



Yews are among our oldest and most remarkable trees, regenerating themselves over centuries and living for millennia. But just how old are Britain's ancient yews, and do they predate the churchyards in which they stand? **STEVE MARSHALL** attempts to find some answers...

This year sees the 800th anniversary of *Magna Carta*; King John was forced, by a group of rebel barons, to affix his seal to the document on 15 June 1215. Though widely regarded as a bill of rights for the common man, *Magna Carta* was nothing of the kind, since it applied only to 'free men', not serfs. Not surprisingly, the charter mainly benefitted the barons who had drafted it. As Marriott Edgar so eloquently expressed it, in a poem made famous by Stanley Holloway:

*And it's through that there Magna Charter,
As were signed by the Barons of old,
That in England to-day we can do what we
like,
So long as we do what we're told.*¹

Magna Carta was sealed by the River Thames at Runnymede, Surrey, about 20 miles (32km) west of London. The recorded location – "in the meadow that is called Runnymede" – identifies an area on the southwest side of the Thames that is still a meadow today. Nonetheless, some believe that the charter was sealed on the other side of the river, beneath the *Ankerwycke*, an enormous ancient yew tree (see panel on p38). The tree measures 31ft (9.4m) round its girth, making it one of the largest yews in Britain.

A glorious history has been invented for the *Ankerwycke*. "At least 2,500 years old", the tree is claimed as a long-established pagan holy place, where English kings were traditionally crowned until the Norman Invasion. The *Ankerwycke* was purportedly the *axis mundi* of England;

utilising homespun etymology, 'Runnymede' becomes 'the place of the runes', and so on. There is no actual evidence for any of this, yet many believe it to be true. They *want* it to be true. The past few decades have seen an increasing awareness of the yew and its ability to live for thousands of years. Since its 'rediscovery', the tree's status is being restored to what it might possibly have been throughout human history: a focus for admiration, respect and veneration.

A REMARKABLE TREE

The English, or European, yew is a remarkable tree. Its flowers are tiny, yet they release vast clouds of pollen in the early spring, launching an untimely assault on hay-fever sufferers. Although classed as a conifer, the female tree produces not cones but scarlet, berry-like *arils*. Known



RTAIYEW

as ‘snotty dogs’ in some parts of Britain, yew arils are soft, gelatinous and extremely sweet, with a perfumed, fruity flavour. Though the flesh of the aril is edible and delicious, it is the only part of the tree that is not poisonous; the dark, shiny seed inside the aril is poisonous and must not be swallowed. The yew’s Linnæan name *Taxus baccata* indicates this: *baccata* means ‘berry-bearing’ and *Taxus* is from the same root as ‘toxic’. Birds are fond of yew arils and the seeds they disperse may become new trees.

Uniquely, the yew has the ability to regenerate itself, with the capacity to live forever. The complex process that makes this possible was not understood until quite recently². From a slow-growing seedling, the juvenile tree grows quickly until, after many centuries, it reaches its maximum size. Now in its prime, the tree continues to grow at a slower rate and its core begins to rot, through the action of a symbiotic fungus. Though trunk and crown may appear unchanged for many more centuries, the load-bearing heartwood is eventually eaten away; this stresses the outer trunk, which is not capable of supporting the tree’s

THE ANKERWYCKE IS CLAIMED AS A LONG-ESTABLISHED PAGAN HOLY PLACE,

weight. The yew now begins secondary growth to reinforce those areas under stress, and its rate of growth, most significantly of the girth, increases again.

As the walls of the trunk grow increasingly thinner, they are strengthened by a new layer of secondary wood, growing over the old. What are known as adventitious shoots can grow anywhere on the tree; they tend to appear low on the trunk and grow down into the ground, reinforcing the trunk and further increasing its girth. Also, as the trunk becomes increasingly hollow, interior roots can grow within it; they typically appear a couple of metres above ground and grow down to regenerate the tree from the inside.

