

Among the 11 yews at this site there is an ancient (tree 1) and 4 veterans (trees 2,3,4 and 5). The site has been well documented, though recorders have concentrated on the ancient tree almost to the exclusion of the others.

Archdeacon William Coxe in 1799 was the first to note yews at this site, describing one with a circumference of 25'. Since then a succession of observers have visited Mamhilad to record the yews. Loudon's description of 1840 is quoted in Lowe's 1896 *The Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland*: 'At 4' the large tree divides into six main branches, one of which is quite decayed. The trunk is hollow; and on the north side it has an opening down to the ground, which is gradually contracting on both sides by annual deposits of new wood. Within this opening, and in the centre of the original tree, is seen another, and apparently detached yew, several feet in diameter, and in a great state of vigorous growth; it is in fact itself a great tree, and overtops the old one. On examination, however, it is found to be united behind, and also at some distance from the ground, by two great contorted arms, one on each side of the inner wall of its decaying parent'. He recorded a circumference of 29' 4".

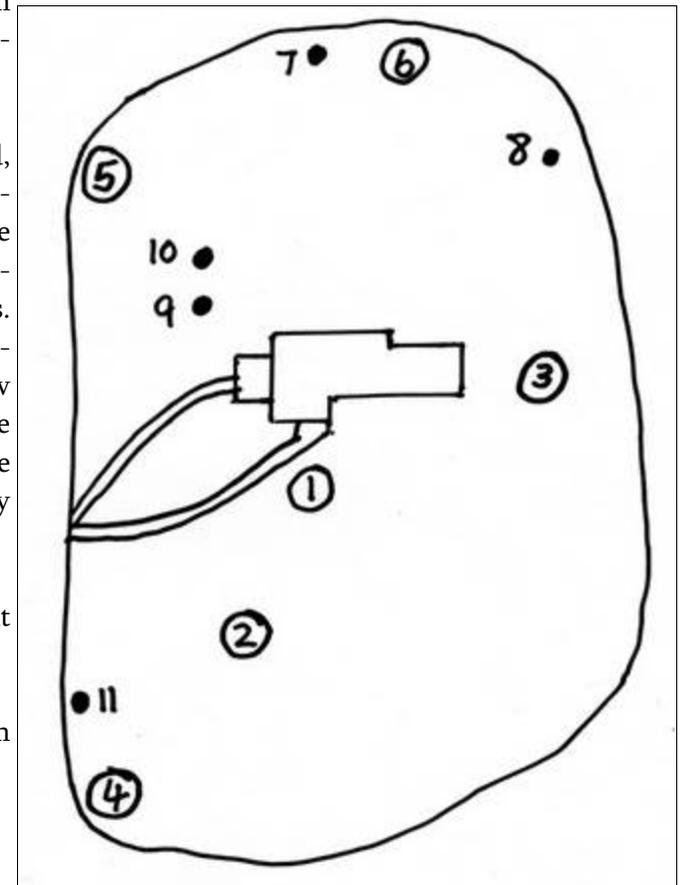
In 1851 botanist Edwin Lees observed that 'Much of the Welch and Monmouthshire churchyards are black with a multiplicity of yew-trees, for instance that of Mamhilade, which has twelve or thirteen, several most luxuriantly cinctured with ivy, and one whose monstrous bole is 30' 7" in circumference'.

In 1880 T.H.Thomas presented a paper to the Cardiff Naturalist Society. He had much to say about Mamhilad, and especially this yew. 'If the Llanthewy tree be the King, the grand "Mamhilad Yew" is the Queen of our locality. Mamhilad Church..... is surrounded by a grove of eleven yews, of which the female tree at the porch is the finest. The girth is 31' at 4' from the ground. At about this height it divides into four principal branches, the largest being 9 feet around. A stone seat has been built against the trunk, and its bossed sides are free from twigs. Hollow and decaying, its bole is filled with mould, into which new roots are creeping. An ancient ivy has established itself upon it.....swollen to the enormous size of 2' 6", has sent its tentacles far and wide over the yew boughs.....But the tree is defenceless, and unless an axe is brought to the rescue may succumb. In spite of strife with suffocating and disintegrating forces, the tree stands full of glorious leaf, spreading its branches 60 feet wide and 50 feet in the air, while at the season it is studded with a queenly *parure* of ruby berries. It will probably long outlive its consort at Llanthewy'.

