

# **Wiltshire Yews**

## **An Inventory of Churchyard Yews Along the Nadder Valley.**

**By Peter Norton**

**Introduction:**

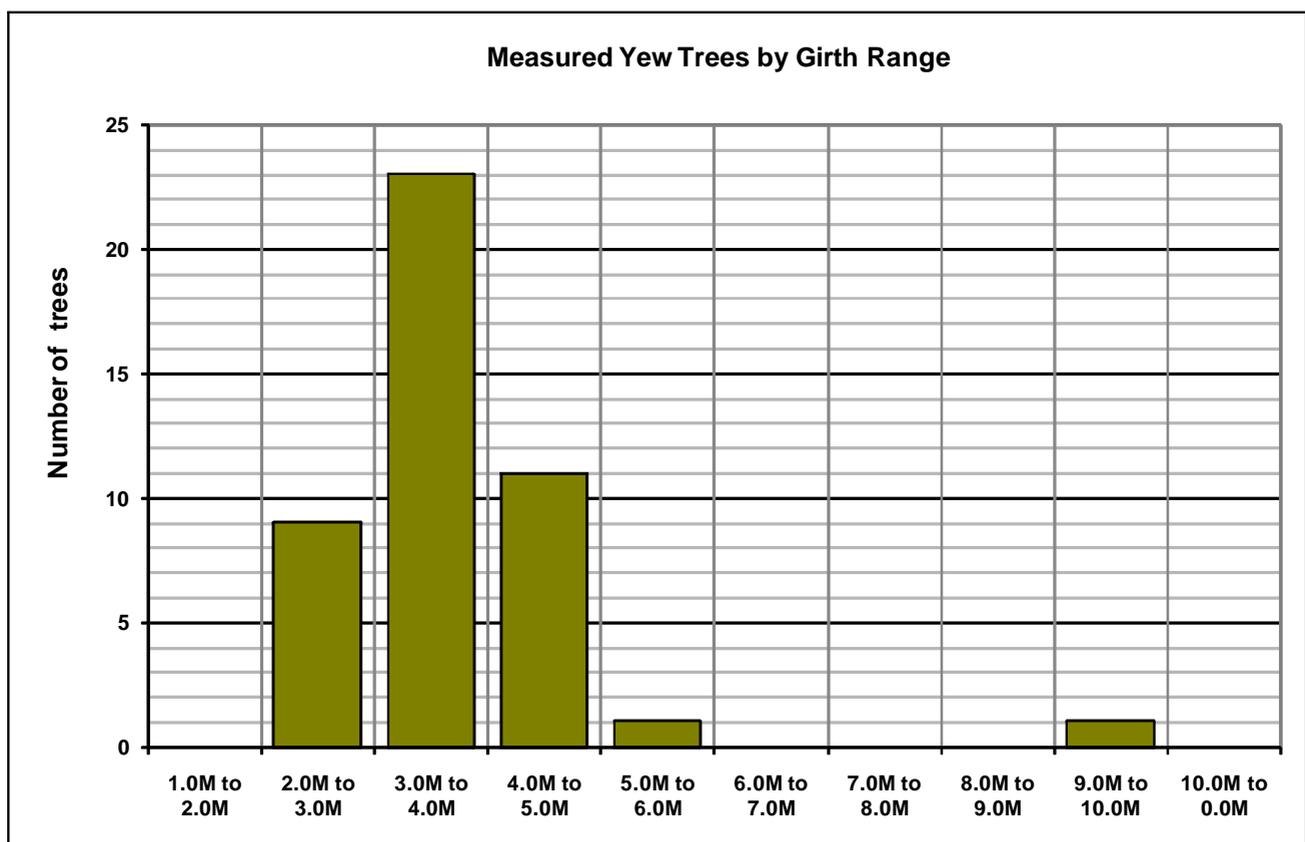
This report is the third of five observations of churchyard Yews in and around the rivers Wylfe, Ebbel, Nadder and Bourne that converge with the Wiltshire / Hampshire Avon as it flows through the Salisbury area.

