

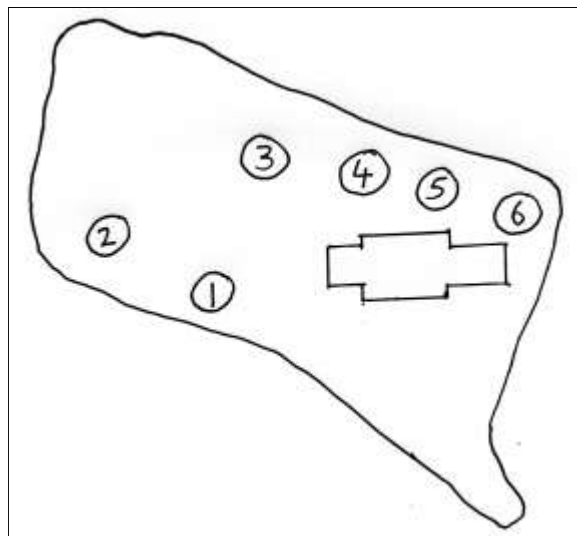
In *Cavalier Lyrics: 'for church and crown'* published in 1887, Molash was described as: 'Well-known to Canterbury pilgrims before Chaucer's day, and since, as a halting-place on their way towards the over-rated shrine of Thomas a. Becket, was that quiet nook of Kent, holding the ancient Priory and churchyard of Molash. Six yew-trees, of magnificent girth and foliage, encircle the church (undesecrated by ruinous 'Restoration'). Sombre and beautiful, the growth of a thousand years, they guard the mouldering dust of a simple honest race, the industrious labouring poor, who have dwelt there contentedly, within sight of the cathedral city, nine miles distant. Formerly there was a seventh yew-tree, standing on the south side, in front of the vaulted church-porch, and near it a Lych-gate; but some bygone Vicars of Chilham enriched themselves by carting away the timber.....'

In *A brief guide to the church of St Peter Molash*, Alan Neame describes the 13th century church, and accepts that there are no discernible features above ground of an earlier building. But he considered that the yew trees as described above would be 400 years older than the present building, and thinks it 'not fanciful to think that, as young trees, they encircled a Saxon church the forerunner of this one'. He recalled the storm of October 16, 1987 which threatened to wreck both church and churchyard, and how following the storm they had to 'undergo extensive tree surgery with the help of a large grant from the Countryside Commission'.

In the photograph below of a watercolour by Petrie (1807), is Molash's missing tree which grew on the south side of the church and would have made the ring of yews more complete.



In *The King's England* 1936, Mee provided the following description: '....ringed with six immense yews, perhaps the most surprising collection in the country, with a total chain of life that would take us back, no doubt to the days before Molash or the English race began'.



Unless otherwise stated, photos were taken in 2013.

Tree 1, growing SW of the church, is male and full of vigour. In 1999 one side of its bole was obscured by impenetrable twiggy growth. By 2013 this had been removed, enabling all sides of the tree to be seen. Girth in 1999 was 16' 8" at 1'. In 2013 the following girths were recorded: 17' 2" at 1', 17' exactly at about 1' 4", the height of an embedded nail, and 19' exactly at 3'. On the side of the tree shown here new wood can be seen being laid down over portions of the original trunk, behind which can be seen internal growth. At about 8' the bole divides into 2 main fluted branches which rise to about the same height.



Tree 2, female, has a large hollow containing many internal stems joined to the main branches. Twiggy growth around the bole affected the measurement of approximately 22' at 5' in 1999. In 2013 girths of 22' 4" at 5' and 23' 10" at the ground were recorded. A single male branch on this female tree leaves the bole at 10/12' and points in the direction of the first yew.

1999



Tree 3, female, grows WNW of the church. It has separated into 2, and a rod was bolted to both fragments to help prevent further separation. Each fragment is itself substantial, with girths at 3' of 17' 0½" and 14' in 2013. Around both fragments 27' at 3' was recorded in both 1999 and 2013, while in 2013 a girth of 24' 5" was recorded close to the ground at the height of an embedded nail. Each of these fragments supports two areas of growth with much branching.



