

A Jubilee for a Mad King?

Most people think that Jubilee Close, a field off Southside developed for housing in 1964, was named in honour of Queen Victoria - who celebrated her Golden Jubilee in 1887 and her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. But that can't be right, because Jubilee Close appears under exactly the same name in the Steeple Aston Rate Book for March 1867! At that time, Victoria had been on the throne for only 30 years, was still 20 years short of her first jubilee, and had only recently lost Prince Albert in 1861.

The event this field-name relates to is the jubilee of 'mad' King George III, celebrated throughout the country on 25 October 1809. Arguably this was a year too early, as it marked only the start of his 50th year on the throne. Perhaps the organisers were worried he might not make it to the finish. Afterwards the celebrations were recorded, county by county, in a book compiled and published by 'A Lady, the Wife of a Naval Officer'. Although the good lady failed to discover what went on in Steeple Aston, she does tell us that in nearby Bletchington: *Upwards of 300 persons were regaled with a fat ox, and a proportionate quantity of bread and strong beer, furnished by a subscription of the principal inhabitants of that parish"*

Ox roasts were staged in many places, and there's a good chance celebrations in Steeple took a similar course, because the owner of Jubilee Close, the likely venue, was almost certainly a butcher. At least as far back as 1837, Jubilee Close had the same owner as Bladebone House, on the corner of South Side and Paines Hill, home to many generations of butchers.



Bladebone dates from the late 18th or very early 19th century. (No earlier, because the 1767 Enclosure Map shows its location as an empty field). It was probably built by a member of the Wall family of butchers, who first appeared in Steeple in the 1780s - either William Wall I (d 1817), or his elder son James (d 1828). In the 1830s it belonged to James's younger brother, William Wall II; when he died a childless bachelor in 1837 he left it in trust for James' son William Wall III (1823-1879). The 1867 Rate Book shows William Wall III as the occupant of a house in South Street with land amounting to 2 acres and 5 perches (2-0-5), *plus* the land named as Jubilee Close (3-0-34). The same house, but with the two parcels of land lumped together (5-0-39) can be traced back to 1837, when it all belonged to William Wall II.



In the 1880s, after a few years in the hands of Thomas Hill, "Bladebone" passed to John Walton. Like Hill, he started as a tenant of trustees appointed to look after William Wall III's daughter, Martha. The freehold only became available in 1902, when the trustees finally put Wall's extensive property portfolio on sale. The flourishing family business carried on by the Waltons only closed in 1996, on the retirement of John's grandson, another John. The Waltons always claimed their firm had been "established 1790" - a date which could well point to the start of activity on the Bladebone site.

Do you have any documents or objects of village history? Why not come to the History Centre?

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