Branch-layering is sometimes seen in British yews, which tend to put out long, low branches that droop to the ground. In time, these branches will put down roots and begin to grow into trees. Their roots may stay connected to the parent tree for a long time; if they eventually separate, the new trees will be clones of the original, with identical DNA. Expanding outwards in a radial pattern, the clone trees may eventually grow to become a yew grove, where what appears to be a forest of separate trees are all parts of the same parent. Branch-layering is rarely seen in churchyard yews, since low, sprawling branches are invariably removed for tidiness or supposed safety reasons. Similarly, interior roots are often prevented from growing into the ground, as hollow yew trunks are commonly used to hide the church’s wheelbarrow, compost heap, or even its tank of heating oil.

A hollow yew will continue to increase in girth, but eventually it can no longer support the weight of a full crown. At this stage the tree collapses, often losing much of its upper growth. In the final phase of

THE YEW GROVE IN REENADINNA, KILLARNEY NATIONAL PARK, IRELAND BY STEVE MARSHALL

MAGNA CARTA AND THE ANKERWYCKE YEW

Didn't King John seal the Magna Carta under the the ancient Ankerwycke? JEREMY HARTE whispers the truth about Runnymede, 1215 and all that...

How old is the Ankerwycke yew? Some say one thing, and some another. It's 2,500 years old to Allen Meredith, 3,000 years to Janis Fry, 1,400 years to Robert Bevan-Jones. Think of a number, any number! Like many veteran yews, it seems to have achieved a sort of stability in old age; when first measured 200 years ago, it was within a foot or so of its present girth of 30ft (9m), and sketches of that time show it looking much the same as it does today. The tree grows on soil that is well watered, fertile, and evidently good for yews, because there are several flourishing younger trees in the hedges nearby. The Thames, which seems as if it will threaten the tree with flooding, spills its waters instead over the meadow of Runnymede on the opposite, southern bank. All things going well, the Ankerwycke yew looks set to last another millennium or two.

Except that in a crowded country like England, old trees can't survive on their own; they have to be looked after. If this yew is still with us after so many years, it is because it has been in the care of Ankerwycke Priory, a small establishment of half a dozen nuns founded by Gilbert de Mountfitchet between c.1160 and c.1180. Fragments of the church and monastery buildings survive a little way north of the yew.

The name gives a clue. When the priory was founded, its site was already called *Ankerwic*, from the Old English words *ancra*, which is 'hermit' and *wīc*, which is something like 'farm': a dependent outlying farm. A *wīc* was usually set up to supply the main estate with some specialised product such as cheese, calves, charcoal or honey. It's a place-name element that is not normally found until quite late in the Anglo-Saxon period, nor is the word *ancra*. And hermits, by the nature of the job, are individuals, so that the most plausible chronology would begin with one original hermit who set up a smallholding by the Thames in the 11th century and left behind a holy reputation inspiring the pious Gilbert to found a nunnery in the same place two or three generations afterwards. Suppose that the Ankerwycke yew was already standing then, and that the *ancra* settled under its branches c.1000. If the hermit was the first person to begin looking after the tree, that gives an outline date for it, since yews don't normally survive unprotected in the countryside for more than three or four hundred years. Bevan-Jones's estimate of 1,400 years sounds about right.

But wait a moment! Wasn't the



Ankerwycke yew already broodingly old in 1215? Didn't Anglo-Saxon elders hold their councils beneath its branches, and wasn't King John dragged by the barons to seal Magna Carta in its numinous presence? Well, actually, no. The charter was sealed "in the meadow that is called Runnymede, between Windsor and Staines", and this name Runnymede continued to be used for the rest of the Middle Ages to describe the same low flat field which now belongs to the National Trust and used to be in the Surrey manor of Egham, owned by Chertsey Abbey. In prehistoric times, the Thames may have slipped around its floodplain like a garden hose, but under the stewardship of the Abbey its main channel was defined on its present course – the line which defines the county, parish and manor boundary. Ankerwycke is not in Runnymede

ABOVE: The venerable Ankerwycke yew at Runnymede; it's old, but just how old is debateable. **LEFT:** King John of England signs (rather than seals) the Magna Carta at Runnymede in June 1215 in a typical early 19th-century imagining of the scene.

