

QUEEN VICTORIA'S DIAMOND JUBILEE

Luke McKernan



This is the text of a multimedia entertainment devoted to the Diamond Jubilee procession of Queen Victoria, which took place in London, 22 June 1897. The show recreates the procession by following its route around London, interspersing the narrative with eye-witness testimony, photographs, and films taken from each location. In performance the show has a narrator, two actors (for the male and female parts) and a pianist. The show was put on at various locations between 1997 and 2012, and the text is being made available for reference purposes. Links to copies of the films now available online are given at the end.

All frame stills come from films held by the BFI National Archive.

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This evening's entertainment commemorates, in film, photography, prose and rhyme, the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of Queen Victoria, held one hundred and fifteen years ago on the 22nd of June 1897. Chiefly we are telling the story through the efforts of the filmmakers of 1897, representatives of a then new and soon to be globally important industry.

Unless you are a historian of early film, as I try to be, you probably will not understand the great irritation felt when I read this passage from a biography of Queen Victoria, which describes the filming of the Diamond Jubilee:

*One of the earliest films ever made of a public occasion recorded part of the service. The Queen described it as "Very wonderful", but "a little hazy and too rapid". Her verdict was almost too charitable as the ceremony appeared to have been conducted in a snow storm, and the venerable participants moved hither and thither like leaves caught in a whirlwind. (Giles St Aubyn, **Queen Victoria: A Portrait**)*

The implication that there was just the one record made, and that it was a primitive and unwatchable blur, is pure ignorance. There were some forty cameramen representing around twenty commercial firms dotted along the route Queen Victoria took around London on that day, shooting many thousands of feet of film, much of it of high quality. Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee was the first true example of that increasingly common phenomenon of the past 115 years, the media event. A number of the films taken on that day survive, and photographic records remain of others, and in following the route that the Queen's procession took that day we will show the films taken at each point along the route. We will also add eyewitness accounts and other reports and reactions to the day, including those of Queen Victoria herself.

Queen Victoria ascended the throne on June 20th, 1837, aged just eighteen. Britain changed radically over the period of her long reign, through social and economic advances, education, inventions, transport and communications, and through the gradual acquisition of a vast Empire. And at the end of this era of great change and mechanical inventions that altered the horizons and experiences of human kind, came the invention of that was to provide the defining medium of communication in the succeeding century, moving pictures.

Our show opens in 1896, the year before that of the Jubilee. 1896 was the year in which projected film was first seen in Britain and it was not long before royalty encountered the new marvel of the age. On October 3rd Queen Victoria (who had but recently passed George III's record to become Britain's longest reigning monarch) was resident at Balmoral with her guests Tsar Nicholas and Tsarina Alexandra of Russia, the latter being Victoria's granddaughter. The Queen kept a journal in which she faithfully recorded each day's happenings, and her account for October 3rd includes this passage:

At twelve went down to below the terrace, near the ballroom, and we all were photographed by Downey by the new cinematograph process, which makes moving pictures by winding off a reel of films. We were walking up and down, and the children jumping about. Then took a turn in the pony chair, and not far from the garden cottage Nicky and Alicky planted a tree.

Nicky and Alicky are the Tsar and Tsarina. Downey worked for the photographic firm W. and D. Downey, long established royal photographers, responsible for the official Diamond Jubilee portrait of the Queen. The following month, on November 23rd, with the Queen now resident at Windsor Castle, Downey's films were premiered among a mixed programme. Victoria's reactions on seeing the films were simple:

After tea went to the Red drawing-room, where so-called "animated pictures" were shown off, including the groups taken in September [sic] at Balmoral. It is a very wonderful process, representing people, their movements and actions as if they were alive.

