



The most significant YEWS in the DIOCESE of ROCHESTER
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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 Rochester, 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 including younger yews with a known planting date.

Significant yews recorded in the Diocese of Rochester

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 Rochester will be able to help us complete the Responsibility for Tree Management column.

Location	Church dedication	County	Tree Category	Responsibility for Tree management
Bidborough	St Lawrence	Kent	1 ancient 1 notable	
Birling	All Saints	Kent	2 veteran	
Bredhurst	St Peter	Kent	1 veteran	
Capel, Kent	St Thomas a Becket	Kent	1 ancient	
Cooling	St James	Kent	1 veteran	
Cudham	St Peter and St Paul	Greater London	2 ancient	
Ditton	St Peter	Kent	1 veteran	
Downe	St Mary the Virgin	Greater London	1 ancient	
Farningham	St Peter and St Paul	Kent	1 veteran	
Hayes	St Mary the Virgin	Greater London	1 veteran	
Hoo St.Werburgh	St Werburgh	Kent	1 veteran	
Horton Kirby	St Mary	Kent	1 veteran	
Hunton	St Mary	Kent	1 veteran	
Lamberhurst	St Mary the Virgin	Kent	1 ancient	
Offham	St Michael	Kent	1 veteran	
Rainham	St Margaret	Kent	1 veteran	
Seal	St Peter and St Paul	Kent	1 veteran	
Shorne	St Peter and St Paul	Kent	2 veteran	
Speldhurst	St Mary the Virgin	Kent	1 veteran	
Stansted	St Mary the Virgin	Kent	1 ancient	
Trottscliffe	St Peter and St Paul	Kent	1 veteran	
West Kingsdown	St Edmund	Kent	1 ancient	

ROCHESTER - Notable yews

Addington, Ashurst, Aylesford, Brenchley, Ditton, Horsmonden, Keston, Knockholt, Otford, Sevenoak, St Mary Hoo, Swanscombe, Waterringbury, Wilmington



2003: 2 significant yews noted. The ancient yew (left), has only recently been recognised. It grows NE of the church on the edge of a steep bank and consists of 3 fragments.

The younger yew grows close to the church porch, and has been written about since 1897.



Branch removal at the height of 4/5ft has resulted in an abnormally large bulge, so that a girth of 13' at its narrowest waist rises to a massive 23' at 4'. Rising through its centre are large vertical branches. Its position makes it a formidable presence in this churchyard.



“In the churchyard stands an old yew which must have been here 500 years.” Mee -1936

There are in fact two old yews here, both female. One is seen below in a b/w half plate of Petrie’s watercolour original (1807). It grows SE of the church and when recorded in 2002 was covered in dense twiggy growth and difficult to examine. Several dead branches pointed away from the church, while thin strips of growth carried life over dead sections of the bole. Girth was 18' 5" at the ground.

The second, shown above, grows NE of the church. It had been drastically pruned and its appearance will be much altered when decaying sections disappear. Girth was 19' 2" at the ground.

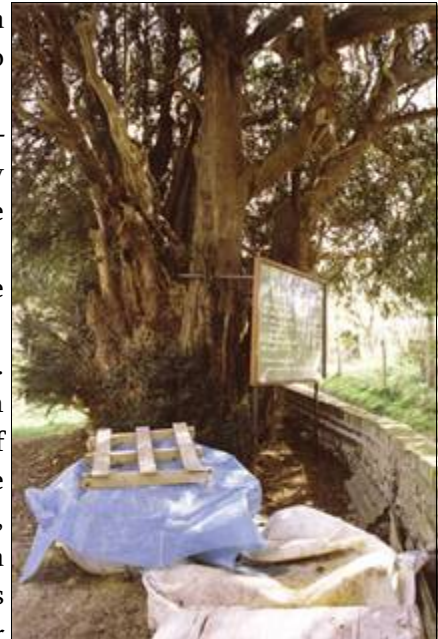


1886: "The tree in Bredhurst churchyard is very remarkable. It is a fine pollard, in which I first noticed the features which give rise to the present inquiry."

Lowe's inquiry led to the publication of *The Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* in 1897. He was the first to carry out systematic yew tree research and it was here that he discovered aspects of yew tree growth patterns that led to further study.

