

GOLDEN JUBILEE

When we were enjoying the celebrations that marked Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee, it amazed me to think that this great lady came to the throne when I was only 17 years old, 50 years ago. What incredible changes we have all witnessed during that time while the world's population has doubled!

While watching the pageantry with Margie on TV, I saw shots of Buckingham Palace which instantly reminded me of my time in the Yellow Chinese room on the first floor, arranged as an artist's studio. The windows of the room are the last three on the left as you look at the building from Pall Mall and face out over St James's Park. The room gets its name from the imperial yellow wallpaper of picturesque oriental gardens and several large Chinese vases. In the middle of the room is a raised chair used by the sitter.

Whoever is reading this must be asking, "How did you ever get into the Palace?" Well, it is a convoluted story but certainly one of the most thrilling and extraordinary moments of my life. It all began with Roy being asked to mend Dr William Harvey's nose. Harvey was born near the White Cliffs of Dover in a town called Folkestone on April 1st 1578. As a young man he had walked over the Alps to Padua to study medicine, wearing out several pairs of shoes on the way, and he went on to become the famous physician who discovered how blood circulates through our bodies.

The town was very proud of their illustrious son and erected a large stone statue of him on their waterfront promenade. The problem was that vandals had knocked off his nose. Someone in the Council offices knew Roy and asked him if he could replace the nose with a new one. Roy said he could and asked me to model a replacement, which he cast in resin stone and then glued back on so William could breathe again!

Folkestone Council offices are located in the adjacent town of Hythe, which is one of King Henry VIII's ancient Cinque Ports. The Council was so impressed with Roy's work they asked him if he could do a head of the Lord Warden of the Five Ports who happened to be the Queen Mother. Roy asked me if I was interested and I told him to tell the Council that I would of course be delighted to accept the job and do it for free!

I received a letter from the Council telling me that the Queen Mother had agreed and could I please contact her secretary and tell him what I would require in the way of sittings. A date was set for the first of two sittings and I turned up at Clarence House with my tape measure and camera and a large bouquet of primroses specially picked by Margie as a gift for the sitter. I was shown into the Queen Mother's study and while waiting took the opportunity to look at her paintings. One was the famous *Eve of St Agnes* by John Millais, painted in 1865, and another the portrait of the Queen Mother by Augustus John painted soon after her husband King George VI's coronation. What a privilege to be able to have such a close look at these two paintings!

Suddenly the door opened and I was caught red-handed in front of the Millais. "Isn't it beautiful? I really love that painting." That broke the ice and we shook hands as I introduced myself. She then sat down in a chair in the middle of the room and put her left leg up on a stool. "I am afraid I have given my leg a bit of a biff. I have taken some arnica so it should be all right soon, but I have been told to keep my weight off it."

By this stage I was so won over and totally relaxed that I had enough courage to pull out the primroses and give them to her saying that Margie had

picked them that morning in Somerset. “Oh how lovely, one of my favourite flowers. Reminds me of playing in the woods with my brothers. I shall take them to Scotland this afternoon.”

The conversation then turned to arnica and homeopathy and I told her how wonderful I thought Ainsworth the Chemist was. “Dear Mr Ainsworth, what would we do without him?” At that stage a corgi bounced into the room and sniffed my ankle. “Don’t put your hand down, he bites strangers!”

It was time to go to work, so with my hands well above corgi height I explained that on the first sitting all I did was take measurements and photographs. I clicked away from all sides and then pulled out my tape measure. It amazes me when I think back that I was actually allowed to put a tape measure around the Queen Mother’s head, neck, and with callipers, measure from her ear to the tip of her nose and between her eye pupils, but this is what I did. I felt awful when I saw that the eye measurement, which I find is the most critical one of all, had made them water.

We then discussed what the head should look like. “Please no hat,” she said, “and I would really like to be remembered as how I looked in the war years, so make me a lot younger.” This meant doing a 40-year-old woman from the photographs of an 80-year-old one! I decided that I would have to go and buy some books of photographs of the Queen Mother taken during the war.



Her Majesty the Queen Mother

A month later I took the clay head to Clarence House for the second sitting. I only had one real problem as the best photograph I had found of her in the war years showed that she had her hair parting on the other side. When I queried this she told me that she had always worn her hair as now, so we decided that they must have printed the photograph back to front. Luckily I had used the parting from my photographs so no major changes were required!



