

# Dorset Yews

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

### Part 2 – The Middle 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. On through Blandford and then Wimborne to Christchurch where it converges with the Avon and Mude to flow out to sea between Mudeford Quay and Hengistbury Spit, some 60 miles from its many sources.

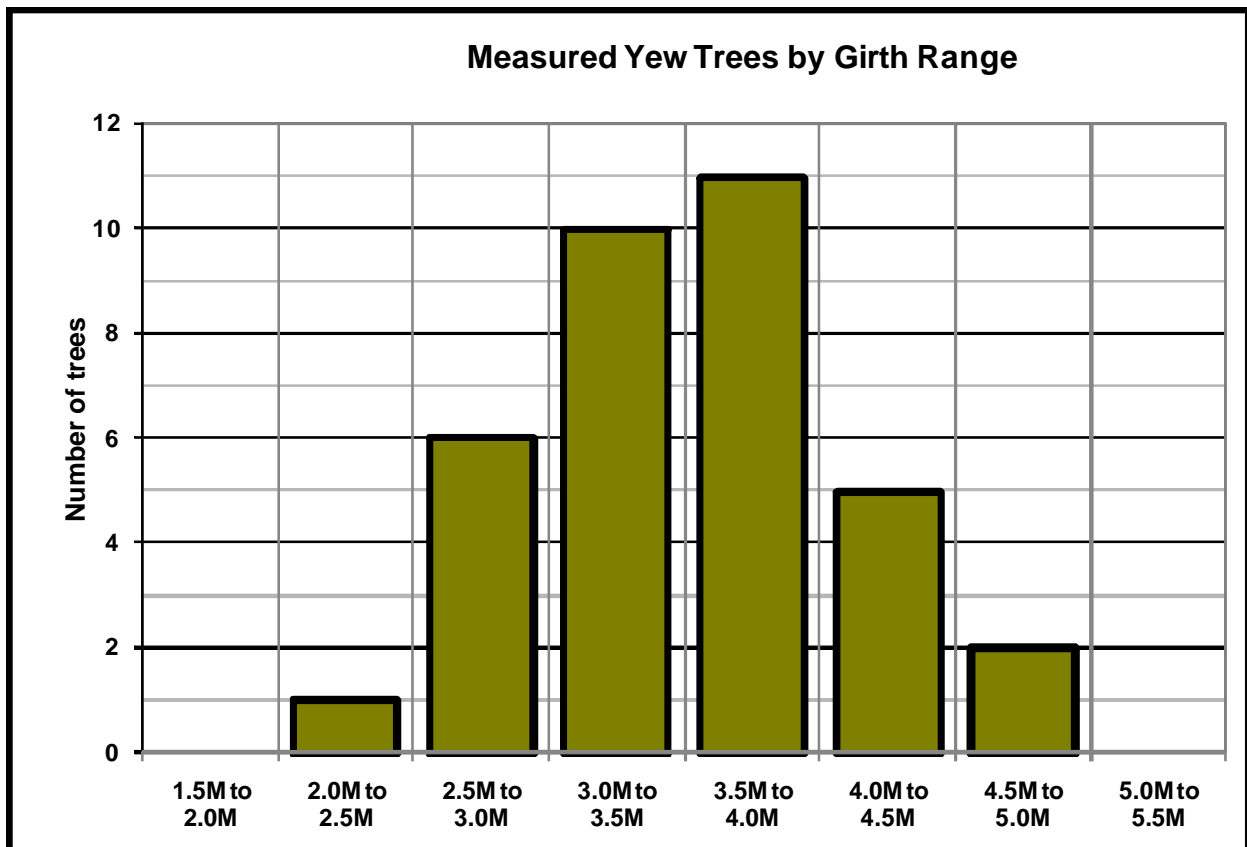
## The Middle Stour OS194 (unless otherwise stated):

This is the second of three reports that split the River Stour into three sections: Upper, Middle and Lower Stour. The areas described are not based on geological features, but on the areas covered by the Ordnance Survey maps 183, 194 and 195. The Middle Stour is therefore described as from south of Hinton St Mary at Yewstock, through Sturminster Newton and on to Blandford Forum, a distance of ten miles by road.

