

Royal Occasions

The earliest photograph I know of a royal event celebrated in Dedham shows the High Street decked with Union Jack flags in honour of **Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee on 22 June 1897**. Dedham must also have celebrated the **Coronation of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra on 9 August 1902** but so far I have found no details or pictures. If anyone can help, I should be delighted to hear.

Records of the various subsequent occasions celebrated in Dedham are uneven but are particularly vivid during the period from 1906 to 1950 when the Rev. F. G. Given-Wilson was Vicar; his detailed accounts of people, events and activities in the village appeared each month in the Parish Magazine. The first royal celebrations he described were those for the **Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary on 22 June 1911**. The day was cloudy, he said, and there was a blustery wind but the rain held off. The High Street that morning had a gay appearance and he wondered where all the decorations had come from. Everyone seemed to have some bunting stowed away and *"the display of flags and streamers gave a touch of bright colour which was so lacking in the sky."* After the short morning service in the packed Church with hearty singing of the three hymns, there was a procession which included the Dedham Territorials, Boy Scouts, Members of the Friendly Societies in their Regalia and then the schoolchildren. Starting from the Boys'

Elementary School in Crown Street it made its way to Upper Park, at the invitation of Mr John Felgate, for a full programme of Sports lasting until late in the evening. Refreshments were provided for everyone, first the children and then the grown-ups. It would be too lengthy here to list the names of everyone involved but the entire population participated in the organisation and enjoyment of a splendid day. The proceedings concluded with a lengthy prize-giving at the end of the Sports, then Mr Deason's spectacular firework display launched with a rocket from the tower at Highlands (now Coles Oak House) at nine o'clock and finally the blaze from a magnificent bonfire lit by the Scouts at ten. By then it was too late to distribute the medals and mugs provided by Mr and Miss Hewitt as mementos for the children; so those were handed out at school on the following Monday.

By the time of the **Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on 12 May 1937** radio was available and in the morning parishioners were able to listen to the two-hour broadcast of the Coronation ceremony in London, on their own or their friends' wireless sets, before attending a United Service of Prayer and Thanksgiving in the Church at 2.30pm. In the afternoon there was a *"gents versus ladies"* cricket match followed by a Carnival on the Duchy Field at 6.30pm. This included a competition for decorated vehicles in four classes - cars, motor cycles,



The High Street decked with Union Jack flags to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee on 22 June 1897.



Baker Ted Eley's photograph of Queen Mary's visit to Dedham on 15 June 1938.

bicycles and prams - using crepe paper in various colours on sale in the village. A small entrance fee was charged to help pay for the prizes. The day was rounded off with a "Coronation Dance" in the Hewitt Hall (now the Assembly Rooms) from 8 pm to midnight. Two days later all the children in the parish were taken in motor-coaches to Colchester to see the film of the Coronation at the Regal Cinema.

It was a fine summer's day for **Queen Mary's Visit on 15th June 1938.**

The Queen, widow of King George V (who had died in 1935) was staying at Thorpe Hall, Thorpe-le-Soken as the guest of Viscountess Byng, whose late husband had been Governor of Canada from 1928 to 1931. The Royal Party visited East Bergholt and Flatford before coming to Dedham at five o'clock in the afternoon on their way home. In the Parish Magazine for July 1938 the Vicar described the careful preparations which were made for the occasion. The police in the High Street were in charge of controlling the large crowd that came from around the neighbourhood to welcome the Queen. The churchyard was reserved for parishioners; three hundred tickets were issued and room was found for everyone. Schoolchildren lined the path from the High Street to the church porch and the Dedham Red Cross and St John's Ambulance were on duty in case of accidents. The front position overlooking the churchyard wall was reserved for the children, so that they could get a good view.

The Queen was shown the Grammar School's Charter and some ancient skeins of wool, relics of Dedham's cloth industry. In the church she signed the Visitors Book, admired the vaulting under the tower, and was interested in the Kempe stained glass windows in the chancel (comparing them with those at Sandringham) and the recently installed choir vestry screen. Her circuit of the churchyard was designed to give everyone a good opportunity of seeing her and to pass by the War Memorial with its "tasteful decoration of flowers". *"The flag flew out from the tower to the light and pleasant breeze, and the bells were chimed as the Royal Party left the church."* When Queen Mary was driven away up Crown Street the visitors' cars slowed down, so that the old folk in the almshouses and the occupants of the council houses could see her too.

