

St Nicholas church is a simple two-cell late Saxon building, thought to date from the 11th century. It is described in the church handbook as a perfect pre-Conquest church, listed in the Domesday Book. The earliest record so far discovered of this 'large yew' is contained in Cox's 1904 *Little Guides*.

The most likely time for planting this yew would seem to be when the church was built, giving it an age between 900 and 1000 years. While we should not dismiss the possibility that it might date from even earlier Saxon times, the estimated 1800 years that appears in Meredith's *Gazetteer* in *The Sacred Yew*, indicating a planting in about 200AD, is not supported by evidence.

2000: The present church guide invites visitors to 'see the famous Yew at the east end of the church. It is over 1,000 years old and the oldest in the county'. Such a claim could be made by several Hampshire churches, and the Hampshire Ancient Tree Survey of 1995 more modestly described it as 'the largest Yew in the Winchester district'. The church secretary wrote in a letter dated 29th Feb 2000: 'It had a huge canopy and the lower branches were propped up with poles and wires BUT in one of the great storms of the 1980s the tree was severely damaged at the top and the lower branches had to be removed so that it is no longer as glorious as it was'.

I found it to be a vigorously healthy male tree, completely hollow, with three openings at the ground, one enabling access to a vast interior space, in which 'local legend has it that a family, in medieval times, sheltered.....throughout an entire winter'.

Following damage in the great storm, the crown has been replaced by considerable horizontal growth at a height of 15/20'. Branches reach the ground a great distance from the tree, one having successfully embedded in the soil. The inner surface had been blackened by fire or smoke and ivy was beginning to cover its particularly attractive bark.

photo Ian Robert Brown

Girth:

1995: 27' 3" at 5' and a height of 20/25' - Hampshire Survey

1999: 27' 3" (8.31 at 1.1m) - Russell Cleaver

2000: 28' 4" at the ground and 27' 2" at 3' - Tim Hills

