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## FEATURE ARTICLE

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### **Past Jubilee Celebrations in East Ilsley.**

Only four of our last six monarchs have reigned long enough to celebrate even a Silver Jubilee and only two have passed that milestone, Queen Victoria and our present Queen.

I decided to look back to see how East Ilsley celebrated Royal Jubilees in the past, starting with Queen Victoria, whose Silver Jubilee occurred only a few months after the death of her husband Prince Albert when the queen was in mourning and the general mood was not one of rejoicing.

Twenty five years later on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1887 The *Newbury Weekly News* reported the Golden Jubilee celebrations in the village as follows

*The proceedings in connection with the Queen's Jubilee commenced on Sunday last. The whole of the hymns used at the service in the church had been written for the occasion, and the National Anthem concluded the services both morning and evening. The sermons preached by the Rector referred especially to the event uppermost in all minds and noted particularly the improvements of the last half-century.*

A week later on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1887

*Wednesday was the day fixed for the great rejoicings, but all the week the village was busy making itself as gay as possible. It had been decided that the dinner should take place in the large barn lent by Mr. Ward, and Mr. J. Gregory spent the greater part of Monday and Tuesday in decorating it. He had a very arduous task, but succeeded admirably. There was a special service in the parish church on Tuesday, and a distribution of medals to the school children on the same day. The weather on Wednesday was all that could be desired, the heat of the sun being tempered by cool breezes. At 2 p.m. 150 men dined on beef and plum pudding, being waited on by a band of willing helpers. The rector was in the chair, and the vice-chair was occupied by Dr. Main. But few toasts were given, the Queen's being of course the chief. Soon after 4 p.m. 240 women and children partook of a meal which was similar to that of which the men had partaken, but tea was provided as an additional beverage. The evening was spent in dancing, athletic sports, &c.*

Queen Victoria celebrated her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Once again the local paper reported the occasion, announcing on 10<sup>th</sup> June that

*The Diamond Jubilee Celebration is to be celebrated at East Ilsley with every demonstration of good will and cordiality. The men are to have dinner and the women and children a meat tea, to be followed by sports. The ladies Committee are deserving the thanks of the parish for the tact and energy displayed in the preliminary arrangements. The dinner will be in Mr. Ward's barn at 1 o'clock and the meat tea will be in the Rectory barn. Each child will be presented with a medal and a mug. The sports will include flat, hurdle, obstacle, sack, and cricketer's races? I mile handicap, races for women and children, and a baby show will be an undoubted attraction. A dance will be given by the Committee on the 24<sup>th</sup>.*

A week later on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1897

*Diamond Jubilee Celebrations - The rejoicings of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee which took place on Tuesday last, were carried out with much thoroughness, and to the satisfaction of the inhabitants generally. At twelve o'clock a large congregation assembled at the Parish Church for thanksgiving service; and at one o'clock, a good dinner was provided in Mr. Ward's barn, some 150 men and lads sitting down. Before separating, the health of the Queen was proposed and drunk upstanding, and the National Anthem was sung. Cheers were also given for the committee of management. Mr. J Lowe, chairman of the Parish Council, returned thanks on behalf of the committee, and expressed the hope that everyone would enjoy themselves, and that the day would be one long to be remembered in the annals of East Ilsley. The catering of host Pickard was generally appreciated. At four o'clock the women and children had their treat, a tea was provided in the barn, which had been very nicely decorated, the beams being hidden by greenery and flags, and festoons depending from the roof. In addition to the sandwiches, there was plenty of cake and bread-and-butter. The tables were beautified by pot plants. Upwards of 250 sat down, and were waited on by numerous staff of lady helpers. Before separating the National Anthem was sung. The town was gaily decorated, Broad Street carried off the palm; the residences of Mr. Lowe and Dr Bennett being adorned with flags, festoons, and Chinese lanterns. The licensed victuallers made a very good display, and the humble cottager showed his loyalty by hanging out a flag. The Hall was illuminated with Chinese lanterns, and fairy lights formed the letters VR. The evening concluded with a display of fireworks; and before separating to their homes cheers were called for and given for the committee. The day's festivities concluded about midnight. The bells rang out merrily, a large flag floated from the church tower, and a contingent of the Ilsley Brass Band provided the music. There was a well contested series of sports.*

The reader will be struck by the fact that the sexes were separated for the dining arrangements.

It was to be a long time before the villagers were able to celebrate on this scale. King Edward VII reigned for only ten years, there followed the trauma of the First World War. There was not another Jubilee until that of King George V in 1935. The king died a few months later in 1936. East Ilsley's celebrations were as usual reported in the local paper on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1935

*The people of East Ilsley had a full programme on Monday. The celebrations started with a thanksgiving service in the Parish Church, conducted by Rev. A. Ogle, before which a quarter-peal of Grandsire Triples was rung.*

*In the afternoon, the schoolchildren had sports in a meadow lent by Mr. H. Wilson. At tea-time the Ilsley and Compton Brass and Reed Band met them and marched to the Old School, where a substantial parish tea had been prepared. A Jubilee mug and medal were given to each child. A fancy dress walking football match took place between married and singles.*

*The carnival in which over 100 paraded, was a great credit to the village. The most difficult job of the day was to choose the winners. The final choice was: Best double, Mrs J. Sanderson and Mr. A. G. Mills (Mr and Mrs Pickwick). Ladies, 1. Mrs E. Sneller, (cyclist 40 years ago), 2. Miss Bartholomew (gipsy): Men, 1. Mr. W. Dudden (Restless nights), 2. Mr. Harry Wells (Scotsman). The most difficult of all to judge were the schoolchildren. Parts of the programme had to be left out as, time passed too quickly. After the National Anthem had been played, the crowd went to a bonfire on Mr. P. Lowe's field.*

*N.B. there is a photo of the fifteen strong women's Jubilee Tea committee in Jim Wilson's book of photographic memories of East Ilsley.*

King George VI, the present Queen's father reigned for only 16 years and died in 1952.

There are still villagers of East Ilsley who will remember the Silver Jubilee of our present monarch in 1977. There was much celebration, with children's parties and tree planting to commemorate the event.

This is a picture of the Silver Jubilee children's tea party in the old barn (where Hildesley Court now stands). Where are these children now, I wonder?



The Queen's Golden Jubilee was marked by parties for the children and a Variety Show, when local talents performed songs and comic monologues in a huge marquee in Puzzle Meadow.

The Diamond Jubilee, had a programme of entertainments and competitions and children's party, on the same weekend as that year's Sheep Fair in Pen Meadow. The children planted an oak tree on the Millennium Green. On both occasions the whole village was bedecked with bunting and flags.

\*If villagers have any pictures of celebrations in East Ilsley from 1977, 2002, or 2012, the History Society would be pleased to receive copies for the archives.