



# **THE WRAXALL CROSS TREE**

**PENNANT REPRINTS N<sup>o</sup> 13**

**WRAXALL**

**BY PHYLLIS HORMAN AND WILFRED REW**

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## THE WRAXALL CROSS TREE

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It would seem that the area around the Cross tree at Wraxall was the most important focal point of the village for hundreds of years, excluding the church of course. It was the site of the weekly market and annual fair, nearby the stocks and whipping post, the smithy and the village pound.

A charter was granted to Elena de Gorges in 1290 for a weekly market on Thursdays and a yearly fair lasting 8 days. This was revised in 1362 for Theobald Gorges and although we have found no written evidence of the weekly market, it is stated in a Dictionary for the County of Somerset 1840 "A fair is held here at All hallows-tide which lasts 6 days".

Legend tells us that during Cromwell's time, the villagers dismantled the market cross and hid it in the river. It was never replaced and an elm tree was planted in the base where the cross had stood. There have been three successive elms here over hundreds of years and it was only when Dutch Elm disease was in this area some years ago that the last tree

died. The present sapling is an oak and seems to be flourishing, it is the third to have replaced the last elm, one was a weeping willow, the other a chestnut, but neither survived.

Repairs to the stocks and whipping post are mentioned in the Churchwarden's Accounts. It would be interesting to know if they were frequently used and for what reasons.

The area immediately around the Cross Tree doesn't seem large enough to have held a fair much less an 8 day market, but it is to be remembered that until 1894 the piece of Churchyard from the east end of the church to the lych gate was open ground, part being an old orchard. The bottom of Wraxall Hill was made into a road in 1820/1 so that would have been more open land and it would seem that when the main road (now B3130) was first laid, alterations were made in the field opposite the Cross tree, so this would have been more spare land.

It is not known if the site of the forge is the original. The cottage to the left of the Cross Tree has been the home of the village blacksmith for a very long time, the forge is on the roadside next to the front garden. The blacksmith was a very important member of the community not only for shoeing horses but for making and repairing any ironwork especially farm tools. From the Churchwarden's Accounts of 1732/3 "Paid Sarah Morgan for ending ye twists and nails for ye pound 4d" also "Paid her for stapels for ye leping stook and speoks nailes 5d". Does this mean she was, or helped, a blacksmith?

The village pound was said to be more or less where the school now stands and when it was built the pound was moved to behind the forge. Eventually it was used by the blacksmith as an extra yard.

It may only be coincidence but when Wraxall had a Post Office, early closing days were Thursdays, is this anything to do with the old weekly market?

To almost the present day the Cross tree was a meeting place and on rare occasions when one went on an outing such as a Sunday School treat the pick up point was the Cross tree.

The last blacksmiths of Wraxall were Mr Warry and a son. As a child it was fascinating to stand outside the forge door and watch the horses being shod; such a hot, bright fire, the puffing of bellows, the tinkling of hammers on iron and the smell met you many yards down the road!

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