

John Duncumb 1765-1839 was commissioned to write the *The History and Antiquities of the County of Hereford*.

In the 1812 edition it is reported to say that "Fronting the south porch is an ancient yew tree - hollow, yet in growth, having a girth of 28½ feet at 5 feet from the ground."

The same description and girth appears in volume iii 1882.

In 1899 *Woolhope Transactions* noted 'the fine yew in the churchyard'.

Mee's *The King's England* was more forthcoming in 1938, describing 'an amazing veteran, a vigorous yew with a spread of branches 70' across and fitted with a seat inside its 30' hollow, where 7 people may sit and shelter.'

1987: Revd Graham Holley wrote to the Conservation with the following report: "We have an ancient yew here at Much Marcle in the churchyard. Many years ago there were chains put into the crown of the tree and they appear to be intact. I have been vicar here for 20 years and shortly before I came in 1967 props were put all around the perimeter to support the branches. We try to keep them in position but the wind frequently wins.

Occasionally we do trim the 'whiskers' from the trunk as much growth does impede funeral parties. However, the tree is showing no signs of dying. The trunk is hollow and from Churchwardens' records there has been a seat in the trunk since the late 18th century when someone had the sum of sixpence for renewing the said seat."

1989: Meredith visited on 3rd January and described 'the old yew south of the porch, and significantly female, I could still see a few berries on the tree, but I also noticed some browning of the needles on one side of the tree. The girth of the tree is 26 feet 8ins near the base, and 27 feet 6ins at 2 feet from the ground, higher up around 4 or 5 feet from the ground the girth increases to 30 feet. The gap inside the hollow trunk is some 5 feet across, the wooden benches are still inside the old trunk.'

2011: The Much Marcle Yew it is now rightly recognised as the 'magnificent, fully crowned tree' described in Morton's *Tree Heritage of Britain and Ireland*. Inclusion in Thomas Pakenham's *Meetings with Remarkable Trees* has led to greater numbers of people enjoying the pleasure of visiting this great tree. It is female and grows south of the church, where its spreading branches are carried on a frame constructed in Victorian times. Similar structures are found at Bentley in Hampshire and Doveridge in Derbyshire.

Girth:

1812: 28' 6" at 5' John Duncumb (acc. Meredith). The same figure appears in 1882

1899: 28' 9" at 5' from the ground - Woolhope

1953: 30' 1" at 4' 6" - Church visitors book

1959: Mitchell measurement of 30' 6" - presumably at 5'

1989: 26' 8" near base: 27' 6" at 2' : 30' around 4' to 5': 30' at 5' - Allen Meredith

2006: 30' 11" at 4' 6" - Tim Hills

2014: 27' 3" at 1', the tree's minimum girth. Nails had been hammered in at about this height all round the tree. - Peter Norton

An age of 1500 seems to have become accepted for this tree. This originated in a certificate issued in the 1990s by the Conservation Foundation. It is however only an estimate, and the tree is probably much younger.

ANCIENT YEW TREE

One month after the Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953 the Reverend Graham Holly and Sir Ernle Kyrle Pope of Homme House measured the girth of the tree. According to one Visitors' Book for that year, at the height of 4 feet 6 inches from ground level, the girth was 30 feet and 1 inch.

In April 2006 the tree was again measured. At the same height from ground level, the girth had increased to 30 feet and 11 inches.

In 2006 the tree was pruned for the first time in many years. We estimate that possibly six tons of dead timber was removed; the work took forty five man-hours and produced more than eight trailer-loads of rubbish. The tree has new growth and looks healthy. The Parochial Church Council have a Certificate stating that the tree is at least 1500 years old. Dowsers claim they can confirm an age of 1508 years.

This means that the tree was planted as early as the year 500.



FIG. 5. THE YEW TREE IN THE CHURCHYARD, NORTH HADLEY.



St. Michael's, the Church



