Our Queen and Patron visited Epsom College in 1955 and again in 1989. In honour of her Diamond Jubilee, we take great pleasure in sharing images and written recollections of her memorable 1955 visit.
On 13 May 1955 H.M. the Queen and H.R.H the Duke of Edinburgh visited Epsom College, arriving at 3pm and departing at 5pm. Their trip to the College included the Biology Laboratory (room 8) and the Zoological Museum. In the laboratory a class composed of members of the Medical Sixth A, under the supervision of Mr Poulton, was engaged in a variety of practical work. Some were seeking and clarifying freshwater animals collected from ponds, others were identifying wild flowers, studying different types of insects, or examining rabbit bones or the dog skeleton. Apart from standing up when the royal visitors entered, all boys carried on with their allotted occupations in as unconcerned a manner as possible under the unique circumstances, while the Queen and the Duke walked around the laboratory. Mr Poulton escorted the Queen and explained the activities in progress, while I attached myself to the Duke.

The Duke of Edinburgh asking me whether there were any dissections of large animals displayed, I apologetically explained that the instructions had been expressly given that nothing of that kind must be on view, as the reactions of non-biologists were apt to be unfavourable. The Duke’s reply was, “We are very grateful to you – thank you very much.” It appeared that the Queen and Duke had visited some institutions where less consideration had been shown, and the HRH twice expressed his gratitude at being spared such distasteful exhibits. After leaving the laboratory, the royal visitors went upstairs to the museum, where the Queen was escorted by R. A. Durrance and the Duke by A.G. Johnson.

As a memorial of this historic occasion, those present have been asked to write their own personal account and impressions of the royal visit to the Biology Department. It is hoped that these records will be cherished and read with interest by those not privileged to be present when this honour was conferred upon the College in its hundredth year. These brief notes however, can convey only a very inadequate impression of a supreme experience, the memory of which will be lifelong, for those of us who were at Epsom on that royal day.
he doors opened and there was a moment of
tension as Her Majesty entered the room.
Everybody rose to his feet and the Queen
immediately suggested that work should continue.
I explained to Her Majesty that we were
demonstrating the sort of practical biology which
was normally carried out by the Medical Sixth Forms
and I invited her to see what various boys were
doing. The Queen nodded appreciation as I pointed
out items of interest.
My impression at this stage was of slight strain as
though the Queen was being rather careful to avoid
faux pas and thus display her unfamiliarity with
biology; moreover I was labouring rather nervously
to talk normally and at the same time to introduce a
few respectful ‘Ma’am’s’. Then the Queen correctly
identified a hornet and seemed to gain confidence
and interest at recognising a familiar object.
Here Tyson demonstrated the double eyepiece and
the flash bulbs went off as Her Majesty looked down
the microscope. A mosquito was on view under
another microscope and when I remarked that such
studies were of direct use in subsequent medical
work the Queen told me how she had recently
visited the School of Tropical Medicine in Liverpool
and had been shown many such exhibits of
considerable interest.
As she turned to the door, the Queen laughed
heartily at a remark by Lord Webb-Johnson and
nodding to me with a smile took her leave.
Before this occasion one had heard accounts of
the ease and naturalness of Her Majesty on such
visits and I can only record that they were in no way
exaggerated and add my personal appreciation of the
charming way in which Her Majesty the Queen
carries out her official duties.

“One had heard accounts of the ease and naturalness of Her Majesty on such
visits and I can only record that they were in no way exaggerated.” JW POULTON
DA TYSON, Laboratory Assistant

When the Queen entered the biology laboratory I was intent on demonstrating a slide of the mosquito to Allan DF, using the ‘double eyepiece’. After Her Majesty had walked along parallel to the first bench I was not certain of her exact position until I was conscious of her passing behind me. When the Queen paused Mr Poulton encouraged her to look down the microscope. Although it was my intention to manoeuver so that Allan should answer any questions Her Majesty might ask, I found that I was in the obvious position to explain what we were doing.

