

## The Marston Bigot Yew in Somerset

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In 1791 Revd. Collinson wrote in his *History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* that Marston Bigot's churchyard contained a "fine old yew-tree, twenty-three feet in circumference at the height of four feet above the surface of the ground."



I visited the churchyard in 1997, but there was no sign of the yew. A local historian was on hand to tell me I was looking in the wrong place. He showed me a copy of the Act of Parliament that had allowed the old church to be moved in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to where we were standing, 220 yards SW of its original site. There are two versions explaining why the church was moved. The more charitable is that it was old and in such a dangerous condition that it had to be taken down, and was just moved to a more convenient location. The more likely explanation is that it was blocking the view from Marston House and so, according to *Historic England*, in 1786 "Edmund, the seventh Earl, improved the view southwards by taking down the old parish church which stood close to the south front of the House."

With the removal of the church, the ancient yew was to become a glorious garden feature, for the sole enjoyment of the owners of Marston House, their employees and their visitors. New trees were planted close to the yew and include the country's champion northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*) and a fine cedar of Lebanon.

The estate ownership has changed hands many times since 1786 and while I was allowed access to record the yew in 1997, today the estate is strictly private. These photographs are likely to be the closest anybody gets to this former churchyard yew for a long time.

