

SPORTS NOSTALGIA

When royalty visited Leavesden



On April 19, 1966, HRH Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent opened Leavesden's School



King George VI and Queen Elizabeth arriving at the Canadian Kaki University in 1946. Picture: Leavesden Hospital History Association

by **Martin Brooks**

AS my mother prepares to celebrate her 90th birthday this year, many members of my family comment on just how much she, over time, has started to resemble HRH Queen Elizabeth II. With her whitened hair, small stature, ever present smile and her determined but hesitant stride, she just gets on with it in true British fashion. This is only fitting as mum has ruled with care, compassion much majesty over our family for some 63 years now and like the Queen, displayed the same amount of dignity, grace and decorum when my dad passed away after their 47 years of marriage ended with his untimely passing.

This started me thinking of all the stories I have heard about the number of occasions that some member, of some royal family, at some time, had come to visit or live in this neck of the woods.

Let's start with Moor Park Manor in Rickmansworth, known as the 'Manor of the More', which was granted to St Albans Abbey around 700 AD and restored by Henry VIII in 1515. Later, the tenancy passed to Cardinal Wolsey whose meteoric rise to fame and power was equalled only by the remarkable rate of his demise. Wolsey frequently entertained his king here and it is believed that it was on one such visit that Henry first declared his love for Anne Boleyn. It was also the first place that Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon, was exiled to when Henry decided to replace her with his newfound love. It is believed that Andrews Lane Farm, along Harefield Road in Rickmansworth, was the hunting lodge for many of the royalty and nobility, the Earl of Ebury for one, who visited Moor Park Manor and where I lived for a year after arriving in the UK in 2006 thanks to the hospitality of my cousin.

Kings Langley also provided a retreat for the royals who wanted to get away from it all and had its own 13th Century royal palace, which



Springfield School in 1985. Picture: Eve Durnnell

was located to the west of the village during the Middle Ages. The origins of Kings Langley Palace are not known, but it is thought that the estate land was originally the property of the Manor of Chilterne Langley or Langley Chenduit. The estate would have been part of a large, dense forest stretching from London out to Berkhamsted that was abundant in deer, and a hunting lodge (possibly the Kings Lodge Hotel in Hunton Bridge) is known to have existed on the estate during the reign of Henry III.

Many a royal figure made their way to other locations in the area, such as the Leavesden Hospital in Abbots Langley. Even members of entertainment royalty, such as Bob Holness from the TV show Block Busters, paid it a visit.

The Leavesden Hospital had started taking in younger patients (up to 19 years old and with learning disabilities) in 1952 and held classes for them in the former site of the St Pancras Workhouse/School. On April 19, 1966, HRH Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent, arrived to open the new bespoke facility known then as Leavesden's School. In 1972 the school was incorporated into the Hertfordshire Educational Authority and renamed Springfield School.

Mum-to-be, Sarah the Duchess of York, visited the hospital on March 25, 1988 and was gifted with a pair of hand-knitted baby's booties decorated with blue and pink ribbons to cover all eventualities by a chatty 62-year-old patient named Betty Newman.

On February 22, 1946, the Canadian Kaki University, located south of the main hospital and across what was then still called Asylum Road, received a special visit from their majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, who were no doubt delighted to be renewing the links of friendship they had with Canada going back to 1939.

Many of the estimated 500 Canadian RAF airmen (and women) attending the university at that time, as well as many local well-wishers, formed a human chain across the road as they gathered to see the royal visitors. The visit was informal, and they visited the student living quarters, inspected the common-room, chemistry laboratory and the main kitchen.

As I remember the passing of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and how members of the royal family put aside their own personal and very common family squabbles to pay him the fitting tribute he deserved, I realise just what "family" really means and why we are all very royal within them.



Sarah Duchess of York at Leavesden in 1988. Picture: Leavesden Hospital History Association



Moor Park Mansion in 1787