

This yew should need no introduction, having received the following accolade: 'The Tree Council in celebration of the golden jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has designated the Heavitree Yew one of fifty Great British Trees in recognition of its place in the national heritage June 2002'.

When Meredith visited in 1991 he found the tree 'in a rather sorry state. The hollow trunk had been bricked up, and the Victorians had surrounded it with rubble and old stones, presumably with the intention of supporting it. Local tree lovers have now removed the rubble and replaced it with new earth'. Meredith found 'a side-shoot which had grown from a very much older tree, now gone. It is possible to see the old roots of the previous tree over a wide area around the surviving trunk. It looks as though the original trunk was cut down but has regenerated itself from the stump'. It also seems that the church tower close to the tree was completely rebuilt in 1541 – considered a possible time when the original tree was felled. Meredith's observations inform us that this is a well developed fragment of a very old tree. The fragment has a girth of 10' 1" at its narrowest close to the ground and looks very much like the William Spreat drawing of 1842.



Photos: Barry Saich

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Threat to Ancient Heavitree Yew

March 8, 2013 *in Heavitree*

“I wasn’t surprised a decade ago,” Olwen Foggin commented, “When the Heavitree Church yew tree was named as one of Britain’s 50 iconic trees for the Queen’s Golden Jubilee. However this January it did surprise me to hear it needs urgent rescue. After all it has survived for hundreds of years.”

It seems over the years more and more of the ground around the great yew has been covered with tarmac. Now it seems not enough rainwater reaches the tree’s roots. It will almost certainly die unless rescue work is carried out. Olwen Foggin and Greg Sheldon, City Councillor for Heavitree went to see the situation.

“It’s not just the tarmac,” Olwen points out, “There have been vehicles driving over its root area.”

In April a City Council appointed contractor will remove the tarmac of the southern footpath, loosen all the surrounding soil and reinstate the area with grass. This will give the yew more room to spread and relieve the roots of the compaction they have been suffering over the years. Posts will be put up to stop any more vehicles being driven over the grass.

Olwen and Greg are relieved and pleased that funding has been found to pay for the much-needed work to preserve this ancient reminder of Heavitree’s long history. “In years gone by it stood beside a smaller medieval church,” Olwen says, “So much change has happened all around it. We do need to preserve it for future generations to wonder at.”