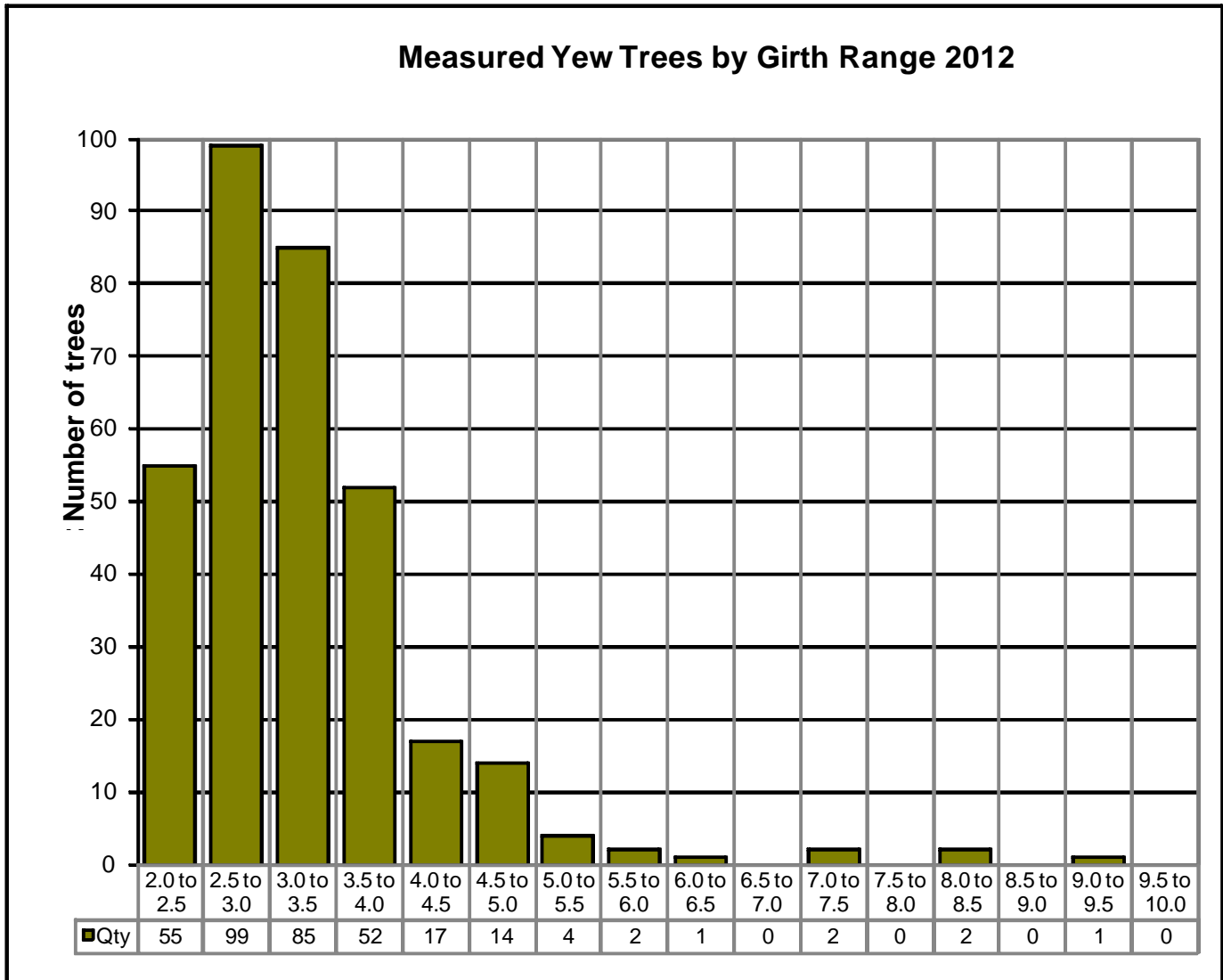


Wiltshire Churchyard Yews

Summary

- A total of 365 churches were visited over a three year period.
- Yews were recorded in 241 of these churchyards.
- In total 1064 yew trees were noted.
- All trees above 9ft in girth were measured, as well as many below 9ft.