The River Nadder is the most substantial of the Avon tributaries, rising around Donhead St Mary and Charlton within the Vale of Wardour and then flowing through some of the prettiest countryside in southern England, twisting and turning amongst the peaceful Wiltshire sheep meadows.

During the course of its 22 miles the Nadder grows in size until it flows through Wilton House grounds where a fine Palladian Bridge straddles the river. Just outside of the grounds the Nadder and Wylfe converge at Quidhampton. The Wylfe then loses its identity and the Nadder flows its last few miles before converging with the Avon near to Salisbury Cathedral Close.

All of the towns and villages along this route were included, with thirty four churchyards visited. Of these twenty five contained yews, and although many of those mentioned are small in stature compared to some of the veterans already recorded within the Yew Gazetteer, it was felt that, as time progresses, these younger trees will become our future giants for the next generations of yew enthusiasts.

A total of one hundred and twenty nine trees were noted at these sites of which forty five 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 but converted to metric. Where multiple individual tree measurements were taken only the lowest to the root/ground was used for this graph.



Where Irish Yews were significant in number at the documented churchyards, they are also noted in this report.

Appendix I lists all the churches visited and those indicated thus \* are detailed within the body of this report.

All recorded height measurements are taken above the root development if visible.

**Donhead St Mary - St Mary the Virgin**

Map 184 ST 906 244

18.5 Miles SW of Salisbury

A Roman road from Bath to Badbury Rings in Dorset crosses the parish and the church stands on a ridge above the road.

The church, originally 12<sup>th</sup> century, was rebuilt in 1291. It underwent alterations during the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, followed by restoration in 1884-5.

Four yews grow within the churchyard. The first two are seen as you enter from the south gate, growing on raised ground at the east and west perimeters.

The male yew growing to the east has dense low sweeping limbs and could not be accurately measured. An estimated\* girth of between 7' to 9' is given.

On the west perimeter a female yew (below left) splits into two trunks about 2' from the base. Girths of 6' 9" and 7' respectively at 1' above the split were recorded. The girth around the base was 13', a figure exaggerated by several protrusions.

A second female yew on the west perimeter had a girth of 7' at 1'.

Lastly is a male yew (below right) with a girth of 9' 8" at 1' and 9' 10" at 3'.



**Donhead St Andrew - St Andrew**

Map 184 ST 914 248

17.7 miles SW of Salisbury

Parts of the church date back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century with additions during the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The porch was rebuilt in 1826 with further internal building work in 1838 and restoration during 1875.

Two female yews grow within the churchyard, the first is multi stemmed and grows at the far north eastern perimeter. The only measurement taken was at ground level where a girth of about 12' was recorded.

The second yew, with a girth of 9' 6" at 1', grows near to the north perimeter, where an adjacent house protrudes into the churchyard.



**Hindon - St John the Baptist**

Map 184 ST 909 329

16 Miles NW of Salisbury

A chapel, built in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century and altered during the following centuries, was demolished to make way for the current church, completed in 1871.

Of five yews growing within the churchyard, four of young status grow along the south perimeter. These have recently had their southerly branches cropped by up to three metres where they hung over an adjoining property (planning application 2008). They now look quite sad.

The fifth yew, female, (right) grows east of the church, and has a large number of low hanging branches. By carefully threading a tape through the growth a girth of 10' 7" at 2' was recorded.



**Chicklade - All Saints**

Map 184 ST 912 345

18 Miles NW of Salisbury

Chicklade sits north of and alongside the busy A303. Its church was built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and may be on the site of a far earlier church. After some minor restorations it was rebuilt and finished in 1834 in the 12<sup>th</sup> century style.

This churchyard is strictly speaking outside of the Nadder catchment, but since this is such an unusual group of yews it is included in this report.



