

G B. Cemetery Improvements

THE ENGLISH YEW

Common Yew Taxus Baccata. Evergreen

The Yew famous for a life span of hundreds of years, specimens within Churchyards estimated to be over 1000 years old. Invariably located on raised ground is the survival system. The roots susceptible to flood submersion during the growing season is basically the only threat to their survival. The tree can develop from a single bole or it is quite commonly found presenting a multi bole growth, touching groups consisting of two or three singles does happen.

Height variations are considerable in mature trees from Thirty three feet to as much eighty two feet. (10 to 25 metres).

Yews pollinate February to March releasing copious amounts for the trees are either male or female.

The male flowers being of small globular vessels that cluster on the underside of last years shoots. Female flowers have minute green embryo berries on ripening they swell to a red fleshy translucent pulp which is sweet and edible, a valuable food source for many birds and small mammals. The black seed embedded within its top, seen exposed is poisonous.

We do have a fine specimen of English Yew its location found at the very bottom of the burial area. Measures to the height of 45 feet, the branches spread averages at 36 feet at extremities 40 feet. Fortunately the ground here is slightly raised which has enabled its survival during last summers flooding. The Gunnsbrook watercourse passes by on the south side and on to enter the River Welland some two hundred yards away just beyond Dingley road.

This tree may be as much as two hundred years old, note its growth is more substantial than the others you can find within the cemetery. The Irish Yews do seem to have been planted with more formality indicating possibly introduced at the time the cemetery was created, as we know was first put to use January 1880. Smaller examples of English Yew are up near the entrance and front boundary wall.

Our Yew is undergoing a trim removing the mass of epicormic growth now dead endangering the tree to fungal infection or disease attack. In addition this tree was suffering from dieback at the west side, brought about by the rampant growth of Elder trees which had developed unchecked during the last twenty years or so. Some twenty eight plus mature and young elder trees were removed March 2007 and burnt on a bonfire.

The final removal of the epicormic growths will be completed during next autumn – winter season, well, live branches have to be removed to balance the tree effectively lifting the head.

The reason for the dieback, the Yew is a slow grower. Cannot react quick enough to counter the fast growing elder trees, which blocked out daylight smothering healthy low growing branches of the Yew. Further branches were removed by H.D.C.staff to facilitate access to a burial space on the north side, fortunately not going higher than the dieback section.

The mature Lawsons Cypress cultivar also lost some trunk growths from its multi trunk system requiring the removal of some dead sections fortunately will look good when finished.

The space between these two trees post the removal of the elders, which also now extends each side along the edge of the watercourse, this space is under a three year planned programme developing as a English Wildflower Site.

This work is being carried out with thanks to the initiative we share with Harborough District Council. Working with Matthew Bills the Manager of The Public Open Spaces Department.

Special thanks to John Coombs for his very able recent active support in this area.

Historic Note

In British History The English Yew Famous for its use as a formidable weapon as the Long Bow .

The Long Bow Militarily creating a firing distance and at such power never before seen on a field of battle.

King Henry 111 led his army to beat the French King Philip August 26th. 1346. to an astounding Victory of Crecy with odds of 3 to 1 against him. History records that this ranks with Blenheim, Waterloo, also the final advance in the last summer of the Great War as one of the four supreme achievements by the British Army up to that time .

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