

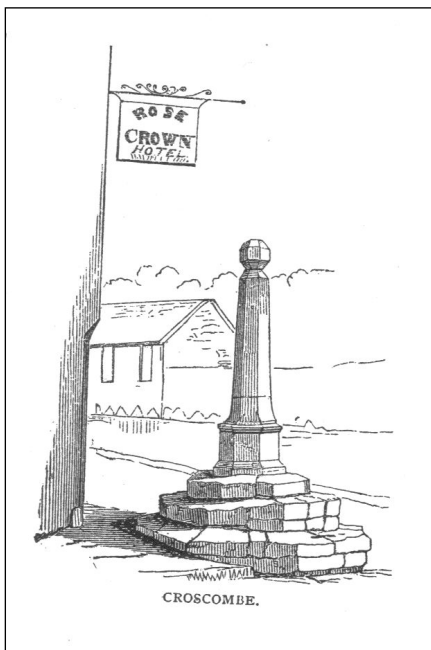
# The 'Great' Battle of the Croscombe Cross and my village ancestry

*By Mark Wareham*

Updated 26<sup>th</sup> August 2013

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century there was an uprising over the preservation of the medieval cross in the village of Croscombe in Somerset. This incident was as a result of efforts by the authorities to destroy the ancient monument and I was delighted to discover that a couple of my ancestors and other family members were directly involved and that one of them was one of the ringleaders. This is a brief story of the skirmish with some notes on the Say, Carver and Marshman families of the Croscombe. I shall start with descriptions of the 'battle' from two authors.

## 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**."

Harriet is pictured above, probably in about 1910 / 1920.

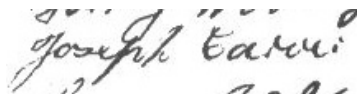
It appears that even before 1870 that there had also been previous attempts by authorities to remove the village cross as evidenced by these minutes -

### *Croscombe Vestry Minutes 1861 (courtesy of Somerset Archives)*

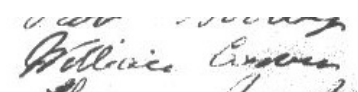
"It was moved by Mr Somerville seconded by Mr Charles Welch that doubts having been suggested of the legality of the notice convening the vestry meeting of the 11<sup>th</sup> July 1861. It is resolved that the minutes of that meeting be rescinded – which was carried unanimously. It was also moved by Mr Somerville and seconded by Mr William Hatcher that this meeting is of the opinion that the Surveyors of the Highways had no legal authority for taking down the Cross but that they will reinstate the same or proceedings be now instituted against them ... that of they will now reinstate the same within the space of fourteen days to the satisfaction of the Rector Churchwardens and Overseers of the Parish or after the expression of the disapproval of their actions signified by this resolution attempt again to remove the Cross this meeting pledges itself to take all necessary legal proceedings to protect the Cross and will also make legal enquiries as to an alleged encroachment by the side of the Cross in this secret alterations carried out at the Stickland House and that the

Rector Churchwardens and Overseers of the Parish be authorised to later and legal steps which was carried unanimously.

The resolution was signed by 49 people including –  
Churchwarden – J C Somerville  
and my ancestors / relatives –  
Joseph **Carver**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Joseph Carver".

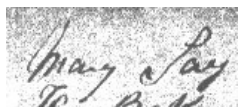
William Carver

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "William Carver".

Thomas **Marshman**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Thomas Marshman".

Mary **Say**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mary Say".



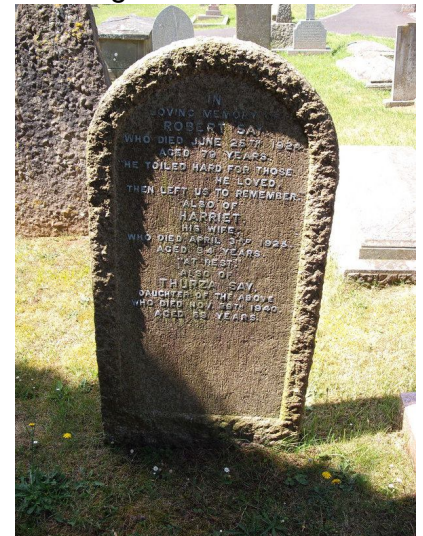
## **My Grandfather's Line - the Say Family**



Harriet Say was my great x 2 grandmother. Her maiden name was Rhymes (or Rimes) (see below) and in 1867 she had 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 and with his brothers Moses and James finishing top and fourth. We think that the picture to the left may well be of Robert and Harriet (at the rear) with three of Robert's sisters in the front row. This was probably taken shortly after Robert and Harriet's wedding.

