

Patience Atfield

A small cross on a plinth in the churchyard simply says 'Patience'. It is machine-made stone memorial, with inset lead letters, that is typical of the style that became fashionable the 1860s and which remained so for many decades afterwards. The letters and numbers following her name have mostly disappeared but the number . . 79 can still be seen. The stone has probably been a source of speculation to many people over the years.

Patience was a most unusual, possibly unique, name in Compton and only one person of that name is recorded in the parish burial registers. It is this singularity that indicates that the cross is likely to be the memorial to Patience Fanny Atfield who was born in the county of Buckinghamshire between 1776 and 1782 (her age given in the 1851 and 1861 census returns and the burial register conflict) and who died in Compton in April 1869.



She was married to Thomas Atfield and they lived in various places around the village. In 1841, they lived in the old Church House in Eastbury Lane and, by the time of the 1851 census, they had moved to a cottage on the edge of the common near the Withies.

Thomas was in his sixties and Patience was just a few years his senior. He was still working as a labourer for there was no old age pension at that time and, for people such as them, the Union Workhouse in Guildford was the usual destination for labouring Compton people once they were unable to work and support themselves.

However, Thomas and Patience escaped that fate. They were still active ten years later when the 1861 census has them living in a lodge keeper's

house, although exactly where it was the census does not tell us. There were not many lodges to choose from, however: they may have been at Church Cottage, at the bottom of the church path, which was the home of the keeper of the Eastbury Manor gate or, alternatively, they may have been living at the lodge at the entrance to Field Place. Either way, it would seem that they were given their new accommodation and occupation as a philanthropic gesture by the owner of one of these houses to enable them to carry on working in a dignified manner into their old age.



The lodge house at Church Cottages photographed around 1880.

According to the 1861 census, Thomas was working as a road man but, in his seventies, his physical energy would be diminished and their new role of lodge keepers, looking after the comings and goings of one of the 'big houses' would have been within their capabilities.

Their last years were, therefore, comparatively secure for which they would have been heartily glad - nobody wanted to end their days in the workhouse. Patience died in April 1869 at the age of 93 years, according to the burial register. Thomas clung on for a few months but followed her to the graveyard in December aged eighty nine.