The finished clay head with the Queen Mother

The most memorable thing about this visit was our conversation about the engagement that had just been announced between Charles and Diana. I congratulated the Queen Mother on the engagement of her grandson and she replied, “Yes, isn’t it wonderful. A Royal Wedding is just what the people need.” If only she could have foreseen what heartbreak the wedding would bring to everyone involved, but thankfully none of us can look into the future!

I handed over the clay head to Roy and he cast a plaster for me to take to the foundry. I ordered two heads as I thought it would be fun to have one for myself because nothing like that would ever happen to me again. I had been asked to leave the bust at Clarence House so Her Majesty could have a look at it before it went to Hythe. I had serious doubts about how successful the head really was as taking away 40 years means that the head you sculpt is not the head you see. When I collected the head I was told that the Queen Mother had found it 'interesting', which basically means that she must also have had her doubts. Still it was what she asked for and who was I to argue.

There was an unveiling ceremony in the Hythe Council Chambers and everyone seemed happy, except one old councillor, who came up to me and said that she didn’t like it. I have always wondered why, when people don’t like something, they feel impelled to tell you. No one is interested in negative reactions and I personally believe it is much better to keep them to oneself. I told the woman that the Queen Mother had asked for the head to be as she was in the war years, but I might as well have been talking to a brick wall!

Some months later my friend, Tim Green, called into Agecroft on his way to Devon. It was his daughter's hands that I had used for the *Birth of Spring* based on Pushkin's poem. He saw the Queen Mother's head in the studio while we were having lunch and asked me about it. "What about doing one of the Queen?" and went on to tell me that Her Majesty was Colonel in Chief of his Regiment, the Royal Tank Corps. He was sure they would like to have a head at their Headquarters.

"You get permission and I shall do the job at cost," I said, and immediately put the idea out of my head as it is easy to have such ideas, but usually they don't come to anything. I hadn't allowed for Tim's persuasiveness so when one evening he rang up and said the job was mine, I couldn't believe it. He went on to explain that the Queen had agreed, but as there are three Royal Tank regiments, each would like a head! He also thought it would be nice if he had a copy and as I would certainly want to keep one myself, it meant casting five. What would it cost, he asked, reminding me that I had said I would do the job at cost price if I got the job! I had been talking about one cast, not five! Why hadn't I kept my mouth shut?

A letter arrived from the Queen's secretary at Buckingham Palace setting the time for an appointment. At least this time primroses were not in bloom so I wouldn't have to take a bouquet!

I arrived at the front gate of the Palace and showed the secretary's letter to the policeman, who then checked a list before directing me to a parking spot near the right-hand entrance door. I walked up the steps between uniformed porters and was directed by them to the secretary's office.

At that time the secretary was an Australian called Bill so we got along famously. He led me across the enormous entrance hall to an old-fashioned iron cage lift and we slowly rose to the first floor. We turned left and walked all the way down the length of the palace along miles of red carpet and past the drawing room that leads out onto the 'Waving Balcony'. I took a quick peek in as we passed and couldn't believe what I was actually doing. When we arrived at the end of the corridor he showed me into the Chinese Room, telling me that this is where I would be working. He pointed out where there was a loo across the corridor before saying that the Queen would be with me soon.

The first thing to do was to visit the loo as perhaps that would stop my knees knocking together! I unpacked the camera and the trusty tape-measure, and checked the flash several times as I couldn't think of anything more embarrassing than it failing to go off. Having set everything up I looked around the room. It was hard to believe I was standing where Anagoni had stood when he painted the Queen. It was all just too much!

The door opened and Her Majesty walked in with Bill. I was introduced and then she asked what I wanted her to do. I explained about taking the photographs and then the measurements and suggested that the best place for that would be if she sat in the chair. She sat down and looked out of the window at St James's Park. "Isn't it amazing how long the willows keep their leaves compared to other trees?" I felt all my tension drain away as she went on to chatter about the park while I happily clicked away.

Suddenly she leant forward and waved at a car that was trying to come in through the gate in front of us. "No, no, go to the other end, we're keeping that one shut now." She turned to me and said, "It doesn't feel like a home any more now we have to keep the gates locked." I knew immediately what she was talking about as only the week before a man had crept into the Palace and

somehow found his way to her room and sat on her bed while he talked to her! The outcome of that event had led to a severe tightening of security and the locking of the gates.



