

Tree Condition Report

St Michaels Churchyard Church Street, Lichfield



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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 **Brief:** Initial inquiries regarding a tree condition report were made in 2016 and a quotation produced. This was then incorporated into a grant bid and instruction for the work was received in April 2018. Due to resource limitations the work was completed in April/May 2019.
- 1.1.2 **Limitations:** The detail and recommendations contained within this report are valid for a period of 12 months from the date of survey. Trees are dynamic living structures and are subject to rapid changes due to internal and external influences. Even apparently healthy trees can be damaged by extreme climatic conditions. Although every effort has been made to identify defects within trees surveyed no guarantee can be given as to the safety or otherwise of any individual tree.
- 1.1.3 **Authors** The authors of this report –Gareth Hare and Ian McDermott- are both professional arboriculturalists with qualifications and experience in the fields of arboriculture and forestry. Any comments outside those parameters should be viewed as those of lay-people.

2 SITE VISIT

- 2.1.1 **Site visit:** Ian McDermott carried out several site visits in order to complete the survey over the course of three weeks. Conditions were variable over the course of the visits. However, visibility was always adequate for the purposes of tree inspection.

Site description: St Michael on Greenhill is a parish church in Lichfield, Staffordshire in the United Kingdom, located on the high ground of Greenhill in the east of the city. A church has been on the present site since at least 1190 but the current building dates mainly from the restoration of 1842-43. The churchyard is one of five ancient burial grounds in England and is one of the largest churchyards in the country at 9 acres (36,000 m²). The church is Grade II* listed; [1] four of the monuments in the churchyard are separately listed Grade II. (Wikipedia). The tree population has a substantial population of large trees, predominantly dating from the Victorian era with a few older specimens. The site also has a large number of younger trees (0-70 years) which have been planted or allowed to regenerate. Many of the trees are close to and displacing monuments. These consist mostly of Ash, Birch and Holly with a few other species as minor components.

- 2.1.2 **Methodology:** The trees were inspected using standard VTA (Visual Tree Assessment) techniques. No drilling, excavation or any other intrusive investigative techniques were used during the survey.

As this is a tree safety survey, all measurements are estimated. Data was entered into a customised spreadsheet.

- 2.1.3 **Species:** Common and botanical names is recorded.
- 2.1.4 **Tree Height:** This is given in metres and was estimated
- 2.1.5 **Trunk Diameter:** is recorded in centimetres and was estimated.
- 2.1.6 **Crown Spread:** this was estimated and given as an average.
- 2.1.7 **Life stage:** This is denoted as Young, Early Mature, Mature or Over Mature respectively.
- 2.1.8 **Life expectancy:** Given in years.
- 2.1.9 **Biological Condition:** This is given as Good, Fair or Poor
- 2.1.10 **Recommendations:** these contain the recommendations for work to the tree and detail the level of works required i.e. PODW (Prune out dead wood)
- 2.1.11 **Comments:** Any comments that may be relevant i.e. pruning history or presence of notable dysfunction. In addition other comments or observations on future management.
- 2.1.12 **Risk Assessment:** The survey includes an integral risk assessment.

3 STATUTORY CONTROLS

3.1 Trees Subject to Statutory Controls:

The site is not currently subject to statutory controls. However, many works in Churchyards require faculties (essentially permission) from the Diocese to be granted and the work is often under the direction of Churchwardens and the relevant Parish Council.

- 3.1.1 **Wildlife:** Trees are the habitat of nesting birds and roosting bats. Many bird species and all British bat species are protected. Timing of works in terms of nesting birds is critical and if the presence of bats is suspected that Natural England should be contacted for advice.

3.2 Implementation of Tree Works:

The Arboricultural Association (The lead body for Arboriculture in the UK) publishes guidance on hiring an Arborist. In addition their register of approved contractors is available on their website www.trees.org.uk and from: The Malthouse, Stroud Green, Standish, Stonehouse,

Gloucestershire GL10 3DL The contractor should carry out work to a minimum standard of BS 3998(Recommendations for tree work) and their work should be informed by modern best practice.