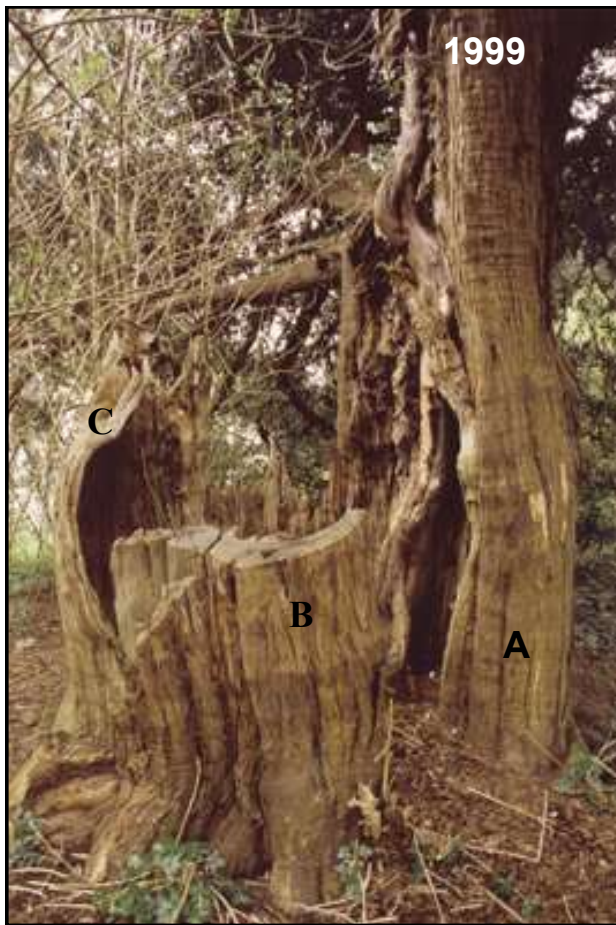
Tree 4, female, grows NNW of the church. In 1999 a girth of 24' at 1' was recorded around its three fragments. In 2013 girth between the ground and 1' was 24' 1", while the internal stem measured 4' 9" at 2'. The tree is low growing with its wide spread of branches supported on props.





Tree 5, male, grows NE of the church. In 1999, as well as the living fragment (A) there were sufficient sections of the sawn off old trunk remaining to record a girth of about 20' at 1'. Between 1999 and 2013 section (C) has disappeared. Section (B) is still in situ but eventually this too will eventually decay. The living fragment will over time become more rounded in appearance as new wood is laid down at its edges. Perhaps in a hundred years or so this will present as a relatively small girthed tree, and the only evidence that it is a tree of great age will be contained in records such as this. Girth of the living trunk was 12' 8" at 1' in 1999 and 13' at 1' in 2013.





The 6th yew, female grows ENE of the church. It was the most difficult to approach, with thick branches growing outwards from just above the base. Inside its bulging bole is a hollow filled with a mixture of dead wood and new growth. A measurement at the base, the narrowest part of the tree below 5', was about 23'.





The **Molash Yews** provided the inspiration for the following poem, published in *Cavalier Lyrics: 'for church and crown'* published in 1887.

For Joseph Woodfall Ebsworth,

Under the Molash Yew

Under the Molash Yews,
When Spring flowers come again, are children sporting,
While youthful lovers linger, coyly courting ;
So sweetly dream they of their future days,
So brightly sunshine on the green turf plays,
None can a smile refuse,
Under our Molash Yews.

Under the Molash Yews,
Summer brings back again, for rest and pleasure,
Our parted wayfarers, in scanty leisure ;
Leaning on rustic stile, sighing, they wonder
What worthless spell had held them long asunder.
No worldly cares confuse
Under our Molash Yews.

Under the Molash Yews,
When Autumn fills the harvest-fields with labour,—
When Hop-grounds ring with mirth, till pipe and tabor
Sound in the early twilight through green lanes,
Where mothers homeward haste, counting their gains :
Soft fall the chilly dews,
Under our Molash Yews.

Under the Molash Yews,
When Winter snow has hush'd the busy village,
And bound the fields from every tread and tillage,
One darken'd grave 'mid the white mounds doth wait
The wearied Pilgrim, borne to the Lych-gate :
Earth claims her wonted dues,
Under the Molash Yews.