

Round About Windsor Castle

(By Arthur P. Woolacott)

The King's smile in happy moments is as engaging as that of his illustrious mother, Queen Alexandra, and many Canadians will recall occasions during the war when His Majesty seemed to take a boyish delight in talking to them like one of themselves.

The Canadian Forestry Corps was given the privilege of establishing one of its most important English Camps in Windsor Forest and His Majesty and various members of the Royal Family were frequent visitors.

On one occasion the mill-crew—for there was a regular B. C. saw-mill in the Forest—were delighted to be quizzed by the King regarding the timber resources of their province, the scale of wages and their occupations in civil life, for it was apparent that not all of them were lumbermen, and when he distributed cigarettes among the boys and discovered that he was without a light, it was the sight of a life-time to see the score of men digging down into their jeans for a match, and then contemplating with comic dismay the dirty stubs unearthed. Probably it was the humour of the situation that lighted up the King's countenance; at all events he cordially invited them all to avail themselves of the opportunity to become better acquainted with Windsor Castle and its environs during their sojourn in the Park.

The Forestry Corps was remarkable for its personnel. Among its twelve thousand members was a wide variety of types, from professors and clergymen of high standing to roustabouts of the wildest and woolliest kind. Consequently there was always a large quota passing through the camp to and from France who were capable of fully appreciating the historical associations of the neighborhood, so that in any party of a dozen men there was usually a sufficient fund of collective knowledge to satisfactorily illuminate a day's wanderings.

Westmacott's colossal equestrian statue of George III surmounts Snow Hill and was within sight of the Canadian Camp. From this point may be obtained a most magnificent view of Windsor Castle and the surrounding country. The great feature of the Park, the Long Walk, lies in full view leading in a straight line bordered by turf and double rows of elms direct from the observer's feet over a stretch of nearly three miles of lovely English landscape to the Grand Entrance to the castle. This is one of the few vistas in the world that will remain in the mind long after other impressions have faded away and those who obtained their first view of Windsor Castle from this point of vantage will have reason to count themselves fortunate indeed.

The elms were planted in 1680 by Charles II and the avenue completed under William III although the carriage road down the centre was not formed until the reign of Queen Anne.

In the pleasant summer weather the inhabitants of Windsor, Eton, Egham, Staines and other places near-by take the air in the shade of the venerable elms that border the avenue.

In these spacious grounds one observes hundreds of red and fallow deer, Welsh goats, and pheasants and rabbits in thousands. In the ghostly moonlight with a fog-like mist swathing a mile of the lowest part of the Walk, one recalls eerie legends associated with the grounds, and the strange noises of things moving in the grass or rushing by in the night resurrects a bookish memory of Herne the Hunter who was wont to career through these glades with his phantom followers.

Another splendid walk that is taken advantage of by pedestrians on their way to Ascot during the Race Week is

Queen Anne's Ride, which is somewhat similar to the Long Walk but with only a single row of elms on either side with turf in between.

The overseas visitor is reminded at every turn of things read long ago in a far-off land, in tiresome books that seemed to be an inextricable complication of dates, and those fragments of almost forgotten knowledge waylay him, and leap out at him with vigor and completeness that is startling; he realises very vividly that Windsor Great Park has been the playground of the Kings and Queens of England during long centuries, for it was William the Conqueror who made this a Royal Forest. Here our monarchs have witnessed contests with the bow, with the hawk, and with the horse; here England's soldiers have shown their prowess and their skill in their thousands, and both before and after the tumult and stress of battle have proudly marched before their sovereign.

Lovers of flowers cherish a pleasant memory of the Rhododendron walk which was formed about the time of the accession of Queen Victoria and extends about a mile from Bishopsgate. During the early summer months these plants present a mass of colouring that affords a picture of surpassing beauty.

One connoisseur who applied to aesthetics the strategy acquired at the front reconnoitered the Castle from every vantage before making the final assault. His second view was from the rushes in the Thames above Windsor Bridge, the favorite view of artists, affording as it does the most comprehensive and picturesque ensemble possible, with a foreground of shadowed water reflecting the soft lines and masses of foliage overhanging the banks, thus giving a setting to the picture that adds greatly to the effect;—a medieval pile, embowered in trees and mirrored in the tranquil waters below.

There is another favorite view from the river a little lower down and closer up, with a foreground of punts, people, straw hats, and dwellings, but this latter view is a present-day affair, a democratic photograph, as it were, of Royalty at the beck of Demos; whereas the upper view is artistic, chaste, and is really suggestive in its medieval remoteness of the divinity that hedges round the conception of kingship.

From the east the pile has a more formal, modern appearance, accentuated by the precisely laid out gardens of the East Terrace. From this angle one does not get the sense of historical perspective.

The North Front which houses the suite known as the State Apartments designed by Sir Christopher Wren, has a palatial aspect, but, as a learned member of the party said, lacks archaeological relief, except for the Round Tower, which breaks the sky-line, and thus redeems the front from the severely conventional. An old gentleman of antiquarian tastes said that the North Front as altered by Sir Christopher Wren, was absolutely stark and insipid, and that all traces of Wren's innovations were removed from the walls by Sir Jeffry Wyatville in 1839 and that to him we owe the present day appearance of the major portion of the pile.

On another occasion our party dined at Staines in a very cosy dining-room overlooking the Thames with such accompaniments as a cheery fire in the grate, a magnificent Stilton cheese flanked by bottles of Bass's ale, set off by white napery and the sheen of silver when some chance remark elicited from the stately maid that Runnymede was just up the river yon.

There was some doubt regarding our right to trespass on land of such ancient lineage as that over which we were