

Introduction:

This report is the first of five observations of churchyard yews in and around the rivers Wylye, Ebble, Nadder and Bourne that converge with the Salisbury/Hampshire Avon as it flows through the Salisbury area.

The Wylye rises 1.5 miles south of Maiden Bradley at Rodmead Farm, flowing through the Deverill valley towards Warminster and on into the Wylye valley. Finally at Wilton and Quidhampton (just two miles from Salisbury) it converges with the Nadder, some 28 miles from its source. The Wylye then loses its identity and the Nadder flows the last few miles before converging with the Avon close to Salisbury Cathedral Close.

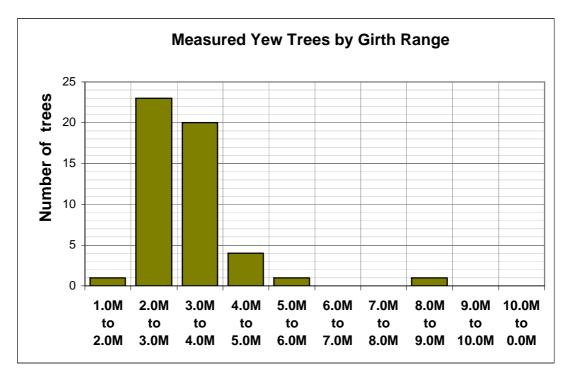
Ancient Wilton took the name from the Anglo-Saxon Wilsaetes tribe living on the banks of the Wylye. The Wilsaetes and Wilton also gave their name to the county of Wiltshire which was first mentioned in the 8th century.

All of the towns and villages along this route were included, with forty one churchyards visited. Of these twenty five contained yew trees, and although many of those mentioned are small in stature compared to some of the giants already recorded within the Yew Gazetteer, it was felt that, as time progresses, these younger trees will become our future giants for the next generations of yew enthusiasts.

Please refer to the article by Paul Greenwood called In Defence of Younger Yews.

http://www.ancient-yew.org/youngeryews.shtml

A total of one hundred and ten trees were noted at these sites of which fifty had measurements recorded. (See graph below which has been grouped by girth and does not include any estimated* values.) Imperial measurements were taken during the recording exercise and converted to metric. Please note that in multiple individual tree measurements only the lowest to the root/ground was used for this graph.



Where Irish Yews were significant in number at the documented churchyards, they are also included in this report.

Appendix I lists all the churches visited and those indicated thus * are detailed within the body of this report.

All recorded height measurements are taken above the root development if visible.

Bradley House, home of the Duke of Somerset sits alongside the eastern perimeter of the churchyard. The oldest part of the current church dates from 1175, but the majority of the building was completed in 1385.

There are nine yews within the churchyard and upon entering the first two are on your left growing up from the bank.





The larger of these (above), excluding the protruding limb, had a girth of 12' 8" at 2' 6". Around the yew are the remnants of curved stone edging, which have been displaced by the root growth.

The second had a girth of 10' 5" at 1' above the top of the bank. This meant a 3' approximate height from the base of the bank.

Measurements below this height would have included some protrusions.

Towards the north perimeter of the churchyard is the third yew (below), which had low foliage, ivy, nettles and grass clippings piled high against the trunk. Clearing as much vegetation as possible, a girth of 10' 7" at 1' was recorded.



Maiden Bradley - cont.

To the left of this yew and backing on to the north perimeter the fourth yew is found. This tree has three large limbs growing from the root structure in a fan shape. The central limb is comprised of a further three branches growing straight and very close together. Measuring this central growth where it was still fused and 1' above the split of the two side limbs a girth of 12' 10" was recorded.

The left limb had a girth about 5', the right a girth about 8'. Both were measured at 1' 6" above the split.

Note that the side limbs had more ivy growth than the central limb.





The fifth yew can be found towards the east perimeter and is easily identified by the fixed bench in front of it. Low foliage hampered measurement but a girth about 10' at about 3' was recorded.

