



Odstock

For The Love of A Child

In Memory of Joshua Scamp

who died April 1st, 1801

May his brave deed be remembered

To his credit here and hereafter.

The above is the inscription on a headstone that can be seen in the churchyard of St. Mary's Church, Odstock. The grave is distinguishable for it is marked with a pink rambling rose bush.

Joshua Scamp was a gypsy. He was a devoted father and was well liked in the village by his gypsy tribe and by the villagers alike. So when Joshua was tried and found guilty of horse theft and hung for the crime, everyone pleaded the vicar to allow his remains to be buried within the churchyard which was not normally permitted for those who had been sentenced to death for any crime.

Everyone including the vicar knew that Joshua Scamp was innocent of the crime and had taken the blame and unshakingly faced the hangman in self sacrifice in order to save his daughter from undoubted shame.

Joshua's daughter to the better judgement of her father had married a worthless rogue. When caught after stealing a horse he lay the blame on his father-in-law. Since horse stealing carried the death penalty and Joshua could not bear to think of his beloved daughter both widowed and shamed he accepted the blame, was tried and executed at Fisherton Gaol.

His body was taken from the Gaol and laid to rest in the churchyard where his grave became a place of pilgrimage for his gypsy tribe.

Each year on the anniversary of Joshua's death his tribe would ascend on the village to pay their respects at the graveside. This often resulted in many disturbances to the quiet village life especially after many of the gypsies had frequented the local inn.

One vicar made an attempt to discourage these pilgrimages to the churchyard and locked the church door. This angered some of the gypsies who were also aggrieved at the removal of the rambling rose from the grave. The church was broken into and ransacked and damage was done to the graveyard itself. The gypsy queen lay down a curse on anyone who locked the church door in the future decreeing that whoever locked the door would die within a year. It is said that two people who did lock the door some time after, one by mistake and another in defiance of the curse, both died within the year. Coincidence or not the key to church door disappeared and was thought to have been thrown into the river nearby.

Joshua lies at peace, blanketed by the rambling rose which was planted as a replacement to the gypsy tribes original plant. His death a symbol of the lengths that a parent would be prepared to go for the sake of a beloved child.



Headstone of Joshua Scamp in churchyard of St. Mary's, Odstock, Wiltshire

(Photo by Miss Steel 2010)