

Dorset Yews

An Inventory of Churchyard Yews along the Dorset Stour and its tributaries

Part 1 – The Upper Stour

By Peter Norton



Introduction:

The Stour rises just above the lakes at Stourhead in Wiltshire and on its way through Dorset it is fed by springs and streams from Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset, with a large part of its catchment edged by chalk hills containing the Blackmore Vale. It continues through Blandford and Wimborne to Christchurch, where it converges with the Avon and Mude to flow out to sea between Mudeford Quay and Hengistbury Spit, some sixty miles from its many sources.

The tributaries of the Stour include: Shreen Water, Cale, Lodden, Lydden, Bow Brook, Caundle Brook, Divelish, Darknoll, Chivrick’s Brook, Key Brook, Fontmell Brook, Iwerne, North Winterborne, Pimperne Stream, Tarrant, Gussage, Allen, Uddens Water, Mannington Brook and Crane, as well as many unnamed streams.

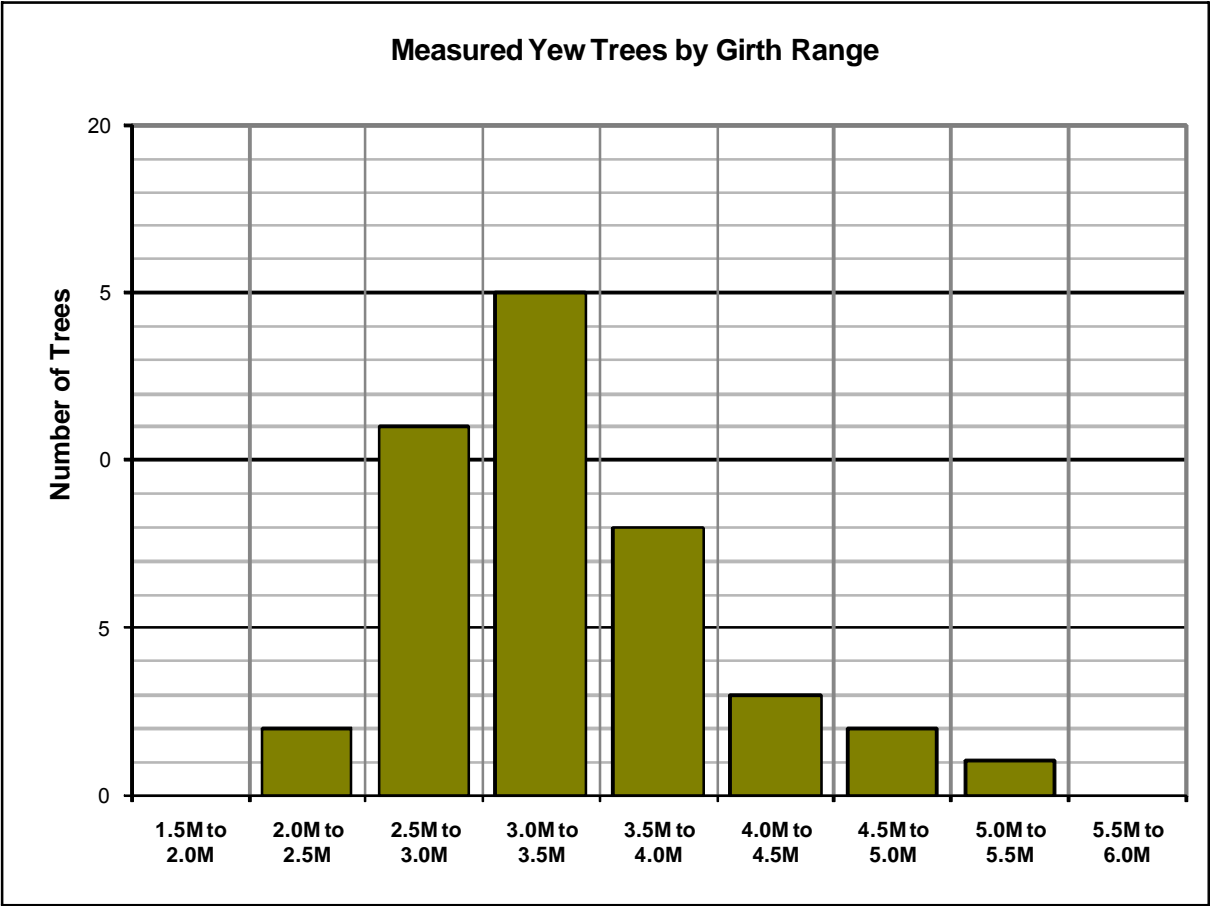
The Upper Stour OS183:

