

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 this written evidence, we also have this copy of an 1810 drawing, looked after in the Prattinton Collection held by 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 below right in 1998, looking uncared for in an overgrown part of the churchyard. Evidence of the tree's history convinced people that this was a tree worth saving. The section marked with an orange dot, which formed half of the tree in 1810, was reduced to a decaying branch in 1998, and has since disappeared. In that year my notes reported '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.

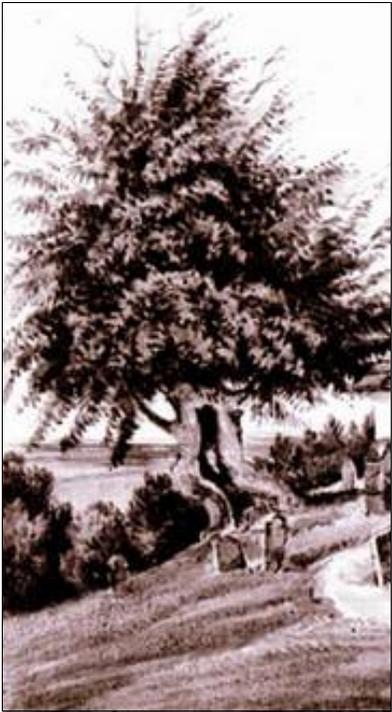


In 2003 I found great improvement. The area around the tree had been partially cleared and enabled me to see that what remained was an elongated half shell leaning at an angle of about 45 degrees. The tree appeared to be in a stage of renewal. Girth close to the ground was about 20'.

(see photos on p2)

A second yew, with a girth of 14' 4" at 5' in 2011, grows SE of the church. It has a fine solid bole of about 8'.





The photos from 2011 show that the area around the tree has been cleared, and the remains of this ancient specimen have once again become a focal point in the churchyard.

