

1782: The first recorded measurement was made for the parish records by Dr Burgh.

1802: "A remarkable yew tree also grows in the cemetery, robbed of a great part of its pristine honours, but still exhibiting a specimen of unusual vegetation, and measuring in girth thirty-three feet." *A tour through the northern counties of England vol I - Richard Warner*

1809: an engraving by T.Cartwright from the British Library on-line gallery



1825: In Darley church-yard, near Matlock in Derbyshire, is a yew tree, thirty-three feet in girth. *Museum Europæum; or, Select antiquities ... of nature and art, in Europe ...* Charles Hulbert

1830: "Descending Darley Dale I went into Darley Church Yard and found by measure that its tall yew tree is in girth eleven times the length of my arm." *The letters of Dorothy Wordsworth vol V. 8th Nov. 1830*

1835: "In the churchyard is a yew tree, an object of considerable attraction for its immense bulk, its thick foliage, and the great extent of its spreading limbs." *Pigot's Directory*

1838: "A circle was a sacred symbol among the Eastern nations of antiquity; and it would be interesting to know whether the raised platform within a circle of stones, which is sometimes found round our old yews, as in Darley and Llanfoist churchyards, be not a remnant of this superstition."

"This ancient tree stands in the church-yard of Darley in the Dale, Derbyshire. It is a female, with a solid trunk, forking, at 7 ft. above the ground, into two nearly upright boughs, which reach a height of about 55ft." *Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum.*

1853: A resident testified that 30 or 40 years earlier the tree was much larger - the branches reaching the churchyard wall, where boys could get onto them from the wall and completely cross to the roof without coming down to the ground.

1863 - The editor of *The Times* received the following letter from Darley Dale's Yew tree, protesting about the situation it found itself in.

"Sir - I am a helpless and most ill-used individual, and my friends have advised me to make my grievances known to you, as the most able and likely source to supply redress. To make my tale short, I belong to that class of national property which guide books call "objects of interest," of which this old historic county possesses so large a share: but I am not an old abbey, nor an old abbey, nor even a cairn; I am simply an old tree. My residence is in a churchyard, in a very lovely valley in Derbyshire, called Darley Dale.

For the reverence which has been paid to me for more generations than I care to name, and from the admiration which pilgrims from all parts of the world who come to see me bestow upon me, I conceive that I am no common tree. My trunk alone girths 33 feet, but from within the memory of man I have stretched my arms around one entire side of the churchyard, and forty years ago the young urchins of the parish used to climb from the outer wall into my branches, and from my branches onto the church leads. My age is fabulous, and learned naturalists now calculate that I must have been born 300 years before the gospel was planted in this country; in which case I was probably associated with an old pagan building, the foundations of which are still discovered in digging graves in my immediate neighbourhood.

If my memory did not fail me of course I could tell about this better than the naturalists; but age has made me somewhat hazy in this respect, so I must leave my origin to the genealogists to settle. Well, sir, with all these claims to reverence, is it not shameful that in this year of grace 1863, men should cut, break, and mutilate my poor old person in all conceivable ways? Until tourists began to multiply and excursion trains to run, I had scarcely a single scar, older than time and tempest had left, on my body. But now the Snookeses, and Tomkinsons, and Joneses have begun to immortalize themselves (as is the fashion of that race) by cutting their names all over my bark, and on Thursday last two fellows of this tribe commenced a still more cruel process. While one of them smoked his pipe and watched, the other drew out a saw, and actually set to work to cut out a great slice of my very flesh, which, but for the lucky intervention of the clerk, he would soon have accomplished."

