



photos 1998



1803: *The History of the County of Gloucester: Compressed and brought down to the year 1803 Vol II* by Revd Thomas Rudge, B.D. rector of St Michael, in Gloucester:

'The church, dedicated to John the Baptist, consists of a nave and chancel, with a low slated tower at the west end. In the church-yard is growing a yew-tree of 20 feet in girth'.

1938: 'It has an old yew which may be 700 years old; it is about 24 feet round its trunk'. Mee's *The King's England*

1980: A hollow shell still throwing forth branches - girth of 22feet. NW of church. Tree situated on very high ground, there is a river and a stream about 400 yards away, in the area is a moat, manor and castle mound. Allen Meredith

1991: The following letter from the then church warden Mr.R.Hawking dated 23 Feb 1991 demonstrates that the fate of our most ancient trees is often determined at a local level and is reliant on goodwill.

'I would like to draw your attention to the (yew) which is obviously very ancient and nearing the end of its life. The church was founded in the 13th century and possibly the tree is even older. It was recorded as having a girth of 20 feet in 1800 and is now completely hollow and reduced to three sections, although these are still growing vigorously. It is held together with a cable, and is probably still standing only because it is very close to the church and sheltered by it. It is little known because it is round the back of the church and out of view.

I am churchwarden and look after the tree by seeing that the top growth is cut back every five years to reduce the strain on the trunk due to wind or weight of snow, but am concerned that this will be neglected if I am no longer around. I would like to see the historic tree 'adopted' by some organisation who would undertake to inspect it every few years and recommend any works necessary to the PCC'.

I visited in 1998, 2001, 2008 and 2011:

The female yew grows NW of the church and is squeezed into a small space between the church, a fuel storage tank and a mature Giant Redwood. For hundreds of years it has been traditional to plant a yew SW of a building, to provide that building with some protection from the prevailing winds. In this instance, however, it is suggested that the tree's long life is in part due to the protection provided by the church! This is undoubtedly a very long lived tree, probably older than the 700 years suggested by Mee. In 1998 it was in fine health, its crown laden with dense foliage. By 2001 this had turned brown and the tree appeared to be dying. We need to be alert to the fact that this is not unusual, and ensure that ancient specimens are not felled simply because for a brief time they are 'looking the worse for wear'. By 2008 the tree was again covered in a rich dense foliage, and the same was noted in 2011.

The remarkable yew consists of six pieces of trunk, some no thicker than a few inches, which join above head height, and are held together by a metal bar at about 12 feet.

Girth

1991: 20' 5" at 3' and 20' 8" at 4' Allen Meredith

1998: 21' 10" at 1', 21' 5" at 3' and 23' 5" at 5' Tim Hills

2008: 21' 4" at 3' and 23' 9" at 5' Tim Hills

2013: 21' 10" at 1' and 21' 1" at almost 3' (minimum girth) Peter Norton



Peter Norton visited in 2013 and observed a tree fragmented into four pieces with one, nearest the church, about to give way. The east side is banded by steel hawser to the west side to help support the tree. The west side has two fragments high in the canopy also banded.