Above the perimeter wall looking west from the church is a semi-circular grove of ten younger yews, of which the largest (NW of the church) is approximately 8', while the others range between 4' and 7' in girth.

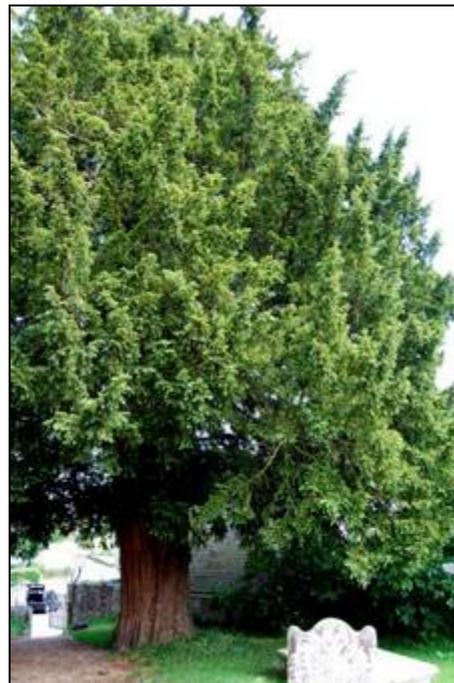
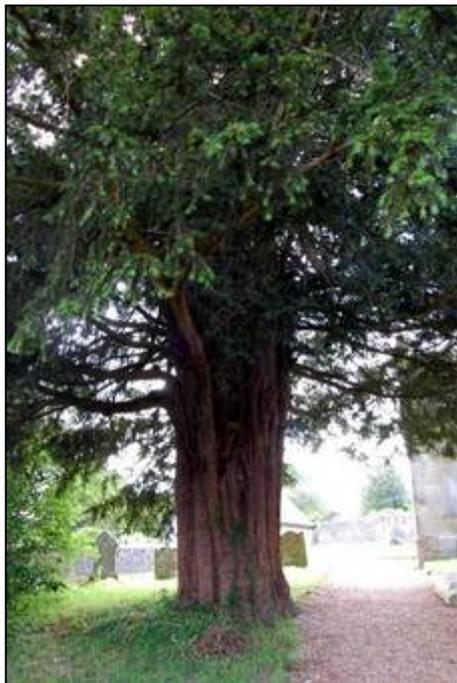
There is nothing remarkable about these trees until you notice that there appears to be a single root structure connecting all of the individuals.

**Fonthill Bishop - All Saints**

Map 184 ST 934 330

14 Miles NW of Salisbury

The church was first mentioned in 1242 and records indicate a porch was added during the 15<sup>th</sup> century followed by an extensive restoration in 1879.



A tall columnar yew with thick foliage stands near the churchyard entrance at the south east corner. Girth was 14' 2" at 1', 13' 6" at 3' and 13' 10" at 4' 6".

## Fonthill Gifford - Holy Trinity

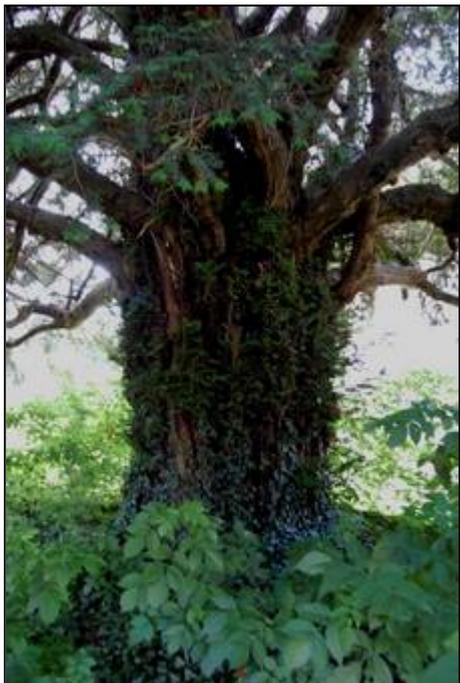
Map 184 ST 929 312

15 Miles NW of Salisbury

St Nicholas, the original church in Fonthill Gifford, stood next to a stream in the north east corner of the parish from 1291 until it was demolished in 1747. As I understand it no trace remains.

