

BRITAIN'S LOST YEWS

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This list, taken from many sources, is not a comprehensive one but an estimate, of the number of yews lost in Britain, mainly since the 2nd World War. There were also losses in Victorian times with the loss of the knowledge of sacred side of the yew trees. There is no way of knowing the true figure as records were not made and collected at the time. The list may be just the tip of the iceberg as it is not always obvious when a yew has disappeared for ever. For instance I am certain there must have been a much earlier, older yew at Nevern in Pembrokeshire but no old stump or evidence can be found. Between the Victorian era and the 2nd World War, thousands of yews, of which just a few examples are included here have gone and since then somewhere in the region of 500 have been destroyed. This list has been researched from old records and books such as Arthur Mee's 'King's England' (1930's), Vaughan Cornish 'The Churchyard Yew and Immortality' (1946), E.W. Swanton 'The Yew trees of England' (1958) and old illustrations and engravings of churches with old yews, where the yews are no longer there. This list is mainly about churchyards known to have lost yews. Many of those places would typically have lost several yews like Myddfai in Carmarthenshire where only 1 yew remains on the north side, out of a circle of at least 5 or 6 originally there.

In putting this list together, it has become clear just how many places originally had a circle of yews planted as part of pre Christian religious practises. Yew circles, commonplace in ancient times, were there to protect the dead. Circles typically consisting of a dozen yews or more, are now reduced to just a few trees which indicate, (if the stumps are left), how great these magnificent circles were. These circles were prolific, particularly in the Brecon and Powys area. On this basis it is easy to see that many churches have lost three quarters of their old yews. The face of Britain has changed in more ways than one! Counties that seem to have lost the most are actually in my home territory of Gwent and Glamorgan although Gwent and Powys still have what is perhaps the greatest density of the largest and oldest yews. Yews were very important at one time and some place names indicate this such as that of where I live in Wales, Dinefwr meaning Kingdom of Yews

Sometimes when a yew is destroyed, all evidence of it's ever having been there is removed, as at Ashford Carbonnel in Shropshire a few years ago. At other places the stumps survive to tell the tale, which is useful for

gaining more information as to the girth and age of the yew, as at Llanspyddid. Yews, particularly during the time of Edward 1st were often destroyed altogether, due to a fashion for 'lawned' churchyards (no trees). This matter was discussed in Parliament in 1307 when the law prohibiting the cutting down of churchyard trees (almost entirely yews) was reviewed and restated, as there was concern for the damage happening to church buildings, as a result of the lack of protection from the weather, once offered by the yews. This marked a particularly dark era in our yew history, where concern for sacred yews was largely forgotten and yews in the main were seen as being there purely for the utilitarian purpose of protecting the fabric of the building from high storms and for sheltering the congregation before entering the building. The law was re instated for this reason rather than for any reverence for yews.

However, perhaps due to modern machinery making it easier to demolish trees, since the 2nd world war, Britain has lost at least 500 yews which were over a thousand years of age. Some of these were enormous, spectacular and truly ancient. We may well have already lost the best of them. Several were of a 30 ft. girth indicating a 2 to 3,000 year old yew. All were important, once celebrated trees.

A recent report in the Royal Forestry Society Quarterly Journal contains the concern that 223 notable yews have been lost from churchyards and highlights the need for better safeguarding for the unique habitat of what is the world's finest collection of yew trees. The report also shows rather startlingly, 'that 10% of large yew trees, previously recorded in churchyards have disappeared, the majority over the last one hundred years. For example at Sullington, Sussex only one of six yews now remains. Whilst churchyard yews, like other trees, fall victim to storms they also fall foul of health and safety fears, poor management and development.' I would add that becoming cloaked in ivy which is unfortunately the norm nowadays, is likely to cause a yew to be more vulnerable to being broken by storms.

Records are patchy and incomplete and as already stated have been gathered from many sources and one writer, Rev. Daryl Evans recorded not just yews in 'The Churchyard Yews of Gwent' 1988 but also stumps. Where specific details about these lost yews are known they are included here. Describing a yew as 'north' for instance, is significant as if the yew is large and old, it is likely to be very old indeed, possibly Neolithic.

