

The Yew Trees of All Hallows

In the quiet, rolling folds of North East Dorset, where farmland meets woodland, and streams trace silver lines through the valleys, lies a secret. It is the hamlet of All Hallows, a place that whispers of a busier past. Once, a possible Saxon church stood sentinel here, its semi-circular churchyard cradled by the land. But progress, as it often does, moved the stones. In the 1740s, they were carried away to build something grander at the nearby village of Wimborne St Giles, leaving the dead in their earth, guarded only by yew trees and time.

For decades, the burial ground remained in use, until a new plot was consecrated across the lane in the 1900s. Then, the old site began its long slumber. Nature, patient and persistent, crept in. Brambles knitted a thorny blanket over leaning headstones; ivy climbed with slow, green intent.

Fourteen years ago, in 2012 I pushed through that green veil. Amidst the dereliction, I found majesty: ancient yew trees, standing a partial guard along the northern and eastern bounds. One giant, its trunk thick and gnarled, reached 8.5 metres around its vast trunk, though it was cloaked in a suffocating sleeve of ivy. I cut the vine, measured the tree, hoping to capture only its enduring essence.

2012



I returned in 2017, and again in 2021. A miracle, quiet and profound, had occurred. The dense summer vegetation had been cleared. The gravestones, their inscriptions once more legible to the sun, stood with a dignified bearing. The yews, especially the ancient one, had been liberated; the strangling ivy cut away. From its old trunk, fresh, green shoots sprouted—a vibrant regeneration, as if the tree, touched by care, was dreaming of its own sapling youth. Someone had remembered. Someone had honoured the forgotten villagers sleeping beneath the earth.

2017



2021



But time's wheel turns, and vigilance is a fleeting gift.

In January 2024, the clean lines were beginning to blur, and then on a cold Friday in January 2026, I stood there once more.

2024



The veil had fallen again. Brambles reclaiming their territory, hiding names and dates from view. Clumps of brave snowdrops pushed white heads through the winter-matted ground, a fragile defiance. And the ivy - the relentless ivy - had returned. It was snaking through the lower branches of the yews, a leafy, smothering tide threatening to pull the sentinels back into obscurity.

The cycle was laid bare: memory and neglect, care and abandonment, all held in the silent tension between the dark, evergreen yews and the creeping ivy. The trees had known centuries, had seen the church built and dismantled, had watched graves dug and then forgotten. Their renewed growth spoke of resilience, but the returning ivy whispered a warning: that without steady hands and remembering hearts, even the most enduring memories can be gently, slowly, buried alive.

All Hallows sleeps on. Its story is not in grand architecture, but in the silent, mossy stones and the ancient, struggling trees - a poignant testament to the beautiful, bittersweet battle between what endures and what is inevitably reclaimed.

2026



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