The picture on the right is of their grave monument 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 Say.



For a time Robert and Harriet had 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).

Robert and Harriet's daughter Minnie was my great grandmother and she married Mathias Tremeer Horler of Mells in Croscombe in 1901.



Mathias and Minnie moved to Combe Hay near Bath, before returning in later life to the village and in the second world war Mathias used his military experience, gained from two periods of service in the Royal Marine Light Infantry (he was mentioned in despatches in the First World War by Sir Douglas Haig for 'gallant and distinguished service'), to lead the Croscombe troop of the 4<sup>th</sup> Somerset Home Guard, as a Lieutenant. In 1953 a local paper recorded –

*"Many friends at Croscombe heard with regret of the death of former resident Mr Mathias Horler, who with his wife had lived with their youngest daughter at 3 Bridge Street, Frome ... He was in charge of the Croscombe Home Guard during the Second World War and was well liked by those who served under him and who was presented with an arm chair on his retirement in October 1942 on reaching the age limit."*

Mathias is pictured above in his Home Guard uniform.

It was Mathias grandfather, Robert Say's father, William Taylor Say, who was the first Say to the area. After a brief period farming in Wiltshire he moved to a farm of about 35 acres at nearby West Horrington between 1840 and 1850. William died in 1860 and was buried in the churchyard at Croscombe and on his tombstone it reads –

*"so teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom"*

William's widow Mary (formerly Mary Ann Hart of Seend in Wiltshire) is the Mary Say who in 1861 signed the resolution reached at the vestry minutes above and it was Mary's daughter-in-law Harriet who led the defence of the Cross in 1870. Mary Say died in 1883 and was buried with her husband.

