

ANCIENT YEW at FAREHAM by Malcolm Low

The largest Yew in Fareham is found in the churchyard of St Peter and St Paul, Osborn Road. It is a male specimen and grows NE of the church.

Old hollow yew trees are difficult to age since the growth rings of its heartwood have long decayed. For the same reason there is no wood from the centre of the tree to carbon date. Other estimating techniques are used but experts continue to disagree over the age of the most ancient yews. Many consider that a yew with a circumference of 20ft might well be 1000 years old; if we accept this possibility then perhaps it is not unreasonable to suggest an age of over 2000 years for a yew with a circumference of over 30ft.



The earliest known record of an old yew at this site is contained in the 1909 *Hampshire Little Guide* by J.C.Cox. It was documented by Russell Cleaver of the Ancient Yew Group in 2005. He recorded a girth of 21' 9" at 3', noting that the missing sections of tree would make a circumference of 24' a realistic estimate. This suggests to me the possibility that the tree could be at the latter end of my estimate of 750-1500 years of age. If that is the case it could have been planted in the early Saxon period (596AD-1066AD), which would coincide with the remains of the original Saxon church on the site.

Many other yews of various shape and size grow in this churchyard. After this ancient specimen the two next oldest, girthing around 11', are likely to be in the range 200-300 years.

It is my understanding that a Yew tree planted near a Religious Cell might also mark the location of fresh water, either a spring or a well, and being evergreen, could guide people to refreshment and shelter throughout the year.

