

THE QUEEN VISITS
HAGLEY

1957

THE VISIT OF HER MAJESTY
QUEEN ELIZABETH II
and
PRINCE PHILIP
to
HAGLEY. 23rd April 1957

Compiled by Don Freeth in June 2002, based on a paper read by Mrs.D Nock to the Hagley Historical and Field Society 26th October 1965.

Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip came to Hagley on St.George's day, Tuesday April 23rd 1957. We speak of it as "The Queens Visit to Hagley". It was in fact, the starting point of a Royal Tour of the West Midlands, which included Halesowen, Stourbridge and Kidderminster.

The Warwickshire and Worcestershire Magazine for May 1957 dismisses Hagley in a sentence, thus:- "The Royal visitors arrived by train at Hagley, where they were received by the Lord Lieutenant for Worcestershire (Admiral Sir William Tennant), the High Sheriff, Lt-Col C.W. Dudley Smith, and the Chairman of Bromsgrove and District Council, Mr L.J. Boffey". The magazine has, however, two very good photographs-one of the Queen and the Prince leaving the station, and one of the presentations.

When the visit to the Midlands was first planned, it was uncertain from what point the tour should start. It was, I think, in February 1957 that we knew the Royal party was coming to Hagley station. I remember walking over the bridge, the old road bridge, for it was before the road was widened, or the Roman Catholic School was built- and saying "Good gracious! They're painting the Station". It was, believe me, quite an event. They even took up the rough bricks on the platform and put smooth paving stone where the Royal Train would stop. I imagine they are still there, though I haven't been to look lately. We felt the Queen was causing quite a revolution. The County Express for April 27th has a detailed account of the transformed station on the great day. It reads, "The station normally a cheerless place, as indeed most country stations are, was transformed into a gay and colourful scene. The traditional red carpet covered the arrival platform and surrounding it and over the bridge was a profusion of floral decorations interspersed with the Royal Cipher and the Royal Coat of Arms. The floral decorations were the work of Blakedown nurseries, supervised b Mr J.R.Bent, and very attractive it looked. In all there were 1500 pot plants, including Hydrangeas, Cinerarias, Pelargoniums!..... This all helped to make an attractive background to the large lettered sign Welcome to Hagley".

Work on the decorations commenced at 9.30a.m. on Sunday and continued until 7p.m. Another two hours work was put in early on Tuesday morning.

As she left the station the Queen congratulated the Stationmaster on the lovely flowers.

All this loveliness of careful decoration was enhanced by the weather. A paragraph in the Birmingham Post on April 24th was headed Weather Fit For a Queen". It tells us that "with almost the precision of a curtain rising on a theatrical first night the sun broke through the morning cloud as the Queen and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, stepped from the train at Hagley Station. Thereafter the royal procession was bathed in a brilliant sun which reflected the warmth of the welcome from thousands who lined the route".

There is a detailed account of the arrival in the Express and Star for April 23rd and a shorter one in County Express painting a picture of the scene before the Queen arrived. It includes the description of the floral decorations, which I have already read and continues, "Reporters and photographers took up their positions, local councillors and their ladies were ushered to their allotted places and, as if to lend colour to the scene the royal train drawn by two gleaming engines, Sir James Milne and Thornbury Castle, steamed slowly into the station in a blaze of sunshine A few seconds before the train drew to a halt, Her Majesty was seen to be reading a newspaper".

The Express and Star tells us that "Almost every house, shop and other building in the picturesque village of Hagley was a mass of flags and bunting". In the centre of the paper the story continues. "As they stepped from the royal train at Hagley, after their overnight journey from Windsor, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh were met by the Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire, Admiral Sir William Tennant - and their first round of cheers.

Sir William then presented the Queen to Lady Tennant, High Sheriff of the County Lt-Col C.W. Dudley-Smith, Chairman of Bromsgrove District Council Mr L. J. Boffey, Clerk of the Council Mr Walter E. Dudley and Mrs Dudley; Viscount Cobham and Viscountess Cobham; and Mrs Lloyd Williams. The Queen spoke briefly to each person presented, but paused for a few moments with Lord and Lady Cobham. When the Duke reached Lord Cobham they chatted animatedly together while the Queen was reaching the end of the line, and the before the Royal car arrived.

Kidderminster crossed its fingers and hoped, because it was too late to do anything else.

The carpet came from British Railways Stores at Paddington and is used regularly for ceremonial occasions. "We take it from place to place when it is needed," an official explained. We have had it for at least fifty years".

