

LUCOMBE OAK - *Quercus x hispanica* 'Lucombeana'

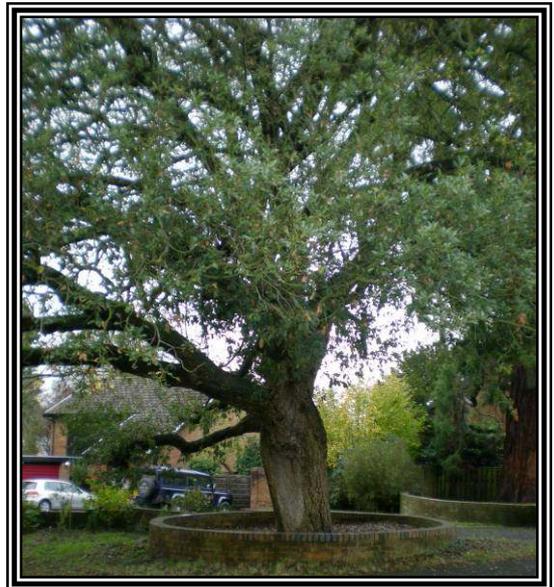
By May 2015, WDVTS had recorded 7,163 trees, but only four Lucombe Oaks. Two are in Wargrave, one in Arborfield and one in Earley.



The Lucombe Oak above (MRN 1642) is in Sewage Farm Road, Wargrave and has a girth of 3.65m. The one below (MRN 5834) with a girth of 3.2m, is in Bayliss Road. (Both measured at 1.5m.)

The Lucombe Oak is a cross between Turkey Oak (*Quercus cerris*) and Cork Oak (*Q. suber*). It was originally raised by William Lucombe at his Exeter nursery in 1762.

Turkey and Cork Oaks both grow wild in south-western Europe, where they hybridise naturally, the hybrids being known as Spanish Oaks (*Q. x Hispanica*). The Cork Oak is evergreen and the Turkey Oak is deciduous. Except in harsh weather, the hybrids keep their leaves through winter, dropping them just before the new growth appears. Like Turkey Oak, the Lucombe Oak has leaves with pointed lobes and acorns with mossy cups. Lucombe Oaks produce fertile acorns and the resultant plants show considerable variation, making identification difficult in some cases!



Although true Lucombe Oaks (or Exeter Oaks) are clones of the original tree, the name is generally used to refer to any hybrid between Turkey Oaks and Cork Oaks, and backcrosses of Lucombe Oak with Turkey Oak. However, other types are recognised, including *Q. x hispanica* 'Fulhamensis' - the Fulham Oak, which was probably "discovered" independently at Fulham soon after the Lucombe Oak. In addition there are two types of true Lucombe Oak, types A and B. Type A is more common around Exeter, and these trees are probably descendants of the first crosses of 1762; whilst type B is more common elsewhere, and may well relate to six seedlings that were selected for further propagation in 1789.

Lucombe Oaks are now common in parks and gardens in Devon and Cornwall, frequent in the rest of southern England, but rare farther north.

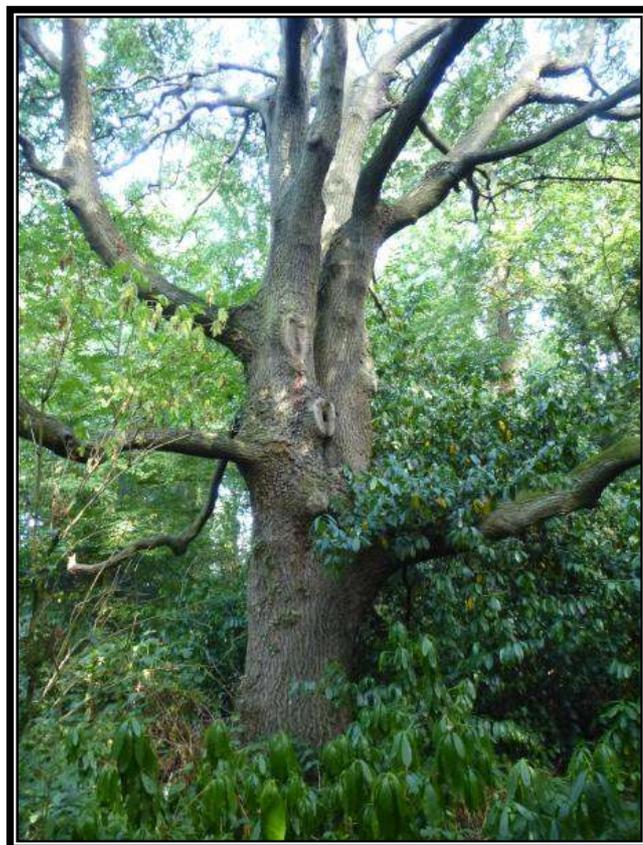
The most venerable Lucombe Oak, 240 year old, is in Kew Gardens. It stands on a mound beside the Syon Vista, behind the Palm House. It was originally planted 20m to the north of its current site, some time around 1773, but spoilt William Nesfield's design for the Syon Vista, and so in 1846 it was moved to make way for new plantings of Holm Oaks (*Quercus ilex*).

The champion Lucombe Oak (as recorded by the Tree Register) is in the grounds of Powis Castle, a National Trust property. Until February 2009, the largest Lucombe Oak in the world was in Phear Park in Devon. It had a girth of 8m and was 200 years old when it was blown down.

William Lucombe liked his oak so much that he felled the original tree in 1785 and kept the boards under his bed so his coffin could be made from them. By the time he died, aged 102, the planks had decayed and an alternative Lucombe Oak, from one of his early graft propagations, was used instead.

His nursery was established in 1720. One hundred years later it became 'Lucombe, Pince & Co.' and was famous for its "Wonder of the West" strains of cinerarias and calceolarias, as well as an extensive rockery. By late Victorian times, the nursery gardens were regarded as one of Exeter's finest sights, drawing visitors from far afield to admire its vast glasshouses packed with orchids, gardenias and rare palms. In 1912 the City Council bought the site and converted it into a "pleasure ground" - Pincus Gardens (St Thomas, Exeter EX2 9DT). To-day it is home to Pincus Bowls Club and Pincus Croquet Club, but the 45-yard-long pergola of mature wisteria, one of the main features of the nursery in the 1880s, is still its most impressive feature.

The Earley Lucombe Oak is on the Whiteknights campus of the University of Reading and is number 14 on their tree walk ([link below](#)). With a girth of 4.12m at 1.5m, it's MRN 5714, in woodland and hence difficult to get a photo of the whole tree.



The Arborfield & Newlands Lucombe Oak (MRN 5611) is in the grounds of Bearwood College and is particularly interesting because it has a very corky bark - much more corky than most specimens. With a girth of 5.7m at 1m, it is also the largest of our four recorded Lucombe Oaks. Although not generally open to the public, Bearwood College does have an annual open day when you can visit the site and follow their tree guide which of course includes this one. The photos below show this Lucombe Oak and its corky bark.



Sources:

Collin's Field Guide to the Trees of Britain and Northern Europe by Alan Mitchell (1974)

www.exeter.gov.uk

www.kew.org.uk

Whiteknights Tree Walk: www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/fmd/Grounds_Tree_Walk_Brochure.pdf