At the same time (1747) Holy Trinity was built and located 1km further away, near the crossroads and the Inn, only to be demolished and replaced by a second Holy Trinity building during 1864-6. The current church is on a NE/SW orientation.

The churchyard is surrounded on three sides by a ha-ha, while the east boundary is defined by a fine stone wall. The church is approached through an avenue of six large cypresses.



The churchyard contains eleven yews of which the most notable, female, (far left) grows outside of the south east door. Girth was 14' 6" at 1' and 14' 8" at 3'.

Seven yews grow along the north west perimeter and moving from north to south, the third yew, female, (left) measured 11' 4" at about 1'.



The fifth yew, male, (left) had a girth of 11' 7" at 1' and 12' 2" at 2'.

The remaining three yews, with girths between 6' to 9', are found on the south east side of the church.

The largest yew in the churchyard has a girth that suggests it could be older than the church built in 1747. [British History](#) shows a sketch of the church in 1749 and there certainly appear to be trees that might be interpreted as yew growing close to the building. This might of course be artistic licence, and architectural artists were not always skilled at botanical drawing.

We also need to be aware that at nearby Sutton Mandeville (p.11) is a yew with a known planting date and a rapid rate of growth. In 229 years it has grown to 13ft 2ins, a similar growth rate to that of the Fonthill Gifford Yew, which has grown to 14' 6" in 261 years.

There was an Abbey on this site during the 7<sup>th</sup> century until its destruction by the Danes in the 9<sup>th</sup>. It is almost certain that a wooden Saxon church, of which there is now no trace, once stood on this site. In 984 the village and church were granted by Ethelred to the Abbess of Shaston (Shaftesbury).

The Norman style church we see today was initially built during the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. The church was altered during the 13th and 14th centuries and a major overhaul was undertaken following a lightning strike in 1762. Further alterations were carried out in the 19th and 20th centuries.



There are a total of twelve yews within the churchyard. Its most notable is Wiltshire's oldest tree, a female yew with a girth of 30', and its vast hollow space filled with concrete. The view taken here (above left) is from the rear of the concrete fill. Further details are to be found in the 'Yew Gazetteer' webpage.

Near to the north east perimeter, the next largest yew, male, (above right) had a girth of 10' 2" at 1'.

A further ten yews, six males and four females, are scattered around the churchyard and all of young status.

One young yew along the south perimeter and at the east of the church is of particular interest. At first sight it appears to be one of the forms of Golden Yew, but closer examination reveals that many branches have reverted back to the Common Yew form.

## Ansty - St James

Map 184 ST 956 263

14 Miles SW of Salisbury

Parts of the current church date from before 1210. In 1211 the Knights Hospitaller settled in Ansty and formed a small Commandery or Preceptory as it became known after the demise (early 13<sup>th</sup> century) of the Knights Templar, whose lands were transferred to them.

The group built the present church, completed in 1230. As well as a fishpond, they also constructed a Hospice which was used by knights to recuperate after service in the crusades.

Alterations occurred in the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The church was partially rebuilt in 1842 with additions during 1878 followed by restorations in 1917 and 1965.

It was dedicated to St. James in 1763.

Three yews are found within the churchyard, the first two growing at the churchyard entrance. Low growth prevented the measurement of one, the other, shown on the right, measured 7' 9" at 1' and 7' 11" at 3'.



The third yew is seen at the rear in the photo above left. This was considered at one stage to be regrowth from an old stump, closer examination however reveals a mixture of Common Yew and Golden Yew branches.

St Peter's church was built in 1843, on land donated by the Earl of Pembroke, and replaced the old church (see p10 below) which stood on lower ground just alongside the stream which flows into the Nadder.



