

The Winscombe yew has attracted much attention, leading to discussion regarding its possible age. Collinson was the first to record it in his 1791 *History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* as 'a very fine yew tree, with a large spread of branches'.

In *The Bristol Flora* of 1912 JM White called it 'perhaps the finest and most perfect ... where a sheltered churchyard has preserved it for many centuries'. He speculated that the tree may have been planted when 'Winscombe Manor was a possession of Glastonbury Abbey' and considered its age 'may approach 1,000 years'.

In *The Heart of Mendip* 1914, Knight called it 'a magnificent yew.....the glory of the churchyard. He calculated that its far spreading branches covered 'a space little less than 400 sq. yds'. He noted that 7 large 'boughs' were broken off its north east side in the storm of 1884. Knight was also interested in what he considered to be the over-estimation of the age of yew trees in general and considered this specimen to be no more than 400 years old. While White may have overestimated its age, Knight has certainly underestimated it. The answer probably lies somewhere between 600 and 800 years.

1998: The 7 large boughs lost in the storm of 1884 have been replaced with new branches and the yew has also recovered from more recent losses. We were informed that branches removed after recent storms had been used for carvings inside the church.



The photos show that some branches have been shortened since 1998. The tree certainly has a fine shape and looks in excellent health.

Girth records:

1914: 16' at 3' - Knight

1940: 18' round the trunk - Mee

1958: Rev WG Tarr informed Swanton that 'girth at ground level is approx. 24' and 18' 2" at 3.'

1998: 21' 3" at 5' - Tim Hills

2014: 20' 9" at about 6"; 20' 6" at 1' (the tree's minimum girth); 20' 8" at 2' - Peter Norton

2015: 20' 7" at 1'; 20' 8" at 2' ; 21' 3½" at 3' - Tim Hills

The measurements in 1914, 1940 and 1958 were presumably recorded before the ground level was artificially raised when the circular wall was built.



In 2015 a further two yews were noted. They grow on the perimeter on the north side of the churchyard in an area that was being used as a churchyard waste dumping ground. Both are male and appeared to be about 5'6' in girth.