

1856: Edwin Lees, in his *Pictures of Nature around the Malvern Hills* wrote: 'Near the west end of the church is a most magnificent old yew-tree, riven into two parts, but still green and vigorous, and which, from the examination of various old yews, I should put down at 900 years old. The Acton (Beauchamp) Yew measures 22ft. in girth at a yard from the ground, and can hardly be matched in Worcestershire'.

If Edwin Lees was close in his age estimate then today this is a fragment of a 1060 year old tree. Even if his estimate was overstated, we are still looking at an ancient tree fragment at least 800 years old. As well as written evidence, we also have this copy of an 1810 drawing, looked after in the Prattinton Collection held by the Society of Antiquaries. It clearly shows the tree 'riven into two parts'.



I visited the site on several occasions between 1998 and 2011 to follow progress in the efforts being made to give this ancient tree every chance of recovery after a period of decline. It is seen above in 1998, looking uncared for in an overgrown part of the churchyard. My 1998 notes recorded 'a female yew reduced to small amounts of foliage on thin branches escaping from the tangle of holly, ivy and elder surrounding the bole'. Meredith's description in *The Sacred Yew* 1994 of 'broken and ivy covered' was a fair reflection of the state of the tree. It was the 1810 drawing and 1856 written account that convinced people this was a tree worth saving. The section marked with an orange dot, which formed half of the tree in 1810, was a decaying branch in 1998, and has since fallen and been removed.

When I visited in 2003 the tree was showing signs of recovery. The land around its bole had been cleared, making it possible to see that what remained was an elongated half shell leaning at an angle of about 45 degrees. Girth close to the ground was about 20'. The photos below, taken in 2011, show that eight years later the large ancient fragment has once again become the focal point in the churchyard.







A younger yew, below, with a girth of 14' 4" at 5' in 2011, grows SE of the church. It has a solid bole of about 8'. The photograph was taken by Geoff Garlick in 2006.



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