

Rev. Simon,
c/o St. Peter's Church,
Peterchurch,
Herefordshire
21st October 2025



Re; Sequoia and other trees

Dear Rev. Simon,

After my work at the church earlier this month, I thought it would be beneficial to summarise the situation.

As you will be aware, I first visited the site last December (2024) after concerns were raised about the condition of the large Sequoia and possible movement towards the church. It was difficult to fully assess the situation based on a single view. In addition, with all the needles accumulated around the base, it was difficult to assess any ground movement. The extensive presence of ivy in the tree made it difficult to survey the trunk. I recommended severing and removal of the ivy and clearing the needles. I also noted that the tree, which is of a species with potential for considerable longevity and size, is very close to the very special and historically important yew tree. The yew tree is fragile, and could easily be damaged by the Sequoia.

The tree was surveyed in June 2025 and dead wood identified as an issue. The architect employed to guide work to the church suggested a climbing inspection. This was arranged, with my colleague Edward Heinrich of Umberslade Arboriculture leading. Edward soon found an abundance of dead wood, with one dead branch balancing in the branches of the yew tree, ready to fall on a passer-by. It was quickly retrieved.

Edward was unable to find a lower branch sufficiently strong to support his weight in order to start to climb the tree and so brought in a mobile work platform. Many branches fell to the ground at the touch of his pruning saw. As Edward climbed to the top, he found extensive dead wood and numerous broken branches. These included branches with 'hazard beams'. These are horizontal cracks that form when a branch has too much weight. With the crack, much strength is lost. It is a matter of time before the branch breaks.

Edward cleared several tonnes of dead wood, the larger branches being left for use as logs, and the smaller material being chipped. He found more failure branches on this one tree than he has found on all of the other trees not being felled, that he has pruned over the past two years. One of the problems is that the prevailing wind, which is from the west, is damaging branches on the west-facing side of the tree, which is on the church side. Edward has removed the more brittle

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dead wood, but some dead branches remain; if he removed all of the dead wood, it would have a visual impact on the tree and would expose inner branches to new winds.

Sequoia as a species can live for 1000 + years, and can grow to more than 100 metres in height. In their native North America, some trees of this species have trunks so wide that a car can drive through. The tree at Peterchurch could more than double in height and trunk width over the next 50-100 years. This is not compatible with the successful and sustainable management of the historically import yew tree. This tree is probably at least 1500 years old. Edward has been processing timber of a dead yew tree he felled for another client, which he has dated to 800 years. He considered the one at Peterchurch to be more significant.

Sequoia should have a strong single trunk, but the one at Peterchurch has forked to form several co-dominant leaders, representing further failure potential.

The most brittle wood has been removed. However, this tree does not have a long-term future. Further branch failure can sadly be anticipated during 2026-7. The large branch that broke recently when Sarah was in the café has had to be retained as its removal would leave a significant gap in the canopy, and expose surrounding branches to the prevailing winds.

As Edward finished pruning the tree, he observed that, for a specimen not being felled yet, it is structurally one of the poorest he has worked on for some time. It should be safe for the next two years, but a decision on whether to fell or undertake further, more extensive pruning, will need to be made.

Faithfully,

Mark Chester MICFor.; BSc (Hons); F. Arbor. A.; Tech. Cert. (Arbor. A.); CUEW

TRAQ (Tree Risk Assessment Qualification) accredited.