

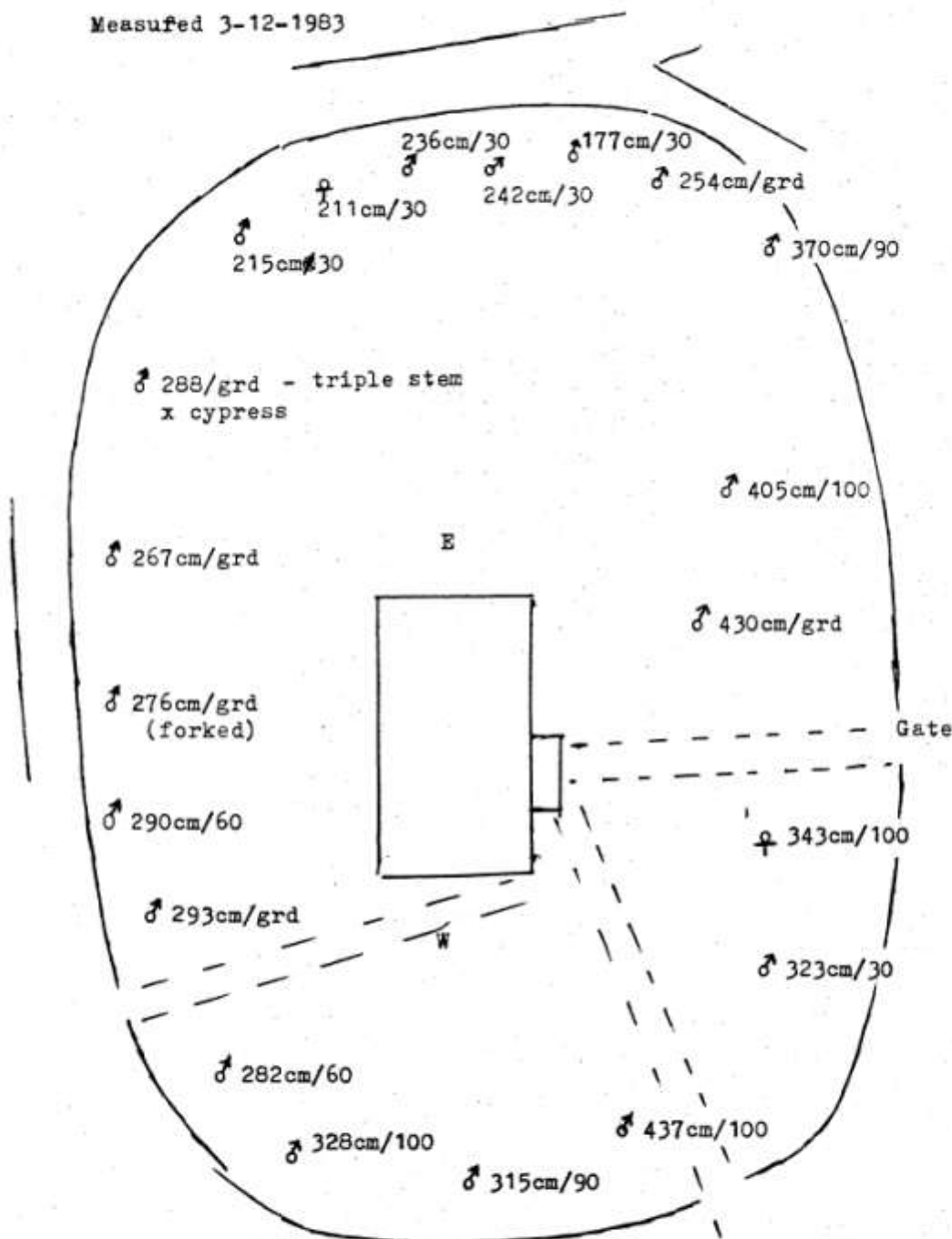
In 1983 Reg Wheeler measured and plotted 20 yews in Guildsfield churchyard. Their girths suggest that they were not all planted at the same time.

In Lewis's 1834 and 1849 *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* he describes that "The churchyard is ornamented with twelve exceedingly fine yew-trees, which, according to a document in the possession of John Jones, Esq., of Crosswood, were planted in the reign of William and Mary, (1689/1694) and are all of the same age."

CHURCHYARD YEWS

St Aelhaiarn GUILDSFIELD Sheet 126 Ref SJ 219117

Measured 3-12-1983



Girths.

