

A Yew tree and its place in Cheshire's History

David Lloyd-Jones, an Arboriculturist (tree surgeon) from Knutsford, tells the sad story of the ancient Yew of Vale Royal.

I want to bring your attention to a sad little story. Not as sad or profound as some perhaps, but still, a sad reflection on how easily our living historical heritage can be lost. I was recently asked to assess and if possible save a tree on a site where a timber framed building was being put up because of my expertise in preserving living trees through the property development process. On arrival I identified an ancient yew which had sadly and inadvertently been killed by the development process. This tree, I should add, was situated near to a truly ancient landscape feature close to Vale Royal Abbey in the heart of Cheshire. The tree itself is so old that it is possible that if Henry the VIII visited the Abbey either before or after he destroyed it, he might have seen it and conversely, it might have seen him. Saving it at the stage at which I was consulted was not an option and so we sadly had to take it down. As is our policy, we attempt to utilise the whole tree to make sure that we can apply a cynical old whaling adage 'Nothing is wasted but the tree (Whale)'. We have a market garden in Norley Cheshire where we store large trees and periodically convert and air dry them, I have also developed a website www.craftwoods.co.uk where you can see the products of this endeavour (planks, beams, craft and wood turning timber).



Top right: David Lloyd-Jones and his Yew tree
Above: David at work in a Beech tree close to Toft Hall

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Here is the truly sad bit. In my efforts to sell this timber I had an offer from a veneer company for the trunk. It is a significant, and I must admit, a tempting offer but I have hesitated. If I took this offer, this four foot diameter, 500 year old-tree would be shipped to France and then peeled into 1.5mm thick sheets of veneer. These sheets of beautiful timber would then be pasted onto MDF or chipboard mouldings to make cheap but attractive and expendable furniture.

In short if I take this offer it is likely that most if not all of this tree will be in many landfill sites around Europe within 30 years. Quite simply, this does not fit into my ideal of making good use of this tree so that, if only in its death we can celebrate its life!

Yew wood in itself is beautiful, long lasting colourful and resilient, All of these facets have made it popular in fine cabinet making. This tree with its historical significance, its size and its

quality justifies that it be used by a gifted cabinet maker to make a piece or numerous pieces of furniture that are likely to last and be treasured for another 500 years. That would be an appropriate end of the living portion of this tree's existence and in 500 years time, whatever is made from it will chart around 1,000 years of this island's history I am hoping Cheshire Life readers can help me to find somebody who can make such use of this very unusual tree.

David Lloyd-Jones.
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