



The most significant YEWS in the DIOCESE of LICHFIELD

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These pages provide a 'snapshot' of information gathered from many sources during the last 13 years, and which is held on behalf of the Ancient Yew Group. A full account will eventually replace this document.

The yews recorded on these pages are the most important to be found in the churchyards of the Diocese of Lichfield, and each one should be adequately protected. See page 2

Ancient yews are at least 800 years with no upper limit. The Yews for the Millennium project took cuttings from yews considered to be 2000 years old, and there is a growing acceptance that our oldest specimens have reached this age, with some thought to be older still.

Veteran yews are at least 500 and up to 1200 years old.

Notable yews are at least 300 and up to 700 years old. This category also includes younger yews with a known planting date.

Significant yews recorded in the Diocese of Lichfield

Location	Church dedication	County	Tree Category	Responsibility for yew management
Adderley	St Peter	Shropshire	1 veteran	
Baschurch	All Saints	Shropshire	1 veteran	
Battlefield	St Mary Magdalene	Shropshire	2 notable	
Chapel Chorlton	St Laurence	Staffordshire	1 veteran 1 notable	
Codsall	St Nicholas	Staffordshire	2 veteran	
Colemere	Colemere Church	Cheshire	1 notable	
Draycott-in-the-Moors	St Margaret	Staffordshire	1 ancient 1 veteran	
Drayton Bassett	St Peter	Staffordshire	1 notable	
Dudleston	St Mary the Virgin	Shropshire	1 veteran	
Ellastone	St Peter	Staffordshire	2 veteran	
Forton	All Saints	Staffordshire	1 veteran	
Gayton	St Peter	Staffordshire	1 veteran	
Horton	St Michael and All Angels	Staffordshire	1 veteran	
Little Ness	St Martin	Shropshire	2 veteran	
Melverley	St Peter	Shropshire	1 notable	
Prees	St Chad	Shropshire	1 notable	
Ruyton-XI-Towns	St John the Baptist	Shropshire	1 ancient	
Selattyn	St Mary	Shropshire	2 veteran	
Tettenhall	St Michael and All Angels	West Midlands	2 ancient	
Uppington	Holy Trinity	Shropshire	1 ancient	
Yorton	unrecorded		1 veteran	

It is not known who is directly responsible for the management of these ancient, veteran or notable yews. Some will be in a Conservation Area, some will be in churchyards whose management has been taken over by the local authority. At others the responsibility for our oldest trees might fall to the Parochial Church Council or the Parish Council, and in some cases the fate of an ancient yew might be determined solely by the vicar acting with their churchwarden.

We are anticipating that the Diocese of Lichfield will be able to help us complete the Responsibility for Yew Management column.

2008: The male yew with a girth of over 20' grows at the east end of the church and overhangs the A 529. Being so close to a main road it has been cut back regularly. While not giving the impression of a hollow tree, a gap suggests that there are large spaces in the lower bole. 4 yews of smaller girth grow on the north side of the church.



1999: There is reported to be a drawing of this tree in 1808. Since that time it has been reduced to a single fragment, with its "poor hollow trunk" described in *The King's England* (1939).

A novel solution to support the living fragment of the tree (A) has been to strengthen the dead fragments by embedding them in concrete (B). This has made it possible to stretch a metal band around the whole tree and help prevent further leaning of the living fragment. This can only be a temporary measure and it will probably be necessary at some time in the future to provide a prop.

It seemed somewhat bizarre to have gone to such lengths to help a tree, while at the same time putting it at great risk of fire damage by allowing its hollow space to be used as a store for drying pine needles.

Girth at 3' was 15' 4", but when the rotten sections finally succumb this will be reduced to about 9'.



2003: Two female yews grow at this site. The tree SSW of the church leans to the south, pulled by the weight of former branches which have now been removed. Girth: 12' 2" at 3'.

The yew SSE of the church also leans heavily to the south. Thick branches on the north side redress the balance. Girth: 13' 10" at the ground.



2008: 2 male yews grow on the south side of the churchyard.

The yew SE had a girth of about 16'. It is completely hollow, with new wood wrapping around the old sapwood carcass. A large gap 1' wide on the south side was no doubt caused by the removal of branches that would otherwise overhang the road. Excessive amounts of ivy had been allowed to grow into the branches.

SW is a smaller girthed yew of approximately 12'. This too is hollow, with a gap about 18" wide. It has been pollarded at about 4' 6", above which it bulges with new growth.

