

## 1838 ARBORETUM AND FRUTICETUM

This tree is situated in Buckland churchyard, about a mile from Dover; and, according to an account given of it by the Rev. W. T. Bree, is of great antiquity and singular formation. About the middle of the last century, the tree 'was shattered by lightning, which, at the same time, demolished also the steeple of the church, close to which it stands. To this catastrophe, no doubt, is to be attributed, in a great measure, much of the rude and grotesque appearance which it now presents. At a yard from the ground, the but, which is hollow, and, on one side, extremely tortuous and irregular, protruding its 'knotted fangs,' like knees, at the height of some feet from the surface, measures 24 ft. in circumference. It is split from the bottom into two portions; one of which, at the height of about 6 ft., again divides naturally into two parts; so that the tree consists of a short equal but, branching out into three main arms; the whole not exceeding in height, to the extreme top of the branches, more than about 25 ft. or 30 ft. Of what may be regarded as the original trunk and arms but little now remains alive: two considerable portions, however, are still conspicuous in the state of dead wood; viz. one on the

inner part of the northern limb, hollow, and forming a sort of tunnel or chimney; the other on the western limb, more solid, and exhibiting the

grain of the wood singularly gnarled and contorted. These, which are probably portions of the original trunk and arms, are partly encased, as it were, on the outside by living wood of more recent growth (as is frequently seen to be the case in other old and decayed trees); the dead portions seeming to evince a disposition to slough out, like fragments of carious bone separating from the flesh ; but they are kept fixed in their position by the living wood lapping over as it does, and clasping them firmly. The encasing of the old dead wood by that of more modern formation is well displayed, also, in one part of the southern limb of the tree, where an aperture occurs, which exposes to view the dead wood completely enveloped and embedded within the living. The trunk is decayed, and hollow at the bottom; but from within the shell there arise two or more vigorous detached portions, of small diameter, which soon unite with the main wood, and run up to a considerable height, lapping into one another, and twisting and interlacing in a very striking manner, so as to suggest the idea that the trunk has been ripped open, and is now exposing to view its very entrails. Imagination, indeed, might readily trace a fanciful resemblance between this vegetable ruin, as viewed in a particular position, and some anatomical preparation of an animal trunk, of which the viscera are displayed, and preserved entire'.

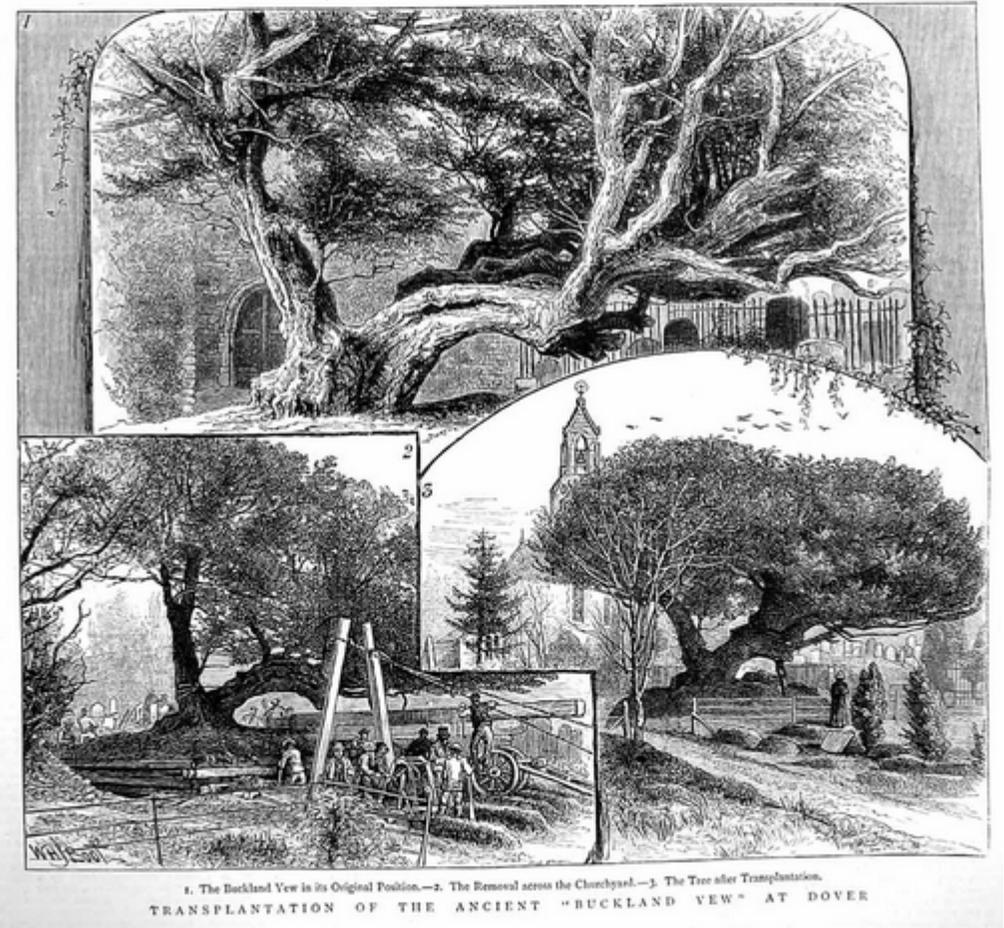
Some of these features can be seen in this 1848 sepia drawing by Saunders and fig 1985, taken from the 1838 Arboretum and Fruticetum.



