

Natural monument Femeiche

(short text)

Natural monument and national heritage tree

With an estimated **age of 800 to 1,100 years**, the pedunculate oak (*quercus robur*) is **one of the oldest trees in Germany**.

The trunk circumference at breast height is 12.45 metres. Due to its high age and historical significance as a courthouse tree, the **vehmic oak** was declared a **natural monument** in 1935 and in 2021 a **national heritage tree** by the German Dendrological Society.

Feme court site

The name of the ***Femeiche*** (**vehmic oak**) derives from its former function as **a place of judgement** (Feme = judgement, punishment). In the Middle Ages, the ***Femegericht*** (**vehmic court**), as it is called, met there **to judge severe crimes and offences**. In 1441, the knight **Gert van Diepenbrock** and two of his servants were **in absentia sentenced to death** by the ***Freigraf*** (chairman of the court) **Bernd de Duiker for the murder of two Freischöffen** (freeborn lay judges). **Contracts** were also notarised there. (see panel on the Femegerichtsbarkeit).

Preservation measures

The form and condition of the national heritage tree has changed over the centuries due to weather-related influences: storms broke off parts of the crown, fungi decomposed the heartwood.

For around 250 years the tree has pulled back its crown in order to minimise the transport routes for the water to the branches and for the sugar to the roots.

While the oak was still relatively full of wood around 1750, the rotten heartwood was removed around 1800. This created cavity was so large in 1819 that **the later King Frederick William IV of Prussia ordered 36 infantrymen in full equipment to take up position in the oak tree**. Later, in 1851, the Bishop of Münster could even dine with eleven clergymen at a round table in the hollow of the oak.

Today, only fragments of the once mighty tree can be seen. Already at the end of the 19th century, the first beam was put up to support the Femeiche, as it leans strongly to the south-west due to sloping growth. It is now **held upright by eleven wooden struts**.