



The most significant YEWs in the DIOCESE of ROCHESTER

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This document provides some of the information gathered from many sources during the last 15 years and held on behalf of the Ancient Yew Group.

The yews featured here are the most significant to be found in churchyards in the Diocese of Rochester and each one should be fully protected.

Ancient yews are at least 800 years with no upper limit. The Yews for the Millennium project took cuttings from yews considered to be 2000 years old, and there is a growing acceptance that our oldest specimens have reached this age, with some thought to be older still.

Veteran yews are at least 500 and up to 1200 years old.

Notable yews are likely to be at least 300 and up to 700 years old, though this category may also include younger yews, for example those with a known planting date.

Site name	County	Age of yew	Site name	County	Age of yew
Bidborough	Kent	1 ancient 1 notable	Hunton	Kent	1 veteran
Birling	Kent	2 veteran	Lamberhurst	Kent	1 ancient
Bredhurst	Kent	1 veteran	Offham	Kent	1 veteran
Capel, Kent	Kent	1 ancient	Rainham	Kent	1 veteran
Cooling	Kent	1 veteran	Seal	Kent	1 veteran
Cudham	Greater London	2 ancient	Shorne	Kent	2 veteran
Downe	Greater London	1 ancient	Speldhurst	Kent	1 veteran
Farningham	Kent	1 veteran	Stansted	Kent	1 veteran
Hayes	Greater London	1 veteran	Trottiscliffe	Kent	1 veteran
Hoo St. Werburgh	Kent	1 veteran	West Kingsdown – also called Kingsdown	Kent	1 veteran
Horton Kirby	Kent	1 veteran			

Notable yews are recorded at the following:

Ashurst: Aylesford: Brenchley: Ditton: Knockholt: Otford: Wilmington

BIDBOROUGH St Lawrence TQ56514320



2003: Two significant yews grow here. The ancient yew (left), was only recently discovered. It grows NE of the church on the edge of a steep bank, and consists of 3 fragments. Girth around the base of the fragments was about 20'.

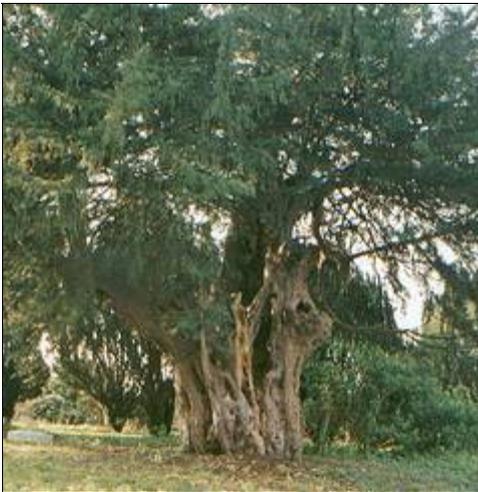
It is the younger yew growing close to the church porch that has been written about since 1897. Branch removal at the height

of 4/5ft has resulted in an abnormally large bulge, so that a girth of 13' at its narrowest waist, rises to a massive 23' at 4'. Rising through its centre are large vertical branches. In spite of it being a small girthed tree, its position makes it a formidable presence in this churchyard.



BIRLING All Saints TQ68026061

'In the churchyard stands an old yew which must have been here 500 years'. Mee -1936



There are in fact two old yews here, both female. One is seen below in the b/w half plate of Petrie's watercolour original (1807). It grows SE of the church and in 2002 was covered in dense twiggy growth, making it impossible to examine. Several dead branches pointed away from the church, while thin strips of growth carried life over dead sections of the bole. Girth was 18' 5" at ground.

The second, seen above, grows NE of the church. It had been drastically pruned and its appearance will be much altered when decaying sections disappear. Girth was 19' 2" at the ground.

