

My Ancestor, Harriet Say, and the 'Battle to Save Croscombe Village Cross'

From the book "Story of Croscombe" by Keith Andrews, By Mark Wareham

"In the 1870's the local Way-Wardens who were surveying the highways prior to the closure of the Shepton and Wells Turnpike Trusts, thought the ancient Cross was an incumbrance. There was only enough room for one horse and wagon to go between the Cross and mill pond and buildings, so the men went about removing the obstruction with crowbars, wedges and hammers.



The shaft was hurled to the ground and the finial broken in two. This so angered and incensed a few villagers standing by that they quickly summoned a large contingent of neighbours who swarmed around defending the remaining structure.

Someone brought a small banner which bore the legend 'Be Faithful'. The standard was hoisted aloft, but during the melee was unfortunately struck. Nevertheless it was speedily regained and proudly waived over the heads of the victorious defenders – the Way-Wardens having made an ignominious retreat. A few of the women remained on guard around the Cross, whilst others hurried to the quarry to summon their menfolk.

About 30 men volunteered that evening to bivouac around the damaged ancient sacred symbol, to guard it against further demolition during the night. Women hastily prepared straw beds, lit a huge fire of faggots and kindling wood and brought refreshments to make the long night watch pass as agreeable as possible.



Some sources later infer that the Way-Wardens were actually driven off by female patriots brandishing blazing torches of twigs, which had been thoroughly soaked in oil. The outcome was decisive; no further attempts were made to destroy the Village Cross. The names of all the women involved in the scuffle with the wardens were said to have been written down and enclosed in a bottle, which was sealed and embedded under a stone block, when the Cross was repaired and pinioned. These names include Sarah Parker, who led the women, Liz Oatley and **Harriet Say.**"

Harriet Say was my great x 2 grandmother and wife of Robert who was at various times in his life a timber dealer, blacksmith and carpenter. He was also a parish Councillor in Croscombe in 1898. The picture on the left is their gravestone in Croscombe churchyard and the inscription to Robert reads "he toiled hard for those he loved, then left us to remember."