

## **Welcome to Ryde's Histree Trail**

*The Venerable Oaks Histree Trail is 8.9km (5.5 miles) long. The trail begins and ends in Playstreet Lane on the outskirts of Ryde. The trail presents a moderate walk with some stiles and gates to negotiate. The trail may also be muddy and uneven underfoot in places.*

### *Getting There*

*Bus: 4 or Downs Breezer to the Ryde cemetery.*

*Train: runs twice an hour to Ryde but it is recommended that a bus be taken to the start of the trail as it is a 30 minute walk up through the town. Car: limited street parking is available near the start of the trail.*

**Follow the text and use the map to explore the Venerable Oaks Histree Trail. Travel the old packway waymarked by guardian oaks, pass through ancient woodland and sit beneath the canopy of the Fishbourne Oak.**

The Venerable Oaks Histree Trail begins in Playstreet Lane on the outskirts of Ryde, with the first tree on the trail being an old **False Acacia** tree (1). The **False Acacia** is among a group of ornamental street trees and can be identified by its furrowed bark and oval-shaped, delicate leaves forming leaflets. These trees may have been planted on the edge of the grounds of the old Playstreet Farm which once occupied the area to your right. Other trees in the group include a **Horse Chestnut**, **Common Lime** and a **Pine**.

Start out along the lane, keeping to the same side of the road. Just beyond the school, in the hedgerow stands a magnificent **Oak** tree (2). This huge tree is an ancient pollard measuring almost 5 metres in girth and is thought to be over 250 years old. Pollarding involves

harvesting timber periodically from a tree in a sustainable way, prolonging the life of a tree. This **Oak** tree waymarks the old packway, an ancient right of way on which loaded horses transported goods from Ryde through to Havenstreet and beyond.

Continue along Playstreet Lane. Just before the lane descends, on the ground to your right, stands an old waymarker made of Island limestone. This stone was set in the 1850s and was used as an indicator to mark the old boundary limits of Ryde. The inscribed initials RB stand for 'Ryde Borough'.

At the fork in the lane follow the left trackway downhill, this is now Play Lane. Both Play and Playstreet Lane take their name from the Player family of Ryde. The Players were involved in the development of Victorian Ryde and were frequent benefactors to the town; many roads and places in the area bear their name.

As you travel down Play Lane, an old ditch and bank boundary runs the length of the packway; the home of several impressive **Oaks**. The largest of these **Oaks** is located opposite the Millennium Green entrance towards the bottom of the lane (3). This mighty **Oak** is likely to be of a similar age to the others, around 200 years. Being situated towards the bottom of the slope means the tree benefits from the most water and nutrients.

Continue ahead and cross the footbridge. The brook beneath your feet once formed part of the old parish boundary between Binstead and Newchurch. Pass through the gate, and begin to climb the chalk path. This area of open land is Dame Anthony's Common. In the 18th century, Dame Anthony Young owned this land which used to belong to the old Binstead Lodge Farm.

In the past, commoners had the right to graze their animals here, collect fodder and also materials for building.

Nearing the top of the common is another **Oak** tree to your left, again marking the packway (4). Just before reaching the gate, take the path to your right across the top of the common. As you follow this path, you can enjoy good views across The Solent and the Spinnaker Tower at Portsmouth.

At the path crossroads, bear left. Keep to footpath R41 as it skirts the edge of the common. Upon reaching the fingerpost keep left, following R41 until reaching Newnham Road. Carefully cross over here and head towards the Barton's Corner junction, then after a short distance join Newnham Lane.

Newnham Lane, is a quiet winding lane bordered by a wildflower verge and hedgerow crammed with typical shrubs and plants. Walk through here in late spring or early summer and elder and honeysuckle are in full bloom.

Upon reaching the sharp bend, cross the stile to take footpath R4 diagonally through the pasture. Please ensure that dogs are kept on a lead. You will pass through a cluster of young **Oaks** in the middle of the field. The largest tree on the right has room to spread; its canopy has the iconic, rounded **Oak** tree shape we know and love (right).

