



The most significant YEWS in the DIOCESE of DERBY

© Tim Hills - November 2012

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 Derby, 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.

Allestree	St Edmund	1 veteran
Ault Hucknall	St John the Baptist	1 notable
Beeley	St Anne	1 veteran
Bonsall	St James	1 notable
Brailsford	All Saints	1 veteran
Carsington	St Margaret	1 notable
Darley Dale	St Helen	1 ancient
Doveridge	St Cuthbert	1 ancient
Edlaston	St James	1 veteran
Hartshorne	St Peter	1 notable
Kniveton	St Michael	1 veteran
Marston Montgomery	St Giles	1 notable
Mugginton	All Saints	1 ancient, 1 notable
Osmaston	St Martin	1 veteran
Shirley	St Michael	1 veteran
Smalley	St John the Baptist	1 notable
Smisby	St James	1 notable

ALLESTREE St Edmund SK34773970

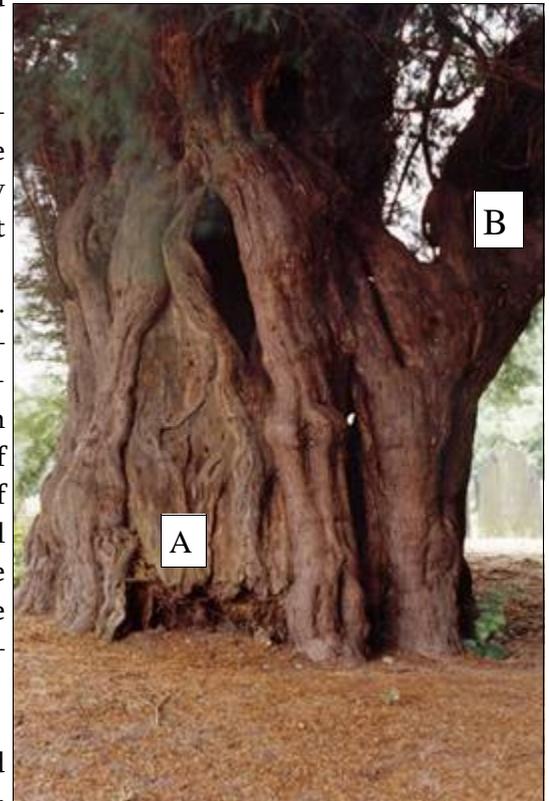
1833: 'In the church yard is a yew tree of large dimensions, which appears to be of equal antiquity with the church'.¹

1857: 'In the Church-yard are two yew trees, one of which is supposed to be nearly as old as the Church'.²

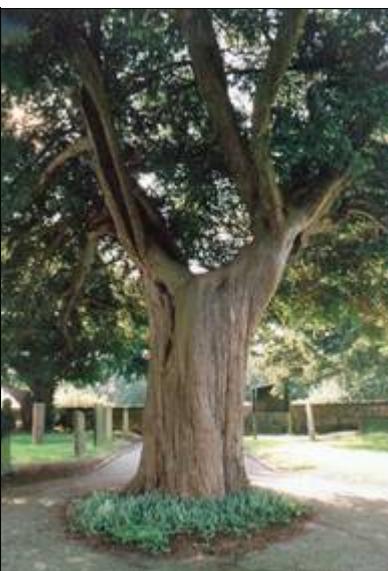
For a relatively small girthed tree, the Allestree Yew receives more local acclaim than many churchyard yews. It features as part of the church logo, along with the cross and the crown of St Edmund. Many church guides fail to mention the old yews in their churchyard, but at Allestree the tree provides the opening paragraph:

'The yew tree has stood in the churchyard for maybe 1,000 years. Was it the tree under which a missionary monk first preached in pre-Norman times, for the church is dedicated to a Saxon Saint? St Edmund was king in East Anglia, where he was martyred by the Danes in 855. Is the Yew Tree Adelard's tree, or Adelardestrew (a chapelry of Mackworth) as it was named in the Domesday Book? It is doubtful if we shall ever be sure, but the ancient tree, more than 16' in girth, still stands a few paces from the church, and deep grooves on stones at the base of the tower can be seen, where arrows of yew-tree wood were sharpened, when young men did their archery practice in the churchyard many, many years ago'. Enid J. Clarke

1999: The male yew grows south of the church. A large section of dead wood (A) partially blocks the entrance to its hollow. Approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of its girth is of dead wood. The limb at (B) is pulling away from the bole and metal rods have been fixed at 15/18' to lessen the strain. Girth was 18' at 3'.