There are a further four yews along this east perimeter. Girth measurements ranged between 9' and 10' at 1'. Again low foliage hampered recording.

Kingston Deverill - St Mary the Virgin

The first record of a church in Kingston Deverill was in 1099, when there was a chapel dedicated to St. Andrew. The oldest parts in the current church date from the 14th century. A major rebuild was completed in 1847.

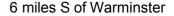
Twelve vews are found on this site, of which five are on the south and six along the east perimeters and of young status.

The most notable yew grows on a small mound south west of the church porch.

Girths of 11' 7" at 1' and 12' 6" at 3' were recorded.

No further measurements were taken due to significant branch growth.







Longbridge Deverill - St Peter and St Paul

Map 183 ST 866 413

3 miles S of Warminster

Originally a Saxon wooden church and rebuilt in stone in 1130, with further alterations during the 14th and 16th century. The final extensions were carried out in 1852.

Four yews grow on this site with the most notable being on the west side of the church. This ancient yew is documented in the website 'Yew Gazetteer' with a girth of 26' 5" close to the ground.

http://www.ancient-yew.org/treeInfo.php?link=570





Photos taken in 2000 (left) and 2009 (above) show that while the condition of the stone seat/wall, which once surrounded the yew, has deteriorated further, the yew remains healthy and vigorous.

Growing close to the ancient tree is this fine fluted yew (below right) with a girth of 10' 11" at 1' and 11' 10" at 3'.





Just inside the churchyard and at the east edge of the church are two yews that appear to have fused at the base. Each trunk measures about 8' at 1'. On the north side of the church a young status yew can be seen. (not measured)

There are also ten clipped Irish Yews evident within the churchyard.

Two small tributary streams flow through the town to form the Were which in turn converges with the Wylye to the south of the town. The Minster church of St Denys sits near to a loop of this river and possibly on a site of an ancient yew grove sacred from pre-Christian times. The current church was built by the Normans during the 12th century to replace the earlier Saxon Minster and the original town of 'Wereminster' took its name from 'the Minster on the Were'.

The church was remodelled in the 14th with additions in the late 15th or early 16th centuries. Extensively repaired during 1626-9 and a major rebuild during 1887-9. A few parts of the old church still remain.



Two yews are found on this site with the most notable, female (above), growing outside of the west porch. This 'old' yew is documented in the website 'Yew Gazetteer' with a girth of 18' 5" at 5'.

http://www.ancient-yew.org/treeInfo.php?link=828

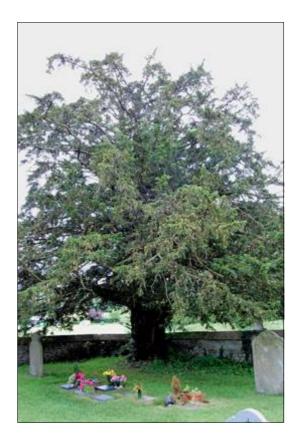
The second yew, male, grows to the north east of the church along the perimeter and has much twiggy growth and churchyard debris against the trunk. No measurements were attempted but an estimated* girth could be between 7' to 9'.

Records indicate that Bishopstrow church could have been Saxon in origin and stood until the 18th century. Restorations were carried out during 1757, followed by a full restoration in 1876.

One story that I heard many years ago told how Bishop Aldhelm (AD 639 - 709), who was renowned for long but inspirational sermons, had stuck his staff in the ground, which then sprouted roots and leaves and grew into a healthy ash tree. That place became known as Bishop's Tree, now Bishopstrow.

Of two yews recorded here, the most interesting is a tree known locally as the 'Bleeding Yew', which grows at the south west corner of the churchyard. Girths of 13' 2" at 1' and 15' 1" at 3' were recorded.





Both measurements ensured the tape was carefully threaded through new growth and missed several large protrusions and branch developments.

'Bleeding' is an uncommon phenomenon observed in only a handful of yews, the most famous being the *'Bleeding Yew of Nevern'*, which attracts hundreds of visitors annually.

