



Queen Victoria Visit

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

In 1861 Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, died and she went into a period of deep mourning. The people of Wolverhampton began a subscription to raise funds to erect a statue in his memory. It was agreed that a statue of him mounted on his favourite horse and dressed in the uniform of a field marshall would be appropriate. Thomas Thorneycroft, a renowned sculptor was chosen to make the statue which was completed in 1866.

Queen Victoria was invited to Wolverhampton to unveil the memorial to her husband even though she had still not made any public appearances outside of London by 1866. Surprisingly, she agreed and declared that she would visit Wolverhampton in 9 days time on the 30 November. It is not certain why she agreed. One local story is that a group of Wolverhampton widows wrote a letter of sympathy to the Queen and she was so touched by it that she resolved to visit the area if she made any future public appearances outside the capital. Another explanation is that her advisers told her that she needed to resume her public duties because she was losing popularity with her people and the invitation to Wolverhampton was one of the first duties that came along.

Preparations for the visit went ahead at full speed. The Wolverhampton Chronicle reported that:

"Every man who could handle a pick, saw a board, or drive a nail, found employment,...gas fitters and professional decorators...thronged the streets. All business except such as was connected with the ceremony was suspended".

Houses were decorated and streets were lit with illuminations. Arches were decorated with tools to show the towns' main industries were erected in different parts of Wolverhampton.

Queen Victoria arrived by train with other members of her family and rode in a procession of open carriages through the town to Market Place where the statue was veiled by curtains in the national colours. A pavilion had been erected to

protect the royal party along with a grandstand for two thousand people. The newly appointed mayor John Morris received the Queen and read a welcoming speech. Queen Victoria was so impressed with the reception she had been given that she asked John Morris to kneel and borrowing a sword from Lord Alfred Paget, astonished everyone by making him Sir John. She then signalled to Mr Thorneycroft the sculptor, who drew a cord to complete the unveiling and she walked around to inspect the memorial. After the ceremony the royal party took a different route back to the Great Western Railway where they had lunch before leaving for Windsor.

The day had been declared a public holiday by the Mayor and people flocked all over the Midlands to try and catch a glimpse of the Queen since she rarely visited the area. Schools and factories closed and the people of Wolverhampton thronged onto the streets to enjoy the illuminations and witnessed a grand firework display at the racecourse.

Source: Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies, Ref: V1/VIC/1a