

# The Ball Family of Steeple Ashton

*My ancestors and the reason for my interest in Steeple Aston by Jo Clinton*

There is much evidence which proves that members of the Ball family lived in Steeple Ashton for over 160 years, from 1689, possibly earlier until at least 1850. (William Ball was a signatory on the will of Thomas Attwood dated 1869)

William Ball was my 7<sup>th</sup> great grand father. He died in Steeple Ashton in 1712 and is buried in the churchyard. His wife Mary née George and their three children, Elinor, Elizabeth and Thomas survived him.

Thomas married Sarah, (surname unknown) and they had two children Elinor and George, who was born in 1720.

George also married a Sarah. They had three children; Sarah born in 1748, Thomas born in 1750 and George born in 1752. In 1754 when George was 34 years old his wife Sarah died, two years later tragedy struck again when his youngest son, 4 year George also died.



*This house, now called the Lodge is situated in the centre of the village opposite the green on which stands the blind house or Village lock-up dating from 1773. The deeds of the house give further information about the Ball family*

The deeds reveal that the house was leased to Katherine Gilbert, widow, in 1717 by Copyhold tenure. This was a system whereby leased property was held by three lives (names). It involved paying a large fee when a new name was added, in the case of one of the lives dying but only a nominal annual rent. Copyhold tenures were formerly abolished in 1924.

Katherine Gilbert's daughter Mary married the widower George Ball in 1757 and took over the tenancy of the house. There is a marriage settlement document between George Ball and Katherine Gilbert dated 7th April 1757. (The original document is held in the archives at Trowbridge). During this period it was quite common for wealthier families to deal with the transfer of property through legal marriage settlements.

There were no children from this union.

A local census of 1770 records Mr Ball, wife, son Thos, daughter Sarah and servant maid.

In 1773 the village lock-up was erected on the green outside their house which must have caused great excitement mixed with apprehension.

Five years later in 1778, George Ball, aged 58 wrote his will. It starts;

"I, George Ball of Steeple Ashton in the county of Wiltshire, Yeoman, being weak in Body and of Sound Mind, Memory and Understanding. Do make publish and declare this my last Will and Testament in manner and form

following that is to say first I give and bequeath unto Mary my wife the use or interest on one hundred pounds or, five pounds a year during her life... (The rest of his estate including quite a bit of land held by copyhold tenure he left to his son and daughter, Thomas and Sarah).

The term yeoman has no legal precision, but was used informally to distinguish a farmer who was more prosperous than the average husbandman. George Ball's will proves this to be the case; he had acquired a lot of land in Steeple Ashton by copyhold which he bequeathed to his two children.

George died shortly after making his will. He is buried in Steeple Ashton.

His son Thomas married Hester. They had three children; Mary born in 1778, George born in 1780 and Eleanor born 1786.

Mary the eldest daughter married her cousin John Adams, a bookseller from Bristol. His occupation in Steeple Ashton is recorded as farmer.

The list of Residents employed in agriculture dated 1826 reveals John held much land in Steeple Ashton which was worked by various families as well as employing 2 carters and 2 women labourers.

The Royal Cornwall Gazette, Jan 21 1826 records;

A 2 year old sow, lately fatted by Mr ADAMS of Steeple Ashton, measured from the top of his nose to the extremity of the tail 8 feet, the bladder distended 3 feet in circumference and it's weight was 30 score and 14 lbs.

John became actively involved in the village and was a church warden for many years. He and Mary raised their seven children in the house on the Green which had been renamed 'Jefferies' in 1832.

John Adams died in 1831 aged 58, his wife Mary died in 1843 aged 65 both were laid to rest in the churchyard.

Their youngest son George, my great great grand father qualified as a medical practitioner and practiced for many years in Nailsea, Somerset.

Mary's brother George Ball married Elizabeth. They had 2 children; Hester born in 1804 and Elizabeth in 1805.

The list of Residents employed in agriculture dated 1826 reveals George also held much land in Steeple Ashton which was worked by various families as well as employing 2 labourers.

In Jan 1832 when he was 52 his wife Elizabeth died.

In 1833 he put an advertisement in the Devizes and Wilts Gazette;

Phaeton For Sale

To be Sold, a neat light one-horse Phaeton, in excellent condition, with seat behind to hold two persons, removable at pleasure, and patent axles - For price and particulars, apply to Mr. Ball, Steeple Ashton, where the Phaeton may also be seen.

The following year it was reported in The Winchester chronicle:

Committed to the House of Correction, Devizes. James WICKS and Wm WILKINS, for four months each for stealing a quantity of potatoes the property of George BALL, of Steeple Ashton.

George died in 1845 aged 65 and was also buried in the churchyard in Steeple Ashton

I would appreciate any further information about the Ball family.

*Jo Clinton*