

ROAST BEEF AND PLUM PUDDING: QUEEN VICTORIA'S GOLDEN JUBILEE, 1887

Keith Ovenden

Leicestershire folk have always enjoyed a good excuse for a celebration and jubilees have been no exception. Many will still remember Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee in 1977, which was celebrated throughout the county. On the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Leicestershire Local History Council I am taking the opportunity to look at one jubilee outside living memory, Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee of 1887. Using documents in the archives of the Leicestershire Record Office and newspaper reports from the Leicestershire Local Studies Library I aim to build up a picture of the celebrations that took place in the county.

The preparations for the jubilee celebrations naturally resulted in a variety of documents being produced for the occasion, such as programmes for the processions, notices advertising the events, minutes of committees, letters, bills for goods purchased and subscription lists. In addition to these are the documents that record the events that took place, such as photographs, newspaper reports and diaries. Of course any picture that can be built up depends on the survival of documents and as a result this article concentrates on three places for which a number have survived, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Melton Mowbray and Ilston-on-the-Hill.

The town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch was well decorated for the jubilee and this can be seen in a photograph of the Market Street.¹ Triumphal arches spanned the street and the town was decorated with bunting and evergreen provided by the jubilee committee and local traders. The celebrations must have been a remarkable spectacle and began early on the morning of Tuesday the 21st of June, as a newspaper report testifies:—

The morning was fresh and clear, and as early as six o'clock the bells of the parish church, which have been recently re-hung, and are now rung with much better precision and effect than formerly, chimed a merry peal, and again at intervals throughout the day. The first and most appropriate part of the ceremony was the service in the old parish church.²

The church service was attended by a congregation from every denomination, highlighting the harmony that was created on Jubilee Day. The service was followed by the procession through the town, after which food became the central feature of the celebrations. A plan of the tables for the men's dinner at Ashby indicates what a large occasion this was.³ There were 29 tables in all, each table capable of accommodating up to 42 men. The plan

is for the table number 24, to which George Farmer, F Thornley and H J Peake were allotted as carvers and R Davenport, W Heafield, Fred Everatt and George Sims as waiters. Gentlemen were requested to take their places at the table at 12.45 pm and the carvers had to provide their own carving knives and forks. A report of the dinner follows:—

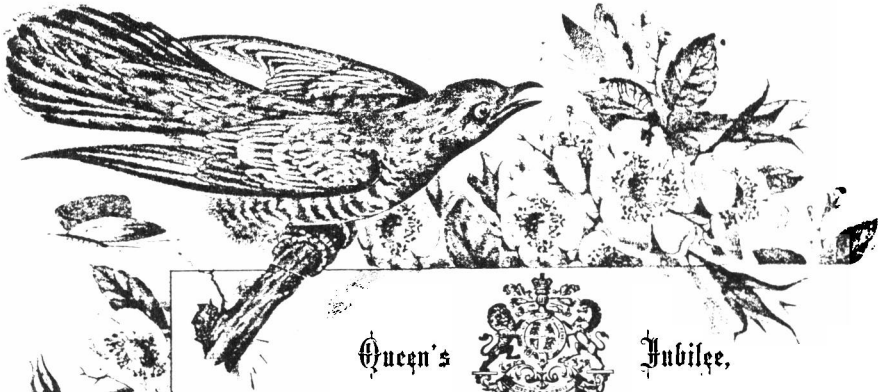
. . . the men's dinner, which was announced for one o'clock, provision being made for 850, and the tables extending from the Market Hall down to Mr. Dyer's shop. The dinner consisted of prime roast beef, mutton, and new potatoes, with plum pudding, and three half pints of beer each, besides tobacco and pipes. The goodwill and general satisfaction of everyone was unmistakable . . . The "last glass" was reserved for toasting the Queen's health, and when the bugle sounded the company rose and with the greatest enthusiasm Her Majesty's health was drunk amid cheers and the singing and playing of the National Anthem.⁴

