

Dorset Yews

An Inventory of Churchyard Yews along the Dorset Stour and its tributaries.

Part 3 – The Lower Stour

by Peter Norton



Introduction:

The Stour rises just above the lakes at Stourhead in Wiltshire and on its way through Dorset it is fed by springs and streams from Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset, with a large part of its catchment edged by chalk hills containing the Blackmore Vale. It continues through Blandford and Wimborne to Christchurch, where it converges with the Avon and Mude to flow out to sea between Mudeford Quay and Hengistbury Spit, some sixty miles from its many sources.

The Lower Stour OS195 (unless otherwise stated):

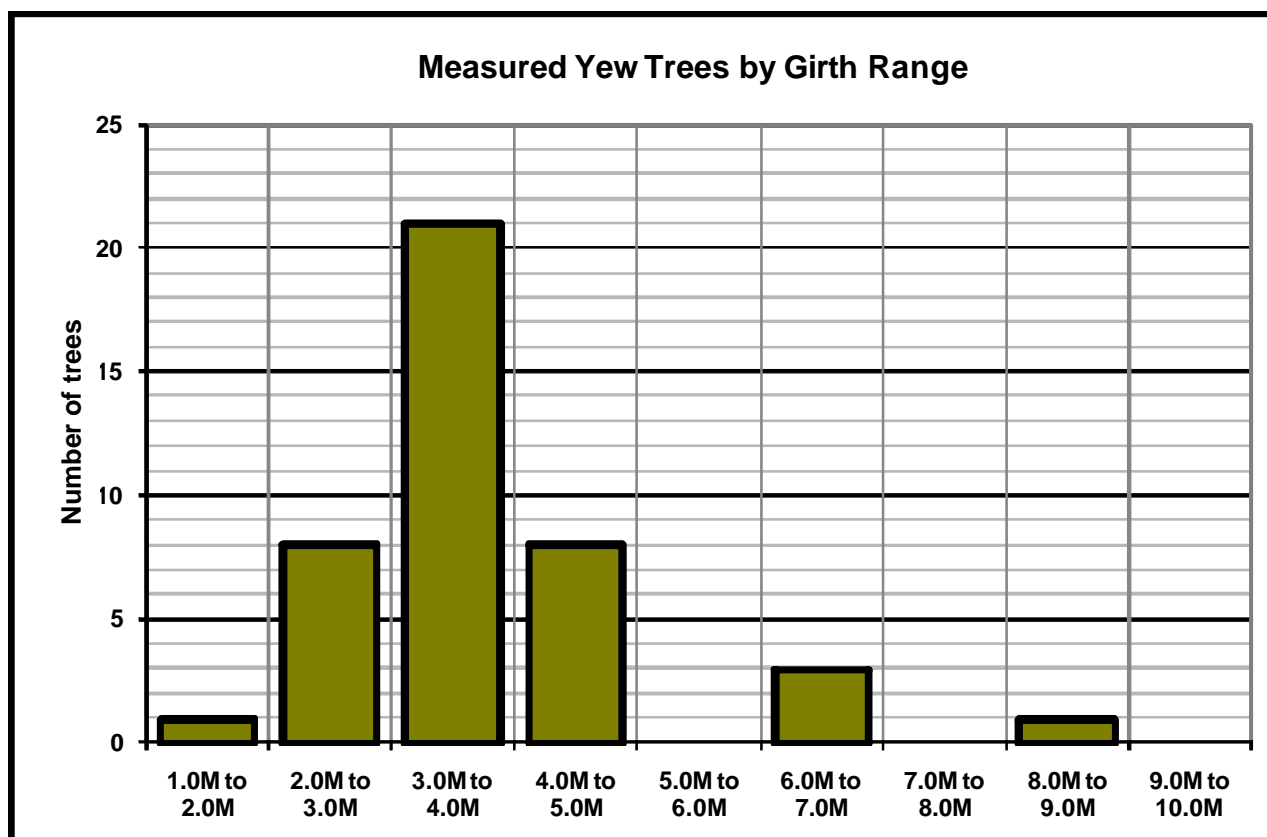
This is the last of three reports that split the River Stour into three sections; Upper, Middle and Lower Stour as covered by the Ordnance Survey maps 183, 194 and 195. The areas described are not based on geological features but on the areas covered by the three Ordnance Survey maps. The Lower Stour is therefore described as from south east of Blandford to Wimborne Minster and onto Christchurch, a distance of twenty three miles by road.