The second yew, male, grows at the rear of the church. Girths were recorded of 10' 9" at 1', 10' 8" at 3' and 11' at 4' 6".

The church is mid 12th century with alterations during the 14th and a partial rebuild during 1838-40. There are five yews in this churchyard; the largest grows from a clump of visible roots.





Four of the yews are immediately in front of you as you enter the churchyard. Of these, the yew nearest the east side of the church (above-right hand yew) is the larger with a girth of 9' at 1'.

The largest yew, male, grows to the rear of these trees (right), with a girth of 10' 9" at 1' and 11' at 3'. Further measurements were not taken because of branch development.

In 2000 Tim Hills recorded this yew with 'minimal foliage, though very green, with a girth of 10' 9" at 4' 6".' In nine years the lower part of the tree has filled with new growth.

Six clipped Irish Yews lead to the church porch.

St Leonard's is a 13th century church with alterations during the 14th and 15th followed by a partial restoration in 1831. However, more repairs were needed and it was finally replaced in the 19th century by a new building situated nearer the centre of the village. The Churches Conservation Trust now manages the largely ruined church.



Two yews grow to the east of the church, one ancient and one younger.

In 2000 Tim Hills recorded the ancient yew growing south east of the church and described it as follows:

"The remains of what was once a large girthed yew, now a wreck competing with elder, hawthorn, holly, ivy and bramble. Only one small section lives, leaning against the largely dead trunk. Whether this living section will be able to stand on its own once the dead wood has rotted away, only time will tell. Girth around these leaning fragments was 14' 10" at 3'."

In the photo note the darker living growth (A) on top of the lighter dead trunk (B).

No measurement of this older yew was attempted in 2009 due to the sheer amount of large brambles etc.

The photo of the younger yew (below) was taken in 2009. It was difficult to measure due to the lower limb development. Excluding the left and front protruding limbs, a girth of about 11' at 2' was recorded.

'About' was used as it was felt that no two people would record the same dimensions.



The church dates from the 13th century with a partial rebuild in 1470 and finally a thorough restoration in 1866. Eighteen yews are evident on this site with the first two found immediately after entering the churchyard from the north west gate.

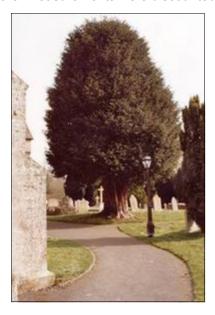




The first yew on the north (left) had a girth of 10' 9" at 1' and 11' 5" at 2' while the yew on the west (above right) had a girth of 11' 10" at 1' and 12' 4" at 3'.

Continuing along the west perimeter are a further three yews with the second measuring 12' 1" at 1'.

The most notable yew grows just outside of the church porch with girths of 14' 5" at 1' and 15' 1" at 3'. Further measurements were discounted owing to branch development.







© Tim Hills 2000

2009

During 2000 Tim Hills recorded this *"fine looking yew with a distinctive trimmed crown, and a girth of 14' at 1'."* In nine years girth has increased by 5", while several feet of growth has been trimmed from its top. There are a further twelve young perimeter yews and 28 Irish Yews within the churchyard.

The area in which the church is situated was an established Saxon settlement and the earliest date given for the current stone building is 1180 with restorations during 1633, 1834 and 1891.

Three yews are evident at this site with the first immediately on your left (below left) as you enter the church-yard and not measured due to the amount of low foliage.





A young yew grows on the north side of the church while on the south perimeter; you can see a fluted female yew (above right) which is growing on a slight mound.

The following measurements do take into account a cover of young ivy growth and due to the undulating ground the heights have been estimated.

Girths of about 11' 11" at 1' and 12' 5" at 3' were recorded.

Further measurements were not undertaken due to large stemmed ivy growth, which has been cut through recently, but would still affect reasonable measurements.

Note; below the 3' level the thick stemmed ivy growth had been removed.

The original date for a church in Boyton is not known but records show that it was rebuilt in 1159 and extended during the 13th and 14th centuries and then generally restored in 1859.