Women and children, on the other hand, had to content themselves with tea and tables were assigned to helpers, as a letter from the Tea Committee shews.⁵ Mrs G Farmer, along with Mrs Perry, Miss Bangham and Miss M Ison, were assigned to one of the tables, with each table seating from 60 to 80 women or children. The tea was a very large occasion indeed:—

At four o'clock 2500 women and children sat down to tea in the Market-place, sandwiches and cake, with bread and butter, forming the fare. The children were each presented with a pot mug, as a souvenir of the Jubilee, bearing the Queen's portrait, with V.R. and the inscription, "The Queen's Jubilee, Ashby-de-la-Zouch." The mugs were presented to the committee by Mr. E. Ison and Mr. John German. Perhaps the tea scene may be said to have been the prettiest sight of all, the ladies presiding at the tables in fancy summer costumes, and the beaming and happy faces of the children in the bright sunshine, with the surrounding scene, having a striking effect.⁶

The jubilee celebrations were also an opportunity for a grand social occasion for the upper echelons of Ashby society. A public dinner was to take place in the Market Hall Assembly Room at 6.30 pm on the 22nd of June. Tickets were priced at 3s 6d and W E Smith, chairman of the Jubilee Committee, was to preside at the dinner. The following evening a Jubilee dance was to be held in the Bath Assembly Rooms, with the Nicholson's Quadrille Band. Tickets for the dance were 2s 6d for ladies and 3s 6d for gentlemen.⁷

Celebrations at Ashby did not end there, as most of the week was set aside for the jubilee. Schools were closed for the whole week and only reassembled on the Friday morning for a Thanksgiving Service in the church.⁸ One of



Queen's



Jubilee,

Market Street,

Ashby-de-la-Zouch,

June 15th, 1887.

Madam,

The Tea Committee are grateful for your kind offer of assistance at the Tables, on the Afternoon of Jubilee Day, June 21st, and respectfully inform you that Table No. is assigned to you, in company with Mrs. Perry

Miss Bingham and Miss M. Ison

Each Table will seat from sixty to eighty women or children, and the Committee will be glad if you can secure the services of a friend to assist you.

Two Badges, with numbers corresponding with the number of your Table, will be sent you in a day or two, for yourself and friend to wear.

The ladies appointed to the several tables are kindly requested to be within the barriers at 3 o'clock on Tuesday, wearing their Badges.

I am, Madam,

Yours respectfully,

J. F. BRAZIER,

Hon. Sec. Tea Committee.

Mrs. G. Jarne,

1887. BROWN, ASHBY

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Letter from the Tea Committee to a volunteer assisting at the afternoon tea in Ashby-de-la-Zouch
Leicestershire Record Office
by permission of Mr A Crane

the final events was the Grand Masked Torchlight Procession, organized by the Decoration and Illumination Committee. Directions were issued to the bearers and each person in the procession was to 'receive a Mask, . . . a Torchlight, with Shield, Extinguisher and supply of Oil'. Everyone was permitted to 'wear the most fantastic Dress care being taken not to expose light clothing to the Torch'.⁹

What about the less fortunate workhouse inmates at Ashby? Was the jubilee an occasion for celebration for them? A letter from the Local Government Board copied into the Guardians' Minute Book empowered them 'to make such modifications in the Regulations in force with regard to discipline and the diet of the poor persons in these Establishments as may seem . . . suitable for the occasion'.¹⁰ The workhouse children were given permission to take part in the procession and an increase in the quantity and quality of the diet for the 21st of June was given consideration:—

Mr. Wright proposed that the Inmates of the Workhouse be provided with Special Fare on that day, the same as on Christmas-day, including a dinner of roast-beef and plum-pudding, and also an allowance of beer, tobacco and snuff. Seconded by Mr. White junr. and carried unanimously.¹¹

The inmates of the workhouse would appear to have been appreciative:— Isaac Stroud an inmate came before the board and expressed the thanks of himself and other inmates for the bountiful treat given to them on the occasion of the Queens Jubilee, and stated that the Master and Matron were most unremitting in their endeavours to make the treat as enjoyable as possible to the inmates.¹²

Obviously there was nothing like a full stomach to placate the inmates of the workhouse.

