

# ROOT DOWN

Scotland's veteran trees have survived wars, religious strife and changing landscapes and climate. Some are even descended from trees that shared the Earth with dinosaurs. Join us on this walk through ancient woods

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## BORN SURVIVORS

### THE DRYBURGH YEW

The peaceful wooded grounds of Dryburgh Abbey are a balm for the senses at any time of year.

They are also home to some spectacular trees, including a towering giant sequoia, an elegant Atlas cedar and exotic tree plantings made for David Steuart Erskine, the 11th Earl of Buchan, in the late 1700s. A guided trail, The Trees of Dryburgh Abbey, is available from the abbey visitor centre.

Of all the trees here, perhaps none is more remarkable than the 900-year-old Dryburgh Yew (*Taxus baccata*), which stands modestly to the side of the abbey's ruins. Historical records suggest the tree here today is the original and may be older than the abbey itself, which was founded in 1150.

To put this in perspective, the yew would have been a sapling when Crusaders headed for the Holy Land, while the Battle of Bannockburn was two centuries in the future.

The abbey was prey to Border warfare and was burned twice in the 1300s and at least once in the 1500s. The yew apparently survived and, in the centuries that followed, slowly – very slowly – established itself. Paul Greenwood of the Scotland's Yew

Tree Heritage Initiative (SYTHI) explains: "The Borders Forest Trust has examined historical records of growth rates, which show this is an extremely slow-growing yew. Despite its relatively modest girth, it could be as old as claimed."

A strong bond has existed between humans and yew trees for millennia and they are often found on old religious sites and graveyards, their longevity considered a symbol of eternal life.

Paul says: "The yew tree is unique. Its presence in the myth and history of many cultures, and its recognition as Yggdrasil – the Norse World Tree – as well as the Tree of Life or Tree of God in other cultures, highlights its significance. The yew is entwined with the people and places that have influenced Scotland's history, but this incredible tree is at risk. Our initiative aims to record the yew population in Scotland to raise awareness and improve their protection."

Dryburgh Abbey nave, grounds, shop and toilets are open for visitors



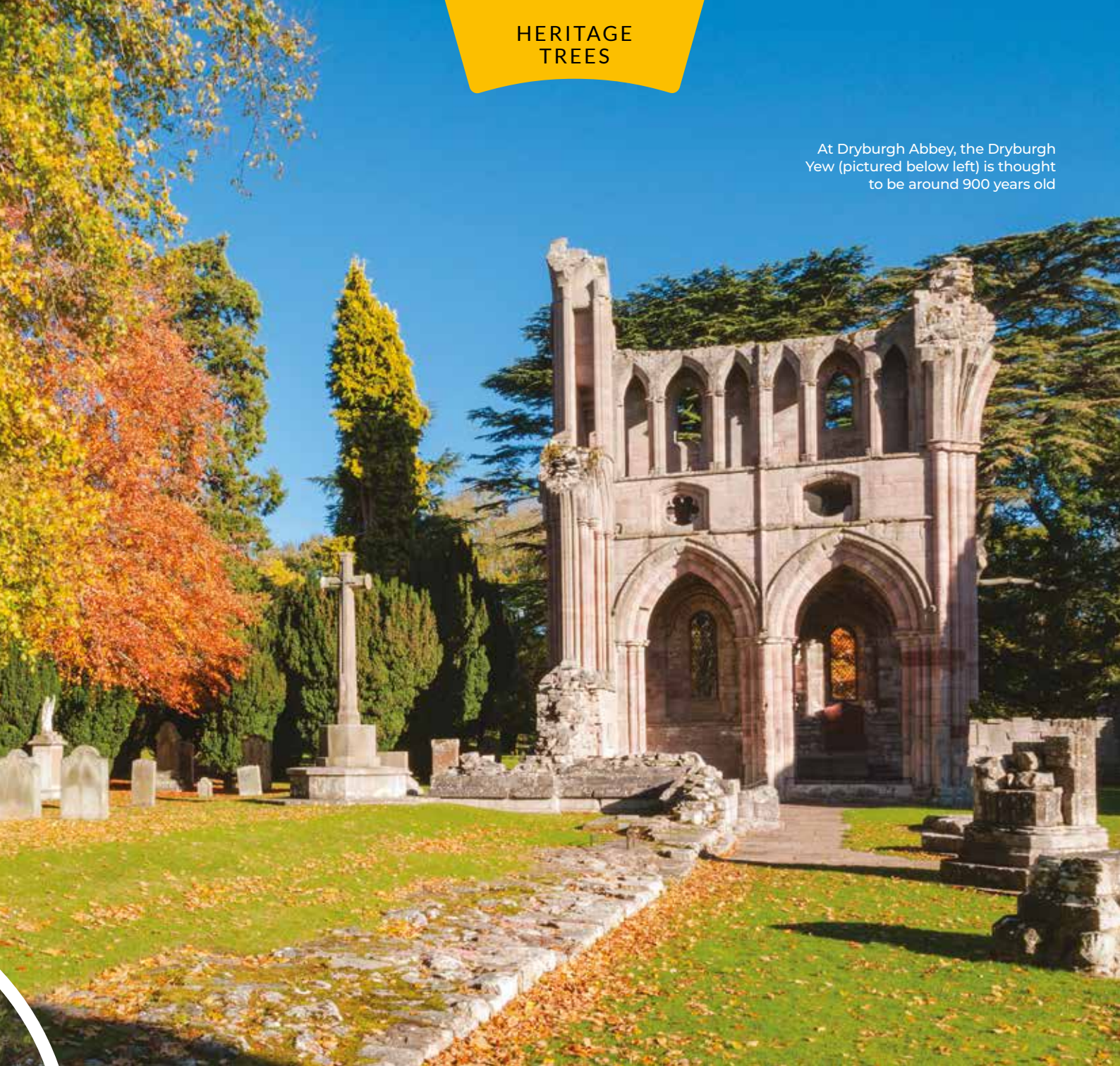
**Yew**  
*Taxus baccata*





## HERITAGE TREES

At Dryburgh Abbey, the Dryburgh Yew (pictured below left) is thought to be around 900 years old



### NATURAL MIRACLES

When it comes to survival, the yew takes some beating. In its natural environment, this resilient tree can live for 1,500 years or even millennia.

In Germany, an early species of yew has been found in the fossil record dating as far back as 200 million years. Paul Greenwood of SYTHI says:

“Yews really are miracles of nature. They’ve survived two major extinction events, including the Cretaceous Boundary event 66 million years ago, which killed off the dinosaurs.

“Over 99.9% of all known species from the last 200 million years are now extinct. The yew is in the

0.1% of species which have survived. Every yew we see in Britain today is a descendant of a population that has lived on Earth for 200 million years, just one of many reasons to care for these sensational survivors.”

Visit the world of yews at [scotlands-yew-trees.org](http://scotlands-yew-trees.org)



One of the yews of Inchlonaig island