

In keeping with its cutting edge reputation, this publication is proud to bring you a report on something that has actually happened within the past month! Who knows - we could be on Twitter next.

During the recent Royal celebrations we had our own Royal Correspondent, Margaret Tinsley, wife of Past Captain Andrew, on station at a prime spot on The Mall. Here is her exclusive report.

Hampshire Royalists at the Royal Wedding

In 1981 Shirley Messinger and I slept one night on The Mall with our daughters, then aged 6 and 7 years, for the wedding of Prince Charles. We did the same again in 1986 for the marriage of Prince Andrew spending two nights, this time with four adults and six children and torrential rain on the first night. All good character building stuff.

So, of course, as soon as the engagement of Prince William and Catherine Middleton was announced, our preparations began. Despite their early training our children declined the invitation to join us, citing their own small children as an excuse. There was a lot to think about, not least the loos, the lack of which had caused difficulties in the past. Even my correspondence with The Duke of Norfolk, the Lord Chamberlain and the Bailiff of The Royal Parks in 1986 had failed to provide mobile loos or even to have the permanent loos open all night. So the first thing to do was write to The Bailiff of the Royal Parks. That letter was returned after a month, "moved address", so off went a copy to The Lord Chamberlain and shortly afterwards a reply was received from the Manager of St. James's Park and The Green Park. He kindly advised that there would indeed be mobile loos and they and the permanent facilities would be available on the 28th and earlier by demand. I wrote by return mail to advise that since we were ladies of a certain age, there would indeed be a demand. We were pleased to receive his assurance that our request would be granted, as indeed it was. The permanent facilities were warm and clean at all times and there were mobiles by the dozen. We would like to take some credit for this!

While we were watching BBC South Today one evening, Sally Taylor asked for viewers to let her know if they were planning celebrations on the big day. So off went an email telling her of our past escapades and plans for this Wedding. Some weeks later the BBC made contact to discuss how they could follow our story. One thing led to another and all of a sudden it was for us "last chance celebrities". By now our group had grown to four with friends Jill from Australia and Astrid from Colombia who gained full British Citizenship on 27 April, agreeing to be part of this celebration.

The excitement really began on Wednesday 27 April at 0715 when Radio Solent arrived to do a live interview on the Julian Clegg Show, followed by the arrival of BBC reporter Ben Moore at 0815. Ben was a great guy and his enthusiasm and encouragement really put us at ease when doing the interviews. He travelled with us, and it was great to meet Chris Coneybeer and Peter Henley who were also on the train. We had a large amount of baggage including comfortable loungers, sleeping bags, wet weather gear, polythene sheeting, gas jet for cooking and all the food we would need for 3 days. Somehow, with the co-operation of the taxi driver and Ben folding his 6' 5" to slide into the last available space, we all managed to fit into the one cab for the trip from Waterloo to The Mall.



Travelling light



Here we are again

Not to our surprise, we were the first on The Mall, and because of this the world Press descended like bees around a honey pot. You name it, we did it - interviews with countries such as Australia, Colombia, China, Malta, Norway, Switzerland, Hungary. In fact we gave up counting after 14 countries. It was almost 3 hours before we could complete setting up our little camp then Ben left us to spend Thursday at Bucklebury, keeping in touch by phone and text. We ate and drank well and so settled down for the night. By now there were two other groups on The Mall so we were no longer alone.

Wednesday night was cold, I managed one hours sleep and by 5 am was wondering if I was getting a bit long in the tooth for this sort of jaunt. But after tea, porridge, coffee and soup I was at last warm again and realised that was a ridiculous notion and of course I will be young enough for The Coronation camp-out

whenever that may be. The day passed so quickly. It is quite amazing that folk who are normally reserved, aloof, disinterested and/or unfriendly suddenly change and just want to stand and chat. All great fun, of course, even the questions such as “Are you here for the Royal Wedding?” and “Are you staying here all night”. The urge to respond with equally silly remarks was suppressed. And then, among all these visitors came, to our great glee, the VIPs. First Nick Marriott (son of Past Captain Peter) with a bottle of bubbly and then none other than our esteemed Storekeeper, Barry.



Welcome visitors on the Thursday

By settle down time The Mall was closed and the traffic and sirens of the previous night were replaced by the noise of the crowd which was really building up, with some folk intent on partying all night. Among those to join us were Helen and her daughter Emma (12) from Swanmore, who had seen us on TV on Wednesday evening and decided that if we could do it, so could they. A warmer night and, for me, around 3 hours sleep before a wash and brush up at 0430 then packing up camp ready for my son-in-law and Astrid’s husband to collect our baggage. At 0530 after great difficulty, with most roads closed, they found a way through.



Ladies in waiting

By 9 am the crowds were fourteen rows deep, all in party mood, cheering everyone who came down The Mall - horses, police, road sweepers, dustcarts, soldiers and guests walking to the Abbey. As always the police were remarkable, joining in the fun and with great diplomacy dealing with the one or two (not us) who had indulged in a few too many. Of course the excitement, the cheers and the flag waving built up as cars and minibuses conveyed the wedding guests to the Abbey. Then came The Princes William and Harry, The Queen and finally the beautiful bride and her proud father. The service was relayed over loudspeakers and as programmes were available for us to purchase we were able to follow the service, join in the singing and then, when they had exchanged vows, toast the happy couple with Nick’s champagne.

And then came that wonderful procession back to Buckingham Palace and we can report, hand on heart, that William and Catherine looked directly at us and read our

banner proclaiming “Hampshire Royalists Here again and again”. In 1986, as soon as the procession had passed us, Shirley and I ran along the pavement, scaled a wall, crossed a garden and dropped down to get as near as possible to the Palace. That was not an option this time for three reasons - now too old to scale a wall, the police would have shot us and the TV studios were in the way. But by unhooking the barrier we were able to jump the queue to join the orderly procession along The Mall and get close enough to see the Royal Family on the balcony. To be part of that crowd was a never-to-be-forgotten experience and I felt just so proud to be British-Australian.

A picnic lunch followed by a short rest in St. James’s Park and off we set to rendezvous with Ben at the Canada Gate for our live TV interview. That was quite an experience when, having produced our passes and passports, we entered the amazing compound where all the world’s media were gathered. And then we went in the recording room, cheered by the crowds outside Buckingham Palace, and once in position had a (long) wait of five minutes before we were on air. Neither Shirley or I were really nervous - possibly because of Ben’s reassurance or maybe just too tired.

A taxi to Wandsworth, champagne, supper, shower and bed ended a most wonderful few days. And now the preparations for the Diamond Jubilee have begun. All are welcome to join us for the River Pageant on 3 June 2012 - bring your own chairs, food and wine!



At last, the Wedding feast