

Yews lost from Welsh churchyards

August 2013 - Tim Hills

Diocese of Bangor

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Cwmdu Garth Brengy Llanddewi Fach Llandefalle Llandegley
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Llanhamlach Llanlleonfel Llanrhidian Llansantffraed-in-Elwel
Llanspyddid Newchurch Oystermouth Patrishow Penpont
Rhulen Swansea High Street Whitton

Lost Yews in the Diocese of Bangor

Gyffin Conwy St Benedict SH7763076940 25/04/2000

In the 1841 *Observations on popular antiquities* by J.Brand and H.Ellis is a letter noting 'that Trees in a Churchyard were often planted to skreen the Church from the wind ; that low as Churches were built at this time, the thick foliage of the Yew answered this purpose better than any other tree. I have been informed, accordingly, that the Yew-trees in the Churchyard of Gyffin, near Conway, having been lately felled, the roof of the Church hath suffered excessively'.

Llanbedrog Gwynedd St Pedrog SH3294031560 26/4/2000

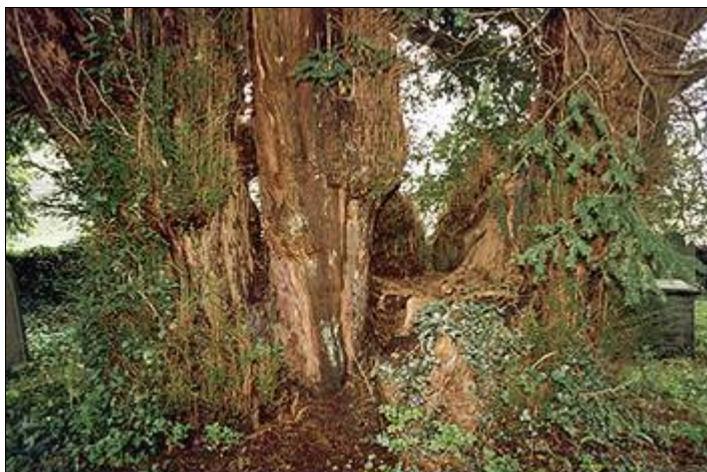
In *The Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* (Lowe-1896) the 'three yew-trees in Llanbedrog Churchyard' were used to 'illustrate the effect of early destruction of the stem, and serve to show how such trees as that at Fortingal may have arisen. Number 1 is 21 feet high, and out of its stem, which is nearly level with the ground, eight trees grow to make one bush. No. 2 has twelve trees growing in a similar manner, and No. 3 has five'.

This stump is all that remains of one of the trees - its girth 12' 5".



Mallwyd Gwynedd St Tydecho SH86291237 6/4/1998

During Warner's *Second walk through Wales* (1798) he was 'induced to stroll into the churchyard, remarkable for several enormous yew trees, of which 4 measure 15', and one 27' in circumference'. Three of the four smaller girthed yews have been lost since 1798. The surviving pair, seen below, grow on the E side of the church.



Trefriw Conwy St Mary SH7806863225 25/4/2000

In 1837 Roscoe reported that 'ancient Yew trees are here to be found in their glory, which seem from their gnarled and venerable appearance to be co-existent with the old church. About fifty years ago, one of these patriarchs was blown down during a violent tempest'. He goes on to note that it 'had acquired from its size and antiquity the title of the Father of Yews'.

More recently, in 1946, Cornish described the church as 'overshadowed by two fine yews'. Only one of these remained at the time of our visit in 2000.

Penstrowed Powys St Gwrhai SO0695391552 25/4/2004

A yew was described in the 1840s as of 'most extensive growth and extravagant girth'. The church was completely rebuilt in 1863, perhaps this was the time that the yew was felled. Two stumps of very small yews could also be seen.

Lost Yews in the Diocese of Llandaff

Caerau Glamorgan St Mary ST1350175048 21/10/2000

The yew was described in a paper read to the Cardiff Naturalists' Society in February 1880: 'Another very good tree is the female yew at Caerau, near Cardiff. Its circumference at the ground is 18', and at 4' from the ground 18' 8". The greater part of the present tree seems a new growth upon a huge internal root, around which we put the tape, the girth being 9'. The whole of the body is an almost indescribable mass of growing, mingled with withering and decaying tissues. The foliage of this tree is remarkable for its density; the multitude of twigs grow close and crisp in their battles with mist from the mountains and winds from the sea, and have wholly lost that fall of the glossy braided tips which is such a grace to the yews which grow in sheltered situations'.

In 1930 a girth of '20' 2" just below the lowest branch' was recorded in *Welsh Timber Trees* by Hyde.