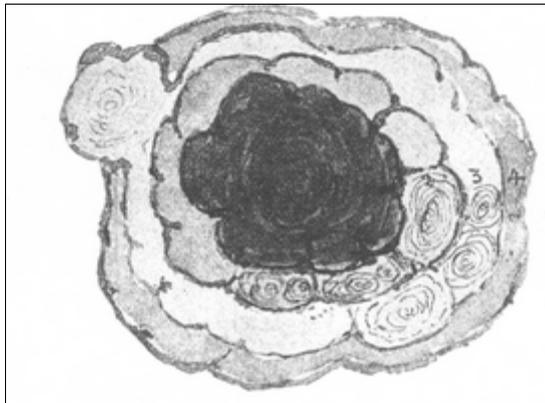
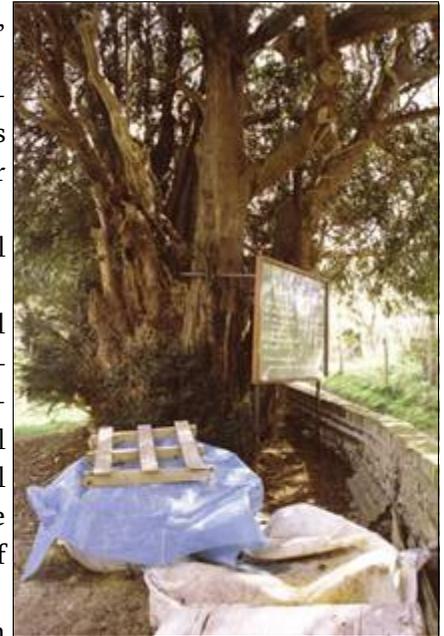


BREDHURST St Peter TQ79886213

1886: 'The tree in Bredhurst churchyard is very remarkable. It is a fine pollard, in which I first noticed the features which give rise to the present inquiry'. Lowe's inquiry led to the publication of *The Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* in 1897. He was the first to carry out systematic yew research and it was here that he discovered aspects of their growth patterns that led to further study.

As such a significant tree is deserved better than sharing its space with an oil tank and builders' materials.

Lowe (1897) wrote a full description of the yew: 'A fine pollard.....The original trunk is dead, but fairly sound, and can be seen through openings in the surrounding layers of new growth. The diameter of the central trunk is 2'. The surrounding ring has a radius of 1'; the wood is quite distinct from the central shaft, and differs in colour. It, too, is dead. Some of the branches which still remain attached have a diameter of 10". The third circle of wood, which for the most part is living, has - together with a commencing fourth ring - a radius of 18".



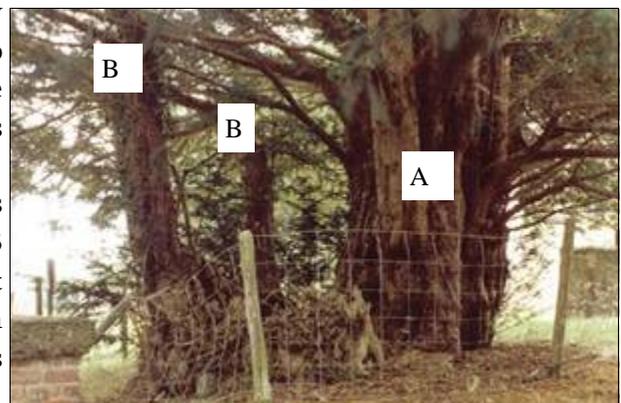
This fourth ring is covered with young spray, some of the shoots having grown to 4 or 5 feet in length, and begun to coalesce at the bases, which are much swollen, but most of the shoots die off after a few years' growth, being smothered by the foliage above them'.

1999 The church sign is supported by two upright branches, behind which the main substance of the tree grows from a bole of about 4'. Girth close to the ground was 20' 8".

CAPEL St Thomas a Becket TQ63734451

Described in 1814 as one of the largest yew trees in the county, Thomas a Becket is said to have preached in the early part of the 12th century to a group of parishioners under a yew 'that was over 500 years old then'. The large girth suggested to Wilks 'that the existence of the yew in the martyr's day cannot be discounted, and for this reason preservation and treatment has been arranged'.

