

Woodman, Spare That Tree!

"The trees are old trees, used to living with people. Family trees that remember your grandfather's name." Stephen

Vincent Benet (1898-1943) was speaking of broad-streeted Richmond, Virginia when he penned those lines but, the giant yew that was felled at Shipton Court on 7th October certainly saw a Reade grandfather or two during its several hundred years of existence.



heart after it was felled. Sam Jepson, who so skilfully dispatched the giant, shook his head in disbelief, describing the ground around the tree as having the consistency of a peat bog; *"A heavy storm with high winds could have brought it down,*

destroying automobiles in the parking lot." He told me.

Why Yew?

The English yew (*T.baccat*) is slow growing, long lived, disease resistant and was once decimated in Britain to provide our armies with the coveted longbow. These days it is nurtured in the ornamental hedges of stately homes and country houses, as well as being silent sentinels in many ancient churchyards. Yews demand respect.

There was a great deal of explaining to do when Shipton Court Management Company sought permission to cut down this particular yew. The gentleman from West Oxfordshire Tree Preservation was not completely convinced, even when he saw the grey sludge that oozed from the ground around the trunk. *"There could be other solutions."* he pleaded, *"The roots could be cut away from the sewerage pipe."* But, they couldn't really. The leakage from the fractured pipe had saturated the ground around the tree and had even permeated the giant trunk itself. I felt the dampness in the trunk's very

Sheltering Arms No More

A small crowd attended the ceremony. As Sam Jepson deftly wielded first one motorized saw and then the other, John and Aelfryth Gittings, Dave Hoey, a wide-eyed couple arrived for a quiet weekend holiday, Mark Jepson, his wife and two little boys - as well as a rather breathless S.C. resident (me!) were all in awe as the giant succumbed with a mighty, earth-shaking thud.

I thought of Reades, and maybe even the Laceys, the Samudas, Peppers, Thomsons, Arathoons and four hundred years of attending servants having known this tree and perhaps sheltering under its branches in a sudden downpour. Surely several generations of workers had swept up the yew debris on steps and courtyard while tutting at pigeon leavings on freshly scrubbed tiles. When the flat roof over the entrance is swept clean, the bewildered pigeons will move on and, after the drain man has worked his magic, the grey sludge will give way to new gravel and some freshly planted ivy or clematis. So do the noble perish.

Trudy Yates