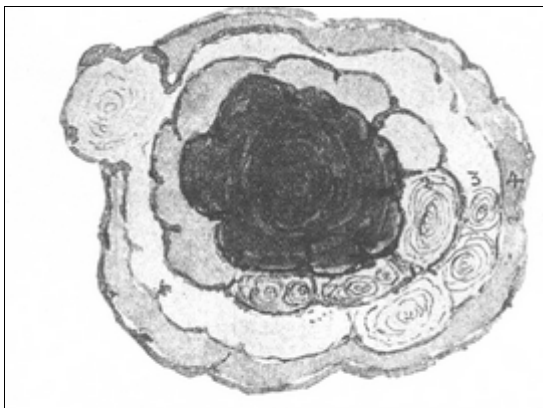
As such a significant tree is deserved better than sharing its space with an oil tank and builders' materials.

Lowe (1897) wrote a full description of the yew: "A fine pollard..... The original trunk is dead, but fairly sound, and can be seen through openings in the surrounding layers of new growth. The diameter of the central trunk is 2'. The surrounding ring has a radius of 1'; the wood is quite distinct from the central shaft, and differs in colour. It, too, is dead. Some of the branches which still remain attached have a diameter of 10". The third circle of wood, which for the most part is



living, has - together with a commencing fourth ring - a radius of 18".

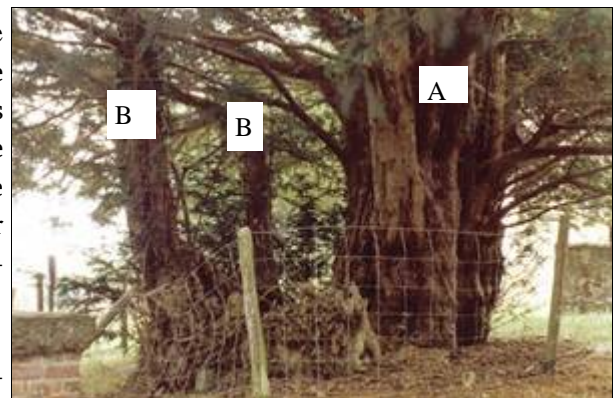
This fourth ring is covered with young spray, some of the shoots having grown to 4 or 5 feet in length, and begun to coalesce at the bases, which are much swollen, but most of the shoots die off after a few years' growth, being smothered by the foliage above them."



1999: The church sign was supported by two of the yew's branches, behind which the main substance of the tree grows from a bole of about 4'.

Described in 1814 as one of the largest yew trees in the county, Thomas a Becket is said to have preached in the early part of the 12th century to a group of parishioners under a yew "that was over 500 years old then." The large girth suggested to Wilks "that the existence of the yew in the martyr's day cannot be discounted, and for this reason preservation and treatment has been arranged."

1999: Almost half of what remains of this yew's circumference is dead wood. When this has completely decayed it will leave 3 fragment yews. Visitors to this churchyard in 2200 will see what appears to be an old yew (A) and two young yews (B) growing in close proximity. Records such as this will help to explain how this came about.



The churchyard at Cooling is thought by some to be the setting for the opening of *Great Expectations*. The now redundant church is beside the long distance walk known as the Saxon Shore Way.

The drawing suggests that this was one of Kent's largest yews. Mee (*King's England-1936*) describes the glorious view across the Thames when "standing by the old yew."

A visit by Owen Johnson to see if the yew shown here in Petrie's painting (1807) was still alive, discovered "an ancient and much decayed tree."



CUDHAM

St Peter and St Paul

Map 187 TQ 445600



1936: "From the hill on which its spire looks out for miles two yews have looked down on Kent for centuries; one is 27' round and the other 26'. They are a marvellous pair, older than the tower of Canterbury cathedral; they may have seen the life of this secluded hill-top come and go for about 1,000 year. These Darby and Joan of trees are all that Cudham has save its old church, which has kept them company since they were young." Mee *King's England*



1999: The female yew (right) was first recorded in 1806. It is hollow with a gap of 1' 6" in its shell that has in the past been blocked by a metal barrier. This is now incorporated into the tree as new wood has grown around the metal. There are substantial areas of growth springing from all around this shell, replacing large limbs that have been removed. Girth: 29' 9" at 1'.

The male (left) has a very tall and straight central branch. Girth: 22' 11" at the ground

DOWNE

St Mary Virgin

Map 187 TQ 432616

The Church is circa 1290. A wall plaque informs us that this was Charles Darwin's parish.

