

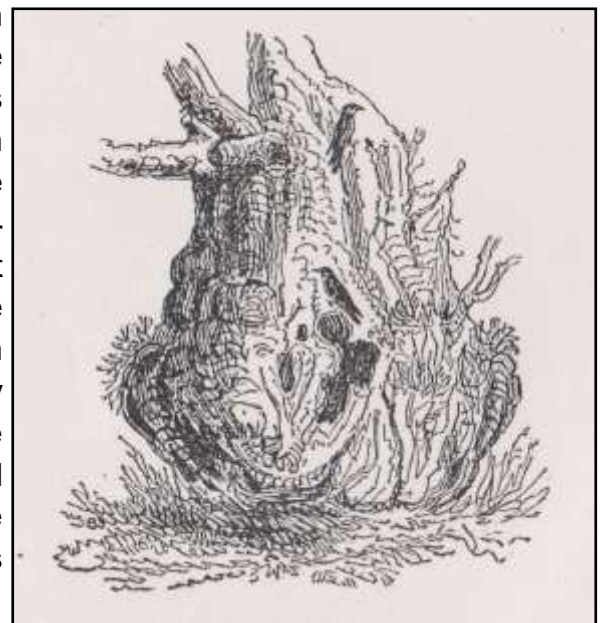
This is a well documented yew, the earliest pictorial record a b/w photo of Petrie's **1807** watercolour, which shows a squat trunk and low canopy that is still in evidence today. The artist has moved the tree from its position west of the tower so that it can appear in the painting.



Its next appearance is in *The Botanic Annual* of **1832** by Robert Mudie, who provides the following information: "Greatest circumference, 31 feet 3 inches; ditto at 7 feet high 20 feet 8 inches; diameter of hollow, 8 feet 6 inches; height to the branches, 7 feet 11 inches; total height 32 feet 4 inches; spread of branches, 50 feet—October 1, 1831"



"The specimenis by no means the largest to be met with in England; but it displays some of the peculiar habits of the tree, and shows that, after the greater part of the heart is entirely gone, the remaining wood continues to vegetate in almost all directions. The trunk of that specimen is not above nine inches in thickness from the hollow to the external circumference. It is open quite to the level of the ground, and also at top in the middle of the branches; so that the tree has some resemblance to a vase in a state of vegetation. Except one in the side opposite to that shown in the cut, there is not any perforation worthy of notice, saving the opening at the top. The lateral opening..... is small, though recently it was enlarged in order to extricate a cow that had entrapped herself by the horns, and struggled bellowing for relief until a portion was sawed off."



The article continues.....“not many years have elapsed since a young woman in the neighbourhood, in the agony of slighted vows, pledged in all probability under the spreading branches of the tree, put a period to her existence by suspending herself from one of them, and now lies interred immediately below. It may be mentioned that also the local authorities, while they interred the misguided girl within the consecrated precincts of the churchyard, took summary and somewhat silly vengeance upon the tree, by lopping off the branch,-the stump of which is shown as the second from the reader’s left hand.

The general representation of the tree is taken from the point where the curious ramification of the branches is best seen, rather than from that at which the effect would be the most striking, and the point of view is much too near, but it is a fixed one, being from the doorway of the belfry tower. In the north, west, and east sides of the trunk there are no openings, and the surface there is almost entirely covered with little twigs and buds, and their foliage. The south side of the trunk is less verdant, more decayed, and contains the opening already alluded to; indeed, so far as we have examined those ancient hollow yews which have stood so long as to be completely tempered to the situation, and yet have escaped any considerable local casualty or decay, we have invariably found the decay of the trunk greatest on the south side, which shows that the action of the sun is more concerned in bringing about decay than that of the rain, the snow, or the cold. The form of the head is of course liable to more contingencies, and therefore no conclusion of a very satisfactory nature can be drawn from it; but with equal exposure we have generally found the westward branches to exceed the eastward by a very considerable fraction of their length.”

