

The history of Grandfathers is bound up with that of the Steele family who became devout and influential members of the Baptist community and whose family lived in the house for possibly over 300 years until it was sold to the present owners in 1970.

One of the first records of the Steeles is the will of William Steele (I) dated 1663 who was active in the Civil War and a supporter of the early Baptists of the area. He is the presumed builder of Grandfathers in ca. 1650-1660. He describes himself as a carpenter. The next will is that of his son William Steele (II) who died in 1680, having been Church Warden of the Parish Church in 1667. Both wills are accompanied by inventories which list the Hall, Boterye, Malthouse, loft over the Hall, Malt loft, Scillian, Barn, the Backside, simple furniture, timber etc. From William Steele II's inventory it is pretty certain that he was living in the same house that his father had; in addition there was considerably more wood in 'the Yards' and hay, hulls, oates, malt, barley, bacon and cheese. Instead of his father's "one Hog" he has "one horse, two beasts, two piggs, one and thirty sheepe". He was also a carpenter and there is evidence of his building houses. The house then passed to William Steele II's son Thomas, brother of Henry Steele the Pastor. Thomas Steele died in 1708 leaving it to his son William Steele III. With each successive will the extent and value of the property increases and by the time of William Steele III's succession the family fortunes were firmly launched on the three hulled foundation of farmer, house carpenter (builder) and timber merchant.

William Steele III (1684-1769) became a celebrated Baptist preacher and became co-Pastor of the Broughton Baptist Church with his uncle Henry, with whom he also built up the very successful timber business. This William had two children, William and Anne (the famous hymn-writer and poet) by his first wife, and a daughter Mary by his second wife. Much of our knowledge of the house and the life of the family comes from a diary kept by William's second wife Anne Cator in the 1730s and 1750s and from letters she and her husband wrote to each other. They had a maidservant in the house, men in the timber yard and by this time, quite a lot of land. Talk is of the harvest, endless visitors staying, many of whom were connected with the Baptist Church, journeys to visit relations and other Baptist communities, and of various illnesses and accidents suffered by members of the family, servants and neighbours. A cousin John Kent lived with them for some time who assisted with the timber business. William Steele undertook long journeys in connection with buying timber, farming or on visits to other Baptist communities to preach. His farming was carried on in Broughton, neighbouring parishes and at Sedgehill. In 1732 we learn that "we are now building the back part of our house". In 1751 a letter from Anne Steele (the hymn-writer) says "This week we had noisy company to alter the Garrets which is at last done and I hope we shall now have dry weather within doors". In 1752 Mrs. Steele says that on 10 August "our house being in some hurry thro' the workmen to alter the fireplaces" and next day "my time was much taken up with the workmen and alterations".

William III died in 1769. He and his uncle Henry had between them cherished and guided the Baptist Church in Broughton and elsewhere for 80 years. In his will he leaves "the Messuage and Tenement in which I now live...together with the Garden Orchard and Close joining with the Buildings thereon and the appurtenances together with a Tenement and garden...joining to my garden, to by daughter Anne Steele". To Anne he also leaves a small adjoining leasehold, asks his son to allow her to "hold and enjoy", during her life, a copyhold estate, leaves her "all my Right in a leasehold estate called Pewseys", all of which are in Broughton; in addition £1,000 absolutely and £400 during her life, "all my Books and Household Goods as did belong to her Mother", and the rest of his books and household goods during her lifetime. To his son William he leaves a freehold estate at Sedgehill, the remaining freeholds he owns in Broughton, and "all the Rest and Residue of my Goods and Chattells and personal Estate".

Anne Steele the hymn-writer (1717-1778) went to live with her brother William Steele IV after her father's death, at the Pigeon House (later known as Broughton

House) until her death in 1778. She was very attached to her niece Polly (William IV's daughter Mary) and there exists interesting letters both to and from William and his daughter of her last years. On her death the house passed to her step-sister Mary Wakeford (Molly) and from her on to her son William Steele Wakeford.

