

THE YATTENDON YEW

Compiled by Tim Hills

In March 2007 I measured the yew in Yattendon churchyard to compare it with the girths recorded in 1888. The results were puzzling until I was shown *YATTENDON AND ITS CHURCH With Records of the Manor and the Village from the 10th Century to the Present Day*.¹

All of the information below, unless otherwise stated, is from this book.

1666

The original yew was planted on the south side of the church by Mr Sayer, the Rector. This information appears in a memorandum “for the amusement of my Successors” written by the rector, Geo. Bellas, and found in the church register of 1726-1773.

1770

Geo. Bellas “strained a Line round it one foot-from the ground and it measured 5 feet, 6 inches, and 2 Barley Corns: it is a fine growing Tree.”

1797

Geo. Bellas recorded a girth of “6 feet 11 inches and a half—1 foot from the ground.”

1849

J. Flory Howard, rector, reported “the first symptom of decay” when on March 1st “a very large bough of this Yew Tree fell down, being nearly one-fourth of the whole Tree.”

1877

A. Loveday, rector in 1877, measured the tree at 18 inches and recorded a girth of 9 feet.

1886

The weight of heavy snowfall caused a large branch of the Yew to be broken off in 1886, and “another fell from the same reason on the 6th January, 1887.” H.C. Beeching, Rector.

1888

“In the churchyard near Newbury, Berks (Nov 14th 1888), is a yew-tree about 30 feet high, measuring 9 and a half feet in girth at 3 feet from the ground. The ground is free from shoots to 7 or 8 feet. The branches are large and well-grown; none were broken away until the spring of last year, when two large ones were split off by the heavy fall of snow which occurred. It will be interesting to note the condition of this tree after a lapse of a few years. The branches all arise from a common point, and are of nearly equal size.

At present there is no sign of decay, and there are no young shoots from the trunk. The flutings of the trunk are very prominent, and can be traced directly to their branches. There is much expansion of the stem just above the ground, where the circumference is fully 11 feet.”²

1893

“The largest remaining branch was broken off in a storm on 12 December, 1893. It brushed the window as it fell in which is the picture of the Good Shepherd, but happily did not break it.” H.C.B.

In the same year H.C.B. planted the yew that can be seen today on the west side of the south porch. “It came up some four years since in the garden opposite the Churchyard belonging to the cottage of Isaac Wise (who has been gardener to three Rectors here), and therefore it may be presumed a legitimate descendant of the old tree.”

1900

The churchyard yew and cross. The cross was given by Robert Bridges, Poet Laureate, who was at the time living at the Manor House.



1925

“In a gale on April 16th, 1925, the tree, which had been previously split down the trunk, lost its last bough, and the bare trunk was finally removed, February 18th, 1926.” John Ernest Smith-Masters, Rector.

From the wood of this tree frames have been made for portraits of six of the eight Rectors, from Dr. Bel-las (1753) to the present holder of the Benefice, all of which hang in the Vestry.

2007

The yew growing SW of the church, considered to be 4 years old when transplanted to the churchyard in 1893, is now 118 years old. Girths are as follows:

1'	7' 8"
2'	8' 1"
3'	8' 11"
4'	9' 7"

Comparisons made with the old tree suggest that its offspring has thus far grown at a faster rate.

5' 6"	in 104 years (1666 - 1770) measured at 1'
7'	in 131 years (1666 - 1797) measured at 1'
9'	in 211 years (1666 - 1877) measured at 1' 6"
9' 6"	in 222 years (1666 - 1888) measured at 3'

A further comparison can be made with a woodland yew growing on poor soil only a mile or so from Yattendon, with a ring count of approximately 197 in a girth of 6' 1".

¹ Compiled by the Rev. S. E. SMITH-MASTERS, MA., Rector of Yattendon.
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² *The Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* - John Lowe 1897

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