Along its path it is joined by the Caundle Brook, Lydden, Divelish, Darknoll, Fontmell Brook, Cookwell Brook, Iwerne and the Pimperne stream. All of the towns and villages along this part of the Stour and her tributaries were included, with thirty three churches visited. Of these, twenty two 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 fifty one trees were noted at these sites of which thirty five had measurements recorded. (See graph below, which has been grouped by girth and does not include any estimated\* girths.) 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.



***The Cam, a tributary of the Caundle Brook rises near Three Gates and travels north for five miles to join the Caundle Brook along with other unnamed streams.***

**Longburton – St James the Great – ST649147**

**19.5 miles W of Blandford**

A 13<sup>th</sup> century church which was rebuilt in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, retaining the original tower. It was added to in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and restored in 1873.

One male yew with a girth of 10' 7" at 1' grows south of the west gate.



**Hermitage – St Mary – ST649069**

**23 miles W of Blandford**

In 1279 Edward the Second confirmed the friars in their possession of a forest clearing of ten acres, on which to build a house. Twelve years later, he extended the grant to one hundred acres of 'waste in the forest', to be given to 'the prior chaplain hermits of Blackmore for Ever'. Their priory was dedicated to St Lawrence, and was called the 'Priory of Hermitage juxta Dorchester'. Later, the dedication was changed to the Virgin Mary, and the present Church is known as St Mary's Church, Hermitage. It underwent extensive restoration in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and again in 1800.

Of three yews at this site, one to the east of the church (below left) had been recently felled while one to the north had been dead for some time. The remaining male tree (below right) growing to the north west was suffering with dieback in the canopy but had some new shoots emerging from the bole. Girth was 9' 9" at 1' from the top of the mound.



*The Caundle Brook rises NW of Buckland Newton; this could be disputed as its source but the OS map indicates many streams emerging in this area to join at the same place as the Cam. It then flows NE to converge with the Lydden near Lydlinch.*

**Holwell – St Lawrence – ST699119**

**15.5 miles W of Blandford**

A late 15<sup>th</sup> century church with general restoration in 1885.

One young female yew grows near to the south entrance. The Yew Gazetteer entry from Mark Hinsley is as follows: "Mee described a pair of old yews, of which only one now survives as a regenerating stump."

**Bishops Caundle – Unknown dedication – ST696131**

**15.4 miles W of Blandford**

The church is often known as St Peter and St Paul but the dedication was lost. Much of the body of the church dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the tower dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Restoration was carried out in the 1860s.

Three female yews grow within the churchyard. The first two are found along the east boundary, with the largest girthing 6' 10" at 1'. The third grows to the west of the church.



- *The Lydden has two main sources; one east of Buckland Newton, the other from springs south of Bulbarrow Hill. It travels north to be joined with the Caundle Brook and then converges with the Stour NE of Hinton St Mary.*

**Buckland Newton – The Holy Rood – ST687052**

**18.7 miles W of Blandford**

The church dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century with 15<sup>th</sup> century additions and several periods of restoration during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Four male yews are found in this churchyard, which includes 3 young trees growing north east of the church. To the south west is this hollowed tree with parts of the outer trunk missing. This allows for easy viewing of two large internal stems along with fine aerial roots. Girth at 3' to avoid various protrusions was 13' 7".





**Mappowder – St Peter and St Paul – ST735059**

**12.8 miles W of Blandford**

The church is thought to date from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, with major restoration in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and again in 1868.

Two yews grow at either end of the north perimeter. The female (below left) grows nearest to the gate and had a girth of 11' 9" at 1' and 12' 2" at 3'. The male (below right) girthed 13' 4" at 1'.



**Hazelbury Bryan – St Mary and St James – ST752082**

**13 miles W of Blandford**

The church sits within the tiny hamlet of Droop, one of the seven hamlets that form the village of Hazelbury Bryan.

Earliest records indicate a small Norman church in 1244 dedicated to St Mary. It fell into disrepair and was pulled down and rebuilt in 1400 and rededicated.

One male yew grows north east of the church, its girth 10' 10" at 1' over a light covering of ivy





**Lydlinch – St Thomas a Becket – ST742133**

**11.6 miles W of Blandford**

Records indicate that the church was finished in 1479, while retaining its 13<sup>th</sup> century tower.

This site contains eight yews and one stump. A lime avenue leads you west from the east gate to the first two yews; a male girthing 12' 3" at 2', measured above its swollen base (right), while opposite a young female is planted close to an old yew stump. The male gives the appearance of starting to hollow.

