

Bettws Newydd's 'fine yew-trees' were first noted in the *Topographical Dictionary of England* of 1848. There are three, though the account below, taken from the 1877 *Gardner's Chronicle*, noted only two. In spite of this omission, the account is exceptional for its detailed sketch and description of Bettws Newydd's most famed yew.

'Ancient Resuscitated Yew at Bettws Newydd - The gigantic old Yew, of which the base is here illustrated, is one of two now growing in the churchyard of Bettws Newydd, between Abergavenny and Usk in Monmouthshire. The original sketch was made by the writer last autumn during the meeting of the Cambrian Association in Monmouthshire. The two great Yews at Bettws Newydd are considered remarkably large even in this district, where Yews of great size are common. The tree illustrated is 30 feet 6 inches in circumference at 5 feet from the ground, and is not only remarkable on account of its great size, but for its singular regrowth or resuscitation from within. The internal stem was probably at first an adventitious descending root, now it is a columnar stem of great size, which serves to support and feed the battered and time-riven old shell.'



The value of this sketch is the evidence it provides of the extremely slow decomposition rate of dead sapwood, which appears little changed in 125 years. New branches, not seen in the 1877 sketch, have since begun to form at the outer margins of the shell (A). In a few hundred years time when the sapwood has finally decayed, this great ancient yew will take on the entirely different appearance of several trunks growing close to each other, but all connected. The largest of these will be provided by its internal stem (below right), which will be surrounded for many more decades by the decaying sapwood shell. In 1977 *Welsh Timber Trees* by Hyde and Harrison, a girth of 31' was recorded for the yew.



Internal stem

Girth of the internal stem was recorded in 1998 by Fergus Kinmonth as 7' 6" at 3'. In 2014 the internal stem was recorded by Peter Norton as 6' 5" at 1' and 6' 3" at 6". In 2025 I recorded 6' 6½" at 1' and 6' 5" at 6".



1997: This fine male specimen grows by the perimeter wall north of the church. On decaying branches and beneath the yew were large quantities of laetiporus sulphurous, commonly known as the chicken of the woods bracket fungus. Other branches dip to the ground and some have become embedded.



The following girths have been recorded:

2000: 19' 7" at 3' and 20' 0" at 5'.

2014: 19' 11" at 3' and 20' 6" at 5'.

2025: 20' 7" at 3' over some ivy

My visit in 2025 was to a less approachable yew, almost hidden in undergrowth and with sections of its trunk covered in ivy. Foliage was thick and green throughout.



2000: The 3rd tree, also male, grows on the east side. It leans slightly towards the church, with its ivy covered bole a confusion of growth and hollows to a height of about 10', where it divides into many branches. In 1997 the hollows were stuffed with churchyard waste and old newspapers, and the ground beneath was a store for dried grass. It was possible to measure the tree, with girths of 21' 1", keeping the tape a constant 1' above the ground and 22' 0" at 3' (through twiggy growth).



2025: Low growth prevented measurement of this complex tree. Foliage was thick and very green, though there was much leaf gall.

