The 1954 Royal Tour of Queen Elizabeth II

Queen Elizabeth II was the first, and to date, the only reigning British monarch to visit Australia. When the 27 year old sailed into Sydney harbour on 3 February 1954, she practically stopped the nation. Her arrival at Farm Cove, where Captain Arthur Phillip raised the British flag 165 years before her, attracted an estimated 1 million onlookers in a city with a population of 1,863,161 (1954 ABS Census). Those who couldn’t be there in person could listen to ABC radio’s nation-wide coverage of the historic occasion. Amalgamated Wireless Australia (AWA) helped make history when it filmed the Queen setting foot on Australian soil and relayed the footage to the Spastic Centre in Mosman – thus the royal arrival became the first televised event in Australia.
The 1954 Royal Tour of Queen Elizabeth II
Published on State Library of NSW (https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au)

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh smilingly receive prominent citizens at the landing pontoon in Farm Cove, Sydney. The Prime Minister (Mr. R.G. Menzies) is in the background. February 3, 1954.

The 1954 royal tour was a much-anticipated event. Planning had commenced in 1949 for King George VI (Elizabeth’s father) to visit Australia and New Zealand. However, a coded telegram received in October 1951 relayed the disappointing news that due to the king’s ill health and an impending operation, he would be unable to visit the antipodes as planned. Instead, the then Princess Elizabeth and her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, would come in his place. Her Royal Highness was at a safari lodge in Kenya, en route to Australia in 1952, when she received the news of her father’s death. She made haste back to England and by the time she came to Australia in 1954, the princess was our queen.

At the time, the royal tour of 1954 was the single biggest event ever planned in Australia. It was organised in the days before email, facsimile and mobile telephones. Official printed programs stated that all those responsible for an event were to synchronise their watches with the A.B.C. time signals at 9am each day. During the Queen’s eight-week tour of Australia, the only glitch was an outbreak of poliomyelitis in Western Australia, which saw the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, intervene to insist that the royal party sleep on SS Gothic and eat only food prepared on the ship (Ferrier, 1954, n.p.).

The fierce February sun did not prevent Her Majesty from wearing her elbow length white gloves and decorative hats. Though the Australian sunlight is glaringly bright compared to England, she was rarely seen in sunglasses.

The royals visited 57 towns and cities during the 58 days they spent in Australia. They traversed the country by plane, train, ship and car from Cairns in the north, Broken Hill in the west to Hobart in the south. Their children, Prince Charles (aged five years) and Princess Anne (aged three years) did not accompany them on the exhausting trip.

During their ten days in New South Wales, they attended 28 major programs, with events scheduled for the morning, afternoon and evening. Queen Elizabeth’s days varied from the cultural – watching a surf life-saving demonstration at Bondi Beach; to the civic – addressing 107,000 school children at three outdoor venues; to the constitutional – opening a session of parliament. The crowds were tumultuous, the press was effusive in its praise and every street the royals paraded along was festooned with decorations.

The Library holds an extensive collection of original photographs of the visit which capture many official and candid moments. Below is a small selection - you can view three albums of photographs through our catalogue [3]. Dr George Bell donated a collection of photographs from the Queen's visit to Broken Hill, which have also been digitised. [4]

Collection of photographs of the Royal Tour, 1954

About this item:

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh disembark from the Royal Barge 1954
Call # Q394.4/E Vol. 1
Digital ID: IE4670969
View collection item detail

About this item:

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, escorted by The Governor-General of Australia, Field-Marshal Sir William Slim 1954
Call # Q394.4/E Vol. 1
Digital ID: IE4670969
View collection item detail

About this item:
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth escorted by the Governor General (Field-Marshal Sir William Slim) and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh accompanied by the Governor of New South Wales (Sir John Northcott), followed by the Prime Minister (Mr. R. G. Menzies) right, and the Premier of New South Wales (Mr. J. J. Cahill)

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh, Park Street, Sydney 1954
Call # Q394.4/E Vol. 1
Digital ID: IE4670969
View collection item detail

About this item:
Scene looking down William St to Elizabeth Street as the car (middle distance) bearing Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh makes the Royal Progress through Sydney. February 3, 1954.

c15568_0038_c.jpg
About this item:
Part of the fireworks display held on Sydney Harbour to welcome Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh. February 3, 1954.

