

Findon Tree Survey

Introduction

“Trees lift the heart and soothe the soul”

Trees are under a lot of pressure in modern day Britain, climate change, disease, building development and agricultural activity all combine to test existing trees and make establishment of new ones difficult.

In England, West Sussex is reckoned to be second only to Surrey in the percentage of tree cover, 20.9%. Much of this cover is associated with the Weald of the county, an old English term for forest.

The village of Findon lies a short distance north of Worthing on the edge of the South Downs National Park and is surrounded by rolling hills. Nestling in an agricultural landscape typical of the downs, tree cover is dense in parts but sparse towards the higher ground. Three hills are important to the village, Cissbury, Church Hill and the far-off clump of Chanctonbury all contribute to the feeling of quiet isolation. This is despite the close proximity of the busy A24 which passes close by but is forgotten once in the village.



Looking towards the village from beside the church, Chanctonbury Ring is seen off to the left.

As in many villages trees are an important feature of the character but all too easy to take for granted. One of the purposes of this document is to encourage you to look up and just notice trees close by and further away. All too often trees only come to the fore when they are seen as in the way or dangerous. We care best for the things that we have made a connection with, this is especially true of the natural world. It is the reason why children especially need to be made aware of their surroundings and encouraged to look at nature, something which comes naturally early in life.

I have been walking around the village for a few months now looking at trees and will outline what I have seen. This survey was just conducted from the lanes and rights of way, there may be all sorts of gems hidden away in private places!

I will make some proposals for possible tree planting opportunities; these are without regard for land ownership and are there for discussion. It could be that others, who know the village better than I, have their own ideas. I hope to start the discussion that leads to trees being planted.

No initiatives can take place without the enthusiastic support of local residents. Findon has active volunteers who undertake many valuable conservation tasks around the village and there are a number of possibilities.



A view out of the village towards Church Hill



Cissbury Hill topped with its iron Age hill fort

A note on identification

To keep things simple, I have kept to using common names for the trees listed in this survey. In appendix 2 there is a list of the trees with their Latin names. There is more work to do to get exact identification of some species, especially the Limes, Tilia species.

It is simple to name an Oak as common but there are two distinct species, *Quercus robur*, the pedunculate Oak and *Quercus petraea*, the Sessile Oak, both are British natives and present in the village. For this overview of the trees of the village I'll keep things straightforward for clarity.

From the South

The church of St John the Baptist

There are a number of ways of approaching the village from the south, along the A24 from Worthing is the most obvious but there is a good network of footpaths either side of the valley. I will start on the west side approaching the parish church, unfortunately the busy A24 has rather cut the church off from the heart of the village, a tree lined drive leads up to it past the impressive Findon Place.



The drive consists mainly of Lime trees with scattered Horse Chestnut and Sycamores. The front of Findon place is an imposing arrangement of tall Yew and Holm Oak hedging, beautifully proportioned with the Georgian façade.

The church itself is almost completely surrounded by trees, in the churchyard are good examples of Irish Yew, Variegated Holly and Cherry. On the boundary wall with Findon Place loom large Beech, Lime and Horse Chestnut. Overhanging the car park is an impressive Walnut which has multi stems and just in the field nearby is a good sized Horse Chestnut.

Back down the drive the main A24 makes its presence felt.



Completed in 1938 the road bypasses the village, the central reservation is planted with a range of trees which have attained reasonable proportions. A group of Rowans shown above are good specimens.

The road splits at a roundabout with the A280 going off westwards and a road into the village on the right. On the roundabout is a good clump of Beech (including a Rookery) some Yew and a Holly.



Back down the A24 past the Black Horse and the Garden Centre a young replacement Lime is planted at the High Street junction, young Field Maples are at the village sign. Around the corner is the fine stand of Evergreen Oaks on the east of the road, these trees are a prominent feature as the village is approached from the south. They are around 70 – 100 years old and planted in a double row along a field boundary.



Nepcote and Nepcote Lane

Up Nepcote from the A24 the lane is bounded by trees forming a tunnel, this is the case in several roads in Findon and gives a special character to those areas. The main species are Ash, Sycamore, Field Maple and a clump of Scots Pine. The lane takes a sharp turn to the left with Cissbury House drive on the corner. Parkland with scattered trees can be seen on the right and views to Church Hill open up to the right. There is a mature Horse Chestnut next to the little chapel.

At the crest of the hill Nepcote green opens up on the right, this is a lovely area which has received some good tree planting over the years. A prominent Copper Beech was planted to commemorate the marriage of Prince Charles to Lady Diana Spencer in 1981, young Limes flank Cissbury lane on the north of the green and a Weeping Willow overhangs the pond.



At the top (north east) corner there is a car park with a tall multi stemmed Beech which was probably pollarded at some time.



The lane turns left down towards the village into another of the characteristic “tree tunnels”. There are some large Hazels near the corner and then tall Sycamore, Ash, Norway maple, Lime, Horse Chestnut, Holly and Yew flanking the road into Findon village itself.



Up Soldiers Field Lane is a fine Beech hedge



On Paddock Way, a small cul de sac, a fine Plane tree stands alone.

High Street

From the Black Horse junction, the High Street leads into the village. A prominent group of Larch shelter a bus stop and good Limes, evergreen Oaks and Sycamore flank the road. Several new plantings are doing well, Winter Flowering Cherry and Rowan amongst them.

In the grounds of Findon Manor can be seen Robinia, Scots Pine and notably a standing dead conifer. Dead trees are seldom left standing especially in such a prominent position, but they are valuable habitats for a range of wildlife.

