



The most significant YEWS in the DIOCESE of LLANDAFF

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This record provides 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 featured here are the most important to be found in the churchyards of the Diocese of Llandaff, and each one deserves adequate protection.

Ancient yews are at least 800 years with no upper limit to their potential age. The Yews for the Millennium project took cuttings from yews considered at that time 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 may be up to 1200 years old.

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

Lost yews:

Most of Llandaff's yews have been recorded in the past. We know that old yews have been lost at the following places.

At Baglan "yews of luxuriant growth" in 1833 have been reduced to a single yew fitting that description.

At Glyncoirwg "five remarkably fine yew trees" in 1811 are reduced to three.

At Llangynwyd a 16ft stump is all that remains of a third yew at the site.

At Llantarnam only one yew remains of "some fine yew trees" recorded in 1880.

At Caerau a 20ft yew was set fire to by vandals in 1937.

At Llanishen two large yews recorded in 1880 have been removed.

Significant yews recorded in the Diocese of Llandaff

Name of Site	Church name	County/administrative area	Status of yew/s found at the site
Baglan	St Catherine/St Baglan	Glamorgan	1 veteran
Coity	St Mary the Virgin	Bridgend	1 veteran
Colwinston	St Michael and All Angels	Glamorgan	1 veteran
Eglwysilan	St Ilan	Caerphilly	2 veteran
Glyncorwg	St John the Baptist	Glamorgan	2 veteran 1 notable
Llanedeyrn	St Edeyrn	Cardiff	1 ancient 1 veteran
Llangynwyd	St Cynwyd	Bridgend	2 veteran
Llanilid	St Ilid	Bridgend	2 veteran
Llantarnam	St Michael and All Angels	Monmouthshire	1 veteran
Llantrithyd Park	St Illtyd	Glamorgan	1 veteran
Llantwit, Neath	St Illtyd	Glamorgan	1 notable
Michaelston-super-Ely	St Michael	Glamorgan	1 veteran
Pendoylan	St Cadoc	Glamorgan	1 ancient 1 notable
Penmark	The Blessed Virgin Mary	Glamorgan	2 notable
Radyr/Llandaff	St John the Baptist	Glamorgan	1 veteran
St Brides-super-Ely	St Bride	Glamorgan	1 ancient
St George`s -super-Ely	St George	Glamorgan	1 ancient 1 veteran
St Nicholas	St Nicholas	Glamorgan	1 notable
Wenvoe	St Mary	Glamorgan	1 veteran 1 notable

As early as 1833 “yews of luxuriant growth” were described at this site. The recent church of St Catherine replaces St Baglan’s church, whose ruin occupies the same site and is documented in *Lost Churches of Wales and the Marches* by Paul Davis and Susan Lloyd-Fern.

1998: The only yew of any note here does not have the appearance of a veteran. It consists of two young looking trunks rising vertically from the original base. A third trunk, which must have once been the major part of the tree, has been felled and when decay of this is complete the evidence that this was once part of a formidable old tree will be lost. Meredith’s *Gazetteer* in *The Sacred Yew* (1994) recorded a girth of 19’ for this female yew.



In a poem published in *The Cambrian Journal* of 1859 the following lines described Coity church:

“Around it (heirs of immortality)
The worthy fathers of the hamlet lie,
Watched by the giant yew, in solemn gloom.”

In a note to the poem J.H. James wrote: “The parish church of Coity stands immediately behind the castle, is a beautiful building in the Gothic style, of a cruciform shape, and is now in course of restoration. Near it stands a gigantic yew tree, numbering at least 100 or 200 years in age, giving an air of solemnity and antiquity to the church-yard, of which it is so great an ornament. Like a good angel it keeps watch over the slumbering dead who lie quietly beneath its shade.”

2006: The male yew grows south of the church within a circular wall, so that the first few feet of the original trunk are now hidden. Many substantial low branches of great age have been removed. A girth of 15’ 2” was recorded below these sawn off branches.

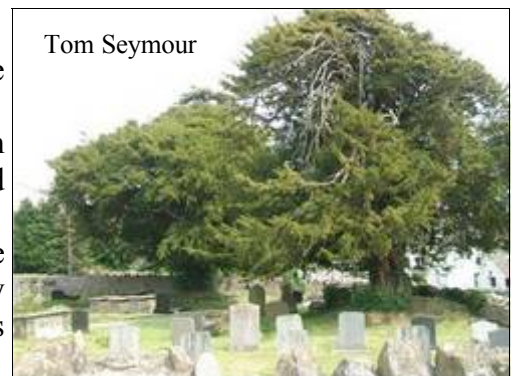


2003: The largest of two yews here is female, growing SE of the church. A single layer of stones encloses a small mound.

The south face of the bole hints of a once larger tree, though copious ivy made it difficult to evaluate. Foliage was thick and healthy and its girth was 15’ 8” will be exaggerated by the ivy .

A smaller male grows SSE of the church on an even more pronounced mound, close to the boundary wall. At the time many dead low branches gave it a rather scrappy appearance. Girth was 12’ 1” at 1’.

