

All Saints church dates from the 12th century, but in Saxon times there was a Chapel nearby at the Manor House for the Monks who worked the farm. In the church porch a notice reads: 'We would like to think that Gilbert White, one time curate of this parish, would approve of this churchyard and that all who visit will enjoy its natural beauty'.

There is no doubt that Gilbert White would have been well aware of the significance of the yews growing here, although W.H.Hudson, writing in *Hampshire Days* 1902 expressed 'regret that White, who looked at this wonderful tree every day for five and twenty years yet never mentioned it, gave no account of its size and appearance in his day'.

I am informed however that in Gilbert White's journal, chapter xiv January 6th 1781, he wrote: 'In the churchyard are two male yew-trees, the largest of which measures 30 feet in girth'. The church guide also states that Gilbert White reported the larger yew in a journal of 1768.

Hudson wrote a fine and thorough description of the oldest yew:

'The Farringdon yew in its biggest part, about five feet from the ground, measures thirty feet, and to judge by its ruinous condition it must have ceased adding to its bulk more than a century ago. It has in its usual manner decayed above and below, the upper branches dying while the trunk rots away beneath, the tree meanwhile keeping itself alive and renewing its youth, as it were, by means of that power which the yew possesses of saving portions of its trunk from complete decay by covering them inside and out with new bark. The Farringdon tree has decayed below in this way; long strips from the top to the roots have rotted and turned to dust; and the sound portions, covered in and out with bark, form a group of half a dozen flattened boles, placed in a circle, all but one, which springs from the middle and forms a fantastically twisted column in the centre of the edifice. Between this central strangely shaped bole, now dead, and in the surrounding ring there is a space for a man to walk around'.



By the year 1952 the 'fantastically twisted column in the centre was gone. The rector of Farringdon, C.G.Burgess, reported to Swanton for *The Yew Trees of England* (1958) that the trunk was now 'completely hollow, enabling people of full height to be able to stand within'.

Allen Meredith observed the yews in 1981 and sent this account to *The Conservation Foundation*:

'Two notable yews in the churchyard, one very large, very ancient on the WSW side, now a hollow shell, a mere skeleton, somehow it still survives, grows new bark and above its vast hollow forms new branches, a sight to be marvelled at. This great hollow yew perhaps for more than two or three centuries, must be one of the oldest living things on this earth. The age of such a tree I can merely speculate at this time. On the west side of this tree and at the base there is a separation gap of 5 feet, at the moment there are three separate portions of this huge hollow shell, though it is very much decayed, it still flourishes. At 3ft from the ground it measures 30ft in girth'.

1998: The church is opposite a startling red brick building known as Massey's folly, incongruous in an area of thatch and half timbered cottages. Its churchyard, entered under the darkness of overhanging trees and Irish yews, contains a variety of trees, crowned by its two fine male yews. At the time of my visit sheep were grazing in the large churchyard.

The large yew, SW of the church, has effectively become 3 fragment trees around a vast hollow centre, each of the fragments leaning gently away from the church and held together by supporting rods and wires. Most of the live wood is on the outside of the tree. Branching occurs from 6/8 feet and upwards and formed a healthy crown, full of vigorous growth.



Girth:

- 1768: 30'                      Gilbert White journal
- 1902: 30' at 5'              W.H. Hudson
- 1984: 30' 6" at 5'        Meredith
- 1998: 29' 9" at the ground and 31' at 3' - Tim Hills

The photos below were taken by Peter Norton in 2012. He measured the yew close to the ground with the tape undulating and recorded 30'. At 1' using four embedded nails as a guide it was 30' 1" and at 3' was 30' 2".





1998: The younger Farrington Yew grows SSW of the church and close to a fine cross on a large octagonal plinth. The yew's hollow space was just large enough to stand inside. Its two huge limbs lean symmetrically outwards and are possibly exerting sufficient stress to eventually pull this tree apart and eventually create two yew fragments. For the time being large metal rods high in the branches are holding it together. Substantial branches have been removed and the wounds treated. At the time of my visit much gall was noted and many of the leafy extremities were brown.

In 1981 Meredith recorded its girth as 19' at 3' and 22' 9" at 5'. The opening in the trunk measured about 14" ins across at 3' from the ground'.

In 1998 I recorded its girth as 19' 4" at 3' (just beneath the limbs).



The photo below is from 2012 when Peter Norton recorded 18' 11" at 1' 5", the height of some embedded nails.

