

## Royal yachts in New Zealand

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Royal visitors to New Zealand before the 1950's travelled by ship of necessity. The first royal visit to this country was by Alfred Duke of Edinburgh, younger son of Queen Victoria, when commanding officer of HMS *Galatea*. He was in New Zealand from 11 April to 1 June 1869. He later visited Wellington from 27 August to 3 September 1870, and returned to New Zealand for a final visit from 8 December 1870 to 16 January 1871. The next royal visit, and the first by members of the royal family specifically visiting New Zealand for an official tour, was not to occur for another thirty years.

From the 11 June to 27 June 1901, George Duke of Cornwall and York, and Mary Duchess of Cornwall and York, later King George V and Queen Mary, visited New Zealand. This was part of an Empire tour, intended partly to pay tribute to the Empire for its response to the Boer War. It also involved a visit to the new Commonwealth of Australia, to open the first federal Parliament. The royal couple travelled on the 6,800 ton Orient Line steamship the *Orphir*, which had been taken over by the Admiralty, repainted white, and reclassified as a royal yacht for the duration of the voyage. The *Victoria and Albert* (III), the latest royal yacht, was not yet in commission, and the *Victoria and Albert* (II) had been laid up.

From 24 April to 22 May 1920, Edward Prince of Wales visited New Zealand on the newest, largest Royal Navy battleship, HMS *Renown*. He made four tours on the *Renown* and her sister ship the *Repulse* between 1919 and 1925, visiting 45 countries and travelling nearly 150,000 nautical miles. By this time the dedicated royal yacht, *Victoria and Albert* (III) was no longer undertaking overseas voyages, because of its age.

The Duke and Duchess of York, later King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, now the Queen Mother, visited New Zealand from 22 February to 22 March 1927. They also travelled on the battleship HMS *Renown*. The cruise was made noteworthy by the occurrence of a serious boiler room fire when crossing the Indian Ocean on the voyage home, and by the fact that, due to bad weather, a tug had to be used by the royal couple to board ship at Bluff.

Henry Duke of Gloucester, uncle of Her Majesty the Queen, visited New Zealand from 15 December 1934 to 29 January 1935. Later to be Governor-General of Australia, he travelled on the Australian cruiser HMAS *Australia*.

In 1951 the Princess Elizabeth (now Her Majesty The Queen) and the Duke of Edinburgh flew to Canada on a BOAC Stratocruiser aircraft. In January 1952 they commenced what was planned to be a five-month tour of the Commonwealth and Empire. They flew to Africa, and were due to meet the Shaw Saville and Albion liner *Gothic* at Mombassa, for the second part of the tour. However, the death of King George VI in February 1952 brought the tour to a tragic and premature end.

However, from 23 December 1953 to 30 January 1954 Her Majesty The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh were in New Zealand, travelling on the SS *Gothic*. The tour was the first

by a reigning sovereign to extend across the world, and to include the majority of the major countries of the Empire and Commonwealth. The royal yacht *Britannia* was not yet ready, although it met the royal couple on their return to Britain.

The heyday of the ocean as a medium of transport was however passing. On all subsequent visits to New Zealand, Her Majesty has travelled by air, and used the royal yacht only as a base of operations, and for local transport in New Zealand waters.

In 1963 Her Majesty The Queen travelled on the royal yacht *Britannia*, on the first visit to New Zealand by purpose-built royal yacht. Subsequent visits include 1970, for the Captain Cook bi-centenary visit, when a seaman was lost off the frigate escort when crossing Cook straight in 60 knot gales and 12m waves; 1974; 1977, as part of the Jubilee Commonwealth tour; 1981; and 1986.

In 1990 and 1995 the royal yacht was not sent to New Zealand. Ostensibly the reason were that she was getting too old for such a long deployment, and (in the case of the 1990 visit) that as Her Majesty would be in residence, rather than merely visiting New Zealand, she did not need the yacht as a base of operations. Political considerations (particularly the attitude of the New Zealand Government to the nuclear armed and powered warships) may however have played a part in the decision.

With the announcement that *Britannia* is to be decommissioned at the end of 1997, the largest, and arguably the greatest royal yacht will never more visit New Zealand.. It is a pity that with the Ocean 97 group deployment to the Far East, the opportunity was not taken to invite the *Britannia* to pay a final visit to New Zealand.