

*The tour of the Don, extempore sketches* by John Holland 1836

About a mile, before we reach Midhope Stones, from Langsett, and just over a plantation behind Husker House, on the left hand side of the road, there is a bold eminence called "Alderman's Head,"—why so called, does not appear—but the spot is rendered interesting from a local tradition, not unsupported by historical evidence : there are two versions of the story, one in prose, the other in rhyme: the former may be seen in the elegant page of Hunter—the latter is here presented to the reader :—

THE YEW TREE OF PENISAL.

De Midhope, of Langsett, as chronicles sing,  
Was lord, when our Edward the First rul'd as King :  
Broad lands, on each side of this well-watered vale,  
Had swell'd his rich rent-rolls from heirship and sale.

In woodland and pasture he summered his flocks,  
And chased the wild deer o'er the heath-skirted rocks;  
While to Kirkstead he paid tythe of all he possessed,  
He bravely and freely rejoiced in the rest.

For **Penisal**, whither his serfs might repair,  
He purchased the grant of a market and fair ;  
Where weekly came vendors with basket and beast,  
And clothiers each year, at Saint Barnabas' feast.

Ere long, and he planted a beautiful yew,  
Which flourished through ages, so slowly it grew :  
On a plot of rich greensward around this fair tree,  
Met buyer and seller, in bargaining free.

Hither came with stout ellwand, the webster whose pack  
Of linseys and woolseys was strapped on his back:  
He, on the wide **yew**, keen with tenter-hooks made,  
From bough-end to bough-end his fabrics displayed.

Hither came too, the pedlar, with glittering things,—  
Sharp whittles, gay girdles, hooks, buckles and rings :  
And far o'er yon moorlands bleak, purple, and high,  
Came mother and daughter to gossip and buy.

Tradition, unchronicled History's page,  
Tells what houses rose here in a subsequent age;  
How the **Yew Tree**, thrice honoured, in growing renown,  
Stood green in the midst of old **Penisal** town !

How in its broad shadow might yearly be seen,  
De Midhope's retainers on Alderman-green :  
Each paying obstreperous, or sullen or mute,  
To the lord of the manor his service and suit.

But ages have left not a trace of that town ;  
And its fair and its market alike are unknown :  
While the Yew—the brave Yew! long survivor of these,  
Shewed how much faster Time levelled houses than trees.

Yea, it stood but three lustres since on yon green knoll,  
When twenty-five feet was the girth of its bole;  
And round it with many a strange legend and tale,  
Oft lingered the greybeards and youth of the vale.

It stood—and perchance had been standing this day,  
Had not a lone fisherman rambled that way:  
He thoughtless, or reckless, to warm his chill'd hands,  
Lit up in its hollow a bonfire of brands!

'Twas April—and moonless the night of Saint Mark:  
O'er the neighbourhood flicker'd strange gleams in the dark;  
'Twas the Yew Tree aflame! its green beauty was gone;  
At the ravage affrighted the rustics look'd on.

Five days and five nights shone the red glow around,  
Ere the time-honoured tree was burnt close to the ground;  
Few years marked the spot—but men died and grass grew,  
And left to tradition the **Penisal Yew**.

A little below Alderman's Head, there stands, in a field by the road-side, a very ancient mouldering yew tree : probably it may have been coeval with the one mentioned in the foregoing verses. At Midhope Stones there is a good inn, at which the coaches stop; a capital stone bridge over the river; and on the hill-side rises the little rustic stone chapel, within its narrow grave-ground. From this point to Deepcar, the vale is mostly cultivated on both sides of the stream : and although the propriety of the appellation—" a garden in a wilderness," may not be very striking to all persons, its applicability will seldom be questioned by any one coming down here from the moors, especially during the summer season.