



The most significant YEWS in the DIOCESE of CHESTER

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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 Chester, 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 Chester

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 Chester will be able to help us complete the Responsibility for Yew Management column.

Site name	Church name	Tree classification	Responsibility for yew management
Astbury	St Mary	1 ancient	
Bunbury	St Boniface	1 veteran	
Eastham	St Mary	1 ancient	
Farndon	St Chad	1 veteran	
Gawsworth	St James the Great	1 notable	
Goostrey	St Luke	1 ancient	
Mobberley	St Wilfred	1 notable	
Nether Alderley	St Mary	1 veteran	
Prestbury	St Peter	1 veteran 1 notable	
Siddington	All Saints	1 notable	
Taxal	St James	1 veteran	
Warburton	St Werburgh	1 veteran	

1888: "To the north east of the church is an ancient yew tree of some centuries' growth..." *Excursion led by Mr C.Lynam*

1915: *Astbury and its History* (1915) by Newbold:

"On the north side of the church stands a remarkable yew tree. It leans over the churchyard path in so threatening a manner that numerous props have recently been placed to support it. The trunk is completely hollow, and a large hole in the outer thin shell allows several people at a time to shelter within. In spite of this deficiency the upper branches are quite vigorous and appear in perfect health. It has been computed that the tree is at least 1000 years old, hence it was quite a patriarch when the act of Ed. III. required the planting of yews in churchyards to supply the tough bows necessary to the English long-bow men."

1998: Morton considered it to date from "Saxon times.....on viewing it today it is incredible that it still lives." *Tree Heritage of Britain and Ireland*

1999: Though we will never know how large this tree once was, its vast old age can not be doubted. The photograph shows how tenuously the trunk is linked to its root system, yet its branches continue to carry a thick and abundant foliage. The numerous props needed in 1915 had been reduced to a single support in 1999.



1999: The male yew has an elongated bole with a more recent stem attached to it at one end. The tree appeared in excellent condition with a full crown and branches sweeping gracefully to the ground.

Girth encompassing the new stem was 19'6" at 1'. Excluding this it is reduced to 15' 2".





The plaque reads as follows: “When, in 1152, the Abbot and Monks of St Werburgh received the Manor of Eastham at the hands of Earl Randall of Chester, the villagers of Eastham entreated the new owners ‘to have a care of ye olde yew’.”

Writing in *English Notebooks* in 1854 Nathaniel Hawthorne described “an old yew-tree of immense trunk, which was all decayed within, so that it is a wonder how the tree retained any life-which nevertheless it did. (This tree was noted as the Old Yew of Eastham, 600 years ago).”

In 1898 members of the Royal Archaeological Society visited the village, expressing the opinion that the yew may have been planted originally against the east end of the timber framed wattle and daub chapel which preceded the Norman church.

By 1999 only a fragment remained of the original tree, badly burnt in spite of containment behind railings. When a dead central section decays, it may leave a tree of 2 or even 3 fragments. Three main areas of recent growth emerge from the bole, two of these were supported with wire to prevent further leaning. There was much adventitious growth. The yew is female, recorded by Baxter (1992) with a girth of 21' at 4' 6".

In 1947 a local recorder described “three ancient yews”. Using the present protocols this description exaggerates the stature of the yews at this site, for which Notable status is more apt. The largest, measuring 15' 6" at 3', grows on the north side of the church.

Church records from 1365 state that the huge yew tree outside the church door provided arrows for Cheshire's archers. *Historic Walks in Cheshire.*

1825: "In the church-yard of Goostrey, in the county of Chester, is a remarkably large Yew tree, which, allowing for the slowness of the growth of the Yew, is calculated to have stood at least a thousand years. Under which tree the following lines, and the others of an Elegy of which they form a part, were written in 1821, by C. A.H. *Museum Europæum; or, Select antiquities ... of nature and art, in Europe ...* by Charles Hulbert



"Proud Yew ! whose spreading branches have withstood
A world of winds and many a stormy flood ;
Nurse of the hamlet, long remembered shade,
Round whose deep roots, are human ashes laid,
To bid thy lasting foliage grow and bloom,
While generations mingle in the tomb.
Thy changeless verdure mocks our mortal fears,
The stubborn grandeur of a thousand years !"

