

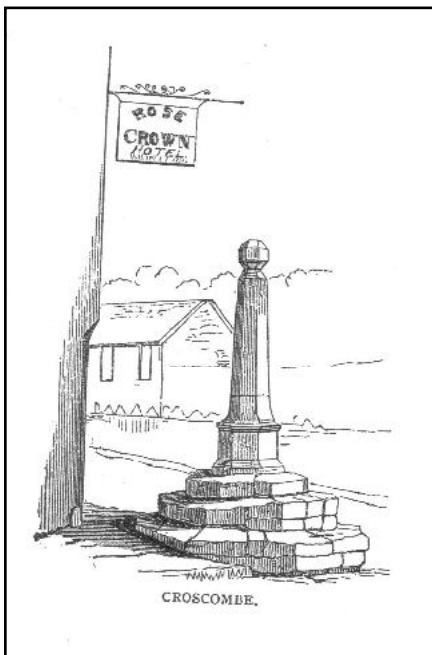
'Battle to Save Croscombe Village Cross' and the Say family of Croscombe

By Mark Wareham

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In the late 19th century there took place a small skirmish around the local village cross in Croscombe. The skirmish was the result of efforts to destroy the ancient monument and I was delighted to discover that one of my ancestors was involved and is named in a book as being one of the ringleaders of the defenders. This is the story of that skirmish with further information about the Say family of Croscombe.

From 'Old Crosses of Somerset, 1877, by C Pooley'



“Some years ago, an incident of no little importance occurred in connection with this Cross, which deserves to be recorded. The local way-wardens, thinking the Cross an incumbrance, endeavoured to remove it. It seems that the removal of so ancient a landmark in historical associations of the village proved a graver and more serious matter than these enlightened wardens of the way were aware of. The inhabitants gathered around the old Cross, and came to its defence with bold and determined hearts, bent upon its preservation, but not before the shaft had been hurled to the ground, and its finial broken in twain. The demolishing party having been driven off, a flag was hoisted by the brave villagers bearing upon it the legend ‘BE FAITHFUL;’ this was struck during the melee but as quickly regained, and the standard of the Cross again waived proudly over the heads of the loyal and Christian defenders. To such a pitch of earnestness was the defence carried, that upwards of thirty stout fellows volunteered to bivouac round the sacred symbol and guard it during the night, while women were actively engaged in preparing beds of straw, and kindling a

huge fire to make the hours pass away as agreeably as possible. It hardly be said that no further attempt was made to remove the village Cross.’

From 'Story of Croscombe, 1997, by Keith Armstrong'

“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**."

Robert and Harriet Say

Harriet Say (pictured above in about 1918) was my great x 2 grandmother. Her maiden name was Rhymes (or Rimes) and in 1867 she married Robert Say in St Mary's Church in Croscombe. Robert was at various times a timber dealer, a blacksmith and a carpenter in the village. In 1898 he was elected as a Parish Councillor, coming third with 68 votes in a poll of eleven candidates with his brothers Moses and James finishing top and fourth. We think that the picture to the right may well be of Robert and Harriet (at the rear) with three of Robert's sisters pictured shortly after Robert and Harriet's wedding.

The picture below is of their gravestone in Croscombe churchyard and the inscription to Robert reads "he toiled hard for those he loved, then left us to



remember.” Robert died in 1924 aged 74 and Harriet in 1925 aged 84. Also commemorated on the tombstone is their daughter Thurza.

For a time Robert and Harriet lived at Mill Paddock House (pictured to the left) and this property eventually passed to my great grandparents Matthias Tremeer Horler and his wife their daughter Minnie (nee Say).



For the Say and Rhymes family tree (as far back as the Crocombe connections in the family) see page 4.



