

The Yew Tree

*Copyright 1984, Brian McNeill of the Battlefield Band
This song appears on "Anthem for the Common Man"*

A mile from Pen-Cait-Land, on the road to the sea
Stands a Yew tree a thousand years old
And the old women swear, by the grey o' their hair
That it knows what the future will hold
And the shadows of Scotland stand 'round it
'Mid the kale, and the corn, and they kye
All the hopes and the fears of a thousand long years
Under the Lothian skies

My bonnie yew tree
Tell me what did ya see?

Did ya look through the haze of the long summer's days
To the south, and the far English border?
With their bonnets of steel, on Clodden's far field
Did they march by your side in good order?
And did you ask them the price of their glory
When you heard the great slaughter began?
For the dust of their bones will rise up from the stones
And bring tears to the eyes of the wind

My bonnie yew tree
Tell me what did ya see?

And once, did you weep, for the poor and the weak
As the moss-troopers lay in your shade
To count out the plunder, and hide from the thunder
And share out the spoils of the raid?
For you saw the smiles of the gentry
And the laughter of lords at their gains
For when poor hunt the poor across mountain and moor
A rich man can keep them in chains

My bonnie yew tree
Tell me what did ya see?

And d'ya no' think to tell when John Knox himself
Preached under your branches so black
To the poor common folk who would lift up the yoke

Of the bishops and priests from their backs?
For you knew the bargain he sold them
And freedom was only one part
For the price of their souls was a gospel so cold
It would freeze up the joy in their hearts

My bonnie yew tree
Tell me what did ya see?

And I thought, as I stood, and laid hands on your wood
That it might be a kindness to fell ya
One kiss of the axe, and you're free from the racks
And the sad bloody tales that we tell ya
But a wee bird flew out from your branches
And sang out like never before
And the words of his song were a thousand years long
And to learn them, a long thousand more

My bonnie yew tree
Tell me what can you see?