AULT HUCKNALL St John the Baptist SK46736521



'The yew tree in front of the church is variously aged between 2,000 and 4,000 years old, evidence of a very ancient pre-Christian burial ground'.³

2005: The yew grows close to the south porch. It is unclear where such estimates originated, for the girth of this yew is only 9' at 2' and 9' 6" at 5'. Although there is a complete circle of living wood around the tree, a gash from 2' upwards shows it to be hollow. It divides at 6' into 2 main branches, these too are hollow.

BEELEY St Anne SK26486765

1891: 'The churchyard contains the remains of a fine old yew tree'.⁴

1999: The male yew grows SW of the church, inside a well maintained 2' 6" high wall close to the church entrance.

It is in three sections that probably grew at the edge of a dying central trunk. One of these looks old, the others appear of more recent growth. Wires and chains have been places in the branches to help prevent these three sections from pulling further apart.

This appeared to be a healthy tree with much new growth.

Girth: 22' 3" at 1' 6"



BONSALL St James SK27985812



1828: 'A remarkably fine yew' is described by T. Grimshawe.⁵

1863: 'Passing through the churchyard after a long survey of the beautiful church-spire and pictorial yew-trees.....'⁶

The following girths were recorded in 2007 for a Derbyshire tree survey: at 30 cm - 4.86m and at 60 cm - 4.76m

The tree is a female. Within the churchyard are three further yews with girths between 2.4 and 3.0m, as well as six smaller yews.

Information and photograph: Sue Quick

BRAILSFORD All Saints SK24494126

1891: 'An ancient yew tree'.⁴

1999: The female yew grows SW of the church. From a short bole of about 3' are two clear areas of growth. Lower branches have been cut off but a rich green and thick foliage is contained on the many evenly spread branches which dip towards the ground all around the tree.

Chains placed to prevent the sides pulling further apart no longer serve a purpose and could be removed.

Girth: 18' 7" at the ground and 16' 7" at 2'.



CARSINGTON St Margaret SK25245342

1857: 'A venerable Yew tree'.²

Church records note a yew planted in 1638, making it at least 367 years old in 2005. 'The 'view' tree was set in the church-yard of Carsington by William THORPE, rector, Illam, Ralph GELL, and Edward VALENS, upon the feast of Simon and Jude, anno Dom. 1638'.

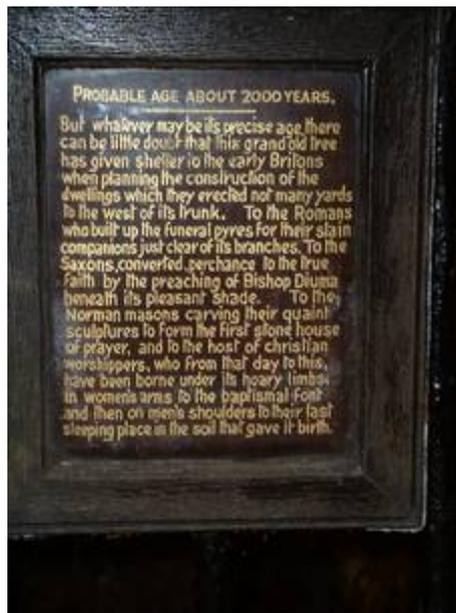
The female yew grows SSE of the church, with dipping branches touching the ground and forming a circle around the tree. The ground is higher on the church side and here the bole is more gnarled as new growth begins to cover over the wounds of many removed branches.

Girth was 11' 9" at 1' and 12' 3" at 4'.