My photographs of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

I told her that my wife and I had been very distressed by the reports of the bedroom intrusion and that we hoped that she had recovered from the shock. “Yes, it did give me a bit of a fright, especially when he started waving a glass ashtray around. I felt very sorry for him, as I knew he wanted me to help him, but I just can’t interfere.”

By this time I understood why everyone around the Queen adores her. If she had asked me right then to lie down in front of one of Tim’s tanks I think I would have. Then came the moment for taking the measurements. Out came the tape and around the Royal Head it went, followed by the callipers to measure the distance between her pupils warning her that I wouldn’t come too close as I had made her mother’s eyes water. I took the measurement and jotted it down. “I think you should do that again and check that you have got it right.” I did what I was told although by then I had so much adrenaline running through my eyeballs I could hardly read the numbers on the tape!

Bill arrived back and the session was over. Before the Queen left she shook my hand saying, “I look forward to seeing the head.” The two of them left the room and I walked over to the window and took a deep breath. What a half-hour that had been!

As soon as I got home I started work on the head as I had a fixed date for the next sitting because Bill had told me that there could be no delays as she was about to leave for a Commonwealth tour.

This was to be a Symbolic Head as well as a likeness I decided, having learnt from the Queen Mother’s head that a portrait was not what was required. What the Royal Tank Corps would get was a symbol, more like the head that appears on the coins. I decided to give the Queen a polished gold crown like the one she had worn as a Princess at her father’s coronation. I also

decided that I would make the top of her dress polished bronze so the Royal Tank badge would stand out as a brooch. All this meant that the head would have to be cast in Italy.

The morning came for the clay to be carried into the Palace for the second sitting, but as it was very heavy it was impossible for me to do so on my own. I thought it would be fun if Margie could give me a hand so she could come in as my assistant and share this incredible experience. We drove to the door and between us we carried the head through the door.

A footman rushed forward and asked if he could help, but Margie hung on to her side and I told them that she was used to carrying heavy weights! I explained that we would rather do the job ourselves, but if they wouldn't mind carrying the stand and my tools it would help! Up we went in the lift and down the passage following the footman until we arrived at the Chinese Room and put the head on the stand. Margie had a quick look round and then left with the footman while I waited for the Queen to arrive.

The second sitting was even more wonderful than the first. We chatted away for a while and then Bill came in to talk over details of the coming events of the day with his boss while I got on with my work. Actually there was not very much to do as I felt that I had already taken the sculpture as far as I could. When the secretary looked at his watch and asked me how I was doing, I said I had finished. We all shook hands and they left. I wrapped up the head in plastic and waited for a couple of footmen to come and give me a hand to get everything back to the car.

So ended what must be one of the most bizarre things I have ever done. I drove back to my mother's flat to have lunch with her and Margie and report on how it had gone. Margie told me that she had walked out of the Palace and along the railings until she was opposite the Chinese Room window where she could see my back as I worked at the stand on the head. I wish I had known she was there and given her a royal wave!

Roy took a mould of the clay and I took his plaster down to the foundry in Italy for casting. Some months later Margie and I collected the five heads and smuggled them back across the border, nearly getting caught as we passed through the Saint Bernard tunnel. I delivered four bronzes to Tim Green, three of which he took to the Barracks.

After finishing the Queen and the Queen Mother I framed the tape measure that I had used and now have it hanging in my study above Hans Holbein the Younger's portrait of *Sir Thomas More*, painted when he was Chancellor to Henry VIII. Thomas is on our family tree and as his head had been removed by a monarch I thought it was an appropriate place to hang the tape that had been around both queens' necks!

Margie and I prefer the Grand Saint Bernard to all the passes that cross the Alps. We have used the Chamonix Tunnel several times, but the terrible fire several years ago had confirmed our own mistrust of the ten-mile long tunnel, so we had decided to avoid using it again. Another pass between Italy and Switzerland requires driving your car onto a train and sitting in it for half an hour while you slowly chug through! It is very dark, low, claustrophobic and spooky, necessitating a glass of vino and very loud music on the cassette player. We have only used that particular tunnel once!



