



The Goostrey Yew, seen here in this old postcard, grows close to the south door of St Luke's church. It was first remarked upon in the 1825 *Museum Europæum; or, Select antiquities ... of nature and art, in Europe* ...by Charles Hulbert.

"In the church-yard of Goostrey, in the county of Chester, is a remarkably large Yew tree, which, allowing for the slowness of the growth of the Yew, is calculated to have stood at least a thousand years. Under which tree the following lines, and the others of an Elegy of which they form a part, were written in 1821, by C.A.H.

Proud Yew ! whose spreading branches have withstood
 A world of winds and many a stormy flood ;
 Nurse of the hamlet, long remembered shade,
 Round whose deep roots, are human ashes laid,
 To hid thy lasting foliage grow and bloom,
 "While generations mingle in the tomb.
 Thy changeless verdure mocks our mortal fears,
 The stubborn grandeur of a thousand years!

The following extract from 1830 not only provides information about the Goostrey Yew, but also an insight into the destruction of yews in English churchyards. It would appear that both in Cheshire and Lancashire the yew populations were once similar to those found in some southern counties.

1830s: *The Gentleman's magazine, Volume 158*

MR. URBAN,—In answer to J. M. who expresses a wish to know to what extent the yew tree appears in the counties of Cheshire and Lancashire, with respect to Cheshire I think I can satisfy his views. There is scarcely a churchyard in Cheshire in which a yew tree, or grove of yews, may not be seen ; the tree is most luxuriant in its growth, and in some instances has attained an enormous size. In one instance in particular, and that is in the chapel-yard of Goosetree, under Sandbach Church, there is a yew tree which measures twelve yards in circumference ; and, taking into consideration the very slow growth of such trees, it must, at the most moderate computation, be at least 1000 years old ; it is gradually u'pon the decay, and in its trunk" there" are several considerable cavities. The Rev. Robert Sittler, late Incumbent of this living, once told me that he had no doubt but that this tree gave the name originally to the chapelry, by the name of God'stree, which, by a more modern corruption, is called by its present one of Goosetree; the yew (by the Anglo-Saxons) being dedicated to God, and the tutelar Saint to whom the church was consecrated. Besides, it may be observed, that almost upon all the old moated sites, where the mansions have long ago been destroyed, either yew trees, or hedges of that tree, may still be seen. I may also state that, with respect to the large yew tree at Goosetree, there are evident appearances, in different parts of its branches, where the bells have formerly been suspended, prior, perhaps, to the building of the present chapel, which is of not very long erection. In all the churchyards which I have seen in Lancashire, there the yew appears equally flourishing and of large dimensions.



By 1999 its circumference of 12 yards had been considerably reduced, and a girth of about 25' was recorded close to the ground and just above its spreading roots. What we see today in this male yew is a platform of heart wood 3' high and about 4½ ' across. The photo on the right shows the decaying sapwood that for the moment is containing the crumbling heartwood. When the process of decay is complete it will leave a horse shoe shaped hollow tree. The photo on the left shows that about half a dozen similar sized branches grow from the edge of the old bole. This would suggest that the tree was pollarded a long time ago. There was also vigorous growth on the outside of the bole.