DARLEY DALE St Helen SK26676299

There is enough historical information about this yew to fill several pages. The first recorded measurement was made for the parish records by Dr Burgh as early as 1782. After that everybody wanted to visit this giant and add their own comments. In the early 1800s it was apparently possible to climb onto the branches by the churchyard wall and get to the church roof without touching the ground. In 1892 the trunk was 'suffering not a little from the modern goths and vandals who have carved their names in the bark'.

Girth in 1782 was 28ft at the ground and 32ft at 4ft.⁷ By 1983 little had changed and 27ft 3 at the ground and 33ft 2 ins was reported.



The notice attached to the railings is as follows:

Probable age about 2000 years

But whatever may be its precise age, there can be little doubt that this grand old tree has given shelter to the early Britons when planning the construction of the dwellings which they erected not many yards to the west of its trunk. To the Romans who built up the funeral pyres for their slain companions just clear of its branches. To the Saxons, converted, perchance, to the true faith by the preaching of Bishop Diuna beneath its pleasant shade. To the Norman masons carving their quaint sculptures to form the first stone houses of prayer, and to the host of Christian worshippers, who from that day to this, have been borne under its hoary limbs in woman;s arms to the baptismal font and then on men's shoulders to their last sleeping place in the soil that gave it birth.

DOVERIDGE St Cuthbert SK11383410

This yew has been documented since 1848, when it was described in the *Topographical Dictionary*⁸ as 'a curious old yew-tree'.

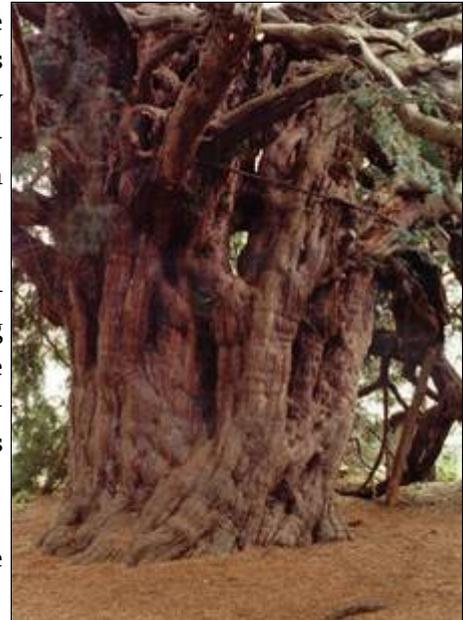
1904: 'Here stands a magnificent yew tree, which spreads its branches further than any other yew tree in Derbyshire, whilst the size of the trunk is only exceeded by the one at Darley Dale'.⁹

The church's own *Guide and Brief History* describes a yew which 'dominates the entrance and spreads towards the fine wrought-iron gates.....The yew itself has been variously aged, most consider that it is at least 1,000 years old - therefore pre-dating the present stone Church. The tree, so carefully propped and maintained has, not surprisingly attracted considerable attention and is the subject of a legend: namely that Maid Marion and Robin Hood were betrothed under its branches'.

1999: The female yew grows ESE of the church, its large visible bole hinting at greater girth in the past. Props hold up its many large and spreading branches, keeping them above head height on the path leading to the church. A double circle of chains helps prevent the bole from splitting outwards. At about 6' and facing the path the tree bulges as new wood grows over removed branches. Overall the tree appeared in excellent health.

Girth: 1904 '23 feet, the spread of the branches 63 feet by 72 feet, and the circumference 212 feet'.

1999: 20' 7" at 3' and 21' 3" at 5'.



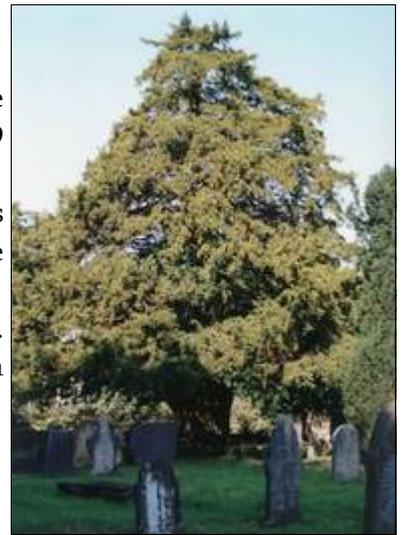
EDLASTON St. James SK18114267

1848: 'In the churchyard is a very aged yew-tree'.⁸

2005: The male yew grows SW of the church. A tombstone is so close that the tree is beginning to grow over it. This is dedicated to John Slater – Feb 2nd 1799 aged 87 and his wife 1810.