Behind the Gun Inn is a row of evergreen conifers which I am yet to identify.



Along to the end of the Horsham Road (as the High Street becomes) is the Homewood Green playground, it is surrounded by good Oak, Horse chestnut, Sycamore, Pine and Lime forming a barrier to the A24.

On the side of the main road are some good Ash trees including at least one Manna Ash.

Cross Lane

This is the other main south – north route through the village. From the A24 after a short distance The Chase is a small cul de sac off to the left where there are a number of notable trees. In the copse bounding the main road are good Beech, Hornbeam, Horse Chestnut and a group of Cedar of Lebanon, two of which are standing dead.



Up the lane is Cedar Chase which is screened by a good row of Evergreen oaks.

Foxlea is a small housing development on the right and there are good young plantings of Sorbus, Birch and Field Maples amongst others.

The lane continues and plunges into another tunnel with branches intertwining above the narrow way. At the junction of Steep Lane is a young Ash on a small mound, it is showing some stress, probably the early stages of Ash dieback. Some good Beech line the lane before it again goes into a tunnel, in front of number 30 is a good sized Bay.



A glimpse of Church Hill from Cross Lane.

On into the village a fine Yew has been squeezed by the surrounding walls.

The village green (historically known as Pond Green) is on the right and has some good young trees, Sycamore and Oak.

On the opposite side is Tudor Close which contains a very fine tree, a large Ginkgo, the Maidenhair tree. It is a significant tree which I estimate to be over 100 years old.



The Ginkgo in Tudor Close with Weeping Willow of character on left

Stable Lane

Up this lane there is a good size Horse Chestnut on the left, it has a big trunk and some recent pruning has rejuvenated the top growth.



A Blue Atlantic Cedar is in a property on the right after the bend. At the top end of the lane there are good Sycamores where the drive to Gallops Farm continues.

Beech Road

Along here is a very fine Beech as befits the name of the road!



Off Beech Road are Ash Close, Lime Road and Elm Rise, it's a pity these roads don't have trees befitting their names.

Continuing up Horsham Road

At the Ambulance Station there are some good young maples and down **Nightingales**, a group of Sorbus.



Steep Lane

This well wooded lane is almost completely tunnelled by overhanging trees. There are some fine specimens of Beech, Copper Beech, Variegated Sycamore, Horse Chestnut, Pine and most significantly, Elm. Although Elms are throwing up suckers in hedgerows, they reach a certain size



round 3 metres in height) and then succumb to Dutch Elm disease. The specimen beside number 29 has attained a height of around 20 metres!

West of the High Street

An avenue of trees leads from the High Street to the A24 leading to the drive to the church, this forms part of the long distance Monarchs Way. There are tall Limes, Beech and a hollow Oak. Two roughly triangular fields lie on either side. Beyond the field to the north is a cemetery, this is bounded by some good sized deciduous trees and a notable Beech in the south east corner.

Within the cemetery there is little planting except at the entrance where there are some young cherries on a raised roundabout.



In 2015 Don Lock was the victim of a frenzied attack by a mentally ill man close to the A24 opposite the road into Findon. A large Beech tree near the scene has become the focus of a memorial.



Proposals

There has been a marked increase in awareness of the environmental crisis facing the world in recent months. Organisations like Extinction Rebellion spell out the grave implications for the future of the planet. It is easy to become despondent in the face of such huge, seemingly insurmountable, problems. But action taken locally by enough people will help to turn the tide. It is also true that the

“optimism of action is better than the pessimism of doing nothing”. The organisation Woodland Trust is actively looking for community tree planting projects to support.

- Plant a community orchard
- Appropriate species of trees to be planted on Ash Close, Lime Road and Elm Rise
- An Oak tree in the middle of The Oval green
- A target of 1000 (or fewer) trees to be planted throughout the parish, in gardens, verges and public places
- Increase planting of trees in the cemetery, it is traditional to plant evergreens in burial grounds, a fine example being Broadwater and Worthing cemetery
- A dedicated group of enthusiasts get together to find ways of increasing tree planting in Findon village

Appendix 1

Ash Dieback Disease

This fungal disease has been in the UK for around 8 years and is affecting Ash trees nationwide steadily. It is not spreading as quickly as Dutch elm disease did in the 1970's but its effect could be more devastating. Ash is very widespread across the country with whole woodlands consisting of the species, unlike Elm which was a prominent tree of hedgerows. If the disease continues to take hold and kill millions of trees, as predicted, the effect will be devastating. The whole landscape will be altered. Findon is surrounded by predominantly Ash woodland, with large stands on Cissbury and Church Hill.

It could lead to many trees having to be felled that cause a threat to roads and property. As trees obviously die action will be necessary, we are still in a “slow burn” period of the disease taking hold. At time of writing many young trees are showing signs with several mature specimens resisting attack – this could all change.

It is likely that disease will become more prevalent amongst British trees in years to come, the warming climate, global movements and environmental stress are all putting the pressure on. All the more reason to look after the trees we have and nurture new plantings.

Appendix 2

Latin names

I have used common names throughout the text and have some work to do to exactly identify some trees to their species, this is a list of genera.

Ash, Fraxinus

Beech, Fagus

Birch, Betulus

Cherry, Prunus

Elm, Ulmus

Hawthorn, Crataegus

Hornbeam, Carpinus

Horse Chestnut, Aesculus

Lime, Tilia

Maidenhair, Ginkgo

Oak, Quercus

Pine, Pinus

Sycamore and Maple, Acer

Whitebeam and Rowan, Sorbus

Willow, Salix

Matthew Ward

Findon Village Tree Warden

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