This is first of three reports that split the River Stour into three sections; Upper, Middle and Lower Stour as covered by the Ordnance Survey maps 183, 194 and 195. The area as described will not agree with the geological understanding but is based on the areas covered by the three maps. The Upper Stour is therefore described as from the source at Stourhead to just south of Hinton St Mary at Yewstock, covering a distance of some sixteen miles by road. Along its path it is joined by the Shreen Water, Lodden, Cale, Bibbern and the Manston Brook, along with many named/unnamed streams that flow into the above waters.

All of the towns and villages along this part of the Stour and her tributaries were included. Forty four churches were visited, of which thirty six contained yews.

Included for each church visited is an estimated mileage from Blandford which will be used as the reference point in all three reports. All churches are in Dorset unless otherwise stated.

A total of ninety two trees were noted at these sites of which forty two 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.



- *Rising at St Peter's Pump in Stourhead Gardens and then flowing south to Gillingham where it is joined by the Shreen and its tributaries and then the Slod Brook and Ashfield Water.*
- *The Lodden which rises near to East Knoyle and its tributary; Fern Brook converge with the Stour just south of Gillingham.*

Zeals – St Martin – Wiltshire – ST781317

22 miles NW of Blandford

The church was built in 1848 on land donated by the Duke of Somerset.

Three yews growing within the churchyard. The male shown here grows to the west of the church – its girth was 11' 2" at 2' and 10' 5" at 3' above the top of the mound.

Two further females were not measured, one to the north because of thick lower growth and one to the east because of thick stemmed ivy.



Bourton – St George – ST768302

22 miles NW of Blandford

Several young yews grow within the churchyard; one at the NE corner of the churchyard and several to the NW of the church. No measurements were taken. This is a recent churchyard with a church that was probably originally built in 1810.

Silton – St Nicholas – ST782293

20 miles NW of Blandford

The church is Grade I listed with parts dating from the 12th century. It was added to during the 14th, 15th and 17th centuries with a general restoration in 1869.



Five yews grow within the churchyard, of which the first four recorded here are female.

Thick stemmed ivy had been recently removed from the yew growing near to the west gate, enabling a girth of 8' 6" at 1' to be recorded. To the north a small pathway leading to a new burial ground has two yews either side of the path. That on the east side of this path measured 11' 4" at 1' while on the west the yew (above left) measured 11' 9" at 1'. Here is a fine example of a tree whose branches have been allowed to touch the ground around the complete drip line.

To the north east of the church is the yew shown above right, already with many red fruit (19th July 2010), its girth 11' 8" at 1'. The final yew and only male, seen in the background of the photo above right, was not measured.

Milton on Stour – St Simon and St Jude – ST801286

19 miles NW of Blandford

The church was built in 1868. The two male yews in the churchyard were both covered in thick stemmed ivy, so measurements could not be taken. One grows to the north and the other to the east of the church.

Gillingham – St Mary the Virgin – ST806265

18 miles NW of Blandford

Apart from the 14th century chancel, this church was totally rebuilt in 1838. One female yew grows north of the porch, a fine fluted tree in which hollowing is taking place. Girth was 12' 9" at 1' and 13' 10" at 3'.



- *Mere sits near the head of Shreen Water, which converges with the Stour in Gillingham*

Mere – St Michael the Archangel – Wiltshire - ST811332

21 miles NW of Blandford



Some parts of the church date from the 13th and 14th centuries while most date from a rebuild in the 15th century. There was no record of Victorian restoration.

