



The Ankerwycke Yew at Runnymede

The Ankerwycke Yew is an ancient yew tree close to the ruins of St Mary's Priory, the site of a Benedictine convent founded in about 1160 in Ankerwycke near Wraysbury in Berkshire, both of which have been in the care of The National Trust since 1998. It is a male tree with a girth of 8 metres. It is at least 1,400 years old and could be as much as 2500 years old. On the opposite bank of the River Thames are the meadows of Runnymede. The name Ankerwycke is possibly derived from the religious order of Anchorite and the word Wycke meaning wooded island.

The tree could be the last living witness to the signing of Magna Carta in 1215.

There is no record of the exact spot where the signing took place. The Magna Carta itself mentions "the meadow that is called Runnymede between Windsor and Staines" and recent evidence has given rise to the opinion that the great yew tree in the grounds of the Benedictine convent was the site of the oath-swearing to the Magna Carta. The manor of Ankerwycke was owned by Richard de Montfichet, one of the 25 barons present at the signing of the Charter.

The signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 was a landmark in social history. It remains the nearest thing to a bill of rights that Britain has ever had and forms the basis of the constitutions of many countries, including the USA.

Sources: (1) Wikipedia (2) The Ancient Tree Hunt, the Woodland Trust