Crossing the bottom stile, taking the footpath through Puckers Copse. The fish ponds visible to the right are thought to possibly date back to the Roman occupation of the Island. They are at least known to have existed during medieval times when they belonged to the nearby Abbey of Quarr. These were carp ponds and would

have provided the monks of the abbey with a supply of fresh water fish.

**(5)** Puckers Copse is an ancient woodland meaning that it has existed since at least the 1600s. 'Copse' is derived from coppice and tells us that the woodland has a history of traditional management, selectively cut at intervals for timber in the past, but managed more for conservation today. You can see old multi-stemmed coppiced **Ash** and **Hazel** trees amongst the standard **Oak** trees. Look out for red squirrels here. They eat the hazelnuts produced by the understorey of **Hazel** trees.

Leave Puckers Copse via the stile which leads into a field adjacent to the road. In this field stand two veteran **Oak** trees, very much local landmarks and well loved trees **(6)**. They are among the largest **Oaks** on the Island and are thought to be around 300 years old.

The largest of the pair is getting on for an impressive seven metres in girth. It likely to be of a similar age to the other tree but may owe its colossal size to its proximity to the nearby stream. The smaller of the two trees has had its crown significantly reduced in size by natural branch breakage. This process is known as 'retrenchment' and occurs in old age when annual ring growth reduces and the tree produces less foliage. This large open-grown **Oak** will ultimately die back over a period of years, maybe decades, shedding large limbs which the tree will not be able to replace. It is said that an **Oak** tree grows for 300 years, spends 300 years resting, then takes 300 years to decline.

There was previously a third veteran **Oak** sited near the woodland but it collapsed several years ago. Part of the trunk can be seen lying left of

the footpath. The dead wood provides an important habitat for insects and also allows us to inspect the growth rings, a new one put on annually by the tree when healthy.

Follow the footpath towards the stile which leads to the main road. Take great care crossing over to join the lane which heads north. Continue ahead and pass through the gate. This was previously known as 'Elm Lane' on account of the great **Elms** which used to stand here. **Elm** still exists in the lane as a shrub amongst the hedgerows. This lane formed the original entrance to Quarr Abbey.

**(7)** Now known as Coronation Lane, the formal row of lithe **Poplar** trees to your right were planted to commemorate Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953. This **Poplar** is a hybrid between the native, and now scarce, **Black Poplar** and the **Eastern Cottonwood** (an **American Poplar**). These **Poplars** are also notable for supporting several large clumps of mistletoe, best seen in the winter when the trees are leafless.

At the path crossroads, turn left to join Abbey Lane. Upon reaching the next crossroads turn right into the main drive of Quarr Abbey (this is a private road). As you approach the Abbey, ornamental **London Plane** trees line the drive – look out for their striking camouflage-pattern bark (see top picture overleaf).

Two huge **Monterey Pine** trees stand just in front of the Abbey gates **(8)**. These towering **Pines** were probably planted in 1914, the same time the modern Abbey was completed. The **Monterey Pine** is a native of California where it has a very localised and restricted range. However, it does extremely well in southern England and can be seen frequently across the

Island in parks and gardens. It was Prince Albert who introduced the **Monterey Pine** to the Island in the 1850s (right).

Quarr Abbey is the largest brick building in England and well worth a visit. The church is open to the public and the monks run a tearoom and gift shop within the peaceful grounds.

At this stage in the trail, there is the option to extend the route. If you wish to walk the extension to the Fishbourne **Oak** of 1.6km (1 mile) please continue with the text. If you wish to walk the shorter route please skip to \*.

Leave the Abbey grounds and turn right to re-join Abbey Lane. Proceed westwards, passing through the gate to join Quarr Lane. Upon reaching the road, you will see the Fishbourne Inn opposite. The next tree on the trail is the Fishbourne **Oak**, continue downhill past the inn to reach it.

Fishbourne literally means 'the fish stream' but this originally referred to Wootton Creek. Where you stand was actually known as 'Fisshors' or 'Fishouse' up until the mid 1800s.

At the bottom of the hill is an attractive circular green with a wonderfully shaped **Oak** located in the centre **(9)**. This tree has been a focal point for the Fishbourne community for around 150 years; its bench provides a welcome rest stop.