The Bromley Record and Monthly advertiser of July 1st 1863:

"But although the yew tree at Downe may not boast so high an antiquity as that at Skelldale, it may still have flourished in Saxon times and have afforded shelter to those who made the memorable survey known as 'Domesday Boke'."

1999: This splendid female yew grows south of the church. At the ground it is in two sections with gaps of 1' and 4' giving access to the hollow. These two sections join at about 10' and the entire structure leans slightly. Many new branches emerging from the side of the bole contribute to its thick green foliage. Girth: 30' 3" at the ground.

**FARNINGHAM**

St Peter and St Paul

Map 177 TQ 547669

1936: "Under Old Yew at the gate sleeps William Pounds, who died at 99; thou shalt honour the face of the old man, says his stone." Mee

2002: The female yew grows north of the church. The original tree has been reduced to a 10' high stump with the new tree growing at its edge and leaning away from it. This divides into 2 upright parallel branches at about 15'. The larger of these consists of new growth snaking along an old dead branch.



When decay of the stump is complete a small girthed tree will be all that remains. Observation of the process of decay suggests this can take decades, or even centuries.

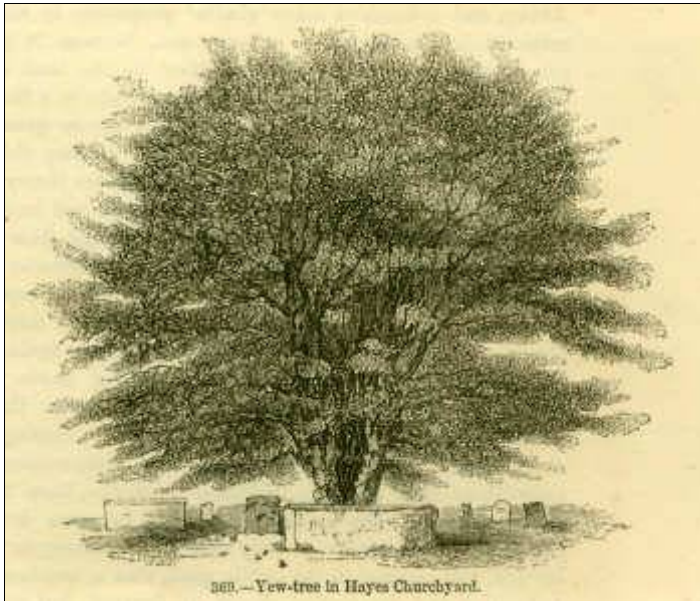
A girth of 16' 9" was recorded at 1', but around the living section it was only 4' 3".

HAYES

St Mary the Virgin

Map 177 TQ 405 663

The church is believed to stand on the site of a Roman house



Seen here in 1840 and 1999 the hollow female yew grows close to the church extension and south porch. It is a good example of a yew in the process of becoming two fragment trees. Girth in 1991 was 23' at the ground.

**HOO St WERBURGH**

St Werburgh

Map 178 TQ 784719

In a churchyard rich in yews, this one was described in 1944 as “very ancient, of great girth, with hollow trunk.”

A letter to Meredith dated 18/03/83 from Revd CG Woodhead contains the following: “Yes, there is a very old yew tree in the churchyard at Hoo, but in recent years the base has suffered from fire by vandals several times, and now one part is dead. Fortunately a considerable part is still alive. It is not possible to give one exact measurement of girth, because the main trunk is split into three, but the present living trunks measure 10 and a half and 6 and a half feet and the whole girth if complete measures 21 feet. The tree has been examined by experts and is undoubtedly over 700 years old, and some even think up to 1000 years old. There are other newer yew trees in the churchyard, I believe about 150 years old.”

1999: 5 young yews grow in this extensive churchyard, along with this fragment of the largest and oldest. A piece of stump with some decaying red heart wood gives an idea of the yew’s former girth, but this will soon rot leaving only the leaning fragment. This stretches 8m outwards from the base of the trunk and will probably require propping in the future.



HORTON KIRBY

St Mary

Map 177 TQ 562686



The Horton Kirby Yew is seen here in a B&W half plate of an 1807 Petri water colour (originals held by Kent Archaeology), The Illustrated London News May 6 1876, and in 2002.

The male yew grows SE of the church. A substantial portion of the tree, consisting of two thick parallel branches, leans and appears to be resting on tombstones; it must be carrying a great weight and putting considerable strain on the tree. A second growth area, consisting of numerous small branches, rises vertically.