1801: The yews were described as “very ancient and they may date from the time of the tower, which is 13th century.” *History and Antiquities of Staffordshire*

1899: It was suggested that the yews might be even older than the tower: “Codsall Church.....its ancient tower, its more ancient yew tree.” *Journal of Proceedings - Lynam*

2003: The largest of two yews at this site (tree 1 in photograph) grows ESE of the church. It is a tree of two distinct sides, each covered in adventitious growth and twiggy branches.

The second tree grows SE of the church. This male yew has been much larger and all that remains is a fragment of its shell.

Girth: Measured close to the ground the larger yew girthed 19' 4", the fragment tree 13' 1".





The photo c1880 shows that the tree was already well established when the church was built in 1870. The site was chosen by Lady Alford to overlook the mere and the yew tree has been within its boundary ever since. Although there are legends of a medieval chapel on the site, there is no historical evidence to back this up. Due to



land drainage the water of the Mere is now a few hundred yards from the site, but according to local tradition the yew once marked the mooring point for boats.

A title map of 1839 gives the name Yew Tree Field to this site. Is this the yew in question, or did it replace an older one that once grew here? The trunk is about 13' in circumference at its base. It is a single column but there are hollows in it higher up where it forks. One or two big boughs have been cut off.

The early photo was taken by the Rev. H.E. Hodson who was Vicar at the time. The original is owned by Mrs. P. Edwards of Ellesmere. There are others in the collection but that is the only one showing the complete tree. The Church owns a small woodland to the north of the church in which all the yew saplings have been gathered into a yew nursery. Christopher Jobson 05/06/2009

In 1913 the North Staffordshire Field Club visited this churchyard and reported: ".....the picturesque church at Draycott - with its ivy clad tower and shadowed by a venerable yew tree-came into view."

2002: There are in fact two significant yews at this site. The first is a veteran male, growing ESE of the church at the perimeter of the churchyard. In the adjacent grassy lane and directly beneath the tree's branches a thick pile of drying grasses was being stored at the time of the visit. An approximate girth is 19'.



The second is an ancient fragmenting female growing SW of the church. Fragment (A) leans dramatically and is held up with thick wire stretched from fragment (B). New growth around the wire suggests that it has been in place for a long time. Fragment (C) has a new branch wrapped around it. Girth: 15' 10" at the ground.





2009: A female yew grows south of the church. It is completely hollow with a section of the old trunk sliced off. All growth is now contained on a single leaning branch, whose foliage was thick and vigorous. 4 further large branches had been cut off. An idea of girth around what remains of this tree was just below 12ft.



1999: "Old yews" have been reported here since 1868. The most significant is this hollow shell, found SW



of the church. It is held firm on the steep slope by spreading roots. When its dead wood decays it will become two fragment trees.

Two metal bands are currently in place to prevent the sections drifting further apart. Foliage was thick and healthy.

In the 19th century, when the tower was being restored, the church bell was apparently hung inside its branches. Girth was about 17'.

Several of the perimeter yews were filled with ivy.



1912: "In the churchyard the wide spreading arms of gigantic yew trees-centuries old-cast deep green shadows....." *J.H.Beckett, ARIBA p 175 vol xlvii 1912/1913*

2005: Two large female trees of striking appearance dominate the churchyard. There is in addition a straight boled younger yew at the churchyard's southern entrance.

Tree 1: SSW of the church. Its elongated bole shape gives it a massive appearance. At 3/4' it separates into 2 distinct sides, one upright and one leaning. The yew had recently undergone branch removal, including one with a girth of 5' 3" in which it was possible to count 163 annual rings. Another, removed a long time ago, had a girth of 1' 8", in which were counted 70 rings. Girth was 18' 5" at about 2'.

Tree 2: SSE of the church, a hollow tree with much of the space filled with new growth. Tall branches rose above the centre, with many more substantial branches surrounding these. Girth was 17' 3" at 1'.



1801: "At the west end on the south side stands a fine large yew." *Gentlemans magazine*
 A 19th century drawing held by the William Salt library shows the tree in a more complete state.

2003: The female yew grows SW of the church. One of the bars placed to prevent the sides of the tree drifting further apart has been swallowed up in new layers of wood. Branches have been allowed to dip to the ground around most of the tree and are helping to support it. An 83 year old gentleman tending the churchyard was of the opinion that the tree was best left to look after itself. Wise words indeed!



At (A) two main branches are pulling the tree towards eventual fragmentation. (B) is largely fed by internal growth. One of these internal root/stems stretches across to side (A) providing the only living wood that links the two sides of the tree. When the large area of dead wood at the back of the tree decays this will be all that links two tree fragments. The tree was healthy with rich green foliage. Girth was 16' 9" at the ground expanding to exactly 20' at 2".

