

1545 Wishart the martyr is supposed to have preached here beneath the yew before he was seized at Ormiston Hall in 1545; the subsequent plot to avenge his death was likewise purported to have been arranged beneath the tree.

1762 *General Report of the Agricultural State, and Political Circumstances of Scotland* by John Sinclair (1814)

"A yew, in the garden of Ormiston Hall in East Lothian on the 10th May 1762 measured 10ft 3 ins."

1792 *The Bee* (vol ii p 333) described the Ormiston Yew

"Its trunk is 11 feet in circumference and 25 feet in length; the diameter of the ground overspread by its branches is 53'; and there is about 1/20th of an acre covered by it. It is still growing in full vigour, without the least symptom of decay."

1794 Gilpin's *Remarks on Forest scenery*

One of the most beautiful yew trees we know is that growing in the garden at Ormiston Hall, a seat of the Earl of Hopetoun, in Haddingtonshire. It throws out its vast limbs horizontally in all directions, supporting a large and luxuriant head, which now covers an area of ground of fifty-eight feet in diameter with a most impenetrable shade. Above the roots it measures twelve feet nine inches in girth; at three feet up, it measures thirteen feet half an inch ; at four feet up, it measures fourteen feet nine inches; and at five feet up, it measures seventeen feet eight inches in girth. It is in full health and vigour.

1834 It measured 12' 9" above its roots and 13' 6" at 3'. Lowe's *Yew Trees of Gt Britain and Ireland*

1838 *ARBORETUM and FRUTICETUM part 3*

One of the most beautiful yew trees in Scotland is that growing in the garden at Ormiston Hall, a seat of the Earl of Hopetoun, in Haddingtonshire. It throws out its vast limbs horizontally in all directions, supporting a large and luxuriant head, which now (1834) covers an area of around of 58 ft. in diameter, with a most impenetrable shade. Above the roots it measures 12ft 9 in girth; at 3 ft. up, it measures 13ft. 6in ; at 4 ft. up, it measures 14ft. 9in.; and at 5ft. up, it measures 17 ft. 8 in. It is in full health and vigour. p2080

1841 *OBSERVATIONS ON POPULAR ANTIQUITIES*

Chiefly illustrating the origin of vulgar customs, ceremonies and superstitions by J.Brand and H.Ellis

Ibid. vol. iv. p. 172, parish of Ormiston, co. of East Lothian: " In Lord Hopetoun's garden at Ormiston Hall there is a remarkable yew-tree. About the twentieth part of an English acre is covered by it. The diameter of the ground overspread by its branches is fifty-three feet, its trunk eleven feet in circumference. From the best information it cannot be under two hundred years old. It seems rather more probable to be between three hundred and four hundred years old."

1846 *A Topographical Dictionary of Scotland* pp. 324-337

Ormiston Hall, the residence of the Dowager Countess of Hopetoun, is a handsome mansion, erected by Mr. Cockburn in 1745, near the site of the ancient baronial castle, which has been converted into offices and servants' apartments. It is situated in an extensive and richly-wooded demesne; the gardens contain every variety of fruits, flowers, and shrubs, and the pleasure-grounds are laid out with great taste and judgment. In the flower-garden are some fig-trees, planted by the then proprietor in the beginning of the last century, and which produce the finest specimens of that fruit in this part of Britain; also a remarkable yew of more than 200 years' growth, which is still in full vigour, and measures seventeen feet in girth at a height of five feet from the ground

1868 *The National Gazetteer* transcribed by Colin Hinson (2003)

"In the garden is Wishart's yew tree, said to be upwards of 300 years old; its trunk is 11 feet in circumference and 25 feet high."

1890 Lowe's *Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* - a girth of 15' 8" at 3'.

This is an extraordinary site with **two** exceptional trees, though the second is considerably younger.

Tree 1 had no fewer than 10 major limbs spreading outwards around the tree from 5' upwards on the bole with much subdividing. Several of these have been supported on metal props. Branches reach the ground at about 5 metres from the base of the yew. As these snake across the ground they are covered in new green growth, but what makes this tree unique is the 22 + new trees that rise up from these embedded branches.

The female tree measured 16' 6" at 1' and 18' 5" at 3'.

The description in Lowe's 1894 *Yew Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* holds good today: "One of the most beautiful trees in Scotland. It throws out its vast limbs horizontally in all directions, supporting a large and luxuriant head..... with a most impenetrable shade."

Tree 2, which grows 16 metres NE of the 1st is also female. It measured 10' 3" at 1'. From 3' upwards great horizontal limbs spread out. Some of these have also embedded to create new upright stems.