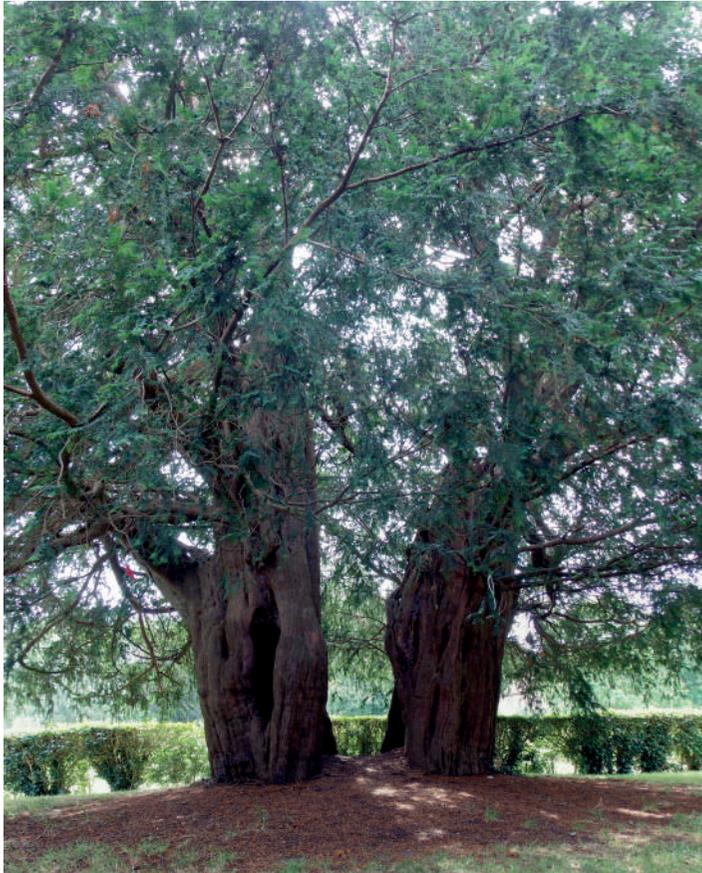
and there was no reason for King John to visit its grounds. He was there for politics, not dendrotourism.

The Anglo-Saxon elders are probably mythical, too, though they're a very old myth. Already in the 13th century, when Magna Carta was becoming an icon of Englishness, the name Runnymede was explained as 'the field of counsel', from the word *rūn* (or rather its later adjective form, *runing*). There's no other evidence for meetings there, though a lot of stuff was written by Victorians of an imaginative bent about ancient gatherings of the Saxon witan. Outdoor courts for the local administrative district, or hundred, were held not in Runnymede but at Godley, miles away on what is now Sunningdale Golf Course. Furthermore, we know a lot more now about the names that were used for open-air assembly places. Hundreds of these describe isolated landmarks, and hundreds more involve words corresponding to modern English 'meeting' or 'speech'. None of them contain the element *rūn*. This is hardly surprising, because *rūn* never refers to public speech or announcements; it means 'whisper', and by extension 'suggestion, quiet bit of advice'. Suppose that King John had leaned over to his most trusted companion and muttered "Let's just seal this damned thing, get out of here and raise an army" – well, that would have been a *rūn*. But if so, he said it so quietly that no one else heard him.

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ABOVE LEFT: The Alton Yew in the Vale of Pewsey, Wiltshire, sited on the south side of All Saints Church. It has a hollowed trunk that has divided into two pieces. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Shoots can grow from anywhere on the yew tree's bark, making it extremely adaptable and assisting its longevity. **BELOW:** Although classed as a conifer, the female tree produces not cones but scarlet, berry-like arils, the flesh of which is the only part of the tree that is not poisonous (the seeds inside the arils are).

the yew's life cycle, the original trunk may be reduced to a number of standing semicircular portions of its old shell. Still the tree continues to grow: the surviving pieces of trunk may individually develop to resemble new trees, though they are still connected to the old root system. Secondary wood may grow over them, and even if they expire, new shoots will grow up to replace them. By this time, a new trunk may already have risen from inside the shell of the original, and so the cycle repeats, perhaps indefinitely.

This all makes it extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to accurately date yew trees. A gnarled, hollow, forest yew may appear to be 800 years old, but how can we be sure this is its first hollowing? The tree's cycle of growth may already have repeated, perhaps many times. In spite of this, dendrologists are regularly called upon to provide absolute dates, preferably prehistoric ones, for Britain's sizable population of venerable yews.

