

Llanlleonfel Church is situated on an ancient hilltop site in a circular enclosure. It was restored by RJ Withers in 1874.



Copies of this picture were on sale in the church, but did not acknowledge the artist or date of the sketch. It is the last record of the living tree, complete with branches and foliage, before it was 'tidied and made safe.' I was told in writing that it had 'in recent years become very overgrown and was obscuring some gravestones as well as making the entrance to the church rather dark. Concern had also been expressed about some of the limbs of the tree and the possibility of them falling on someone visiting the church.'

A local woodsman had been employed to 'tidy the tree and make it safe. His work was a little more drastic than anticipated.'

At the time of my visit in August 1999 the work had only recently been completed. The large stump had a few green shoots and I asked that it should be left since the tree might recover. I was assured, again in writing, that 'the intention is not to fell it.'

Three years later, in 2002, I visited to see how the green shoots had developed, only to find an overgrown mound with a young yew planted in the centre of the few remaining inches of stump. The rest of the bole lay on the ground awaiting removal.



Frances Kilvert (1840-79) was the first to note the yew at this site. The following is an extract from his Diary: "I wandered away by myself into congenial solitude for a visit to the ruined church of Llanlionfel.....The ruined church tottered lone upon a hill in desolate silence. The old tombstones stood knee-deep in the long coarse grass and white and purple flowers nodded over the graves. The door stood open and I went in. The window frames and seats were gone.....The place was deserted, there was not a sound. I ascended the tall rickety pulpit and several white owls disturbed from their day sleep floated silently under the crazy Rood Loft on their broad downy wings and sauntered sailing without sound through the frameless east and west windows to take refuge with a sweep of their broad white pinions in the ancient yew that kept watch over the Church. It was a place for owls to dwell in a satyrs to dance in."

The yew came to our attention through the 1970 Brecon Yew Survey. In 1999 its girth was recorded as 18' 6" at 1', a measurement that classifies the yew as veteran (500+). However we need to consider that the tree's girth would have been considerably larger when a complete circle of growth surrounded the sawn off internal stem (A). This was quite possibly an ancient specimen (800+), and with the potential to double its age, we have to wonder at the rules and regulations that allow for such destruction to occur.

This church is in the same parish as the Cilmerly Yew, felled in 2009.



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