A third yew, with a fluted trunk, measured 11' 8" at 3' and grows 22 metres to the west of the main tree. It has had many branches cut off, so the 1st now emerges at a height of about 7'. Branches also dip to the ground from this tree and have also embedded and created new growth. Its proximity to the wall has altered its growth pattern, with several upright branches emerging from the bole from 12' upwards.

TREE 1



TREE 2



Branch layering



ORMISTON YEW TREE;
With a LAMENT FOR THE EARL OF HOPETOUN

Taken from St. Baldred of the Bass; a Pictish Legend.
The Siege of Berwick

Hail ! monarch of the garden's bed,
That gleams like Druids' grove afar;
May lightnings never blast thy head,
Nor blighting dews thy glories mar;
And, should Destruction's arm abhorr'd,
E'er smite thee in thy noon of fame,
Thy trunk shall deck the festive board,
Like Shakspeare's tree, and save thy name.

Beneath thy dark umbrageous shade
The village swain delights to rove,
To tell his kind-consenting maid
The soft voluptuous tale of love;
While blushes tinge her rosy cheeks,
As crimson rays o'er snow-wreaths steal,
The silent sigh too well bespeaks
What maiden lips may not reveal.

How oft thy branches, spreading wide,
Have canopied the children's ring,
From merry morn till eventide,
Disporting like the birds in spring;
While chasing from their dewy nest
The covey o'er the lily'd lea;
Or, climbing high, with fearless breast,
To rob the rook on yonder tree.

Years speed away—the rustic core
Again beneath thy foliage meet,
But not so blest as when of yore
They tripp'd on music-loving feet.
Now manhood's sterner cares engage,
As Mammon's paths they keen explore;
Or, haply, read the patriarch's page,
Or turn unmeaning thesis o'er.

When sultry Sol is flaming high,
At summer's noon the swains repair
'Neath thy impervious canopy
The frugal fare of health to share.
The cup goes round at pleasure's call,
The kiss is stolen from buxom maid ;
While, catching fragments as they fall,
The fawning dog is couchant laid.

But when the clouds in darkness roam,
Thick scatter'd by the murmuring wind,
The moralist loves thy solemn gloom,
That suits his meditative mind:
Dull tree! thou lov'st the burial-ground,
With evergreens thou mock'st decay;
For where the woodmen moulder round,
Thou gather'st moisture from their clay.

Canst thou, like old Dodona's oak,
Thy silent leaves to language wake,
Where sacred doves responsive spoke ?—
The tree this answer deign'd to make:
" Here Wishart shew'd prophetic powers,
" Before that vial of wrath was given,
" When in St Andrew's dungeon towers
" His vengeance-blood uprose to heaven !—

" Here Cockburn, in my solitude,
" Forgot the bench and wrangling bar,
" With Science in her gentler mood
" To wage the literary war:—
" Alike the senate or the plough,
" The olive branch or patriot's steel,
" To him who with undaunted brow
" Still advocated Scotia's weel.

" Haply, beneath my verdant spray,
" You tread the muse's path divine,
" Where lovely Fairnalie would stray,
" The gentle votress of the nine.
" She struck the lyre amongst these bowers,
" And breathed that sweetly plaintive lay,
" That weeps the forest's wither'd flowers,
" To fatal Flodden wede away."

The tree was silent as before,
It's voice like summer breezes died,
When the lone stranger rests his oar
Upon Loch Lomond's shelter'd side.
Perhaps thy earlier shoots might form
The trusty bow on Flodden's plain,
Where fell, amidst the arrowy storm,
Thy warrior lord 'midst heaps of slain !

But now thy vernal boughs must mourn,
The archer weep beneath thy shade ;
For Hopetoun never shall return,
In Gallia's fields all lowly laid.
He loved to prune thy dark-green plumes,
Which rising beauties still display ;
Nor deem'd thy never-fading blooms
The emblem of his laurel bay. .

When on Corunna's fatal shore
Afar the Gallic ensigns waved,
When fell in Victory's arms, brave Moore,
Hopetoun retiring legions saved ;
Then, 'midst the din of doubtful war,
Ere British ships came o'er the sea,
His pensive thoughts might wander far,
And sigh for home, and think on thee !

Thy chieftain fought on Egypt's sands,
And turn'd the battle's reddening tide;
Broke vaunting Gallia's veteran bands,
Unconquer'd by the world beside:
His monument, his country's page,
In burning characters shall live;
Twill gather lustre age by age,—
The lustre worth alone can give.

This though his public acts may earn,
Yet private tears will also flow,
The splendid tower, the mountain cairn,
A country's weeping love will shew.
These domes shall warm the patriot's breast
To deeds of glory undesign'd,
While at the base the swain shall rest,
And mourn a benefactor kind.



