

The church has the unusual dedication in honour of Margaret the Queen of Scotland.

Inside the church at the time of my visit was a photo of a painting showing the 'yew tree in Buckstead churchyard' in 1829. Five years earlier in 1824, Horsefield wrote that 'In the north-east part of the churchyard stands a venerable yew. A seat has been constructed around the shattered trunk of this hollowed out tree'.

During the mid-1800s articles in *Archaeological Journals* described the yew as probably coeval with the 1250 church. However the nature of the tree as well as its girth suggests that it might even have been alive at the time of an earlier church at this site. While there is no agreement about its age we can probably agree with a note about the yew which formed part of a paper read to the *Archaeological Society* in 1848, that 'although internally decayed, is one of the most beautiful trees of this kind to be met with in Sussex'.

In 1897 Lowe's *Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* reported a girth of 33' at the ground and 39' at 3'. This erroneous figure meant that the tree was included in an exclusive list of the largest girthed yews in Britain, which this certainly is not.

In 1954 it was measured for Swanton by Rev. David Hall, and he was informed that the girth was 23' at the ground and 28' at 3'.



I visited in 2004 and recorded as follows: Growing ENE of the church, a fine yew with 5 substantial main branches, each showing varying degrees of hollowing and supporting prolific new growth. Internal growth joins to three of these branches. There are also remnants of what might have been the original central trunk. The central space is filled to about 18" with humus.

Four of the five sections lean outwards sufficiently to need the support of props. This vast and spreading yew conceals most of its branches in abundant foliage.

During the war the space was used to store coal; pieces can still be found among the roots. About 25 years ago it was considered necessary to support some of the branches, but official quotes to carry out the work were deemed unacceptable. Help instead was given by a local tug of war team who erected them using nearby grave-stones for leverage.

A guide to the church, available in the 1950's, noted the tree to be 'probably about 850 years old'. In the latest version of the guide, compiled by Canon Greville Cooke this has jumped to 2,000 years old. This is the estimated age that appears on a certificate issued by the Conservation Foundation, and is based on Allen Meredith's *Gazetteer* in *The Sacred Yew*. While the yew might well be 1000+, more evidence would be needed to establish a planting date around the time of the birth of Jesus.

#### Girth

1851: 'measuring 23 feet 4 inches in circumference' *Sussex Archaeological Society*

1897: Lowe's measurements are misleading. He presumably copied the 23' 4" from the source above, yet in a girth grid on the same page in his book it has grown to 33' at the ground rising to 39' at 3', leading to its erroneous inclusion in his list of the largest yews in Britain and Ireland.

1954: 23' at the ground and 28' at 3'. Rev. David Hall for Swanton

1994: 14m tall x diameter of 248 cm at 0.1m. Owen Johnson *The Sussex Tree Book*

1999: 25' 6" at the ground -Tim Hills

2004 25' 8" at the ground - Tim Hills