



King Charles and the Royal Australian Navy

By Petar Djokovic

On 8 September 2022, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II passed away. With her passing, her son, His Majesty, King Charles III, ascends to the throne. The King, like his parents, has enjoyed a close association with Australia and the Royal Australian Navy. Indeed, his father, the Duke of Edinburgh, is the only British royal to have visited these shores more often than King Charles.

The future King was born Charles Philip Arthur George at Buckingham Palace on 14 November 1948. Upon Elizabeth's accession to the throne, His Majesty, as heir apparent, took on the traditional titles of the Duke of Cornwall, Duke of Rothesay, Earl of Carrick, Baron Renfrew, Lord of the Isles, and Prince and Great Steward of Scotland. On 1 July 1969 he was invested as Prince of Wales in a widely broadcast ceremony at Caernarfon Castle, Gwynedd, Wales.

His parents broke with royal tradition sending him to school rather than having a tutor educate him at Buckingham Palace. He attended the Hill House School in West London, Cheam Preparatory School in Berkshire, and Gordonstoun in

East Scotland. His father, the Duke of Edinburgh, was an alumnus of both Cheam and Gordonstoun.

The future King did not accompany his parents on their extensive coronation tour of the Commonwealth in 1954; rather, his long association with Australia began when he spent two terms at Geelong Grammar School's rural Timbertop campus in 1966, an experience he later described as the most enjoyable of his whole education.ⁱ Upon his entry to the school, Geelong Grammar's headmaster, Mr Thomas Garnett, emphasised that "in accordance with his parent's wishes, the Prince will be treated like any other pupil. Boys and masters will address him as Charles. He will be given no special favours."ⁱⁱ

Chopping wood, mid-winter camps and cross-country hikes were all part of the curriculum. There was little time for formal royal engagements but he undertook them when he could. He has often spoken since then about his affection for Australia and his time at Timbertop. "I have gone through my fair share of being called a Pommy bastard, I can assure you of that," he said in 2011. "But look what it has done for me... If you want to develop character, go to Australia."ⁱⁱⁱ His Majesty



maintained relationships with a few of his school-mates and teachers, including his old roommate, Stuart McGregor, who said in 2005; "I met a very fine person in the Prince of Wales."^{iv}



The future King and his roommate, Stuart McGregor, at Timbertop in 1966.

His Majesty commenced university studies at Cambridge in 1967 but was back in Australia at the end of the year under sombre circumstances; representing the Royal Family at the memorial service for Prime Minister Harold Holt. While his first two visits were comparatively subdued affairs, his third was anything but. On 30 March 1970, His Majesty, his parents and

his sister, Princess Anne, arrived at Mascot airport to be greeted by the Flag Officer in Charge, East Australia Area, Rear Admiral G.J.B. Crabb, CBE, DSC, RAN, along with a Naval Royal Guard and Colour Party, and the RAN Band. The Royal Family's visit coincided with the bicentenary of Captain James Cook's arrival in Australia in 1770. Events included a re-creation of Cook's landing at Kurnell, and a water carnival and fireworks display on Sydney Harbour on 29 April. The RAN played a central role in all events.

The RAN Band was again on hand during an official reception at Government House on 1 April before the Royal Party continued on to Hobart where they embarked in the Royal Yacht, *Britannia*, on 3 April. The ship was escorted in Australian waters by HMAS *Stuart* (II). His Majesty's schedule, however, saw him depart Australia in Melbourne on the 8th to attend EXPO 70 in Japan. He later returned to Australia in 1974 to open the Anglo-Australian Telescope at Siding Springs with then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam.



A bearded Prince of Wales aboard HMS Bronington in 1976.

Following in his father's footsteps the future King learned to fly and in March 1971 he flew himself, in a twin-engined Beagle Basset aircraft of The Queen's Flight, to RAF Cranwell to begin advanced training as a jet pilot. After receiving his wings he embarked on a naval career entering the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, on 15 September as an acting sub-lieutenant.

