

Stoke is an Anglo-Saxon word for a holy place, suggesting that a church existed on this site long before the present building. In the churchyard is found a yew that has, in spite of its relatively young age, attracted attention for nearly two centuries.

1838: 'In Devonshire, in the churchyard of Stoke Gabriel, situated on the river Dart, is a fine old yew, 40 ft. high, the trunk of which is 13ft. 6in. in circumference, and the diameter of the head is 70ft.; at about 7 ft. from the ground, the trunk divides into two limbs, one of 5 ft. 6 in., and the other 4ft. 6 in., in circumference'. *ARBORETUM AND FRUTICETUM PART 111*

1895: Rev F.H.N. Neville informed Lowe that the tree was 'not hollow, no spray'. *The Yew trees of Britain and Ireland*

1958: In *The Yew trees of England*, Swanton was informed that this was '...said to be the second largest in England'. His informant was unaware that there were at least 400 yews with a larger girth in English churchyards.

1992: '...a particularly fine specimen.....its bole is sheltered by a huge umbrella of branches, and a low circular stone wall around the tree serves as a focal point and meeting place for several footpaths'. *The Eternal Yew Baxter*



Girth records:

1836: 15' at the ground, a bole height of 6'10", an overall height of 40' and an umbrage of 83' - *Arboretum and Fruticetum*

1946: 16' 9" - Vaughan Cornish

1972: 17' and height of 45' - *J.H.Wilkes*

1992: 17' 9" *Baxter*

It is unfortunate that the height at which the tree was measured was not recorded in most of the above, but we can assume that it was probably at the customary 5' .

1999: 16' 8" at 1' and 17' 5" at 3' - Hills



1999: This is a popular tourist village in an attractive riverside location. From the churchyard are extensive views over the Mill Creek and across the quayside towards the river Dart. The female yew grows NW of the church and has an undoubted presence, set within a well maintained circular wall and with an unusually pale appearance. Two limbs develop at a height of about 5', but most of its many large branches grow from 7' and upwards. Many of these dip towards the ground and are supported on props, whose heights vary from 1' to 6'.

The church guide states that 'Expert opinion has recently estimated the age of the Yew Tree to be between 1200 and 1500 years old, making it one of the oldest trees in England'. There is no evidence pointing to this sort of age, and something between 500 and 600 would seem more likely. Construction of the tower in the 13th century tower or the 15th century rebuilding of the main body of the church are more likely to suggest possible planting dates.

