

A representation of the yew is seen in this painting **c1800** by an unnamed artist.

The formidable male tree has been recorded since **1832**, when Robert Mudie referred to it as nearly 40ft in girth and having a 'vigorous head'.

On January 7th **1835** a speaker, addressing The Verulam Philosophical Society on the subject of yews, said 'I have seen some very fine ones in the neighbourhood of Maidstone; one at Loose, (if I recollect,) the Rev. Mr. Holloway informed me, measured either twenty-nine or thirty-one feet round (I forget which)'. This appeared in the aptly named *Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*.



Loose Church c1800 - Kent Archaeological Society

In **1854** *The Cottage Gardener and Country Gentleman's Companion* contained an article by George William Johnson entitled *Remarkable Yew Trees* – Jan 26th pp327/8

"In the beautiful and romantic village of Loose, which stands in a valley, or gully, through which a small stream of water passes on its course to join the Medway, the parish church rears its head, without exciting any extraordinary claims for distinction beyond any others of its class ; but near the entrance, at the western end a venerable Yew has stood the blast of many a winter. This remarkable tree, when viewed a few yards off, presents nothing extraordinary in its outline, beyond that its foliage seems in excellent health, and extends laterally a greater breadth than the majority of such trees, but not so much as to call for particular attention, while in form it is like most of its class, hemispherical, or nearly so ; but a closer approach excites the admiration, if not astonishment, of the inspector – its venerable trunk, rising out of the ground, seems to have presented a straight bole to the height of eight or ten feet, and then diverged off into branches in the usual way. This bole, which at one time, doubtless, showed its capabilities of furnishing good sound planks for a hall dining table, is no longer what it was then, although, in the eyes of an antiquary, it presents features more beautiful ; in one respect, however, it is probably unaltered – it is still perpendicular, thus showing its stability, and giving promise to afford shade and shelter for many generations of the human race yet to come. Now, I presume that readers will think this is nothing more than many trees similarly placed give promise to, but when I tell them that the trunk of this tree, without presenting any of those uneven humps, or projections, which give a false measurement to their circumference, is, at the smallest part, between the root-claws and the breakings of the branches, no less than thirty-two feet ten inches, they will assuredly give it the credit of being an extraordinary one.

True, it is no longer sound; in fact it is a mere shell with several openings, but none exceeding two feet wide, while the shell itself is from six or eight inches to a foot thick.



There is space inside for a number of people, and, doubtless, many of the village rustics have, in their younger days, been within its ample enclosure. Of late years, however, the parish authorities have put a fence around it to protect it from the molestation of those who seem disposed to think that the pleasure of viewing an object is not complete without the possession of a portion of it ; in this respect the uninformed rustic is a less dangerous visitor than the learned collector of antiquities or curiosities. In the present instance, the addition of a fence certainly mars the beauty of this fine natural object ; neither has the best description of protective material been adopted ; the heavy wooden paling conceals as well as protects the object inside, whereas, an iron one need not have done so ; however, the inquiring visitor will be able to see sufficient of it to form an idea of its magnitude.”

P185 of *The Journal of Horticulture, Cottage Gardener and Country Gentlemen* **1862** describes “the pleasant and romantic village of Loose, with its paper mills and village church nestled in a deep valley, has a pleasing appearance. An aged yew tree in this churchyard in excellent health has a trunk 33 feet in circumference at the narrowest part between the root-forks and the limbs, and though hollow, in fact a mere shell, it still promises to outlive many generations of worshippers who weekly pass under its shade.”

Mee’s *The King’s England* (**1936**) described it as a marvellous old yew that ‘has seen its people come and go for most of a thousand years, for it is 12 yards round, one of the biggest we have seen’.



1982 Allen Meredith: “I visited this great yew on Thursday 11th March 1982. The tree has been for many years completely enclosed by iron railings. With the help of Mr Hood we measured the trunks at about 4 ft from the ground. It measured about 32ft 6ins. The tree is SW of the church, very hollow and decayed, but rejuvenating itself from within.”

1984 Allen Meredith: I visited again on 6th February to check its measurements. The last occasion proved difficult because of the surrounding metal railings. I measured the yew from within the iron railings, which are at least 6 feet high, and these measurements should be more accurate. A large portion of the trunk has long since ceased to grow, and is only kept in place by wires and the surrounding metal railings. The iron railings have probably surrounded the yew for about 100 years. A great deal of inner growth has taken place from within the old shell. This should sustain the old trunk for many more centuries, though its girth may not increase much over the next century or two.

At 3 feet from the ground girth measured 33ft 8 inches.

At 4 feet from the ground girth measured 34ft 8 inches.

Near the base the girth measured 34ft 7 inches.

There were no unusual obstructions on measuring, though I would allow an error of a few inches because of a portion of the trunk coming away slightly, but from base up to 4 feet the girth would not be less than 33 feet, obviously the large portion of decayed trunk may have increased the girth as it has fallen slightly away from its original position. In 1859 it measured around 31 feet, the increased girth is almost certainly due to the act of separation.

I noticed a great deal of *laetiporous sulfureus* on the inside and the outside of the trunk.



In July 1999 I found a yew protected behind high, spiked railings. Its internal structures are well developed, filling a large area in the hollow, and joining with the external parts to make a tree of great bulk and strength. I was given various accounts of work recently carried out in the churchyard which involved disturbing some of the roots. Comments ranged from 'acts of vandalism' to 'every possible precaution having been taken'. I was told that it took over a year of wrangling for the church authorities to obtain the necessary permission to carry out the work, so that when the sewage pipe was laid any exposed roots were properly lagged to keep them moist.