The tree is hollow with a live internal stem and another dead. The space is filled to 4' with soil and decaying material from the tree. This hollow can be followed into one of the two main branches to a height of about 20'.

Its relatively small girth of 16' 3" at 3' belies a fine tree of great character. Branches dip to about 3' from the ground and have been cut to prevent them reaching the ground.



HARTSHORNE St Peter SK 32742084

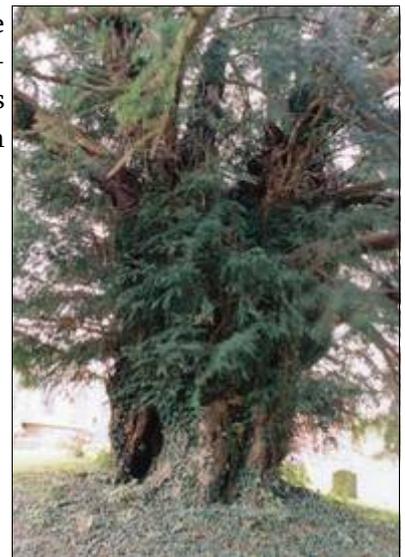
1813: A 'large yew' was described in This no longer exists.¹⁰

2005: A female yew grows at the east end of a church aligned NE/SW. It is inside a large circular stone wall about 6" high. Ivy, which filled the tree, had recently been cut away. Girth at the base was 13' 1". Above this height is considerable swelling created by the removal of numerous large branches.

KNIVETON St Michael SK20995040

2005: A male yew grows on the south side of the church. Its elongated bole has hollows at each end, one revealing an internal stem. The tree swells above 6' as new wood is laid down over cut branches.

Girth: 16' 11" at 6" and 19' 1" at 3'.



MARSTON MONTGOMERY St Giles SK13483789

1910: 'The churchyard contains a fine old yew tree'.¹¹

1999: The male yew is a hollow shell with a girth of 11' 9" at 1'. Foliage was thin and carried on new branches which grow from the bole above a height of 8'.



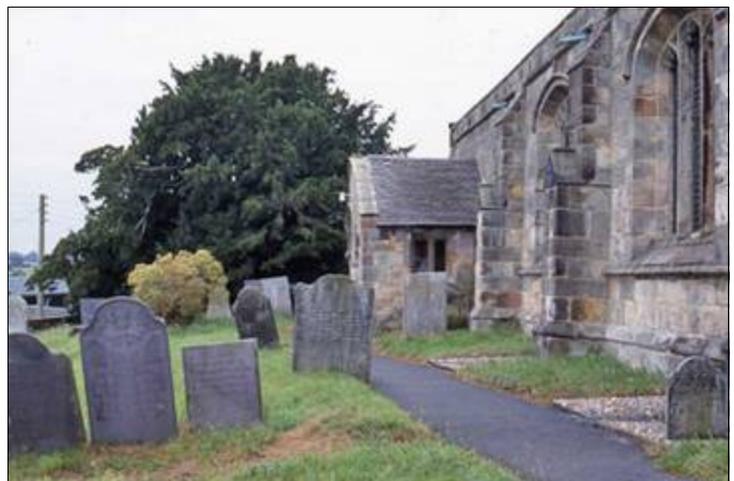
MUGGINTON All Saints SK28324287

1880: The yew was noted in the *Journal of Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*.

The tree is not only noted in the church guide, it receives an unusual accolade: 'The church is fortunate in having three great treasures - the magnificent, almost hollow yew tree.....' This is the first time I have found a yew taking precedence over windows and altar-tombs!