\* Return to the lane, carry on past the Abbey and the cottages. Beside the last cottage you will see the romantic ruins of the original Abbey, and The Solent beyond to the north. The Cistercian Abbey was founded in 1132 and played an important part in the Island's history as it owned a great deal of land until its suppression by Henry VIII in 1536 when the

monasteries were dissolved. The cottage dates back to 1706 and is predominantly made up from stone retrieved from the old abbey ruins.

Trace the line of the wall eastwards and, in the bottom right corner of the pasture, sits a mysterious **Oak (10)**. It is said that this mighty tree grew from an acorn which dropped onto the top of the wall. As it grew, the tree put down three large roots which have now become trunks supporting the tree forming a natural archway. This is the location of the old infirmary chapel where one wall and a window frame remains which this special tree seems to mimic (right).

Continue along the footpath and pass through the gateway where Quarr Road begins. After about ½ a mile the coastal path veers off to the left. Following this footpath, you will pass several large **Oaks** some of which are ancient pollards. Beyond these trees to the right is 'The Pitts'. Quarr stone was quarried from these pits many centuries ago for the construction of Quarr Abbey. The stone was thought to be of such good quality that it was shipped to the mainland and used in the construction of both Winchester and Chichester cathedrals. The area now takes its name from the quarrying.

At Church Road bear left and left again until the road reaches the Church of the Holy Cross. The church was built to serve the men working the nearby stone quarries. The oldest surviving part of the church is the chancel which is at least 13th century. The nave was rebuilt in the mid 19th century and some inscriptions on the headstones date back to the 1700s.

Beside the church car park are some unusual **West Himalayan Spruce** trees also known as **Morinda Spruce**. These trees are uncommon

on the Island and display spectacular pendulous cones .

Within the churchyard, to the right of the building is an impressive **Ash** tree thought to be around 120 years old, and to the left a **Yew (11)**. **Yews** have a long association with churchyards and, although this one is not ancient, it dates back to mid-Victorian times when the area beneath the **Yew** was usually reserved for dignitaries of the parish.

Leave the churchyard and pause at the stone archway on the boundary wall which features Binstead's oldest resident. The stone idol has been here since the 13th century and is believed to bring good luck to those that pass by.

Proceed east along Ladies Walk, which takes its name from the Victorian promenading era. This route was extremely popular with residents of Ryde who would have paraded out from the town to the romantic ruins at Quarr for afternoon tea.

Continue downhill to cross the stone bridge. Beside the brook is a group of **Wingnut** trees, best seen in spring when they display lengthy catkins. Follow the path through the golf course. As you climb, there are glimpses of many remarkable standalone trees, in particular Oaks on both sides of the golf course through which Ladies Walk passes. This area was once the private parkland to Ryde House where George Player resided.

As Ladies Walk begins to level, take the turning on the right to join footpath R49. Make sure it is safe to cross the golf course. Join Glade Close, then take the gravel lane ahead to emerge onto Binstead Road. Take care when crossing the

main road, then head towards the green opposite.

The next tree is a towering **Wellingtonia (12)**. It was probably planted in the mid 1800s and could be one of the first of its kind on the Island. The tree takes its name from the Duke of Wellington; many were planted in tribute to him during the 1850s. They are actually a species of **Sequoia**, native to California, where they can reach incredible heights and live for thousands of years. In 2008 this tree was 26 metres tall.

Follow the fence line to join Binstead Lodge Road which crosses the brook and then take the first turning on your left onto footpath R112. This footpath follows the Binstead Brook where there are several mature **Oak** trees along its bank.