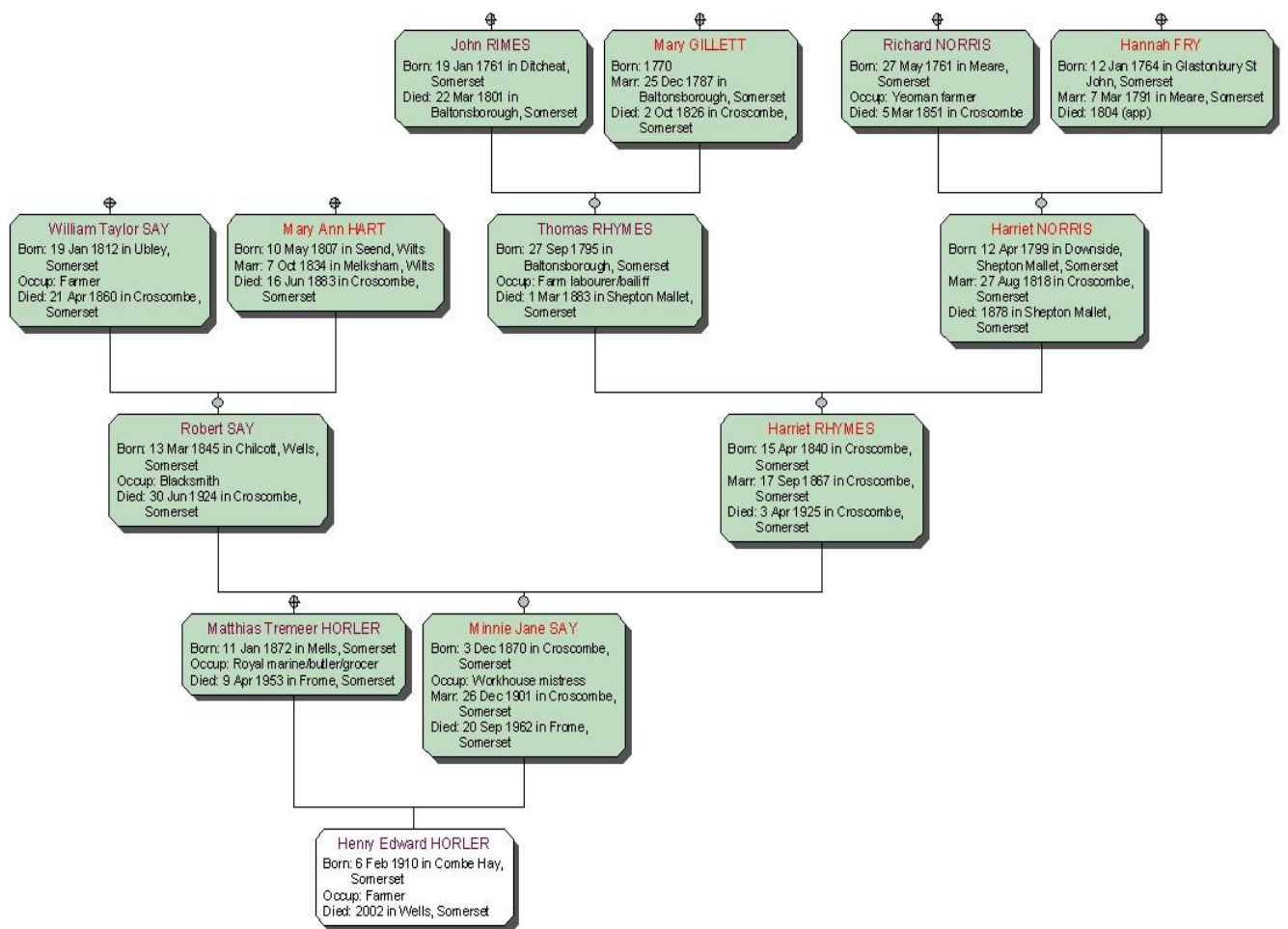
The Say family were originally from Ubley, on the northern edge of the Mendips, where I can trace them back to about 1700. The Horlers were from Mells and Kilmersdon and brought with them an interesting family rumour about being descended, through illegitimate offspring, of the Horners of the Mells estate.

The Rhymes family are first recorded in Croscombe in 1818 when Harriet's parents, Thomas Rhymes and Harriet Norris, were married in St Mary's church. Thomas was born in Baltonsborough and Harriet in Shepton Mallet. Thomas and Harriet were step-brother and step-sister because their widowed parents Mary Rhymes (nee Gillett) and Richard Norris had married at Glastonbury in 1805. Thomas became a farm bailiff, after having been a farm labourer, and died in 1881 in Croscombe. Harriet died in 1878.

It was Richard and Mary Norris who brought the Rhymes branch of the family to Croscombe because after their marriage in 1805 they moved to Shepton Mallet and then to Croscombe. They were in Croscombe by 1816 when they buried their second daughter, Charity, in the village in 1816, aged just 7 years old. Mary died in Croscombe in 1826 and Richard (a retired farmer of independent means in the 1841 census) died in the village in 1851, aged 90.

The Rhymes family were originally from Ditchet in Somerset, via Baltonsborough, where I can trace them back to about 1550. The Norris family were originally from Edington in Somerset, via Meare, where I can trace them back to about 1600.

For the Say and Rhymes family tree from my grandfather Harry Horler (as far back as the Croscombe connections in the family) see page 5.





## **My grandmother's line - the Carver Family**

William Carver, who signed the vestry resolution in 1861, was my great x 3 grandfather. He was born in 1806 in Croscombe and had married and died in the village in 1826 and 1890, to Eliza **Marshman** (see later). He had been a farm labourer all of his life, living at Duncart Lane, Shepton Road and Thrupe Lane, and he lost one of his teenage sons to the cholera outbreak in the village in 1849. William and his brother Joseph were two of the signatories to the vestry resolution pledging to defend the village cross in 1861. William and Eliza's daughter Ann married William **Talbot** at Croscombe in 1854 (see later).