Seven years later the tree was destroyed: 'The yew tree to the South of the churchyard was said to be 2000 years old when it was destroyed by vandals setting fire to it on 6th July 1937. Fortunately it did not fall on the church. It was reported in the local press that the Reverend R.C.Evans had a lucky escape as the tree fell'.

In 2000 we found no sign of the yew stump. Younger trees were already suffering the same fate as the Caerau Yew.

Glyncorrwg Glamorgan St John the Baptist SS8742399292 28/08/1998

In Carlisle's 1811 *Topographical Dictionary* were described 'five remarkable Yew Trees, the largest of which (in 1810) measures 10 yards 4 inches in circumference'. The large yew recorded in 1811 and 'still there' in 1933 has since been lost. Of the five remarkable yew trees noted only 3 remain.

Llangynwyd Bridgend St Cynwyd SS8572088820 31/05/2006

As well as the 2 old yews which grow here, the stump of a third can still be seen. This is about 8' in girth, but rests on a much larger base of up to 16' in girth.



Llantarnam Monmouthshire St Michael and All Angels ST3070093170 31/5/1999

'Some fine yew trees' were recorded here in 1880, of which one has survived. In *The Churchyard Yew of Gwent* (1986) Evans noted 'a big yew stump near entrance gate to the west'.

Lost Yews in the Diocese of Monmouth

Blaina (formerly Aberystruth) Blaenau Gwent St Peter



The images above show St. Peter's Church around 1827 when it was drawn by Henri Gastineau for *Wales Illustrated*. It includes some of the trees recorded by Archdeacon William Coxe in 1799, who noted one yew with a girth of 24' and a further 11 yews, all apparently old, forming a square around the edge of the churchyard. Every one has gone, presumably at the time when the old church was replaced.

Cwm-yoy Monmouthshire St Martin SO2990123347 8/7/2000

In 1884 a visit from the Woolhope Society reported: 'The very yew trees in the churchyard bore out the air of desolation that hangs on the place - two were dead and bare, and the others, ragged and worn, seemed scarcely able to sustain their existence'. There was no trace of the trees in 2000.

Goetre Monmouthshire St Peter SO3270805912 28/03/1998



The place name may also be spelt Goytre, Goytre or Goitre. The largest of 4 yews at this site was felled over 30 years ago. The stump remains, a fine example of the lasting quality of yew wood, which can exist in this state for decades, even centuries. Found close to the south porch, it was reported as 'felled in 1973' by Hyde and Harrison in *Welsh Timber Trees* (1977). It appears on the left in the 1840 lithograph, while the yew on the right lives on.

Kemeys Commander Monmouthshire SO3489804797

In the *Gentlemen Magazine 1818 vol 88 part 2* an item called Natural Curiosities reported the following: 'In Cemmeys Commander church-yard is a hollow yew tree 15 feet in girth, in which is inclosed an oak of 7 feet'. Correspondence between Roy D. Goodridge and Allen Meredith (1983): 'The very oldest inhabitants can recall a great yew' and 'whatever the structure was, it has long since disappeared, apparently having collapsed in a storm at the beginning of the century'.

Llanddewi Rhydderch Monmouthshire St David SO3498912972 22/3/1998

In 1909 'some fine old yew trees much decayed' were recorded in *Little Guides* by GW and JH Wade. In 1986 Evans noted '4 large stumps of yew to the north of the church'.

Llandogo Monmouthshire St. Oudoceus SO5266304077 21/10/1999

It was reported that the church has 'recently chopped down the yew trees in the graveyard, presumably on the grounds that they were too big'. <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/nigel.nicholson/gn/page%2040.htm>

Llanfair Kilgeddin Monmouthshire St Mary the Virgin SO3558608660 22/11/1997

When Evans was collecting information for his book *The churchyard yews of Gwent*, he described '3 impressive yews'. At the time of our 1st visit the trunk of one lay in the nearby lane awaiting removal. By the time of our second visit this too had gone. It was measured in 1988 when still standing and a girth of 13ft at 3ft was recorded. The surviving yews are double this size.



Llangovan Monmouthshire St Govan SO4567805478 1/3/1998

Two significant yews have been lost to this site. Rev J.Daryll Evans recorded 'a massive ivy-crowned yew stump near the gate in the west wall of the churchyard'. No trace of this remains. The stump shown, with a girth of 671 cm, is found east of the church.



Llangwm St Jeromes Monmouthshire St Jeromes SO4329100592 1/2/1998

The yew grew on the N side of the church. In life it had a girth of 23' 8" with 'a secondary trunk growing inside the hollow original' (Evans 1986). It was destroyed in the early 1990s when a bonfire to reduce the pile of churchyard waste apparently became out of control and set fire to the tree.