This yew is recorded in the *Yew Gazetteer*, growing NNE of the church and girthing 17' 7" at 2' in 2005. Two unverified planting dates are suggested for this yew. 1636 is recorded in the Tree Register's data base and 1707 appears in the church guide. Either would make this an unusually fast growing specimen.

- *The following four churches sit close to the multi-sourced Lodden; along with the Fern Brook and converge with the Stour near Madjeston, Gillingham.*

West Knoyle – St Mary the Virgin – Wiltshire – ST859326

22 miles N of Blandford

Parts of the church still retain pre-conquest indicators; it was added to in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, with a general restoration in 1845. A new burial ground was opened in 1899. Five young yews grow to the NW of the church and mark the perimeter to the new burial ground. No measurements were taken.

East Knoyle – St Mary – Wiltshire – ST880305**18 miles N of Blandford**

This was a religious site before the 12th century Norman church was built. Evidence is provided by the worn stone cross in the churchyard and parts of the chancel. Additions were made in the 13th and 14th centuries with restoration in the 19th century. Sir Christopher Wren was born in the village (1632) and spent his early years in the rectory while his father was the rector.



Three yews grow within the churchyard. The first (above left), south of the porch, is a male measuring 13' 9" at the root crown and 15' at 3' from the ground. The second (above right) grows to the west of the church near to the perimeter. It is female with a girth of 13' 11" at 1' above the mound. The third, growing north of the church, could not be measured due to thick spray and dense undergrowth around the tree.

Sedgehill – St Catherine – Wiltshire - ST866282**17 miles N of Blandford**

The church may well have been there in the 14th century, but was mainly rebuilt in 1844.

Four young yews grow to the west of the church, with the largest growing at the NW. No photographs or measurements were taken.

Motcombe – St Mary – ST849242**15 miles N of Blandford**

The church was rebuilt in 1846, no previous history could be found.

Five yews, three female and two male, grow within the churchyard. The female (below left) growing east of the church had a girth of 11' 4" at the root crown. The male (below right) grows north of the church on a small mound and measured 10' 4" at 1'. The remaining trees to the north and west are much smaller in girth.



- *The Stour flows on through Marnhull where it is joined by the Cale.*

East Stour – Christ church – ST798228

16 miles NW of Blandford

A Neo-Norman church totally rebuilt in 1842 on the site of a 12th century church. Two female yews grow within the grounds. The tree next to the north entrance (below left) girthed 10' 11" at 1' 6", while the other (below right) girthed 10' 1" at 1'. A more formidable yew once grew here. It was described as follows in the 1805 *Traveller's Guide* by W.C. Oulton : "In the chapel yard is a prodigious large yew-tree, under which 1500 men can stand: its circuit 24 feet."



West Stour – St Mary – ST785228

17 miles NW of Blandford



The church dates back to the 13th century with the tower and nave rebuilt in 1840.

Two male yews grow within the grounds. The one shown in the photo grows east of the church. Its girth, over a cover of ivy, was about 11' at 1'. The second, growing north of the church, was more difficult to record with an eight inch diameter ivy stem growing up against the trunk. Allowing for this a girth of 12' 8" was calculated.

This too is the site of a lost yew. In the 1805 *Traveller's Guide* by W.C. Oulton, is the following description: "Opposite Eastour is Westour, where is another remarkably large yew-tree, whose body is 21 feet in circuit."

Fifehead Magdalen – St Mary Magdalene – ST783215

16 miles NW of Blandford

The church is mostly of 14th century origin, with the north chapel added in 1750 and a full restoration in 1905. Two young female yew are found in the churchyard. One grows near the south west entrance, the other north east of the church. No measurements were taken.

Stour Provost – St Michael and All Angels – ST794215

15 miles NW of Blandford

The church may be 13th century in origin, with major restoration in the 19th century.

One female yew with a girth of 10' 11" at 1' grows SE of the porch.



Marnhull – St Gregory – ST781187.

