

The Parish Church is thought to be the oldest in the New Forest, a church having existed on the site since about 800 AD. It is on raised ground in a churchyard whose circular origins can still be traced. Much has been said about its yew, going back as far as 1793 when Warner's *Topographical Remarks* described 'a fine tree....upwards of 60' in height'.

In the 1841 *Observations on Popular Antiquities*, J.Brand and H.Ellis wrote that 'the churchyard exhibits two examples of enormous vegetation - a large oak, apparently coeval with the mound on which it grows, measuring five-and-twenty feet in girth; and a straight majestic yew-tree. On the latter the axe has committed sad depredations, despoiling it of five or six huge branches - a circumstance that doubtless has taken greatly from its ancient dignity. Still, however, it is a noble tree, measuring in girth fifteen feet, and in height upwards of sixty. I should think it might lay claim to an antiquity nearly equal to its venerable neighbour'.

Both oak and yew are seen in these images, the drawing is from the 1855 *North Devon Athenaeum England under Victoria*.



In the past:

1865: *A handbook for travellers in Surrey, Hampshire, and the Isle of Wight*, RJ King and J Murray described ‘an enormous yew-tree, the hollow trunk of which is 17 ft. in circumference’.

1890: The *Hants Antiquary and Naturalist* reproduced an article that appeared in *The Hampshire Independent* on October 5th 1889:

Mr J.R.Wise, in his work on “The New Forest,” gives the measurement of a yew in Brockenhurst churchyard, “which, from the Conqueror’s day to this hour, has darkened the graves of generations,” as 17feet.

1895/7: An extract from the Woolhope Papers describes it as follows: ‘the head still unbroken...and with a spread of foliage about 70 yards in circumference’.

1939: In *The King’s England* Arthur Mee waxes lyrical: ‘...a yew with a hollow trunk...nearly 1000 years old and still vigorous. The yew.....may have seen the Norman builders lay the foundation stone for the church, and the carvers marking out the mass dial on the wall. It may have seen the Normans bring the doorways through which we enter still, beautifully carved in the Conqueror’s day’.

1981: According to Allen Meredith, Brockenhurst means the ‘height of the yew-trees’, Brocken being the genitive of the name of a yew-tree in the Anglo-Saxon, and hurst possibly that of a dry elevation. He notes an old legend that the bow used to kill William Rufus on 2nd August 1100 was cut from the yew at Brockenhurst. In his opinion the Brockenhurst yew would only have been about 200 years old then, and surmises that there may have been other yews in the churchyard much older than the present one would then have been.

1998: I recorded a healthy female tree growing SW of the church. Two openings to its hollow on the opposite side of the tree are gradually narrowing as new wood is laid down; each is now only a few inches wide, one rising 6', the other 8'. The main branches form at a height of 15'/16'. Most low growth has been removed, leaving an unusually clean, visible bole. It is my impression that the yew has been larger - suggested by the white line - and that the section of trunk marked A originated as internal growth.



Girth:

1793	15' - Warner's <i>Topographical Remarks</i>
1865	17' - <i>Handbook for Travellers</i>
1892	18' at 3' and 21' at the ground - John Lowe
1915	18' 4" at 3' - Sir Daniel Morris
1963	19' 2" at 3' - Alan Mitchell
1979	19' 6" at 3' - Alan Mitchell
1998	21' 5" at 1', 20' 9" at 3' and 21' 6" at 5' - Tim Hills
2006	Height 15m Diameter 203cm girth 637 cm (20' 11") at 0.6m - Owen Johnson
2010	22' 2" at 1', 21' 2" at 2' and 21' 4" at 3' - Peter Norton