Near to the south porch is a female yew measuring 10' 6" at the root crown while to the west of the church are two young trees, male and female. North west of the church is a large male on top of the raised bank, measuring 14' 4" at the root crown (below left). Nearby and on a raised mound away from the bank grows a fine fluted female (below right) girthing 12' at 1' and 12' 2" at 3'. The eighth tree, also growing on the raised bank is female, girthing 11' 4" at 1' 6".



- *The Divelish rises in several places around Woolland and Ibberton then flows north to converge with the Stour just north of Sturminster Newton.*

**Woolland – The Chapel – ST776069**

**10 miles W of Blandford**



There have been four churches on or near the current site; their dates are 1310, 1547, 1743 with the present church built in 1856/7.

One massive female yew grows south of the porch and is recorded in the Gazetteer with a girth of about 31' at 1'.

The tree was not measured during this visit and the girth is not included in the histogram on the front page.



**Ibberton – St Eustace – ST789075**

**9.5 miles W of Blandford**

The church was built around 1380 – 1400 and added to in the 1500s. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was in a poor state of repair and finally collapsed in 1889. Restoration was carried out in the period 1902/1909. Access is via a steep path that is unsuitable for vehicles.

Four yews grow in the churchyard with the first two female trees along the west perimeter. The northerly tree (below left at A) girthed 10' 1" at the root crown while (B) girthed 11' 5" at 1'. Part of the outer trunk was missing but it showed no obvious sign of being hollow.

To the south of the porch grow two male trees; one young and the other (below right) hollow with an internal stem and part of the outer trunk missing. Girth was 11' 7" at 1'.

The Gazetteer entry describes a lost yew near to a well below the church.



**Belchalwell – St Aldhelm – ST794097**

**9.2 miles W of Blandford**

The porch is the oldest part of the church and dates from around 1190. Rebuilding in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was followed by major work in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and in 1912 when the tower and porch were restored.

One male tree grows south of the porch. It has a fine fluted bole which girthed 11' 6" at the root crown.



**Fifehead Neville – All Saints – ST768110**

**11.4 miles W of Blandford**

Originally a 14<sup>th</sup> century church having major restoration in 1873.

One hollow female yew, with a girth of 11' 1" at 1' grows on a raised bank at the south east gate.



- *The Darknoll begins as four streams near to Betchalwell and Okeford Fitzpaine and then converge as one stream with the Stour at Fiddleford Mill.*

**Okeford Fitzpaine – St Andrews – ST807108**

**7.2 miles W of Blandford**



The church was entirely rebuilt in 1866 but retained the 14<sup>th</sup> century tower. There is a record of consecration in 1302.

Two yews grow in the grounds. The most significant, shown here, grows on a high mound west of the church. It is female with a girth of 16' 1" near to the root crown and at its narrowest point.

North east of the porch is a male yew with a girth of 11' 1", measured at 1' from the top of the bank.

- *The Stour then continues on through Manston (covered in the first report) and then to Hammoon, where it is joined by the Fontmell Brook.*
- *The Fontmell Brook starts at Mill Bridge in Fontmell Magna (above the bridge, it is Collyer's Brook). Jacob's Brook joins it at Piper's Mill Bridge, and from there it runs into the Stour east of Hammoon.*

**Fontmell Magna – St Andrew - OS183/ST865169**

**8.7 miles N of Blandford**

Part of the tower dates from the 15th century and the church was rebuilt in 1863.

One tall male yew grows south west of the church. An embedded headstone hampered measurement, but 10' 3" at about 2' was recorded. A second male grows north of the church. The Gazetteer entry records this as a lost yew site.





**Sutton Waldron – St Bartholomew – OS183/ST861357**

**8 miles N of Blandford**



The present church replaced the earlier derelict church in 1847.

One female grows near to the east perimeter and is partially hidden from sight. The bole has a very smooth reddish hue and measured 11' 2" at 1'.

**Hammoon – St Paul - ST817146**

**8.6 miles NW of Blandford**

The church was built in the late 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> century and restored in 1896.

Two male yews grow within the grounds; the first is found just to the east of the church and comprises five branches that give the appearance of growing up from an older tree. In the centre is much rotten wood, but ivy hampered further investigation. An approximate\* girth of around 13' is given. The 2nd yew with a girth of 9' 3" at 2' grows north of the church.