THE MAN WHOM THE TREES LOVED

Current awareness of the yew has grown from the pioneering work of Allen Meredith, as reported in Anand Chetan and Diana Brueton's 1994 book *The Sacred Yew*. Unfortunately, several misconceptions grew from the same source. In the 1970s Meredith received a mystical calling from Britain's yews; information about their great age, and their endangered state, was imparted to him in a series of dreams. Until the 1940s Britain had a thousand or so ancient yews, but by

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ALLEN MEREDITH EMBARKED ON A ONE-MAN MISSION TO SAVE BRITAIN'S REMAINING YEWS



the 1970s half of them were lost forever. Due to errors made at the beginning of the 20th century, the dating of yews was deeply flawed and none were thought to be more than a couple of centuries old. Meredith embarked on a one-man mission to save the remaining yews, and to convince the dendrological establishment that the yew can live for thousands of years.

Touring the length of Britain by bicycle, Meredith produced a gazetteer of more than 400 ancient yew sites that included the trees' measured girths. Teaching himself, he became conversant in botany. He researched historical accounts of the trees; some were measured centuries ago, so their sizes could be compared. He began calculating the age of yews, based on the size of their girth. Combining science with intuition, he returned astonishingly early dates. All the trees examined were over 1,000 years old, and most churchyard yews were between 1,500 and 2,500 years. The oldest yew in Britain, at Fortingall, Scotland, was declared to be 5,000 years old.

Meredith was taken seriously, to varying degrees. David Bellamy and Robert Hardy were early converts. As well-known figures from TV, they were able to mobilise the BBC and other media into disseminating Meredith's findings. The idea that a living tree could be "older than Stonehenge" captured the public imagination; the wave of interest and awareness generated by all the publicity probably saved more than a few yews from the chainsaw. Dating living yews to

THE POISON TREE



The yew is extremely poisonous, despite its long history of use in folk medicine. Today *Taxol*, a drug derived from the yew tree, is used effectively in chemotherapy, particularly in the treatment of breast cancer. The leaves, the most toxic part of the tree, are more poisonous in winter than summer. Fifty to 100 grams of yew leaves are enough to kill an adult, and far smaller doses will prove fatal to children and dogs; the alkaloid responsible is *taxine B*, which kills mainly by acting on the cardiac muscles, causing heart failure.¹ In Britain, there have been at least four reported suicides by yew poisoning in the past decade.

The yew has claimed psychoactive properties, which, from the few accounts that exist, do not sound like fun; it seems that the yew produces a low, rather than a high. Few psychonauts are willing to risk death by experimenting, but one young man has described smoking yew needles on his website. It sounds awful. The effects were, “not the most pleasant (disorientation, fatigue, feeling of numbness but also relaxation and an ignorant, indifferent mood)”.²

Several historical accounts warn that sitting beneath a yew may cause harm; there is a suspicion that on hot days the yew exudes a vapour, or gas, that can produce altered states. Dr A Kukowka, a retired medical professor, reported a strange experience in 1970. After gardening beneath four yews for a couple of hours, he became dizzy, nauseous and disoriented; losing his sense of time, he began to hallucinate. This was at first terrifying, with visions of snakes and vampires; he then became happy and euphoric, lulled by heavenly music and images of paradise.

NOTES

¹ Fred Hageneder, *Yew: A History*, The History Press, 2007, p 47

² <http://psychotropicon.info/en/taxus-spp-eine-psychoaktive-gattung-2/>

the Bronze Age led to much speculation about the pagan origin of Christian sites. If Meredith was correct, then many churchyard yews were twice the age of their churches, suggesting that the yews, after countless centuries of pagan reverence, had been appropriated by Christianity. *The Sacred Yew*, with its uncritical and rather New Agey style, makes much of this.

