

# Clophill through the years

## *The Cross Tree*

In the middle of Great Lane where it joins the High Street, used to stand an old tree know as the Cross Tree. Why it was so called is not known. It is at a tee-junction, not a cross road.

The first reference to it, according to Mary Phillips (The Clophill Story) was in a survey of 1606. In 1716, she says, there was a house called Cross Tree House (King's cottage) owned by John Carter and in 1738 the house is mentioned in a quit claim (conveyance). The tree is also mentioned in a will of 1810.



In the Quarter Session Rolls of 1810 and 1812 it is referred to as the Stocks Tree. Was this the site of the village stocks, an early form of punishment that restrained the victim's legs between wooden boards as a public form of punishment?

In Amptill News for November 25, 1911 it was reported that *“The Old Cross Tree, which stands in the centre of the village, has been lopped this week. It is an elm, and has stood for many years. It is quite hollow - a mere shell - but it still seems full of vigour. The oldest inhabitant can remember it when it had just begun to decay. It is lopped every six or seven years, or its head would become too heavy. The village boys love to climb up inside the tree, and look out at the top. Very soon it is to be enclosed with an iron railing as it is one of the few venerable things which the village possess.”*

In December Mr. Edward Crouch paid for an iron fence to protect it from injury and to commemorate the accession of King George V (6th May 1910). A plaque can be seen in the photograph presumably inscribed to this effect.

Within two weeks two horses attached to a vehicle of the Signalling Department at Haynes Park (a training camp for the Royal Engineers in World War One) bolted and collided with the iron fence.

During World War Two the tree was regarded as a danger to traffic in the blackout and removed. During the blackout street lamps were switched off and vehicles had to dim their lights with black paint or newspaper. This resulted in a huge increase in accidents. People were encouraged to walk facing the traffic and men were advised to leave their shirt-tails hanging out so that they could be seen by cars with dimmed headlights.

If the hollow tree that was finally cut down was the same tree as existed in 1606 then it certainly had a long life.

