

The church is in a dangerous condition and no longer used as a place of worship. It occupies a fine position in mature parkland with far ranging views across the Exe estuary.

1776: 'The rector was the Rev. William Johnson Temple.....When he was an undergraduate....he made a close friendship with James Boswell, biographer of Samuel Johnson. The chief difficulty experienced by Boswell in carrying out his literary work was inability to conquer the propensity for liquor, and so, when staying with Temple at Mamhead, he took an oath under the churchyard Yew never to get drunk again. He admitted later, that "his promise under the solemn yew was not religiously kept, because a little wine hurried him on too much".' *Parochial Memoranda*

1818: 'At Mamhead there is a pretty little church, in the yard of which stands the largest yew I ever saw. The trunk is thirty-six feet in circumference.' p208 *Autobiographical recollections* by Charles Robert Leslie

1857: At Mamhead is a yew of twenty-nine and a half feet. *Chronicles of the Tombs* by Thomas Joseph Pettigrew

1881/82 - *The Western antiquary : or, Devon and Cornwall notebook / edited by W. H. K. Wright v.1 1881/82 Vol X July 1890/July 91*: 'During the recent visit of the Devonshire Association the members visited.....Mamhead Park and church and other places of interest. At Mamhead Park we were shown an ancient yew tree of gigantic proportions, which had evidently flourished in that spot for some hundreds of years.'

1859: Girth of 32' 10" at 5' given by the Rector writing his *Parochial Memoranda*.

1903: The following is from a letter written by Shirley Callard's husband's great-grandfather in 1903. It confirms why the tree looks as it does today. 'The outer portion of this desk was made from a portion of a yew tree now standing in Mamhead churchyard a great number of years before the top of the tree was sawn off just level, about eight feet from the ground. At that point shot up 15, I now call them trees, at and over 2 feet in diameter, they grow just close together except an opening between 2 of them, just as I could go in on the top. When I tell you I measured it and it was twelve feet across, you will not be surprised if I tell you that tea parties have been taken in there, and it was said that the pulpit in the church was made from the top sawn off.'



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1958: Swanton was given the following information by Rev R. Davison: 'Girth 34' at 3', trunk 5'6" high, not hollow. Diameter of umbrage 80'. It would be greater if some branches had not been trimmed at the ends'.

1999: This remarkable yew grows SE of the church. It has an almost complete bole 7' high with a girth of about 32'. A yew of such size would normally produce large branches, however after being struck by lightning in the 1940s its crown was severely damaged. It has recovered, and now supports a clipped crown on the numerous small branches which radiate from the edge of the bole.

In the centre of the tree at a height of about 6' is a platform of rich soil. It was not possible to ascertain what lay beneath. Around the tree were many holes in the ground. Their shape and depth suggested they once contained props which supported its large branches. Smashed graves and the damaged metal surround of a tomb must have once borne the weight of these branches as they collapsed.

In September 2012 Peter Norton recorded a girth of 31' 6" at about 6".

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