The new church has seven yews within its churchyard with the first, female, (above left) growing adjacent to the south east gate on the raised east perimeter bank. It has two major limbs and branches from one of these form an arch over the road.

On the south side of the churchyard entrance another female, (above right) has a girth of 9' 3" at 1' and 9' at 3'.



The male yew (below) grows midway along the east perimeter and appeared to have the largest girth and height. Measurement was hampered by low foliage, thick stemmed ivy and a drop of five feet into the adjoining property. The root development along this bank is impressive.



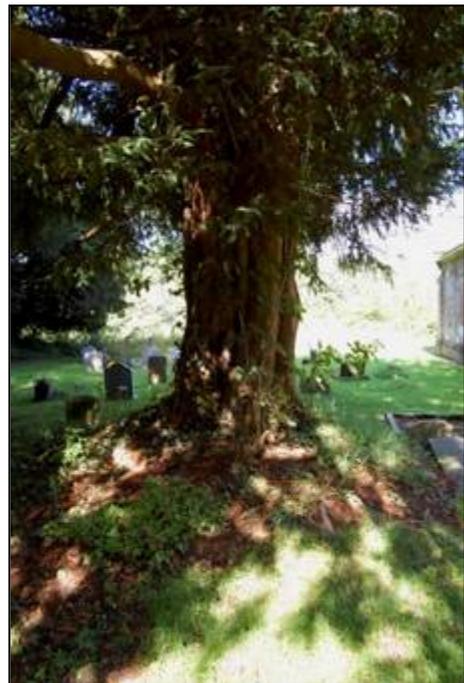
Carefully threading the tape through the growth at ground level and behind the thick stemmed ivy where possible, returned an approximate\* girth of 13'.



**Swallowcliffe – cont.**

Along the north perimeter grow a further three yews, two female and one male.

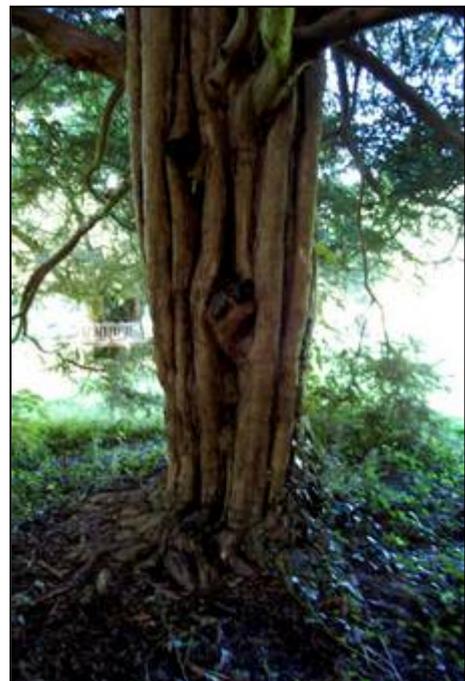
The final yew, male (right) grows from a raised mound at the north west corner of the churchyard and has a girth of 9' 6" at the ground and 9' 3" at 3'.



**Swallowcliffe - St Peter's old church**

Grid ref: ST 965 271

The original church dated from 940 to 1843 and was subject to flooding; even today the ground is very damp under foot. No trace of the church remains, apart from a perimeter wall and gate. The stone was used in the rebuilding of the new church.



Of the two yews growing in this abandoned churchyard, the most obvious is the male, with a memorial bench circling the tree. Masses of twigggy growth made measurement difficult, but a girth of about 10' at 2' was recorded.

The trunks splits into several branches a few feet above the bench and the tree spreads outwards and is of low appearance. Vast amounts of lichen and moss were particularly noticeable on the branches and foliage, probably a result of the damp growing conditions. It set me wondering whether it might also be an indicator of a tree that is older than its girth alone suggests?