Hagley had just one further link with the Royal Tour. The County Express for April 24th tells us "Members of the Hagley Over-Sixty Club, thanks to the excellent arrangements made by the officials of The Stourbridge Council, had an excellent view of the Queen and Prince Philip as they drove around Mary Stevens Park".

For myself I was very lucky. About a fortnight before the visit my husband and I heard that four members of the Hagley Parish Council, with their wives, were to be allowed on the arrival platform. Naturally the Chairman and Vice-Chairman were chosen to be there, and after that the privilege was offered to the Chairman of the committee who had served the longest on the Council. This brought my husband in and so me as well. The fourth couple were Mr. & Mrs. Nash of Kidderminster Road.

At the time I wrote down a very short account of what I saw, and here briefly, are my impressions of that great day. We reached the station at about 9.15 and took our place behind the barrier on the down platform. Even the waiting was enjoyable. There was plenty to watch. The station had been cleaned and many repairs done. There was a red carpet on the platform and red carpets on the footbridge. Drapings and flowers were everywhere. There was a blue backcloth to the arrival platform and on it in yellow letters was "Welcome to Hagley". We saw the great ones arrive. Viscount Cobham stood laughing and talking in the station entrance and Viscountess Cobham looked very lovely in blue.

As the Royal train steamed into the station (two minutes early) the sun came out, and stayed out for the whole two days. Very importantly and slowly that shining train steamed in. The Queen was sitting in a chair in the lounge coach, reading a newspaper. Then the train stopped - and I saw the Queen get out and the Lord Lieutenant stepped forward to greet her.

The line of waiting people were presented to her, with Prince Philip following her. He stayed to talk to Viscount Cobham, and with a smile and a gesture she beckoned him on. She reached the end of the line and stepped back and spoke to them all.

The Duke was forced to hurry to catch up with the main party before it crossed the station bridge.

Two British Railway officials, Mr H. E. Mallett, divisional operating superintendent Western Region, and Mr H. L. Birch Station Master at Hagley, were then presented.

Watching the presentations from a special enclosure on the platform were members of the Bromsgrove Rural District Council and Hagley Parish Council including the Chairman, Mr AH. Hingley and Mrs Hingley, the Vice - Chairman Mr R. P. Matkin, and Mrs Matkin.

After the presentations the Queen and the Duke walked to their car waiting in Station Drive. Sir William Tennant accompanied the Queen and Lady Tennant was with the Duke. Behind them walked members of the reception party.

As the royal car drove away on the first part of the tour, fifty people in an enclosure erected in the drive by British Railways had a never-to-be forgotten view of the visitors. The car, followed by others in the official procession, swung out of the drive into Station Road. Then it drove slowly up Park Road, past a crowd of several hundred schoolchildren. Sifting on the raised grass verge they had a first class view of the royal couple.

As a centre piece and as a reminder that this was rural England, children from Hagley Primary School were manning a red, white and blue maypole.

Once clear of Hagley, the procession increased speed through the green belt of Worcestershire countryside between the Hagley and the Halesowen boundaries. The cars slowed down as they reached the boundary at Hayley Green. At Hayley Green Hospital as many patients as possible had been brought out to see the royal visitors.

As soon as the Queen and her husband had left the vicinity of Hagley Station, the work of dismantling began. If I remember rightly, the floral decorations

were sold. To my amusement, the carpet from the platform was rolled up and taken to Kidderminster, where it would be needed in the afternoon. On looking through the Birmingham Post for April 24th I found a paragraph in the Midland diary headed

“Travelling Carpet”. It reads “After the Queen left Kidderminster yesterday it was hoped that one thing had not been noticed. It was the carpet that she walked along from the station entrance to the departure platform and it was not the sort of carpet that Kidderminster would have liked her to see. In fact it might not have been made there. Workmen unrolled it and finished brushing it only a few minutes before she turned and walked up the steps and over the bridge.”

The cheers of the waiting people met her. I caught another glimpse of her through the train window and then she was gone. She was wearing a skirt and jacket in a lovely shade of blue, with a blouse and hat which matched exactly. Her handbag, gloves and shoes were black.”

At six o'clock that evening my husband and I sat down to listen to the news on sound radio. We were delighted to hear from the news that ... “in Hagley every building was lavishly decorated, while the eye witness report called us the smart suburban village of Hagley.”

As I gave my love to Hagley when it was just a little country village I cannot express much enthusiasm for the adjective “suburban”, but it is , at any rate, a comfort to know that we were considered “smart” on that outstanding day eight years ago.

Acknowledgment is due to Mr. D. Ferguson, Worcester Road, Hagley, for permission to reproduce the photographs shown.



















