



The most significant YEWs in the DIOCESE of BRISTOL

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This document provides some of the information gathered from many sources during the last 15 years and held on behalf of the Ancient Yew Group.

The yews featured here are the most significant to be found in churchyards in the Diocese of Bristol, and each one should be fully protected.

Ancient yews are at least 800 years with no upper limit. The Yews for the Millennium project took cuttings from yews considered to be 2000 years old, and there is a growing acceptance that our oldest specimens have reached this age, with some thought to be older still.

Veteran yews are at least 500 and up to 1200 years old.

Notable yews are likely to be at least 300 and up to 700 years old, though this category may also include younger yews, for example those with a known planting date.

Location	Church dedication	County	Tree category
Abbots Leigh	Holy Trinity	Somerset	1 ancient
Bitton	St Mary the Virgin	Somerset	1 notable
Langley Burrell	St Peter	Wiltshire	1 notable
Oldland	St Anne	Gloucestershire	1 veteran
Purton St Mary	St Mary	Wiltshire	1 veteran
Tormarton	St Mary Magdalene	Gloucestershire	Yew avenue
West Kington	St Mary the Virgin	Wiltshire	1 veteran

ABBOTS LEIGH Holy Trinity ST54467404

1829: The first record we have is of an 'ancient yew tree' noted by John Rutter.¹

1889: Measurements of 22' at the ground and 24' at 3' were sent to Lowe.² Historical measurements often do not include inches, which suggests an approximate rather than an accurate reading.

1946: The Revd LJ Carter responded to a request from Cornish³ for information. He gave the yew a 'girth of about 27 ft'.

1958: Swanton⁴ must have been puzzled by the discrepancy and commented that it 'may have included spray'. It is more likely that the tree had been measured at what was then the conventional height of 5ft and took in some of the leaning branches.

2003: The healthy female yew grows NNE of the church in a churchyard containing many yews. Most of its bole is covered with live wood. A hole at the ground (A), 16" high and 13" wide, revealed vast hollow spaces within what otherwise appears to be a solid tree. Some of the hollow spaces had been filled with stone or concrete. The large leaning branch which grows from the base of the tree (B) will exaggerate any measurements above 1'. I recorded 23' 10" close to the ground.



Beneath the yew is a grave with the following inscription:

Here would I sleep. This is the spot which I have long marked out to lay my bones in
Tired out and wearied with this naughty world,
Beneath this yew I would be sepulchred
It is a lovely spot! The sultry sun
From his meridian light, endeavours vainly
To pierce the shadowy foliage.

Christopher George

BITTON St Mary ST68196934

2000: A male yew with signs of burn/smoke damage on the inside. A gap of 19" at the ground gradually narrows before closing at a height of 6/7'. Girth was 12' 11" at the ground.

LANGLEY BURRELL St Peter ST92767580

2003: The largest yew here grows ESE of the church and close to a wall separating the churchyard from Langley Burrell House. Two feet of soil was piled against the bole and girth at this height was 12' 6".

OLDLAND St Anne

ST66877116

In 1830 a 'venerable yew tree' was described in the *Gentleman's Magazine* ⁵.

In 1938 Mee ⁶ described an 'old yew about 15ft round'.

In 1990 Meredith recorded a girth of 17ft.

2003: The healthy male yew grows at the perimeter of the churchyard above a 10' drop. The tree leans outwards over the wall. Many new branches are attached to the lower part of its bole, some becoming thick and swelling its girth to the 16' 10" we recorded close to its base. It has a large central branch with a long split revealing its rotting interior. Both on the land below the church grounds and in an adjacent garden were several more yews.

PURTON St. Mary

SU09688718

The earliest evidence of a yew at this site is this photo of 1903, held by the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre at Chippenham. It clearly shows the split tree we see today. In 1994 Meredith's gazetteer described it as a hollow and decrepit female tree. The photos below, taken in 1998, show that only fragments of the original shell remain, held together with wire.



The following extract was taken from the *The story of Purton*⁷:
'An old feature of the graveyard at Purton is the yew, strapped together with its iron bands, and another the stem of the old Preaching Cross, both memorials of the days of open-air worship in God's Acre'.

In 2010 Peter Norton recorded its girth as follows: 17' 2" at 1', 16' 3" at 2' and 15' 6" at 3'.



TORMARTON

St Mary Magdalene ST76957885

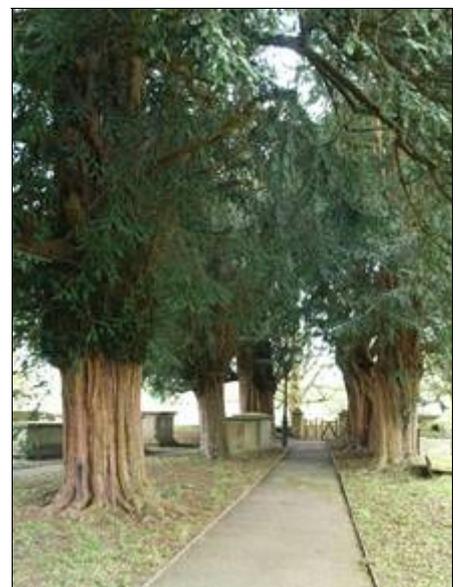
2003: An avenue comprising 7 yews, probably in the order 150/250 years old.

On the left side from the churchyard entrance towards the church:

- 1 female 8' 11" at 2'
- 2 female 8' 3" at 2' a tree with a large dead section and internal growth
- 3 male 7' 7" at 2'

On right side from churchyard entrance towards the church:

- 1 6' 8" at 2'
- 2 4' 11" at 2' – living wood on only a third of its girth
- 3 female 6' 8" at 2'
- 4 female 8' 8" at 2'





2005: Drive through the farm to find parking by the church. The churchyard has a fine outlook towards the SW and in 2000 won a Bishop's Conservation Award.

The male yew with a solid looking bole grows SW of the church inside a 1' high circular wall. The tree bulges following branch removal at 5' on the side facing the church.

A gap at the base reveals portions of the original trunk. At about 15'/18' two main upright branches develop. It is a many branched and fine looking yew.

Girth: 15' 7" at the ground and 16' 11" at 3'.

The postcard text reads: 'Hugh Latimer, the Martyr, who was burned at the stake at Oxford in the reign of Queen Mary, was rector of the parish from the year 1530 to 1535, and, it is said, he was accustomed at times to preach under this tree'.

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- 1 *Delineations of the north western division of the county of Somerset* John Rutter 1829
- 2 *The Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* John Lowe 1896
- 3 *The Churchyard Yew and Immortality* Vaughan Cornish 1946
- 4 *The Yew Trees of England* Swanton, E.W. 1958 Farnham
- 5 Gentleman's Magazine part II p393 of 1830
- 6 *The King's England* - Arthur Mee 1938 edition
- 7 *The Story of Purton; a Collection of Notes and Hearsay* Ethel M. Richardson A reproduction of a book published before 1923