A female yew, which towers over the older male, grows to the rear of the churchyard near the small stream that flows alongside the churchyard perimeter; it has a fluted trunk with a girth of 8' 1" and 8' 5" at 3'.

**Sutton Mandeville - All Saints**

Map 184 ST 986 288

12 Miles SW of Salisbury



Records show the church was built during the 13<sup>th</sup> century with additions during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> and restoration in 1862.

Its one yew, growing south west of the church porch, has sparse foliage, with many branches having been removed or cut back. A girth of 13' 2" at 4' 6" was recorded.

A Known Planting Date of 1780 has been attributed to this tree.

**Fovant - St George**

Map 184 ST 996 295

11 Miles SW of Salisbury

Although Fovant was founded by the Saxons the current church dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century with some restoration during 1860.

Five yews grow within the churchyard with four females of young status, hidden behind dense undergrowth along the south perimeter as you enter the churchyard.

The fifth, a fluted male, grows on a small mound outside the church south west entrance. Girth was 11' 4" at 1' above the impressive root system.



**Compton Chamberlayne - St Michael**

Map 184 SU 029 300

9 Miles W of Salisbury

The church of St Michael and All Angels was initially built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century with additions during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> and a major restoration in 1878.



Three yews grow within this churchyard, with the most notable to the south of the church porch having a girth of 14' 11" at 2'.

The tree appears to have three major limbs, two of which are chained together at a height of about 7', while the third has hollowed (right) and begun to decay. This will eventually reduce the tree's girth. The lighter dead wood can be seen in the front of the photograph (above left).

A very young yew grows just south of this old tree and a plaque indicates it was planted in 1977 to mark Queen Elizabeth's Jubilee. Another young yew with a girth of 6' grows by the churchyard entrance.

**Chilmark - St Margaret of Antioch**

Map 184 ST 969 327

12 Mile NW of Salisbury

The church was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century with additions in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> and restoration in 1856.

This site boasts 16 yews that grow alongside the south, west and north perimeters. A mixture of nettles, low foliage, vast piles of grass clippings and at least two very active buried wasp nests made measuring difficult and a winter visit will be needed to record girths with any accuracy.



Along the south perimeter grow four young yews, three female and one male.

Seven yews, four female and three male, grow along the west perimeter – the tree shown in the photo is typical of these.

Five yews, two female and three male, grow on the raised north perimeter, of which one male and one female at the north west corner of the churchyard appeared to have the largest girths in the churchyard. For the moment estimated girths\* of between 7' to 10' are given.

Four clipped Irish Yews lead to the church porch.

### Teffont Magna - St Edward

Map 184 ST 989 324

11 Miles NW of Salisbury

The church was built during the 13<sup>th</sup> century but there could have been an earlier Saxon church on or near this site. It is largely untouched having just a porch added in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and was restored in 1955.



The church's full name reads - Church of St Edward King of the West Saxons. It sits alongside a small stream known locally as the Teff, which rises just to the north at Spring Head and eventually flows into the Nadder.

A female yew grows south of the church porch and has a girth of 9' 10" at 1'.

### Teffont Evias - St Michael

Map 184 ST 992 324

10.5 Miles NW of Salisbury



As you travel south to the next church the Teff fronts several of the thatched cottages along the way and has to be one of the prettiest views along this route. The churchyard is entered by crossing the stream via an ornate bridge and the yew is on the left.

A church may have stood on this site since 1100 and is thought to have been rebuilt in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and altered during the 16<sup>th</sup>. It was restored in 1824-6 and a spire added between 1830-43.

The church was dedicated to St Michael and all Angels by the bishop of Salisbury in 1965. No earlier dedication is known.



One female yew with a girth of 11' 11" at 1', 11' 9" at 3' and 11' 11" at 4' 6" was recorded.

Its branches sweep down to ground level where one has taken root. Also noted was recent removal of ivy.

Other yews are visible within the adjoining but private grounds of Teffont Manor.