1999: Almost half of what remains of this yew's circumference is dead wood. When this has completely decayed it will leave 3 fragment yews. Visitors to this churchyard in 2200 will see what appears to be an old yew (A) and two young yews (B) growing in close proximity. Records such as this will help to explain how this came about.



COOLING St James TQ75647594

The churchyard at Cooling is thought by some to be the setting for the opening of *Great Expectations*. The now redundant church is beside the long distance walk known as the Saxon Shore Way. The drawing suggests that this was one of Kent's largest yews. Mee (*King's England*-1936) describes the glorious view across the Thames when 'standing by the old yew'.

A visit by Owen Johnson to see if the yew shown in Petrie's painting (1807) was still alive, discovered 'an ancient and much decayed tree'.



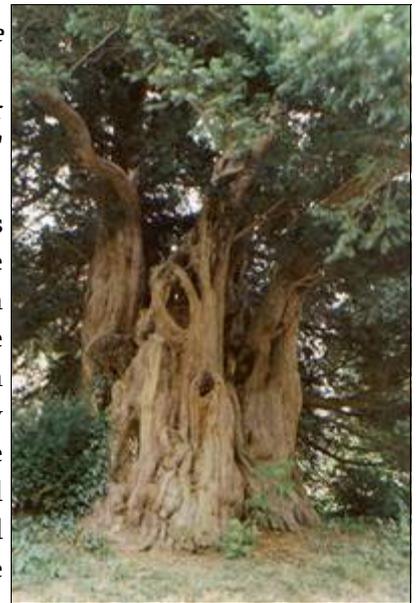
CUDHAM St Peter and St Paul TQ44505995



The female yew (right) was first noted in *The Gentleman's* magazine of 1804.

Both trees were measured by Revd. Nigel Freer in 1890, the female as 28' 4" at 3', the male 28' at 3'.

In 1936 the following was written in Mee's *King's England*: 'From the hill on which its spire looks out for miles two yews have looked down on Kent for centuries; one is 27' round and the other 26'. They are a marvellous pair, older than the tower of Canterbury cathedral; they may have seen the life of this secluded hilltop come and go for about 1,000 year. These Darby and Joan of trees are all that Cudham has save its old church, which has kept them company since they were young'.



1999: The female is hollow with a gap of 1' 6" in its shell that has in the past been blocked by a metal barrier. This is now incorporated into the tree as new wood has encased the metal. There are substantial areas of growth springing from all around this shell, replacing large limbs that have been removed. Between 1890 and the present day girth has remained about the same.

Girth of the male has been reduced as parts of the tree decay. 22' 11" at the ground and 25' 7" at 3' was recorded.

DOWNE St Mary Virgin TQ43216164

The Church is circa 1290. This was Charles Darwin's parish.

The Bromley Record and Monthly advertiser, July 1st 1863:

'But although the yew tree at Downe may not boast so high an antiquity as that at Skelldale, it may still have flourished in Saxon times and have afforded shelter to those who made the memorable survey known as 'Domesday Boke'.'

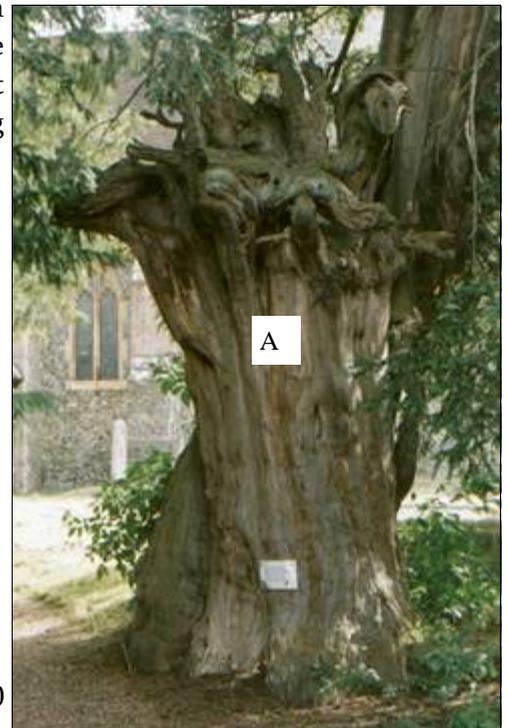
1999: This splendid female yew grows south of the church. At the ground it is in two sections with gaps of 1' and 4' giving access to the hollow. These two sections join at about 10' and the entire structure leans slightly. Many new branches emerging from the side of the bole contribute to its thick green foliage. Girth: 30' 3" at the ground.