12.5 miles NW of Blandford

The earliest parts of the church date from the Norman period with many additions and alterations over the centuries and a restoration in 1887.

Four female yews grow north of the church, all less than 8' in girth.

- *The Cale rises in Newpark Wood north of Charlton Musgrove. It flows in a southerly direction through Charlton Musgrove to Bayford where it is joined by tributary streams, one that originates just east of Stoney Stoke and the other near to Pen Selwood (note the correct spelling as opposed to OS spelling). The river continues on through Wincanton, past the western side of Kingston Magna and joins the Stour, west of Marnhull.*
- *On its journey to the Stour it is joined by a number of unnamed tributary streams, one that rises north of Stoke Trister and another that rises on Malkiln Hill. Further south it is joined on its western side by Bow Brook that rises near Holton and South Cheriton, and on its eastern side by Filley Brook which originates south of Cucklington.*

Charlton Musgrove – St Stephen - Somerset - ST721299

23 miles NW of Blandford

The church may be of 12th century origin, with additions during the 14th and late 15th centuries and restoration in 1884.

Four yews grow within the grounds. The first, below left, is a male growing south of the porch. Its girth is 8' at both 1' and 3' from the ground. To the east of the church are found two females and one male. The female growing south east girthed 9' 4" at 1' while the male to the east and seen below right, measured 9' 10" at 1'. The last female yew was much smaller.



Pen Selwood – St Michael – Somerset – ST756314

23 miles NW of Blandford



Originally a 12th century church with addition of the tower in the 15th century and major work in 1847.

A single female yew grows here, to the south of the porch. Its girth was 11' 10" at 2' and 11' 5" at 3'. On the north side of the tree at about eight feet from the ground can be observed hollowing, with aerial roots already formed

Wincanton – St Peter and St Paul – Somerset – ST711284

23 miles NW of Blandford

There is evidence of a stone church being built here in 1313. It was modified in 1748, enlarged in 1828 and partially rebuilt in 1887.

Three male yews grow within the grounds. The tree to the north east (right) is hollow with part of its trunk missing. This supports a reduced crown. Its girth was 9' 4" at 1'. The tree growing east of the church girthed 9' 9" at 1', while that growing south west has a short bole from which three main stems grow. Seen below, it measured 11' 6" at 1'.



North Cheriton – St John the Baptist – Somerset - ST687258

21 miles NW of Blandford



Records show a church on this site in 1256. Parts of the present church are late 15th century and it was largely rebuilt in 1877/8.

Two yews grow east of the church. The tree shown here is an unmeasured female. A male growing on the high bank just to the north had an estimated girth of 7' to 9'.*

Nearby on the A357 is a graveyard and small chapel built in 1893 (ST693255). No yews grew here.

Horsington – St John the Baptist – Somerset – ST703237

20 miles NW of Blandford

The Church, originally a 13th century building, was largely rebuilt in 1844/5.

Two yews are found here, the first at the north east entrance (right) is male, girthing 9' 10" at 1'.

A female yew grows near the north east corner of the churchyard; allowing for ivy a measurement of 7' 6" at 1' was recorded.



Stowell – St Mary Magdalene – Somerset – ST686223

20.5 miles NW of Blandford

The oldest part of the church is the base of the 14th century tower while the upper stages were rebuilt in 1748. The rest of the church was rebuilt in 1834, with extensive restoration in 1890. In 1913 the church, with the exception of the tower, was demolished and replaced by the present structure.



Two male yews grow in the grounds. This yew, at the SW entrance, comprises three stems emerging from the ground of which the largest girthed 10' 4" at 1' before splitting into four branches. Thick ivy prevented measurement of the remaining two stems. In the photo the main stem is on the left.

The remaining yew grows near the north east corner of the churchyard and could not be measured due to thick stemmed ivy, elder, bramble and nettles.

Templecombe – St Mary – Somerset – ST708226

18.5 miles NW of Blandford

The village of Templecombe was once two different parishes -Temple Combe and Abbas Combe-and was the only Preceptory of the Knights Templar in Somerset when in 1185, the manor was granted to the Order. A painting with a fascinating Templar history hangs inside the church.