**Dinton - St Mary**

Map 184 SU 009 315

9 Miles W of Salisbury



Records indicate a church at this site since about 1160, being rebuilt during the 13<sup>th</sup> century and added to during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> with major restorations between 1873-5.

Of the four yews found within the churchyard, two females grow close to the north west entrance to the church.

The yew on the right has a girth of 9' 1" at 1', 9' at 3' and 9' 4" at 4' 6" and that on the left a girth of 8' 6" at both 1' and 3'.



The largest yew, male, grows towards the south east of the church and separates into a central branch with seven branches radiating outwards. Girth of about 10' at the ground was recorded.

Near the south west corner of the churchyard a smaller female yew is in the process of displacing a large tomb.

**Baverstock - St Editha**

Map 184 SU 028 315

8 Miles W of Salisbury

This church is dedicated to St. Editha of Wilton and is one of only two such dedications in the country. There is evidence of a larger church on this site and parts of the modern church date from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Restoration work was carried out in 1834 and 1883.

One female yew grows on a small mound at the north west corner of the church and has a girth of 8' 4" at 1' and 8' 9" at 3'.



**Barford St Martin - St Martin**

Map 184 SU 056 313

6 Miles W of Salisbury

The church was originally built in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century with some refurbishments during the 15<sup>th</sup> and restoration in 1841. Surrounded by water meadows and otherwise liable to flooding, the church is built on an earth bank retained by a high stone wall.



There are four yews within the churchyard with a male and female (above left and centre) either side of the churchyard’s west entrance. The male, on the left, has a bulbous base and could only be measured at about 2’ from the root where a girth of 8’ was recorded. Girth of the female yew was 7’ 8” at 1’ and 7’ 5” at 2’.

Along the north perimeter is a male yew (above right) with a girth of 7’ 5” at 1’, 8’ 1” at 2’ 6” and 9’ 1” at 4’. The remaining yew, a young female, grows at the east perimeter and was not measured due to dense lower foliage.

**Burcombe - St John the Baptist**

Map 184 SU 072 311

5 Miles W of Salisbury

This small church, hidden by a tall hedge on a high bank alongside the A30, is of 13<sup>th</sup> century origin with alterations during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> and a comprehensive restoration in 1859. It was considered redundant during 2002 and closed for worship in March 2005. I understand it has now been sold and in private ownership for use as a studio.

The three yews growing within the churchyard were all hidden by summer foliage and low branches.

Two are on south west perimeter and look down over the busy A30. The largest of these had a girth of 9’ 5” at the ground and 10’ 5” at 3’. Take note that the high bank slopes steeply towards the road.

The third yew grows to the north west and was difficult to measure due to low branch growth. A girth of 9’ at about 3’ was recorded.



Ancient Wilton took its name from the Anglo-Saxon Wilsaetes tribe living on the banks of the river Wylie. The Wilsaetes and Wilton also gave their name to the county of Wiltshire, a shire county first mentioned in the 8th century. Due to the importance of this market town I have included several historical references regarding the following two sites.

This church was built in the Italian Romanesque style between 1841 and 1845 on the site of the medieval Church of St. Nicholas, at the instigation of the Countess of Pembroke. The church is not set in the usual east-west axis but north-south. This was said to be the wish of the Countess as it was the custom for churches in her native Russia. The old parish church of St. Mary was partly demolished in 1845.



Twenty one yews grow in this churchyard. The first four, two females and two males grow close to the south east perimeter at the gate leading from the adjacent house.

The female yews at the front of the photograph were measured at 2' and girths of 8' 6" and 7' 2" were recorded.

Behind these are the two male yews of which only one could be measured, its girth 9' 2" at 2'.



Just to the north of these, near to a closed church doorway, grow a male and female. The female could not be measured due to heavy, thick stemmed ivy while the male girthed 11' at 1'.



At the north west perimeter fifteen yews have been planted to form an avenue. The largest, one male and one female, grow at the most southerly position.

