Yews Trees of the Lost Church and Manor of Monketon, Kent
Site of St Martin’s Church, Monketon, Kent.

Grid Ref: TQ9434555354

Date visited: 18/03/08

Nearest town: Faversham

Public access: No to site, Yes to adjacent yews (see below).

Sex: See below.

Location: See below.

Girth: See below.

MONKETON is another hamlet, situated at the north-west extremity of this parish, which was formerly likewise accounted a parish of itself. The manor of it, which extends into the parish of Neunham, seems to have been given by Ralph Picot, to the abbey of Faversham, at or soon after the foundation of it, and this gift was confirmed to it by Henry II in his 11th year, [1165].

The church of Monketon has been long dilapidated, though the exact ground plot of it is still visible, having two very large yew-trees near it. It is situated in a wood of about half an acre.

From: 'Parishes: Otterden', The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 5 (1798), pp. 533-549. Edward Hasted

In his book 'Vellare Cantianum' T. Philpott, when dealing with Otterden, says: 'I have seen an old Court Roll relating to the Manor of Monkston in this parish which seemed to commence from the reign of Edward II .... The parish of Monketon lay on the northern boundary of Otterden and the parish of Borefield at its south-eastern extremity. Both have since been incorporated in Otterden.'

The exact ‘site’ is now fenced off from the public, though I was fortunate on the day to be granted access. Nothing of the church is visible, and as can be seen from the aerial photograph the site is now very much that of woodland: at ground level the undergrowth is a mass of brambles and ivy vines. A number of relatively small yews lay on the ground, I suspect blown down during the storm of 1987 and since, while a few more share the site with other trees. Yews numbered 9 & 10 are, I believe, the two mentioned by Hasted, and can only really be appreciated by gaining access to the area.

The other area recorded below, wherein yews 1 to 8 are located, is of a
rectangular nature. Within this area Yews 1 to 5 occupy the summit of a small embankment which forms the eastern side and extends to 112 feet on a north/south axis. The ground sloping away from these yews extends 60 feet to the western side of the rectangle, where yews 6 & 7 are located. Yew 8 stands very much on its own, away from the rectangular area.

The fact that on a number of yews limbs, branches and sections of ivy have been removed would suggest that some tree management has at some time taken place.

There are a number of sizeable flints that lay scattered along the raised embankment and down its slope, suggesting perhaps a structure of some kind - a stand alone wall or that of a building maybe?

The yews featured here are in an isolated area of woodland surrounded by rolling fields.

The woodland now occupying the site of St Martin’s Church. Looking in the general direction of Hasted’s two large yews (9 & 10).
The area in which the church stood with yews 9 and 10 is fenced off and not accessible to the general public.

The area occupied by yews 1 to 8 is accessible to the public.

The entire landscape occupied by the church site and all the yews slopes westward.

Accepting that the indicated site of the church is correct, then yews 9 and 10 are probably the two yews referred to by Hasted. Their location was presumably south and southwest of where the church would have stood.

The entire area featured above cannot be seen from the road. It is best approached from the tracks indicated on the map which lead off from the road.
View of eastern bank looking south, featuring yew clusters 3, 2 & 1.
View of eastern bank looking north, featuring yew clusters 2, 3, 4 & 5.

View of eastern bank looking south east, featuring yew clusters 4 & 5.
Yew 1:

One main root base with one trunk projecting north from it and two trunks immediately adjacent, possibly projecting from the same root base, but beneath the ground. From main root base two sizeable trunks project upwards. A large limb which faced south has been removed. Girth of the two main limbs projecting from the root base is 15 feet when measured at the base. Signs of aril kernels on the ground. This cluster could be all one female yew – can’t be 100% certain. Very tall.
Yew 2:

Two yew trunks from one apparent root base.

Sex: Male

Trunk projecting south has a girth of 4ft 7ins at 3 feet from base. 
Trunk projecting north has a girth of 6ft 6ins at 3 feet from base.
Root base of Yew 2:
Yew 3:

Three yew trunks from one apparent root base.

Sex: Can't be sure.

Overall girth when measured at base is 12 feet.

A small, separate trunk with a break at its base, is featured in the foreground, to the left of the picture.
Root base of Yew 2:
Yew's 4:

Two separate yews.

Sex: Female.

The yew to the left of picture has two trunks with an overall girth of 8 ft 6 ins when measured at its base.

The other trunk measures 6 ft 6 ins when measured at its base.
Yew/s 5:

Four separate yews.

Sex: Both.

Four apparent separate root-based yews, two single trunks and two with triple trunks. No measurements taken.
Yew 6:
I was told by a nearby land owner that this yew was blown down 20 years ago (I suspect during the storm of 1987). Some of its root system is still intact, with some upper branches very much alive.

View of exposed roots. A young elder occupies the foreground.
Yew 7:
Located on a slope.
Sex: Male.

Girth: 11 feet, measured at base, horizontal to the ground.

A number of branches have been removed 4 to 8 feet from ground level. Also, some sizeable lower limbs have been removed.
Another view of yew 7.
Yew 8: Grid reference TQ94355527
Located some 60 feet, south west from the above rectangular site.
Sex: Female.
Girth: 15 feet, measured as horizontal as possible from the base.
Two large trunks rise from this single bole, with further large limbs projecting outwards. Lots of lower branch activity which made measuring difficult. This yew commands attention.
A sizeable limb of yew 8.

This is the last of the yews detached from the fenced-off area of the church site.
Yew 9: Grid reference TQ9434555354
Located within the fenced-off area of the church site.
Sex: Unknown.

Girth: 19 feet, measured at base but then expands very sharply from here.

A cavernous interior is a feature of this yew along with lots of flourishing branch activity and encroaching ivy. The weather has been responsible for some lost limbs as well as a saw. A candidate for veteran status I’m sure.
Another side of this formidable yew.
Two interior views of yew 9.
Yew 10: Grid reference TQ9432655332
The second of Hasted’s yews within the fenced-off area of the church site.

Sex: Unknown.

Girth: 18 feet 6 ins, measured at 3 ft approx.

This yew is in complete contrast to yew 9, in that this one looks almost warn out. It has been both well weathered and cut about. It is on the exposed boundary of the site. The condition of this yew speaks for itself. Much of the yew’s felled/removed branches lie at its base. Hollowing is now quite obvious.
Yew 10:
Though in a sorry state it projects great character.
Yew 10 again:
Yew 10:
A rather dramatic scene.