

# PROTECTION and RESPONSIBILITY (churchyard yews)

by Tim Hills

The majority of ancient and veteran yews (500 years and older) found in England and Wales grow on the consecrated ground around churches. We can be sure that the 800 we have so far recorded owe their survival largely to the protection afforded by their location.

The Ancient Yew Group (AYG) has been gathering information for many years and is now in a position to present data showing the location of our churchyard yews.

In addition to this, Toby Hindson's ground breaking studies at last enable us to categorise yews as Ancient, Veteran or Notable, based on clearly defined criteria. This gives us a strong statistical base from which to argue for tree protection, and helps those who should be looking after our oldest trees to know the precise number and location of trees entrusted to their care.



The ancient Alltmawr Yew



One of Heyop's veterans



Ault Hucknall's notable yew

To help us build a picture of who is managing Britain's oldest trees, our Yew Gazetteer webpage contains a new heading "Protection and Responsibility". We are hoping that dioceses and other sources will help provide this information. We will not be surprised if we discover that in many instances there is no protection at all, or that responsibility lies solely with the Vicar acting alongside their Church Warden, Parochial Church Council or District Council. Tree expertise in such decision making bodies is often lacking, as indeed are the funds necessary to carry out the best remedial work.

It is not always an individual church or diocese that is responsible for grounds and tree maintenance, and some burial grounds have been taken over by the local authority. This does not necessarily mean that an old yew will receive sensitive treatment, as this tree at Bromham in Wiltshire demonstrates.



Some churches, no longer used for worship, have their buildings maintained by organisations such as the *Churches Conservation Trust* and the *Friends of Friendless Churches*.



In this example at Elworthy in Somerset, a 13<sup>th</sup> century church, complete with embattled tower and outside stairway, is looked after by the Churches Conservation Trust. The tree is centuries older than the church and yet we do not know who looks after it. There are similar examples at Alton Priors in Wiltshire, Capel and Waldershare Park in Kent and Yazor in Herefordshire.



At Llanfair Kilgeddin in Monmouthshire, this church building is managed by the Friends of Friendless Churches. We visited in 1997 expecting to find the “3 impressive yews” described by Revd J. Daryll Evans in his *Churchyard Yews of Gwent* 1988. Sadly all that remained of one was this stump lying in a nearby lane awaiting removal. It might be that there was a good reason for felling this tree, but we were unable to establish one. This lack of accountability is not acceptable.



The deconsecrated church shown below is now a house. On the east side is a large hollow veteran yew the same age as the original church. While the building has grade 2 listed status, the tree has no protection.



The tables below contain a summary of the numbers of Ancient, Veteran and Notable yews in the Dioceses of the Church of England and the Church in Wales. The numbers will increase as new trees are discovered, particularly those of Notable yews (300 years and older), which have to date only been systematically recorded in parts of the dioceses of Salisbury and Oxford.

The number of trees recorded is almost always greater than the number of churchyards, since many churches have the responsibility of looking after more than one significant yew.

### Yews in the dioceses of the Church in Wales

Diocese	No of churchyards	Ancient	Veteran	Notable
Bangor	28	12	14	22
Llandaff	19	4	9	6
Monmouth	45	18	24	20
St Asaph	62	27	39	41
St Davids	40	9	29	17
Swansea and Brecon	84	32	97	69

## Yews in the dioceses of the Church of England

Diocese	No of churchyards	Ancient	Veteran	Notable
Bath and Wells	81	13	34	42
Birmingham	2		1	1
Bristol	6	1	3	2
Canterbury	63	22	47	32
Carlisle	10		6	7
Chelmsford	6		2	4
Chester	12	3	6	4
Chichester	43	14	19	12
Coventry	10		2	8
Derby	18	3	7	9
Exeter	40	10	17	22
Gloucester	30	6	9	18
Guildford	11	4	5	3
Hereford	103	27	56	55
Leicester	3		1	2
Lichfield	21	5	15	8
London	3		2	3
Newcastle	2		2	1
Oxford	42	8	14	26
Peterborough	5	1	3	1
Portsmouth	24	11	9	8
Rochester	35	7	18	13
Salisbury	50	9	10	32
Southwark	11	4	5	4
St Albans	10	2	6	2
Winchester	37	10	14	18
Worcester	16	1	7	11