

1859: The following account appears in *Travels in Victorian Devon, Illustrated Journals and Sketch-books 1846-1870*, compiled by Jeremy Butler from Peter Orlando Hutchinson's notebooks:

'In the churchyard at the north-east part there is a remarkable yew tree of great size. I thought it was four yew trees growing close together with just space enough to walk between the trunks, but the sexton's wife who accompanied us said that it was one tree which many years ago had been struck by lightning and split into four portions down to the ground'.

In 1988, when this photo (left) was taken, it was difficult to examine the 4 yew fragments through the elder and ivy that surrounded the tree. By 2006 this had been removed and it was possible to see that they appeared to be of similar age. We thought that both male and female parts were present, but I have since been informed that all four sections are male. The photo right is from 2010 - Todd Gray.



Robert Stanes, founder member of the Devon History Society, wrote the following; 'The yew has the virtue of being immortal in a curious way. After fifteen hundred years perhaps the main trunk collapses, but the tree does not die. Instead it sprouts from the rim of the tree near the ground and sends up shoots, and these will grow to a great age. This is what happened to the Payhembury yew. It now consists of four large sprouted branches with a mound in the middle where the old trunk collapsed. These branches must at some time have been selected to grow, as there would have been many more such sprouts originally. Some believe that the original tree was struck by lightning and split into four'. He goes on to say that the yew 'has a girth, in 2005, at soil level, of *circa* 35ft.....the four trunks are in girth at the ground level 11', 13' 1", 8' 10" and 12' 9" respectively, perhaps not all the same age therefore, or with different advantages of light and exposure'.

Girth around these all 4 fragments has in the past been exaggerated, with 46' 6" appearing in Meredith's *Gazetteer* in *The Sacred Yew* (1994). I recorded 34' 8" at the ground in 1998.