- *Continue along the Stour to reach Child Okeford.*

**Child Okeford – St Nicholas – ST836127**

**6.7 miles NW of Blandford**



The church was rebuilt in 1850, retaining its 15<sup>th</sup> century tower.

Four yews grow south of the church porch, with the largest to the south east. The first three described are female. Working from east to west, the first (A) measured 12' 2" at 2'. A fine sulphur fungus on the bole probably signifies that hollowing is taking place. The second (B) measured 11' 11" at 1'. The third had a girth of 8' 4" at 1' and finally at the south west the only male yew girthed 11' 9" at 1'.



- *The Cookwell Brook rises just east of the church at Okeford Fitzpaine and converges with the Stour at Hayward bridge nr Shillingstone.*

**Shillingstone – Church of the Holy Rood – ST825115**

**5.4 miles NW of Blandford**

It is suggested that this is the site of a Saxon church which was replaced by the Normans in 1090. The tower was replaced or added in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with a full restoration in 1888.

Two yews grow within the grounds; the first on a small mound south of the porch, a female with advanced hollowing and fine aerial roots. The girth was 12' 2" at the root crown and 12' 6" at 3'. One large branch and several minor branches have been removed from the north side of the tree and it has the appearance of one that will eventually split into three fragments. To the north of the church grows a young male measuring 9' 6" at 1'.



- *At Stourpaine, the Stour is joined by the Iwerne which rises in the chalk hills to the north of Iwerne Minster in Dorset, runs through it and travels for about four miles before joining the Stour at Stourpaine. The river which lends its name to Iwerne Minster is an ancient river whose name came from the Celtic language and is believed to mean "yew-tree stream".*

**Iwerne Minster – St Mary – ST868144**

**7 miles N of Blandford**

A Saxon charter dated 871 refers to "ywen". The Old English "mynster" (church) is probably referring to the 10<sup>th</sup> century Abbey that was in possession of the church at that time.

The present church was built over the remains of an earlier Norman structure from 1100. The tower was added in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Restoration was carried out in 1870 when the tower was reduced.

Of the six yews growing in the churchyard, five are to the south and east of the church and one to the north. They are all male. South east of the porch two grow close to each other. The tree below left measured 13' 2" at 1', the other 12' 2" at 1', this one with evidence of an internal root. Moving east to the churchyard perimeter is found an unmeasurable tree with many low branches, while another nearby on a mound girthed 9' 2" at 1'. Moving north but still on the east side of the church is the yew (below right) with 13 branches sprouting from the ground. Was it multi planted or cut down many years ago so that what we see is re-growth? The final yew, to the north of the church, girthed 9' 7" at 1'.





**Stourpaine – Holy Trinity – ST861094**

**3.4 miles N of Blandford**

The church was rebuilt in 1858 but retained its 15<sup>th</sup> century tower.

One large yew grows east of the church and comprises four large branches emerging from a very short bole. Thick ivy prevented measurement.

- *On the south side of the Stour*

**Durweston – St Nicholas – ST859085**

**3 miles NW of Blandford**



The church was rebuilt in 1846 but retained the 15<sup>th</sup> century tower.

Two female yews grow within the grounds. The largest, measuring 15' 1" at 1', grows west of the church.

The second grows south east of the church and has a short bole with seven large branches.

- *The Pimperne Stream runs from and through the village of Pimperne into the Stour at Blandford Forum. It has been suggested this is a pre-Saxon name meaning five trees.*

**Pimperne – St Peter – OS195/ST904094**

**2 miles NE of Blandford**

The present church was built on the site of an older Saxon church during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but by 1873 it had been completely rebuilt. Parts of the Norman church survive and are incorporated in the new building.

One female yew grows on a high bank outside the south porch and measured 14' 6" at 1' and 14' 5" at 3'. Many lower branches have been removed over the years.

This is the last recorded yew on the Middle Stour.

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

Folke – St Lawrence  
Caundle Marsh – St Peter and St Paul  
Holnest – St Mary  
Glanvilles Wootton – St Mary the Virgin  
Pulham – St Thomas a Becket  
Stoke Wake – All Saints  
Sturminster Newton – St Mary  
Compton Abbas – St Mary (new church)  
Iwerne Courtney or Shroton – St Mary  
Blandford Forum – St Peter and St Paul

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

