

MIDDLETON AND ROYALTY, CORONATIONS AND JUBILEES

Queen Victoria's immediate predecessors as monarchs were sons of George III. The first, the Prince of Wales, who succeeded to the throne in 1820 as George IV had been regent for the last nine years during the period of his father's mental incapacity. In his early days as a leader of fashion he had been described as the "First Gentleman of Europe" and at the beginning of his reign he had been quite popular, particularly in Scotland where he sported Highland dress but later he was increasingly seen in the popular mind as dissolute, spendthrift and a bloated enemy of political reform.

His coronation had been lavish at a time when the country at large was facing severe economic hardship and he even managed to deny his estranged wife Caroline the satisfaction of being crowned Queen. Following his death the Times newspaper delivered the final verdict in its obituary notice with a resounding vote of disapproval "Never was there a human being less respected than the late King what eye weeps for him?"

As George IV's only legitimate child, Princess Charlotte had died in 1817 his brother William, Duke of Clarence, succeeded him. Nicknamed "Silly Billy" because of his conversational style his was a naval background of modest achievement but he had more popular appeal than his brother and proved with suitable coaxing amenable to modest political reform. He had wanted to dispense with a coronation altogether but in the end settled for a cut price version.

Despite having many illegitimate children William's two legitimate daughters had died in infancy so Victoria as the only child of George III's fourth son, the late Duke of Kent, acceded to the throne in 1837 and was crowned the following year in a ceremony which was a compromise in terms of expenditure. The proceedings were under rehearsed and resulted in some embarrassing and even physically painful experiences such as when the Archbishop forced the ring on the wrong finger.

In Middleton the coronation was celebrated and the "Hull Packet" of the 6th July 1838 contains the following report:-

"Middleton and Lund"

"The loyalty and good feeling which have been so universally displayed on the celebration of the day set apart for the coronation of Her Majesty, were exhibited in no small degree in these parishes, £14 having been subscribed at Middleton and £6 in the adjoining parish of Lund; the labourers were regaled with dinner and their wives with tea. 220 children having previously received medals, sat down to tea on the lawn in front of the house of the Rev. John Blanchard, the rector at Middleton and nearly the whole of the population went afterwards to witness the gratifying scene. Nothing could exceed the attention of the worthy rector and his lady, who exerted themselves to the utmost in promoting the comfort and hilarity of the juvenile party; few of whom will ever forget the liberal entertainment provided for them or the auspicious occasion which called it forth".

The local people celebrating that day could not know that this was the start of a reign of 64 years by a Queen who was to become known as the "Grandmother of Europe" and who was to preside

over a country embarking on a period of rapid change in the fields of trade, science, communications, political reform and empire building. Do any of the medals survive?

JUBILEES

There had in the past been monarchs who had reigned for 50 years or more such as Henry III (1216-72) and Edward III (1327-1377). George III who reigned for 59 years (1760-1820) was a man of wide interests but with a particular concern about agriculture thereby earning himself the nickname "Farmer George" and later in his reign he overcame his political disappointments and established a reputation for domestic virtue so much so that in 1809 the fiftieth anniversary of his accession was widely celebrated.

On 18th June 1887 the Driffield Times, anticipating Victoria's Golden Jubilee, harked back to that of George III by citing a rare book by a lady, the wife of a naval officer, on the subject of that King's jubilee festivities in Yorkshire in 1809. There were references to Wansford, Beverley, Bridlington and Hunmanby and a common feature seems to have been beef, beer and firing volleys together with grander dinners for the local bigwigs.

Following the death of Prince Albert in 1861 the Queen went into prolonged mourning so much so that she performed the minimum of duties required of her as monarch. There was consequently public disquiet and during the 1870s a demand in certain quarters for the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic became evident. In 1877 Disraeli, one of her favourite politicians, created Victoria Empress of India and her re-emergence in the public esteem began.

There were widespread celebrations for Victoria's jubilee in 1887 with North Dalton and Bainton receiving mention in the local press but if Middleton rejoiced it did not appear to have been reported. However the Beverley Guardian on the 25th June reported that the jubilee arrangements in the "Wolds villages were of a spirited character". That newspaper also issued a special supplement about the life of the Queen.

The diamond jubilee in 1897 was celebrated nationally with greater enthusiasm than 1887 but in Driffield less so because there was disagreement on what form the permanent commemoration of the event should take. In Middleton the sudden death of Wilsh Crowe, a local worthy, cast a gloom over the village Jubilee festivities according to the Driffield Times. That newspaper published a special illustrated supplement entitled "Queens Record Reign a bird's eye view of the Commerce, Science, Art and Literature of sixty years".

The Beverley Guardian however did publish a report on the 26th June:-

"Middleton-on-the-Wolds – On Sunday there were special services and hymns in the parish church for the 60th anniversary of the Queen's Accession. Collections of £3 were made for the Victoria Sustentation Fund. On Tuesday the church bell ringers rang several times during the day, beginning at 6.30 in the morning, of their own free will. The parishioners had kindly subscribed about £30 which was expended on an excellent tea for more than 500 parishioners, in addition to provisions sent to the houses of about 20 who could not come in person, and in 22 kinds of sports for children in the afternoon and adults in the evening. The prizes were given by Mrs Wood about 9.50pm"

In January 1901 the Driffield Times reported the "the long, glorious and benevolent reign of Queen Victoria came to a close at half past six on Tuesday evening".

Whilst it was in regal mode the Drifffield Times on the 2nd February 1901 published the following:

“Middleton, Living in Five reigns - There is at present living in this village, an old labourer named James Gell who has lived under five British monarchs and who remembers the death of George III. Gell, who was 25 years of age when the Queen was crowned, has brought up a family of nearly a dozen children and at the present lives on a little of the money he has saved. He is 89 years of age and still occasionally does a day's work.”