It was obviously difficult to recall exact speech but as far as I can remember I explained the use of the double eyepiece in teaching and I demonstrated the ‘pointer’ while the Queen looked into the eyepiece. The flashing of cameras belonging to the official photographers at this point was, I found, a little disturbing.

The Queen seemed in no particular hurry in examining the slide, showing considerable interest in it and I had the feeling she would have liked to have heard much more. I pointed out the value of drawing specimens, indicating Allan’s practical drawing book, in fixing the knowledge permanently in the student’s memory.

My impression of Her Majesty the Queen was one of quiet friendliness. She seemed genuinely interested in what I was saying, and her calm dignity as Head of State combined with an unusual ability to be ‘one of us’ was very impressive.

“She seemed genuinely interested in what I was saying, and her calm dignity as Head of State combined with an unusual ability to be ‘one of us’ was very impressive.” DA TYSON
I had carefully set up my microscope with a mosquito slide under low power and opened a thick volume from the Bi-library at the appropriate chapter in the hope that these and an array of other slides, magnifying glasses, etc would convey an impression of studiousness and rather deeper knowledge than I had on the subject. My shaky nerves were greatly relieved by the arrival of Mr Tyson to demonstrate the slide to me and as I hoped, the Queen. By careful manoeuvring, or by the hand of Fortune, this fortunate circumstance was realised when the great moment came.

While the Queen was viewing the exhibits of the third year under the supervision of Mr Poulton, Mr Tyson was pouring into my ear words of wisdom to comfort me in such a time of trouble and thus braced, I was ready to enjoy the occasion. After thankfully a quick glance at me, the Queen proceeded to peer down my microscope at the mosquito which Mr Tyson demonstrated with admirable skill. Press photographers’ flashes then lit up our faces with blinding flashes and the Queen moved on. For the rest of the time it was plain sailing, apart from some awkward questions on mosquitoes fired at me by the Lord Mayor, which I evaded as far as possible by the briefest possible answers and my personal share of this great occasion came to an end.
As we moved slowly around discussing the various models, the Queen pointed to certain objects which were of interest to her. About Physalia, the Portuguese Man of War, she said she had seen very few, but thought they looked very beautiful in a frightening sort of way, with their sails sticking out of the water. When I remarked upon the faded colour of the coral, she agreed, saying that even in the Great Barrier Reef the colour was disappointing compared with colored pictures of them. At the mollusk cases she remarked upon the attractive representations of the original specimens, arranged in the shells.

The next few cases contained birds. I pointed out the Golden Pheasant which, I told her came from China, saying that I thought most of these exotic birds compensated for their beauty by a compelled silence.

**R DURANCE** (Fayrer 1950-55)

When the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh entered the College after being presented to the staff I saw no more of them until I watched from the upstairs window, their slow approach to the Biology Labs.

Then nothing except a few murmurs reached us from downstairs until, after a burst of cheerful laughter, the Royal Party was heard to start coming up the stairs to the Museum.

First the Queen was presented to A.G. Johnson, my co-escort, and then, as she held out her hand to me saying “How do you do”, I murmured a reply and invited her to begin the tour of the Museum…
CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF OUR QUEEN & PATRON

“I thought what a charming woman our Queen was – her ease and her ability to put others at their ease was truly delightful.” R DURANCE

On this point, however, she differed, for it evolved that she possesses two of these birds down in Sandringham, and they emit a characteristic and ugly shriek. Then she suggested that all pheasants originally came from China. I did not know but agreed with her, although she added, “At least I think so.”

The other birds were much admired, especially the ‘Cock of the Rock’, a bright orange creature which the Queen referred to as a ‘fine fellow’.

When we came to the Duck-billed Platypus, she fell to reminiscing, on the way it swims – “like an otter” she said – and about the flat bill which, she said, was soft and flexible, not at all like that of a duck or a spoonbill.

The last case in which she showed interest was that containing the College’s best butterflies. And that was all we had time for, though I could have wished for much longer. After they had gone out, I thought what a charming woman our Queen was – her ease and her ability to put others at their ease was truly delightful.