He served in the destroyer HMS *Norfolk* and the frigates HM ships *Minerva* and *Jupiter*. He toured the Pacific while serving in *Jupiter* visiting Singapore, New Zealand, Tonga, Western Samoa, Hawaii, San Francisco and Acapulco. He was promoted lieutenant on 1 May

1973 before going on to qualify as a helicopter pilot at RNAS Yeovilton in 1974. He then joined 845 Squadron and flew Wessex HU.5 helicopters from the carrier HMS *Hermes*, operating primarily in the Mediterranean Sea and North Atlantic Ocean.

In February 1976 His Majesty took command of the Ton class minesweeper HMS *Bronington*. His ten months in command of *Bronington* proved to be his last sea-going service in the Royal Navy.

In 2011 His Majesty held a reunion for his old crew during which the ship's chef, Michael Sinker, fondly recalled his former commanding officer; "Charles was brilliant. When you got him to sea without his bodyguards he was just like one of the rest of the crew, though he wasn't a very good sailor and he was seasick, as were a lot of us. If it was rough he would go on the bridge with a bucket... There was quite a bit of apprehension before he came on board because of who he was, but once he was on board he was treated with respect just like any captain."^v



The future King inspects the Naval Royal Guard of Honour at RAAF Fairbairn in November 1977.

In keeping with naval tradition, His Majesty initiated a beard growing contest on board, which he himself won. He was promoted commander in January 1977 shortly before ending his active naval career.

As the Prince of Wales and heir to the throne, many honorary naval appointments followed; he was promoted captain in 1988; rear admiral in 1998; vice admiral in 2002; admiral in 2006; and was made Admiral of the Fleet in 2012; along with numerous other honorary appointments across the Commonwealth including the ranks of vice admiral in the Royal Canadian Navy, and Admiral of the Fleet in the Royal New Zealand Navy.



The future King inspects the Sydney detachment of the RAN Band and Royal Guard of Honour at Garden Island on 9 November 2012.

His Majesty did not accompany his parents on their Silver Jubilee visit to Australia in early 1977 but he did visit later in the year as the patron of the Queen's Silver Jubilee Appeal for Young Australians. He arrived in November attending various events in connection with the Jubilee including inspecting an RAN Royal Guard upon his arrival at RAAF Base Fairbairn. His visit is remembered by many for a memorable interview conducted by flustered television compare Ian 'Molly' Meldrum for the popular ABC program, Countdown. His Majesty recorded a message for the show's 40th anniversary in 2014 in which he quipped; "Was it really 40 years ago? It seems like yesterday. I wish it were tomorrow, I'd cancel it." ^{vi}

The future King was back in Australia the following May for the funeral of former Prime Minister Sir



Robert Menzies, which he attended in naval dress uniform. He returned for the third consecutive year in March 1979 primarily to celebrate the sesquicentenary of the founding of the Swan River colony in Western Australia.

His eighth visit to these shores occurred shortly after his engagement to Lady Diana Spencer in 1981. A naval Royal Guard of Honour again welcomed his arrival at RAAF Fairbairn on 12 April and the following day he officially opened the Australian War Memorial's Hall of Valour, an event also attended by the RAN's most highly decorated officer, Lieutenant Commander Leon Goldsworthy, GC, DSC, GM, RANR. Later in his visit he opened the 50th Anniversary Convention of Apex Clubs of Australia in Geelong.

The 1983 visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales, and their infant son, Prince William, proved to be a more elaborate affair than His Majesty's previous visits as they were welcomed by large crowds in Alice Springs, Albury, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Adelaide. A Royal Guard of 100 sailors and officers from HMAS *Albatross* once again greeted the Royal Party in Canberra. The couple visited again in 1985 but it was their visit in 1988, coinciding with the nation's

Bicentennial celebrations, which cemented the Prince's strongest ties with the RAN.



The future King with HS Blue crew after presenting the Duke of Gloucester's Cup seated with Commander Adam Muckalt (Commander Australian Hydrographic Meteorological Group), Rear Admiral Jonathan Mead, AM, (Commander Australian Fleet) and Lieutenant Commander Dean Battilana (Commanding Officer HS Blue) aboard HMAS Leeuwin on 8 April 2018.