Many dendrologists, whilst conceding that yews were indeed far older than previously thought, took a more conservative stance. That yews may live for 1,000 years or more was no longer in dispute, but there was wariness of the older dates. Meredith’s wider claims, many of them intuited, earned a mixed reception. He dreamed up, literally, the Ankerwycke’s Magna Carta and coronation stories, and surprisingly, some respected historians endorsed his ideas. No one could doubt Meredith’s sincerity – he honestly believed that the yews were communicating information directly to him. It seems that he went through some kind of transformative, even shamanic experience, living alone in the forest for long periods and receiving knowledge from the trees. Many readers will understand this: yew trees have a profound presence, and it can seem that they have a deep, dark intelligence. Simply being near the Fortingall yew – its sign proclaiming it “5,000 years old – the oldest living thing in Europe” – moves me almost to tears on every visit. Is this

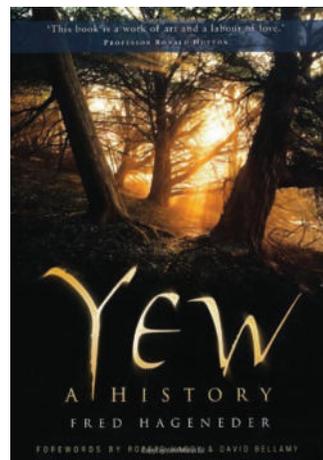
HE WENT THROUGH SOME KIND OF TRANSFORMATIVE, EVEN SHAMANIC EXPERIENCE

just a consequence of reading Tolkien at an impressionable age?

Time has moved on, and a new understanding of the yew’s complex life cycle

has taken research to a new level. Fred Hageneder’s detailed and beautiful *Yew: A History* has become the standard work. Sensibly, Hageneder avoids the absolute dating of individual trees, stressing the near-impossibility of the task. Examination of the growth rings of felled trees has shown that the yew’s rate of growth may vary enormously, and some annual growth rings may be only one cell layer thick.³ In periods of drought, the tree can stop growing altogether. There are marked disparities in growth rate between individual

trees: groups of yews known to have been planted simultaneously can show substantial variation in size. It is now clear that the yew’s rate of growth relative to time cannot be



ABOVE: The Alton Yew was estimated by Allen Meredith to be 1,700 years old, yet it is elegantly positioned next to the 800-year-old All Saints Church, suggesting that tree and church may be contemporary.



ABOVE: The impressive ancient yew tree at Tandridge, Surrey. It has been claimed that it predates the church near which it stands – from 2,500 years old to ‘prehistoric’ – but the evidence makes this most unlikely. BELOW: An old yew thrives in the cloistered courtyard of Muckross Friary in Ireland’s Killarney National Park.

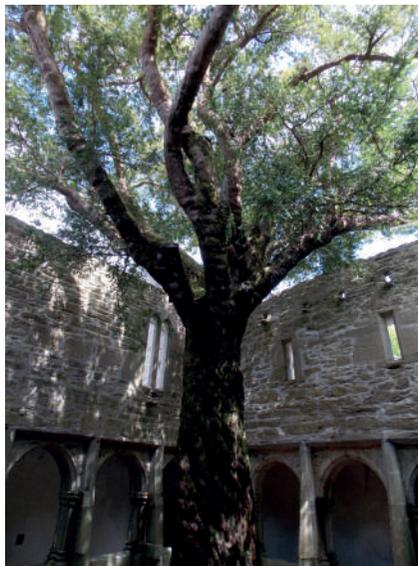
plotted as a straight line; the exponential curve used by Meredith for calculating the age of larger trees is also regarded as inaccurate.

Meredith’s contribution to the yew tree’s cause has been enormous, but the ages of ancient yews are now generally considered to be about half of those he calculated. The “5,000-year-old” Fortingall Yew has been reassessed at about 3,000 years, though its sign has not been changed. There is considerable reluctance from the public to accept these more recent dates; although still undoubtedly ancient, Britain’s yews are no longer as ancient as they *could* be.

YEW AND RELIGION

There is scant evidence for a connection between yews and prehistoric monuments, but it is hard to believe that the immortal yew was not revered in prehistory. Yews can thrive on, or near underground springs, and the importance of water to the siting of monuments is becoming more and more apparent.⁴ Inconveniently for archaeologists, prehistoric religious activity at springs or trees is unlikely to have left any trace.

One of Meredith’s more tantalising revelations is that the form of stone and timber circles was inspired by the radial expansion of a yew tree as it evolves into a grove. Made of multiple concentric rings, timber circles could feasibly represent the yew’s habit. Woodhenge, The Sanctuary and Stanton Drew might well have been inspired



by the yew; they might even be memorials to actual yews that died. Could the maze of posts inside a timber circle symbolise a yew grove?

