



Market Place Cross, Devizes - Its Purpose Remembered

The market cross at Devizes has attracted widespread notoriety from recording an event which took place in the middle of the eighteenth century - the death of a market woman immediately after she had told a lie in the course of her trading, and had called upon God to strike her dead if she had not told the truth. An account of this event was originally inscribed on the base of a pillar in the market place. In 1814 that pillar was superseded by the present handsome cross, with drinking fountains, the gift of Viscount Sidmouth, and according to an inscription on the eastern panel, "the Mayor and Corporation availed themselves of the stability of the new building to transmit to future times the record of an awful event, which occurred in this market place in 1753, hoping that such a record may serve as a salutary warning against the danger of impiously invoking Divine vengeance or of calling on the holy name of God to conceal the devices of falsehood and fraud." The follows a full account:-

"On Thursday, the 25th of January, 1753. Ruth Pierce, of Potterne, in this county, agreed with three other women to buy a sack of wheat in the market, each paying her due proportion towards the same. One of these women, in collecting the several quotas of money, discovered a deficiency, and demanded of Ruth Pierce the sum that was wanting to make good the amount. Ruth Pierce protested that she had paid her share, and said 'she wished she might drop down dead if she had not!' She rashly repeated this awful wish, when, to the consternation and terror of the surrounding multitude, she instantly fell down and expired, having the money concealed in her hand."

Western Gazette, 26 February 1909