

# Hemsworth's famous Yew tree faces chop



This item by [Stuart.Robinson](#) first appeared in the Yorkshire Evening Post on 22 March 2010

**<http://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/Time-catches-up-with-Hemsworth.6169945.jp>**

For more than seven centuries it has stood resolute as the small town of Hemsworth has grown around it.

Weather-beaten and gnarled, it has seen the mining industry flourish, sparking the area into life, then silently watched its collapse change the town forever.

But after outlasting kings and queens and surviving two world wars, council workers will soon take their saws to the ancient yew tree in the graveyard of St Helen's Church to make it safe for future generations.

Wakefield Council has been forced to take action to save the tree, which locals say could be anything from 700 up to 1,000 years old, because of the danger of it collapsing on to the nearby road.

The potential Health and Safety nightmare of it injuring a passerby means the council's Countryside Arbor Section will have to cut back a huge chunk of the tree's top weight.

But because of its historic value and place in the town's history, every effort is being made to ensure enough of the yew is left for others to appreciate in years to come.

Although the tree is in the churchyard, because that section is closed for burials the responsibility rests with the council to make sure it is safe.

Fr Robert Hart, rector of St Helen's, said: "The tree is quite a local landmark and if it was to fall down, that would be terrible.

"This is something that has to be done but we're hoping people will appreciate what it is the council are trying to do and why they are doing it, even though it's an important part of the town's heritage."

Beside the tree, a stone has been placed at some point in the past with the inscription "This venerable yew has braved many a winter and weathered a storm."

The stone goes on to commemorate the great gale of January 1884, when the tree "lost some of its noblest branches".

Yew trees have long been a symbol of longevity and even immortality, with the oldest tree in Europe said to be the Fortingall Yew of Fortingall, Scotland, which may be more than 3,000 years old.

The oldest known wooden implement is thought to be a spear made of yew wood, dated at around 50,000 years old and found in Clacton-on-Sea.

Yews have a tradition of being grown in graveyards and are believed to have been planted around pagan temples long before Christianity.

But the centuries have now taken their toll on Hemsworth's own yew, and specialist tree management officers have decided that the best way to preserve it for future generations, whilst removing the danger of an accident, is to cut back its top weight by 50 per cent.

Cutting the yew, which has a circumference of more than 15ft at one of its thickest points, to that height will mean that if the unthinkable does happen and it eventually falls it will be small enough to avoid it falling on the nearby highway.

And to ensure a lasting legacy for Hemsworth, the operation will also see a new yew tree planted in the churchyard in the hopes it might one day follow on from the original.

Fr Hart said: "The tree is actually dead and the vertical part of it isn't connected to the root system. If it were to fall into the road, it's several tonnes so it would be dangerous.

"There's a lot of local interest in it though and it's good that a new tree will also be planned – maybe in a thousand years, someone else will have the same problem!"

And Clive Hudson, Wakefield Council's cabinet member for environment, added: "Hemsworth's yew tree is part of the village's history. We know how important it is for local people to see this landmark preserved for future generations if it is at all possible.

"We also have a duty to protect public safety and the tree is in such a condition as to be very close to collapse. We are confident that by removing some of the top, heavy branches we will be able to make it safe and preserve it further and by planting another young yew tree we are also ensuring there'll be a yew tree on this site for many years to come."