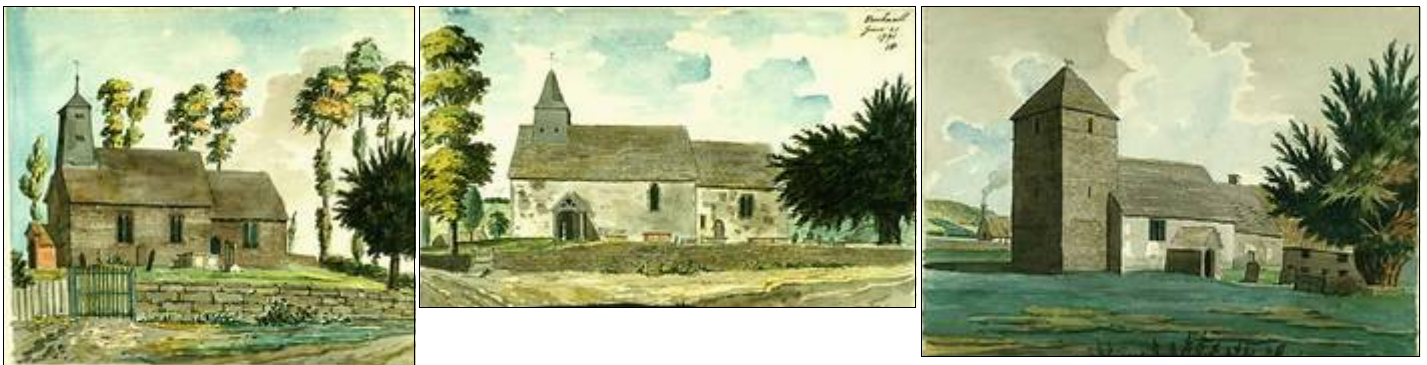


## SHROPSHIRE'S CHURCHYARD YEWS

painted by Rev. Edward Williams M.A. more than two hundred years ago  
photographs by Tim Hills between 1997 and 2012

Between 1786 and 1791 Rev. Edward Williams made a record of most of Shropshire's parish churches. He was described in *The Gentleman's magazine vol 153* as "an excellent draughtsman" who had also "studied much of botany". We are told in *The annals and magazine of natural history, zoology and botany - vol 1 p183* that his studies included "a catalogue of all the plants which he had detected during many years' careful herborization of the county of Salop" for which "his accuracy is well known, and perfect reliance can be placed on any plant which he recorded".

Williams work thus gives us a rare opportunity to see some of Shropshire's churchyard yew trees as they appeared two hundred and twenty years ago. The examples below give us reason to be confident in the accuracy of his recording. The yew at Boningale (left) now has a girth of about 13ft, while that at Bucknell (centre) now has a girth of about 19ft, and the Norbury giant (right) has a girth above 33ft.



His attention to detail is illustrated in this example at Tasley. In the painting we can clearly see that sections of the bole are leaning outwards, a process which has led to the distinctive yew we see today.

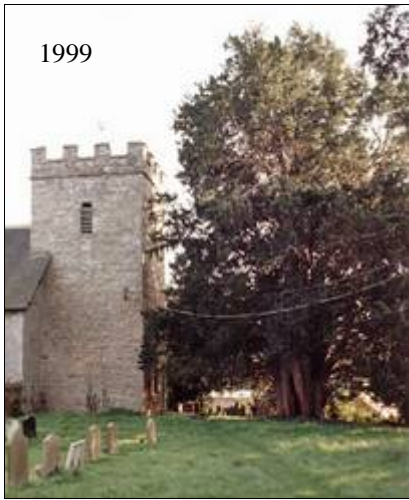


On the following pages, 28 of the yews in Williams' paintings are seen as they appeared two hundred and twenty years ago and at they are now.

We are grateful to Shropshire Archives for granting us permission to use their material in this way.