At Melton Mowbray the celebrations were also an extravagant affair and some idea of this can be gained from the receipted bills for goods bought by the Jubilee Committee.¹³ The bills are for all manner of food and drink, beef, plum pudding, bread, butter, cakes, ale, tea and, of course, pork pies. Orders were placed fairly equally amongst the Melton traders — for example 50 pork pies bought from Tebbutt and Company at a cost of £1 5s — and as a result provide a good selection of headed bills for Melton traders in 1887.¹⁴ The bills include many other items besides food and drink; crockery, tables, flags, medals and fireworks were all required by the Jubilee Committee. A marquee was hired for the occasion from R Billson and Sons, rope and twine manufacturers of Leicester, for £12 12s.¹⁵

The cost of the jubilee was largely defrayed by subscriptions to the jubilee fund. A subscription book shews that much was received in kind; for example

Programme of Day's Proceedings at MELTON MOWBRAY.

*VOLUNTEERS will assemble in the MARKET PLACE,
at 9.45 a.m., and Fire a FEU DE JOIE, the*

GENERAL PROCESSION

Will then be formed in the CATTLE MARKET,
in the following order:

Melton Town Band. Court G. & D. Court
Union. Amicable Lodge. Keyworth Band.
Manchester Unity. Notts. Temperance
Band. Town Wardens. Local Board.
Constables. Inhabitants.

To assemble in the Cattle Market at 10 am.—Head of Procession in the Broad Avenue, on Nottingham Road side, facing South. The Procession will parade the Town via Nottingham Street, King Street, Timber Hill, Goodricke Street, Melbourne Street, Thorpe End, Sherard Street, Burton Street, Market Place, and Church Street, arriving at the Parish Church in time for Service at 11.30 a.m. After Service the Procession will be re-formed and march to the Market Place, and the various sections wheel off to their respective destinations, viz:— Melton Town Band, Court G. and D., Court Union, and Amicable Lodge to Mr. LORD'S Brewery, where Dinner will be served at 1 p.m. The Keyworth Band and Manchester Unity to Corn Exchange, via Lester Street and High Street, to Dine at 1 o'clock. Notts. Temperance Band and Inhabitants of the Town to Play Close, via Cheapside and Park Lane, to dine at 12.30. The

✻ CHILDREN'S . PROCESSION ✻

Will be formed in the Cattle Market at 2.30 p.m., and, headed by the Notts. Temperance Band, will parade the Town by the above indicated route to Burton Street, where the "Old Hundredth" Psalm and the National Anthem will be sung, after which the Procession will march to Play Close, via the Burton End Entrance, where a Meat Tea will be provided. The Committee has decided to admit Babies in arms.

one fat bullock from Mr Goddard and a barrel of ale from Mr Shilling. Others chose to give money; £5 5s was pledged by Captain Adcock.¹⁶

The procession on Jubilee Day was obviously one of the highlights at Melton and a programme of proceedings shews the order of the processions and other events, such as hymn-singing, sports, music and fireworks.¹⁷ One of the bands in the procession was the Nottingham United Temperance band, whose bandmaster J Thompson had replied to the Jubilee Committee's advertisement for a band:—

Dear Sir,

We have 17 performers including Drums. And the time is short for answer and will forward recommendations. The total expenses including Railway Fare £7 0s 0d Pounds. And you never mentioned as to Refreshments. These would be Dinner and Tea. Would you provide or allow 25 shillings for same? Please let me know not later than Saturday Morning Post as I have other Applications already.¹⁸

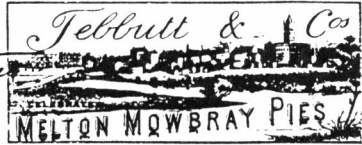
Obviously bands were in great demand on this day and a report of the Nottingham band's involvement follows:—