There are five yews growing to the rear of the church forming a southern boundary with a paved pathway behind, which leads into the private residence of Boyton Manor.



At the churchyard's south west corner the first yew (left) had a girth about 9' at 1'.

Large protrusions are evident but attempts were made not to include them.

Further measurements were not attempted due to massive (bushy) limb development. Also note the young ivy covering the tree.

Moving west to east, the second yew is smaller in size measuring 7' 11" at 1' and 8' 2" at 3'.

The third yew (right) measured 9' 9" at 1' and 10' 9" at 3'.

The remaining two trees measured 6' 6" and 7' 2" at 1'.

A Millennium yew was planted in this churchyard in 2000



Codford St Mary - St Mary

Map 184 ST 974 397

7 miles SE of Warminster

The first reference to a church on this site was 1282 but some internal features date back to 1060. A major restoration took place in 1843.

There are three yews on this site, growing near the north east perimeter adjacent to a private residence close to the church. Estimated* girths are 7' to 9'. More detailed measurements were not undertaken due to very heavy ivy growth.

Originally two churches were situated at Chitterne, St Mary and All Saints, both were demolished apart from their chancels when the new church of St Mary and All Saints was built in 1861. Only the Chancel of St Mary remains.

In October 1842 the Curate of St. Mary and All Saints planted a yew tree in the south east corner of St Mary's churchyard stating that it would be a memorial of him when he was gone. He was taken ill that same day and on the following went to Salisbury for medical advice, where he died and was brought back for burial in the churchyard of St. Mary, during November 1842.

The female yew was heavily clad with thick stemmed ivy of which some had been cut through at about 2' from the ground.

A measurement at this height returned an approximate* girth of 12', but was discounted as the ivy was hampering recording.



Stockton - St John the Baptist

Map 184 ST 982 381

9 miles SE of Warminster

The church is largely untouched with parts of the building dating from the late 12th century.

There are six yews in the churchyard and many more, both on the gravel approach to the churchyard and towards the south and west perimeters within a private residence.





Entering the churchyard from its north west gate the first yew, an ivy covered male, had a girth of 12' 5" at 1' and 11' 10" at 3'.

Stockton - cont.

To the east grows a female yew (below left) with a girth of 13' 2" at 1' and 13' 5" at 2' 6". At about 5' the tree splits into four main branches, while a further ten have been removed.





A further four yews grow against the east and south perimeter with the first yew along the east perimeter, male (above), having a girth of 10' 11" at about 2'.

The second yew (near right), female, had a girth of 8' 9" at 2'. The tree has two main limbs that initially start at about 1' from the ground but appear to have fused together through branch development around 3' and 5' height.

The third yew (right) had a girth of 9' 11" at about 1'. There are four main branches of which one appears to have fused with the largest branch at about 12'. Eight large branches have been removed.





Along the south perimeter, the final yew, male, had a girth of 8' 5" at 2' 6". Thick stemmed ivy growth only allowed measurement where it had been cut away.

The church may have been originally built in the 12th with additions during the 13th and 15th centuries and rebuilt in 1844-6.

One male yew, with a splendid root system, grows on a large mound just outside of the church porch and is in the process of displacing some large tombed graves.



In 2000 Tim Hills recorded this male yew as " 11' 9" at about 3'. Large amount of fungus and a blotchy red bark were noted."

Measurements during 2009 indicated a girth of 10' 10" at 1' and 12' 1" at 2'.

Further heights are discounted due to branch developments.

There are 21 clipped Irish Yews that continue around the churchyard perimeter.

Steeple Langford - All Saints

Map 184 SU 036 374

9.4 miles NW of Salisbury

Originally built in the 12th century and largely rebuilt in the 14th with extensive restorations in 1875.

Towards the north west of the church there is one young male yew tree with a girth of 8' 10" at both 1' 6" and 3'.

During 2000 Tim Hills noted "one young male and ten large and rambling clipped Irish Yews."