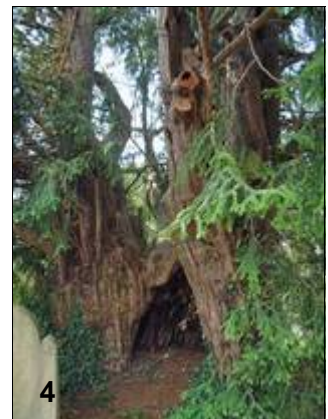
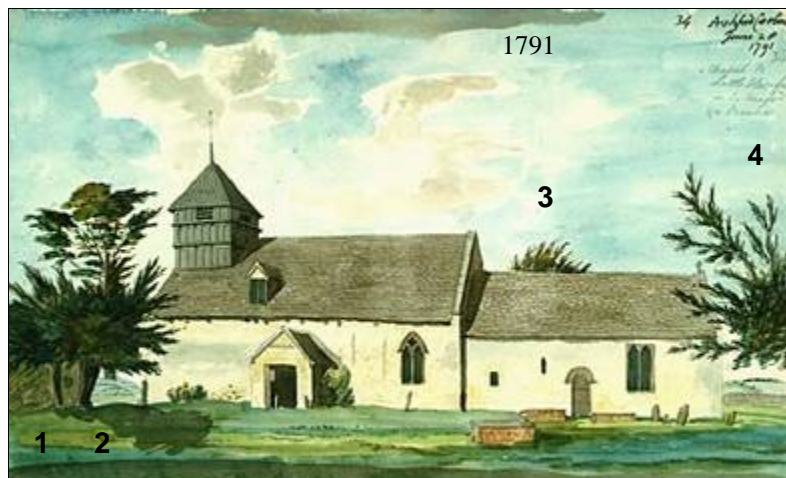
### ACTON SCOTT St Margaret

Of thirteen yews growing in Acton Scott's churchyard, the oldest six are found west of the church. Two of these appear in Williams' painting, one by the boundary wall, the other close to the tower. Girth of this ancient hollow specimen was 20' 4" at 1' in 2012.



### ASHFORD CARBONELL St Mary

When Williams painted this scene he was able to incorporate four of Ashford Carbonell's five old yews. It is unfortunate that tree 3, which grew on the north side, was unnecessarily felled in 2011. Geoff Garlick's photo of 2003 is one of the last to be taken of this ancient tree. All 4 yews had girths between 18' and 22' in 1998.





**ASTON BOTTERELL St Michael and All Angels**

This yew was still standing in 1939 when Mee described it in *The King's England* as "an ancient yew with two trunks" In 2012 all that remains are these pieces of stump. In 50 years time they too will be gone, leaving Williams' painting as the only pictorial record of the tree. The reason for its felling is not known.



**BETTWS-Y-CRWYN St Mary**

This village, close to the Welsh border, is above 1300' and one of the highest settlements in England. Its remote mediaeval church is situated on an old drovers road and is sometimes known as the shepherd's church. The large yew in the foreground shows signs of damage, reputedly by lightning, and more than 200 years later it is possible to see the split (A). The tree now has a full flourishing crown and a girth of 13' 11" at 5' in 2012.





**BILLINGSLEY St Mary**

Two old yews grow in the churchyard. The hollow yew shown here is a veteran male tree with a girth of 16' 6" in 1998. It is seen at the far left of the painting, outside of the church's south porch.



**BONINGALE St Chad**

The yew grows SE of the church. It appears solid from the road, but its north side has become hollow. Girth in 2012 was about 13'.



**BUCKNELL St Mary**

2 veteran female yews grow at the east end of St Mary's church. The taller tree is the one seen in the painting. Girth of both yews was 18' 7" in 1999.





### CAYNHAM St Mary

This veteran male, standing alone in 1791, now grows at the end of a line of younger yews. In its solid looking bole is a gap where internal structures can be seen in the decaying heartwood. Girth in 2000 was 17' 4".



### CLEE St MARGARET



The male yew, with a girth of 14' 4" in 2009, grows outside of the south porch. Today its branches dip towards the ground, and tombstones are propped against the bole.

