

The Legend of Doughty's Cross

Local legend has it that in years gone by a reverend gentleman called at Hathern School to examine the pupils' religious knowledge. He asked one schoolboy who had died on The Cross. He was not amused when the boy replied, "Doughty, Sir."

Around 1972 Osborne Hunt recalled the tragic tale of William Doughty (pronounced Duffy) who died from injuries sustained after falling from Hathern Cross in March 1896. Sarah Jane Doughty stated that her 38-year husband arrived home from work around 4pm on 2nd March smelling of alcohol. At his request she wrote a note to local Social Democrats to say that William wished to convene a public meeting that evening to discuss matters concerning the election of a Parish Councillor. While he was waiting for them to arrive, he climbed onto one of the top steps of the Cross and began to sing. A group of children gathered around the monument to watch his antics. Witnesses testified that he was obviously drunk and toppled sideways and fell heavily onto the road beneath.



Two children sitting on the steps of the Cross on 9 June 1906.

Two of those present managed to take William Doughty to his house on The Green where he lived with his wife and two daughters. They called Dr. G. Cardno Still from Shepshed who

found that he had sustained lacerations to his upper lip and serious internal injuries. He had excruciating abdominal pain and his bowel was damaged. He died later, and at his inquest the jury returned a verdict that “the deceased died from exhaustion, consequent on peritonitis and pneumonia which arose from a fall accidentally received while intoxicated on the 2nd of March 1896.” To view the initial report of the accident and of the inquest that appeared in the Leicester Chronicle, go to the News Archive 1896(i) on this website.

Osborne Hunt said that William was renowned for addressing passers-by from the Cross after a few drinks. He also commented that some time after the incident there was an annual inspection of the religious knowledge of the children at Hathern School. The visiting clergyman asked them several questions, including who had died on The Cross. One lad put his hand up and said, “Sir, it was Doughty.”

The Cross is still a favourite place for photographs of children from Hathern School. One hundred years after Doughty’s accident, children and staff there while waiting to leave for a trip to the Black Country Museum.



Photograph from the Echo, 8 June 1986.