In William Steele IV's will dated 1785 he mentions "the dwelling house and premisses late my fathers which I purchased of my nephew William Steele Wakeford situate in Broughton ..." and "a Tenement adjoining situate in the said Manor of Roak which I purchased of my Nephew William Steele Wakeford and likewise the stable and premisses adjoining held by Lease of Lives under Sir Henry Mill Baronet and the Reverend Charles Mill Clerk". William mentions a good deal more property in Broughton and at Sedgemoor and at Hallstock, Dorset. He left Grandfathers to his widow Martha from whom it passed to their daughter Anne Tomkins. Anne Tomkins died in 1859, the house going to her daughter Mary Steele Bompas and Broughton House to her son William Steele Tomkins. From Mary Steele Bompas it passed to her son Henry Mason Bompas, K.C. who made some alterations to it and planned to retire there. However, he died in London before he could do so and it was inherited by his son Cecil Bompas (1868-1956) who only lived in it from 1940 to his death in 1956. During much of this period it was leased to a variety of people. After Cecil Bompas' death it was lived in by his widow Nita until her death in 1969. Her son Michael Bompas then sold it in 1970 to the present owners. By this time all that was left of the estate was the house, garden and a small paddock. The adjoining parcels of land were sold off comparatively recently and included Ruth's Cottage (named after one of Judge Bompas' daughters) which replaced two thatched cottages, the property known now as Brook Cottage and the cottage on the East side known as Butlers. The other properties belonging to the family presumably passed out of their hands some time before.

The name "Grandfathers" is said to have come into use at the time of Anne Steele's marriage to Joseph Tomkins, when they referred to William Steele III's house as such (even though of course he would have died by this time).

The house has survived very little altered from its earliest days. Apart from alterations mentioned in Anne Steele's Diary, little appears to have been changed until the Victorian period when bay windows were added to both front rooms and alterations at the back were made to provide more small rooms below and above, all with small Victorian fireplaces. It is said that the tall chimney at the west side of the house was to provide a fireplace in Anne Steele the hymn-writer's bedroom and that later Judge Bompas built the arch over the landing and the removable balustrade to match the existing one up the staircase. Water was drawn from a well under the scullery floor. The tile-hanging at the back and on either side is of comparatively recent date - earlier pictures of the house show timber and brickwork on the sides. There was oak panelling in two rooms which was no doubt put there to mask the damp which clearly had always been a problem since Anne Steele the hymn-writer writes in a letter home of 1751 "I desire you to take out my best gowns in a fine day and spread them on the Bed with ye windo open lest they should be mildew'd as my shade was and to tell Betty to set the Drawers a little off the wall...". Twentieth Century central heating has ruined some of the oak panelling but the house is a little drier!

Much of the above information and extracts from Anne Steele's Diary and letters were provided by Mr. Hugh Steele-Smith in whose possession they are. He has produced a most detailed study of the Steele family.

Written for O.B.E. by Mrs. Dorothea Fitzgibbon of Grandfathers,
May 1988.

Robert _____

✓ 18/3/88 1436

I can add anecdotes or amusing poems or more entries from letters or A.S.'s Diary if you think this too dry. I must have misunderstood you as I thought you wanted only one side of paper!

Johnna _____

The following extracts are from poems collected in a MS book, probably written by Anne or her sister Mary in the 1730s and 40s.

A Candle is lighted and chearful we sit
Close round a good fire of odiferous Peat
Its fragrance inhaling delightful perfume
Which sweetens our garments and fills all the Room

.....
And sometimes a Neighbour may chance to come in
A Farmer or so to enliven the Scene
Then making of Matches improving of Farms
And different Opinions the Conference warms

.....
Another poem describes how tragic it is for the race of Spiders when Mary leaves and a more conscientious maid (?) takes her place:

How will the wretched race of Spiders moan
When Mary their protecting friend is gone
When her successor arm'd with dreadful broom
And cruel eye and murdering hand shall come

.....
How happy we in gentle Mary's time
Who never thought our buildings were a crime
But unmolested suffered us to dwell
Each Spider then in peace possessed his Cell

.....
She ne'er attacked nor viewed with threatening eye
Bed, Cornice, Ceiling, they were all our own
We built and proper's ev'n where Sunbeams shone
But now, alas, the gentle Mary's gone.

? PROPER'S.

I may say those Spider's descendants
have a harder time here now!