Llanhilleth Blaenau Gwent St Illtyd SO2179101937 14/12/1998

Archdeacon William Coxe visited this parish of Llanhiddel in 1801 he noted the '12 old yews, which surround the church'. A living fragment of one survives alongside several stumps. Eleven old yews have been lost at this site.



Mamhilad Monmouthshire St Illtyd SO3054303420 14/2/1998

In 1799 Archdeacon Coxe visited Mamhilad and recorded 12 fine yews. They were still there in 1895 when Rev. Christopher Cook wrote 'there are 12 yew-trees in the churchyard, the largest being situated near the south porch; of the others, five measure from 15 to 20 feet in girth'. Two of the 12 yews are lost.

Mathern Monmouthshire St Tewdric ST5230390877 9/1/2000

A photograph of the 'massive yew stump to the north, it measures 670cm' is shown on p59 of *The Churchyard Yews of Gwent*.

Mynyddislwyn Caerphilly St Tudor ST1933393907 22/3/1998

The new yew planted by the stump of the dead tree has grown considerably in the 11 years between 1998 and 2009. A further 5 veteran or ancient yews grow in this churchyard.



Penrhos Monmouthshire St Cadoc SJ2367216591 1/10/2007

In the 1909 *Little Guides* 'two fine old yews' were recorded. The survivor grows SSW of the church. There are no details of the girth of the second yew or when it was lost.

Rudry Caerphilly St James ST1930486540 31/5/1999

Cardiff Naturalists' Society 1880: 'The Yews of Rudry, near Caerphilly, present a group of an exceedingly interesting character. One girths 17' 6" at 2' from the ground, and in height surpasses any we have described. The great peculiarity of the tree is the clear way in which the phenomena of adventitious roots is shown. The lower part of the trunk is a mere shell, partially alive; through the rent sides a mass of internal roots may be seen, varying in size from 2' diameter to mere rods, all covered with clean, ruddy bark; they twist around each other and form curious adhesions, which remind one of the vagaries of the banyan. Another tree exhibits the same character even more fantastically. From a vast stool 21' girth and 2' 6" in height, branches start from around a central trunk which is one mass of canker and decay. In spite of this the tree bears a great pyramidal canopy, and the reason is apparent on ascending the trunk, when it is found that every cranny of the dead wood is pierced with a multitude of small roots, many dry and dead, but others sending nourishment to the branches'. The smaller of the yews described has not survived.

Trevethin Monmouthshire SO2838302000

The largest yew at this site, recorded as 20' 8" in 1930, was 'recently taken down'. (Evans 1986)

Wilcrick Monmouthshire St Mary ST4100887982 9/1/2000

'The little building at the foot of Wilcrick Hill is heavily overshadowed by a pair of yews'. (*Buildings of Wales-Gwent/Monmouthshire* - John Newman) Neither has survived. Evans visited in 1986 and recorded: 'Outside the churchyard to the north is a yew stump, 560 cm in circumference'. We found the circle that marked the stump. By now it too will have disappeared.

Lost Yews in the Diocese of St Asaph

Bettws Gwerfil Goch Denbighshire St Mary SJ0323846585

The Clwyd/Powys Archaeological Trust (1997) recorded that the last yews were felled in the 1970s. We have no details of the number of yews involved, their size or the reason for felling.

Coed-ladyr Gwynedd SH899275

An 'old yew tree' at this site was 'crushed under a weight of snow in 1937'. The church is now gone and precise location of the site uncertain. *Archaeologia Cambrensis* referred to 'yr hen Eglwys' or old church as the site of this yew. Its position was about a mile ESE of Coedladur, spelt Coed-ladyr on the present OS map, at a height of about 1300' on an old Celtic-Roman road.

Cwm Denbighshire St Mael and St Sulien SJ0662577465 07/09/2004

The Clwyd/Powys Archaeological Trust have a 1791 record stating that there was once 'six ash, one sycamore, two firs and one old yew tree in the churchyard'. Today there is no sign of the old yew.

Forden Powys St Michael SJ2272801115 10/09/2004

An old yew on the west side of the south path was blown down in the 1970s. Several Irish yews have been planted to take its place.

Guilfield Powys St Aelhaiarn SJ2191611652 19/04/2001

A *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* of 1849 described 'twelve exceedingly fine yew trees'. The largest, measuring 18' 5", is now only a stump.

Kerry (Ceri) Powys St Michael and All Angels SO1471990100 17/4/2001

In 2005 a fire was lit in the hollow of this fine 20ft girthed yew. Following advice about the safety of the tree, it was cut at about 2 metres from the ground. In 2007 I was informed that there was some regeneration to be seen, also that a replacement yew had been planted alongside.