Three heads of the Colonel in Chief of the Royal Tank Regiments

The Grand Saint Bernard is different as it is composed of a long open gallery for most of the way and only a short tunnel section at the top. If you are lucky enough to travel in the summer you can use the old high pass. It is well worth the extra hour's drive to go via the monastery to enjoy the views. It amazes me to think of all the people who have passed that way. First to cross the mountains were people like the Iceman who was found frozen, murdered by an arrow in his back 5,300 years ago. The Roman armies marched over the pass on their way to invade England and later Napoleon with his armies did the same to invade Italy. Grand Tour dandies, like Lord Byron, headed towards Rome, walking behind their coaches as the horses strained to drag them over the pass. It is a very romantic route.



On top of the 'Grand Saint Bernard' pass

However, the high pass is usually closed so we are mainly forced to use the tunnel. I always feel sorry for the Customs officers who have to work in the fomy atmosphere so I wasn't surprised to hear my friend, Geo Urban, tell me that the Swiss had done an in-depth study of Border Custom officers who work inside tunnels. The results had shown that there were two kinds of men who took the job: Manual and Intellectual. It turned out that the Manual officer sees you coming and waves his hand in front of his belly indicating that you are to pass through the barrier without stopping. The Intellectual officer sees you coming and flips his head left and right to indicate the same thing!

Usually this is exactly what happens and fortunately we have never been stopped. Actually that is not quite true as we were once stopped at a German border because we didn't have a GB sticker on the back of the car! In those days we were travelling on Australian passports so I explained to the German that as we had an AUS sticker we didn't need a GB one. I could see his brain struggling with this information until he said, "No, the car has a GB number plate so you must have a GB sticker. You will have to buy one from me before you can proceed." He charged us an outrageous amount that made me wonder how much he earned this way every year. The officer didn't even get out of his cubicle to take a look at the back of the car so he must have had a mirror set up on the side of the road. I guess he has now retired and is living in comfort on the Spanish coast at 'Costa-a-Lot'.

As we were constantly taking plasters down in the car and bringing back bronzes and were not breaking any laws, we had become a bit careless. Of course it had to be when we were bringing back the heads of the Queen that we had a heart-thumping experience. We had loaded the bronzes into the back of the car at the foundry and covered them over with a blanket.

We arrived at the checkpoint inside the tunnel and found ourselves stuck behind a stalled campervan. Rather than help push it out of the way the officer started to walk towards us. Because we were in a British car and had the steering wheel on the right side instead of the left, it was Margie who lowered the window and handed over our passports when asked if we had anything illegal to declare, which we didn't, only having *works of art*.

We had discussed being searched on the way up the mountain and had dismissed the possibility as it had never happened. "No, nothing to declare." My heart practically stopped when the bored officer walked towards the back of the car and peered through the windows at our load.

Bang, the campervan in front of us backfired and jumped forward. I held my breath and let the clutch in and slowly rolled forward as I could see in my rear-view mirror an irate Italian in the car behind waving his fist at the officer. I prayed that the two of them would get into a shouting match and the officer forget about us. Luckily that is just what happened and we crawled away.

We rolled out of the tunnel into Switzerland and pulled off onto a narrow farm track. We fell out of the car and found our legs had turned to jelly, but soon relaxed, started to laugh and then fantasised about the newspapers headlines, *Smugglers apprehended at the border with Queen of England's Head*. We decided to celebrate straightaway with a glass of wine and share a Mars bar. We continued the trip with our hearts in our mouths and were very happy to arrive home without any more scares.

On the Last Night of the Proms, *Land of Hope and Glory* makes my eyes water, an emotion I have inherited from my father. I think Queen Elizabeth II is one

of the most remarkable women who has ever lived. After only a short apprenticeship she has reigned for 50 years without putting a foot wrong. It is quite remarkable and I don't believe that we shall ever see the like of her again.

I am also a fan of Princess Anne. She holds herself superbly and appears to be quite tall, which to my surprise she isn't. I discovered this when Margie and I were invited to a dinner at the Victoria and Albert Museum by the Royal Geographical Society in 2000. Our invitation was one of those fortunate happenings that came about because I had lent the RGS some of my Symbolic Sculptures for an exhibition. The dinner marked the end of Princess Anne's tenure as Honorary President of the RGS. After the meal she spoke with wit and we were very impressed with her style and assurance She is lucky to be a wonderful mixture of her mother and her remarkable father.

I have always admired Prince Philip as he is completely his own man, and says what he thinks. A wise and witty man who has done marvellous things for young people throughout the Commonwealth. My one brush with the Duke came about at the unveiling of the *Bonds of Friendship* in Portsmouth.