Williams father William had been a carpenter and in 1841 he was living in the Old South Road in Croscombe. William senior married in Croscombe in 1796 to Mary Chancellor, daughter of the parish clerk of twenty one years James Chancellor. He was born at Ubley, where the Carvers were originally from (like the Says), and where I can trace them back to about 1650.

## **The Marshman Family**

Eliza Marshman, who married William **Carver**, was my great x 3 grandmother and she was born in Croscombe in 1807 and died in the village in 1885. It was her cousin Thomas Marshman who also signed the vestry resolution in 1861.

The Marshman family had good Croscombe heritage and I have traced their male line, after a brief period of being in Wiltshire between 1700 and 1780, back to about 1650 in the village. Ancestor John Marshman was baptised in Croscombe in 1654 and his father Richard died in the village in 1699. John married Anne Phillips in St Mary's church in 1681 and through her the connection with Croscombe goes back to family shown in village records in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Phillips line appears to go back to a 'J Phyllyps' who is recorded in the churchwardens accounts in 1494 and in 1569 John Phillips of Croscombe is recorded in the Tudor muster rolls as being an archer.

In 1638 Richard Phillips of Croscombe married Mary Hickes at St Mary's and who, I believe, was the granddaughter of Jeffrey Hickes of Dinder who had substantial land holdings in that neighbouring parish. It was in 1776 that Elizabeth, a daughter of Richard Hicks of Gloucester and descendent of Jeffrey's, married George Somerville and brought with her the rights to property and the Manor of Dinder. It was Mr Somerville, a distant relative of the Eliza Marshman, who in 1861 proposed the defence of Croscombe Cross from the Highway authority. My grandparents became neighbours of the Somervilles and knew the family when they lived in Dinder in the late 1930's and 1940's.

## **The Talbot Family**

My grandmother Hebe Florence Talbot was baptised at Croscombe in 1915. She was the daughter of William Carver Talbot and Emily Newport. William Carver Talbot was the son of Fredrick Talbot and Ann **Carver** (see above) and he was born in Croscombe in 1856. He was a stone quarryman for most of his life and married three times (losing Emily when she was just 38 years old) and having children with the first two wives (eleven in total, although two died in childhood). He was partially blinded in



a quarry accident in about 1920 and received a company pension on his retirement due to the injury. In his younger days William had been in frequent trouble with the authorities and in 1878, 1879 and twice in 1883 he was fined for poaching, using a lurcher dog, and trespass, as reported in the local press. He is pictured above outside of his home in the village with his third wife Annie. William was a regular of the Bulldog pub in Croscombe and was known to have entertained using his accordion. He lived at times at Church Street, Duncart Lane, James Terrace, West Lane and Rock Street and he died in 1933.

William's father Frederick had been a farm labourer and he was married in the village in 1854. Frederick's parents lived in Croscombe in 1841 and they were staying with their daughter Martha in who had married David Foxwell of Croscombe. Prior to this the Talbots had been in West Pennard. Frederick must have followed later and met and married local girl Anne Carver. James and Jane Talbot were married in Bristol and it may have been Jane's parents, William and Rebecca Martin who first introduced this branch of the family to the village when they moved in about 1800 from Doultling, which is the other side of Shepton Mallet. Rebecca Martin was buried at Croscombe in 1818. Frederick Talbot was buried there in 1889 and his wife Anne in 1890. James and Jane Talbot were buried at Croscombe in 1864 and 1865.

The Talbot family were originally from Butleigh in Somerset, via West Pennard, where I can trace them back to about 1500.

Pictured below are my grandparents Harry and Hebe Horler celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. They had married at Croscombe in 1935 and lived at Sharcombe Farm in Dinder, then at Underhill Farm and the Cocked Hat in East Knoyle in Wiltshire before returning to live out their final years back at Wells in Somerset. My late aunt Barbara recently kept up the family connection to Croscombe by being cremated in the new facility there in 2013.

The Talbot family tree connection to Croscombe is shown on page 9.





