

# Giants of History

About ten years ago I stumbled across a Victorian photograph of Sherwood Forest's Major Oak – arguably Britain's most famous tree. I had seen it as a child thirty years previously, and remembered connections with Robin Hood and the sheer awe I had of standing beside its huge, cavernous trunk. I revisited and photographed the Major Oak in its present state.

That one photograph inspired me to travel Britain seeking out our largest and oldest trees and their stories, a project that became the book *Britain's Tree Story*, published by National Trust in 2011.

Since then, my passion for ancient trees has taken me around the world on an odyssey to photograph 100 magnificent

trees in 39 countries and record their stories and connected culture in a companion volume: *World Tree Story – history and legends of the world's ancient trees*. It is my great pleasure to share some of those stories with you here, in abridged form, in *Living Woods*.

– Julian Hight



**Majesty**  
Nonington, Kent, England

A tree growing on private land at Fredville Park wins the prize for Britain's largest maiden Oak – that is, a tree that has not been pollarded, and retains its natural towering crown. The giant Oak (*Quercus robur*), fittingly known as Majesty, measures 12.2m (40ft) around its waist, and is hollow

throughout the length of its 18.8m (61.6ft) tall trunk.

One of the earliest mentions of the tree appears in 1793, when it was found to measure 9.5m (31ft), meaning it has grown 2.7m (8.8ft) in the interim. Most estimates proffer an age of 5-600 years on Majesty, but its vast size coupled with reports of its mature presence in 1554 – known then as the King Fredville Oak – surely confer a more senior status.

**Yamatata Jindaizakura**  
Jissoji Temple, Hokuto, Japan

Japan's obsession and reverence for its flowering Sakura (Cherry Blossom) is unparalleled. Japan's earliest texts, including the eleventh century *Tale of Genji* – sometimes referred to as the world's first novel – mention the tree often, both literally and poetically. Yet the tree cult is rooted far deeper, stretching back