

1677: "Sir John Cullum met with a yew tree at Totteridge Churchyard; its trunk everywhere of nearly the same girth, 3' above the ground is 26' in circumference. I measured it myself in 1777, one hundred years after; it was precisely the same size."¹

1796: "In this church-yard is a yew-tree of a very remarkable size, its girth, at three feet from the ground, being 26 feet."²

1867: "In the cemetery of Totteridge Parish is to be seen a yew-tree which from traditional records must have occupied its present position for a period of some centuries. It is quite hollow and will admit of a party of eight persons to occupy the interior, without the same experiencing the slightest inconvenience. The tree is female."³

1876: "In the churchyard stands an aged yew, the most ancient tree in the neighbourhood for many a mile. This sturdy old yew is estimated by competent authorities to be upwards of 700 years old, but it is still as fresh and green as ever, and in several parts is sending out new branches. The main trunk is hollow and decayed in the centre, but about five feet from the ground it divides into stalwart limbs, rising to a height of thirty or forty feet and preserving abundant vitality. These limbs are eight in number, besides one that is dead; they spring out from the edges of the main stem, and on the platform between them, the hollow trunk having been filled up with earth, there is room enough for five or six people to stand. I recently measured the tree just under the forks, about four feet from the ground, and found its circumference to be twenty-six feet. The yew presents several instances of *anastomosis*, i.e., the uniting and growing together of two separate branches."⁴

1883: "The largest yew tree, at the w. end of the church, which I ever saw, whereunder the founder of the church was interred. It may be 1000 years old."⁵

1923: "...some of the branches were dying back, and the centre of the tree was hollow. The dying branches were cut off, their stumps treated, and the hollow trunk was filled with cement."⁶

1990's "West, female, shell that is suffering badly from inadequate foliage and cover. Serious concerns regarding survival of tree, as rain is hitting the shell directly. Meetings of the Cashio Hundred used to take place under the yew. Tree is hollow filled with internal growth."⁷

2001: The notable feature of this female yew is that almost all of its outer skin is dead wood. I counted only 7 strands of living wood on the outside of its large bole. From a platform within the tree can be seen a young rising central branch; along with this were 6 growth areas, many where new branches grow alongside remnants of the dead branches they replace. This main growth emerges from the ground inside the tree through the layer of humus that makes up the platform. It goes some way to explaining why measurements recorded from as long ago as 1677 show little difference today, since the yew would seem to have been growing from the inside for hundreds of years.

- 1 The antiquary Gough, in a letter to Rev M.Tyson (Swanton p 39 *The Yew Trees of England* 1958)
- 2 *The Environs of London: volume 4: Counties of Herts, Essex & Kent* (1796) - British History on-line
- 3 *The Sporting Review* 1867
- 4 *The Mill Hill magazine* 1876
- 5 The Family Memoirs of the Rev. William Stukeley, M.D. Page 211 by William Stukeley et al.
- 6 The vicar of Totteridge, Rev Edwin Le Grice informed Swanton
- 7 *The Ancient Yew* (2002) Robert Bevan-Jones

The Totteridge Yew in pictures and photographs