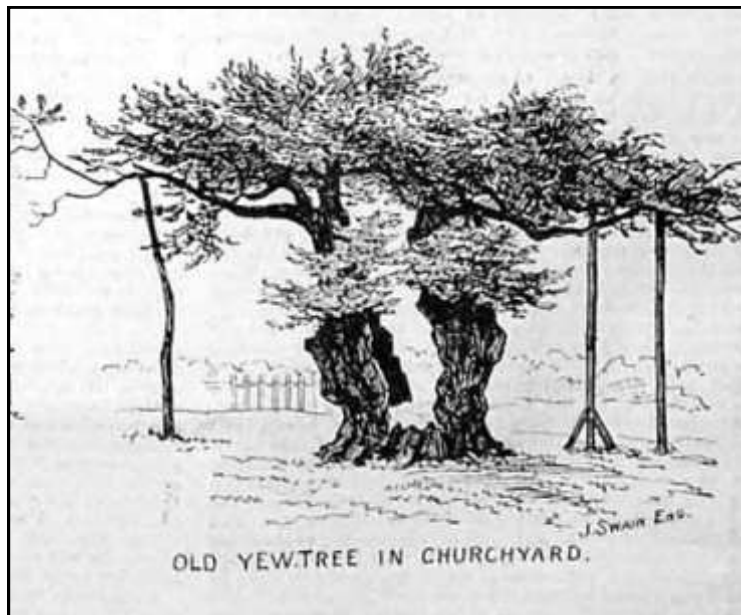
In **1835** the following account appeared in *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*, and later in *ARBORETUM AND FRUTICETUM. PART 111*. ‘I saw a majestic yew, the greatest circumference of which was thirty-one feet two inches; at seven feet high, twenty-eight feet eight inches; diameter of the hollow, which, in October, 1833, when I saw it, some gipsies had been residing in it, eight feet six inches; height to the lowest branch, seven feet eleven inches; total height, thirty-two feet four inches; spread of the branches, fifty feet.’

The **1842** *Journey-book of England* (Derbyshire, Hampshire, Kent) noted two yews in the churchyard, ‘one of which is of the extraordinary circumference of 40 feet, hollow within, and shaped in the stem like a vast bulbous root of the lily tribe. It still vegetates on the exterior, which is curiously sheathed with the knotted overgrowths of a thousand years, of a purplish red colour; and its head is still as green as when ‘it stood of yore, Not loth to furnish weapons for the bands that crossed the sea And drew their bows at Azincour’.

In **1854** *The Cottage Gardener and Country Gentleman’s Companion* contained an article entitled *Remarkable Yew Trees* – Jan 26th p327/8 George William Johnson

Having already described yews at Loose and Ulcombe the article describes ‘A third tree, scarcely less interesting than either of the last, exists in the churchyard at Leeds, near Maidstone, another rural parish but a few miles from the last-named. This tree, is, however, hollow, and has also the singular form of having been much thicker at a yard from the ground than at one foot from it; at the former height it is upwards of thirty feet in circumference, and several openings admit of it holding several persons, who are not in this case debarred by an unsightly fence; but the tree is certainly not so remarkable as the one at Loose, the latter presenting limbs of some five or six feet diameter at the breaking; whereas, those at Leeds are much less; still, it is a remarkable tree, and bids fair to live for many generations yet. It is, however, much exposed: and the barbarous practice of digging graves so near a relic of former times, may, doubtless, tend to lessen the days of this, as well as of many other trees, similarly placed; but as this is sacred ground, and calculated to arouse indignant feelings, I say no more than urge on parish authorities the propriety of restricting innovations of this kind as much as possible; and though the anxious wish of some eminent parishioner to be buried under the Yew-tree may seem the duty on the part of those to whom the bequest was made, we are far from certain, that the next generation will regard the injury done to so venerable a relic in the same light.’

This **1884** drawing appeared in *The illustrated sporting and dramatic news*. The tree is seen to have almost become two separated fragments.



In **1892** this photograph was given to Lowe as part of his research for *The Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland*. It too shows the bole almost completely split into two fragments.



Lowe described “a very old tree, now in its decadence, a mere shell of the original trunk remaining. At the ground line it measures 28 feet in circumference, and it swells gradually upwards to 32 feet, at 3 feet 6, contracting again to 25 feet at 5 feet (Feb. 26, 1892). There is not very much of the top remaining; it must have diminished largely within the last 60 years, as the following measurements given by Loudon show: “Greatest circumference 31' 2 ; at 7 feet high, 28.8; diameter of hollow in October 1833, when some gypsies had been residing in it, 8 feet 6 inches; height to the lowest branch 7 feet 11 inches; total height 32' 4" and diameter of head 50ft.”

Lowe describes the female tree as much infested with galls. He also tells us that ‘in the same enclosure are three other trees, all males, none of which show any sign of galls. One of these at the east side is a fine well-grown tree, measuring 6 feet 5 inches at 3 feet from the ground.’

In **1936** Mee's *King's England* noted 'two of Nature's sentinels standing by, old yews, one probably as old as the tower though by no means as sturdy, for it is split in two'.

In **1958** the Revd F.Tylie was asked by E.W.Swanton (*The Yew Trees of England*) to describe the condition of the tree. He replied that 'It is still alive, though only a shell supported with iron rod across and enclosed within six foot iron railings, but the shell has much life in it and spreads out branches all round some distance.'

According to the church guide the younger yew was uprooted in the storms of **1987**. We noted a stump WNW of the church, next to which was growing its young replacement.

By January **1999** the yew appeared to have completely separated into two fragments. Each supported vigorous growth on young branches, as the tree enters a new phase of regeneration. The 'new' canopy has not yet had time to spread and was contained in a neat ball shape. An iron rod, in place before 1958, remains clamped to the outside of each fragment to prevent further separation.





The Leeds yew in 2012 - Wim Peeters

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