Llandderfel Gwynedd SH9816337062 26/04/2000

A notable yew lost since 1834. In that year two yew trees of 'remarkably fine growth' were described. The survivor continues to thrive at the west end of the churchyard, while this stump of 12/14' girth is all that remains of the tree that once grew at the east end. A ring count revealed about 50 per inch.



Llangadwaladr Powys St Cadwaladr SJ1815730310 12/08/1998

Three significant yews grow here, with girths of 25', 22' and 19'. In *Bye-gones* (1871) the writer was told that a still larger yew was destroyed a few years since by a foolish attempt to smoke out a swarm of bees that had made their nest in the hollow trunk.

Llanllugan Powys St Mary SJ0577402340 23/11/2005

Clwyd/Powys Archaeological Trust in 1996 recorded 'an older yew tree near the south-west corner has been cut down and a yew in the south-east corner is no longer growing'.

To the SW we found a young yew growing in the centre of a 12' girthed stump. It appeared too central to be regrowth and was probably planted there to replace the lost tree. There was no sign of the yew which grew SE of the church, though a patch of raised ground suggested where it once might have grown.

Llanwddyn Powys

The 1849 *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* described 'some remarkably fine yew-trees' in the churchyard. In the 1880s the whole village was drowned in order to create a reservoir to supply water to Liverpool.

Llanycil Gwynedd St Bueno SH9147134872 6/04/1998

In 1834 Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* documented 8 yews 'of venerable growth'. By 1998 only 5 of these remained, signifying the loss of 3 veteran or ancient yews from this site.

The tradition of planting yew has continued and there are in addition 4 younger trees in the churchyard. The church at this site has been declared redundant, creating uncertainty about management of the remaining ancient and veteran yews.

Lyss, near Halkyn Flintshire SJ233696

The history of Northop, Flintshire by Thomas Edwards has the following: 'Not far from Llys, on the road leading to Halkin, stood formerly a chapel, of which not a stone now remains, tradition of which is very imperfect. It was erected probably in the twelfth century'. By 1832 'The last remains of anything like ecclesiastical antiquity here, were four fine yew trees on the verge of the ground on which the chapel stood; they were cut down in 1799, and converted, by the Crews of Celyn, into household furniture'.

Northop Flintshire SJ2463768486 Ss Eurgain and Peter

In 1832 the following was written: 'In the north side stood a yew tree, which must have defied the storms for ages; but the steady course of time succeeded, a few years back, in its downfall. When it stood, the Rev. John Owen, late curate of the parish, was buried under its shade'.

Lost Yews in the Diocese of St Davids

Abergwili Carmarthenshire

St David

SN4398020850

10/10/2006



This substantial stump is found close to 2 large female yews at the east end of the churchyard.

Bridell Pembrokeshire

SN1765842075

10/10/2006



All that remains of the yew are these few pieces of stump, found on the south side of the church and a few metres from the Ogham stone. The reason for the yew's demise is not known.

Gartheli Ceredigion SN5859156722

Evans (1903) wrote that 'At the end of the eighteenth century the building was in ruins, so much as to be unsuitable for marriages to be solemnized in it, and accordingly they took place in the graveyard under the wide branches of the old yew which still flourishes, and is as full of life as ever'.

This yew grew on a walled mound SE of the chancel and when recorded in 1980 its girth was 333cm. Its health was regarded as poor and in 1985 it was cut down. A piece of its hollow trunk 6 cm thick and 5 cm from the outside of the tree had 136 annual rings. A replacement was planted SSW of the church porch.

Information provided by Arthur O.Chater, author of *Flora of Cardiganshire*.

Llanafan Ceredigion St Afan SN6847372145

As early as 1810 an avenue of yews was described by Meyrick in this churchyard. Later reports describe 10 yews forming the avenue with two larger yews to the east and north east. The avenue has gone. Two yews, one S of the nave, the other SW of the porch are thought too small in girth to be relics of the original avenue. Of the two larger yews, described by Evans in 1903 as having ages 'which can be counted by centuries', one is a hollow partly burned stump E of the church with a girth recorded in 1978 of 440cm, while 'the other is a multi-trunked female tree on a mound NE of the chancel, and assuming it is all one tree, was c.750cm at soil level in 2005'.

Information provided by Arthur O.Chater, author of *Flora of Cardiganshire*.

Llanarthne Carmarthenshire St David SN5343120262

A medieval church with many yews in the churchyard. The photo (Ros Jones) shows the stump of a yew whose age is likely to have been between 300 and 400 years. It was felled because it was leaning on the tombstone.