The story of the *Bonds of Friendship* started with my receiving a letter from Admiral Scotland, the President of the British Australian Society, in which he asked me for my ideas on how to mark the 200th birthday of the departure of the First Settlers from Portsmouth and their landing in Sydney Australia. I can't remember how he found out about me, but when he invited me to come and see him in London, I took along a maquette of the *Bonds of Friendship* in Pop Begg's old leather top-hat case.



'Bonds of Friendship' maquette

When the admiral asked me if I had had any ideas I opened up the case and pulled out the polished bronze of the *Bonds of Friendship*. I already knew from the admiral's letter that the Society wanted a memorial to be placed in

Portsmouth where the convicts had embarked on the ships bound for Australia and another memorial was to be placed where they disembarked at Sydney Cove on arrival.

I suggested that the English edition should be patinated to represent the Old Country and the Australian one should be polished gold to represent the New Country. I explained that I saw the symbolism of the sculpture as representing the inseparable link between Britain and Australia. Scotland liked the idea and asked me to find out how much two eight-foot long versions of the sculpture would cost. I left the meeting full of hope for the commission but, knowing that we were talking about a vast amount of money, I was not very confident that it would happen, thinking that it would all be too good to be true, in fact, unbelievable!

The admiral also asked me to explain my ideas to Austen Spraggles, the Head of the Portsmouth branch of the British Australian Society. So began an extraordinary encounter with a larger-than-life character. Austen asked if he could come and see me in Somerset and on the appointed day a large car arrived and a large man got out. We welcomed Austen with open arms as this would be the biggest job any artist could hope for, if it came off. Margie had made a special lunch and a lot of it, which was lucky as Austen also turned out to be a large eater!

It was a very successful lunch and by the time Austen left, plans had been made for a granite stone to be quarried on Dartmoor as a base for the Sydney sculpture. I personally thought getting a plinth from Dartmoor, home of the famous prison, was rather rubbing salt in the wound but kept my mouth shut! Portsmouth already had a plinth at the Sallyport, as a granite slab had been quarried in the Blue Mountains in NSW and sent over by the Lord Mayor of Sydney. It had been erected on the exact spot from where the First Settlers had embarked 200 years previously and would be the perfect plinth for a giant *Bonds of Friendship*. The only problem was that all this had to be completed in nine months so the Queen could unveil it on the anniversary of the Fleet's departure from England, and the Australian edition was to be completed in time for the Governor General to unveil it on the anniversary of the Fleet's arrival a year later in Australia!

I rang Roy and asked him if he could make me a plaster ring six foot diameter and two foot wide. There was a moments silence at the other end of the telephone and then he said, "It will take a couple of weeks." Nothing ever fazed Roy Wakeford! True to his word he had a plaster ready for Jack Crofton's Meridian Foundry under the Peckham railway arch, where the sand casting would be poured for the Portsmouth sculpture. Jack did a wonderful job of casting the two rings and joining them together to make the *Bonds of Friendship*. When I went to see the finished sculpture with Austen we were absolutely delighted.

