



Ancient Yew: A History of Taxus Baccata

Robert Bevan-Jones

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The gnarled, immutable yew tree is one of the most evocative sights in the British and Irish landscape, an evergreen impression of immortality. For hundreds of years it has marked holy places for travelers. In this book Robert Bevan-Jones paints a many-sided portrait of this extraordinary tree and the role it has played in history and culture. He begins by examining the yew's fascinating, poisonous biology, the origins of its name, and its distribution. He reviews the various attempts to date ancient yew trees, and concludes that many of them are certainly over a thousand years old; some of the oldest specimens many even be linked to the cells of early Celtic saints. Ancient yews survive today most typically in churchyards. They are also associated with abbeys, springs and pre-Reformation wells, and serve as ancient markers in the wider landscape at hillfort and castle sites. Yew has an important place in woodland history, and provides the formal gardens of many great houses with hedges and topiary. Yew trees feature frequently in folklore tales, especially from Ireland, and are often invested with dark or magical associations. The prehistoric archaeological record is also rich in yew finds. With photographs and etchings of famous old yews, and a gazetteer of the oldest and largest yew trees in Britain, The Ancient Yew is a cultural flora or a single species: a tree which provides a living botanical link between our own landscapes and those of the distant past. Second edition is revised and updated.

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