Along its route it is joined by the Tarrant, North Winterborne, River Allen (to distinguish it from the Allen River which is a tributary of the Avon), Arrowsmith, Kinson, Leadon Stour and finally the Crane/Moors.

All of the towns and villages along this part of the Stour and her tributaries were included, with forty eight churches visited. Of these thirty six contained yews.

Included for each church visited is an estimated mileage from Blandford which is used as the reference point in all three reports.

A total of one hundred and seventeen trees were noted at these sites of which forty two had measurements recorded. (See graph below which has been grouped by girth and does not include any estimated* values.) Imperial measurements were taken during the recording exercise and converted to Metric. Please note that in multiple individual tree measurements only the lowest to the root/ground was used for this graph.



Lower Blandford St Mary – St Mary – ST892054

1.8 miles SE of Blandford

The church is thought to be of 12th century origin with a 14th century tower and further alterations and additions in 1835 and 1863.

Two yews grow in the churchyard. Below left is a male yew girthing 10' 9" at 1' growing near the east gate. On the right is a much hollowed half tree of small girth which supports a healthy looking crown.



Langton Long – All Saints – ST898059

1.7 miles SE of Blandford

The old church was demolished in 1861 and rebuilt.

Four yews grow in the churchyard. The two largest are shown here: a female girthing 10' 2" at 1' with many branches removed high into the crown and on the north west perimeter a male girthing 13' 9" with much debris around its roots. Of the remaining two, one grows near the north east entrance and the youngest is found south east of the porch.



Charlton Marshall – St Mary the Virgin – ST900040

2.6 miles SE of Blandford



Many parts of St Mary's church are medieval, including most of its tower and northern aisle. The rest was rebuilt in 1713 with further restoration in 1895.

The old female yew that grows NE of the church measured 20' exactly just above the ground. Many of its gnarled branches are hollow. See Gazetteer entry for more information.

A younger male grows to the SE.

- *Opposite Spetisbury the Stour is joined by the Tarrant (Celtic for 'liable to flood') which rises some ten miles away at Tarrant Gunville to the east of Blandford Forum and runs through Cranborne Chase, an area of chalk downland. The eight Tarrant Valley villages all bear the name of the river.*

Tarrant Gunville - St Mary – ST925126

5.7 miles NE of Blandford



The source of the river is in the grounds of Gunville House, now demolished. The church dates back to Norman times and was re-built twice, in 1503 and in 1845.

A female yew grows to the east of the church and girthed 11' 10" at 1'.

Tarrant Monkton - All Saints – ST943088

4.7 miles NE of Blandford

The church was restored in 1873, retaining some parts from both the 14th and 15th centuries.

Six yews grow south of the church, 5 male and 1 young female. The largest, shown here, is a male girthing 13' 3" at 1'. It is the 4th tree from the north east churchyard entrance.



Tarrant Rushton - St Mary – ST937060

3.7 miles E of Blandford



A small cruciform church originally built in the 12th century, fully restored in the 1880s and again during 1963.

One female yew grows north east of the church, completely hollowed and split into two halves, with the west side of the tree completely dead. The east side continues to flourish, in spite of the unnecessary cutting away of an internal root.

The Gazetteer entry records a girth of 10' 10" at 3' in 2000.

Tarrant Keyneston - All Saints – ST924040

3.9 miles SE of Blandford



This is the largest village along the Tarrant and the church, originally dating from the 14th century, was almost completely rebuilt in the 1850s on exactly the same site.

2 male yews grow to the north of the church, with the largest girthing 11' 7" at 1'. Near the base of the tree was a young root emerging from the trunk.