The yew tree is intimately connected with the early Christian Church of the sixth and seventh centuries. The Celtic saints had a particular fondness for yews. St Columba is said to have preached beneath a great yew on the Hebridean island of Bernera; he also established a monastery on the mystic Iona, “island of yew trees”. There are no yews on Iona today (I have looked) so

perhaps Columba had brought his own? St Patrick and St Kevin were enthusiastic yew-planters, and it is claimed that they planted several notable trees as they travelled the British Isles on their missions of evangelism. Several Irish and Welsh saints actually occupied hollow yews, living inside them and preaching from the trees; sometimes a church or monastery would later grow up on the site.⁵

The popular belief that all old British churches are built on pre-Christian sacred sites is rarely supported by evidence. There are undeniably a few churches built next to Bronze Age burial mounds; standing stones have occasionally been absorbed into the fabric of churches, and there is All Saints in Rudston, East Yorkshire, which suffers the indignity of sharing its hallowed ground with a 25ft (7.6m) high Neolithic stone phallus. Examples like these are rare though, and the misconception is largely based on the erroneous dating of churchyard yews, to what is likely about twice their true age. More than 130 certificates hang in British churches, assigning pre-Christian dates to their yew trees; some claim a date from the Bronze Age or even earlier. Disappointingly for many yew-lovers, the vast majority of churchyard yews are probably mediæval.

Because yews are living things, it is natural to attempt to assess their age by size; however, they can be considered just like any other archaeological feature.

THE WORLD TREE

Known as 'The tree of God' in Japan, the yew was also revered by Indo-European cultures across Europe. Fred Hageneder has found yew references in the records of the Hittites, dating from the 18th century BC; there are traces in the myths and legends of ancient Greece, pre-Christian Ireland and Imperial Rome. [1] The funerary customs of the Phrygians, Saxons, Merovingians, Germanic tribes, Egyptians, Alaskans and others, all featured the yew. [2] It seems that, like springs and marshes, the yew was regarded as *liminal*, occupying an intangible space between the two worlds of the living and the dead.

As well as being a gateway to the Otherworld, the yew may also have been seen as the 'World Tree' that is found in cultures the world over. In northern Europe, the World Tree was known as *Yggdrasil*. Immense and holy, *Yggdrasil* connected the mysterious 'nine worlds'. Its roots watered by springs, wells and sometimes a



lake, the great tree reached to the heavens and was the centre of the world – the *axis mundi*. This belief probably originated from shamanic religions, since the shaman may sometimes

use a tree as a ladder to ascend to the heavens. From *Yggdrasil*'s branches, the Rainbow Bridge also connects to other worlds; *Yggdrasil* itself is sometimes described as a

"column of light".

Because of the difficulties of translating old Icelandic, *Yggdrasil* was long thought to be an ash tree, since texts describe it as the "needle ash". Since it is also described as the "wintergreenest tree" and "the glossy one", this rules out the common ash, which has no needles and is not evergreen. The yew, with its glossy foliage, is a far more likely *Yggdrasil*. The western European scholars who pondered this mystery in past centuries were unfamiliar with tall, straight yews reaching up to heaven, since their local population had long since been decimated; they thought the yew to be a low, spreading and often convoluted tree. However, majestic *Yggdrasil*-like yews still thrive in the forests of Croatia, and in other parts of eastern and central Europe. [3]

NOTES

- 1 *Yew*, Fred Hageneder, Reaktion Books, 2013, p140.
- 2 *Yew: A History*, Fred Hageneder, The History Press, 2007. x p153
- 3 *Ibid.*, p 218

MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY / ALAMY

Jeremy Harte has shown that there are veteran yews growing on Anglo-Saxon boundaries and hedgebanks. The trees cannot be older than the earthworks they are rooted in, yet they have girths of 20 to 30ft (6 to 9m). Meredith has dated some at 2,000 years old, but the archaeological evidence indicates an age of around half that. There are similarly majestic yews growing on mediæval earthworks.

The authors of *The Sacred Yew* claim the unusually tall churchyard yew at Tandridge, Surrey, as prehistoric. With a girth of 35ft (10.6m), its age was declared by Meredith to be "in excess of 2,500 years". Unusually, there appears to be some archaeological evidence. The yew, claim the writers, "is around 25 ft from the church, which has Saxon foundations." In the crypt, "it is clearly visible that the Saxon builders constructed stone vaulting over the tree's roots", indicating that the yew was already fully grown by 1,000 years ago.⁶ This would be compelling evidence indeed, if it were true.