With the knowledge currently available to us, the chart below suggests that a large number of yews were planted between 200 and 250 years ago, with only a small number coinciding with a Victorian restoration of the church.

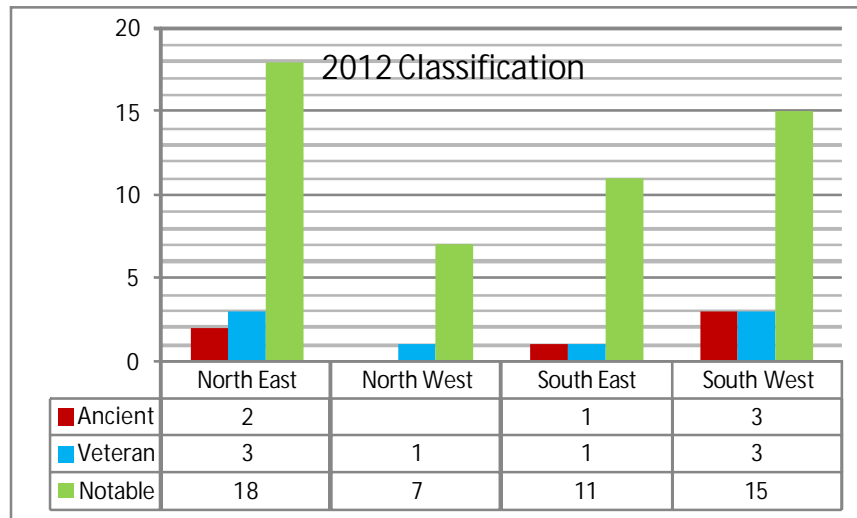


This table sets out the three main types of classification - Ancient, Veteran and Notable.

In 100 years time this chart will look very different as some trees are reclassified. This will be most apparent with a large numbers of Young yews becoming classified as Notable.

		Totals	
Girth Mtrs	Classification	QTY	% Total
7.0	Ancient	6	0.6%
4.9	Veteran	8	0.8%
3.7	Notable	51	4.8%
	Young	274	25.8%
Total		339	31.9%
Not Measured		725	68.1%

Set out here are the classified yews as noted in the four regions.



Many reasons have been given as to why yews are to be found in nearly every old churchyard. One that is often quoted is from a medieval author who stated that the yew was grown in churchyards: “as an emblem of Resurrection, from its perpetual verdure”. But it does not explain why in the mid to late 18th century so many yews were planted.

One possible answer is that by the 18th century, Britain's great forests had been largely squandered, partly by the extravagant use of wood as domestic fuel and for industries such as iron-smelting, but mainly because it hadn't occurred to anyone that a programme of replacement was necessary.

The position was made critical by the ever increasing demands of the Navy for more timber. In 1755 the newly formed Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce for the common good (became RSA in 1908) called for the

"planting of timber trees in the commons and waste ground all over the Kingdom, for the supply of the Navy, the employment and advantage of the poor, as well as the ornamenting of the nation".

To encourage afforestation the RSA began offering premiums or prizes from 1757 for tree planting and specified the types to be planted beginning with Oak, Chestnut and Elm and followed by 17 other species.

Between 1755 and 1820, 50 million trees were planted and perhaps 100 million if hedgerows etc were taken into account, giving rise to many of the woods we enjoy today.

Although the listing of trees does not include the Common Yew it is plausible that this great tree planting exercise had a knock on effect within communities, who then in turn contributed to the “*ornamenting of the nation*” by the decoration of their churchyards.

At the present time it is not easy to access old church records, but recent plantings seem to commemorate important events, like the Millennium (Boyton), the Silver Jubilee of King George V (East Kennet) and Queen Elizabeth's Jubilee in 1977 (Compton Chamberlayne). It is possible that similar events in the 18th century were commemorated in the same way.

It might also be that significant historic events were commemorated by planting a yew, for example the 1707 Union with Scotland, the adoption of the Gregorian Calendar in 1752 or the founding of Sunday Schools by Robert Raikes in 1780.