

It is said that St Erfyl's staff was planted at this site and that the tree we can see today resulted from that occasion. Such happenings are not uncommon in yew tree legend. This is without doubt a most extraordinary tree, considered in the 1849 *Topographical Dictionary of Wales* to be 'one of the finest yew-trees in the principality'.

The tree was described in *Bygones* of 1872: 'In St. Erfyl's Churchyard, Llanerfyl, is the mother yew tree of Montgomeryshire. This old tree is encompassed by a stone wall about a yard high. This renders it impossible to take the measurement at the base, but on the level of the wall there are three branches spreading out which measure in circumference, respectively, 19ft. 6in., 16ft 9in., and 7ft. The total measurement round the tree where these branches out is 43ft. 3in. These branches are hollow where they leave the tree, and one of them is held up by a prop. Under the shade of the tree there is a stone bearing the following inscription:-

Hic in
Tvmvlo ia
Cit Ri.....ste
C....E...Filia Pa
Ternini
An IXIII In pax.

'Here lies in this grave Rustece, daughter of Paterninus, aged thirteen years. May she rest in peace'.



1983 - Allen Meredith: I visited the yew on October 31st. It has obviously changed drastically over the centuries. It was hardly recognisable as one yew tree. At first glance there appear to be three large separate portions of a split trunk, but on closer examination I noticed the portion furthest away appeared to be a separate yew, and not part of a split trunk, ancient this portion is but it is male unlike the two larger portions of trunk which are female. The male portion, almost in a prone position is about 10 feet in girth. It appears, judging by its condition, to have been around for some centuries and certainly not far from the original old trunk which now consists of two separated portions. Looking at this relic of an old yew situated south from the church, the portion on the right is a little over 24 feet in girth. It is still upright and supported by a wall. The portion on the left is over 17 feet in girth and almost in a prone position. It is mainly supported by its branches. Despite the puzzling appearance of a male tree, the split female yew is undoubtedly very ancient.

This yew is really quite impossible to measure as one tree, but it could certainly have been over 40 feet in girth at some stage. The yew may have been split and separated over 200 years ago.

Much more background information is needed on this yew to gauge its actual girth centuries ago. The combined girth of the two stems is 41 feet.

Looking at the yew from the church the left portion has obviously twisted itself around since early separation, and for the most part is fairly solid. It is still possible to see where separation has taken place. The remains of this yew appear to be quite healthy, despite its wrecked appearance.

Girth of the 3 stems were 20ft 7ins, 17ft 4ins and 8ft 8ins.

CHURCHYARD YEWS

Eglwys St Erfyl

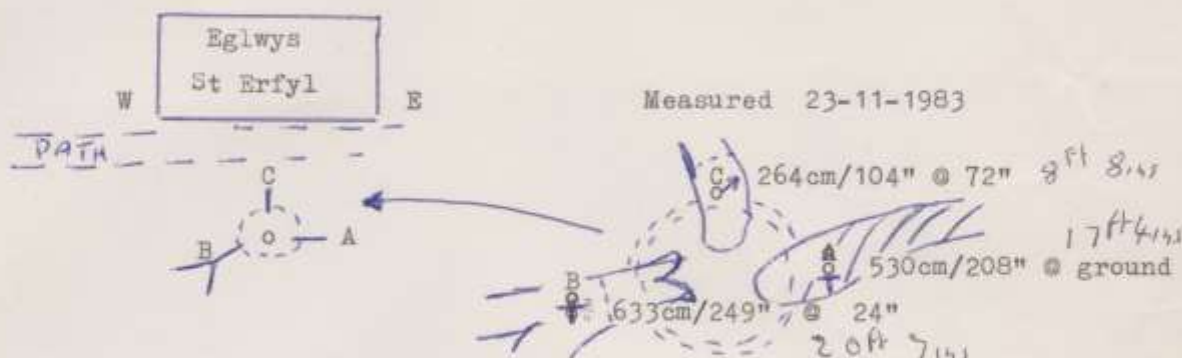
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*Female original tree,
(A B are from one tree)*

♂ male

♀ female



This yew, mentioned in "Works of the Rev. Griffith Edwards (1895)" ←

....'of great age and patriarchal appearance (p.81)protecting an ancient stone (p.85)...- engraving pp86/87 - is the subject of a stanza by a native poet, Mr Evan Breese (p.96).

Translation (p.97) :- One stock of the principal yew-tree, full of life is divided into four different branches

A visit on 23-11-1983 revealed four different branches comprising not one tree but at least two and possibly three. Three main trunks rise within a walled surround, one splitting to form two stems, making four altogether as described in the stanza.

One of the three main trunks, however, is male, the other two female. This observation by my wife caused us to examine the trunks more closely. Yews being dioecious - i.e. single sex - establishes at least two separate trees in the group. The two female trunks, however, comprise one (a) very twisted, the other (b) not nearly so, suggesting they may be different genotypes - i.e. two individual trees rather than trunks of one 'patriarch'.

| | | | | | |
|-----------|-----|---|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Stem/tree | (a) | ♀ | twisted | 530cm/208" @ ground | 1 stem |
| | (b) | ♀ | less twisted | 633cm/249" @ 24" | 2 stems above split |
| | (c) | ♂ | | 264cm/104" @ 72" | 1 stem |
| | | | | | Total 4 stems |

englynion (stanzas) by Mr Evan Breese.

One stock of the principal yew-tree, full of life
Is divided into four different branches;
The four trees thus form,
By the united juncture, a grand shelter.

The heavy large branches, - with lasting life,
Lean upon supporting poles;
Frail, and unable to stand without support,-
The beauty of the evergreen has vanished !

It is stated (note 1 - p.96) Games were formerly played under this yew-tree, for instance, bowls.

Not, I imagine, 'traditional' bowls as the yew shelters many grave stones.

→ See also p.81 and p.85 of Rev. Griffith Edward Works.

1998 - Tim Hills: I considered there to be four twisting fragments making up this unforgettable tree, though it can be seen here that two are joined at the ground. Since they consist of male and female parts, there is inevitably argument over whether this is one or more than one tree.