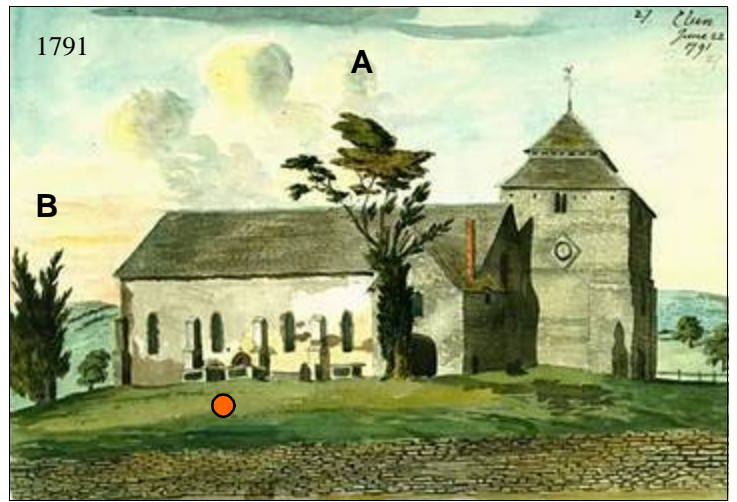
### CLEOBURY NORTH St Peter and St Paul

The male yew (A) grows on the south side of the church. In the painting it has been moved to the right to avoid obscuring the building. Girth was 12' 9" in 2012.

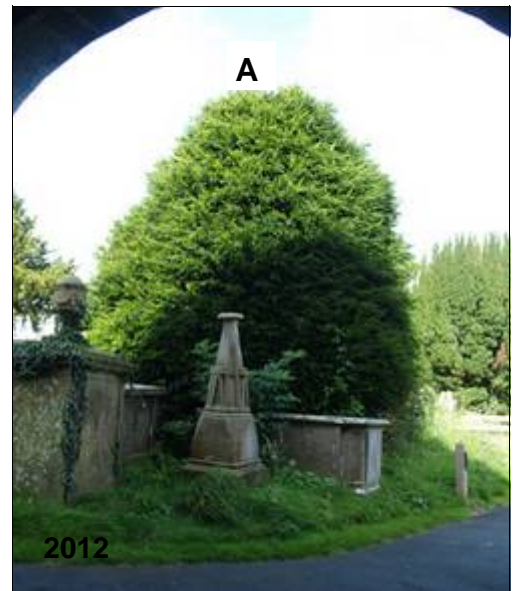




CLUN St George



Williams has shown Clun's two significant yews, each growing on the north side of the churchyard. The red circle marks the approximate location of one of the twenty largest girthed yews in England. It is likely that Williams has moved it to the new position (B) for the painting.



Tree A is seen above in 1998, with its impressive, stocky 19' bole. In a remarkably short space of time it has become covered in dense foliage, and it might be some time before the bole is visible again.

Tree B is seen below, a tree of fragments with a combined girth of over 34ft.





**DAWLEY MAGNA** Holy Trinity

The yews found today have small girths for trees in the likely age range of 270/300+ years. Observations of the many clipped yews at Painswick in Gloucestershire show that trees treated in this manner have low girth increase.



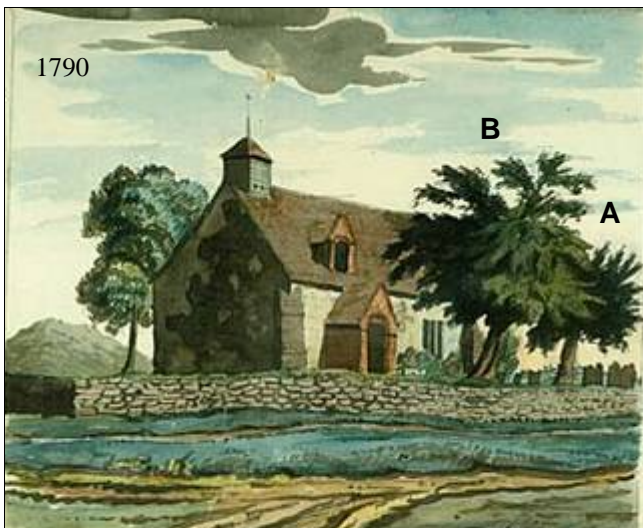
**EATON-UNDER-HEYWOOD** St Edith



The yew at (A) appears to be in the same position as in the painting. Its small girthed trunk however suggests that it was planted more recently, perhaps as a replacement for the original tree.

**HABBERLEY** St Mary

In 1790 two yews are seen growing side by side south of the church. Tree B has been moved to the right of its actual position.



Tree A has lost half of its bole, and a prominent internal stem is now seen on the outside of the tree.

Tree B is a solid looking tree with a girth of 13' 1" in 2003. It was leaning in 1790 and continues to do so.



## HARLEY St Mary

As well as this illustration, there is a record of the tree in the 1852 *Gentleman's magazine*, which describes it as a "venerable yew-tree of large girth".