Tarrant Crawford, St Mary the Virgin – ST923034

3.7 miles SE of Blandford

Tarrant Crawford is at the confluence of the Tarrant and Stour. The old church is all that remains of medieval Tarrant Abbey. The church dates to the Norman period (1170), but much of the current structure is late 13th century. Tarrant Abbey was an important and powerful Cistercian nunnery, and the church may have been built as a lay chapel to the abbey. The church is rarely used for worship and is cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust.

One male yew grows to the south of the church and at some time in its past it was blown over. The once horizontal branches are now vertical with healthy growth. It was impossible to measure the original girth as it is partially buried. An approximate* diameter of just over 3' was obtained, which equates to a 10' girth. One of the now upright branches was 2' 7" in girth.



- *The Stour continues to Shapwick and Sturminster Marshall.*

Shapwick – St Bartholomew – ST936016

5.3 miles SE of Blandford



The church dates from the late 11th and early 12th century, but all that remains are the two arches in the north wall and the north porch doorway. Towards the end of the 19th century, it was in a ruinous state and a major restoration was carried out in the 1880s.

One male tree grows north of the porch, girthing 12' at 1'.

- *At Sturminster Marshall the Stour is joined by the North Winterborne which rises near to Winterborne Houghton. Turnworth is located just to the north of the beautiful North Winterborne Valley and is recorded in the Gazetteer. The Winterborne, as its name suggests, is only active in the winter months.*

Turnworth – St Mary – OS194/ST821075

6.3 miles W of Blandford

The Church, mentioned in the Domesday Book, was built in the 10th century and retains its 15th century tower. It underwent major restoration in the 19th century (1869). Of particular interest are its links with Thomas Hardy, who was one of the architects involved in the restoration prior to his success as an author. There are almost certainly further notable dates associated with this church.

There are five yews in the churchyard, of which four are quite small in girth. This large female tree measured 15' 9" at about 2' from the ground over a light covering of ivy. A large limb was removed some 15 years ago; it was thought that it posed a threat of breaking off and falling into the rectory garden, crushing the water tank. I was informed that a wire holds two of the large branches together. This is only visible by standing near to the porch and looking up.



Winterborne Stickland – St Mary the Virgin – OS194/ST834046

4.8 miles W of Blandford

The church was built in the 13th century and retains its late 15th century tower. Alterations were carried out in the 18th century.

One male yew, with a girth of 9' 9" at 1', grows south east of the porch.



Winterborne Clenston – St Nicholas - OS194/ST839027

5.5 miles SW of Blandford

The church was rebuilt in 1839/40.

There is no yew in the present churchyard, but just beyond the perimeter wire three yews grow on a large mound north of the church. Largest of this trio is a male measuring 11' 2" at about 2'.

Winterborne Whitechurch – St Mary – OS194/ST837001

6.4 miles SW of Blandford

Originally a 12th century church with major alterations in 1844. It was seriously damaged by fire in 1867.

Six yews form an avenue from the churchyard east entrance to the south facing porch. Growing nearest to the church are the two female yews seen below left, with girths of 13' 8" (R/H) and 10' 6" (L/H). The remaining four are male, the largest of which measured 12' 4". All 6 were recorded at 1' from the ground.



Winterborne Kingston – St Nicholas – OS194/SY862976

7.4 miles S of Blandford

The church is thought to be 14th century, with major restoration carried out in 1872.

One male yew grows north east of the church. It measured 12' 2" at 1' and 13' 6" at 3'.



Sturminster Marshall – St Mary the Virgin – ST951004

7.3 miles SE of Blandford

The church was established in 1162 and extended in the 13th century. This was followed by additions in the 14th and 15th centuries and extensive restoration in 1859.

Two male yews grow west of the church; the largest was 10' 9" at 1', the smaller had much ivy and was not measured. A further two young yews, recorded in the Gazetteer, have associations with Queen Victoria. This is also the site of a lost yew of considerable girth.



