

An exceptional tree with a well documented history. In 1729 it was clipped into a series of circles and balls, a practice that ceased in about 1825. The engraving on the left shows the tree as it appeared in 1729, the print in the centre shows it in about 1810 and that on the right in 1840, fifteen years after the practice of clipping ceased.

In 1914 a notice in the churchyard informed the public that this tree was 'one of the most famous in England, of vast age, and 'probably more than 1,000 years old'.



The 1958 *Middlesex Quarterly and London Review* informed readers that 'in a recent gale half the old yew in Harlington Churchyard fell, and the other half is in danger'.

Swanton, author of *The Yew Trees of England* (1958) saw it a month after the gale and reported that 'all the large boughs had been removed from the erect half and we gazed upon the wreck of a tree which, three years previously had an umbrage of 60'+ in diameter'.

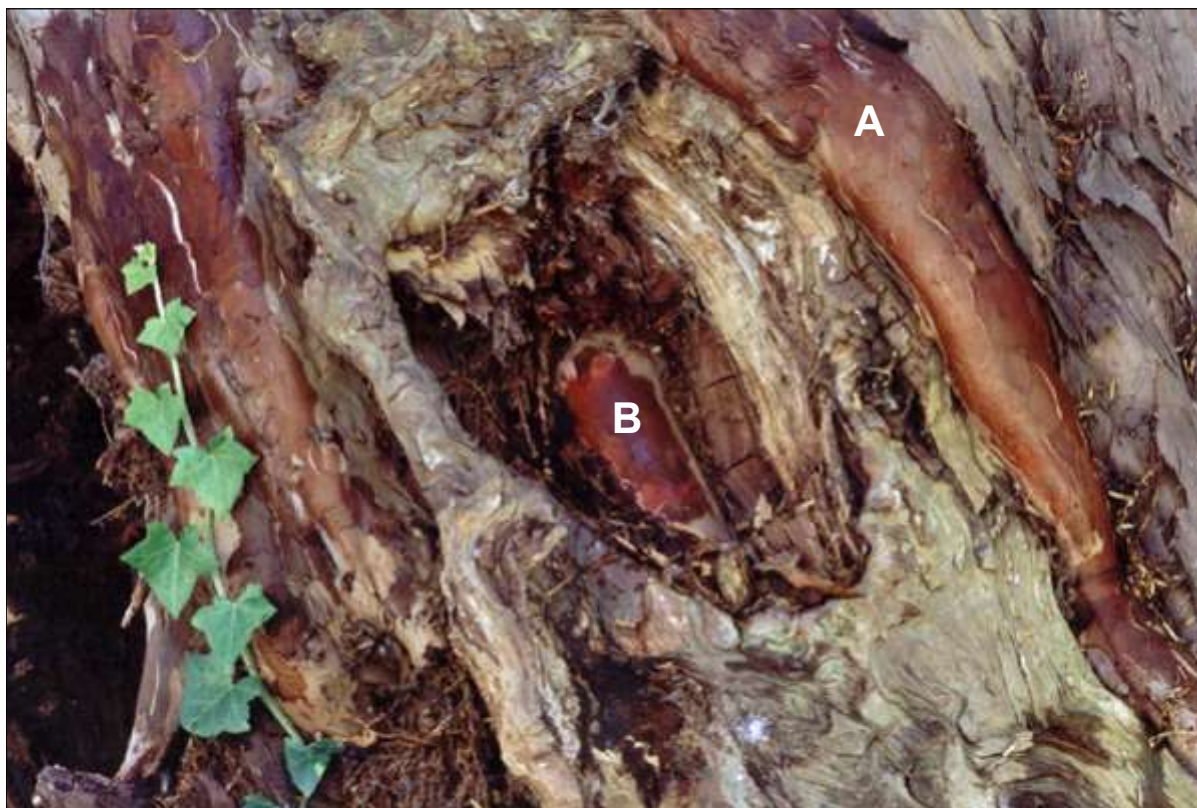
In 1975 an article published in *This England* described how 'the main trunk collapsed, and it took the men of the church council 9 months to saw it up. Fortunately for the continuity of history a substantial stump survived, about 20' high. This has taken on a new lease of life and is growing vigorously'.

I visited in 1999 and found an outpouring of new growth from the 'substantial stump'. At (A) a piece of dead wood 2' high will eventually decay, reducing ground level girth of 19' 3" by about 2'.



The tree provides an excellent example of the yew's power of regeneration. A dead branch not only has new wood snaking along the outside (A), but by removing some of the decaying heartwood a living internal stem was exposed (B).

The Harlington Yew epitomises the ability of *Taxus Baccata* L. to survive against the odds. Its latest struggle has already begun, since this site may be demolished as part of the planned redevelopment of Heathrow Airport.



The Harlington Yew is seen below before and after the losses sustained in the storm of 1975.



Harlington. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ St. Peter & St. Paul. Middlesex.

Description:-

This tree is south of the porch, and female. It had become famous not only for it being cut in strange shapes, during the eighteenth century, but also as a result of a poem written by John Saxy in 1729. The shape of the tree can clearly be seen in the engraving by William Cottrel, dated 1770. At about this time the Yew would have been some eighteen feet at its largest girth.

It is strange that this once great Yew of European fame is now almost forgotten. I hope now in 1989 that it will again be remembered, and that the clinging Ivy, which attempts to smother it, will be removed.

I visited the Harlington Yew on May 2nd, 1989. I was pleased to see that it had survived since the 1959 storm. Apparently it was severely damaged and much of the trunk had broken away, leaving only a twelve or fifteen foot stump. Shortly after the storm the tree was described as dying, but, as I saw, it has made a remarkable recovery. Apart from the Ivy, and obvious hollows of decay, it is in a very healthy state. It is approximately fifteen paces south of the church porch.

Its girth at six feet from the ground, avoiding branches, was sixteen feet, and at three feet from the ground 19'2". The age of the tree appears to be between 950 to 1,000 years.

Dates visited	Girth Measurements	By
1806	15'7" at 6' from the ground	Dr. Samuel Lysons
1808	15'7" at 6' from the ground	Gentlemans magazine
1823	17'9" at 6' from the ground	Mr Scandrett
	19'3" at 2' from the ground	Mr Scandrett
1833	18'3" at 4' from the ground	Samuel Lewis
1895	19'6" at 3' from the ground	Rev. E.J. Haddon
1895	17'3" at the base (narrowest point).	
1914	20'5" at 3' from the ground	Elwes & Henry
	19'5" at 5' from the ground	Mr Bartlett
1950	20' at 3' from the ground	Mr Bartlett
1989	19'2" at 3' from the ground	E.W. Swanton
	16' at 6' from the ground	Author A. Meredith
		Author

Further Information

The Yew appeared to be clipped annually at the time of the Whitsun Fair, and we know from records it was clipped as early as 1720. Clipping appears to have come from some ancient ceremony; part of this ceremony was to join hands in a circle and circle some sacred object. Many years ago that sacred object may have been a Yew. We have a reminder of this in an ancient Celtic ballad called " Hey Down, Ho Down, Derry Derry Down, among the leaves so green ho".

John Saxy's poem should be read carefully. It tells us a great deal about the Yew. For instance in 1729 it appears to have been hollow from the top to the ground, which again suggests a fairly old tree, as most Yews do not become hollow until after some 500 years. Also it tells us that the Yew is female.

Worth noting from engraving in the Gentlemans Magazine of 1808, is another large Yew, north-east of the church, of impressive size.