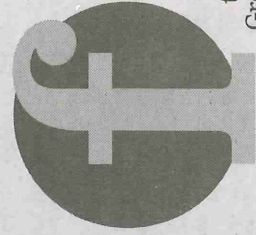


The Queen being welcomed by the Member for Wagga Wagga, Mr Eddie Graham and his wife (CSURA Collection – RW43/39).

Wagga's greatest day



at the archives
Wayne Doubleday



February 13, 1954, will long be regarded as one of, if not the, most important day in Wagga's history. *The Daily Advertiser's* front page of February 14, 1954, (a special Sunday souvenir edition) carried the headline "Wagga's Greatest Day", and devoted the entire ten-page supplement to the visit of Queen Elizabeth II and her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh.

The editorial for that day read, "Yesterday the Queen of Australia rode in triumph through the streets of Wagga."

"For 145 thrill-packed minutes, the centre of the Riverina became the heart of the mighty British Commonwealth."

Estimates vary to the exact number of people who crammed Wagga's streets to catch a glimpse of the royal couple, but most range from between 80,000 to in excess of 100,000.

This sounds even more significant when one considers that the population of Wagga at the time was only 18,500 and that the temperature reached a maximum of 92 degrees Fahrenheit on the day (the hottest of the entire 10-day royal tour).

After arriving at Forest Hill from Canberra, the royal progress, comprising 18 cars, made the slow trip into Wagga.

The first official duty was the visit to the council chambers, where the Queen and Duke were introduced to the mayor, Mr W.F. Dunne and his wife, local parliamentarians (including the Member for Wagga, Mr Eddie Graham), church and civic leaders.

The royal couple also spoke to several ex-servicemen, three of whom were Victoria Cross winners from the Riverina.

On the journey throughout the streets of Wagga, the crowds were so great that the royal

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The Duke of Edinburgh being presented with a boomerang (CSURA Collection – RW1574/209/690).

car was forced to travel at less than two miles per hour.

A highlight of the day included an exhibition of boomerang throwing at the showground conducted by Mr Joe Timbery, his wife and two children, Joe, 7, and Jeanette, 12.

When the display began "...The Queen turned to the Duke and excitedly cried 'Oh, Phillip, look'. This was the first time the Queen and the Duke had seen boomerangs thrown."

At the conclusion of the display, the Duke exclaimed, "Good heavens! The only thing you could kill doing that would be yourself".

The royal couple then spoke with the Timbery family (from La Perouse in Sydney), who in turn presented the Queen and Duke with boomerangs, and two specially embossed "baby" boomerangs – one each for Prince Charles and Princess Anne.

More excitement followed shortly for the Queen while watching the exhibition of tree felling and wood chopping, when she was almost struck in the face by a six-inch woodchip.

Her Majesty saw the chip coming and shielded herself with her umbrella, but did not move



The Queen talking with the Timbery family after the exhibition of boomerang throwing (CSURA Collection – RW1574/209/690).

away until the display had finished.

The Duke had requested that the lead axeman, Mr Ron Greentree from Canowindra, demonstrate a standing chop on a 14-inch log. However, the royal couple found they were a little too close to the action, standing only 12 feet away.

Mr Greentree did not know that a woodchip had nearly hit the Queen until later told of the incident. Greentree replied "Gee, I'm sorry ... I was flat out trying to show the Queen and the Duke how fast we can chop. I didn't think of where my chips might fly."

References: Riverina Royal Visit – Wagga Wagga – February 13, 1954 brochure (CSU WS390/A1/2/pamphlet); The Royal Tour of Australia and New Zealand, 1953-54; The Land newspaper, February 19, 1954, p2; Sunday Telegraph newspaper, February 14, 1954, pp. 1-8; The Daily Advertiser, February 14, 1954, pp. 1-10.

■ Special thanks to Chris Griffiths for supplying reference material.

what you need to know

The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building on South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue. Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 02 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au, or visit our website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.