

1998: This tall female yew has been noted by botanists since 1780. Estimates of its age range from De Candolle's 1400 years in 1831 to Lowe's between 700 and 1000 years in 1897. A sign by the tree is more precise, giving the year of planting as A.D. 457, a date which also appears in *The Sacred Yew* (1994). There is no evidence to back up such a claim.

In *Heart of Mendip* (1915) Francis Knight wrote that the yew shows 'a clear case of rejuvenescence. The top of the tree was long ago broken off. Young shoots then sprang up around its stem, forming at length a solid ring around the original trunk'. When the original trunk died it left the hollow 'in which 21 men can stand upright'.

The King's England (1939) described it as 'one of the noblest yews in England, about 50' high and 200' round the branches. It is flourishing, green and shapely, with great iron bands round its hollow trunk, which measures 33' round the base and 23' at 4' up; it must have been growing before the days of Joan of Arc'.

Photos were taken in 1998



Below are some of the girth measurements given to this yew over the centuries. There is no explanation for some of the extraordinarily large and varied girths recorded at the base of the tree.

	1780	1833	1889	1946	1955	1983	1998
base	32'2" Lowe	36' Lowe	40'5" Sparrow		36' Rev Butler		
1'			30'10" Sparrow		29' Rev Butler		
4'	19' Lowe	22' Lowe	21' 9" Sparrow	23' Gardner	23' Rev Butler	23' 1" Meredith	24' Baxter
5'							23' Hills
7'			22' Sparrow				



In his 1898 *The History of Church Preen* A.Sparrow presents the following information:

In the churchyard, adjoining the church, there is probably the largest yew tree in England, certainly one of the largest; it is indeed the glory of Preen.

In 1780, it measured 32ft. 2in. In circumference at the ground, and 19 ft. At 4ft., showing the increase in circumference in one hundred and nine years has been 2.9, or 11 ins. in diameter ; this is an increase of 1 in. in diameter in ten years.

In 1833, the measurement at the ground was 36 ft., and at 4 ft., from ground 22 ft. ;so that in the last fifty -six years it does not appear to have increased at the same rate.

The only yew trees that I know comparable with our Preen tree are the yews in the churchyards at Crowhurst in Sussex, and at Darley Dale in Derbyshire.

The following are the measurements of the Preen yew taken August 26th, 1897:-

Umbrage	230ft.
At ground	37 ft. 2 in.
One foot from the ground	32 ft. 7 in.
Four feet from the ground	24 ft. 4 in.
Seven feet from the ground	23 ft. 3 in.
Branches	12 ft. 7in.
Their height from ground: No 1	4 ft. 6in.
No 3	3 ft. 4in.
No 4	4 ft.
No 5	4 ft. 6 in.
No 6	3 ft. 6 in.
Branch 16 ft. from ground	3 ft.10½ in.
Branches 17 ft. from ground:-	
No 1	6 ft. 7½ in.
No 2	3 ft. 3½ in.

The following is extracted from that most valuable work, *The Yew-trees of Great Britain and Ireland*, by John Lowe. (London:Macmillan and Co, Ltd 1897)

“*Church Preen* - In the churchyard is one of the finest, if not the finest, tree in existence.....The trunk is hollow, and measures 3 feet six across inside : it is this width for 10 ft., and will hold twenty-one men standing upright. Notwithstanding the hollow trunk the tree is to all appearance healthy, and every year throws out new wood.....There are some noteworthy points in these measurements which are no often so clearly brought into view. First the difference betwixt the girth at the base and that at 4 feet from the ground, amounting to no less than 18 feet 8 inches. We have here distinct evidence that the top was broken at an early period and probably on several occasions in later times ; that a large amount of young shoots sprang up from the base and became welded together to form the trunk ; and that the original trunk has entirely disappeared, as is shown by the central hollow. We may further observe that the rate of difference betwixt these two points has been increased in the following degrees during the last hundred years. Thus :

In 1780 the difference between base and at 4 feet was	13 ft. 2 in.
In 1833 the difference between base and at 4 feet was	14 ft. 10 in.
In 1889 the difference between base and at 4 feet was	18 ft. 8 in.



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