Thick green foliage throughout the tree was competing with ivy into its topmost branches. Girth was 22' 4" around a base, which currently includes dead material. When this decays girth will be significantly reduced.

HUNTON

St Mary

Map 188 TQ 724498

In 1936 Mee noted the "dark umbrella yews shading the lychgate" but made no mention of the old yew growing NE of the church. The central section of the tree is decaying and when this process is complete, two fragment yews will remain. Girth in 2002 was 19' 5" at 1' and 20' 4" at 5'.

LAMBERHURST

St Mary the Virgin

Map 188 TQ 682366

There is evidence to suggest a Church on this site in Saxon times, consecrated on September 29th 998.

Measured in 1889 with a girth of 25ft at the ground.

1999: The tree has an unusually large number of straight rising branches. To the right of the opening is a large section of dead wood (A); with its eventual disappearance the tree's girth will be diminished by about 2' 6". There is a particularly fine spread of branches towards the church. Foliage was not thick and there were many yellow leaves. The unseen face of the tree, as is so often the case, was covered in dense twiggy growth.

110 years later I measured the tree at the same height and recorded 25' 11".



OFFHAM

St Michael

Map 188 TQ 660581

The yew here was first noted in 1835. In 1904 it was "almost destroyed by fire on February 14th. It was then discovered that the hollow trunk contained the remains of a cusped stone cross."

1999 : This low symmetrical tree grows around a thickened horse shoe bole. A tall central dead trunk marks the original tree. This was a healthy tree, growing vigorously. Girth: 17' 10" at 1', 19' 3" at 3', 17' 9" at 4'

**RAINHAM**

St Margaret

Map 178 TQ 817659

2002: This healthy female yew grows WNW of the church. From its open centre radiate a profusion of live and dead branches, with many split and jagged edges. I taped above the undercut base and included the substantial fallen branch which has formed at the edge of the bole; the result was 23' 5".

During 2009 one of the more unusual attempts at yew conservation was carried out on this tree.

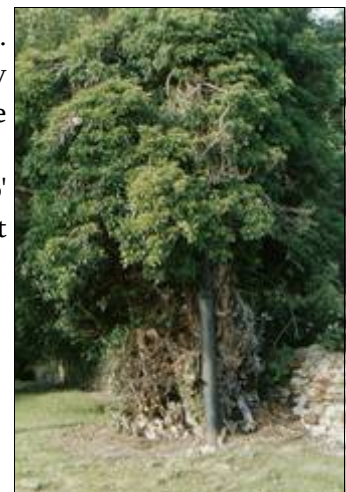
**SEAL**

St Peter and St Paul

Map 188 TQ 550570

2002: A male yew SE of the church and almost touching the perimeter wall. Most of its bole was dead, with growth rising from only a single point. Ivy had colonised the decaying centre, and the small amount of yew foliage struggled to be seen.

The old bole, which can be seen clearly where it faces the road, is about 6' high. In its prime it divided into 2 large upright branches. Girth was 18' 7" at the ground.



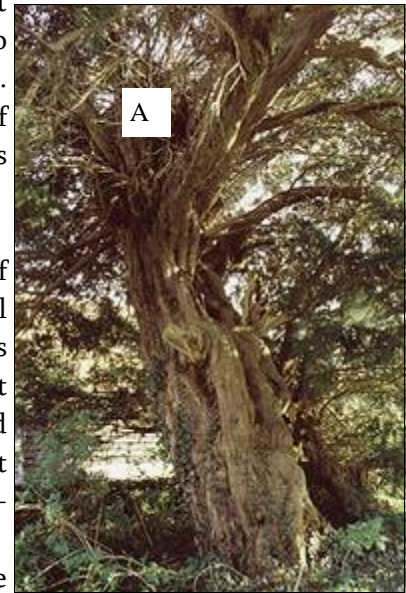
1897: "Two yews of good size, each in its way well illustrating the effects of pollarding."



2000: Two female yews, the first (left) grows just inside the entrance to the churchyard, NW of the church. This is almost certainly a fragment of a once much larger tree. It develops two main branches at about 7'.

The larger tree (right) grows NE of the church. It has a thickened shell which leans away from the church. Its bole bursts into growth at about 12' (A). At this height the tree would have lost its crown, either as a result of storm damage or deliberate pollarding.

One decaying section of wood at the base suggests that the tree's girth was once larger than its present 16' 7".



