

'The oldest thing about the church is the yew in the churchyard, which many believe may be 2000 years old. When the Anglo-Saxons came here 1300 years ago...and they established it as Helma's valley - then, that yew would not have seemed particularly venerable, but merely a very fine tree approaching maturity. Perhaps its parent, as venerable as our yew, made them select this lip of the valley for their sacred grove...And here, beside that fine young yew, some early converts insisted on building their first timber church to Christ'. Extract from the 1988 *Church Guide* - Jean Spendlove

The tree has long been considered to be of great age, with the postcard seen here even describing it as 'The oldest Yew Tree in England'. While it is without doubt an ancient tree, there is no evidence to support an age as high as 2000 years, and there are more than 100 yews in English churchyards that are likely to be much older than this one.



The yew was noted as early as 1849 in the *History, gazetteer and directory of Northamptonshire* by Whellan Francis, who recorded 'a large yew tree, which measures 28 feet round its trunk'.

In Kelly's 1884 *Directory of Bedfordshire, Hunts and Northamptonshire* it was described as 'a yew tree of remarkable proportions and beauty, measuring round the trunk nearly eight yards'.

In 1945 Mee's *King's England* described it as 'the glory of the churchyard...one of many magnificent trees in the neighbourhood; its trunk is nearly 23' round, but the storms of our time have sadly maimed this mighty being of trees'. At around the same time R.C.B.Gardner recorded a girth of 22' at a height of 3' 6", information which appeared in *The Churchyard Yew and Immortality* by Vaughan Cornish (1946).

1999: The fine male yew grows on the east side of the church and close to its NE corner. It is a tree of two distinct growth areas, each carrying many branches. I was able to climb into its heart 10' above the ground and see evidence of at least 5 substantial sawn off branches. A hollow is developing at a height of about 3', inside of which could be seen much internal growth.

On the other side of the tree is a section of bole consisting of dead sapwood (A) with crumbling red heart wood in the developing void. The bark on this side of the yew was particularly red.

This symmetrical tree spreads over a vast area. Its main branches climb well above the rest, while others dip to the ground and among the graves all around the tree. Girth was 22' 4" at the ground, 24' 6" at 3' and 27' 11" at 5'.



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