On investigation, Jeremy Harte found the church to be mediæval, with no Saxon phase and no crypt.⁷

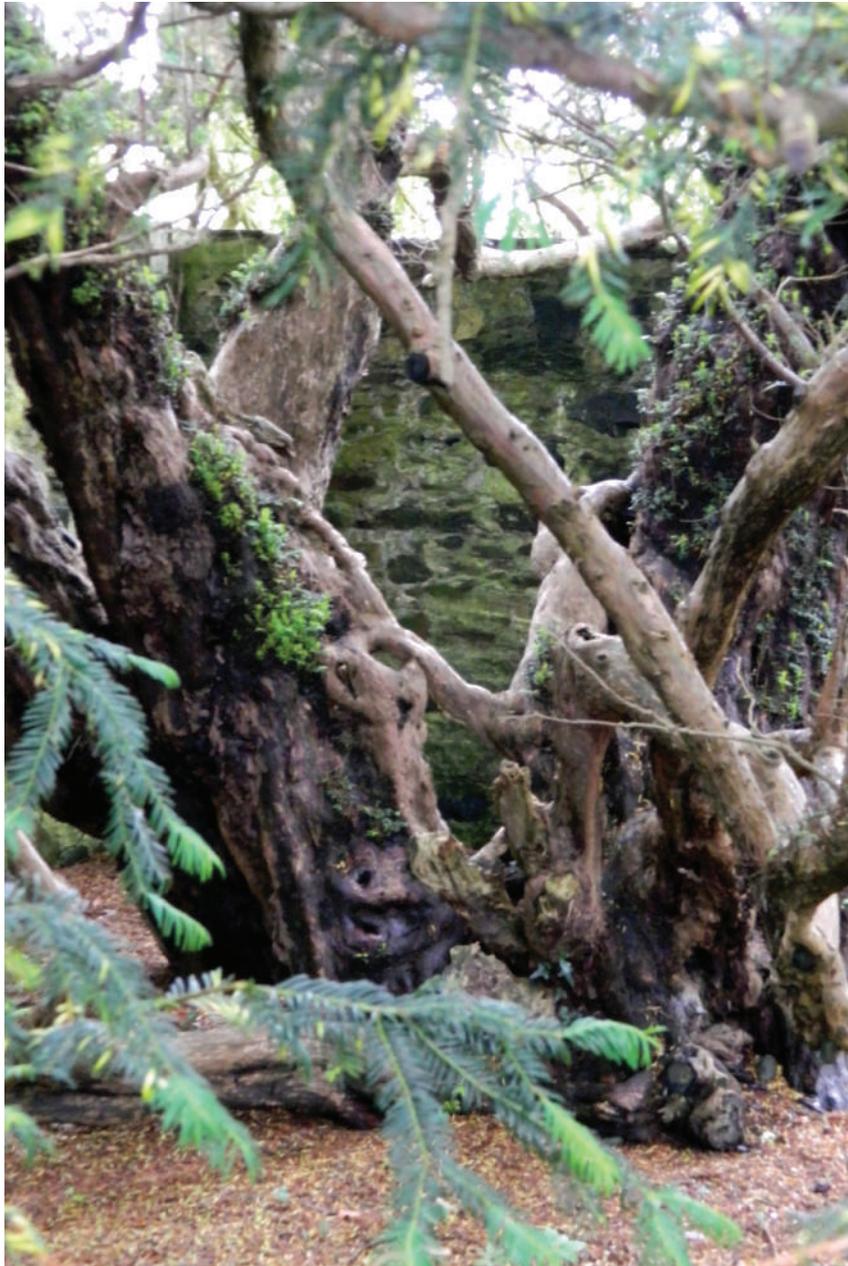
Harte observes that, "almost every old yew can be seen to harmonise with the plan of the church for which it was planted." The yew is commonly sited on the south side of the church, opposite the porch; sometimes the porch is on the north side, and so is the

yew. There may be two yews, one by a minor entrance and one by the main funeral path. Can so many British churches, with all their additions and alterations, really have been built to align with ancient, pagan yews that already occupied the site? The churches are themselves aligned broadly to east, and sited relative to boundaries, settlements and topography, on ground that will not flood.