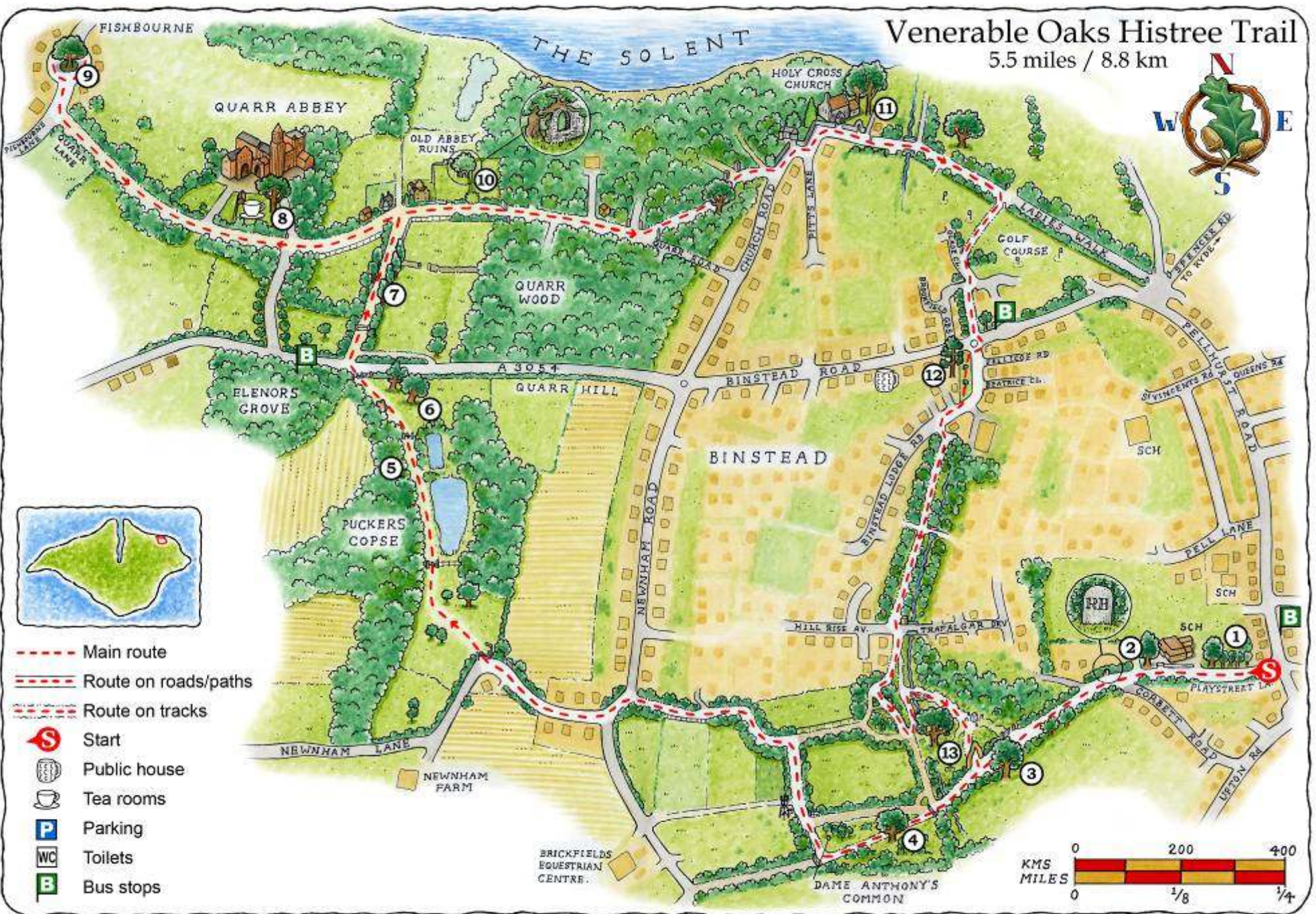
Upon meeting Hillrise Avenue, cross over the road to rejoin the footpath, then take the right fork onto the permissive path back towards Dame Anthony's Common - the path climbs slightly uphill - then take the left fork downhill. At the path crossroads take the path immediately to your left. This will bring you to a footbridge which again crosses the brook.

Follow the boardwalk and path until reaching the **Millennium Oak (13)**. This tree, with its vast canopy, is part of the Millennium Green - a public open space maintained by local volunteers. The Oak is just off the packway, and much younger than those encountered earlier on Play Lane. This is the final tree on the Venerable Oaks Histree Trail.

To return to Playstreet Lane, leave the Millennium Green and turn right to Play Lane. Stay on Play Lane until it becomes Playstreet Lane and retrace your steps back to the start of the trail.

# Venerable Oaks Histree Trail

5.5 miles / 8.8 km



-  Main route
-  Route on roads/paths
-  Route on tracks
-  Start
-  Public house
-  Tea rooms
-  Parking
-  Toilets
-  Bus stops

