

According to *Arboretum and Fruticetum 1838* 'when Leland visited Strata Florida in the reign of Henry VIII there were no fewer than 'thirty-nine vast Ewgh trees in the churchyard belonging to Strathfleur Abbey'. By 1890, only three of the thirty nine remained, and today there are only two.

1999: The tree closest to the church has had a wall built around it, so that the base of this yew is at eye level, making its old sapwood features easy to see. Between 1999 and 2005 the fine expansive tree, with a girth of about 22', was extensively trimmed following severe damage during a storm in 2002. It is recovering well. A stone marked David ap Gwiliam has been placed in front of a cavernous opening into the tree, information which was also etched into a piece of slate. But should it be here? And if it should, is it by the right tree?



Dafydd ap Gwilym is one of Wales's celebrated poets. Scholarly opinion is divided as to whether he was buried here at Strata Florida or at Talley in Carmarthenshire. If he was buried at Strata Florida and the monks did plant a yew on his grave in the 14th century, there is now debate over which is the yew in question. George Borrow (1862) in his narrative of a walk through Wales in 1854 wrote: 'I would give something, said I, to know whereabouts in this neighbourhood Ab Gwilym lies. That, however, is a secret that no one can reveal to me. At length I came to a yew-tree which stood just by the northern wall which is at a slight distance from the Teivi. It was one of two trees, both of the same species, which stood in the churchyard, and appeared to be the oldest of the two. Who knows, said I, but this is the tree that was planted over Ab Gwilym's grave, and to which Gruffydd Gryg wrote an ode? I looked at it attentively, and thought that there was just a possibility of its being the identical tree. If it was, however, the benison of Gruffydd Gryg had not had exactly the effect which he intended, for either lightning or the force of wind had splitten off a considerable part of the head and trunk, so that though one part of it looked strong and blooming, the other was white and spectral. Taking off my hat I knelt down and kissed its root, repeating lines from Gruffydd Gryg, with which I blended some of my own in order to accommodate what I said to present circumstances ...'

If the tree Borrow described has survived, it would be this one, with half of its bole missing, growing on the churchyard's northern perimeter. It was certainly known as Borrow's tree into the 20th century, as seen in these postcards, but since the yew closest to the church had a more impressive appearance the plaque was moved from this yew to the tree seen on p1.