- *The Stour continues to Wimborne passing the northern outskirts of Corfe Mullen*

Corfe Mullen – St Hubert – SY976984

10.7 miles SE of Blandford

The church dates from the 13th century and retains its 14th century tower. Alterations were carried out in the 15th and 16th centuries, followed by restoration and further changes in 1841.

Three yews are found in the churchyard; a 4th grows on a raised bank in the car park (formerly a railway cutting) and a 5th just outside of the gates.

To the west of the porch are the fragmented remains (below left) of a male yew. Its gazetteer entry records a girth of about 11' around the fragment, but closer to 16' if the stump is included. Near to the north west gate is an unmeasured female and a male girthing 9' 10" at 1'.

The yew on the raised bank is male and measured 10' 5" at 1', while that growing just outside the gates is a hollowed out male with an internal stem (below right). Girth of 11' 9" at 1' was recorded.



- *At Wimborne the Stour is joined by the Allen, a chalk stream which rises near Monkton Up Wimborne and travels over ten miles to join the Stour at Wimborne Minster. History records indicate that in the 16th century it was known as the Wimborne. It has two tributaries, the first being the Gussage, which rises near to Gussage St Andrew and flows through several villages that take on the name, before it flows into the Allen just to the west of the Knowlton Circles. The other is the Crichel which rises near to Chettle and flows into the Allen after Crichel Lake.*

Wimborne All Hallows – All Hallows – SU023125

11.7 miles NE of Blandford

The church first mentioned in the Domesday Book was demolished in 1742 but the graveyard was still in use in the 19th century because there was no room at nearby St Giles. During the 20th century a new graveyard was established at All Hallows, on the opposite side of the road.

A record in the Gazetteer indicates a 20' 3" female near the north west corner, while on the east side is an even larger tree with the girth of 28' 1" at about 2'. The site is extremely overgrown with many small trees and dense summer vegetation obscuring the yews from view.

More details are available in the article on the Ancient Yews of Cranborne Chase.

Wimborne St Giles – St Giles – SU031119

12.1 miles NE of Blandford

The church built in 1732 replaced a small chapel. It was repaired in 1785 and 1852 and rebuilt in 1908 after being badly damaged by fire. This church replaced the old church at All Hallows.

A record in the Gazetteer indicates two males growing south east of the church. The largest girthed 22' 5" at 1' and was becoming increasingly covered in ivy. The smaller male measured 11' 3" at 2'.



Knowlton – Unknown dedication – SU024103

11.7 miles E of Blandford

This ruined 12th century Norman church sits in the centre of a Bronze Age henge and is a good example of the transition from Pagan to Christian worship. It was modified during the 14th century, but in 1485 the Black Death wiped out what was a prosperous Anglo Saxon community. The church continued to be used into the early part of the 18th century but was finally abandoned around 1747, after a newly fitted roof collapsed.

There is a detailed record in the Gazetteer of these two female yews which grow ENE of the church on the outer ring of the earthwork. The photograph is of the larger northerly tree and shows wind prayers that at the time of my visit covered the lower branches of both trees.

More detail is also available in the article on the 'Ancient Yews of Cranborne Chase'.



- *The Gussage (meaning small stream or spring) rises near to Gussage St Andrew and converges with the Allen at Knowlton.*

Gussage St Michael – St Michael – ST985113

8.1 miles NE of Blandford

The church retains its 12th century tower but the remainder was rebuilt in 1857.

Four yews grow in the churchyard, the largest being this female north of the church. In the Gazetteer its girth is recorded as 14' 6" at the ground.

The two male trees growing west of the church are much smaller, as is the young female near to the gate.



Gussage All Saints – All Saints – ST998108

9.8 miles NE of Blandford

The tower dates from the 14th century but the remainder was restored in 1864.

Two yews grow south of the church, the first near to the south porch is this male girthing 11' 11" near to the ground.

The second is a smaller female near to the gate.



- *The Crichel rises near Chettle and converges with the Allen at Witchampton*

Chettle – St Mary - ST952133

6.7 miles NE of Blandford



Earliest records indicate a church in the 14th century. The present church was rebuilt in 1849, retaining its 16th century tower.