After warm sunshine in May 1953 there was a complete change in the weather and the **Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2nd June 1953**

coincided with pouring rain. In the July Parish Magazine the Vicar, the Rev A.R.Johnson reported that *"the parish had spent weeks in preparation for the great day and, despite the very bad weather, most of the day's programme was completed, but not according to plan!"* A pageant to celebrate the occasion was performed by the children at the Primary School, organised by headmistress Miss Hooker and her staff with the co-operation of the parents who helped with making the costumes.

Some families had television by that time and invited friends and neighbours to watch the Coronation ceremony with them. I do not remember the other activities which took place in the village because my sister Becky (now Curtis) and I went with our parents to join the crowds of spectators in London. Driving up in the early hours, we secured places on the pavement in Pall Mall to watch the splendid procession pass by. We had a very long, damp but cheerful wait. People put newspapers over their heads to ward off the wet and kept up their spirits by singing "*It ain't going to rain no more*" and WWI songs such as "*Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag*" and "*It's a long way to Tipperary*". The Queen, when she finally arrived, looked magnificent and the entire spectacle was heart-lifting. Queen Salote of Tonga endeared herself to everyone as she rode in an open carriage, ignoring the rain and beaming with infectious enjoyment.

We returned home in the late afternoon in time to watch an inter-village tug-of-war across the river downstream from the bridge. Stratford St Mary's team was tipped to win and as soon as it became clear to the Dedham participants that they were losing the contest, they just let go of the rope to avoid being pulled into the water! Later that evening fireworks were planned on the playing field and I believe they went ahead in spite of the unrelenting weather but we were exhausted after such an early start and fell into bed.

The commemoration of the **Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, 7th June 1977** began with a special service held in the Church on Sunday 5th June at 11 o'clock and public celebrations continued until Tuesday 7th, which was a special Bank Holiday. These included a procession of decorated floats which made its way along the High Street, ending on the playing field with games, entertainments and refreshments. The anniversary was recorded by the presentation of a Silver Jubilee Commemoration Pew in the Lady Chapel paid for by public subscription.

The **Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II on 1-4 June 2002** was an extra special celebration in the village thanks to the many parishioners who were involved in all the planning, fundraising and organising involved. The Church was beautifully decorated with flowers for the Civic Service held on Sunday 2nd June. Many residents contributed to a delightful exhibition of Coronation Souvenirs on show all weekend at the Assembly Rooms, especially Betty Gladwin (1928-2011) whose house in Littlegarth Cottages, Princel Lane was crammed with her amazing lifetime collection of Royal memorabilia. Also on view was project work by the Primary School children. Events arranged for the Bank Holiday Monday, all well recorded by photography, included a cricket match, a Parade and a Great Children's Tea Party in a marquee on the playing field where a band was playing.



Ironmonger Eddie Ray's photograph of his Wolsey car featuring "Bergers Paints on Land and Sea" taking part in the Pageant celebrating George VI's Coronation in 1937. His note on the back says that the vehicle was preceded by six period attendants and Lord Nelson featured in the rigging of the ship.



Dedham's Vicar, The Rev A.R. Johnson rehearsing some of the schoolchildren taking part in the Elizabethan Pageant to be held on the Queen's Coronation Day in 1953. In the background are schoolmaster Mr H. G. Flegg, Miss Faye Watson and headmistress Miss E. W. Hooker.



The procession on 7 June 1977 celebrating the Queen's Silver Jubilee.

Describing the successful weekend in the Parish Magazine for July 2002 the Vicar, the Rev Gerard Moate wrote of *“the food and fun on the Duchy Field culminating in a super firework display. All seemed to run like clock-work,”* he added, *“(although we know there were anxious moments) and the rain stayed away”*.

The **Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II on 3 June 2012** was marked by an all-day programme of celebrations beginning with a Civic service at 10.30am in the Church, which was specially decorated to mark the Diamond Jubilee Royal Tours of the Commonwealth. The afternoon’s

activities included a cricket match for *“Gentlemen of Dedham v Players of Dedham”* at 1.30pm and an *“American Tournament”* at the Tennis Club at 2pm. At the same time the Thames River Pageant was broadcast live on a big screen in the Assembly Rooms. The evening began at 6 o’clock with a Big Jubilee Picnic on the Duchy Field, when people brought their own food and drink but could also buy their meal from a Hog Roast, a Bar and a Pimms’ Gazebo. The day was rounded off with a *“Grand Firework Display + a Surprise”*. I never discovered what that was!

Lucy Archer



The church porch decorated for the celebration of the Queen’s Golden Jubilee weekend, 1-4 June 2002.



Processing to join the Golden Jubilee celebration on 4 June 2002.



The tent prepared for the Children's Tea Party at the Golden Jubilee celebration on 4 June 2002.