Llanbadarn Fawr (Aberystwyth) Ceredigion St Padarn SN5989681000

In 1823 there were recorded 'eleven yew-trees, the largest of which is twenty-four feet in circumference'. This one no longer exists, though many new yews have been planted since this time.

In 1985 there were 32 yews in the old part of the churchyard, with girths between 191 and 340 cm, all perhaps planted at about the same time and giving it a character unique in the county. Three of the trees were felled that year. Another was blown down in 2002, and its solid trunk 175 cm girth had 104 annual rings, making it the only dated yew in the county.

This information provided by Arthur O.Chater, author of *Flora of Cardiganshire*.

Llandeilo Abercywyn Carmarthenshire St Teilo SN3091213032

Allen Meredith visited this site with this photo from a 1912 publication, showing an old yew SE of the building. The dead stump was found hidden beneath nettles and brambles. Meredith considered it of similar girth to the yew which survives next to the ruins at Trefenty, 800 yards away and separated by a stretch of water.



Llandovery (Llanfair-ar-y-bryn) Carmarthenshire

St Mary on the Hill SN769783517

It is reported that a second yew used to grow close to the spot where William Williams was buried in 1791. This has been cut down. Ros Jones

Llangathen

Carmarthenshire

St Cathen

SN5844122137

24/08/1998

Although of small girth, the felling of any tree in a Conservation Area without permission of the local authority is usually considered to be an illegal act. This tree was felled on 27th June 2006. Attempts were made to bring a prosecution, but since only two people were directly involved and it was considered unlikely that they would testify against each other, the case was dropped.

This case is a graphic illustration of the lack of protection afforded to churchyard trees.



Llansteffan

Carmarthenshire

St Ystyffan

SN3499810710

In the visitor's guide to the church is the following description: 'The altar is made like a box and inside the lid are carved the words: Made of an old yew tree 16 feet round and blown down in this churchyard Feb 1841'.

Llanwrda

Carmarthenshire

St Cwrda

SN7125131955 26/08/1998

George Borrow (1862 - *Wild Wales*) reported an 'enormous yew' by Llanwrda church. Today three yews are found in this churchyard. There is also this large stump by the churchyard entrance - could this have been the yew described by Borrow? A second yew stump north of the church was reported by M. Rees-Hughes in 1993.



Meidrim

Carmarthenshire

St David

SN2889820860

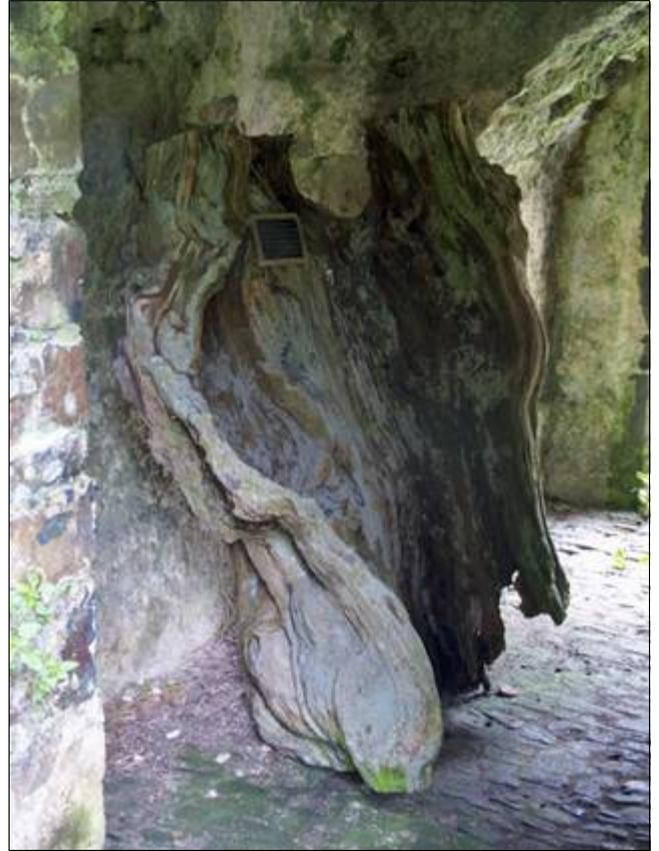
10/10/2006

Two large yews, formerly growing on the south side, have been lost from this site. We were told that the first was removed in the 1930s. Evidence suggests that this was formerly an immense tree. A little further to the south are the remains of a second yew.



