

THE UPMINSTER YEW AVENUE
St.Laurence Church Upminster.OS Sheet 177 GR 559866

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The following text from *A History of the County of Essex:Vol 7 (1978)* led to an exploration of the fine yew avenues in St Laurence churchyard at Upminster:

"The 'old' churchyard was closed in 1891, and by 1902 the 'new' churchyard was full. In 1926, with parish sentiment continuing to prefer burial in a churchyard, the rector gave another piece of the rectory garden north of the nave. The present avenue of yews were planted by Mrs Branfill in 1848; they replaced horse chestnuts given by Champion Branfill before 1735."

I visited the churchyard on 24/08/2007 to make a record of the yews growing here and also carried out research at the Essex Record Office Archive in Chelmsford. Recorded in the diaries of Ann Eliza Branfills was the following entry:

"On the 6th January 1848 she was "Sent by Herr to propose planting yew trees in the churchyard". While it is not certain who Herr was, the name crops up often in the diaries it may have been a nick name for her husband Champion Russel Branfill." There is no further mention of the yews. The archive reference for this is D/DRu/F12/22.

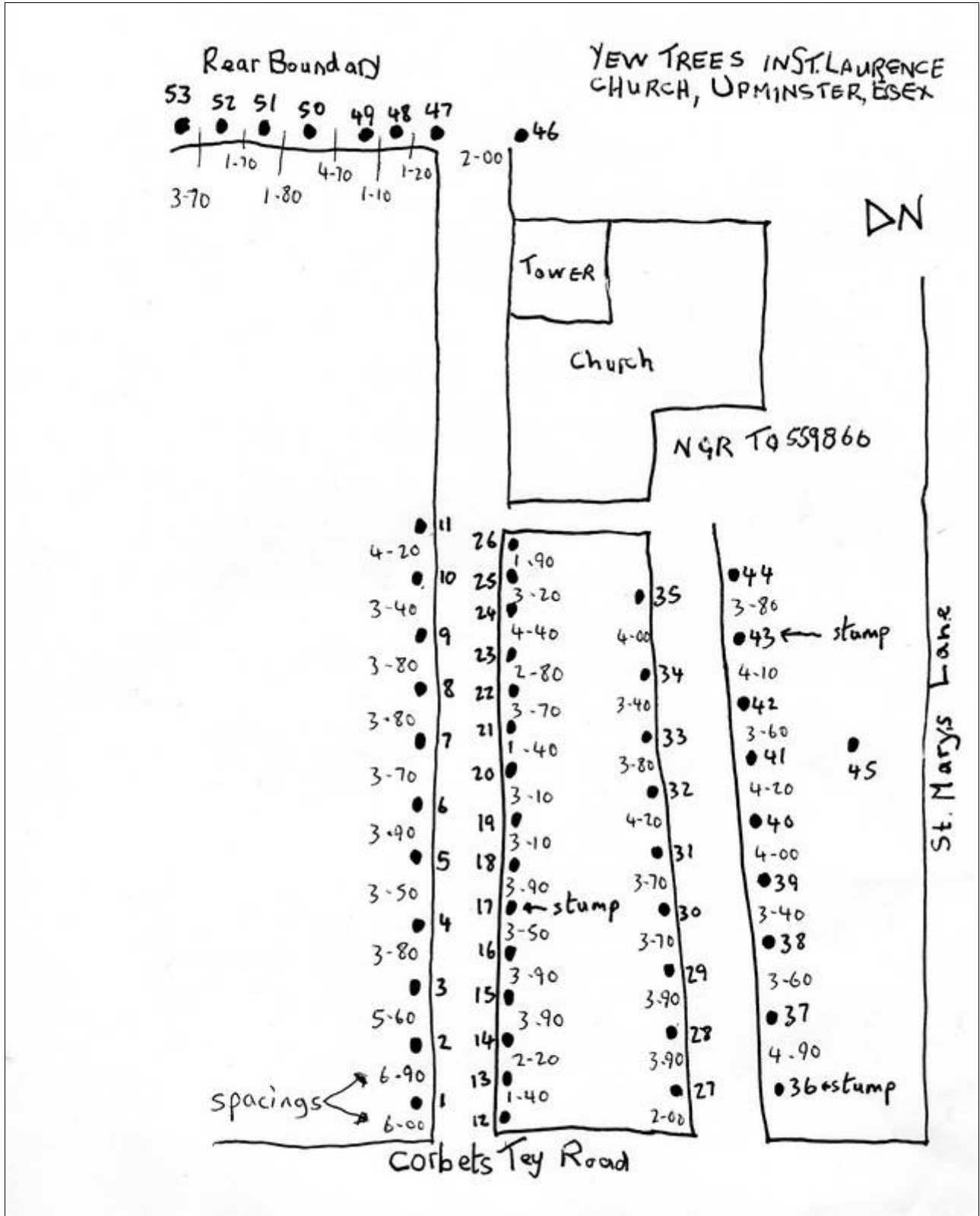
There is also a letter book ref.D/DRu/C4/8 , which provides a summary of letters written and received. On 24 March 1867 Ann Eliza wrote to Mr Holden (the Rector) with a request to plant a few Yew trees to replace those that had died. While there is no direct reference to the name of the church, St Laurence was their village church and Holden was the rector there at the time.

