

IN THE PARK – A REFLECTION ON HISTORY

Thursday 8 September 2022

I have walked several times up the Long Walk with the castle behind me and facing King George III, “what what” riding his horse and high up on that stony mound. He points back toward his favourite residence – the same favourite residence of our late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

My first visit to Windsor Great Park was back in the 1970s when a beacon was lit on bonfire night and my aunt and uncle, who resided just off Alma Road, treated us to all manner of hot tidings, chocolate and roasted chestnuts. I couldn't tell you whether our Royal Family were intermingling with the throngs of people, but a part of me believes they may have.

In the 1980s, on Sunday summer and autumn afternoons, the Park was a favourite walk; often starting at Bishopsgate adjacent to the Fox and Hounds pub and taking a right turn so as to join the Long Walk by the monument of King George. From there, the path turns southwest, passing several work cottages, built in the late Victorian period, occupied by Estate caretakers and gardeners, and then doubling back toward Bishopsgate passing Cumberland Lodge.

Built in 1650, Cumberland Lodge has been home to princes and princesses down the centuries, but in more recent times an education centre. It has its place in history for in 1936, it was used by Alex Hardinge, Secretary to King Edward VIII, for meetings with Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin during the constitutional crisis that resulted in the abdication. I have often stood at the gates of Cumberland Lodge and wondered just what was said in that building between Hardinge and Baldwin – King Edward at that time incidentally but a stone's throw away at Fort Belvedere.

Finding my way back to King George III still proud on his horse, I have sat for hours, warming in the sun and looking down to that great castle three miles north. The tree lined avenue was originally laid out by King Charles II after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660; but before then it was a well established route from and to the castle.

To the right just above the treetops can be seen the Royal Mausoleum close to Frogmore House – the spectacular and private burial place of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Built to replicate a Greek cross, the actual structure lends itself more to a Romanesque design and has an imposing 70ft central roof structure. Senior members of the Royal Family since Queen Victoria's reign have been buried in the grounds of the Royal Mausoleum. Whilst all other monarchs and their spouses are buried in St George's Chapel or Westminster Abbey; The Duke of Windsor formerly King Edward VIII, and Wallis Duchess of Windsor are buried in the grounds of the Royal Mausoleum.

It is worth reflecting that the abdication of King Edward VIII changed the course of history – our late and beloved Queen became Heir Apparent on 10 December 1936 and so began a long and committed path of service and duty. On 6 February 1952, so she became our Queen and as her namesake back in 1558, so she led by her grace, faith, trust and loyalty – an example to us all.

God may our late beloved Queen rest in peace.