

The Yews of Himley Hall, Staffordshire

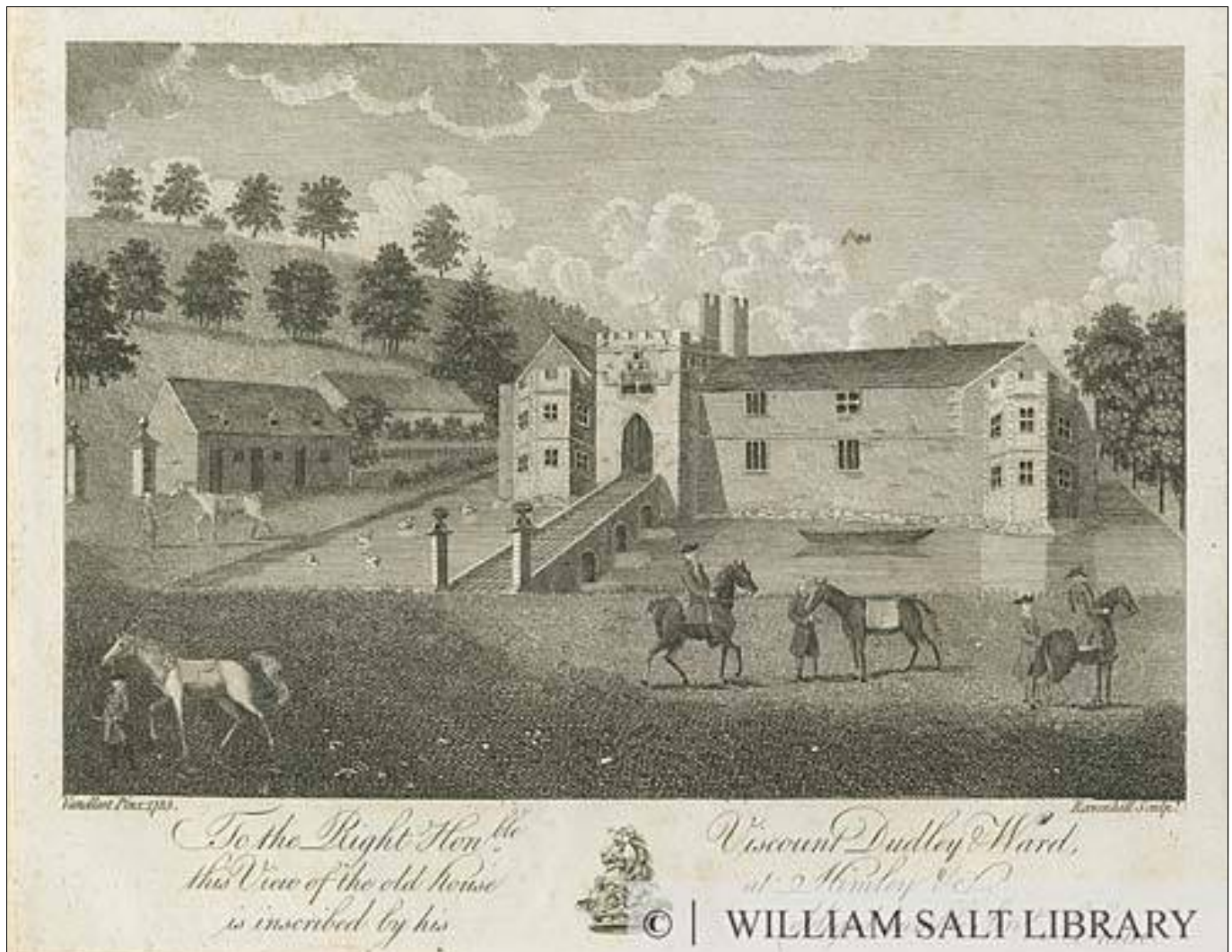
Tim Hills

This poem by William Thomas Fitzgerald was published in 1801 *Miscellaneous Poems*. A copy of it was: FIXED ON A VERY ANCIENT YEW TREE, OF EXTRAORDINARY SIZE, WHICH STANDS UPON A HILL, NEAR THE MANSION HOUSE, IN THE PARK AT HIMLEY HALL, STAFFORDSHIRE, THE SEAT OF LORD VISCOUNT DUDLEY AND WARD; WRITTEN IN 1791, WHILE ON A VISIT THERE.