Six have now been heavily trimmed to within about 3' of the ground.



Tilshead lies on Salisbury Plain at the head of the valley of the River Till which is no more than an occasional stream or winter bourne, but does converge with the Wylye just south of Stapleford. There are eight churches with yews along this tributary of the Wylye.

The earliest records of a church at this site date back to the 12th century with alterations during the 14th and 15th. Extensive repairs in the 17th and 18th century and restored during 1845-6.





There are four yews on this site with the first (far left) growing at the churchyard south east entrance. The yew, male, had a girth of 9' 2" at 1' and 7' 2" at 4' which excluded the protruding branch.

One male and one female are growing along the east perimeter and both have a girth of 7' 4" at 2'.

The final yew (right), male, grows midway along the north perimeter and had a girth of 9' 10" at 2'.

Orcheston - St George

Map 184 SU 059 449

12.6 miles NW of Salisbury

A medieval church fully restored in 1833 and now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. Only one yew, female, was found on this site and grows mid way along the north perimeter. Measurements were not recorded due to the heavy ivy growth which distorted recordings.

Heavy ivy growth in the canopy was also noted. Estimated* girth between 7' to 9' could be given.

Shrewton - St Mary

Map 184 SU 069 443

11 miles NW of Salisbury



A small church existed in the 13th century with additions during the 15th. No major refurbishments until 1855 when it was enlarged and refurbished.

Only one yew, male, is evident within the churchyard with a girth of 9' at 1'

A total of ten Irish Yews are scattered around the churchyard.

The church was first mentioned in 1179, with alterations during the 17th century. It was fully restored between 1843-53, then declared redundant in 1975 and is now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

There are seven yews within this churchyard with the most 'interesting' growing to the west of the north churchyard entrance.



This female yew has the appearance of significant internal root growth, starting high in the canopy and fully established, along with evidence of the rotting and decayed outer trunk. The girth measured 8' 9" just above the root crown but this did not take into account the missing decayed trunk. A further investigation of this tree is required so as to fully understand its original girth.



Growing to the east of the churchyard entrance a female (below left) with a girth of 8' 6" at 2' 6"

The third yew, male, grows at the west of the church (far right) and many branches have been removed from the lower trunk. Girth measured 11' 6" at 2' 6".

Two young status yews grow alongside the west perimeter of the additional graveyard, the male had a girth of 7' at 2' 6" and the female was not measured.

Two further yews, male and female, grow along the east perimeter but were not measured due to heavy lower growth and dense summer vegetation.





The church originally dates from the 13th century and was in possession of the Knights Hospitaller for around 350 years. Only minor alterations were carried out until a partial restoration in 1845. The church is now redundant and in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

One very young female yew grows at the west side of the church and was not measured.

Winterbourne Stoke - St Peter

Map 184 SU 076 406

9.9 miles NW of Salisbury

Records show a church was on this site in 1066 with additions during the 13th and 14th centuries. The church was extensively restored in 1838-40.

Five yews are found on this site with the most notable growing on a slight mound at the west of the church.





Clearing the young ivy growth as near as possible to the ground, as can be seen in the photographs, the girth measured exactly 12' at 1'.

There is evidence of heavy branch removal and local concern for the slight leaning towards the church was voiced.

The remaining four yews grow alongside the churchyard entrance and are of young status and therefore not measured.

Berwick St James - St James

Map 184 SU 072 391

8.8 miles NW of Salisbury

The church has its origins in the mid 12th century, with additions through the 13th to 16th centuries.

There are three yews at the eastern end of the church with two males estimated* between 7' to 9'. The larger of the two is covered by heavy thick-stemmed ivy so accurate measurements could not be taken. This tree is in the process of totally displacing a very large tombed grave.

The third yew is a young female with heavy bushy growth and much smaller in girth than the other two.

Six yews grow within this site. On the west perimeter are two young male trees with estimated* 4' to 6' girths and a further four leading up to the north perimeter that are considered much smaller. Heavy lower growth did not permit any accurate measurements.