Slebech Pembrokeshire St John SN0320113932 12/05/2007

This large piece of yew is on display in a covered part of the church ruin. A notice next to it states that it is 'a relic of the famous yew which grew in Slebech churchyard. Its circumference was 13' 8" and the Cambrian Archaeological Association on their visiting tour expressed their opinion that it was at least 800 years old'. So far no record has been traced of precisely where this tree grew, its former appearance and why and when it was felled.



Strata Florida Ceredigion SN7464665757 10/06/1999

When Leland visited Strata Florida in the reign of Henry VIII he described : 'thirty-nine vast Ewgh trees in the churchyard belonging to Strathfleur Abbey'. By 1874, only 3 of the 39 remained, the largest of those in 2 parts, with a passage through its centre. Today only 2 remain.

This would seem to be the loss of what might have been the finest churchyard yew site in the world.

Lost Yews in the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon

Bishopston Glamorgan St Teilo SS5777689350 2/11/2002

John Andrew (*Churchyard Yew Trees in the Archdeaconry of Gower*) reported that the yew 'blew down in the 1987 storm'. Mrs Alison R. Thomas gave him measurement details which translate to a circumference of 6m 09cm (20'). At that time the stump was 'lying on its side in the central southern part of the old churchyard'.

Cantref Powys St Mary SO0564325452 26/8/2000

Site of a noteworthy 'lost yew'. In Lewis's 1834 *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* the following was recorded: 'At a distance of 12' from the ground, a mountain ash has taken root and not deriving sufficient nourishment from the old tree on which it grows, has struck down its roots through the decayed trunk, which have long since penetrated into the earth'. This is testimony of the long lasting nature of yew wood, even in decay.



Cascob Powys St Michael and All Angels SO2390666400 1/1/1998



The 1970 Brecon Yew Survey recorded two yews of 25ft girth. The one on the right has survived, the other has been replaced by a younger yew. Edwin Pretty, visiting in 2009 'noticed a slightly raised area of ground. In the middle of it a yew has been planted. Around the edge of the raised ground are the remains of a decayed tree trunk. I enquired about it whilst talking to the local farmer there. She said the old tree which blew down in gales over twenty years ago was indeed a yew, and she had planted this sapling in 1998'.



Cefnlllys Powys St Michael SO0848661505

The yew is seen here in photos taken by Geoff Garlick in 2005 and David Alderman in 2012.

It is reported that the ancient tree was set on fire in 2007. The dead trunks, seen either side of the living stem, would have made ample flammable material. Well before anyone realised anything was amiss the whole tree was alight. The fire brigade was called but too late, since 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. Nothing living survives above ground.



Felling of the Cilmerly Yew - 2009 SO 00905172

I visited the site of Llanganten church, in the parish of Cilmerly/Cilmeri, on 20th August 1999. The yew, which grew SW of the church, was recorded with a girth of 15' 1" around the base. Its bole height was about 5', above which the tree narrowed before sprouting new growth in all directions. A vigorous and healthy yew was noted, confirmed by the photo taken in 2005. Height of the tree was about 25'.



Cilmerly Yew in 1999 - Tim Hills



Cilmerly Yew in 2005 - Geoff Garlick

In 2009 I was informed that 'the yew has been felled recently...., it is a tiny church in a very out of the way place and we could see no reason for it'.

In 2012 I took these photos of the stump. The only information I have is that a group of parishioners complained that the yew cast too much of a shadow on that part of the churchyard. I was also told that the tree feller gave assurances that because it was yew it would regrow from the stump.



It is another instance of the needless destruction of our yew heritage. This church is one of the Llangammarch Group of Parishes, the same parish responsible for allowing the destruction of the Llanlleonfel Yew in 1999.

Cwmdu Powys St Michael the Archangel SO1805123830 21/02/2000

In the 1970 Brecon Yew Survey a girth of 17' 6" was recorded for a yew at this location. Although there are 28 yews ringing the churchyard we found nothing approaching this size.

Garth Brengy Powys St David SO0456533527 5/8/1998

In 1862, query 113 to the Cambrian Archaeological Association asked: 'What is the greatest number of old yew trees now standing in any churchyard in Wales?' The answer was that 'in the churchyard of Garth Brengy, near Brecon, there are now standing thirty-three old yew trees forming portions of a double line which once surrounded the church; and they seem from two hundred to three hundred years old'. *Archaeologia Cambrensis* by T.R. Powel and D. Moore.

There are now only 23 yews, a loss of 10 trees. Since the church is no longer in use, there is the question of how the remaining yews will be managed.

Llanddewi Fach Monmouthshire St David ST3319695877 9/01/2000

In 1822 the tree was described in Strutt's *Sylva Brit.* as follows: '30 feet 4 inches in circumference at 3 feet from the ground; has a stunted, hollow trunk, with a lateral opening, and will hold more five or six persons. It has in the centre a still more remarkable inner trunk, covered with bark, quite detached and distinct from the old trunk, but united to it above by a great branch running into, or more probably proceeding from it'.