A record in the Gazetteer records this hollow male yew growing south east of the church with a girth of about 15'.

Long Crichel – St Mary – ST977102

7.3 miles NE of Blandford

The church was largely rebuilt in 1852, but retained its 15th century tower. It was declared redundant in 2003.

One female yew grows south of the church amid much scrub and ivy. A girth of about 10' at 1' was recorded.



Witchampton – St Mary, St Cuthburga and All Saints – ST988064

7.5 miles E of Blandford

The church sits high above the main road through the village. The tower is 15th century, with the remainder rebuilt between 1832 and 1840.

Two male yews and one female grow in the churchyard with the female (right) near to the north gate measuring about 12' at 2' 6". Immediately to the north of this tree, on a raised bank, grows a smaller male whose low branches prevented measurement. To the east of the church and overhanging the road is a male measuring 11' 9" at 1'.



Standbridge – St Kenelm – SU004038

9.8 miles E of Blandford

This is one of only nine churches known to be dedicated to St Kenelm (or Cynehelm), an Anglo Saxon Saint. It was formerly a chapel to Wimborne Minster, rebuilt in 1860.

Some sixteen yews grow near to the church. The largest is a female girthing 9', found within a group of six trees to the south east.

- *The Arrowsmith Stream flows from Broadstone and converges with the Stour at Canford Magna*

Canford Magna – Not dedicated - SZ032987

12.9 miles NE of Blandford

This ancient church was once known as The Royal and Ancient Chapel of Canford Magna. The chancel dates back to 1050 and is orientated to where the sun rises on St Augustine's Day, which may hint at its original dedication. The Norman tower was added around 1180. Major restoration was carried out in 1846.

Five yews form an avenue leading to the church. No measurements were taken of the two female and three male yews.



- *The Stour continues*

Hampreston – All Saints – SZ055988

14.9 miles SE of Blandford



The church is thought to have its roots in the Saxon period but many parts date from the 14th century. A full restoration was completed in 1896.

Three male trees grow amongst many Irish Yew to the south of the church. The largest is close to the south west perimeter and has six main branches emerging from a 2' high bole. Girth recorded was 11' 2" at 1'.

- *The Kinson stream now converges with Milhams stream to then converge with the Stour north of the church.*

Kinson – St Andrew – SZ067969

16.5 miles SE of Blandford

This was originally a 12th century church, restored in 1894 but retaining its old tower. It is Bournemouth's oldest church.

Kinson was an inland smuggling centre, and it is believed that the village was once riddled with underground tunnels centred on the Church of St Andrew. The tower acted as a lookout point, store house and head office. Marks can be seen worn into the stone where contraband was hauled up the tower by rope.

Four young male yews grow in the churchyard; two near to the east gate were unmeasurable due to twiggy growth and thick ivy, while one to the south of the porch was hampered by low growth and brambles. The yew shown here grows on a small mound and measured 8' 8" at 1' 6". The others appeared to be of similar girth.



West Parley – All Saints – SZ086968

17.2 miles SE of Blandford



Historic centre of West Parley and now a nature reserve. The 12th century church replaced an earlier Saxon building and retains its 12th century nave and 15th century porch. Some restoration and enlargement work was carried out in 1896 and the wooden nave roof was replaced in 1933.

One young male yew grows north east of the church, its girth 8' 8" at 1'.

- *The Leaden Stour now converges with the Stour just west of Holdenhurst*

Holdenhurst – St John the Evangelist – SZ128952

20 miles SE of Blandford

The original church is thought to have been of Saxon origin. In 1834 the old church was demolished after a new church had been built close by.

There are eleven yews in the churchyard; seven are female, four are male, and there are a further three stumps. One young female measuring 6' 9" at 1' grows midway along the south perimeter and a further three females are found near to the east wall of the church. Along the north east perimeter grows a very young female next to a stump followed by two further stumps and the remaining trees. The largest recorded was male girthing 9' at 1', growing 2nd to last at the far north east. It is seen here in the centre.