It is worth remembering that the destruction of yews is almost always unnecessary. Yews are unlike other trees that have a certain life span

before falling into decay at the end of their life. In most cases yews, capable of continuous regeneration, do not need to be destroyed and removed without trace. Careful management, removal of ivy, rubbish, oil tanks and old Victorian ornamental walls around the base of the tree (gradually over several years to avoid shocking the tree), is normally all that is needed to keep yews alive, growing and thriving.

KNOWN LOST YEWS OF OVER A THOUSAND YEARS

Site	Girth (feet), date and details
Aber, Gwynedd	Originally a circle of 10 old yews recorded in 1983, now just 1 left.
Asthall Leigh, Oxfordshire	19 ft. yew cut down in 1985.
Ashford, Carbonnel	21ft. yew cut down in 2011.
Bignor, Sussex	20 ft. yew cut down in 1985.
Bishop Stoke, Eastleigh, Hampshire	1 yew cut down.
Bishopston, Gower	20 ft. Removed in early 1990s.
Blaina Aberystroth, Gwent	At least 1 substantial yew lost.
Bolton Abbey, Yorkshire	Removed in 19 th century.
Bowden, Cheshire	1 very old yew. Yew still there in the 1980's.
Brabourne, Kent	57 ft. yew gone.
Bridwell, Pembs	1 large yew gone. Stump left.
Buckleberry, Berkshire	27 ft. Removed around 1954. 1 other yew lost.
Cantref, Brecon	1 dead yew on west with Rowan tree growing inside.
Capel y fin, Powys	1 lost yew.
Cascob, Powys	1 yew gone, stump left.
Cefnlllys, Powys	Out of an original circle recorded in 1953, only 2 are left. 1 yew was set fire to in 2006.
Cenneys Commander, Gwent	1 yew gone.
Chipstead, Surrey	24 ft. Remains burnt down.
Christchurch, Newport, Gwent	Substantial yews now vanished.
Congresbury, Somerset	St Congar's yew (staff planting) lost in 1900's.
Cholsey. Oxfordshire	Blown down in 1989.
Chilham, Kent	30 ft. yew cut down pre 1790.
Chirk, Denbighshire	3 yews gone.
Cilmery, Powys	15 ft. Felled 2009.

Coldred, Kent	1 old yew gone.
Colemore, Hampshire	1 old yew gone.
Condober, Shropshire	1 lost yew.
Craswal Priory, near Hay on Wye	1 massive old fallen yew, still lives on. Other stumps.
Dibden, Hampshire	30 ft. yew cut down in 19 th century following storm damage.
Durfield, Derbyshire	1 yew cut down after storm damage.
East Lavant, East Sussex	28 ft. yew cut down in 1982.
Eastrey, Kent	1 lost yew.
Fountains Abbey, Yorkshire	26 ft. yew. 7 cut down in 1975.
Garth Brengy, Powys	10 lost since 1862. Originally a double circle of 33 yews.
Gartheli, Carmarthenshire	1 yew cut down in 1985.
Glyncorrwg, Glamorgan	4 Killed by neglect and poisoning by cement and stone wall built around them.
Goudhurst, Kent	27 ft. yew lost.
Goetre, Gwent	1 very large yew cut down.
Gwenlais Holy Well, Carmarthenshire	14 ft. yew cut down and regrown.
Gwytherin, Conway	1 yew lost.
Gyffin, Gwynedd	Yews felled in 19 th century.
Hampstead Marshall, Berkshire	1 yew lost from the woodland, reported to have been 59 ft. in 1830's.
Hardham, Sussex	Hollow yew destroyed in storm.
Little Chart, Kent	1 yew lost prior to 1936.
Llanafan, Carmarthenshire	4 yews cut down in 1980s.
Llanddewi Rhydderch, Monmouthshire	4 yews gone.
Llandderfyl, Gwynedd	1 yew cut down in 1991.
Llanddewi Ystradenni, Powys	1 large old yew used to store a coal house inside its hollow trunk, destroyed in 60's or 70's.
Llandewi Fach, Gwent	30ft. Cut down and burnt in 1975.
Llandyfaelog Fach, Brecon	10 yews gone from original circle of 13 yews.
Llanelen, Gower	Hollow yew set fire to
Llanelly, Gwent	6 yews gone from original circle of 18.
Llanfihangel Abercywyn,	Cut down in 1980.

