

THE DIBDEN YEW

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ANCIENT YEW TREE DESTROYED BY THE HURRICANE IN NOVEMBER 1836

There are few objects of nature presenting more real interest to the mind, or richer points of beauty to the eye, than a noble aged tree; and at times these glories of the forest become associated, either from intrinsic character or local situation, with our best and purest feelings.

The wonder and beauty of trees is, however, much overlooked. We admire the vast superstructures which man may rear, and, when the temple or the palace may be overthrown, we note and deplore their fall; but those stately sylvan structures which the Almighty architect has reared around our footsteps, and so lavishly adorned, are but little regarded, and their massive trunks fall to the ground, as unheeded as the autumnal leaves from their boughs.

Circumstances sometimes rescue from this oblivion a sylvan hero of marked character, and the venerable tree represented in the annexed engraving, has points of interest connected with it claiming this distinction.

It is a celebrated yew which has for ages adorned the church-yard of Dibden, a parish in the purlieu of New Forest, Hampshire. During the severe gale on Tuesday, the 30th of November, 1836, the larger portion of its time-shivered trunk was uprooted, and fell to the ground; and an object whose picturesque grandeur had long excited the admiration of strangers, and had been associated with many a solemn feeling of the rustic inhabitants, is now, like many of their generations it has seen lowered to the grave, no more seen. Its age is unknown, but evidently it had withstood the storms and tempests of many centuries, and, as one of the venerable fathers of the forest, should not be allowed to pass away unnoticed.

In the interesting work of Gilpin, *On Forest Scenery*, published in 1694, four extraordinary trees are recorded as particularly worthy of notice, within the district of the New Forest, and this now prostrated Yew is one of them. It is thus mentioned:-

Another tree worth pointing out in New Forest, is an immense Yew, which stands in the church-yard at Dibden. It is now, and probably has been during the course of the last century, in the decline of life; but its hollow trunk still supports three vast stems, and measures below them about thirty feet in circumference, a girth which, perhaps, no other Yew-tree in England can exhibit. Though its age cannot be ascertained, we may easily suppose it has been a living witness of the funerals of at least a dozen generations of the inhabitants of the parish.