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2008: The first church was Norman. The yew grows only yards away from the end of the chancel, at the east end of the church. It has been larger than its present girth indicates. In the first photo at A is a structure called an internal root or internal stem. This would have begun its development at a time when the tree was a solid cylindrical shape. Removal of a branch facing the church centuries ago would have allowed water to penetrate the trunk and begin the process of heartwood decay. At the same time the tree developed shoots from one of the branches which grew downwards through the decaying centre to the ground. Once in contact with the ground the root has effectively become a stem, sustaining the very branches from which it originated. Girth 15' 10". Information and photos provided by Jane Rock



1884: "The dedication of St Michael's was a favourite one with the Normans for churches standing in high situations, and an aged yew tree on the south side of the church will probably carry us back to their days." *North Staffs field trip report*

1999: The female yew's hollow centre contains a fine internal stem which shared the space with much decaying wood. Girth was 18' 3" at the ground.

A smaller girthed (8' 2" at 3') male yew growing SW of the church exhibited many of the characteristics of old age.



The tiny Norman church stands on what was once the bailey platform of a small motte and bailey castle.

2007: No fewer than 21 yews ringed the churchyard, of which two are exceptional specimens. Both



male, they grow NE and SW of the church. Fourteen of the remaining nineteen are female. NE is a solid looking tree (left), but small amounts of concrete filling could be seen at the base of the tree. Girth was 16' 2" between 6" and 1'.

To the SW is a yew on sloping ground with a girth of 15' 8". This one is hollow, with a piece of frame indicating that a small door was once fixed to the tree. The hollow closes over completely at a height of about 8'.



On February 14th 1947, the Reverend Parrott, Vicar of Little Ness, reported damage to a Tumulus near his church caused by Mr Davies, a local farmer, when he cut down a yew tree. The reason the Rev. Parrott was concerned about this minor mound is interesting, for he believed that it was not a motte but a burial mound and that it was here that Cynddylan was buried after a bloody battle against the Saxons at nearby Baschurch.

2003: A 13th century black and white timbered church above a river. In the churchyard are two male trees, both in fine health. The yew SE of the church has a fluted bole about 6' high supporting many branches and forming a fine spreading crown. Girth at 1' was 11' 7".

The yew north of the church had a girth of 13' 10" at 2'.



2003: 21 yews grow on 3 sides of the churchyard perimeter, but unusually none on the south. The significant tree here grows NW of the church, the first tree to the right on entering the churchyard. It had a girth of 13' 11" at the ground. Much of its first two feet of growth is fluted, above which is considerable swelling, caused by the cutting back of low branches. Foliage was very thick on a tree in good health. This yew is considered to have a Known Planting Date of 1509, but I have not been able to establish the source of this information.

Mee (*King's England*) noted this "propped - up yew" in 1939.

1999: The broken female yew grows just inside the churchyard gate. An ivy clad fragment lies on the ground. Above this rises a propped up branch which suddenly twists round on itself, crossing to the other side of the path before dividing into several smaller branches. Behind this are 3 upright branches, two ivy clad, a third visible and fluted. Because much of the growth is youthful the impression was of vigorous green health.

In *The Trees of Shropshire* Morton recorded a girth of 7.7m (25'/26') around these fragments.