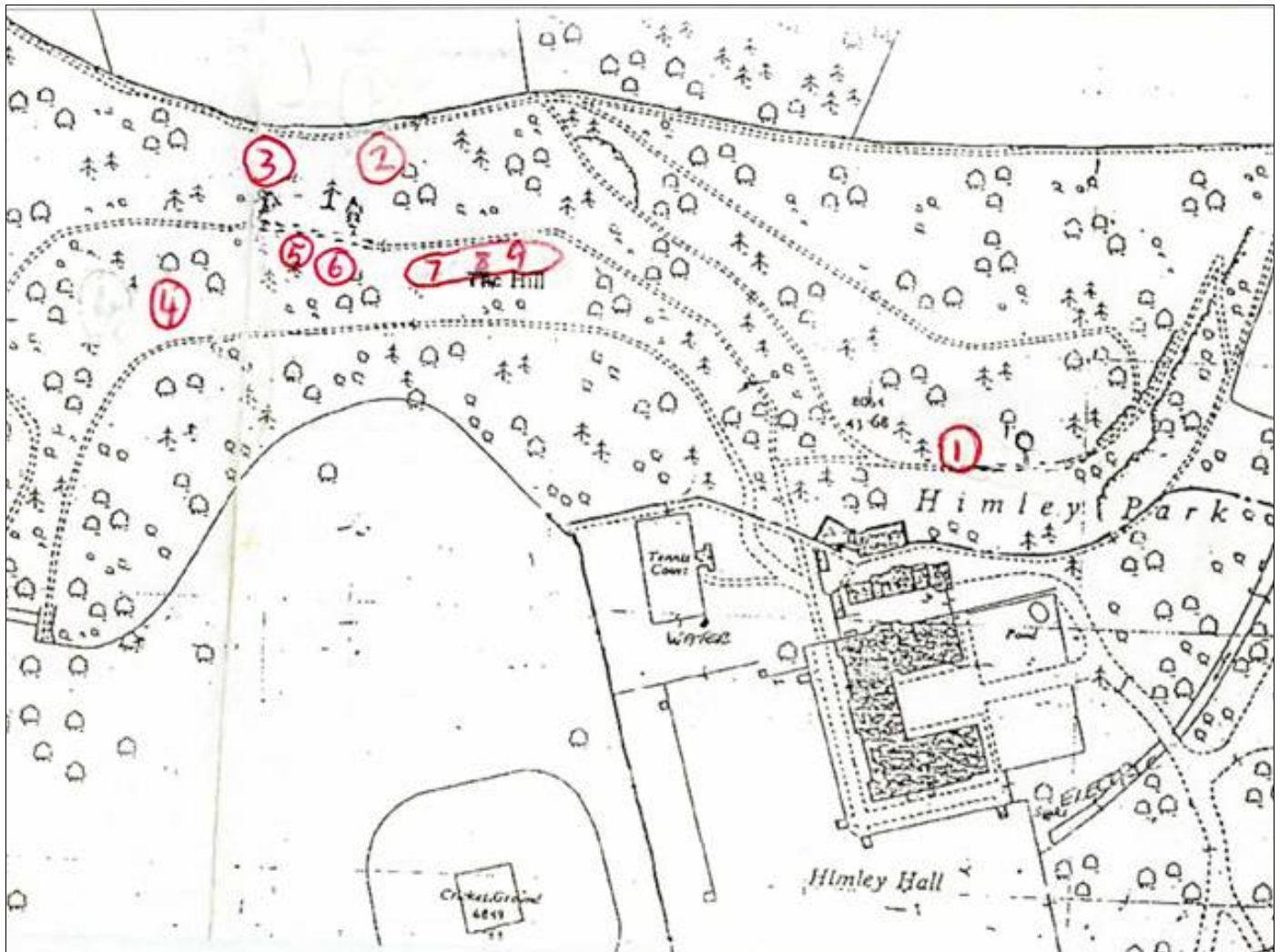
THIS stately yew, which has for ages stood,
The gloomy monarch of its native wood!
Perhaps some Norman Baron planted here,
Who liv'd by rapine, and who ruled by fear;
The tree a symbol of its master's mind,
Emblem of death, and fatal to mankind!
Beneath its boughs no verdant plants are seen,
Its baneful branches poison ev'ry green;
And thus the feudal tyrant's hated reign
Oppress'd the village, and laid waste the plain.
To these dire scenes an happier age succeeds,
No despot threatens, and no vassal bleeds!

At Himley now the poor man finds relief,
Forgets his poverty, and checks his grief;
Raises his languid eyes, and drooping head,
To bless the liberal hand that gives him bread;
While, in the mansion, mirth and song attend,
To cheer the stranger, and delight the friend;
And smiling hospitality awaits
To open wide the ever-friendly gates.
But still the yew, though hast'ning to decay,
Retains the venom of its pristine day;
Its branches still their gloomy nature shew,
And frown upon the cheerful scene below.*

* This majestic yew stands among a number of old oaks, upon an abrupt hill; and, from its great elevation, the branches seem to overhang the house.



This drawing above is reproduced with the permission of the Trustees of the William Salt Library. It shows the moated Manor House as it used to be, and includes two lines of yews on the hillside above the house. The Manor used to stand next to the medieval church and village. The site belonged to the Earl of Dudley, who had the house demolished in the 18th century, and built a Palladian mansion in its place. Both house and grounds (designed by Capability Brown) are now owned by Dudley Council.



In the 1838 *Arboretum and Fruticetum Part III*, several ‘immense yew trees’ were noted, ‘particularly one which is celebrated for its widely spreading head.’

Of the nine yews recorded in 2003, six were identified as male and one as female. It is possible that a fuller investigation might add to this number.

Tree 1: Female - girth 14' 6" at the ground. A red barked tall columnar specimen. If this was the yew whose branches seemed to “overhang the house”, these have been removed and new wood grows over the cuts.

Tree 2: Girth 20' 11" at its narrowest point 2' to 3' above the ground and exactly 21' at 5'. More than half of its circumference is of dead sapwood. Roots spread a considerable distance from the bole. Inside the hollow is a 4' deep accumulation of humus.



Tree 3: Male - girth of 17' exactly at 2'. Hollow, with live wood on the side facing the path. A large piece of dead sapwood is seen here on the downward slope. Almost all growth feeds into one thin hollowed out branch (A). Two internal stems can be seen in its hollow.

Tree 4: Male - grows above a large badger sett. It is completely hollowed out, but nonetheless gives the impression of great strength. There is plentiful healthy green foliage on this tree, which girths about 16'.

Tree 5: Male - Girth of about 14' 6".

Tree 6: Male - Girth approximately 11'.

Tree 7: Girth 18' 6" close to the ground. A tall central branch. Living wood around most of its bole.

Tree 8: Male - Girth 9' 11" at 3'. Solid.

Tree 9: Male - Girth about 10'.

