

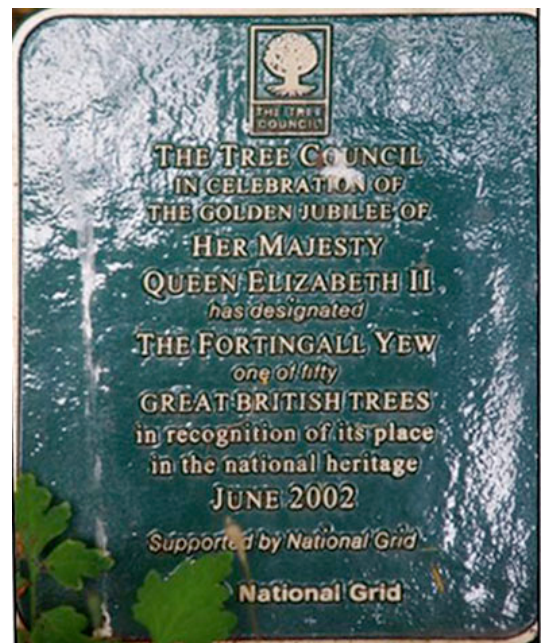
The Fortingall Yew

On a recent trip to the UK, I was fortunate enough to come across several very old trees. I took lots of photographs and was awed at the suggested ages of these trees. This inspired me to conduct some research and write some articles named World's Ancient Trees. I hope you enjoy them.

In the churchyard of Fortingall Church near the east end of the attractive village of Fortingall is the Fortingall Yew, believed to be 5,000 years old and quite possibly the oldest living thing on earth. Fortingall village is located in Perthshire approximately two and a half hours drive north east of Edinburgh in Scotland, UK. Various authors have stated that yew trees were planted at the centre of sacred Druid sites as part of the religious ceremony. These sites in turn were used to build Christian churches. A sign at the site of the Yew states "Before you stands Europe's and possibly the worlds oldest living thing.



Under the dark veil of needles are two relic trunks of a huge ancient yew tree. Scholars believe the roots of this great survivor coil back some 5000 years. The markers show you the size of the original evergreen giant in 1769 when it had a girth of over 56 feet (17m). Sadly, it attracted souvenir hunters who removed large sections to make souvenir quaiches or celebration cups. Children then reportedly lit fires inside the hollow trunk and funeral processions passed through its midst. Eventually a wall had to be built to stop the tree disappearing altogether.

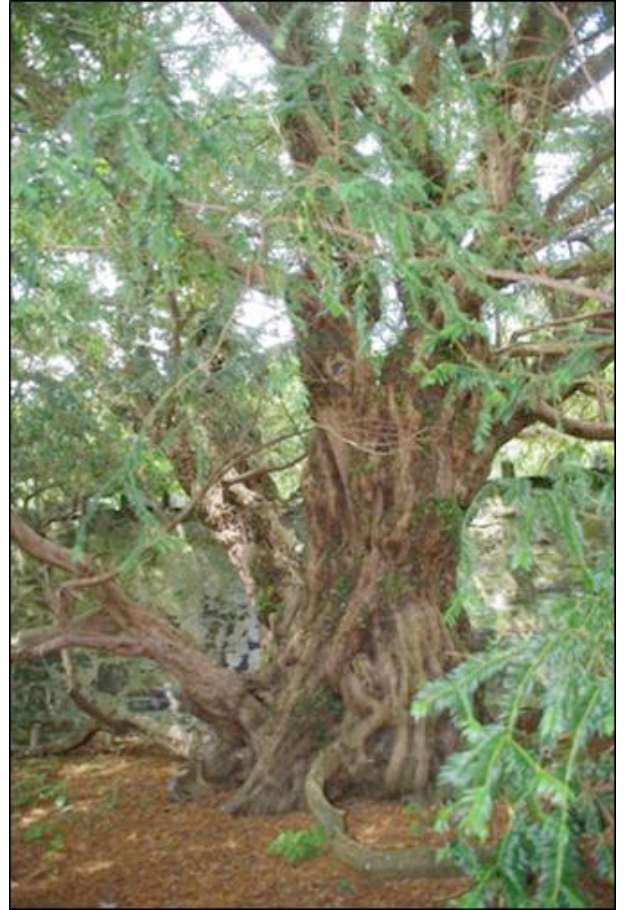


It is of interest that there is also a sign on site that states that the actual age of the tree is unknown, as the core of the tree has long gone, removing the ability to count the growth rings.

The first effort to protect the tree was the building of a wall around it in 1785, though as already noted this seems to have done little to prevent further damage. The wall was rebuilt with gaps for viewing, protected by railings in 1842, and this is the wall that still surrounds the tree today.

A line of posts in the ground shows the circumference of the yew as it stood in 1769; what remains today bears little resemblance. While the tree miraculously continues to grow, what is left is more like a grove of small individual trees sprouting from the single mighty trunk that once stood here.

In June 2002 the Fortingall Yew was listed in the national trust (see the attached plaque). While the Fortingall Yew might only be a shadow of its former self, visiting it remains a deeply impressive experience.



George Pastuch