goat Willow does not grow as large as White and Crack Willows, but two specimens at the Forest of Arden Golf course of 3.10m/2007 (bottom left) and 2.53m/2007 (bottom right) are very large examples for this species.

Further Exotic Broadleaves

Pre-Victorian specimens of further broadleaves are very rare in Warwickshire, but a few specimens deserve mention.

London Plane *Platanus* x *hispanica*

Ten Warwickshire specimens have girths exceeding 5 metres and are judged to be pre-Victorian. The county champion grows in the riverside parkland of Stratford-on-Avon just south of the Brass-rubbing Centre SP2014754447. It has a wonderful form and the trunk is bulbous at its base just like the fine ones you see in London parks. The girth at 1.5 metres is 6.46m/2006 and it probably has an early to mid 18th century origin. Further fine examples can be seen at Warwick Castle at SP2807264301 (6.1m/206) and Stoneleigh Abbey (largest 5.94m/2006) SP3200371103. Honington Hall has a number of specimens probably dating from the early 18th century, the largest being 6.19m/2006. Specimens at Compton Verney with girths up to 4.67m/2006 are also claimed to be pre-1800 in tree reports produced for the grounds. It is possible that they originate from Capability Brown's landscaping, though the girths seem rather too small for this.

Top left: Warwickshire's largest London Plane of 6.46m/2006 beside the River Avon, Stratford upon Avon. Top right: a False Acacia of 5.21m/2007 at Talton House said to be planted in 1718. The tree behind it is a sucker from the same root system. Bottom left: a superb Tulip Tree of 5.25m/2006 at Farnborough Hall which almost certainly has an 18th century origin. Bottom right: Warwickshire's largest Walnut of 3.93m/2007 at Wolfhampcote could also be pre-Victorian.

False Acacia *Robinia pseudoacacia*

At Talton House, near Crimscote, an exceptional specimen can be found just beside the House (and visible from the nearby lane). The main trunk is

5.21m/2007 and wonderfully textured. The upper crown has largely been lost, but the root system has sent up several satellite trunks of respectable size. The owner informed me that it had been planted in 1718. A multi-stemmed specimen with a base of 5.05m/2006 nearby at Honington Hall is said to be a similar age, but presumably lost its main trunk some time ago, resulting in a dense regeneration of stems from the base (a frequent habit of False Acacias that have lost their trunks). Two further pre-Victorian specimens, probably of late 18th century origin, can be found in Warwick's Priory Park, not far from the Warwick County Record Office. The largest of 4.66m/2007 is at SP2834265293 and is very over-mature.

Tulip Tree *Liriodendron tulipifera*
A very fine specimen of 5.25m/2006 grows close to Farnborough Hall. It is the only one in Warwickshire that is obviously pre-Victorian.

Walnut *Juglans regia*
Only five Common Walnuts with girths exceeding 3 metres are recorded in Warwickshire. The largest, is one of 3.93m/2007 at Wolfhampcote SP5261465227 It may have a pre-Victorian origin, though it is not especially large by national standards. Several fine Black Walnuts *J. nigra* at Coombe Countryside Park, the largest of which is 3.34m/2006, are assumed to originate in Victorian planting.

Black Mulberry *Morus nigra*

Two Black Mulberries that may have 18th century origins: Bilton Rectory (left) and Stratford-upon-Avon's New Place (right).

Black Mulberries often acquire a very ancient appearance with a number of thick limbs spreading outwards and often artificially supported by rods or plinths as if they could collapse under their own weight. I have been told by some tree experts that they may not be as old as they look, and many may be at best be mid-Victorian. One particular story relating to the mulberries of Stratford-upon-Avon provides the tantalising possibility that few specimens may actually have an eighteenth century origin. Some are said to result from the planting of cuttings taken from a tree chopped down by the Reverend Gaskill at New Place (once the home of Shakespeare and his wife) in c1760.

The tree he destroyed was apparently planted by Shakespeare when he first moved in, and attracted too much attention for the Reverend's liking. He eventually demolished the house itself! Further fine specimens that mat predate 1800 can be found in the garden of Bilton Rectory next to the church, and at Spon Street in Coventry.

Gymnosperms and conifers

Many of our most familiar conifers such as Giant Redwood (Wellingtonia), Coast Redwood (Sequoia), Atlas Cedar, Deodar and cypresses were first introduced to Britain by the Victorians. This means that even the largest examples cannot predate the known year of introduction for that species (e.g. 1853 for Wellingtonia and 1841 for Atlas Cedar). Pre-Victorian conifers are unusual and special, and they often originate from grand landscaping schemes by the likes of Capability Brown.

