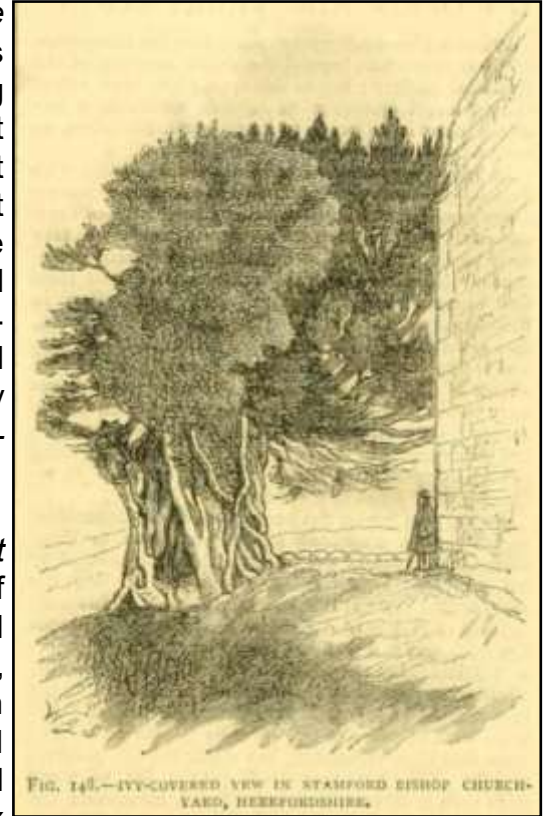


1840 visit of Dr Johnson: "As some heavy clouds gathered, threatening thunder-rain, I hastened on to Stanford Bishop, about two miles distant, and famous for its yew-trees. The yews at Stanford were certainly the finest that I had ever seen, and there were seven or eight grand ones. But they gave a touch of sadness to the churchyard, and specially so the Patriarch, by far the largest as it certainly was the oldest. It was hollowed out by the decay of age, its interior forming a cavern, and yet the old tree still wore a crown of green showing its vitality."

1856 Edwin Lees wrote in his *Pictures of Nature around the Malvern Hills* that 'several very old and remarkable yew trees stand in the churchyard; one in particular, of surpassing magnitude, a female tree, measured 27ft in circumference at 4ft above its base, and higher up, where the trunk bulges out, 31ft. It may be possibly 1,000 years old or more; and as it is only just beginning to get hollow, and bears its age well, if no hurricane assails its integrity it may last another 1,000, as a faithful watchman at the church doors, and in its perennial verdure a symbol of the life that shall never end'. Some time between 1856 and 1880 this female yew 'of surpassing magnitude' was apparently cut down. This drawing, found in Lees' 1877 *The Forest and Chace of Malvern* is the only pictorial record of the yew.



1880 - Dr Johnson visited for a second time. In *The Finding of St Augustine's Chair* the tree's loss is recorded as follows: "A walk of two miles brought me to Stanford, and turning up a field-drive, I readily got into the churchyard, so famous for its old yew-trees, and was very sorry to find that the grand old Patriarch had been cut down. There are five or six very old trees however still remaining. One of them, standing by the church tower, and overtopping it, measured twenty-seven feet in circumference at six feet from the ground, sound to the core; a grand mass of dark green colouring.

The clerk at once drew my attention to the yew-trees, specially pointing out the one standing near the tower as the oldest and largest, and sound to the core. I remarked to him that I missed one older and larger, but perfectly hollow, and asked him if he could tell me what had become of it."

" Ah ! then you've been here before. I thought you was a stranger. Well, this is a big one you'll allow, but then it's a female you see. The other was a bigger tree; but quite worn out and hollow. By the vicar's order I cut him down two or three years ago, for the parson said that it was nothing else than a regular lodging for tramps and vagabones. Why, Lor', I've seen as many as ten or a dozen sleeping in it of a night, and sometimes they'd even light a fire inside of it to cook their victuals, as I've seen myself. So passed away that venerable witness, probably planted when the first British church of timber and wattle-work was erected, some 1400 years ago."

Stanford Bishop is still able to boast one exceptional yew. In 1913 *Kelly's Directory* recorded that 'on the N side of the church is a huge yew tree supposed to be over 1000 years old, and which, at 6ft from the ground, is 24ft in circumference. From its bole at a height of about 8' rises a large central hollowing branch and 3 further substantial branches. These form a regular canopy around the tree.'

In 1938 Mee's *The King's England* described 'an ancient yew measuring 22ft round the trunk'.