This was originally a 12th century church with a tower added in the 13th century. It was rebuilt in the 15th century, and added to during the early 16th century and in 1724 and 1834. Restoration was carried out in 1864.

One female tree grows near to the south east corner of the churchyard. It gives the appearance of having once been larger. Thick ivy growth prevented full exploration, covering what looks like a large piece of stump.



Stalbridge – St Mary – Somerset – ST733181

15 miles NW of Blandford



A 14th century church with much restoration in 1878. The churchyard is high above the main street.

One female yew grows here. In spite of thick bushy lower growth, careful threading of the tape enabled a girth recording of about 16' girth at the ground.

Stoke Trister – St Andrew – Somerset – ST737287

22.5 miles NW of Blandford

The original 12th century church, which stood north of the manor house, was burnt down. The present church, on a new site, was built in 1841.

Two male yews grow in the churchyard. The tree near to the south west corner and entrance to the churchyard was un-measureable due to thick lower growth. It did however appear to be larger than the second tree which grows to the east of the church and girthed 8' 7" near to the ground.

Cucklington – St Lawrence - ST755277

21 miles NW of Blandford

Early records indicate a church on this site in 1291, with additions in the 15th century. A major rebuild in 1703 was followed by extensive restoration in 1880.



Three yews grow in the churchyard. The first, near to the south west gate, is female and girthed 10' 4" at 1'. There was evidence of early hollowing. The second grows on sloping ground north west of the church; it is male, partially hollow and measured 12' 10" at 1' from the top of the bank. The photo shows the difficulty of recording such trees, with thick elder and churchyard rubbish left around the roots. The third yew, male, grows south east of the church. Thick low branches hampered measurement, which was estimated as between 10' and 12'.*

Buckhorn Weston – St John the Baptist – ST757247

18.5 miles NW of Blandford

Of the original 13th century church, only the porch remains. The building was fully restored in 1870.

One male yew is found growing near the north east of the church. Its girth was 13' 2" at 1'.



- *The Stour is then joined by the Bibbern; rising near Purse Caundle and converging south of Marnhull.*

Purse Caundle – St Peter – ST696175

16 miles W of Blandford



The original church was built in 1480, possibly on the site of an even earlier structure. It was partially rebuilt in 1840.

Three female yews grow within the churchyard. One of the two found on the east perimeter is shown here, its girth 10' 1" at 1'. The third grows west of the tower and girthed 10' 4" at 1'.

Stourton Caundle – St Peter – ST714152

14 miles W of Blandford

A 13th century church retains its 14th century tower. The church was added to in the 15th century and fully restored in 1902.

Four male yews grow in the churchyard. None of the 3 along the west perimeter have a girth above about 8'. The notable yew is found south west of the church, a twin trunked male with a girth of 15' 2" at 1'. The east trunk measured 9' 3", with its partially hollow stem full of needle drop, deadwood, and the beginnings of an aerial root. The west trunk measured 9' 5".



- *The Stour is then joined by the Lydden rising near Buckland Newton and converging south of Marnhull; to be detailed in the second report.*

Hinton St Mary – St Peter – ST787161

11 miles NW of Blandford



A church was first established in the 12th century with a tower added in the 15th century and a major rebuild in 1846.

One young female yew grows south of the tower, its girth not recorded but the photograph shows the cuts following major ivy removal.

- *Manston will be the last village on the OS183 map and Sturminster Newton will therefore appear in the second report—Middle Stour.*
- *The Stirchel rises in Melbury Abbas and merges with the Twyford Brook and then the Manston Brook before its confluence with the Stour at Manston.*

Melbury Abbas – St Thomas – ST882200

9 miles N of Blandford



The church was completely rebuilt in 1852.

This single unmeasured yew grows SE of the church porch. Many of its lower branches have been removed.

East Orchard – St Thomas – ST833179

11 miles NW of Blandford

The church was built on this new site in around 1859-61.