In 1880 TH Thomas presented a paper to Cardiff Nat. Soc. 'We may next consider the Yews of which the two counties can boast; some are splendid specimens, quite of the first class as to size and beauty. Foremost amongst them stands the great Yew of Llanthewy-fach, near Caerleon. This is the King of our Yews, a male tree of enormous dimensions, 31' in girth, the internal hollow being 20' in circumference. Long past its prime, the trunk is a mere shell, cleft, on the eastern side, from the crown to the ground, each portion bearing one or more branches. Examination of the interior of the trunk exhibits a remarkable example of the power possessed by many slow growing trees of renewing their strength when the trunk has been injured or become decayed, by sending down new roots from the crown of the tree to the earth, gaining sustenance up their course from the decaying tissues. Incidences of this may be seen in ancient Ashes, Alders, and especially the Yew and Olive. The process has taken place on a large scale in the tree at Llanthewy. An immense, or inner trunk, 9' in girth, covered with bark, grows through the centre of the hollow; it is united to the outer shell at the crown, and this new tree formerly supported much of the foliage; at this moment it is dead down to about 12' from the ground. Around the bole of the tree a small grove of suckers has sprung up, hiding the trunk. Braced by its internal roots the tree supports a grand mass of foliage; one large limb at the centre of the tree is dead, as are some smaller boughs. The loss of these portions of the tree, and the pressure of a large ivy plant upon other parts, render the upper leafage rather sparse; but the lower branches spread widely, laden with the glossiest green; the lowest drooping so as to sweep the turf which covers the 'rude forefathers of the hamlet'.

In 1897 Rev. W.A.W. Evans informed Lowe that its trunk was covered with young spray, and gave him a girth measurement of 31' at the ground and 32' 5" at 3', with a bole height of 5'.

In 1958 Swanton corrected Lowe's spelling of 'Llanthewy Bach', which had made it difficult for him to locate the site, but compounded the error by changing the county from its correct 'Monmouth' to 'Montgomery'! He also wrote to Rev. Harold Richards for measurements. He received a reply in September 1955 saying that the veteran had vanished: 'It seems as though there used to be a great yew tree, but, from what I can glean from the old parishioners, it was destroyed by fire over 30 years ago - how and why remains a mystery'.

However in *Welsh Timber Trees* Hyde and Harrison reported that in 1975 it was still 'just alive'.

In 2000 I found no trace of the tree, just some raised ground in the SW corner that might be where this 'King of our Yews' once stood.

Llandefalle Powys St Matthew SO1076335567 1/3/2102

One of the many yews in this circular churchyard has been reduced to a stump. The yew growing nearby appears to have been planted as its replacement.



Llandegley Powys St Tecla SO1391862887 16/4/2001

Lewis's 1834 *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* described the churchyard as having 'some of the finest yew trees in south Wales, one of them 9 and a half yards and another 7 and a half in girth, and though generally of very great age, their trunks are most perfectly round'.

By the time of the Brecon Survey of 1970 all that remained were three yews recorded as 18', 17' and 12', with two of these noted as being hollow.

By 2001 only one lived on. The 2 smaller trees which grew side by side have been reduced to these stumps, one measuring 13' 7", the other incomplete but with a girth of about 15'.



Llandeilo Talybont Glamorgan St Teilo on the Marsh SN5840003000

The medieval church ceased to be used for regular worship in 1851 when it was replaced by the more conveniently sited Church of St. Teilo's in Pontarddulais. The old Church has since been dismantled and the stone removed to the Welsh National Folk Museum at St Fagan's for rebuilding.

Col. W.E.Llewellyn Morgan (1889) reported that 'On the south side of the church are the remains of a very old yew tree which was burnt down a few years ago'. Nothing now remains of this tree except for a small part of the stump situated on a large mound. The tree was undoubtedly medieval'.

Churchyard Yew Trees in the Archdeaconry of Gower by John Andrew in Gower

Llanellan, or Llan-elen Monmouthshire St Helen SS5110093300

The yew noted by R.E.Kay in 1969 was later 'killed by burning'. Its size is disputed, Kay recorded 7.616m, John Andrew recorded 4.65m. The church was demolished in the 1970's.

Llanfihangel Tal-y-Llyn Powys St Michael at the head of the lake SO1142528399 18/04/1998

The 1970 Brecon Yew Survey recorded four yews as follows: 28', 17', 16' 6" and 10' 6". The trees that remain could account for the latter three (though I recorded smaller girths) but the 28' yew is lost.