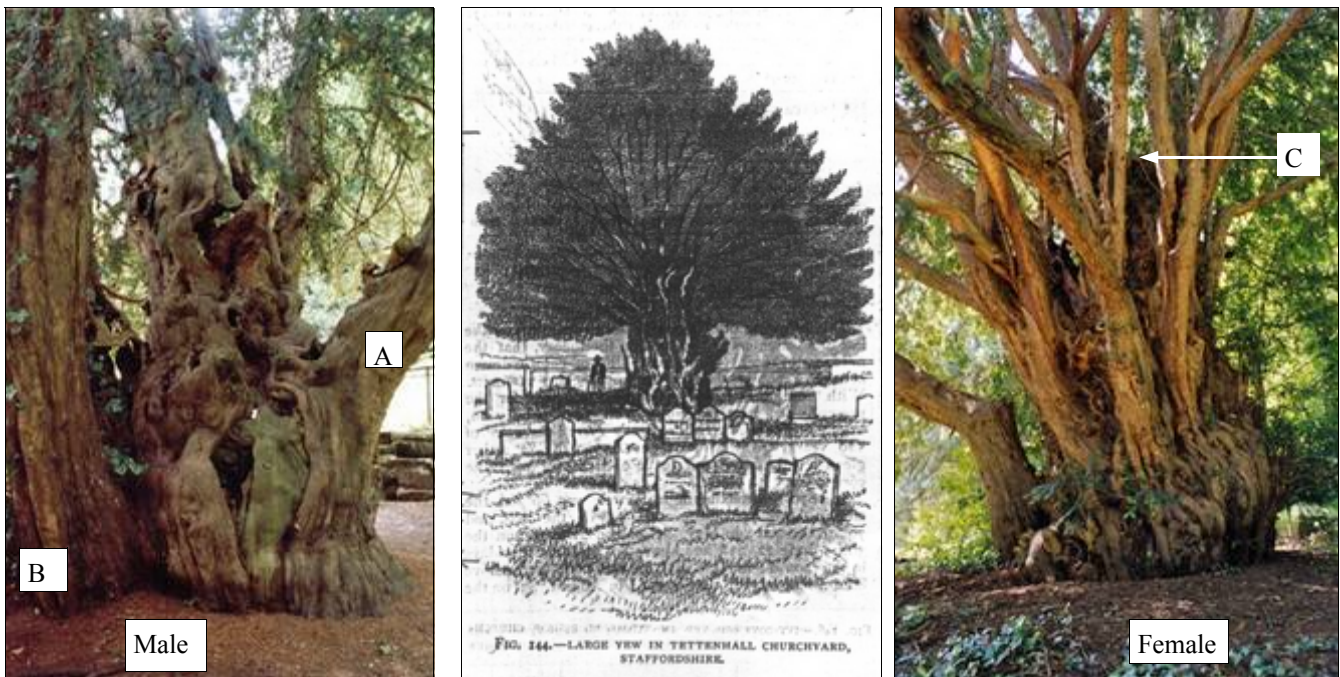
2007: SSW of the church (right) is a fine looking hollow yew, leaning, but with many branches reaching the ground to provide support. Tinder dry old Christmas trees littered the space. As well as this fire risk the area was also used to store grass cuttings from the churchyard. Such a fine specimen deserves better. A guide to its girth is about 16'.

WSW of the church and in a more open aspect is this older looking tree. With much twiggy growth it was difficult to examine, though decay could be seen on the SW side. Girth was 16' 6" at the base.



“Venerable yew-trees” were noted here in 1804. After a visit by the North Staffs Field club in 1899 the following was written: “Mr. Collins of Trentham, inspected the great yew tree to the north of the church, and pronounced it to be of more than 2,000 years growth. This, of course, would be of a date prior to Christianity itself, but that is not inconsistent, seeing that it is generally admitted that in this island the Britons revered the yew, and that the early Christians selected sites for their churches where the tree existed, regarding it as a symbol of everlasting life.”

Although I have only recorded two yews here *The Gardener's Chronicle* of 1874 reported 3 trees: “The Tettenhall Yew, standing in Tettenhall churchyard, near Wolverhampton, where are two others forming a gloomy row, gives a good idea of this connection. The most bulky of the three, which is here represented, is 24 feet in girth.” I have received more recent reports that there are still 3 yews here.



1999: Each of the two ancient yews I recorded showed signs of fire or smoke damage.

The male's main growth area develops into four branches, while a limb (A) is putting strain on the bole and a new trunk has emerged from the base of the tree at B. Girth of 22' 9" at 1' was recorded.

The female is a series of branches around the truncated centre of the original tree (C). Girth of 22' 4" around the base was recorded.

Morton's *Trees of Shropshire* refers to a watercolour of 1790 by Rev. Williams showing that there were once two large trees here. One was once described as admitting "12 persons into the trunk." It is likely that the yew formerly growing west of the church was removed during restoration work.

1999: The surviving yew grows SE of the church. It is completely hollow, an almost complete shell with just one space giving access to the inside. The first two feet of the bole was covered in thick twiggy growth. Ivy appeared to have been treated. Girth: 28' 4" at the lowest point and 31' 5" at 5'



Pevsner described that "...the ruin of the church lies in a field, with a big yew tree and the base of a churchyard cross to its south." He calls the church Old St Mary.

In Brian Bailey's *Churchyard of England and Wales* 1987, the location is called Broughton, Shropshire, where "a large yew shades the ruins of the old church."

In 2003 the ruins had all but disappeared, but the yew remained, a female tree of two fragments. The larger fragment, complete with internal stem, was dead. The smaller leaned at an angle of about 45 degrees. Thick stems of elder growing nearby helped it to remain upright. It was also supported by its own branches which dip to the ground.

The living fragment grows to one side of a portion of trunk separated from the larger dead section. Foliage, while not thick, was sufficient in quantity to maintain the yew's viability. It grows more or less south of the old church, of which it was almost impossible to find any trace.

Girth: 15' 10" at 2'.