On Tuesday morning Melton was *en fete* at an unusually early hour . . . and the excitement commenced with the arrival of the Nottingham Temperance Band by the nine o'clock train, and a *feu de joie* was fired in the Market-place about a quarter to ten. At ten the clubs of the town and general populace began to assemble in the Cattle Market, and when formed for starting, under the arrangements of Major Powell, who had charge of the procession, the large cavalcade marched round the streets of the town . . . the Nottingham band led the general public to the large tent erected in the Play Close, where more than a thousand people were fed with roast beef, &c., and plum pudding. At half-past two o'clock all the school children of the town, headed by the Nottingham band, marched from the Cattle Market round the town, the Keyworth Band playing in the centre of the procession. When they arrived in Burton-end they were all filed into position by Major Powell, and led by the band and conducted by Mr. J. Warner they sang God Save the Queen and the 100th Psalm, the effect being very impressive. They were then marched to the play field, where they were supplied, to the number of about 1400, with pork and mince pies, bread and butter, and cake and tea, and during the rest of the day enjoyed themselves with games of their own, and witnessing the old English games which were indulged in for prizes in the field.¹⁹

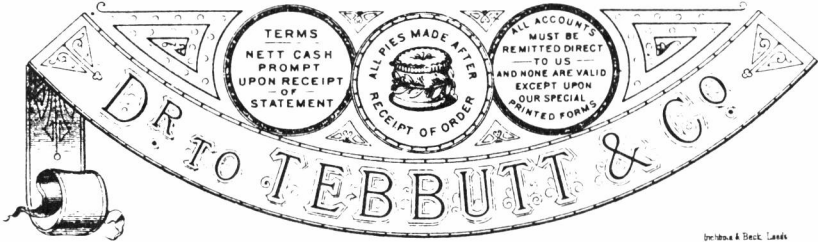
The jubilee was also regarded as an opportunity to erect a memorial to the Queen. At Melton a meeting of the Parochial Church Council, the trustees of Hudson's Charity and the Local Charity Trustees proposed to erect twelve

PORK PIE MANUFACTORY; MELTON MOWBRAY.

14th Jubilee Committee



COPY OF REGISTERED TRADE MARK AS UPON EACH WRAPPER.



Dr. Tebbutt & Co. Ltd.

1887
 June 21 To Goods.
 50 Pork Pies 6
 £ 1 50

Paid
 Aug 1/87
 per Tebbutt & Co.
 J. Ball & Co.

Bill for supplying fifty pork pies at Melton Mowbray

Leicestershire Record Office
 by permission of Melton Mowbray Town Estate Trustees

almshouses at the rear of the Bede House. The scheme, however, fell foul of the Charity Commissioners, as the endowment was insufficient to support the inmates.²⁰ A memorial was erected in the form of a drinking fountain and lamp in the Market Place, the fountain and lamp being supplied by George Smith and Company of Glasgow and installed by C Barnes, builder and timber merchant of Melton Mowbray.²¹

Apart from newspapers, contemporary reports of celebrations in Leicestershire are quite rare. We are most fortunate in having one such report in the diary of Joseph Nourish, an agricultural labourer at Ilston-on-the-Hill. This gives a first-hand account of how an ordinary family celebrated the jubilee in a small village. A transcript follows:—

June 18, Saturday. Up at five. Went to the mangold hoeing but was sent away to help put the wood together for a beacon fire at the Carlton Clump, to be burnt in celebration of the Jubilee of Queen Victoria on the 21. Put together 8 waggon load of wood. Seven of us worked at it all day. Home at six. Worked in the garden until nine. Bed at ten . . .

June 20, Monday. Up at half past four. Worked in the garden a bit. Went mangold hoeing all day. Home at six. Had supper after going to meet Eliza, she being gone to Ilston to fetch the things that we have gave to us on account of Jubilee of Queen Victoria, she having reigned 50 years today. The things we have gave to us instead of a dinner consisting of a pound and half of beef per head, making 7½ pound in all, 1 pound of tea to a house, 1 pound of bread, 1 pound of sugar, 1 quart of ale per man and 1 pint per woman, making us 3 pints in all, 2 oz of tobacco per man and a pipe all though the village. Had mother and father to supper with us. Had some of the meat and tea for supper. Off to bed at ten.