1999: The male yew grows south of the church. Around the edge of a central platform are 5 recent branches of similar age. Foliage was not particularly dense. A young holly tree grew too close to the yew and an oak had succeeded in germinating only 4" from the bole. Girth was about 25' at the ground, above spreading roots.



In 1938 Mee described "a great yew tree" in the churchyard. In the 1952 history of Mobberley Village we are told "the fine old yew tree in the churchyard was probably planted in Saxon times, possibly 727.

The size and appearance of the only large yew in this churchyard suggests a planting closer to 1727, so we have to ask whether the great yew tree Mee described has been felled. If this is the tree Mee described it is hard to know why it should have acquired such an exaggerated age.

Dean Loftus 2008:

The female yew shown here has a girth of 13' at the ground and 12' 2" at 3'. 8 smaller yews line the south east boundary wall of the churchyard. These have a known planting date of 1937.



NETHER ALDERLEY

St Mary

Map 118/SJ842 761

1850: "In the churchyard, under an old yew, stands an ancient stone font, removed from the church and green with exposure; under the same yew lies buried the sister of the late Dean Stanley. Alderley is worthy of note having been connected with the Stanley family since the fifteenth century." *Notes and queries*

1999: The bole retains its large girth for a considerable height. One hole, about two and a half feet high and 8 inches across reveals a large internal stem that becomes part of the tree's main branch. Large sections of wood flowing around sawn off branches are a notable feature of this yew. Girth recorded in Meredith's gazetteer is 18ft.

Growing nearby are 2 further yews; one grows tall and straight and is possibly layered from the parent tree. The second is a fallen, twisted female.



PRESTBURY

St Peter

SJ901 769

1876: A "venerable yew tree" was first noted in a publication for the Chetham Society by Frank Renaud.

Dean Loftus 2008: Two yews stand 6 feet apart, the largest is hollow with about a third of the trunk missing. It is slightly fire damaged but shows new growth. The crown is large and foliage healthy.

The smaller tree, little more than a fragment, has much worse fire damage although it too is showing new foliage growth and seemed quite healthy.

There is little evidence that the trees are actually one tree, fragments of decaying wood in the soil seem to indicate a full trunk on the smaller tree was once about 16feet.

Girth of the two female trees was 13 ft 4in and 7 ft 3in.



SIDDINGTON

All Saints

SJ 846 708

1850: "A fine old yew tree stands on the south side of the Church" *History, gazetteer, and directory of Shropshire: comprising a general survey ...*by Samuel Bagshaw.

This appears to be regrowth around a very old stump. Present girth is about 12'.

Photo supplied by Peter Turner





1850: "A fine old Yew-tree stands in the Church yard." *History, gazetteer, and directory of Shropshire* by Samuel Bagshaw

1938: "a magnificent yew 20 feet round" described by Mee in *Cheshire*.

2005: The female yew grows ESE of the church. It consists of a horse shoe hollow shell with a low broken wall around it, so that the original base is hidden. A small additional piece of stump will probably not last much longer.

Much of the original trunk remains to a height of between 5' and 8', and new growth on thin upright branches stretches from this.

A girth of 15' 5" close to the ground may only suggest a 500 year old tree, but decay and regrowth could make it considerably older.

1872: The Revd G.E.Warburton described the yew as "practically dead, being a mere shell of wood with a few green branches growing from one side." *church guide*

1946: Cornish was informed by Rev. E.Jauncey that the yew had "renewed vigour in its old age."

1990s church guide: "It now appears quite healthy and seems to have taken on a new lease of life, but in another 50 years or so all trace of the size of the original tree will be lost. Its great age can be realised when we consider the length of time a slow-growing tree like the Yew must have taken to form a trunk 18 feet in circumference, and for all this solid wood to decay."

1999: The pieces of this male yew which remain measure 9' 4" at 1'. They provide a rich foliage on young branches. From this a 'new' tree will develop, capable of lasting for many more centuries.