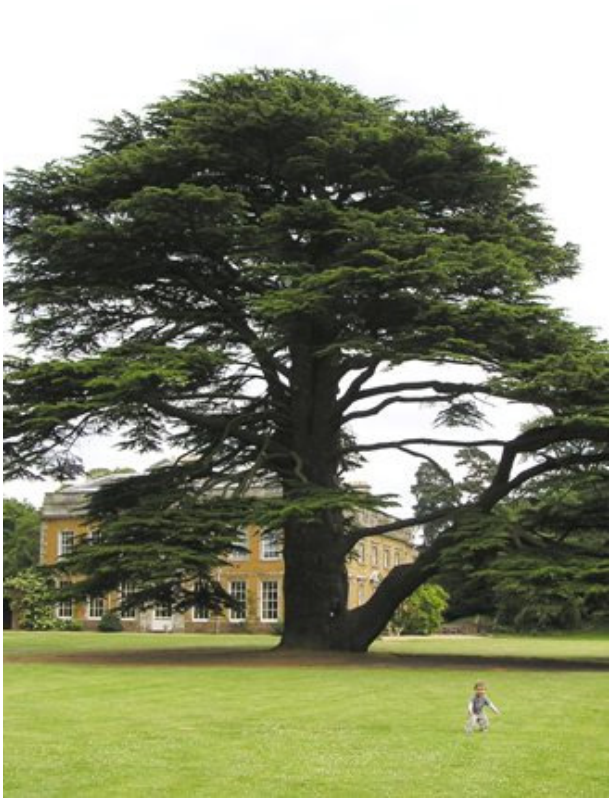
Yew *Taxus baccata*

If you come to Warwickshire hoping to find Yews as large as some of those found in counties like Shropshire or Herefordshire you will be disappointed. Only 14 trees with girths exceeding 4 metres (which seems to represent about 300 years-plus) are currently known. The county champion, a multi-stemmed tree of 6.43m/2007 around the base, hides away in a private garden at Leamington Hastings. Ragley Hall has a fine specimen of 5.7m/2006 in its formal gardens (though this may be a 'twin' comprised of two fused trunks) and a tree of 5.7m/2007 grows in front of Shuckburgh Hall. Good churchyard specimens can be found at Haselor (5.60m @ base/2007), Hatton (5.50 @ 1.40m waist/2007), Priors Hardwick (4.6m/2006) and Meriden (4.44m @30cm/2006). A specimen of 2.85m/2006 at Wixford Church with wooden struts holding up its branches is said to date from 1780. Leicestershire County Council's Ready Reckoner for ageing Yew is: 9' (242 yrs), 11' (292 yrs), 18' (720yrs), 19'8" (820yrs) and 20' (1000yrs). This would make our local Yews with girths of 5.50m-plus an astonishing age of at least 700 years.

Cedar of Lebanon *Cedrus libani*

Most if not all British specimens of this Middle-eastern tree post-date 1740 because a severe frost of that year killed off most of the original British specimens. However, they were popular in mid-eighteenth century landscaping and Capability Brown planted many. Most of Warwickshire's oldest specimens seem to be associated with his work and the finest collection can be seen Compton Verney. This includes a stunning multi-stemmed specimen at SP3105552712 with a basal girth of 10.56m/2006 making it one of the largest in Britain. At Farnborough Hall, a trunked specimen of 8.0m @ 2m/2006 may be just as old, though I am not familiar with the planting history of this site, which is not listed as a Brownian scheme (though clearly influenced and possibly contemporary). Further 18th century specimens exist at Charlecote Park, Packington Park, Shuckburgh Park, Wroxhall Abbey and possibly Warwick Castle, though the largest one at the last site has a relatively small girth (4.41m @ 1m/2007) and may be a Victorian addition.



Top left: the county champion Yew of 6.53m/2007 at Leamington Hastings, and top right: another fine specimen of 5.5m/2007 at Hatton Church. Both of these trees could be over 700 years old. Bottom left: a multi-stemmed Cedar of Lebanon with a basal girth of 10.56m/2006 at Compton Verney - one of the largest in Britain. Bottom right: a trunked specimen of 8.0m/2006 (measured above the low side branch) at Farnborough Hall.

Other conifers
Most conifers fail to acquire girth in the same way as a broadleaved trees such as oaks, and gauging their age can therefore be difficult. Within Warwickshire, the champion Black Pine *Pinus nigra* is a 3.75m/2007 specimen thought to represent subspecies *pallasiana* (Crimean Pine) beside the Compton Verney public car park SP3130452713. The champion Scots Pine is a specimen of 3.71m/2006 in the rose garden of Farnborough Park SP4290949426. Both are considered to be 18th century trees. Further fine Scots Pines can be found at Stareton beside the Abbey Business Park SP3438971690 (3.64m/2007) and Halford Church (3.60m/2006).

One of our most interesting large conifers is a European Larch *Larix decidua* within a private enclave at Stoneleigh Deer Park Golf Course. The girth of 5.64m/2007 makes it the English champion and not far short of the national record. It appears to be one of several larches that caught the attention of Elwes & Henry (1900-1913) and may well attain 300 years. Most larger specimens of Norway Spruce *Picea abies* seem to originate from early- to mid-Victorian plantings, but a specimen of 3.48m/2009 at Brandon Hall is significantly larger and may predate 1800.

Happy tree hunting!

I hope you enjoy hunting out veteran trees as much as I have over the years and find new ones that have been missed by others. If you do, don't forget to report them to the Warwickshire County Council Ecology Unit.

Warwickshire's two largest pines, a Scots Pine of 3.71m/2006 at Farnborough Park (left) and a Black (Crimean) Pine of 3.75m/2007) at Compton Verney (right).

The county (and English) champion European Larch of 5.64m/2007m grows at Stoneleigh (left) and Warwickshire's largest Norway Spruce of 3.48m/2009 is at Brandon Hall (right).

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