1999: The female tree is an elongated shell of which 5' is dead wood. When this decays it will leave two fragment trees with a large space between. The two sides are joined with metal rods and plates to prevent further splitting apart. A small internal stem is visible to the right of the entrance and close to the trunk.

Girth: 24' 6" at 4' and 22' 6" at the ground.



A second female yew was planted by the Revd. Samuel Pole in 1732. Its girth is 6' 10" at 4'.

OSMASTON

St Martin SK19954401

2005: The largest yew here is male and grows close to the road in the SSW corner of the churchyard. Proximity to the road has meant constant cutting back of the tree, creating a jumble of growth. It appears solid but the hollow interior is more obvious in the side facing the road, with crumbling heartwood and other signs of decay.

Girth: 17' 7" at 1'.

SHIRLEY

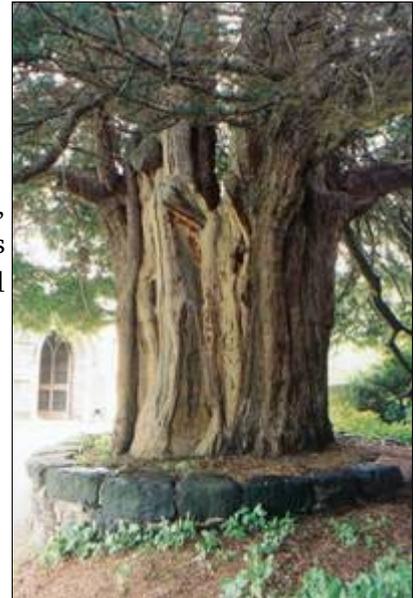
St Michael SK21884166

1813: The yew here was first noted by John Farey.¹⁰

In 1848 the *Topographical Dictionary* described it as 'remarkable'.⁸

2002: The male yew grows SW of the church. We visited in torrential rain, yet the foliage cover was so dense that it remained dry beneath the tree. Its fine bole is a mix of live and dead wood. At 6' it divides into two substantial upright branches.

Girth: 18' 3' at 1' and 17' 11' at 3'.



SMALLEY

St John the Baptist SK40704456



1813: The yew here was first noted by John Farey.¹⁰

2005 A large stump SE of the church. It is 15' high and forms a complete circle, but with a gash on the side facing the church, revealing numerous internal stems and filled to 4' with crumbly heartwood.

This stump provides the scaffolding for one living area to flow up the trunk into an outpouring of female growth at the top. Metal banding at 4'/5' and at 10' is intended to hold the tree together, but it is possible that these were not adjusted as the tree expanded, and contributed to its demise.

Girth: 13' 3" at 3'.

Numerous other yews were also observed in this churchyard.

SMISBY St James SK34801913

2005: Crossing the churchyard is to see a stunning tree with a fine shape and thick foliage throughout, spreading to the ground. Unfortunately this female yew has become a dumping ground, with its dipping branches hiding the rubbish. This included a shed, rubble piled against the bole, a wheelbarrow, several dustbins, a pile of decaying grasses, old piping, pallets, a door and some bricks.

The tree grows WSW of the church and quite close to its tower. It is twin trunked from a bole of about 2', each trunk further sub-dividing and with many thick branches, both upright and angled.

Girth - 13' 6" at 2'.



© Tim Hills—November 2012

- 1 *The History and Gazetteer of the County of Derby* by Stephen Glover 1833
- 2 *Directory of Derbyshire* White
- 3 www.tonybell.co.uk/Charities/st_john_the_baptist.htm
- 4 *Kelly's Directory*
- 5 *A memoir of the Rev. Legh Richmond* by T. Grimshawe 1828
- 6 *The illustrated magazine* 1863
- 7 *The Sacred Yew* Chetan and Brueton 1994
- 8 *A Topographical Dictionary of England* (1848) British History On-line.
- 9 *Journal of proceedings. Vol xxxix* Walk led by Rev. C.F.L.Barnwell on Tuesday August 23rd transactions 1904/1905
- 10 *General View of the Agriculture of Derbyshire Vol II.* Farey
- 11 *Cambridge county geographies* H. H. Arnold-Bemrose