

It is said that there has been a church at this site since around 786AD, while the present church dates from around 1130. Although there are several fine trees growing here, including a 130 year old Wellingtonia, some Himalayan Pines and a Weeping Ash, it is only the yew whose origins might be coeval with the original church.

The Woolhope Papers noted it on no fewer than three occasions. In 1866 it was described as 'the largest that I know of in the county.....the trunk of this is partially hollow, and the ends of some of the branches are dying, but it is still a noble tree'. In 1881/2 it was 'an old, but still vigorous yew tree' and in 1888 was 'a grand old yew tree, which although it is difficult to measure on account of irregularities in its growth, may honestly be stated to have a girth of thirty feet around its hollowed stem'. Mee, in *The King's England* (c1938) described 'a magnificent yew with a girth of about 30ft and a stone seat round its base where 50 children can sit comfortably in its shade'.

The Guide to Peterchurch describes this as a yew that has been many times coppiced to provide bows, and dates it from the late 13th century. Its great girth suggests that it is considerably older. It suffered in a bad fire in the late 1970s that was 'only put out by a concerted effort with a bucket chain'. Baxter *The Eternal Yew* 1992

1998: A square stone wall surrounds the female yew which grows north-east of the church. I assume that the old black and white photograph was taken soon after the wall was built; it shows clearly that the capping stones were made to fit snugly against the bole. Did they really believe that this would halt the bole's expansion?

My own photograph shows that there is at the moment a gap between concrete and tree sufficiently large for elder and ivy to grow alongside! These invaders have also been allowed to grow inside the tree where they are nourished by several feet of accumulated humus, helping them to grow almost to the same height as the yew. I was denied access by barbed wire, presumably considered necessary to prevent further fire damage to its interior.

In 1986 on St Peter's day a small yew was planted by Bishop Cannon, to take over, if necessary, from the ancient yew. It will have many centuries to wait.

Girth - the fact that the measurements, including my own, are exact feet suggests they are approximate only.

1866: 28' at 3', and 66' in the spread of its branches from side to side. Woolhope

1938: about 30ft Mee

1944: 31' recorded by Rev. W.S. Drew for Cornish.

1990: 29½ft at 3ft - Percival Morgan

1994: 28' - Meredith

1998: 34' at 5' - Tim Hills

2015: 23' 9" min. girth close to ground - Peter Norton