FARNINGHAM St Peter and St Paul TQ54716688

1936: 'Under Old Yew at the gate sleeps William Pounds, who died at 99; thou shalt honour the face of the old man, says his stone'. *King's England Series Mee*

2002: The female yew grows north of the church. The original tree, seen in a painting c1800, has been reduced to a 10' high stump with the new tree growing at its edge and leaning away from it. This divides into 2 upright parallel branches at about 15', the larger consisting of new growth snaking along an old dead branch.

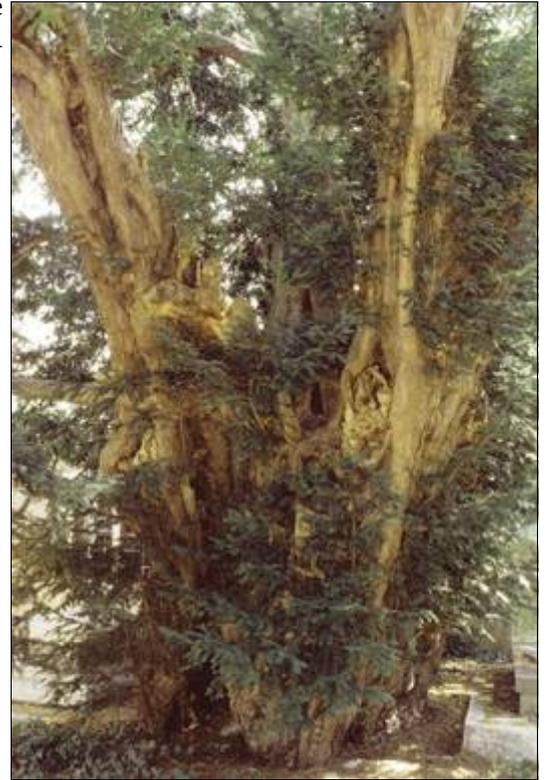
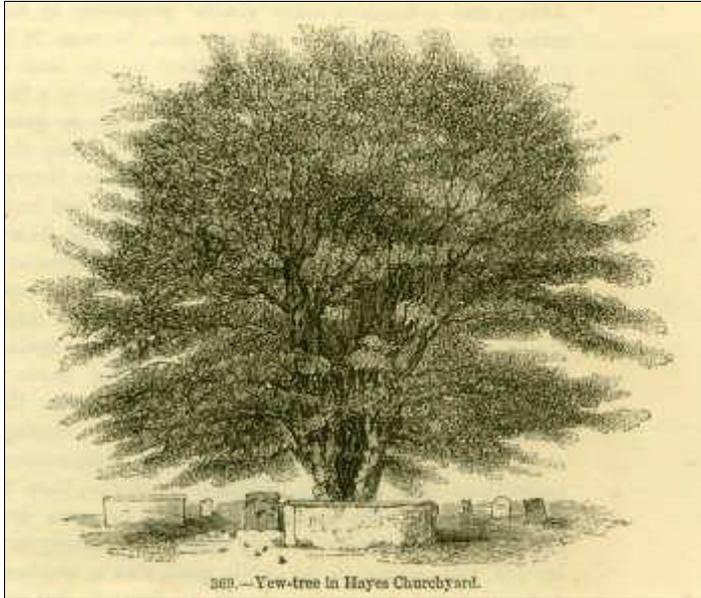


The dead section of this tree (A) does not look very different from 200 years ago, but will eventually decay, leaving a small girthed tree. A girth of 16' 9" was recorded at 1', but around the living section was only 4' 3".

