



When street lights came to Steeple Aston

You only need to walk from Steeple to Middle Aston on a moonless night without a torch to discover how easy it is to lose your bearings in the dark. But Steeple Aston itself had no street lights at all until the end of the 19th century. The issue was first raised soon after the Parish Council was inaugurated in 1896.

In December 1897 three Banbury firms were invited to tender, and the agricultural ironmongers J Mawle & Sons won the contract to supply four lamps to the following specification:

- Good oak posts 5½ by 6½ inches (14x16.5cm) in 9 foot (275cm) lengths
- 100-candelpower lamp with patent raiser and extinguisher
- 17 inch (43cm) lantern with opal top, wrought-iron cradle with ladder-rest
- Fixing of same when required, painting two coats of good paint.

The following month the council advertised for a lamplighter: he would be required to find all necessary tools including a ladder. In March 1898 a committee reported it had appointed Mr W Stockley as lamplighter at three shillings (15p) a week for four lamps. Stockley was a road foreman in his late 30s, living in Fir Lane. His pay was later raised to 3s 6d (17½p) for five lamps - the extra lamp to be fixed in Payne Street (now Paines Hill). Mr J Harris - of Harris Stores, the village shop - won the fuel contract, against competition from two other shops, Messrs Grace and the Co-op. Harris agreed to supply Tea Rose Oil for Lamps at 8½d (just over 3p) a gallon. This seems to have been a popular product at the time, and may have made the street lamps pleasantly aromatic.

Lighting the village cost the ratepayers around £28 a year, and the lamps only seem to have been used in winter. In April 1898 it was decided they should "not be lit any more at present", and in June it was agreed Mrs [Annie] Rogers (blacksmith's widow, also living in Fir Lane) would be paid 10 shillings (50p) rent for a room to store them in. Mr [Edward] Wilkes (estate agent, Paines Hill) would take charge of them during the summer months.

In October 1899 it was decided to add two more lamps - one by the Reading Room in South Street (now part of Acacia Cottage). The other would be "placed on Mrs Vincent's wall opposite the Radcliffe School" - i.e. on the wall of Cedar Lodge - although the council later decided it would be more desirable to put it on a post like the rest. These details from the first book of Council minutes sent SAVA on a quest to find seven early street lamps in our collection of historic village photos. Their distinctive white posts make them relatively easy to spot: so far, as you can see we have located four, though the one in Paines Hill seems to have been moved at some point.

Geoffrey Lane



Church Corner



South Side facing Paines Hill



Paines Hill below Windy Ridge... & by the Coal Barn

