

Here is a tree whose praises have been sung for a long time, with girth records dating back to 1680.



Some of the recorded measurements dating from 1680:

1680	27' at 4'	John Aubrey	The Sacred Yew
1835	27' 7" at 4'	Horsfield	The Sacred Yew
1879	26' 7" at 4'	CS Greaves	The Sacred Yew
1894	26' 9" at 4'	Lowe	
1954	27' 2" at 3'	Swanton	Rev E.D. Edwards
1982	28' at 4'	Meredith	The Sacred Yew
1998	289 cm diameter 0.8 / 1.5m	Johnson	The Sussex Tree Book

In the past:

1842: The yew carried 'a noble and flourishing head'. *Forest Trees* Selby

1897: Lowe reported 'sad changes.....as the tree shows every sign of rapid decay, and there is very little verdure left'. There was also a wide opening 'caused by the falling away of a large portion of the tree on the south side'.

1907: Described as a 'caged lion' by Rev.Lonsdale Ragg after fencing was erected around the tree
Trees of British Isles in history and legend. JH Wilks

1954: '...in fairly good condition, although it has to be supported with chains, and there are props or stays to support the branches. It is certainly not dead'. *Yew Trees of England* E.W.Swanton

Phyllis Springford, Parish clerk from 1980 to 1985 provided me with recent information about the yew.

In 1982 Tony Denyer, forestry advisor for East Sussex visited the site with a tree surgeon to make recommendations on work to conserve the yews. An appeal to raise the necessary funding was launched and generosity enabled work to start in 1983. This was 'ably' carried out by the Sussex Tree Surgeons and consisted of cutting out dead wood, particularly in the upper crown, removing loose bark, pruning, and feeding the root system. The unsightly metal bands were removed and replaced by 3 hawsers bolted through the branches, this being considered more effective and visually less obtrusive. Pockets of decay and the build up of debris in the trunk were removed and drainage established to prevent further decay. The existing props were replaced by new ones.

17 years later when I was sent this information the tree was already considered to have 'increased vigour'. It was able to withstand the 1987 hurricane with 'no significant damage'.

1999: I recorded three yews, the largest and most significant of which grows south of the church above a steep embankment to the road. Foliage was plentiful though not dense in the upper branches.

The process of change, sometimes imperceptible and at others dramatic, is a feature of an old yew's long life. Owen Johnson in his *Sussex Tree Book* (1997) reasoned that the 'timber of yew is so fluid that the gap, that must have yawned open in the rest of the bole as the southern section split away, is now hardly visible: in another hundred years the leaning part will probably have been shed, and the enigma will remain of a perfectly clean bole the same size as, or slightly smaller than the tree measured four centuries earlier'.



In 2015 Peter Norton took the following notes and photographs below: Of the three female yews that grow here the most celebrated is southeast of the porch. Protected by iron railings, it is slowly separating into two distinct fragments with much dead wood being re-covered by secondary growth. Also noted were some fine internal stems. Branches to the east, south and partially west have been allowed to grow resulting in some fine serpentine growth.



As well as this formidable ancient specimen, Crowhurst also boasts two veterans, one east and the other northwest of the church. They are thought to have been planted by Sir John Pelham shortly after 1412.

The yew growing NW is female. It was described in 1897 as much storm broken and measuring 13' 3" at 3' in *The yew trees of Great Britain and Ireland*. It consists of three main branches supporting much growth. Behind a large panel of white wood it was possible to see red crumbling heart wood and internal stems. In 1999 I recorded a girth of 16' 10" at 5'.



Peter Norton's photos are from 2015, when he described that a partial loss on the flared bole's west side allowed for internal growth to be seen.

He also photographed the smallest of the trio (below) with a fluted bole. Girth was about 16' at 3' in 1999. Previously recorded as male, he noted arils in the canopy, so this is a female tree.