In 2012 the male yew has a girth of 13' 9" at 3'. It is a thick skinned hollow tree growing on a mound.



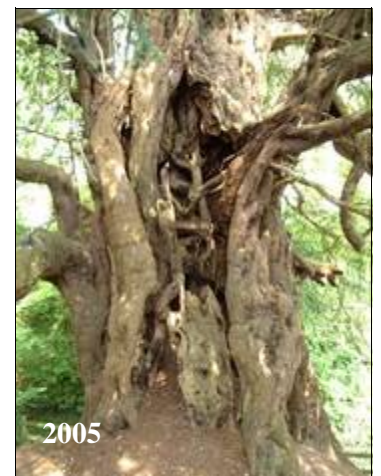
## HOLDGATE Holy Trinity

This unusual male yew grows ESE of the church. Girth in 2003 was 12' 9", but the tree has been larger, with internal growth now appearing on the outside of the trunk.



## HOPE BAGOT St John the Baptist

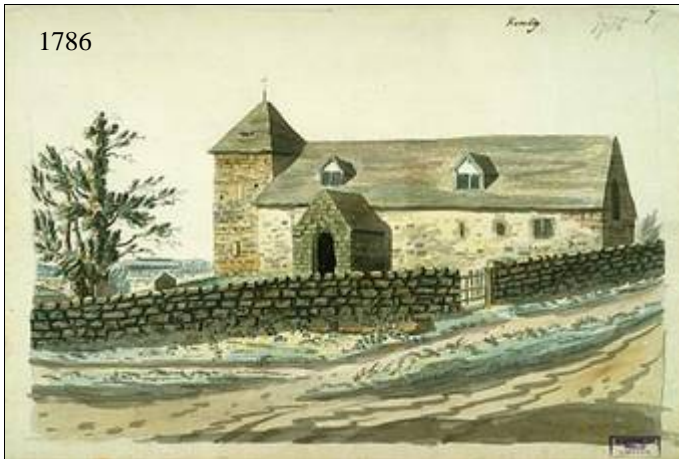
This ancient female yew, with a girth of 24' 2" at 1' in 1997, grows north of the churchyard. A spring below the tree was once thought to have curative properties and attracted many visitors. The routes leading to the site was once marked with old yews, but these have been destroyed.





**KENLEY** St John

In 2012 five yews are seen in this churchyard. Williams has included the oldest of these, this ancient female growing in the wall west of the churchyard.



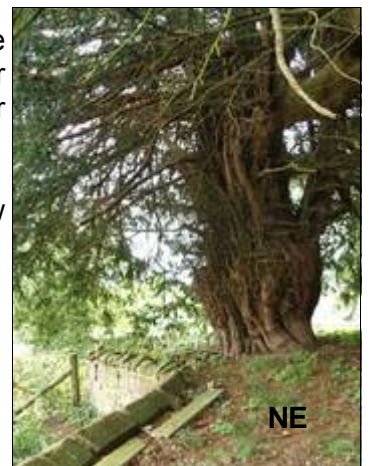
**LITTLE NESS** St Martin

No fewer than 21 yews ringed the churchyard in 2007. The two shown here are its most exceptional specimens, each appearing in Williams' painting.



Both male, they grow SW and NE of the church. The tree SW girthed 15' 8" and is hollow with a piece of old door frame attached from a time when the tree was used for storage.

The tree growing NE is a solid looking tree with hollow spaces. Girth was 16' 2".





## LOUGHTON



This ancient female yew, with a girth above 30', grows at the east end of the church.

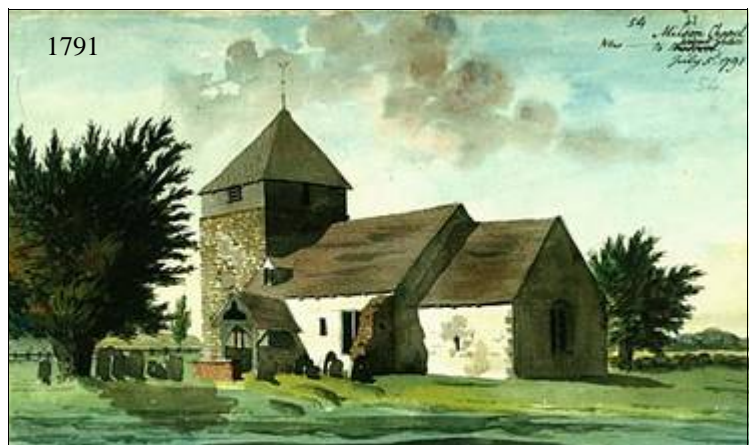
## MELVERLEY St Peter

Two notable male yews grow by this timber framed church, one on the south and one on the north side. In 2003 the tree close to the porch on the south side had a girth of 11' 7". Just showing behind the church is the tree on the north side, its girth 13' 10".