HAYES St Mary the Virgin

TQ40536628

The Hayes Yew is seen here in 1840 and 1999. It is a hollow female growing close to the church extension and south porch. It is a good example of a yew in the process of becoming two fragment trees. Girth in 1991 was 23' at the ground.



HOO St WERBURGH TQ78387188

The yew was described in 1944 as 'very ancient, of great girth, with hollow trunk'.

A letter from Revd CG Woodhead dated 18/03/83 contained the following: 'Yes, there is a very old yew tree in the churchyard at Hoo, but in recent years the base has suffered from fire by vandals several times, and now one part is dead. Fortunately a considerable part is still alive. It is not possible to give one exact measurement of girth, because the main trunk is split into three, but the present living trunks measure 10 and a half and 6 and a half feet and the whole girth if complete measures 21 feet. The tree has been examined by experts and is undoubtedly over 700 years old, and some even think up to 1000 years old. There are other newer yew trees in the churchyard, I believe about 150 years old'.

1999: 5 young yews grow in this extensive churchyard, along with this fragment of the largest and oldest. A piece of stump with some decaying red heart wood gives an idea of the yew's former girth, but this will soon rot leaving only the leaning fragment. This stretches 8m outwards from the base of the trunk and will probably require propping in the future.



HORTON KIRBY St Mary

TQ56226856



The Horton Kirby Yew is seen here in a B&W half plate of an 1807 Petri water colour (originals held by Kent Archaeology), The Illustrated London News May 6 1876, and in 2002.

The male yew grows SE of the church. A substantial portion of the tree, consisting of two thick parallel branches, leans and appears to be resting on tombstones; it must be carrying a great weight and putting considerable strain on the tree. A second growth area, consisting of numerous small branches, rises vertically.

Thick green foliage throughout the tree was competing with ivy into its topmost branches. Girth was 22' 4" around a base, which currently includes dead material. When this decays girth will be significantly reduced.

HUNTON St Mary

TQ72414975

In 1936 Mee noted the 'dark umbrella yews shading the lychgate' but makes no mention of the old yew growing NE of the church. The central section of the tree is decaying and when this process is complete, two fragment yews will remain. Girth in 2002 was 19' 5" at 1' and 20' 4" at 5'.

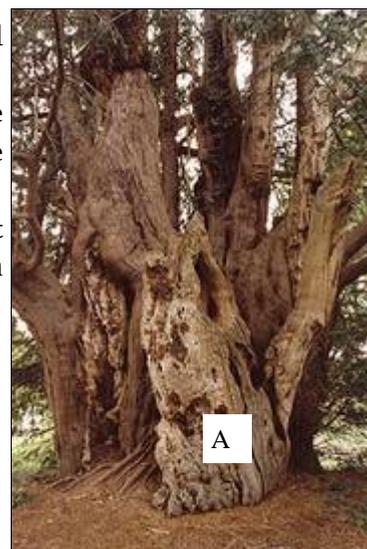
LAMBERHURST St Mary the Virgin TQ68213659

There is evidence to suggest a Church on this site in Saxon times, consecrated on September 29th 998.

The tree was recorded in 1889, with a girth of 25ft at the ground. In 1999 I recorded 25' 11" at the same height.

It has an unusually large number of straight rising branches. To the right of the opening is a large section of dead wood (A); with its eventual disappearance the tree's girth will be diminished by about 2' 6".

There is a particularly fine spread of branches towards the church. Foliage was not thick and there were many yellow leaves. The unseen face of the tree, as is often the case, is covered in dense twiggy growth.