Tom Seymour





2006: Of the two veteran yews, one (right) survives only as a fragment of the original tree. Both are contained within well constructed walls.



The largest is male and grows closest to the south porch. There is live wood around its entire trunk and the vigorously growing tree had a fine shape. It girthed 18' 7" close to the ground.

Nearby and SSE of the church is the 8' 6" fragment of a female tree, leaning over towards the male tree. While there is no way of knowing how large this once was, the size of the containing wall suggests that it was once of a similar size to its male counterpart.

The 1811 *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* recorded "five remarkably fine yew-trees, the largest of which measures ten yards 4 inches in circumference."



1998: Only 3 are found today.

The first (left) is male just inside the entrance to the churchyard. It is old, hollow and gnarled but not very large in girth. The second (centre) is female, now growing in its well defined space within a circular wall. The original base of the tree is several feet below what we see today. Its two fine trunks are joined only for the first 2 feet, with a girth of about 20'. Each supported considerable healthy growth. The third (right) is male. Only 5' of its 14' circumference is live wood. When the centre fully decays it will leave a small girthed horse shoe shaped trunk.

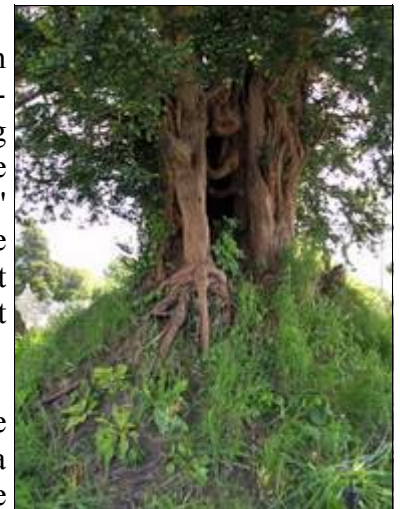
1998:

Two male yews grow at this site. The first, on a mound, has split into two fragments. Unchecked growth of elder made the site almost impenetrable, also filling the gap between the fragments. There was evidence of fire or smoke damage to the tree's inner surfaces. Girth was approximately 30'. The second yew also grows on a mound, its girth about 20'.



2006:

Almost east of the church on a very steep mound is a hollow yew (right) with sagging internal stems. It is female and girths approximately 15' low on its trunk. This figure would have been higher but for a section of the trunk that has been removed.



SSW of the church is a male yew (left) contained within a 3' high wall. Girth was 15' 11" at about 18" above the wall height. Some remnants of the original trunk are visible.

Due south of the church by the path is a piece of stump about 8' in girth which rests on a much larger base of up to 16' in girth.



"Some fine yew trees" were noted here in 1880. Only 1 remained in 1999, this female growing north of the churchyard boundary wall that its more interesting face is almost hidden. It leans slightly towards the road.

At 6' its bole divides into 2 growth areas supporting many branches. Foliage was sparse, with many discoloured leaves. A piece of stump about 5' high (A) is separated from the tree.

Girth including the stump was 20' 8" at 3' and excluding it was 18' 4". In *The Churchyard Yews of Gwent* Revd. J.Daryll Evans also recorded "a big yew stump near entrance gate to the west."





2006: Two exceptional yews grow here. The most significant is on the SSE side of the church, a 23' girthed twin-stemmed male (right). One of its two stems (A) has been cut off at about 6', and out of it once grew a cherry or birch – now dead. This stem is joined to the more significant half of the yew (B) for about 3/4'. In the centre of this live



yew trunk grows a huge and well developed oak tree. Yew and oak leaves mingle high into the canopy, a true botanical curiosity.

The second male (left) grows ESE of the church. It is 3 stemmed from a low bole with a girth of about 18' at 1'. One of the three is dead, while the largest is full of new growth wrapped around the sections of the original trunk. A large elder grew up against the yew.

The Cambrian traveller's guide, and pocket companion by G. Nicholson (1840) described “a yew tree, in perfect health, girth 18 ft. 6 in. In 1803 it was large and branching; in 1806 it was stripped of its venerable arms, and left a naked trunk, robbed and dishonoured.”

A Topographical Dictionary of Wales (1834 and 1849) described “a yew tree, which, at the height of six feet from the ground, measures twenty-six feet in girth, and near the root little less than forty feet.”

There are several possible explanations for these discrepancies; these include (1) whether the same tree is being described in both accounts and (2) whether the *Topographical Dictionary* accounts were written at the publication time or reproduced from an edition decades earlier.

1998: It is not possible to know whether the yew we see today is the same tree described in one of the above accounts. It is a large male yew with sparse foliage, well protected behind a good quality fence. The redness of new outer bark growth had been stripped away from about half of the trunk, revealing a large expanse of lustrous white sapwood.

It has a hollowing bole to about 8/9' with many branches, including several that are dead and hang down from the tree.

Large elder grew next to the yew and is probably not helping a tree that is struggling to remain alive. Girth was about 17' at 3' and 19' 6" at 5'.



