

Welcome to East Cowes' Histree Trail

The East Cowes Histree Trail is 4.2km (2.6 miles) long. The trail begins and ends at the Umbrella Tree in the heart of the town. This trail presents an easy, accessible walk, highlighting mostly street trees and hard surfaces throughout.

Getting There

Bus: 4 or 5 or Medina Breezer to the Umbrella Tree bus stop. Car: The Red Funnel ferry terminal is located close by. Car: There is a pay and display car park in Well Road.

Follow the text and use the map to explore the Parks and Parasols Histree Trail. Find out about the influence Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had on the landscaping of the town's ornamental avenues, discover a hidden botanic garden and even sit under an umbrella tree.

The Parks and Parasols Histree Trail begins underneath The Umbrella Tree **(1)**. The cascading foliage of the Umbrella Tree has been a feature of the town centre for almost 100 years. This **Weeping Ash** is an ornamental variety of the **Common Ash** tree and was planted in 1914 as part of a scheme to enhance the street corner below the Town Hall. The tree is a focal point for the community, providing a meeting place, shelter, bus stop and also the inspiration for poetry – see nearby wall plaque.

From the Umbrella Tree, head up York Avenue passing the Town Hall on your right. The Town Hall was constructed in 1896 and the row of **Common Lime** trees alongside the building were planted at the same time.

After crossing two side roads, you will reach the Jubilee Recreation Ground. This land was given to the people of East Cowes by Lord Gort in 1887 in honour of Queen Victoria's fifty years on the throne. The Gort family were benefactors to the town, making regular, generous donations of land, shrubs and street furniture.

Towards the upper plantation, leave the pavement to view the larger specimens of **Holm Oak** and **Monterey Pine (2)**. As saplings in 1887, these trees were fenced off providing them with the best chances of reaching maturity. The **Holm Oak** is the UK's only common evergreen **Oak** and was introduced from the Mediterranean during the latter 16th century; the Victorians later popularised the tree. **Holm Oak** occurs frequently across the Island and features several times on this trail. Prince Albert is attributed for introducing the **Monterey Pine** to the Island during the 1850s. This **Pine** can be identified by its deeply furrowed bark; with needles, not leaves and cones growing in a spiral fashion around the branches.

Return to York Avenue then take the next right into Connaught Road. This road is lined with a combination of ornamental street trees including a **Plane**, **Horse Chestnut** and a **Cherry** tree **(3)**. These trees mark one of the original entrances to the Victorian East Cowes Park development and Botanic Garden.

An unusual **Flowering Ash** tree sits near the junction with Orchard Road to the right **(4)**. Look out for its straight trunk and, in spring, large sprays of tiny flowers can be seen.

At the end of Connaught Road, turn left following the bend along Mayfield Road until reaching Victoria Grove. Here you will see the Victoria

Recreation Ground on the opposite side of the road - cross over the road here.

The huge **Holm Oaks** which can be seen stretching to the bottom of Victoria Grove were planted in 1898 **(5)**. This land was given to the people of East Cowes by Queen Victoria in exchange for a section of the Old Newport Road acquired for part of the Osborne Estate. Beatrice Avenue was named and opened on July 23rd 1898. It skirts the top of the rec and provides a link to Whippingham to the south, and was planted with **Common Lime** trees which can still be seen today **(6)**.

Look over to the opposite boundary of the rec and you will see an impressive row of hedgerow **Oaks (7)**. These **Oaks** can be traced all the way down to the shore of the River Medina and would once have marked the boundary of the Old Kingston Farm – one of Prince Albert's experimental 'model farms'.

Return to Victoria Grove passing more **Holm Oaks** and **Common Limes** until arriving at the junction with York Avenue - this is the highest point in East Cowes. Just around the bend in the road to the right is the entrance to Osborne House, the Island residence of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and well worth a visit. Within the grounds are some magnificent historic trees. The estate is managed by English Heritage; please note, admission is charged to the house and grounds. Refreshments are available in several of Osborne House's cafes.

Turn left into York Avenue and cross to the opposite side of the road. Just before reaching the bench you will find the entrance to Osborne Cottage which was home to Princess Beatrice from 1901 to 1914, Victoria and Albert's

youngest child. Osborne Cottage is now a private residence however, close to the road, is a multi-stemmed **Wingnut** tree (8). This is an ornamental tree and probably the best specimen on the Island. Although the trunk of the tree is obscured by the hedge, the tree's pendulous catkins in late spring and the wing-nut shaped seed pods in the summer are worth viewing.

Back on York Avenue, take a moment to sit on the bench which affords a great view of a magnificent **Wellingtonia** tree (9). This tree would have been planted around the same time as the grounds of Osborne House. **Wellingtonias** take their name from the Duke of Wellington - many were planted in tribute to the Duke during the 1850s. They are a species of **Sequoia**, native to California, where they can reach incredible heights and live for thousands of years.

