

LOVELY JUBILEE!

This month sees us celebrating an historic occasion – the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. Last month's DPN recalled the way Dorney marked her jubilees in 1977 and 2012, and this June will surely create similar wonderful memories. To reign for 70 years is of course extremely rare, and the Queen will be the first British monarch to reach this milestone. But Dorney also celebrated the Golden and Diamond Jubilees of her great-great-grandmother.



Queen Victoria came to the throne on 20 June 1837, when she was 18 years old. Preparations for a week of events commemorating the 50th anniversary of her accession in the Windsor area were well underway early in 1887, and Dorney's vicar, the Reverend J Archer, was on the organising committee. A key feature was the installation of the statue of the queen outside Windsor Castle, which has since become such a familiar landmark. Dorney was one of the local parishes whose residents contributed to the costs of the statue and jubilee festivities.



The Queen travelled by train from Windsor to London on 20 June for two days of celebrations, including processions through the streets of the capital, a royal banquet at Buckingham Palace, and of course the balcony appearance in front of huge crowds. Meanwhile, in Windsor there was a week-long programme of activities. Bands played, horse troops demonstrated their skills and an open-air concert was held. Sports featured heavily - cricket, football, polo, tennis and athletics, and a regatta and water sports on the river. In the evenings there were fireworks, torch lit processions, bonfires and an ox roast. Windsor bridge and the streets of Eton and Windsor were heavily decorated and illuminated at night, with electric light from the Round Tower a notable novelty.

The Queen returned on 22 June and a grand procession took her from a formal reception at Slough railway station through Eton, where the College boys lined the road cheering, and into Windsor for the ceremonial unveiling of the statue. Among the representatives of parochial committees presented there to the Queen was Dr Waters from Dorney. The following day, seventy children from Dorney School were among over 6,000 school children aged 6 and over who were entertained to dinner and tea in the Home Park, where Punch and Judy shows, swings, see-saws and games kept them amused and the Queen came out in her carriage to greet them. Younger children and the "aged poor" in contributing parishes were provided with similar refreshments at home. The weather remained fine and sunny throughout the Jubilee week – the "Queen's weather", according to the Windsor and Eton Express.

Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee was celebrated in similar but even more extensive style, festivities in Windsor and the surrounding area lasting from 19 to 30 June 1897. There was again a festival for local children in Home Park, 5,000 of them, attended by 51 from Dorney, with refreshments, entertainment and sports. The highlight of this event was the presentation to each child of a commemorative Jubilee medal, a gift from the Queen who paid a visit during the afternoon in her carriage, lifting her veil so that the youngsters could see her face. The newspaper recorded that *"the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee will be a lasting memory for all who were fortunate enough to participate in it, and even the very youngest upon whom the Queen smiled so benignantly in the Home Park last Friday will not be allowed to forget such a red-letter day in the history of their young lives"*. I wonder if any of the older Dorney families still has one of the medals?

This time we know there were also celebratory events in Dorney itself. The school was visited by the 94 year-old Dowager Lady Palmer, grandmother of Charles Henry Dayrell Palmer who was Lord of the Manor at that time. Jubilee medals – presumably the same as referred to above – and a handkerchief were presented to each child, the girls also receiving an embroidered pinafore and the boys a cap. There was singing, accompanied by a zither, and the dowager spoke to each child before they sat down to tea. The occasion was also used to make a farewell presentation to the teachers, sisters Jane and Annie Trotter, who were leaving the school after five years (although they returned less than a year later).

A week later, Charles Palmer gave a Jubilee dinner for 120 villagers in the coach house at Dorney Court. Catering was by the village grocers, Messrs Grove and Hart. The Dowager Lady Palmer attended and spoke to several of the oldest inhabitants. After toasts had been drunk and speeches made, a concert was given by both children and adults. Similar celebrations took place in surrounding villages, but the Maidenhead Advertiser published a (tongue-in-cheek?) letter on behalf of residents of Marsh Lane complaining that they had not been invited to any Jubilee events and felt they were in No Man's Land. The writer commented that the smell from the dinner given in Dorney had been lovely and nearly broke their hearts.

Meals with neighbours, fireworks, decorated streets, concerts – there are many echoes of the Victorian celebrations in the way we mark royal jubilees in our own time. Like our own Queen today, in later life Victoria's mobility was constrained. She had to use a wheelchair to watch the fireworks in the garden at Buckingham Palace in 1887, and ten years later sat in her open carriage for a service of thanksgiving outside St Paul's Cathedral. But the enthusiasm of her subjects saw great throngs of people turn out to snatch a glimpse of her as she passed and to celebrate her long reign – just as we still do today.

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