Four yews grow near to the church, each quite small in girth. Thick stemmed ivy covers much of the trees and has recently been cut through. Because of the ivy only one yew was measurable, the male growing north west of the church, its girth 9' 1" at 1'.

West Orchard – St Luke – ST823164

11 miles NW of Blandford

This was originally a 15th century church, fully restored in 1876.

Two female yews grow south of the porch. The tree growing SW measured 11' 6" at 1' while that to the SE measured about 10' at 1'. Ivy again hampered accurate recording.



- *Joining the Manston Brook at West Orchard is the Key Brook which has its source west of Shaftesbury and is joined by many un-named streams*

Shaftesbury

Although Shaftesbury's recorded history dates from Anglo-Saxon times, it may have been of Celtic origin. Alfred the Great founded a Burgh (fortified settlement) here in 880 as a defence in the struggle with the Danish invaders. Alfred and his daughter Ethelgiva founded Shaftesbury Abbey in 888, and it became the wealthiest Benedictine nunnery in England. It was demolished in 1539. Nearly all the Medieval buildings have long gone with most of the town dating from the 18th century



The church was first recorded in 1140 but there may be a late Saxon foundation located slightly east of the present building which was erected in 1866.

Five yews grow in the grounds. Two growing south west and two north west of the church were small girthed and not measured.

The female yew shown here grows north east of the church and girthed 10' at 1'.

Shaftesbury - St John – ST858226

This is not to be confused with St John the Evangelist at Enmore Green which was built in 1843. This church was first recorded in 1272 but the parish was united with St James in 1446. The church may have already been disused by that time. Nothing remains apart from a small hidden graveyard; however the site might be marked by uneven ground at the south end. Hutchins mentions the foundations of a little church visible in the late 18th century, (Hutchins 1774, 32). The old site is well hidden and has nothing to indicate what lies within. Much summer vegetation dominates the entrance, however a small path from a gap in the wall on St John's Hill leads to one very large male yew dominating the area. This yew is recorded in the Yew Gazetteer as 'unmeasurable'.



Shaftesbury - St Rumbold - ST867226

The church was first recorded in 1307. It was rebuilt in 1840 on the original site, retaining some of the earlier fabric. It was renovated in 1910 and declared redundant in 1971. It now forms part of the Shaftesbury school art centre.

One male yew grows east of the church, with evidence of thick stemmed ivy having been cut through. Girth was recorded as 11' 5" at 1' 6" above the root crown.



Stour Row – All Saints – ST823211**13 miles NW of Blandford**

The church was built in 1868 and has one young yew SW of the porch; no measurements were taken.

Margaret Marsh – St Margaret – ST823185**12 miles NW of Blandford**

The church was rebuilt in 1872, retaining its 15th century tower.

Seven yews are found in the churchyard; three male and four female. Near to the east gate are two males and one female, the largest of these a male girthing 8' 10" at 1'. Close to the south porch are one female measuring 9' 6" at 1' (below left) and a younger male. The remaining two female trees are found to the south and west of the church. The first measures 8' 9" at 1', the second has four stems emerging from a short bole and a girth of 11' 2" at 1' 6" (below right).

**Manston - St Nicholas - ST816150****10 miles NW of Blandford**

The church is found in the grounds of Manston House and accessed from the road along a private drive. Parts date from around the 11th century and the tower dates from 1534. The church was fully restored in 1885.

A few young yews grow outside of the churchyard. A yew was recorded here in J.Hutchins *'History of Dorset'*, 1st edition 1774. That tree no longer exists.

Historical references have been obtained but not directly copied from:

- Dorset Historic Churches Trust
- Dorset Online Parish Clerks
- Dorset Churches Web Pages
- Common Ground Web Pages

The following sites were also visited. None had any yews.

Stourton – St Peter – Wiltshire
Todber – St Andrew – Dorset
Charlton Musgrove – St John the Baptist - Somerset
Holton – St Nicholas – Somerset
Henstridge – St Nicholas – Somerset
Kington Magna – All Saints – Dorset

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