From the bench, cross back over the road and turn left into Kent Avenue. Pass by the splendid straight-stemmed **Beech** tree on the right, and take a look at the **Common Lime** tree on your left beside Verdon House.

You will arrive at a small triangular shaped green where Kent Avenue meets Broadsmith Avenue. You have found the hidden remnant of the East Cowes Botanic Garden (10). The most intriguing trees amongst the collection are two giant topiaried **Monterey Pines**. It is unknown how they came to be this way, possibly a combination of visionary pruning and storm damage but they are certainly eye-catching.

The former Botanic Garden was established in 1842 as part of a major development known as East Cowes Park which occupied the area between the Osborne Estate and the River Medina. The scheme was intended to attract the

elite and fashionable, with the Botanic Garden at its heart. However, because of a combination of climate, other more favourable locations on the Island and the lack of funding, the scheme never really took off and the land was sold in 1874.

From the **Pines** join Kent Avenue, passing a mature flowering **Hawthorn** on your right half-way down the road; probably a Botanic Garden planting. Take the next right into Princess Close.

A pair of **Holm Oaks** will become obvious on the small green towards the end of the close. These featured in the garden of Kent House, one of the original villas from the East Cowes Park development. The larger tree is a splendid specimen which, with space, has attained the 'lollipop' shape associated with this species, visible in the background.

Take the narrow walkway behind the largest **Holm Oak** which links to York Avenue. Upon reaching the road, cross over, turn right and proceed uphill until reaching the junction with New Barn Road on the left. As you turn the corner, the imposing structure of the Queen's Gate comes into view. Only the Sovereign may pass through the gate; they remain locked until such a time.

The interpretation panel here illustrates how the view from this spot would have once looked across the town and The Solent. The grand tree featured in the engraving is probably a mighty **Elm**, unfortunately long gone, perhaps succumbing to the devastating Dutch Elm Disease. This pocket of woodland contains a **Corsican Pine** planted in 1854 and an uncommon type of **Atlantic Cedar** (11).

Tucked away amongst these trees is a stone pillar, all that remains of the grand gateway to

East Cowes Castle built in 1798 by the flamboyant Regency architect John Nash. Nash also designed the ornate Pavilion at Brighton, London's Regent Street and Buckingham Palace.

Continuing along New Barn Road, a short detour can be made by taking the first road on the left into Sylvan Avenue. The word sylvan derives from 'sylvatica' meaning 'of the woods' which gives us an indication that this whole area was once covered in woodland.

At the first bend in the road, a grassy hump indicates the site of the East Cowes Castle ice house, a small brick building once used for chilling food in the warmer summer months.

Retrace your steps or continue on New Barn Road. Follow the road and turn left onto Old Road, taking care along the short stretch without a pavement. This road marks the old boundary of the East Cowes Castle Estate. The grounds were designed by the eminent landscape gardener, Humphrey Repton. Repton coined the term 'landscape garden' to describe the natural style of gardening which required "the united powers of the landscape painter and the practical gardener".

Continue down Old Road, formerly the route of the old East Cowes to Newport Road. Any mature trees in this area would have featured in the grounds of East Cowes Castle. Look out for Northlodge, the old gatehouse at the north entrance to the East Cowes Castle Estate and now the oldest surviving building in East Cowes, dating from 1798.

On the grassy verge to your left, accompanied by a grand **Beech** tree, an Island stone waymarker still stands - one of only a handful

remaining. The inscription is no longer legible but a plaque has been installed which states '5 miles to Newport'. Again, take care along this stretch of road as there is no pavement.

At the next left, head back into Hefford Road where a magnificent **Oak** tree comes into view **(12)**. This tree measures over four metres in girth. It is one of a handful of **Common** or **Pendunculate** Oaks in East Cowes and is likely to have been an old hedgerow oak or boundary marker – a survivor of a much more ancient landscape.

Enter Sylvan Avenue via the first turning on the right. After a short distance, descend a short flight of steps to your right linking with Church Walk. This path leads past Sylvan Woodland and down to St. James' Church. Alongside the path are some impressive **Horse Chestnut** trees, identifiable by their twisted and fluted trunks and branches extending across the path creating pleasant covered walkway **(13)**.

St. James' Church to the left was designed and built by John Nash, who is buried in the churchyard next to the tower. As the path

emerges onto Church Path, a group of upright **Irish Yews** can be seen within the churchyard. The **Irish Yew** is sometimes clipped to form ornamental hedges or features in gardens. Cross over to the small green and turn right again to bring you back onto York Avenue. Continue down York Avenue, this will return you to the Umbrella Tree.

Thank you for walking the Parks and Parasols Histree Trail. There are seven other Histree Trails in the series for you to enjoy.