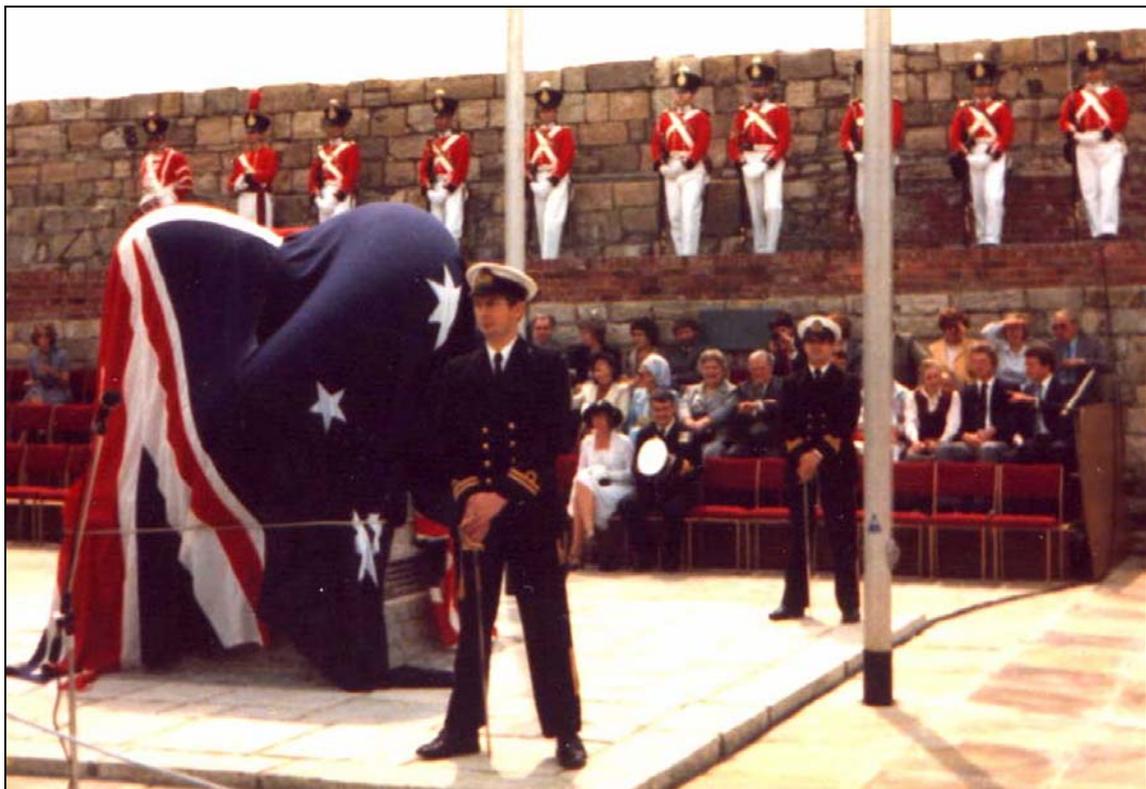
While Meridian were sand casting the Portsmouth sculpture that would be patinated dark brown for the Old Country, I ordered the Australian edition from the Mariani Foundry in Pietrasanta, as it had to be a lost-wax casting and polished bright gold for the New Country.

To cut a long story short, both sculptures were miraculously completed and delivered on time, one to Portsmouth and the other to Sydney. There had been a problem about paying for the Australian edition, but it was solved by Peter, the cousin who taught me to swim by throwing me in the lagoon full of weeds. Peter was now a Director of the Bank of New South Wales and he

persuaded the Board that this would be a very good thing for the Bank to support. Perhaps he was still feeling guilty about how rough he been with me at the end of a rope!

Events moved steadily forward and the day of the Portsmouth unveiling arrived and what a day it was! It started with the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth asking Austen, Margie and myself to an official lunch at the Town Hall. At the end of the meal we all boarded a bus and were driven down to the Sallyport, where the sculpture was hiding under a Union Jack and Australia's national flag. We filed out of the bus and walked over to two rows of chairs on one side of a square of spectators with John Slim, the son of Lord Slim of Burma, who had taken over as President of the British Australian Society from Admiral Scotland. I had met him a couple of times and really liked him and, as he was standing in our row, we at least had one friend close by, which stopped me feeling quite so nervous.

As we passed the benches of spectators we saw Roy, his wife Olive, our three boys and Admiral David Martin and his wife, Susie, Margie's closest friend from her days at Clyde School near Melbourne. They had all met for lunch in a fish and chip shop and had a much jollier party than we had had in the Town Hall.



“What’s hiding under the flags? An elephant!”

While we waited for the Queen, who was busy commissioning the Royal Navy’s new Aircraft Carrier *Invincible*, a troop of soldiers dressed in period uniforms marched into the square and took up a position along the ancient city wall while the band of the Royal Marines played stirring marches. The Queen arrived and mounted the rostrum, and with a yank on a string she pulled the flags off the sculpture. Everyone clapped and I gave a sigh of relief.

No one had told us that we would be introduced to the Royal couple. They walked around the sculpture and came across to our row of chairs. The Lord Mayor introducing everyone as he went and it soon came to our turn. After the Queen came Prince Philip and when he arrived in front of Slim he joked, “I thought you were hiding an elephant under the flags.” Come to think about it that’s exactly what it had looked like.



*The unveiling of the 'Bonds of Friendship'
by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II*

It was then my turn to be cross-examined with the inevitable question. “What are you doing here?” When I confessed that I was the sculptor all I got back was a big grin!

A year would have to pass before the *Bonds of Friendship* would be unveiled in Sydney by Sir Zelman Cowan, the then Governor General of Australia. If the ceremony turned out to be anything like the one at Portsmouth it was definitely something to look forward to!