I have recorded the girth on several occasions as follows:

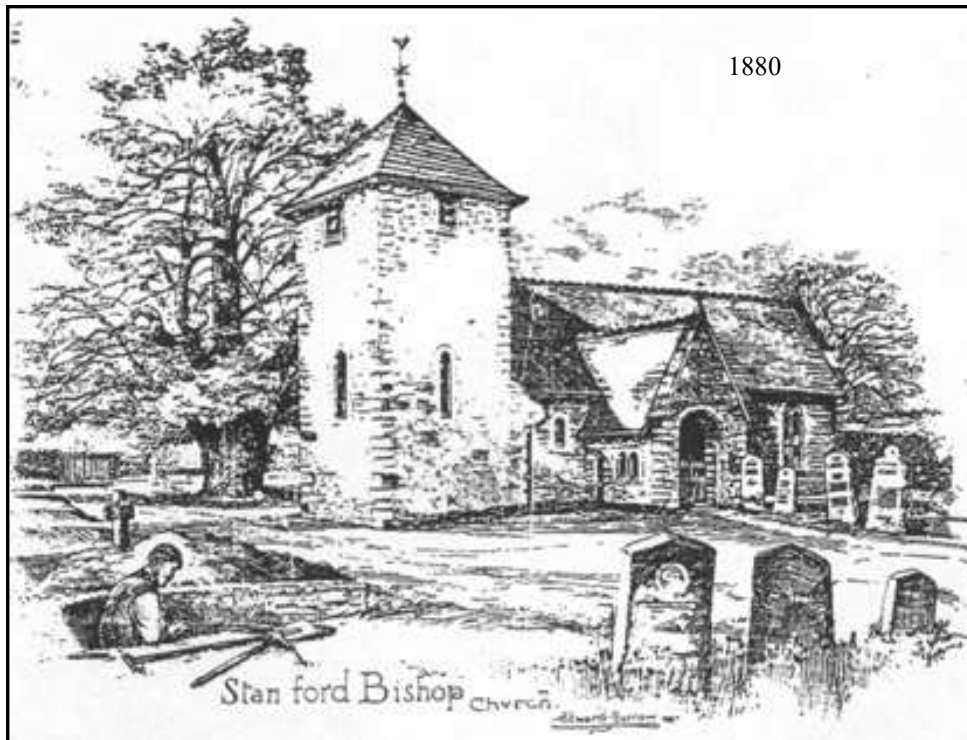
1998: 22' 8" at 1' and 28' 3" at 5'

2004: 22' 7" at 1' and 24' 9" at 3' (beneath the bulges)

2012: 22' 9" at 1'

2020: 23' 0½" at 1'; 25' 0" at 3' and 28' 10" at 5'.

Stanford Bishop's largest living yew in 1880 and 2012



Two notable yews and four young yews are also found in this churchyard.

To the NE is yew 2 (below left) with a complete circle of growth around a large hollow space. A vigorous healthy tree with girths as follows:

13' 11" at 2' in 2004

14' 1" at 2' in 2012

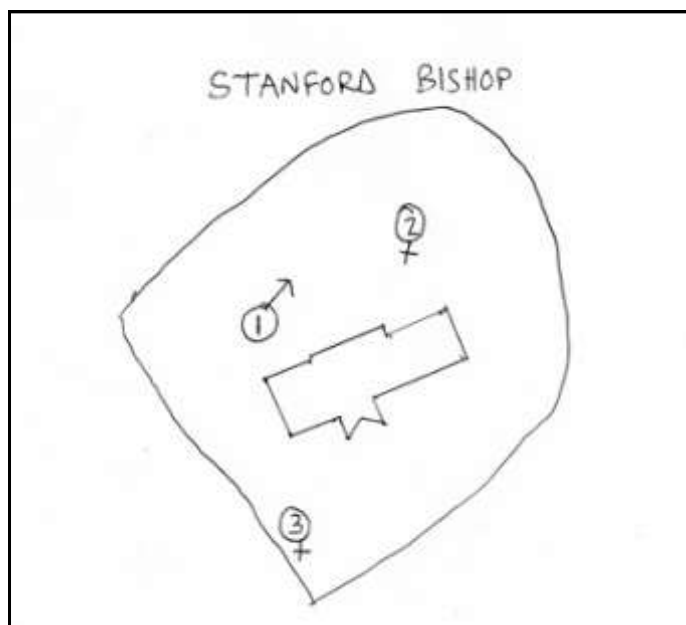
14' 3" at 2' in 2020.

Tree 3 (below right) grows SW. Girths recorded as follows:

13' 6" at 1' in 2004

13' 5" at 1' in 2020 - height of an embedded nail

The sloping ground and nature of the tree prevents reliable measurement.



Correspondence in The Times - Friday August 13th 1943

The vicar of Stanford Bishop had apparently suggested that his yew is "reputed to be the oldest in England." This, according to the correspondent "is to arouse feelings of dissent bordering on indignation in the breasts of many who have been brought up to believe that their own particular yews can claim that honour. Clearly it is one of those arguments that can have no definite end, and this is a good thing. If it could conceivably be proved that St Augustine's Yew was the oldest, Stanford Bishop might enjoy a brief and scornful satisfaction in saying 'I told you so', but all the other claimants would be as angry as they were unconvinced. The sum of human happiness would be perceptibly diminished with no corresponding gain. Facts were once said by a distinguished and picturesque writer to be a sad hindrance, and the same is true of evidence, which is often valuable and sometimes essential, but nevertheless a miserable spoil-sport."