Thomas Wilson's *Religious History of Upminster* notes that Holden planted Yews in the churchyard. Whether it was Ann Eliza Branfill, the Revd Holden or one of the Church wardens who carried out the planting, it seems likely that the majority of the Upminster Yews were planted in 1848, with a few planted about 20 years later to replace those that had not survived. Is also not known how many years after this the practice of replacing dead trees continued, but it is possible that a few of the yews are younger still.



The two fine avenues at Upminster

In the churchyard are two avenues of yews, and a further line of yews on the western boundary. One of the two stumps is complete and without decay so the rings are visible all the way through. The trees appear to have been planted at about the same time with the exception of tree 11 which is larger than the rest. A possible explanation for this is its position at the end of the avenue where it enjoys an unimpeded southerly aspect, whereas the others tend to shade each other. Tree 45 is thought to be the only female, and grows outside of the avenues, perhaps planted by mourners at a graveside.



There may have been other trees in this avenue that were removed when the church was extended in 1928. I agree some of the smaller trees may have been the replacements planted in 1867 by Henry Holden. It is also possible that some of the smaller trees were planted even later, though there is no known record of this.

1	1.60 at 0.15	1.20 at 1.50	5' 3" at 6"	3' 11" at 5'
2	1.23 at 0.15		4' 0" at 6"	
3	1.25 at 1.50		4' 1" at 5'	
4	1.90 at 0.15	1.70 at 1.50	6' 3" at 6"	5' 7" at 5'
5	1.40 at 1.50		4' 7" at 5'	
6	0.96 at 1.50		3' 2" at 5'	
7	1.38 at 1.50		4' 6" at 5'	
8	1.50 at 0.15	1.15 at 1.50	5' at 6"	
9	1.40 at 0.30	1.32 at 1.50	4' 7" at 1'	4' 4" at 5'
10	1.90 at 0.15	1.26 at 1.50	6' 3" at 6"	
11	3.02 at 0.30		9' 11" at 1'	
12	xxxxx xxxxx	Stump unable to measure		
13	1.00 at 0.15	0.90 at 1.2	3' 3" at 6"	2' 11" at 4'
14	0.65 at 1.30		2' 2" at 4' 3"	
15	1.10 at 0.15		3' 7" at 1'	
16	1.69 at 1.50		5' 6" at 5'	
17	0.94 at 1.50		3' 1" at 5'	
18	1.70 at 1.50	Stump		
19	1.36 at 0.30	1.17 at 1.50	4' 6" at 1'	3' 10" at 5'
20	1.60 at 0.15	1.00 at 1.50	5' 3" at 6"	3' 3" at 5'
21	1.37 at 1.30	1.37 at 0.90	4' 6" at 4' 3"	4' 6" at 3'
22	1.81 at 0.15	1.40 at 1.50	5' 11" at 6"	4' 7" at 5'
23	1.60 at 0.15	1.50 at 1.00	5' 3" at 6"	5' at 3' 3"
24	1.70 at 0.30	1.55 at 1.50	5' 7" at 1'	5' 1" at 5'
25	0.70 at 1.00		2' 4" at 3' 3"	
26	1.16 at 1.50		3' 10" at 5'	
27	2.13 at 0.15		7' at 6"	
28	2.44 at 0.00		8' at the ground	
29	1.63 at 1.50		5' 4" at 5'	
30	1.30 at 1.50		4' 3" at 5'	
31	1.30 at 0.15	1.00 at 1.50	4' 3" at 6"	3' 3" at 5'
32	2.43 at 0.30	2.28 at 1.50	8' at 1'	7' 6" at 5'
33	1.41 at 1.50		4' 8" at 5'	
34	1.70 at 0.15	1.80 at 1.40	5' 7" at 6"	5' 11" at 4' 7"
35	2.10 at 0.50	1.87 at 1.50	6' 11" at 1' 8"	6' 2" at 5'
36	0.50 at 0.15	Stump	1' 7" at 6"	
37	2.20 at 0.30	1.91 at 1.50	7' 3" at 1'	6' 3" at 5'
38	1.17 at 1.50		3' 10" at 5'	
39	1.80 at 0.30	1.77 at 1.50	5' 11" at 1'	5' 10" at 5'
40	1.30 at 1.00		4' 3" at 3' 3"	
41	1.50 at 0.30	1.50 at 1.50	5' at 1'	5' at 5'
42	1.50 at 1.50		5' at 5'	
43	1.55 at 0.30		5' 1" at 1'	
44	2.40 at 0.30	2.00 at 1.50	7' 11" at 1'	6' 7" at 5'
45	1.50 at 1.50	Female tree	5' at 5'	
46	1.52 at 0.30		5' at 1'	
47	1.85 at 1.00		6' 1" at 3' 3"	
48	1.65 at 0.30		5' 5" at 1'	
49	0.60 at 0.15		2' at 6"	
50	0.95 at 0.15		3' 1" at 6"	
51	1.36 at 0.30		4' 6" at 1'	
52	1.46 at 0.30	1.67 at 1.40	4' 9" at 1'	5' 6" at 4' 7"
53	1.29 at 1.00		4' 3" at 3' 3"	

A breakdown of these figures shows girths of trees as follows:

Girth	1/2'	2/3'	3/4'	4/5'	5/6'	6/7'	7/8'	8/9'	9/10'
No. of trees	2	2	7	19	12	5	4	0	1

