



The yew at St Johns in the Wilderness near Exmouth was included in the engraving of 1860. By enlarging the base of the tree it is possible to see three substantial branches emerging close to the ground.

I visited in 2000 with no prior knowledge of this engraving or the accounts of others, and recorded as follows: Three large branches emerge from a 2' high bole. The two largest were covered in adventitious growth, making it difficult to measure, but girth at the ground appeared to be no more than 16/18'.

In the 1878 *Gardner's Chronicle* this location was known as Withycombe Raleigh. Because somebody had recorded the yew with a girth of 30' (almost certainly a measurement at 5' that would have included the leaning trunks) it led to the tree's inclusion in John Lowe's 1897 list of Britain's largest girthed yews in his book *The Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland*.

This incorrect girth meant that for some time it was regarded as one of Britain's most significant yews. In 1906 *Some old Devon churches* continued to use this misinformation, describing 'a very fine yew tree in the churchyard, the trunk being about 25 feet in circumference'.

The error was not corrected until 1958, when Swanton's *The Yew Trees of England* carried information supplied by Rev J Hawkins that the 30ft measurement probably included the base of 3 branches. Hawkins told Swanton that 'the circumference of the base is about 16'. The tree branches into three just above ground level'.