Measurements in centimeters/ height from ground (or grd)

Two only ♀ All others ♂

R.T. Wheeler

Wheeler’s measurements indicate older yews to the south and west of the church, but establishing which of these make up the 12 noted in 1834 would require further research.

This painting by John Ingleby, dated 1796, shows well formed yews on the south and west sides of the churchyard.



1871 Bye-gones p7 Queries. From an article *Yew trees in Montgomeryshire.*

In a recent number of *Montgomeryshire Collections*, issued by the Powys-land club, Dr. Ramage has an interesting article on the probable age of the yew trees in Guilsfield churchyard. Under the shade of one of them he found the following epitaph on a stone:- “Here lyeth ye body of Richard Jones of Moysgwyn, gent., who was interred December ye 10th, 1707, aged 90.” After which followed these lines:-

“Under this yew tree
Buried would hee bee
For his father and hee
Planted this yew tree.”

Some measurements for this yew:

	1871	1977	2001
Ground	10' 2"	12' 0"	12' 10"
1 yard	9' 0"	10' 3"	11' 8"

The yew was reckoned to be 244 years old in 1871, making it 374 at the present day (2001).

These are interesting growth measurements, showing at the ground level an increase of 1' 10" in 106 years and 10" in 24 years. But at a height of 3', growth increase was 1' 3" in 106 years, followed by 1' 5" in 24 years.

Using the 1871 girths, Dr Ramage considered that the age of the tree could be ascertained - or at least guessed at - and accordingly he enters on the following speculations.

“The dimensions are the following: on the ground its circumference is ten feet two inches, at a yard from the ground its circumference is nine feet. The branches begin to spread out at fourteen feet four inches. Its height is, so far as the eye could judge, thirty-five feet. Having been uninterrupted by other trees in its neighbourhood, it has spread out with wonderful regularity to a complete circle, with a radius of twenty-four feet. In yew-trees some of the branches are often decayed, but in this case none has given way. Taking the dates on the tombstone, we find Richard Jones, who was buried in 1707 at the age of ninety, was born in 1617. If we assume that the tree was planted when he was a boy in 1627, this would give the age of the tree as two hundred and forty-four years in 1871. The present (1871) circumference is ten feet two inches, which, if divided by five, gives an average growth of two feet in girth every fifty years.

“There are other yew-trees in Guilsfield churchyard of still larger dimensions, evidently of an older date than the one planted by Richard Jones. Three of them are thirteen feet in circumference on the ground, and one fifteen feet, which would, by my mode of calculation, make it from three hundred and fifty to four hundred years old.

“Of course, to apply this mode of calculation to other trees in different parts of the country will only give an approximate idea of their age, as no doubt something will depend on the nature of the soil, the climate, and such like matters; but still I think we have supplied by this tree at Guilsfield a kind of datum, which may be usefully applied to all yew-trees.”

19th April 2001: We counted no fewer than 20 yews, as well as one recently planted, in this almost circular churchyard. The three largest are recorded here.

I took no photos, and those shown here were taken by an anonymous photographer on 29th January 2001, only three months before my own visit.



The largest yew is the first tree encountered on the right when entering the churchyard by its south gate. It is male with a fluted trunk and a girth of 15' 5" (470cm) at 1'.

It was not possible to measure above this height as the tree bulges on one side at a height of 18". It is an upright tree which divides at about 15' into two tall parallel

branches. It had much epicormic and upright twiggy growth and appeared to be solid.

The photographer gave this tree a girth of 21', which suggests that it was measured at a height of 5' and included the swelling around branches.



The second significant yew (left) is male and grows close to the path that leads to the church from the south west entrance. This tree breaks at a height of 12'/14' into 2 large and many branched growth areas.

In 2001 I measured exactly 15' (457cm) at 1' and 15' 10" (483cm) at 5'.

The photographer recorded a girth of 15' 4" (height not noted).

In 1983 Reg Wheeler recorded 437cm (14' 4") at 1m.

On the right is the tree growing by the Jones monument. Some measurements for this yew are recorded in the account on page 2.



What must have once been the largest yew in this churchyard is now only a stump. Girth of the yew remnants and stonework, which perhaps marks where the tree once stood in greater completeness, was 18' 5". Next to it has been planted a millennium yew, propagated from one of the yews at nearby Pennant Melangell.