On the left in the photograph is the male which divides into two main trunks. Girth at ground level was 10'. Measured 1' above the separation, girths of 7' 6" and 5' were recorded.

The female opposite, measured over some ivy growth, had a girth of 10' at 1'.

This church is cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. Although no longer needed for regular worship, it remains a consecrated building.

It was originally a medieval church with some rebuilding in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and restoration in the 18<sup>th</sup>. After the new parish church of St. Mary and St. Nicholas was completed in 1845, the old parish church of St. Mary was partly demolished. The easternmost bay of the nave and the chancel were retained and the chancel converted to a small chapel.



There are seven yews in the churchyard with four young trees along the south and east perimeter. One of these has a large electrical switch box firmly attached to the upper limbs. This is used at Christmas when a large cypress tree is covered with lights.

The most impressive yew, male (below left), grows at the north west corner and has a girth of 16' 2" at 1', 16' 4" at 3' and 17' 2" at 5'.



Near to this large male tree is a female yew (centre) with a girth of 8' 2" at 1' and on the south east side of the church a male yew (right) with a girth of 10' 2" at 1'.

**Bemerton - St John**

Map 184 SU 120 305

Salisbury boundary

St. John's, completed in 1860, was built because St. Andrew's (200 yds to the east) had become too small to accommodate its parishioners.

Three yews grow here, two young trees on the west perimeter and one south of the church porch. Heavy lower growth did not allow for accurate measurements and an estimated\* girth of 6' to 8' is given.

Four clipped Irish Yews lead the way to the church porch.

**West Harnham - St George**

Map 184 SU 134 292

Salisbury boundary



There may have been a Saxon church here but certainly by 1115 it had been rebuilt, with alterations following in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a rebuild in the 14<sup>th</sup> and a major restoration in 1873-4.

One female yew grows outside the south west church porch and has a girth of 11' 7" at 1'.

**East Harnham - All Saints**

Map 184 SU 141 289

Salisbury boundary

All Saints church was built on donated land and consecrated in 1854.

One young yew with a girth of 7' at 1' grows on the north perimeter.

The Nadder splits into two main channels at West Harnham with one channel converging with the Avon near Salisbury Cathedral Close. The other channel converges with the Avon just to the north of All Saints church.

This is the last churchyard yew recorded along the Nadder Valley.



## Appendix 1: Churches visited

Those indicated thus\* are detailed within the body of this report.

Charlton	St John the Baptist
Donhead St Mary	St Mary the Virgin*
Donhead St Andrew	St Andrew*
Semley	St Leonard
Hindon	St John the Baptist*
Chicklade	All Saints*
Berwick St Leonard	St Leonard - Churches Conservation Trust
Fonthill Bishop	All Saints*
Fonthill Gifford	Holy Trinity*
Tisbury	St John the Baptist*
Tisbury	Zion Hill Chapel – Now a private house
Tisbury	Methodist
Tisbury	Church of the Sacred Heart
Ansty	St James*
Swallowcliffe	St Peter* (New church)
Swallowcliffe	St Peter* (Old church)
Sutton Mandeville	All Saints*
Fovant	St George*
Fovant	Fovant Chapel
Compton Chamberlayne	St Michael and all Angels*
Chilmark	St Margaret of Antioch*
Teffont Magna	St Edward King of the West Saxons*
Teffont Evias	St Michael and all Angels*
Dinton	St Mary*
Baverstock	St Editha*
Barford St Martin	St Martin*
Burcombe	St John the Baptist*
Wilton	St Mary and St Nicholas*
Wilton	St Mary* - Churches Conservation Trust
Bemerton	St John*
Bemerton	St Andrew
Netherhampton	St Catherine
West Harnham	St George*
East Harnham	All Saints*

### Historical references;

Historical date references have been obtained but not directly copied from;

Wiltshire County Council - [http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/church\\_search.php](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/church_search.php)

University of London and History of Parliament Trust <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/>