OFFHAM St Michael TQ66035807

The yew here was first noted in 1835. In 1904 it was 'almost destroyed by fire on February 14th. It was then discovered that the hollow trunk contained the remains of a cusped stone cross'.

1999: The low symmetrical tree grows around a thickened horse shoe shaped bole. A tall central dead trunk marks the original structure.

Girth: 17' 10" at 1', 19' 3" at 3', 17' 9" at 4'



RAINHAM St Margaret TQ81746589

2002: This healthy female yew grows WNW of the church. From its open centre radiate a profusion of live and dead branches, with many split and jagged edges. I taped above the undercut base and included the substantial fallen branch which has formed at the edge of the bole; the result was 23' 5".

During 2009 one of the more unusual attempts at yew conservation was carried out on this tree.



SEAL St Peter and St Paul TQ55045697

2002: A male yew SE of the church and almost touching the perimeter wall. Most of its bole is dead, with growth rising from only a single point. Ivy has colonised the decaying centre, and the small amount of yew foliage struggles to be seen.

The old bole, which can be seen clearly where it faces the road, is about 6' high. In its prime it divided into 2 large upright branches. Girth was 18' 7" at the ground.



SHORNE

St Peter and St Paul

TQ69017101

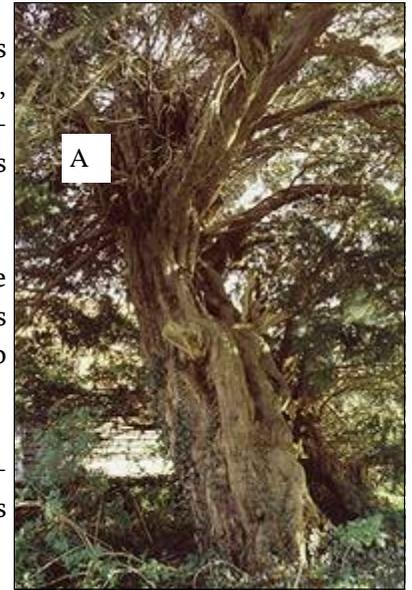
1897: 'Two yews of good size, each in its way well illustrating the effects of pollarding'. Lowe



2000: Two female yews, the first (left) grows just inside the entrance to the churchyard, NW of the church. This is probably a fragment of a once much larger tree. It develops two main branches at about 7'.

The larger tree (right) grows NE of the church. It has a thickened shell which leans away from the church. Its bole bursts into growth at about 12' (A).

A decaying section at the base of the tree suggests that its girth was once larger than its present 16' 7".



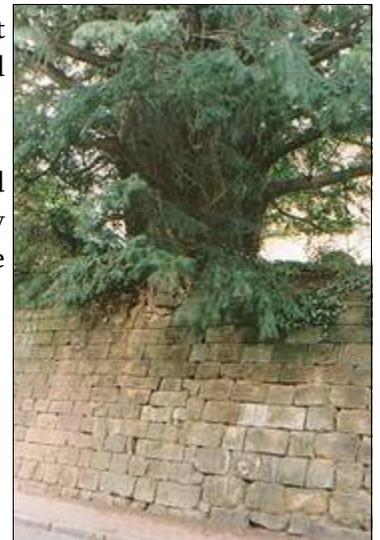
SPELDHURST

St Mary the Virgin

TQ55334143

In 1897 the yew was 'about 25' high, measures 18'6" at 3' from the ground. At 10' it is about 3' in girth. The top has been broken. This is a good example of the rapid growth of the trunk after fracture of the leading stem'. Lowe

2003: The female yew grows ESE of the church, above a precarious drop to the road below. From its elongated bole two branches rise in the centre. There is also new growth on the periphery, swelling the tree's dimensions. Limbs that would have grown across the road have been removed.