The letter's publication inspired many responses, including the following:

"The church historian, John Charles Cox, writing in 1876, described the yew as "magnificent" and that it was "said to be the largest in girth and the finest specimen in the kingdom". He noted that Ebenezer Rhodes, when writing in 1817, had said "that the trunk, for about four yards from the ground, measures upwards of thirty-four feet, and that it then assumes the appearance of two separate trees, which rise perpendicularly from the parent trunk, and throw out their ramifications over an area of between seventy and eighty yards in circumference". However, in the intervening years the tree had been "shorn of many of its limbs". Cox observed that others had estimated the tree's girth as being thirty-three to thirty-five feet. He added that "a measurement that we recently took, failed to make the circumference thirty-two feet by a few inches, and this in the widest part, which is about four feet from the ground. Mr. Fearn tells us that there is a cavity in the tree, about half-way up one of the trunks, that will hold seven or eight ordinary sized men standing upright therein".

Following a vestry meeting in May 1876 a record was made in the parish books as the yew had been enclosed "by a very handsome iron railing". A Manchester solicitor with no connection Darley, one Charles Lister Esq., had paid for the railing to protect the tree from further vandalism.

The famous yew tree in Darley Dale churchyard suffered somewhat seriously during the recent gale (according to the writer of the pleasant and cultured Derbyshire gossip which appears week by week in the *Sheffield Independent* under the heading of "The Man on the Peak"). I gather (says the writer referred to) from a local reader that a great branch was blown right from the centre of the trunk. Experts in forestry compute the age of this immemorial yew at over 2000 years. Four feet from the ground its girth is something like 32ft., and its branches cover an area of 120ft. Half way up its double trunk there is a cavity that will comfortably accommodate eight ordinary-sized men standing upright.....The Darley yew is one of the institutions of Derbyshire, and it would be a thousand pities were it to become numbered among the 'things that were but are not.' The veteran has of course, been recipient of the usual marks of attention accorded to all "objects of interest" by Messrs. Goth, Ostrogoth, Visigoth, Vandal, and Co., who have scored its bark all over with their vainglorious hieroglyphics, and has naturally suffered considerably in the past from stress of weather. But notwithstanding its almost fabulous age, it still remains a stately tree, in proud contrast to its crippled congener in the churchyard at Fortingall, Perthshire, reported to be "the oldest authentic specimen of vegetation in Europe." The Darley yew is the pride of the beautiful dale which it adorns and dignifies. May its shadow never grow less.



1908: "But the finest thing about Darley Dale is the marvellous old yew tree in the churchyard of Church Town, a few minutes' walk from Darley Station. A church of St. Helen has stood here for many centuries, as the stone coffins and sculptured lids now set up in the porch bear witness." [p.382] "The yew stands opposite the south porch, surrounded - most wisely, considering the vandals with pocket knives who infect the roads - with spiked iron railings. It is not as tall in the bole as most ancient yews, for it divides almost immediately into two main trunks, and then sub-divides again into scores of branches of varying thickness. Many of these were lopped off around 1820" [p.386] Firth, J.B. (1908) "*Highways and Byways in Derbyshire*" MacMillan & Co., London.

1925: Darley Dale - The churchyard is ornamental with one of the largest and most ancient yew trees in the kingdom. It measures 33 feet in girth, and though robbed of many of its branches, still exhibits a singular specimen of luxuriant vegetation. *Kellys Directory of Derbyshire*

1979: An article in the local news of 18 Oct reported that "The Darley Dale Yew was savaged by the cruel winter which broke its limbs under the weight of frozen snow. But the tree..... is so strong it would probably need an Ice Age to kill it. Yesterday it looked full of life, leaves, berries and colour, not a day over 1,000 years!" (*Yarwood letter*)

1999: Some of its huge girth appears to have resulted from regeneration after the cutting away of low level growth. From the bole rise two large branches giving the tree greater height than most churchyard yews. Branches dip downwards all around a healthy yew full of green and plentiful foliage. A second female tree in the churchyard had a girth of 12' 6" at 4'.



	1782 Dr Burgh	1836 J.Bowman	1867 C.Greaves	1876 Dr Cox	1888 Paget Bowman	1950 Rev RJ Stanford	1983
Ground	28'	27' 7"			27'	26' 7"	27' 3"
4'	32'	31' 8"	31'	31' 8"	32' 3"	31' 9"	33' 2"

Notice by the Darley Dale Yew