## MILSON St George

The veteran male yew of two fragments grows south of the church. Girth in 1999 was 19' 5". The painting also shows what appears to be a younger yew on the north side.





**MUNSLOW** St Michael



A veteran male yew grows at the boundary wall, SSE of the church. Like so many old yews planted at churchyard boundaries, it is now causing damage to the wall. Girth in 2012 was about 17'.

**NORBURY** St Mary

This enormous ancient male yew, with a girth above 30', grows on the south side of the church. There is a wall/seat around the tree in 1790, which will have been renewed on many occasions as the bole expanded. The 1999 photo shows that the wall again needs attention.



**QUATFORD** St Mary Magdalene

The notable male yew grows at the highest point of the churchyard SE of the building. Girth in 2007 was about 14'.





**SIDBURY** Holy Trinity

This split, hollow ancient male grows east of the church. Morton gave it a girth of 21' 9" in *Trees of Shropshire* (1986).



**TASLEY** St Peter and St Paul



A female veteran, with many branches from a low bole. It grows on the east side of the church. Girth was 16' 2" in 2000.



**UPPINGTON** Holy Trinity

An ancient female yew SE of the church (A). Girth was 28' 4" in 1999.



There was also a yew at the east end (B) in 1786 but this has been removed, possibly during restoration work.



With thanks to the Shropshire Archives Service for allowing these paintings to be reproduced on our website.

Acton Scott: 00012380, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/2 (24/669) - painted on 31 August 1790  
Aston Botterell: 00012559, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/3 (264/16408) - painted on 13th June 1791  
Ashford Carbonell: 00012585, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/3 (264/16434) - painted on 28th June 1791  
Bettws-y-crwyn: 00012566, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/3 (264/16415) - painted on 22nd June 1791  
Billingsley: 00012357, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/2 (24/646) - painted on 11th August 1790  
Boningale: 00012549, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/3 (264/16398) - painted on 14th June 1791  
Bucknell: 00012552, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/3 (264/16401) - painted on 21st June 1791  
Clee St Margaret: 00012368, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/2 (24/657)- painted on 18th August 1790  
Cleobury North: 00012377, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/2 (24/666)- painted on 27th August 1790  
Clun Shropshire Archives 6001/372/3 painted on 22nd June 1791  
Dawley Magna: 00012430, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/1 (263/16278)- painted in 1786  
Easton under Haywood: 00012498, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/1 (263/16346) - painted on 13th August 1789  
Habberley: 00012337, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/2 (24/626) - painted on 24th June 1790  
Harley: 00012642, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/3 (264/16491) - painted on 16th October 1821  
Holdgate: 00012506, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/1 (263/16354) - painted on 25th August 1789  
Hope Bagot: 00012582, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/3 (264/16431) - painted on 5th July 1791  
Ness Chapel/Little Ness: 00012348, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/2 (24/637) - painted on 13th July 1790  
Kenley: 00012417, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/1 (263/16265) - painted in 1786  
Loughton: 00012547, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/3 (264/16396) - painted on 13th June 1791  
Milverley: 00012340, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/2 (24/629) - painted on 30th June 1790  
Milson: 00012596, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/3 (264/16445) - painted on 5th July 1791  
Munslow: 00012389, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/2 (24/678) - painted on 1st September 1790  
Norbury: 00012371, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/2 (24/660) - painted on 25th August 1790  
Quatford: 00012363, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/2 (24/652) - painted on 11th August 1790  
Sidbury: 00012579, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/3 (264/16428) - painted on 4th July 1791  
Tasley: 00012517, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/1 (263/16365) - painted on 3rd September 1789  
Uppington: 00012415, Shropshire Archives, 6001/372/1 (263/16263) - painted in 1786