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Friday, February 11, 2011 Good afternoon!
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News - Index - St Michael Church Yew Tree Snapped



Heavy Snow damages ageing Yew Tree

13th February 2009

Over the past few weeks, heavy snow and sub-zero freezing temperatures may have painted the countryside and buildings with spectacular wintry scenes, and indeed many areas were picturesque. However, the weight of the snow paid the penalty on the old yew tree that stands as a canopy to the south entrance of St Michael and All Angel's church.



As a result of three days accumulative snow, 7 inches falling from the Wiltshire skies during last week, adding to the sub-zero temperatures, all these conditions did not help, as thick snow stuck to the evergreen tree and it was too much for the symbolic tree. The top section of the tree, could not withstand the weight of the snow and broke off about 25 foot section off the middle main trunk, leaving a gaping hole in the once ornamentally trimmed tree.



This tree was subject to periodic maintenance inspections and over the past sixty years has had safety checks carried out with various propping, chaining and trussing of the branches to improve its stability and shape. The large portion of the tree that snapped off, has defaced the photographic composition around the parish church, it added a character to the church and the churchyard scenes. Tree specialist, Matthew Dry of Dryad are expected to carry out a thorough inspection as soon as weather conditions improve and hopefully provide an answer, if there is one, to what future the tree holds.



The yew tree prior to the damage
July 2007

Yews are a symbol of immortality. Ancient people were in the habit of planting yew trees as acts of sanctification near to where they expected to be buried. Over the centuries, it has been widely planted in churchyards as an ornamental tree.

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The tree has a reputation for living longer than almost any other species in the UK. There is an old yew at [Fortingall](#) in Glen Lyon, Scotland which might be 2000 years old. The trunk is erect, usually much divided, with thin red-brown bark. The leaves and seeds of yew are very poisonous to stock.

As you enter or leave St Michael and All Angels church you could not fail to notice this ageing evergreen tree, perhaps as old as the original church. A local resident recorded the tree in a painting of the church in 1806 shows it well-established then.

The exact age of the tree is undetermined but records suggest it could have stood for over ten centuries. The very stout trunk, measured in 2003 with a girth of 4 metres 47centimetres, is covered with red-brown, peeling bark and topped with a rounded or wide-spreading head of branches indicate it is well established. Ancient trees are living relics of incredible age that inspire in us feelings of awe and mystery and certainly this tree fills that category. This tree was propped as early as 1940 with large telegraph poles to support the over hanging trunks.

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