4. Discussion

- 4.1 Tree survey. This is provided as a separate document due to size and is accompanied by an annotated plan based on the topographical survey carried out by Beacon Land Surveys.
- 4.2 The trees are situated throughout the churchyard. As previously indicated, many of the older specimens date from the Victorian era with a small proportion being of potentially earlier origin. There are a number of trees that have been planted in the last 20-30 years. Some of these have established well but have suffered from initially high planting densities and subsequent delayed management, lack of formative pruning and perhaps most significantly, bark stripping by grey squirrels. In addition there are hundreds of self set trees (Ash, Birch and Holly predominantly). Many of these trees are within or very close to monuments and are displacing or damaging them. Many also surround older mature trees.
- 4.3 The combination of recently planted trees and regeneration/self sets has resulted in areas which:
- Are very dense and closely spaced,
 - Where large trees are being crowded by the smaller ones
 - Where monuments are being displaced/broken
 - Have large numbers of small trees that require re-spacing in order to give the better specimens a chance to develop
- This is reflected in the management recommendations for groups where halo thins (giving space to the larger trees) and re-spacing of the regenerated trees has been recommended. Removal of self-set trees that are displacing or damaging monuments should also be undertaken as soon as possible. As noted within the survey, poisoning the stumps will ensure they do not re-grow and continue to damage the monuments in question. This can be achieved using plug type herbicide application which is discreet, effective and extremely low risk to wildlife/visitors and pets due to the entirely contained nature of application.
- 4.4 There are relatively few large trees which require works. In the majority of these cases the works amount to simple operations such as removing basal growth to allow re-inspection, crown lifting, removal of

deadwood etc. In only a handful of cases are more substantial works required such as felling. The likelihood of failure of the retained trees is considered for each individual or group and an overall risk rating is given.

- 4.5 Works over recent years have been undertaken within the site with the main impact being the removal of some of the substantial trees to the frontage of the church and within the body of the Churchyard. These have been due to poor condition either physiologically or structurally. Nevertheless, the impact of the removals is apparent and serious consideration should be given to the well planned replacement of these lost specimen trees. Current pest and disease issues such as Ash Dieback and Phytophthora make this a more pressing issue as it is likely that Ash Dieback will affect the tree population of the Churchyard substantially and Phytophthora is the likely cause of decline of some of the Limes. Well planned in this context means the use of species suitable for the conditions, with enough space to develop properly, good planting stock and with a maintenance regime in place to ensure establishment. When climate change and other pressures (such as Grey Squirrels) are taken into account, the need for careful selection of species for the task becomes more apparent. Species which are prevalent in the Churchyard now –Ash, Beech and Birch for example– are unlikely to be suitable in the long term.
- 4.6 Where re-inspection is recommended following works such as Ivy stripping the enabling works should be carried out within 3 months of the date of receipt of the survey. This will enable re-inspection to take place in a reasonable timeframe. The contractor undertaking the Ivy stripping etc. should contact the author of this report if any significant defects are identified which are not capable of being identified from ground level.
- 4.7 All other works within the survey should be undertaken within the recommended timescales.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The tree population within the churchyard is currently in need of attention if there is to be a sustainable tree stock left for future generations. Whilst there has been planting or regeneration much of this has not been maintained or been damaged or is inappropriate for its location. The mature tree population has lost a number of trees in recent years and given their age and species mix, this trend is likely to continue. This combination has resulted in a population of trees which require some intervention proportionate to the risks they impose, with

the integrity of the churchyard and its memorials in mind and to ensure a long term sustainable tree population. This report gives recommendations and suggestions to enable this process to commence. This report, as well as enabling duty holders to discharge their duty of care, should be considered as a starting point on the road to bringing the tree stock back into sustainable management.

- 5.2 Replanting with appropriate species and in appropriate locations should be considered as detailed at 4.5. Detailed consideration must be given to the tree's eventual size, its space requirements, the proximity of memorials and the potential for any replanting to obscure desired views. Advice on replanting is available on request

- 5.3 Further detail such as a full management plan for the tree stock could be provided on request.

G D Hare, 22/05/2019