

Veteran Yew destroyed by fire in 2006 at CEFNLLYS, Powys



In this remote spot, 3 miles due east of Llandrindod Wells, is found an isolated church set in fields above the River Ithon. The medieval town that once surrounded this church has long since vanished, its masonry buried in the bumpy field that is crossed to access this site. There is car parking at Shaky Bridge, clearly marked on ordnance survey maps, about 300 metres from the churchyard.

At the time of my first visit in 1999 the churchyard was ringed by ten yews, of which four were classified as Veteran - those with a minimum age of 500 years.



Geoff Garlick - 2006



The photos above are the last record of one of the veterans, for the tree was to be burned down later in the year. Although two of its three stems were dead, there was considerable new growth around the base of the stumps to complement a fine healthy canopy.

Local farm owners were questioned by Russell Cleaver who reported that “ it seems that late last summer (2006) this ancient tree was set on fire by persons unknown. The dead stumps perhaps would have made ample flammable material. Well before anyone realised anything was amiss the whole tree was alight. The fire brigade was called but all too late, this is an exceptionally remote site. The yew burned and then toppled over towards the church. The fire brigade eventually attended but could do little more than let the tree burn itself out.” The tree was so totally destroyed that nothing survived above the ground.



We should be concerned that such ancient trees can so easily be destroyed by fire. It has often been stated that our native trees are virtually incombustible, but this is clearly not so with hollow trees. David Alderman found night candles among the other yews and while it is possible that the fire began accidentally, it would seem more likely that a bonfire got out of control, or that this was a deliberate arson attack.



How safe are the remaining Cefnlllys Yews? In 2012 I found this store of old wood - chairs, pallets, hardboard - beneath the branches of one of the trees, while under another two were piles of grasses, which will become tinder dry in a hot summer. I met the wife of the church warden and asked her to pass on my concerns.

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