Children lift Queen’s spirit during her Wagga visit

Our greatest day

The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh walking around Robertson Oval (CSURA Collection RW43/39).

The Queen and Duke are driven around Robertson Oval to meet the assembled children. (CSURA Collection RW43/39).

The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh, the royal procession moved to Bolton Park and Robertson Oval, where some 15,000 schoolchildren from 240 schools throughout the Riverina had assembled. Some of the children had travelled up to 200 miles to see the Queen.

The children started cheering as soon as the Queen came within sight of the oval, and did not stop until she left (except for when the Queen addressed the children from the dias). The 210 schoolchildren from Wagga who were dressed in red, white and blue were moved into formation to form a huge Union Jack flag in the centre of the oval.

As the Queen turned to face the children from the dias, the flag children leapt to their feet, screaming their welcome and flourishing red, white and blue 'waving' on their arms. The whole centre of the oval became a surging mass of waving, brilliant colour. The noise of the cheering was deafening... The Queen looked tired and drawn as she entered the ground, but she was visibly affected by the welcome and she smiled happily to the children.

After the Queen addressed the children and thanked them for their warm welcome, the children sang "Elizabeth of England.

A leading radio commentator who had covered the entire royal tour throughout NSW, remarked that the song was the "... most moving moment of the tour."

In a wonderful gesture from the Queen, she ordered her driver to complete two laps around Robertson Oval instead of the scheduled ones, so that more of the children would be able to see her.

The allotted time for the visit to Bolton Park was 15 minutes. However, the extra lap meant the couple was five minutes late leaving the oval.

Adults had been prohibited from entering the grounds of Bolton Park and Robertson Oval, however, several hundred who forced their way in were removed by police, so the royal car could exit the oval easily.

Others lined the fences and took up vantage points in the bowling and croquet lawns, buildings and even on the living boards at the city baths. Police also found themselves busy long after the Queen and Duke had left Wagga, with large numbers of lost children being reported.

Officers were kept busy well into the evening entertaining and amusing lost children at the station, while also answering numerous phone calls from concerned parents.

Not to mention the 20 minor car accidents which occurred in the heaviest traffic Wagga had ever seen.

This historic day was also one to remember for newspapers and communication in Australia. A picture of the Timbery family presenting the Queen with a boomerang at the Wagga Showground was the first to be transmitted by radio inside Australia.

It was sent by short-wave radio on the Sunday Telegraph's portable picture transmitting unit direct from Wagga to the newspaper's offices in Sydney.

The picture appeared on Page 8 of the Sunday Telegraph on February 14, 1954.

Special thanks to Chris Griffiths for supplying reference material.