With the coronation of Edward VII in August 1902, previously postponed because of emergency surgery we are once more faced with the problem that whilst the event was widely celebrated locally there are no press reports for Middleton. The King himself who reacted against his stern parents, particularly his mother's determination to keep him out of State affairs, by living the life of a playboy when he was Prince of Wales could easily have turned out to be a disaster like George IV but did in fact manage to push the monarchy forward in public esteem by his interest in foreign affairs at a critical time and his ability to appeal to the population at large.

At the time of George V's coronation in a particularly hot summer there were violent storms in the area with many reports of lightning strikes. Once again there was no press coverage of Middleton's celebrations but the Drifffield Times reported that “Bainton was all en fete and North Dalton was certainly not lacking in loyalty on Coronation Day”.

There was a reminder of the Poor Law arrangement of the time with a report in that newspaper showing the more human aspect of a system which in retrospect seems so unfeeling: “At the workhouse the inmates, numbering 114 were regaled with ham and eggs and hot cakes for breakfast, together with a distribution of tobacco, tea, sugar, sweets etc” and “in the afternoon all the inmates who were able, were allowed to visit the Recreation Ground and on their return had tea, the edibles consisting of sweets, plum cakes, cheesecakes, tarts etc.”

From the beginning George V's reign was punctuated by problems on the national scene: industrial unrest, women's suffrage and Irish Home Rule to name but three and from 1914 by the monumental trauma of the First World War and its aftermath. Despite this and his modest but shrewd character the King had become by his silver jubilee in 1935 a much respected head of state worthy in the public mind of celebration. His reputation as a diligent monarch who helped to give stability and uphold family values during the inter war years was given a boost in 1932 when, aided by Rudyard Kipling, he started the practice of Royal Christmas Radio Broadcasts.

On this occasion Middleton's efforts were not overlooked and the Drifffield Times of the 11 May contains the following report:-

“Middleton celebrated the Jubilee in royal fashion. There was a children's parade from the school to the church, where a service was conducted by the rector. The lesson was read by the Rev. R. A. Loten, Drifffield. A collection was devoted to the Prince of Wales Fund. A feature of the day was the distribution of tea, tobacco and cigarettes to the old folk. Sports were held in the afternoon and there was maypole dancing. Tea was enjoyed by children in the C.E. school. Mugs were presented by the Rev. E. J. Wilson and Jubilee Cups were provided by Mrs Noble. About 150 children were recipients. Cheers were given for Mrs Clements who presented each child with a bag of toffee. Winners of the children's prizes at the sports were:

GIRLS:

V. Stephens

J. Dunn

B. Lazenby

J. Pickering

P. Horne

K. Welbourne	J. Noble	V. Oxtoby	L. Dove	G. Thompson
A. Burnett	V. Ellis	D. Soanes	J. Dooks	H. Lill
E. Oxtoby	A. Gee	J. Eastwood	B. Bentley	J. Ellis
G. Shipley				

BOYS

R. Foley	J. Swallow	E. Duggleby	W. Stuart	A. Linford
R. Atkinson	G. Wray	D. Thompson	B. Peacock	H. Lazenby
A. Dove	V. Dooks	D. Horne	H. Lill	R. Wray
R. Potter	D. Sims.			

OFFICIALS: STARTS: Messrs. W. Dooks and H. Towse

STEWARDS: The Rev. E. J. Wilson, Dr. E. Clements, Mr. C. E. Mann, Mr. W. Abbot, Mr. W. Eastwood, Mr. J. W. Noble, Mr. L. Powell and Mr. D. B. Soanes.

Jack Bentley remembers at the sports there was a mile race i.e.4 times round the football field which was then situated near the old laundry house in South Street. Frank Soanes who was in the lead was overtaken at the last minute by Johnny Kirby and the cycle race was won by Eddy Heed.

George V died the following year and was succeeded by his eldest son Edward the Prince of Wales who was regarded in his early days as a veritable “Prince Charming” with charisma and international popular appeal. Later however those in authority were concerned by his lack of commitment for his future role and this came to a head with his stubborn refusal to abandon his marital preference which led ultimately to the abdication and the seamless accession of his reluctant brother Bertie as George VI destined to reign with the help of his redoubtable wife Queen Elizabeth through the turbulent war years.

The coronation, the first to be broadcast by radio, was carefully organised and lavish. Bertie had stood in during rehearsals for his brother’s coronation ceremony as Edward was too busy to get involved so with the change of succession the proceedings were not too arduous for him.

In a diary entry for the 3rd May 1937 Tom Soanes, in Middleton recorded “Coronation meeting” and on the 12th “Wet coronation day had tea in Village hall. Football at night.”

The Driffield Times reported “Brave show in dismal weather “ and with regard to Middleton:-

“A united service, held in the Parish Church which was well attended, was the prologue of a day of merriment in the village. There was a public tea in the Village Hall and the day’s festivities were concluded by a dance in the Village Hall. To commemorate the event the children were presented with silver spoons”.

In the north the 1930s were a time of financial hardship, unemployment and agricultural depression so it is interesting to read a letter to the Driffield Times at the beginning of coronation year about the dreaded Poor Law from “an inmate of the Public Assistance Union” recording the kindness shown by “the master, matron and staff during the Christmas period. His object in writing was “to let the people of this part of Yorkshire know that we had a fine time during Christmas”. With the introduction of Old Age Pensions on the 1st January 1909 and subsequent amendments the stage was set for a complete change in welfare provisions following the Second World War.