ABOVE: This beautiful Welsh yew in a churchyard at Defynnog was said to be 5,000 years old in 2014, a claim since refuted.

HOMER SYKES / ALAMY



STEVE MARSHALL

LEFT: Britain's oldest tree, the Fortingall Yew in Perthshire, is claimed to be 5,000 years old, though experts now suggest an age of 2,000-3,000. Its original trunk has hollowed, then rotted away entirely. Although still one tree, it now resembles several small yews.

To satisfy all these requirements *and* have an ancient yew already growing opposite where the church porch would best be placed, is asking a lot. It seems rather more likely that the churches were laid out first, and the trees planted beside them.

THE NEW OLDEST TREE IN BRITAIN?

In 2014, the media trumpeted the claim that a Welsh yew in Defynnog was found to be older than Fortingall, and was now “the oldest tree in Britain” (see FT318:18). The story went around the world and visitors

flocked to Defynnog; some were suspected of damaging the tree by removing pieces as souvenirs. There was concern that hordes of tourists would compact the soil, endangering the tree’s root system and possibly killing all four yews in the churchyard. A similar situation was seen at Fortingall, where in 1785 a wall had to be built around the yew, to prevent souvenir-hunters from destroying it entirely.

The Defynnog claim originated from *The God Tree*, a 2012 book by Janis Fry. Advised by Allen Meredith, she declared

the tree to be “more than 5,000 years old”. There are two ancient yews at Defynnog, spaced 17ft (5 m) apart; they have identical DNA and according to Fry, they are the last fragments of one great original trunk. The Fortingall yew also became two trees, but they are known for certain to be fragments of one trunk: it was still just about complete in the late 18th century, when drawings were made. There is no documentary evidence for a single, large tree at Defynnog.

The *Ancient Yew Group* (AYG), inundated by inquiries, investigated and refuted the Defynnog claim. Toby Hindson explained in detail why Fry’s dating is wrong⁸. If the two trees really were remnants of one rotted trunk, its girth would be over 100ft (30m), almost twice that of the largest yew ever recorded.⁹ A yew of such a size would surely have been noted: the celebrated Fortingall yew measures 56ft (17m).

The dating method was shown to be inconsistent. Meredith had already recorded the largest single Defynnog yew at 40ft girth (12m) and 3,500 years old, although it actually measures 33ft (10m). As two fragments of the same tree, it grew to a notional 100ft girth, yet was now claimed to be over 5,000 years old. The two trees share the same DNA, probably because the smaller tree is a clone of the larger tree, produced by planting a cutting or by branch layering. Finally, the Defynnog yew’s age was determined as “quite possibly over 2,000 years old, but very unlikely to be as much as 3,000.” As the oldest tree in Britain, Fortingall reigns still. **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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is a former circus xylophonist, stunt pilot and cranial osteopath. He spent 2014 as artist-in-residence on the International Space Station. Dividing his

time between his ranch in Montana and a tiny yurt on Salisbury Plain, Steve is the best-selling author of *Lying for Business* and *Lie to Win!*

NOTES

1 “The Magna Charta” by Marriott Edgar, 1930s.

2 The ‘seven life stages of *Taxus baccata*’ were first identified by Toby Hindson in 2000. The yew’s process of regeneration is explored in great detail by Fred Hageneder

in his *Yew: A History*, The History Press, 2007.

3 *Yew: A History*, p85.

4 “Silbury Springs”, Steve Marshall, *British Archaeology* No 131, July/August 2013.

5 *Yew*, Fred Hageneder, 2013,

Reaktion Books, 2013, p152.

6 *The Sacred Yew*, Anand Chetan & Diana Brueton, Penguin Arkana, 1994, p47.

7 “How old is that yew?”, Jeremy Harte, www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/oldyews.htm. Originally published in *At the Edge* No 4, 1996.

8 “Addressing the claim that the Defynnog yews in Powys may be 5,000 years old”, Toby Hindson, AYG, 2014.

9 Largest yew: Brabourne, Kent 58ft 6in.