In 1880 'it was decided to double the length of the nave and aisles, but to do that it was necessary to destroy or remove the ancient Yew tree at the west end. Local people wanted to see the tree spared because it had long been an object of curiosity to visitors. The plea of 'spare that tree' prevailed and it was resolved to secure the necessary extension to the church westwards by removing the Yew tree with its roots and earth, en bloc, to a more westward site. The removal aroused widespread attention with many theories to its age, some asserted that it was verging on 900 years, others that it was there before the Norman Conquest. However, the firm who moved it said they had transplanted another Yew which was 600 years old, but was a 'chicken' to the Buckland Yew'. *Church guide*

The London News of the 27<sup>th</sup> March 1880 gave a full account of this removal in **TRANSPLANTING AN OLD CHURCHYARD YEW**. The illustrations are from *The Graphic*.

'The village church of Buckland, near Dover, is about to be enlarged; and for this purpose it has been needful to remove a venerable old yew-tree, which had grown nearly a thousand years close to the western door. The aged tree, of which we give an illustration, is now transplanted to the distance of 56ft., and it is hoped that it will continue to live for ages longer. It is said to be the only one of its species mention in the Domesday Book. By the effect of a stroke of lightning, it is divided into two principal limbs. The north limb at the fork is 6ft. 10in. in circumference; the south-west limb, before being divided, was 10ft. 10in. The south limb divides at 9ft. from the centre of the trunk, horizontally to the principal limbs of the tree. The north-west fork is 8ft. 8in. at 9ft from the centre of the stump. The spread of the branches over the south side from the centre of the trunk is 30ft. 10in. and the whole diameter of the branches from north to south is 48ft. The extent of the branches west is 33ft., and the whole mass is calculated to weigh 55 tons. For the operation of its removal, the Vicar, the Rev. Turberville Evans, consulted Mr. William Barron, of the firm of W.Barron and Son, od Elvaston Nursery, Borrowwash, near Derby, whose line of business of transplanting trees, extends back to before the year 1830, and who has most successfully carried out his profession in all parts of the world; having transplanted trees in different parts of Paris by means of his self-patented machines, which are of various sizes according to the extent of the undertaking. The operations consisted of digging a complete trench round the trunk to the depth of some six feet by four feet in width leaving a square block of earth of about 16ft. by 15ft. round the root of the tree. In order to remove this whole block, tree and all, to the proper spot at a distance of 56ft. away rollers had to be used, and to do this Mr. Barron's process has been to introduce by means of drifts, bored at a depth of three feet from the surface of the block of earth, four baulks of timber 22in. square at intervals of 24in. Placed transversely to these are three other pieces of timber, and the whole is battened round or boxed in with planks. Underneath this box, in order to give a surface for the rollers to play on, were laid a number of deal boards. By means of pulleys and blocks, the entire mass was gradually worked forward, the most spreading limbs of the tree being kept in a steady position by a timber trolley and props while being removed'.