A further four yews sit outside the east perimeter in an adjacent garden. One wonders if the boundary has been moved.

There are sixteen clipped Irish Yews within this churchyard of which six elegant specimens lead to the church porch.

Great Wishford - St Giles

Map 184 SU 080 355

6 miles NW of Salisbury

Back on the Wylye, St Giles is noted for a series of stone tablets, set in the wall of the churchyard and chronicling the cost of bread from the Napoleonic Wars to 2000!

The church may be 12th century with additions and alterations right the way through to a major refurbishment during 1863-4.

Four yews grow within this site with the largest, female, to the west of the church.

Although there is heavy lower foliage the tape was carefully threaded through and a girth of about 9' at 3' 6" was recorded. Below this height was discounted due to the foliage.





In 2000 Tim Hills noted "Three yews are planted in a triangular formation on one of the curved corners of the churchyard – beneath these is a harmful build up of church yard waste to the depth of about 1'."

The remaining three young yews, two female and one male are located in the far north west corner with recent partial removal of grass clippings that has exposed some of the previously buried trunk. Careful examination showed that the soil was also removed; root growth was exposed along with obvious breaking of roots themselves.

The male tree (r/h) measured 7' 4" at 1' above what remains of the soil; churchyard waste has started to fill what had been removed.

Six Irish Yews lead the way to the church porch.



The church is of 13th century origin and largely restored in the 19th.

Due to its small size the church has never been converted to electricity, and in the 21st century it still has and uses the original Victorian gas lighting.



Three yews grow within this site with the apparent largest, male, adjacent to the east perimeter gate and covered by heavy thick-stemmed ivy, so accurate measurements could not be taken. An estimate* of 6' to 8' could be given.

The other two are female, both smaller than the male, but like the male each is covered in thick stemmed ivy.

All the yews had very large piles of grass clippings around their bases.

There are 39 clipped Irish Yews within the churchyard and they line the pathway from the west gate to the west side of the church. All have been reduced in height to about 5'. Photographs available via the Wiltshire Council web site indicate these trees to have been above head height in 2003.

Fugglestone St Peter's church lies within the boundaries of Wilton where there are other churches, but all are situated closer to the River Nadder, which, in turn will be the subject of a further article.

The Wylye converges with the Nadder just further east so this is the last church recorded along this valley.

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Appendix 1: Churches visited

Those indicated thus* are detailed within the body of this report.

Maiden Bradley All Saints*

Kingston Deverill St Mary the Virgin*

Monkton Deverill King Alfred – now a private house

Brixton Deverill St Michael the Archangel

Hill Deverill Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – now a private house

Longbridge Deverill St Peter and St Paul*

Warminster St Deny*
Warminster Christ Church

Warminster St John the Evangelist

Bishopstrow St Aldhelm* Norton Bavant All Saints*

Sutton Veny St John the Evangelist

Sutton Veny St Leonards*
Tytherington St James

Heytesbury St Peter and St Paul* Knook St Margaret of Antioch

Corton Holy Angels – now a private house

Upton Lovell St Augustine of Canterbury*

Boyton St Mary the Virgin*

Codford St Peter St Peter Codford St Mary St Mary* Chitterne St Mary*

Chitterne All Saints and St Mary
Sherrington St Cosmo and St Damien
Stockton St John the Baptist*

Fisherton de la Mere St Nicholas

Wylye St Mary the Virgin*

Steeple Langford All Saints*

Little Langford St Nicholas of Mira
Tilshead St Thomas a Becket*

St Mary

Orcheston St George* Shrewton St Mary* Maddington St Mary* Rollestone St Andrew* Winterbourne Stoke St Peter* St James* Berwick St James Steeple Langford All Saints* **Great Wishford** St Giles* South Newton St Andrew Fugglestone St Peter St Peter*

Historical references:

Orcheston

Historical date references have been obtained but not directly copied from;

Wiltshire County Council - http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/church search.php

University of London and History of Parliament Trust http://www.british-history.ac.uk/