STANSTED St Mary the Virgin TQ60736213



1897: 'A remarkably fine tree....a splendid head 30' in height. A central hollow containing a dead trunk about 5' in diameter. A network of roots of good size that have intertwined and coalesced in a striking manner. 6 principal branches, 5' to 8' in girth, each enclosing a dead branch of the original trunk. One or two of the branches have separated from the others'. Lowe

1999: A sizeable section of the Stansted Yew is pulling away from the main bulk of the tree. A double row of chains (there in Lowe's time) and thin wires in the upper branches are stretched taut in an attempt to prevent it from leaning further outwards. In several places these have been swallowed by new layers of wood.

The centre is filled with large internal stems which help feed the tree's 6 substantial growth areas. Branches from these dip gracefully all around this fine healthy tree. Girth 22' 10" close to the ground.

TROTTISCLIFFE St Peter and St Paul TQ64626055

2002: The yew is recorded in the Tree Register's database with a diameter of 150 cm. It is male, grows SE of the church and measured 16' 1". In its hollow is a large internal stem feeding into the main upright branch. On each side of the tree large branches had been removed.

WEST KINGSDOWN St Edmund TQ57986334



1999: This sturdy male grows west of the church. It is hollow, with one of its gaps filled with concrete.

A feature of many old yews is that of bulging outwards at between 3' and 5'. In this yew the feature is present in about $\frac{3}{4}$ of its girth. This is a many branched yew, its two main branches dividing from the bole at about 14'. It carried thick foliage.

Girth: close to the ground 24' 7, at 3' - 25' 3", at 5' - 22' 9"



NOTABLE YEWS in Diocese of Rochester

ASHURST St Martin of Tours TQ51173903

2004: The yew grows east of the church. It is tall with a clean bole except for one bulgy section between 2' and 6' on the S side. It appeared to be solid. Several large branches have been removed. Ivy was beginning to creep along bole. Girth exactly 15' at 2'.

AYLESFORD St Peter and St Paul TQ72935903

2002: A plaque embedded into the wall records that 'The yew tree was planted in the year of our Lord 1708 by W.Farncom'.

It grows by the south gate, is female and horse shoe shaped, measuring 9' 1" at 3' and 8' 8" at 5'. At about 8' the hollow closes over with a flurry of growth.

In 1936 Mee recognised the importance of yews with a known planting date, which help us to 'fix the age of yews when we see them'.

BRENCHLEY All Saints TQ67974170

2005: An avenue of clipped yews, thought to be between 380 and 400 years old. Height between 20 and 25 feet. Steve Young

DITTON St Peter TQ70985805

2002: Mee (1936) described 'a churchyard rich with yews'. The largest grows SE of the church by the wall which separates churchyard from a recent housing development. It is an unassuming female with a girth of 16' 9" at the ground. Its bole is an elongated hollow with thickening at each end. An excessive quantity covers the tree high into its branches.

KNOCKHOLT St Katherine TQ46785892

1999: A tree of fine appearance with a straight fluted bole dividing at 10/12' into many strong branches. Holes have been filled with concrete and other substances and the upper parts are held together with wire. Girth 17' 1" at 1'.

OTFORD

St Bartholomew

TQ52855929

2010: Cliff Hansford: SE of the church. The bole of the yew looks very much the worst for wear as a result of some earlier work either to save the yew or, perhaps, prevent it from being vandalised (set on fire). Originally there were five limbs projecting from the one bole from a height of 6 ft. Two of the limbs have been removed. A number of branches in the canopy have been cut back and foliage looks sparse. Girth: 12 ft at 3 ft from ground, increasing to 15 ft at a height of 5 ft. All hollow areas that are visible from the ground are filled with cement (concrete) and some areas suggest a rubble in-fill.

**WILMINGTON**

St Michael and All Angels

TQ53807246

2005: Penelope Stanford: A yew of known planting date grows to the SE. A fairly cylindrical yew, its trunk thickening above head height. A brass sign by the tree contains details of its planting date -1732 - and several girth recordings taken at three feet. 4' 1½" in 1803: 5' 2½" in 1846: 7' 3½" in 1947: 7' 10½" in 1972.

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