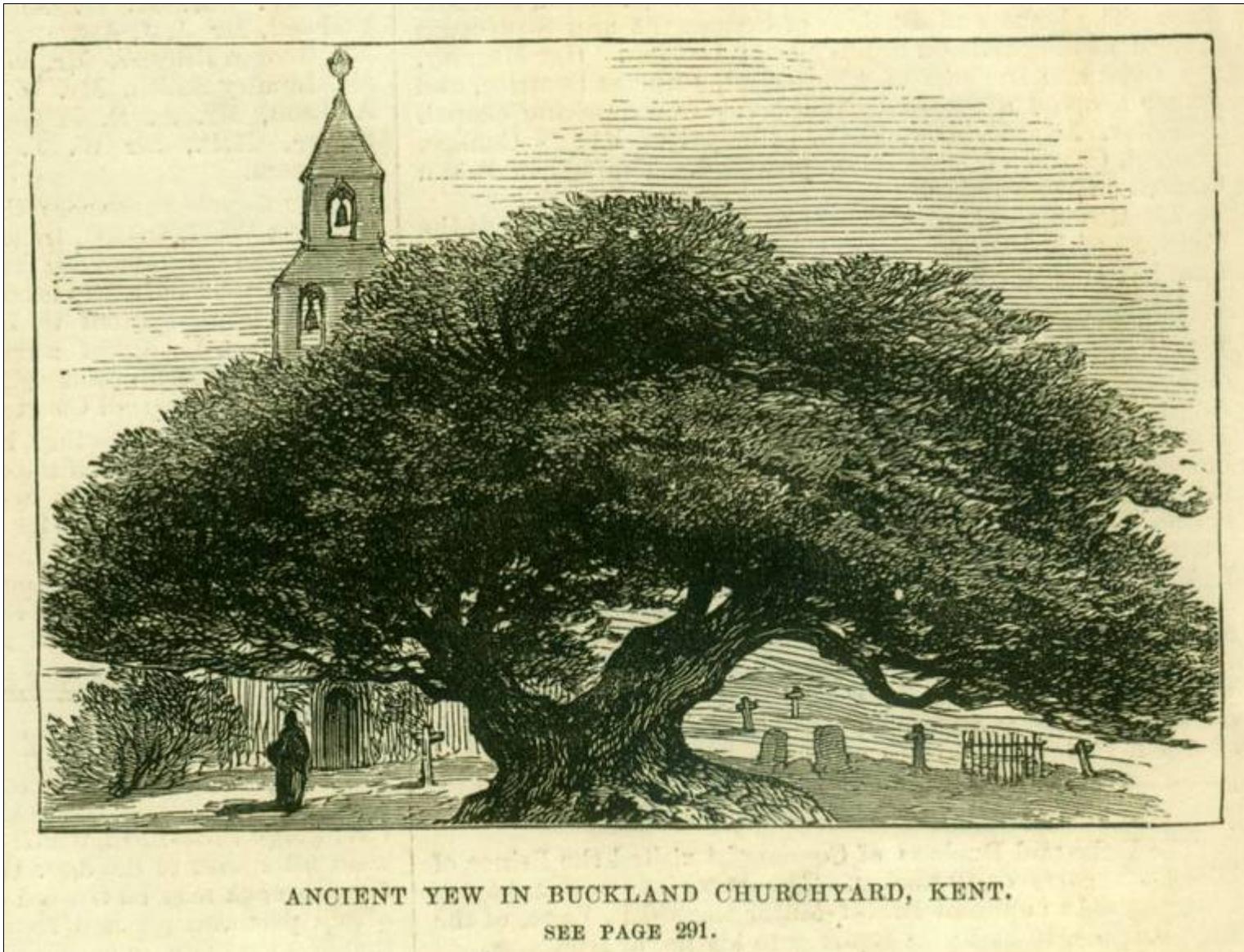


1st April 1999: The yew continues to thrive in its new position. The vicar, in church to celebrate Maundy Thursday, told me that the tree had both male and female branches. We searched for evidence but were unable to locate the female branch on a tree laden with pollen.

The most substantial part of the yew leans outwards towards the church path and was supported on 3 props. A second part that leans away from the path further divides into 2 and each of these branches were supported on a further 3 props. This work had been given unusually careful consideration and the branches rested on rubber inside U-shaped crutches.

Recording the girth of such a tree is not possible, but we can get an idea of its immensity from the 24ft recorded by Strutt in 1822.





ANCIENT YEW IN BUCKLAND CHURCHYARD, KENT.

SEE PAGE 291.

Illustrated London News 1880

1880



1999