We were pleased to note that the Royal party stayed for about a quarter of an hour in the Museum – they were allocated only 5 minutes – though later on in the programme they were over 10 minutes ahead of schedule. The Civic Party followed shortly afterwards, while the Royal Party was inspecting other parts of the College.

The time for tea was drawing near, and we all congregated in the Library, where it was to be held. It was beautifully decorated with flowers arranged in silver cups and one could almost forget that there were large patches where the paint had flaked off the walls.

When the Royal couple came in, we all sat down to tea, the Queen at one table and the Duke at another, facing her. I sat at the Duke’s table, a little too far away from him to hear much of the conversation but I heard him talking about coal mines and his acting experiences at school. When eating had come to a standstill, and the Queen had touched up her face, we all went out of the library, following the Royal couple, and with the rest of the College, watched the tree planting, farewells and departure.

As the Queen entered the Biology Labs we all stood up and were at once told to resume work by Mr Poulton. The Queen passed gracefully behind me and not daring to look behind I peered intently down my microscope. A voice asked me what I was doing; I turned around – the Duke of Edinburgh was talking to me.

He seemed quite knowledgeable on the subject of freshwater pond life and was especially interested in the larvae of the caddies flies and leeches. He then passed on to the next boy and I suddenly realised I had spoken to the husband of the reigning monarch. Nothing had gone wrong – I hadn’t swallowed my words and I hadn’t stuttered! But... instead I had been perfectly at ease.

What followed was rather an anti-climax. Various distinguished ladies and gentlemen followed up the rear, but nothing of note happened. At the end, however, Lord Webb-Johnson came and asked me if I had found out the name of the water beetle I was trying to identify. I didn’t, and very informally he said to the Queen, “This chap doesn’t know what he is doing.” The Queen laughed heartily and left the room. I say informally, because it was informal and no better word can summarise the whole day.
The murmur of voices suddenly died away. The whole room became tense with excitement as the Queen entered and everyone stood up. We were then told to carry on normally, while the party walked around and looked at the various specimens. The Queen asked my next door neighbour what he had under his microscope, he told her and she looked with interest. I then turned slightly to my right and was amazed to see her peering attentively at some wild flowers beside me.

The Duke of Edinburgh followed and made his way to the far side of the lab, leaving the rest of his party. Suddenly there were several blinding flashes accompanied by the characteristic pops of flashlight bulbs, as press photographers endeavoured to take good pictures of the Queen.

The Queen after one last glance at the crowded lab, left to tour the Museum, followed by the Lord Lieutenant, the Queen’s lady in waiting and other distinguished people. The lady in waiting was particularly interested in the pond life I was studying and spent some time peering down my microscope.

The occasion will always be remembered as one of the greatest and most enjoyable of my life.

“The occasion will always be remembered as one of the greatest and most enjoyable of my life.” R INGHAM
I arrived at the biology block from the Guard of Honour about three minutes before the royal party was due to arrive, to find the place in complete chaos which subsided when the photographers had taken up their position.

I hastily caught a water flea from a jar of miscellaneous pond life which we had previously collected, and put it on a slide. I was just focusing the microscope when a slight tension in the air announced the arrival of the royal party.

As they came into the laboratory, we all stood up and after the introductions, we were told to get on with our work. Her Majesty went slowly around the benches, looking down microscopes and examining bones; all with quiet serenity that was most impressive.

Since I was on the back bench in Room 8, I was still looking for the water flea under the microscope when her majesty came along. She did not actually speak to me, but she paused for a moment and looked genuinely interested in what I was doing and this attention which she gave to all that was going on around her was what impressed me most about this memorable occasion.

It must be admitted, in conclusion, that the scholastic value of the lesson was not what it might have been, but it was a unique experience, and one which will always be remembered by all who were in the biology block that day.

“The attention which she gave to all that was going on around her was what impressed me most about this memorable occasion. G ROBB

G ROBB (H-S/Wilson 1949-55)