- *The River Crane, which rises in the chalk above Cranborne and near Pentridge, becomes the Moors River after its confluence with the Ebblake Stream. This rises in Ringwood Forest and drains into the lakes at Moors Valley Country Park. The Moors travels around eight miles and is joined by the Maddington Brook and Uddens Water before passing Hurn and into the Stour to the east of Holdenhurst.*

Pentridge – St Rumbold – OS184/SU033178

12.2 miles NE of Blandford



There has been a settlement below the hill at Pentridge since at least the recordings of the Domesday survey in the 11th century, when St Rumbold's Church received its first mention. It was rebuilt in 1815 with later additions during 1855/7.

Six yews grow in the churchyard; four male and two female. The most interesting is this male tree growing east of the church. Ten branches emerge from the ground but thick ivy hampered further investigation.

Cranborne - Saints Mary and Bartholomew – SU054133

14 miles NE of Blandford

The parish church is Norman in origin, built on the site of a Saxon Benedictine monastery founded in 980. The present church, with its 15th century tower, is the only surviving part of the monastery whose last remaining parts were demolished in 1703. The north porch is from the late Norman period. Some restoration was carried out in 1875 and a new roof fitted in 1958.

Four yews are found in this churchyard, with the first seen by the east gate, a female girthing 9' at 1'. The second grows nearby, a male girthing 12' 9" at 1' (below left) while to the south of the church on the perimeter are two female trees. The westerly yew (below right) measured 13' 10" at 2' from the top of the mound; note the hollowing and internal stem. The easterly yew could not be measured due to thick ivy and summer vegetation. Dense ivy was also noted in the crown.



Edmondsham – St Nicholas – SU161115

15 miles NE of Blandford

The church, which originated in the 12th century, has a 14th century nave and a 15th century tower. Major restoration and rebuilding were carried out in 1862.

Two female yews grow in the churchyard. The tree east of the church is seen here, its girth 11' at 1' and 10' 11" at 3'. The other grows near to the north gate leading into Edmondsham House, and girthed 9' 5" at the root crown.



Horton – St Wolfrida – SU030074

11.8 miles E of Blandford



A monastery here was of the Benedictine Order, founded in 961. The Priory was a cell to Sherborne Abbey. Wolfryth the Abbess was a Saxon related to Alfred's Royal Line. The church of St Wolfrida contained part of the Priory wall inside the church, situated near the chancel. It was rebuilt in 1720/2 after the tower collapsed. Restoration followed in 1869 and 1900.

One male yew, girthing 16' 4" near to the ground, grows east of the church on a steep bank. The tree comprises five massive limbs with as many again having been removed. They all stem from a short bole.



A church has existed on this site since the Saxon period. The present building dates from 1870 and retains some of the 13th century fabric.

This unmeasured female yew grows east of the church.

Holt – St James – SU029039

12 miles E of Blandford

The church was built between 1834 and 1836 along with further additions during 1875. One young male grows south of the church and girthed 6' 5" at 1'.

This is the last church recorded before the Stour reaches Christchurch and its convergence with the Avon.

The following sites were also visited. None had any yews.

Spetisbury - St John the Baptist
Tarrant Hinton - St Mary
Winterborne Houghton - St Andrew
Winterborne Anderson - St Michael
Winterborne Tomson - St Andrew
Winterborne Zelston - St Mary
Almer - St Mary
Pamphill - St Stephen
Gussage St Andrew - St Andrew
Wimborne Minster - St Cuthburga
Chalbury Common - All Saints
Colehill - St Michael and All Angels

Historical references have been obtained but not directly copied from:

- Dorset Historic Churches Trust
- Dorset Online Parish Clerks
- Dorset Churches Web Pages
- Common Ground Web Pages

Summary:

Over the three reports into the churchyard yews that grow along the River Stour and its tributaries we have visited 125 churchyards, recorded the positions of 260 yews and taken measurements of 119 trees. The histogram below groups the measured trees according to their girth. The pie chart shows the percentage of yews in each girth range, while the column graph compares the statistics for each of the three areas visited.