**FL4671677 [17]**

Fireworks display held on Sydney Harbour to welcome Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh 1954
Call # Q394.4/E Vol. 1 [13]
Digital ID: IE4670969
View collection item detail [18]

About this item:
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth speaking with one of the patients of the Repatriation General Hospital, "Yaralla". With her is the Medical Superintendent. 5th February 1954

**FL4671811 [19]**

Medical Superintendent and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth speaking with one of the patients of the Repatriation General Hospital 1954
Call # Q394.4/E Vol. 1 [13]
Digital ID: IE4670969
View collection item detail [20]

About this item:

**FL4672323 [21]**

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh at Sydney Cricket Ground. 1954
Call # Q394.4/E [22]
Digital ID: IE4672247
View collection item detail [23]
About this item:
His Royal Highness Duke of Edinburgh accepts a bouquet of flowers from a small schoolgirl from the convent school as the Royal Car moves through the Sydney suburb of Lane Cove. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh were returning from a visit to the Repatriation General Hospital "Yaralla", Concord. February 5, 1954.

FL4672324 [24]

His Royal Highness Duke of Edinburgh accepts a bouquet of flowers from a small schoolgirl from the convent school in Lane Cove, Sydney 1954
Call # Q394.4/E [22]
Digital ID: IE4672247
View collection item detail [25]

About this item:
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh wave to Sydney crowds lining Elizabeth Street as they leave Legacy House. February 6, 1954.

FL4672332 [26]

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh wave to Sydney crowds lining Elizabeth Street 1954
Call # Q394.4/E [22]
Digital ID: IE4672247
View collection item detail [27]

About this item:

FL4672340 [28]

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh (in Land Rover) at Bondi Beach 1954
Call # Q394.4/E [22]
Digital ID: IE4672247
View collection item detail [29]
About this item:
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II with the Archbishop of Sydney (Dr. H. Mowll) leave St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, after attending Divine Service. February 7, 1954.

c15568_0093_c.jpg [30]
About this item:

FL4672349 [33]

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh inspect sheep at The Showground Dubbo (N.S.W.) 1954
Call # Q394.4/E [31]
Digital ID: IE4672247
View collection item detail [34]

About this item:

c15568_0120_c.jpg [35]
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh arrive at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra 1954

Call # Q394.4/E [36]
Digital ID: IE4672247
View collection item detail [37]
About this item:

c15568_0162_c.jpg [38]
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh arrive by plane at Brisbane airport 1954

Call # Q394.4/E Vol. 3 [39]
Digital ID: IE4672081
About this item:
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth making a broadcast over The Flying Doctor network at H.Q. Broken Hill. March 18th, 1954.
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth making a broadcast over The Flying Doctor network 1954

Call # Q394.4/E Vol. 3 [39]
Digital ID: IE4672081
View collection item detail [42]
About this item:
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth acknowledges loyal greetings from Northern Territory aborigines at Whyalla Memorial Oval. (South Australia). March 20, 1954.

The State Library’s collections relating to the 1954 royal tour include invitations, entry tickets, commemorative school exercise book covers, orders of service, menus and timetables. These ephemeral items would usually be thrown away after the event. They show the detailed planning that went into the royal visit, which aimed to give as many people as possible the opportunity to see ‘their queen’.

Since her first visit in 1954, Queen Elizabeth II has visited Australia another 15 times.

The Library would like to thank volunteer Anne Munro for typing all the original hand-written captions for the photographs.

Ephemera items from the Royal Tour, 1954

The Education Department issued school children with these commemorative covers for their exercise books. The front shows Queen Elizabeth II, the Duke of Edinburgh and the Australian coat of arms. The back shows the royal family from when Queen Victoria ascended to the throne in 1837.
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Commemorative silk timetable for the six hour train journey from Bathurst to Sydney on 12th February 1954.

[Image: royal_visit_a1_commemorative_silk_train_timetable.jpg]
Commemorative silk timetable for the six hour train journey from Bathurst to Sydney on 12th February 1954.
The timetable includes the stations and times when the train would stop so fans could line the route. There was just enough time for the royal party to disembark at Lithgow and Katoomba to take in the sites.
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Height (m)</th>
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<td>SYDNEY...arr.</td>
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This 70 page booklet issued by the Department of Government Transport shows how the tram and bus timetables for Sydney services were altered during the royal visit to allow the Queen and her official party to have right-of-way.

royal_visit_b1_special_tram_and_bus_arrangments.jpg [48]
This 70 page booklet issued by the Department of Government Transport shows how the tram and bus timetables for Sydney services were altered during the royal visit to allow the Queen and her official party to have right-of-way.
This page shows timetable changes for the 6 February when the Queen travelled to Legacy House, Randwick racecourse, Bondi Beach and the Tivoli Theatre.

royal_visit_b3_public_transport_changes_6_feb1954.jpg
This page shows timetable changes for the 6 February when the Queen travelled to Legacy House, Randwick racecourse, Bondi Beach and the Tivoli Theatre.


Links