

Stanstead Abbots

Jubilee Celebrations June 1887

By
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The Jubilee to mark Queen Victoria's 50 years on the throne was celebrated in the June of 1887, with events being held nationwide on Monday 21st and Tuesday 22nd of June. Celebrations took place in London with many members of Royal Families from around the world attending.

Queen Victoria recorded her impressions of June 21st 1887 in her diary;

This very eventful day has come & is passed. It will be very difficult to describe it, but all went off admirably. The morning was beautiful & bright with a fresh air. Troops began passing early, with Bands playing, & one heard constant cheering. The crowds from the Palace gates up to the Abbey were enormous, & there was such an extraordinary outburst of enthusiasm as I have hardly ever seen in London before, all the people seemed to be in such good humour. The Old Chelsea Pensioners were in a stand near the Arch. The decorations along Piccadilly were quite beautiful & there were most touching inscriptions. Seats & platforms were arranged up to the tops of the houses, & such waving of hands. Piccadilly, Regent Street & Pall Mall were alike, most festively decorated. Many schools out & many well-known faces were seen. . . God save the Queen was played & then changed to Handel's Occasional Overture, as I was led slowly up the Nave & Choir, which looked beautiful all filled with people. . . I sat alone oh! without my beloved Husband, for whom this would have been such a proud day. The service was very well done & arranged. The 'Te Deum' by my darling Albert sounded beautiful, & the anthem by Dr Bridge was fine, especially the way in which the National Anthem & dear Albert's Chorale were worked in. Dr Stainer's beautiful 'Amen' at the end of the service, was most impressive. The noise of the crowd, which began yesterday went on till late. Felt truly grateful that all had passed off so admirably & this never to be forgotten day, will always leave the most gratifying & heart stirring memoirs behind.

With no radio or television in those days people around the nation celebrated the event in their own towns and villages and caught up with the national events from the newspapers the following days. Stanstead Abbots was no exception with much planning taking place over some considerable time beforehand. This included the organisation of events and all the preparations and purchases needed to ensure a successful village celebration of the Queen's Jubilee. Over the weekend preceding the celebrations decorations were placed at the entrances to the village both at the Vicarage near the bottom of Cats Hill and on the Stanstead side of the river bridge. In addition, decorations also adorned the bridge over the millstream, that existed at that time very close to the mill. Some individual houses were also suitably dressed in bunting and in other appropriate ways, particularly noted were those lived in by the Bryant, Lynsell and Stonehouse families. Mr Stonehouse had created quite a spectacle for the darker late evening with his house lit up by an array of Chinese lanterns.

Events started on the afternoon of Monday 21st when each child at the Village School was given a Jubilee Medal, a gift from Mr Thomas Fowell Buxton of Easneye. A service of songs called the "Queen's Resolve" was given in the early evening by the children of the Church Sunday School. These activities on the Monday being designed to give the children a role in the celebrations and act as an introduction to the events of the following day. Tuesday began with a service in St Andrews Church which was filled to the brim with folk from the village. A short address was given during the service to stress the importance of the event and the collection raised four pounds and four shillings [£4.20] for the Clergy Distress Fund.



Although this picture dates from a few years after the Jubilee of 1887 it gives a good idea of the way the village appeared at the time of the celebrations described in this article. Mr Bright on the sign above the door to the left arrived in 1866/7 to open his plumbing business just in time for the opening of the gas works and the considerable amount of plumbing required. The gas lamp on the pavement and indeed street lighting in the village would have been less than 20 years old in 1887.

The congregation dispersed back to their own homes for their dinner. Each household had in fact been in timely receipt of a suitable quantity of meat and some tokens for the purchase of additional items from village shops to make their meal something special to mark the occasion. Consideration being given as to the size of the family in each household. This was in those days a particularly thoughtful arrangement as many village households at that time would have had little in the way of spare money to celebrate such an event. After dinner the activities recommenced with the sports events taking place starting at 1.30 pm and continuing on until 9.30 pm with just a one-hour break for tea. The activities included steeple chases, hurdle races, a greasy pole event, wheelbarrow races and tug of war this was all woven around a series of varied running races. There was of course the usual competitive edge, the banter and enjoyment associated with such occasions. The afternoon came to an end about 4.30 pm as folk prepared for a very large public tea which took place inside one of the villages maltings, courtesy of Mr Taylor. Almost 900 locals attended this tea and it was recorded that it was much enjoyed by young and old alike. At 10.30 pm a large bonfire was lit which attracted a considerable crowd with fireworks being let off at intervals. To finish off the events a crowd of men took it upon themselves to walk round the streets of the village singing the national anthem quite loudly and raising a cheer to the Queen at several of the houses as they went along.

After the excitement and exertions of the previous day a quiet meeting took place in the main schoolroom on Wednesday evening. This event saw the prizes won by a considerable number of contestants in the sports events presented to them by Mr F. Bryant. This event was also used to round off the Jubilee Celebrations with thanks given to the many individuals who had been involved in organising all the various aspects of the celebrations. The meeting was concluded appropriately with a rousing three cheers for the Queen. A fitting end to the celebrations of the Jubilee in the village which were reported to have been well organised and much enjoyed.