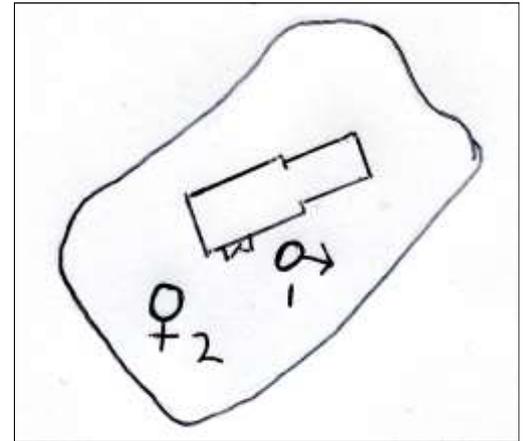


1901: *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society* noted 'two magnificent yews in the churchyard'. Mee, writing in *The King's England* (1939) was less flattering, describing 'two poor old yews, both of which have been growing by the porch for centuries'. One hundred and forty years earlier, in 1790, Revd Williams included the male yew (1) in his watercolour of Billingsley church. This painting is held by Shropshire Archives and reproduced here with their kind permission.



When Morton wrote *The Trees of Shropshire* 1986 he noted 'debris in the hollow trunk' of tree 1, a situation which had not changed when I recorded the tree in 1998. Since a small internal stem grows in the hollow, its development could be hampered by this unnecessary debris. A large dead section (A) will eventually decay - a process that might take a century or more - leaving the shape of a horse shoe hollow tree. This decaying section was probably once completely surrounded by living wood, which would have made the tree larger in girth than it is today. About 11' of its present 16' 6" circumference, measured at a height of 1', is living wood. At a height of 5' its girth was almost 22'. Ivy had been removed from the tree, but has left cuts up to a foot long, and in places one and a half inches deep, in its trunk.



The female tree (2) is smaller in stature, measuring 13' 9" at 1', but swelling to about 20' at 3'. This is an excellent example of the 'vase' shape, an indicator of a tree that is probably older than its small girth at 1' suggests. This tree is beginning to hollow and its bark had been stripped to a height of about 3'.

The trees are recognised in the church guide: 'The two yews in the churchyard are several hundred years old and are amongst the oldest trees in the County'.

In 2017 Paul Wood recorded the yews. The larger of the pair was described as squat with very green and thick foliage and in good health. It is in the process of becoming horseshoe shaped as the centre dies away and new growth expands outwards and around the white wood. Some stones and a piece of wire that the tree has grown over were the only bits of debris now inside the tree. Girth was 16' 11" (5.16m) at 1'.



The smaller girthed yew seemed very much in decline. About 80% of what we see is dead and dying wood. There were few signs of growth and little foliage, though what there is was evenly distributed over the short crown and canopy. I measured at 1' and recorded a girth of 13' 11" (4.24m).