June 21, Tuesday. Up at five. Worked in the garden until 12 o'clock & then shifted myself and went with Eliza and the children to the sports that was held in Mr Baillie's field in honour of the Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Stopt there until seven. Home at eight. Had supper. Put the children to bed & then went up to Ilston to fetch a scythe. We sat up until eleven to see the beacon fires that were lighted through the Country in honour of the Jubilee. I counted from Three Gates 18 fires, including one at Carlton Clump, one at Holt-Naseby and the Forest Hills. They were a grand sight.²²

It had been half a century since the beacon fires had last been seen in Leicestershire and they proved to be a grand spectacle on a fine evening, as a gentlemen on John Ball-hill, near Shearsby, witnessed:—

. . . beacons blazed out in every direction. He counted nearly 20 in all, and some of them appeared very distant. The fire on the historic field of

PAINTER'S WORKS AND 133 BELGRAVE GATE
LITCHFIELD

June 21. 1887

The Melton Mowbray Jubilee Committee

Bill

COCOA MATING
 DOOR MATS
 RICK SHEETS
 TENTS
 ROPES & TWINES
 FENCE NETTING
 CANVASS
 COTTON WASTE



ENGINE PANS
 WAGON AND
 CAR COVERS
 MARBLES
 CORN BAGS
 WOOD SHEETS
 THATCHING VAN
 OLD CLOTHES & TAPPING
 FOR PACKING CASES

To	Five of a Large Marquee as arranged	12	120
----	--	----	-----

Paid
 R  4.87
 per R. Gault

Bill for hire of marquee at Melton Mowbray

Leicestershire Record Office
 by permission of Melton Mowbray Town Estate Trustees

Naseby was among the most prominent . . . The night was still with a slight breeze from the north-east. The sunset was a brilliant one, and by ten o'clock although the stars were shining in a clear sky, the night was sufficiently dark to make the distant fires perfectly distinct.²³

From the variety of sources consulted it is possible to gain quite a vivid picture of the events and atmosphere that the jubilee generated. Throughout the county it was celebrated as a show of loyalty and love for Queen Victoria. It was an occasion when social barriers were largely broken down and even in the workhouse the harsh regime, with its rules and regulations, was relaxed for a day.

References:

1. Photograph of Market Street, Ashby-de-la-Zouch; Leicestershire Record Office (LRO), DE 3736
2. *Leicester Advertiser*, 25 June 1887
3. Table plan for Men's Dinner; LRO DE 3182/13
4. *Leicester Advertiser*, 25 June 1887
5. Letter from Tea Committee, 15 June 1887; LRO DE 3182/14
6. *Leicester Advertiser*, 25 June 1887
7. Notice for Public Dinner and Jubilee Dance; LRO DE 3182/10
8. Headteacher's Logbook, Ashby-de-la-Zouch Free Grammar School; LRO E/LB/9/4
9. Directions to Bearers in the Grand Masked Torchlight Procession; LRO DE 3182/15
10. Guardians Minute Book, Ashby-de-la-Zouch Poor Law Union; LRO G/1/8a/9, p 244
11. *Ibid*, p 249
12. *Ibid*, p 257
13. Melton Mowbray Town Estate Records, LRO DG 25/18/1/1-2
14. Receipted bill of Tebbut & Co; LRO DG 25/18/1/1-2/1
15. Receipted bill of R Billson & Sons; LRO DG 25/18/1/1-2/3
16. Subscription Book; LRO DG 25/18/1/1-2/2a
17. Programme of Proceedings for Jubilee Celebrations; LRO DE 836/32
18. Letter from J Thompson, 2 June 1887; LRO DG 25/18/1/1-2/10a
19. *Leicester Advertiser*, 25 June 1887
20. Minute Book of Jubilee Committee; LRO DG 36/254
21. Receipted bill of C Barnes; LRO DG 25/18/1/1-2/27a
22. Diary of Joseph Nourish (spelling and punctuation modernized); LRO DE 2768/3/1
23. *Leicester Advertiser*, 25 June 1887