In 1895 Lowe updated these details with notes supplied by Rev C.Cook, who measured the yew as 30' 9" at ground level and 29' 10" at 3'. He also noted 5 other yews with girths between 15' and 20'.

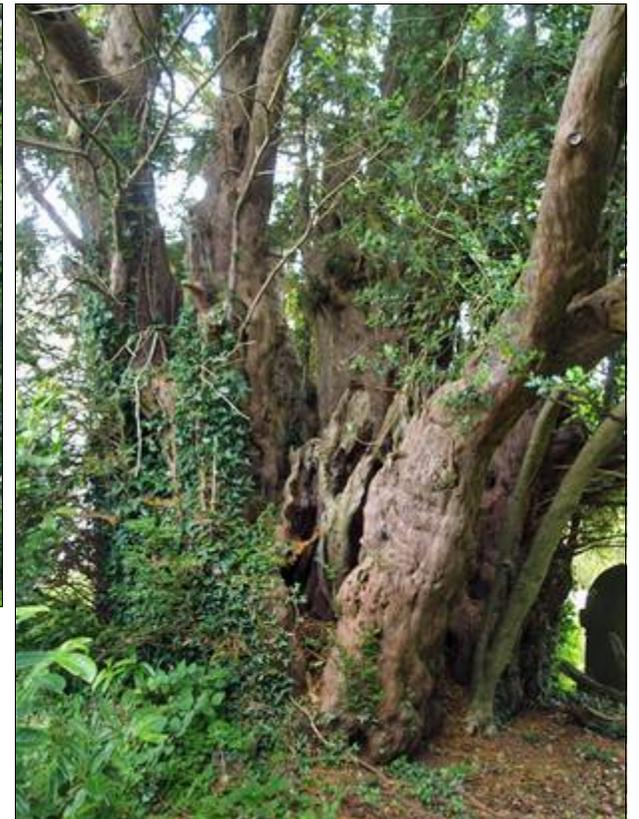
In 1955 the Rev R. Edgar Seaton's notes describe that 'the tree now consists of 2 trunks, one is 22' the other 18' in girth. Circumference at ground level is 31' 6". The hollow is not filled up, you can step round the inside'.

In 1999 I recorded 31' 3" at the ground.





Mamhilad's ancient female yew is seen above in an 1833 engraving and a 1998 photo taken from the church porch. By 2014 this side of the tree had become obscured by twiggy growth and the photos below show it from the opposite side. The large holly is unnecessary competition and should be removed.



Mamhilad's four veterans are seen on the following pages, photographed in 2014.



Tree 2 (above) : A male yew covered in ivy in 1997. Its removal made it possible in 2014 to appreciate its substantial bole, from which several thick branches develop at a height of about 8'. In 1998 a girth of 20' 7" was recorded at the ground. In 2014 a girth of 20' 3" was recorded between 2' and 3' .

Tree 3: A male yew growing on sloping ground. New stems are emerging from the base of the tree. Including these a girth of 17' 4" was recorded in 2014. Excluding these girth was 15' 11".

At the time of our 1997 visit we noted the dead trunk of another tree that had been growing inside the yew. This was a mountain ash, and in 1958 the Rev. R Edgar Seaton wrote about it, concluding that 'the seed the ash must have fallen in a hole in the trunk about 8' to 10' from the ground. The ash now tops the yew'.





Tree 4 is female, growing SW of the church and on the boundary of churchyard, garden and the road. Inaccessible in 1997, by 2014 it was possible to get a tape round the tree between the ground and 2' and confirm its girth as about 20'. The tree appears to have a central platform at a height of about 12' around which many branches develop.



Tree 5, female, grows NW of the church close to the road. Only its canopy is visible from the churchyard, but breaking through thick vegetation and crossing uneven and sloping ground it was possible to record this fine veteran tree, with a girth of 16' 5" at the base. It appears to be solid with many thick branches.

The remaining yews are of smaller girth and could easily go unnoticed. However, searching behind the dense twiggy growth covering tree 10 (left), I found a large section of old trunk, probably the remaining fragment of one of the large girthed yews mentioned in past accounts. Other notable yews are number 11 (centre), for which the churchyard retaining wall has been adapted, and tree 6 (right) growing inside an impenetrable wall of holly.

