

The majority of ancient yews found in England and Wales grow on the consecrated ground around churches. We can be sure that the trees we have so far recorded owe their survival largely to the protection afforded by their location.

The Ancient Yew Group (AYG) has been gathering information for many years and is in a position to present data showing the location of our churchyard yews.

In addition to this, Toby Hindson's ground breaking studies at last enable us to categorise yews as Ancient, Veteran or Notable, based on clearly defined criteria. This gives us a strong statistical base from which to argue for tree protection, and helps those who should be looking after our oldest trees to know the precise number and location of trees entrusted to their care.



The ancient Alltmawr Yew



One of Heyop's veterans

The problem is establishing who is directly responsible for protecting our oldest trees. It is likely that in many instances there is no protection at all, or that responsibility lies solely with the Vicar acting with their Church Warden, Parochial Church Council or District Council. Tree expertise in such decision making bodies is often lacking, as indeed are the funds necessary to carry out the best remedial work.

It is not always an individual church or diocese that is responsible for grounds and tree maintenance, and some burial grounds have been taken over by the local authority. This does not necessarily mean that an old yew will receive sensitive treatment, as this tree at Bromham in Wiltshire demonstrates.



Some churches, no longer used for worship, have their buildings maintained by organisations such as the *Churches Conservation Trust* and the *Friends of Friendless Churches*.

In this example at Elworthy in Somerset, a 13th century church, complete with embattled tower and outside stairway, is looked after by the Churches Conservation Trust. The tree is centuries older than the church and yet we do not know who looks after it. There are similar examples at Alton Priors in Wiltshire, Capel and Waldershare Park in Kent and Yazor in Herefordshire.



At Llanfair Kilgeddin in Monmouthshire, this church building is managed by the Friends of Friendless Churches. We visited in 1997 expecting to find the “3 impressive yews” described by Revd J. Daryll Evans in his *Churchyard Yews of Gwent* 1988. Sadly all that remained of one was this stump lying in a nearby lane awaiting removal. It might be that there was a good reason for felling this tree, but we were unable to establish one. This lack of accountability is not acceptable.



The deconsecrated church shown below is now a house. On the east side is a large hollow veteran yew the same age as the original church. While the building has grade 2 listed status, the tree has no protection. The tables below contain a summary of the numbers of Ancient, Veteran and Notable yews in the Dioceses of the Church of England and the Church in Wales (January 2020). The numbers will increase as new trees are discovered, particularly those of Notable yews (300 years and older).

The number of trees recorded in a diocese is always greater than the number of churchyards, since many churches have the responsibility of looking after more than one significant yew.



Yews in the dioceses of the Church in Wales

Diocese	No of churchyards	Ancient (age 800+)	Ancient (age 500+)	Notable (age 300+)
Bangor	34	13	15	29
Llandaff	29	5	21	13
Monmouth	49	18	35	24
St Asaph	72	29	44	53+
St Davids	44	11	35	18
Swansea and Brecon	84	28	169	73

Yews in the dioceses of the Church of England

Diocese	No of churchyards	Ancient (age 800+)	Ancient (age 500+)	Veteran (condition)	Notable (age 300+)
Bath & Wells	165	12	49	30	86
Birmingham	2		1	1	
Bristol	9	1	3		5
Canterbury	80	22	53	4	39
Carlisle	17		9	2	21
Chelmsford	7		2		5
Chester	13	3	6	1	4
Chichester	53	15	22	3	22
Coventry	12		2	1	9
Derby	25	3	7	3	13
Exeter	48	10	16	1	29
Gloucester	45	6	12	4	38
Guildford	14	4	4	1	5
Hereford	151	29	77	8	119
Leicester	3		1		2
Lichfield	30	5	18	4	11
London	8		4		4
Newcastle	3		2		2
Oxford	60	8	14	4	40
Peterborough	6	1	4		1
Portsmouth	26	11	8	1	11
Rochester	44	8	19	5	20
Salisbury	94	11	14	10	63
Southwark	14	5	3	1	8
Southwell & Notts	7		1	2	4
St Albans	16	3	7		6
Winchester	49	10	16	3	30
Worcester	27	2	11	4	13