

Future Kings in Albury

Noel Jackling

Two future Kings of England have stopped at Albury railway station due to the break of gauge, namely Prince George, Duke of Cornwall and York (later King George V), on May 18, 1901, and Prince Albert, Duke of York (later King George VI following the abdication of King Edward VIII), on May 7, 1927.

Prince Albert, known as 'Bertie', and his wife Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, Duchess of York, were on their way from Melbourne to Canberra to open the then new temporary Houses of Parliament. A brief royal visit at Albury was sanctioned.



The only flashlight photograph of the royal tour - the Duke & Duchess of York with Albury mayor Alfred Waugh & Ellen Waugh at the Albury Railway Station

The platform was brightly lit. Almost every pillar was adorned with a large flag, and every second pillar with a palm frond. Pennants were strung along the whole length of the platform.

At 9.30pm. the royal couple alighted from the rear carriage of the broad gauge Victorian train on to 600 metres of carpet that ran to the station entrance. There, in the brightly lit railway square, the band played the Royal Salute. The couple inspected the guard of honour.

The Duke visited a group of 300 pioneers who, by reason of their age, represented a living link to the earliest days of Australia, while the Duchess talked with some of the Girl Guides.

The royal couple then mounted a dais, which faced the town beneath the central tower of the station buildings. Mayor Alfred Waugh addressed the crowd of over 10,000 people. He called for three hearty cheers for the royal couple. The gathering then sang the national anthem.

'Bertie' suffered from a speech impediment, and dreaded public speaking. After his disastrous closing speech at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley on October 31, 1925, he consulted Australian-born speech therapist, Lionel Logue. His consultations with Logue became the subject of a notable movie, 'The King's Speech'. With Logue's help, he gradually became able to speak with diminished hesitation.

Prince Albert was accordingly given the honour of opening the Houses of Parliament in Canberra. For that occasion, due to take place on May 9, 1927, he needed to deliver the opening speech. He reached Albury, just two days beforehand, when he was publicly and eloquently greeted by mayor Alfred Waugh.

The Duke did not respond with voice; he made no speech. It can be speculated that in Albury, he could not afford to become nervous and stammer his way through a speech on the eve of the key event in his Australian tour.

To the cheers of the crowd, Prince Albert raised his hat while the Duchess acknowledged the people with a wave—and the royal couple disappeared back to the railway platform.

There was to be one last glimpse of their Royal Highnesses on the observation platform at the rear of the train, as the standard gauge NSW train chugged off to Wagga Wagga.