Carmarthenshire	
Llanfihangel Nant Melan	8 or 9 yews lost from a circle
Llangovan, Gwent	1 yew
Llangua, Monmouthshire	8 yews
Llanhamlach, Brecon	6 or more yews cut down in 1985
Llanhilleth, Gwent	9 yews, stumps left
Llanlleonfel	18 ft. Destroyed by 2002. 'tidied and made safe'
Llanfoist, Monmouthshire	27 ft. Blown down in 2012.
Llansantfraed yn Elvel, Powys	At least 5 yews gone from a circle of 14
Llanspyddid, Brecon	Around 7 yews cut down in what was once described as a 'noble yew grove'
Llantarnam, Monmouthshire	North yew, large stump left.
Llantwit Major, Glamorgan	1 large old yew.
Llanddewi Rhydderch, Monmouthshire	4 large yews. Stumps left on north.
Llanwrin, Powys	28 ft Cut down in 1984. Resurrected.
LLanwrda, Carmarthenshire	2 yews, 1 very large, 1 cut down in the 90s, other previously.
Llanrhidian, Gower	17 ft Deliberately burnt down.
Llanyre, Powys	2 yews lost from circle
Lydney, Gloucestershire	1 large yew gone 1980
Mathern, Gwent	22 ft north yew gone
Meidrim, Carmarthenshire	At least 2 yews gone
Mobberley, Derbyshire	1 yew gone
Myddfai, Carmarthenshire	6 or 7 yews cut down in the early 90s
Old Colwyn, Clwyd	1 yew cut down
Orcop, Herefordshire	30 ft yew
Overton on Dee, Clwyd	4 yews cut down
Patterdale, Lake District	26 ft yew gone
Penpont, Brecon	24ft yew cut down in 1970
Pontardulais, old church of St. Teilo	Yew cut down when building removed to St Fagans
Rhulen, Powys	Partially blown down; cut up 1987
Sanderstead, Croydon, London	2 old yews felled in 1962 and early 2000s
Sandhurst, Berkshire	Large yew stump yew cut down.
Sandford Orcas, Dorset	1 yew
Sedburgh, Yorkshire	2 very large yews gone.
Shute, Devon	1 yew gone 1954 came down in gales

	and removed
Stanford Bishop, Worcestershire	Over 30ft. Cut down in the 1880s
Stoneaston, Somerset	1 old stump
Stone, Kent	28 ft. Removed in 1980
Strata Florida, Cardiganshire	39 originally. Only 2 survive.
Sullington, Sussex	5 yews gone
Tankersley Park, Yorkshire	Yew gone which was so big and hollow it was said a horse with rider could ride around inside
Taplow Court, Buckinghamshire	21 ft. Removed in 1889
Trevethin, Monmouthshire	Largest yew cut down in the 80s
Trostrey, Gwent	Tree fell years ago but still lives.
Uffculme, near Birmingham	1 large old yew cut down in 2016
Uppington, Shropshire	1 yew gone
Vowchurch, Herefordshire	1 large stump
Walmer, Kent	1 old yew gone
Wilcrick, Gwent	18ft Outside churchyard North Yew stump far larger than other living yews.
Windlesham, Berkshire	Hollow yew gone
Woodford, Essex	17 ft 1987 Damaged by building works and gales and also set fire to.
Wormelow Tump, Herefordshire	Yew on tump disappeared.

Beechmont, near Seven Oaks, Kent 1 'giant yew' lost in the 1960's