

Gypsy curse is shown the door

A GYPSY curse that has hung over a village for nearly 200 years has finally been removed at a special church service.

Now the congregation at St Mary's, Odstock, can lock the church door for the first time since 1801 without the fear of dropping dead within a year.

The cleansing and renewal service to lift the curse was conducted by the Bishop of Ramsbury, the Rt Rev Peter

By Marilyn Kay

Vaughan, after Odstock's parochial church council decided it was time to lay the malediction to rest.

The cause of the problem goes back to the 18th century when gypsy Joshua Scamp was wrongly hanged for stealing a horse.

His grave in Odstock churchyard became a place of pilgrimage for gypsies, until their gatherings were banned by the rector because of drunken unruliness.

At that, the gypsies wrecked the church, and the gypsy queen put curses on individuals and the church door.

When all the prophecies came true, the keys to the church were thrown in the river and the doors have remained unlocked ever since.

Assisted by the Archdeacon of Sarum, the rural dean, Odstock's own rec-

tor and other clergy, the Bishop formed the entire congregation into a linked-arm chain to jointly lock the church door with a newly made set of keys.

This was only the third time the doors of St Mary's had been locked in nearly 200 years — on both previous occasions the curse had held true and those who had turned the key were dead within a year.

The tale of Joshua Scamp and the gypsy queen's curse is a well-known local story, and appears in a number of publications. But although the curse has now been expelled, Salisbury Tourism Information office was not afraid that business will be affected.

"This is not something that is on the general tourist route, so people are not likely to be disappointed. Anyway, the tradition and the story still remain," a spokesman said.