The Royal couple arrived in Sydney on 25 January where they were once again greeted by a Royal Guard of Honour. That afternoon they attended the official presentation of Britain's Bicentennial gift to Australia, the brigantine STS *Young Endeavour*, in Farm Cove, Sydney Harbour, in front of a crowd of about 10,000 people. Prime Minister Bob Hawke said that the ship was "a timely reminder of the sea links that were for so many years the only

SEA POWER

SEMAPHORE



Issue 6, 2022

lines of communication between Australia and the rest of the world.”^{vii} The ship had departed England for Australia on 3 August 1987 with a crew that included 24 young people from Australia and the UK. Mr Hawke pledged her to serve Australian youth and handed her over to the RAN to operate and maintain.

The *Young Endeavour* Youth Scheme was established in partnership with the RAN to manage the sail training program with its head office established at Garden Island. The ship routinely participates in major events around Australia and the world undertaking around 20 voyages per year with a crew comprised of 24 young Australians and nine RAN officers and sailors. She has since circumnavigated the country on numerous occasions, and has twice circumnavigated the world; in 1992 and 2015. As of August 2018, she had completed 569 voyages and been crewed by 13,466 people.

On Australia Day 1988 the Royal Couple joined some two million Australians who lined the shores of Sydney Harbour to witness a re-enactment of the arrival of the First Fleet. His Majesty later delivered a Bicentennial address on the steps of the Sydney Opera House and shortly

after 3.00pm the Royal Couple and other dignitaries embarked in HMAS *Cook* to review the fleet. His Majesty met and spoke to the majority of the ship’s company in their respective areas of duty before lines were cast off and the ship manoeuvred to her reviewing station south of Bradley’s Head. She anchored at 4.15 and over the next hour and a half the Parade of Sail was reviewed by the Royal Couple. The Royal Party disembarked shortly after 6.30 at Woolloomooloo.

His Majesty has made five further visits to these shores since 1988; in 1994; 2005; 2012 when His Majesty and the Duchess of Cornwall laid a wreath at the Australian War Memorial and visited a number of bases in Sydney including the Navy Heritage Centre at Garden Island; 2015; and his last visit was in April 2018 for the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games.

His Majesty visited HMAS *Cairns* during that visit where he took pleasure in presenting HS Blue Crew with the prestigious Duke of Gloucester’s Cup aboard HMAS *Leeuwin*, the first time that the award for the most proficient unit in the RAN had been won by a hydrographic unit.

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SEA POWER

SEMAPHORE



Issue 6, 2022

been in attendance during each of his visits, whether in a ceremonial capacity such as providing guards of honour, or behind the scenes

providing security, communications and other services. That association will no doubt continue in his new role.

- ⁱ "Prince had happy time at Timbertop", *The Canberra Times*, Canberra, 31 January 1973, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/110705075>.
- ⁱⁱ "The new boy at Timbertop", *The Australian Women's Weekly*, Canberra, 9 February 1966, p. 7, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/51384379>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Totaro, Paola, "'Pommy bastard' Prince Charles reveals 'huge affection' for Australia", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 27 January 2011, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/pommy-bastard-prince-charles-reveals-huge-affection-for-australia-20110127-1a5na.html>.
- ^{iv} Davies, Caroline, "I loved it all, says prince on return to school that gave him hell", *The Telegraph*, London, 4 March 2005, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australia>

- [andthepacific/australia/1484941/i-loved-it-all-says-prince-on-return-to-school-that-gave-him-hell.html](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-07/prince-charles-roasts-molly-meldrum-for-countdown-40th/5875744).
- ^v Singh, Anita, "Prince of Wales holds reunion for former Navy crew", *The Telegraph*, London, 7 March 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/theroyalfamily/8362557/Prince-of-Wales-holds-reunion-for-former-Navy-crew.html>.
- ^{vi} Kent, Lucinda, "Prince Charles recounts Countdown host Molly Meldrum's most royally awkward interview ever", *ABC News*, 7 November 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-07/prince-charles-roasts-molly-meldrum-for-countdown-40th/5875744>.
- ^{vii} "Enthusiastic welcome for the Royal Couple", *The Canberra Times*, Canberra, p. 3, 26 January 1988, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/10999729>.