Llanhamlach Powys St Peter and St Illtyd SO0895326438

The *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* of 1849 described the churchyard as 'remarkably picturesque, and is adorned with some fine yew-trees, several of which, though of great age, are flourishing in full vigour'.

In 1870/2 J.M. Wilson's *Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales* described Llanhamlach church as 'shaded by massive yew-trees'.

The 1970 Brecon Yew Survey recorded the girths of 8 yews. Allen Meredith's gazetteer records 'many cut down in 1985'. The trees lost since 1970 had girths of 20', 14', 13' and 12'.

LLANLLEONFEL Powys SN 938 499 20/8/99 and 19/7/02

Llanlleonfel Church is situated on an ancient hilltop site in a circular enclosure. It was restored by RJ Withers in 1874.



Copies of this picture were on sale in the church, but did not acknowledge the artist or date of the sketch. It is the last record of the living tree, complete with branches and foliage, before it was ‘tidied and made safe.’ I was told in writing that it had ‘in recent years become very overgrown and was obscuring some gravestones as well as making the entrance to the church rather dark. Concern had also been expressed about some of the limbs of the tree and the possibility of them falling on someone visiting the church.’

A local woodsman had been employed to ‘tidy the tree and make it safe. His work was a little more drastic than anticipated.’

At the time of my visit in August 1999 the work had only recently been completed. The large stump had a few green shoots and I asked that it should be left since the tree might recover. I was assured, again in writing, that ‘the intention is not to fell it.’

Three years later, in 2002, I visited to see how the green shoots had developed, only to find an overgrown mound with a young yew planted in the centre of the few remaining inches of stump. The rest of the bole lay on the ground awaiting removal.



Llanrhidian Glamorgan St Rhidian and St Illtyd SS4967392247 20/8/1998

On 15th August 1988 Reg Wheeler recorded the yews at this churchyard. Of the lost yew he wrote that it was 'south of the church, on a level space near the top of the hill which slopes downwards towards the church, and north west of tree 1'. He recorded the stump circumference as 5.17 adding: 'all that is left of this tree is a hollow stump. The vicar informed me that the tree was cut down in 1986 because it appeared to be in a dangerous condition. The wood was sold to Mr D. Cowley of the Cillibion Sawmills. There is an opening into the hollow bole on the west side of the tree'.

Llansantffraed-in-Elwel Powys St Bridget SO0996654875 2/8/1998

13 yews in August 1998 are now 12. The tree shown here was dead in 2001.



Llanspyddid Powys St Cattwg SO0117328197 5/8/1998 and 2006

I was told in 2006 that the two yews, with girths of 19' and 15', were cut down about 25 years ago and the younger yew planted between the stumps to replace them. On my earlier visit in 1998 I had been unaware of the stumps in an over-grown churchyard.



Newchurch Powys St Mary SO2161350732 18/8/1999

An extract from Kilvert's diary of 1873 describes the 'great yew tree overhead bent weeping upon the grave'. A letter to the Conservation Foundation in 1988 shows that this was indeed a huge tree: 'Yew at west end of church by the churchyard gate - at 3ft. 7.7m girth and at 4ft. 7.4m girth'. The Clwyd/Powys Archaeological Trust reports that the tree fell in 1990.

Oystermouth Glamorgan All Saints

A 1790 illustration shows what John Andrew describes as ‘a very large, and presumably medieval, yew tree’ south of the church porch. No trace is now to be found.

Patrishow Powys St Ishow SO2788922434 8/7/2000



A Naturalist Club meeting of 1912 observed: ‘By the church porch is a yew, holly and ash tree all in one, and this came in for much attention’. This is now a stump.

Penpont Powys Bettws Penpont Church SN9728328520 5/8/1999

According to Meredith one of the large yews here (230cm diameter in Tree Register data base) was ‘cut down in 1970’.

Rhulen Powys St David SO1377149835 15/8/1999

Andrew Morton in *Tree Heritage of Britain and Ireland* wrote ‘against the east wall of the church are the remains of a yew that crashed in a storm in the mid-1980s. The tree’s position prevented any extension to the chancel in the 14th century’.



Swansea High Street Glamorgan St Matthew SS656937

John Andrew reports that an old drawing by Baxter shows a tree of large girth in the south of the churchyard, partly obscuring the building. Even at that time the tree appeared to be ‘in the terminal stages of decay’.

Whitton Powys St David SO2705167317 1/1/1998

The 1970 survey of Breconshire yews recorded 4 in this churchyard with girths of 26', 18', 13' and 10' 3". The 18' yew and one of the smaller trees have been lost since the survey.