In 1897 the yew was "about 25' high, measures 18'6" at 3' from the ground. At 10' it is about 3' in girth. The top has been broken. This is a good example of the rapid growth of the trunk after fracture of the leading stem." Lowe

2003: The female yew grows ESE of the church, above a precarious drop to the road below. From its elongated bole two branches rise in the centre. There is also new growth on the periphery, swelling the tree's dimensions. Limbs that would have grown across the road have been removed.





1897: "A remarkably fine tree...a splendid head 30' in height. A central hollow containing a dead trunk about 5' in diameter. A network of roots of good size that have intertwined and coalesced in a striking manner. 6 principal branches, 5' to 8' in girth, each enclosing a dead branch of the original trunk. One or two of the branches have separated from the others." Lowe

1999: A sizeable section of the Stansted Yew is pulling away from the main bulk of the tree. A double row of chains, known to be there in Lowe's time, and thin wires in the upper branches are stretched taut in an attempt to prevent it from leaning further outwards. In several places these have been swallowed by new layers of wood.

The centre is filled with large internal stems which help feed the tree's 6 substantial growth areas. Branches from these dip gracefully all around this fine healthy tree. Girth 22' 10" close to the ground.

2002: The yew is recorded in the Tree Register's database with a diameter of 150 cm. It is male, grows SE of the church, measured 16' 1" and bulges at 5'. Its hollow is filled with a large internal stem feeding into the main upright branch.

To each side of the tree large branches have been removed.



1999: A sturdy male growing west of the church. It is hollow, with one of its gaps filled with concrete. A feature of many old yews is that of bulging outwards at between 3' and 5'. In this yew the feature is present in about $\frac{3}{4}$ of its girth. Its two main branches divide from the bole at a height of about 14'. It carried thick foliage.

Girth: close to the ground 24' 7", at 3' - 25' 3", at 5' - 22' 9"



A few of the NOTABLE YEWS in Diocese of Rochester

ASHURST

St Martin of Tours

Map 188

2004: The yew grows east of the church. It is tall with a clean bole except for one bulgy section between 2' and 6' on the S side. It appeared to be solid. Several large branches have been removed. Ivy was beginning to creep along bole. Girth exactly 15' at 2'.

AYLESFORD

St Peter and St Paul

Map 188 TQ 729590

2002 A plaque embedded into the wall announces that "The yew tree was planted in the year of our Lord 1708 by W.Farncom."

It grows by the south gate, is female and horse shoe shaped, measuring 9' 1" at 3' and 8' 8" at 5'. At about 8' the hollow closes over with a flurry of growth.

In 1936 Mee recognised the importance of yews with a known planting date, which help us to "fix the age of yews when we see them."

BRENCHLEY

All Saints

Map 188 TQ 679417

2005 Steve Young

An avenue of clipped yews, thought to be between 380 and 400 years old. Height between 20 and 25 feet.

DITTON

St Peter

Map 188 TQ 710580

2002: Mee (1936) described "a churchyard rich with yews." The largest is an unassuming female with a girth of 16' 9" at the ground and an excessive covering of ivy high into its branches. It grows SE of the church by the wall which separates churchyard from a recent housing development. Its bole is an elongated hollow with thickening at each end.

KNOCKHOLT Kent

St Katherine

Map 188 TQ 467589

1999: A tree of fine appearance with a straight fluted bole dividing at 10/12' into many strong branches. Holes have been filled with concrete and other substances and the upper parts are held together with wire. Girth 17' 1" at 1'.

2010: Cliff Hansford: The yew grows SE of the church. The bole looks very much the worst for wear as a result of some earlier work either to save the yew or, perhaps, prevent it from being vandalised (set on fire).

Originally there were five limbs projecting from the one bole from a height of 6 ft. Two of the limbs have been removed. A number of branches in the canopy have been cut back and foliage looks sparse. Girth: 12 ft at 3 ft from ground, increasing to 15 ft at a height of 5 ft. All hollow areas that are visible from the ground are filled with cement (concrete) and some areas suggest a rubble in-fill.



2005 Penelope Stanford

A yew of known planting date grows to the SE. A fairly cylindrical yew, its trunk thickening above head height. A brass sign by the tree contains details of its planting date -1732 - and several girth recordings taken at three feet. 4' 1½" in 1803; 5' 2½" in 1846; 7' 3½" in 1947; 7' 10½" in 1972.'

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