

The majority of ancient yews (400 years and older) found in England and Wales grow on the consecrated ground around churches. We can be sure that the 800+ we have so far recorded owe their survival largely to the protection afforded by their location.

The Ancient Yew Group (AYG) has been gathering information for many years and is in a position to present data showing the location of our churchyard yews.

We thus have a strong statistical base from which to argue for tree protection and this helps those who should be looking after our oldest trees to know the number, location and status of trees entrusted to their care.



The ancient Alltmawr Yew



One of Heyop's ancients

The problem is establishing who is directly responsible for protecting our oldest trees. It is likely that in many instances there is no protection at all, or that responsibility lies solely with the Vicar acting with their Church Warden, Parochial Church Council or District Council. Tree expertise in such decision making bodies is often lacking, as indeed are the funds necessary to carry out the best remedial work.

It is not always an individual church or diocese that is responsible for grounds and tree maintenance, and some burial grounds have been taken over by the local authority. This does not necessarily mean that an old yew will receive sensitive treatment, as this tree at Bromham in Wiltshire demonstrates.



Some churches, no longer used for worship, have their buildings maintained by organisations such as the *Churches Conservation Trust* and the *Friends of Friendless Churches*.

In this example at Elworthy in Somerset, a 13th century church, complete with embattled tower and outside stairway, is looked after by the Churches Conservation Trust. The tree is centuries older than the church and yet we do not know who looks after it. There are similar examples at Alton Priors in Wiltshire, Capel and Waldershare Park in Kent and Yazor in Herefordshire.



At Llanfair Kilgeddin in Monmouthshire, this church building is managed by the Friends of Friendless Churches. We visited in 1997 expecting to find the “3 impressive yews” described by Revd J. Daryll Evans in his *Churchyard Yews of Gwent* 1988. Sadly all that remained of one was this stump lying in a nearby lane awaiting removal. It might be that there was a good reason for felling this tree, but we were unable to establish one. This lack of accountability is not acceptable.



The deconsecrated church shown below is now a house. On the east side is a large hollow veteran yew the same age as the original church. While the building has grade 2 listed status, the tree has no protection. The tables below contain a summary of the numbers of Ancient yews in the Dioceses of the Church of England and the Church in Wales (October 2022). The numbers will increase as new trees are discovered, particularly those of Notable yews (300 years and older).

The number of trees recorded in a diocese is always greater than the number of churchyards, since many churches have the responsibility of looking after more than one significant yew.



Most significant ancient yews in the dioceses of the Church in Wales

Diocese	(age 800+)	(age 500+)	(age 400+)
Bangor	13	13	20
Llandaff	5	13	17
Monmouth	10	32	25
St Asaph	23	43	37
St Davids	11	25	20
Swansea and Brecon	27	110	81

Oldest yews in the dioceses of the Church of England

Diocese	Ancient (age 800+)	Ancient (age 500+)	Ancient (age 400+)
Bath & Wells	11	34	72
Birmingham			2
Bristol	1	2	
Canterbury	20	45	34
Carlisle		4	11
Chelmsford		1	2
Chester	1	4	3
Chichester	12	22	17
Coventry		3	3
Derby	1	8	7
Exeter	9	16	11
Gloucester	3	11	22
Guildford	3	6	
Hereford	23	63	69
Leicester		1	
Lichfield	2	13	14
London		2	1
Newcastle		1	1
Oxford	6	13	20
Peterborough		5	1
Portsmouth	10	8	8
Rochester	7	15	10
Salisbury	9	14	44
Southwark	4	5	3
Southwell & Notts		2	2
St Albans	2	8	4
Winchester	8	18	18
Worcester		8	10