2006: A low growing female tree SE of the church, with a girth of 14' 3" close to the ground. Its numerous thin branches create a good cover of foliage. Ivy covered much of the tree and grew into its branches, while a sycamore had established itself in the tree's decaying centre. Tombstones leaned against the trunk.

MICHAELSTON –SUPER- ELY

St Michael

Map 171/ST 115 763

A yew described by Owen Johnson in 2004 as “old but branchy, on a mound by the church”. He recorded a girth of 540cm at 0.1m - 17' 8" at 4".

PENDOYLAN

St Cadoc

Map 170/ST 060 767



2006: Two old male yews grow here. SW of the church (left and centre) is a fine tree, split into 2 halves – both hollow with internal stems. The mound probably conceals the common origin of the two halves 2/3' beneath the ground. Girth of this fine expansive tree was 23' 9" close to the ground.

Growing ESE of the church is the yew seen above right - with a central stem around which grow many others of similar girth. Beneath the yew were several feet of rubble, remains of a bonfire and the slippery ooze of decaying grasses.

PENMARK Glamorgan

The Blessed Virgin Mary

Map 170/ST 059 689



“2 old yews” were noted by Howell in 1861.

2006: A male yew (left) grows SW of the church, with large branches cut off near the base. Girth was about 14'.

The female (right) grows SSW of the church. It measured exactly 15' a few inches above the ground. The bole of about 3' height forms a central branch with many other surrounding it. There was much ivy on this yew.

A third yew, also within a circular wall WSW of the church is much smaller, girthing 10' 2" at 6" .



2009:

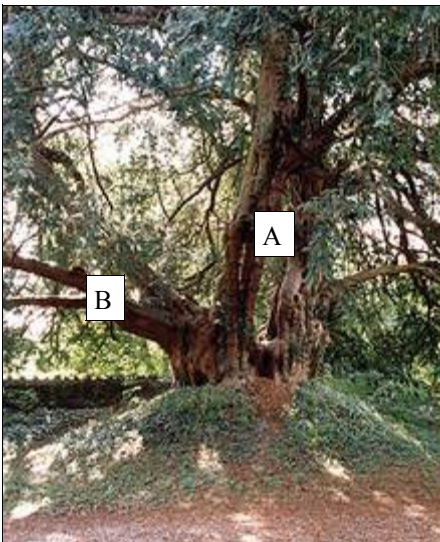
The yew grows south of the church, inside a 2' high wall. On the side facing the church the tree's whole trunk can be seen, while on the south side there is much bramble and elder growth.

It is a fine, imposing and well looked after tree which retains its large girth to a height of about 20'. Vigorous branch growth supports an evenly shaped canopy. As would be expected of a yew of this size there is a large hollow space, in this case revealing several internal stems. Another section of the trunk facing SW is dead. Girth was 18' 2" at 2'.



St BRIDES - super - ELY

Map 171/ST 097 776



The earliest reference to this yew so far discovered is from 1945 in *Glamorgan: Its History and Topography*. It describes that a "a very old yew tree stands in the churchyard".

1998: The male yew grows on a mound. From its short bole are 3 main growth areas, two rising (A) and the third (B) a limb like structure. All three support considerable branching.

Girth 24' 6" at 1'

St GEORGE'S – super – ELY

Map 171/ST 104 766

2009: The railway from Carmarthen to Cardiff passes this churchyard. A yew enthusiast reported what appeared to be old yews that might be worth checking, and in doing so has uncovered two previously undocumented very old yews.

A female yew grows on a mound SW of the church. A large detached and decaying section is now separated from the main tree. Including this a girth of about 24' would be recorded, indicating the size of the original tree. The living section, a twisted hollow shell with plenty of live growth, has a girth of about 16' and supports a low crown.



The male grows SSW of the church. This is a large hollow tree that has fallen in two stages. One of these split and fell recently, the other probably more than a century ago. Girth around the large fallen section alone is above 22', showing that this was once a very large girthed yew.

Girth of largest yew is 13' 11" at 1' and 15' 6" at 5'. There are further smaller yews in the churchyard. 20 yards from the churchyard boundary is another large yew in a private garden which appears at least as big as the one measured. Recorded by Bruce McDonald



In the 1833 edition of *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales* by Samuel Lewis, the following is described: "..... near the church grows a remarkably fine yew tree, in excellent preservation, which is said to be one of the oldest in the county."

2006: This female yew at the SE corner of the church is a leaning fragment of this tree, growing inside an ivy covered circular wall. It appears to be a tree which became hollow and then leaned over. Since then the hollow has almost sealed up with new growth.

A new branch has grown vertically from the fallen section. This new branch is itself 8' 8" in girth, suggesting that the tree has been prone for at least 200 years and was probably beginning to lean when described in 1833. Also in the churchyard by the WNW perimeter wall is a less distinguished female tree on a slight mound, with a bole of 1' 2' from which rise a series of tall branches. One of the central branches is hollow with internal roots among the decaying heartwood. Girth of the tree was about 15' 3" at 1'.