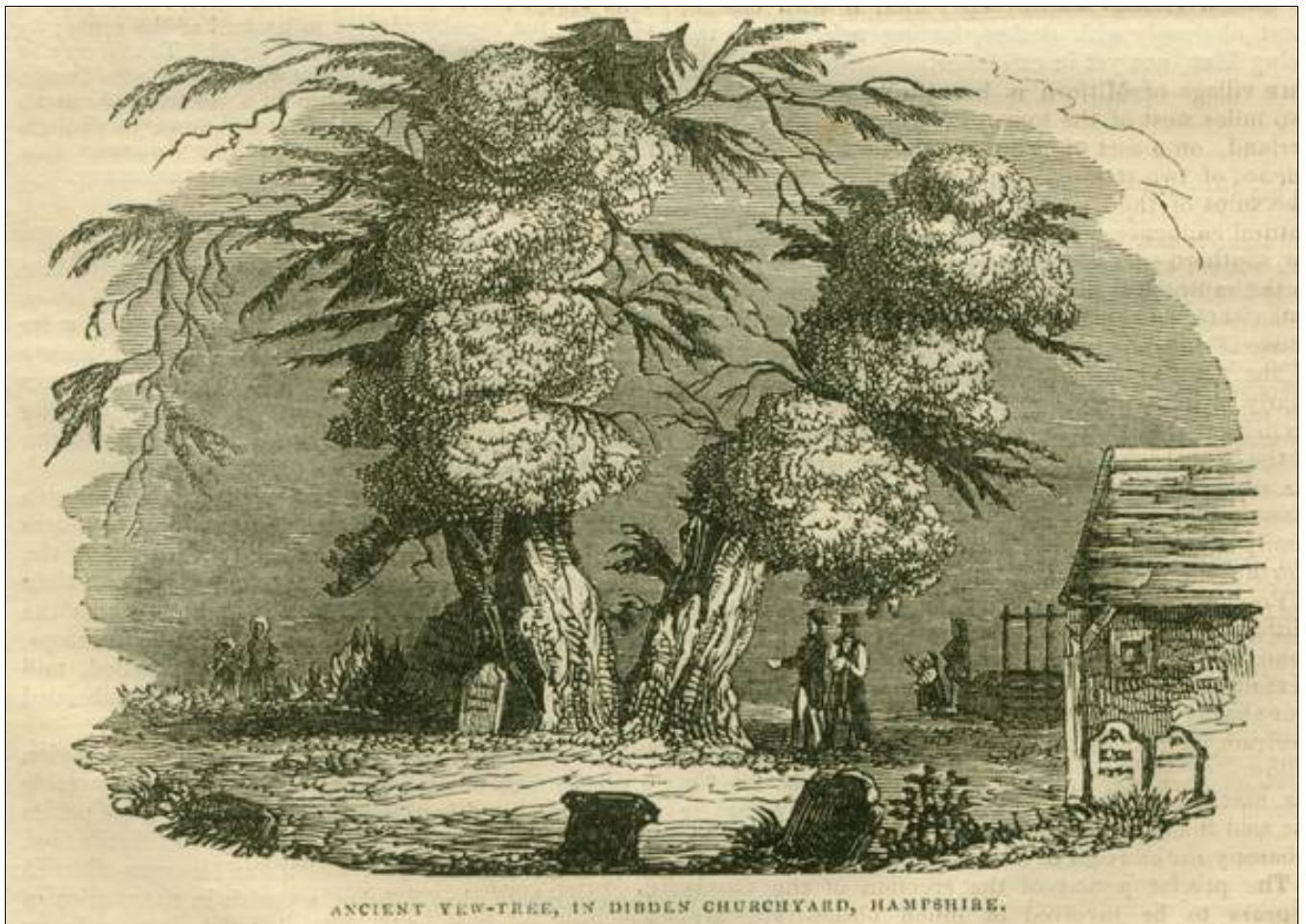
But if thus claiming to be specially recorded merely from its picturesque and ancient character, the local situation which it occupied amidst the hallowed precincts of the grave, invests it with high additional interest. It stood casting its full and sombre shadows over the scene of sorrow and decay, silently preaching lessons of comfort and immortal hope. Race after race might view, in this ever-living witness of the departure of their friends, a connecting link uniting together sire and son, from by-gone to long-coming generations; ---and while frailty and oblivion seemed marked upon all that transpired around it, the bright deep green of its underlying foliage, admonished of a state where no death, no sorrow, can ever come.

This venerable tree had, beyond the memory of any living person, become split down the centre of the trunk, and being thus divided into two parts, it had latterly almost appeared like two distinct trees; the weight of the upper branches had gradually widened the fissure, and at the time of its fall, the intervening space was at the base two feet, and at almost two yards from the ground, five feet; but persons now living, remember when, as children, the opening was not sufficiently wide to admit them to creep between the two portions of the trunk.

A circumstance which strongly marks the great distance of time when this fissure took place, is presented in the singularly large stems of ivy which had grown up against the interior portions of the trunk. One of these ivy stems measures two feet in circumference at the base, and after ascending seven feet, this gigantic parasite sends out fantastic limbs, which, entwining around its antique supporter, had in many parts entirely overshadowed its decaying branches. It appears, however, that the support thus obtained has been amply repaid, as upon the fall of the tree, it was discovered, that the still vigorous roots of the ivy had been the only stay that had prevented the overthrow of the Yew many years since, all the larger roots of the latter being quite decayed. This tree measured at the base, taking the exterior circle of the two divisions of the trunk, twenty-five feet, and at three yards from the ground, thirty feet. Its height was forty-one feet, and some of its branches spread out to a wide extent. It has carried to the ground with it many a tombstone reared beneath its branches, it having been a favourite selected spot.

.....that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

Gray – Elegy written in a country churchyard



Ancient yew-tree in Dibden churchyard, Hampshire