The scene moves on to 1897, the year of the Jubilee. Ten years beforehand the nation had celebrated fifty years of Victoria's reign, and the crowned heads of Europe had attended as she made her tour of the city to resounding cheers from the populace. This time around, Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary in the Marquess of Salisbury's Conservative Government, and an ardent imperialist, had had a brainwave. The Diamond Jubilee would become a celebration of Empire, showing the British people just what it was to have meant to have so large a percentage of the map of the world coloured red. Thus none of the Kings and Queens of 1887 were invited (though they sent representatives); instead the Premiers and troops of the Colonies took part in a spectacular procession through London in what was to be an extraordinary display of Empire and global authority.



Her Majesty the Queen and TIMs the Emperor and Empress of Russia, TRHs the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, HRH Princess of Battenberg and Royal Children at Balmoral (W&D Downey, 3 October 1896)

In 1897 the British Empire, although not yet at its peak size, covered an area of 11 million square miles and boasted a population of 372 million. A quarter of the earth's land surface, a quarter of its population. The Empire stretched over Europe, Asia, the Americas, Australasia and the islands of the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. Acquired almost haphazardly in places, and certainly not with any grand plan in mind, suddenly the British found themselves masters of an Empire greater than that of Rome. But few, it was felt, among the ordinary British were truly aware just what it was that they were masters of. It was as an illustration and a lesson to both the world and

the British themselves that Chamberlain devised the colonial theme of the Diamond Jubilee. Imperialism was the political keyword of the hour, Britain's manifest destiny. Many were opposed to it, of course, even in Britain, with Gladstone as their worried spokesman. But June 22nd 1897 was not their day.

The actual sixtieth anniversary of Victoria's reign was on June 20th, a Sunday, which was kept as a largely private celebration, while the main public event was announced for Tuesday the 22nd, which was made a Bank Holiday. The preparations were huge. An estimated £300,000 was spent on decorating London, nearer £30,000,000 in today's money. A huge number of timber stands went up, totally obscuring the frontages of churches and offices. A thousand-seater stand went up in front of Charing Cross station. A vast stand of 4,000 seats went up in Whitehall, opposite the Horse Guards, at a cost of £6,000. Seats were eventually priced there at from four to twenty-five guineas and facilities on offer included promenades, reception rooms, a smoking gallery, a ladies room, a luncheon room for four hundred, and a telephone. Another 4,000-seater stand was erected at St Martin's Church in Trafalgar Square.

Profiteering was rife. Victorian touts offered prime seats in the St Paul's Churchyard location at wildly inflated prices. Others in provincial offices sold seats in extremely attractive locations at cheap prices to many thousands, who sadly found on the day that they journeyed down to London that no such seats or stands existed. Jubilee Day itself was also to prove to be a jubilee day for London's pickpockets. Though no such crime could compare with the theft in transit of a £300,000 diamond, intended as a Jubilee gift to the Queen from the Nizam of Hyderabad.

London was in a state of exhilaration. An estimated 3,000,000 visitors came to a city dressed in red cloth, flowers, triumphal arches, flags and illuminations. Popular (and sentimental) chronicler of that age W. Macqueen-Pope recalled the scene some fifty years later:

London really let itself go and became a City of Flowers, for Venetian masts swathed in, or painted, red, flags and real flowers were the main embellishments. There were flags and banners by the tens of thousands; there were emblems of all kinds, trophies of every sort and vast triumphal arches, spanning the streets. It was amazing. Every man, woman and child sported their red, white and blue; every whip of every cart was so bedizened, every horse had its mane entwined with the national colours; every bicycle was a flashing replica of the Union Jack. Staid, bewhiskered City Fathers, tall-hatted and frock-coated, of immense wealth and respectability, of unbending integrity, all had a red-and-white-and-blue rosette or a small Union Jack in their buttonholes.

Part of all these preparations, paying hefty prices for optimum locations, were the men with the motion picture cameras; each no doubt with a Union Jack in his buttonhole. They were positioned at every point along the route, from Buckingham Palace, to St Paul's Cathedral, the focal point of the festivities, where numerous cameramen were to struggle to gain clear pictures above the bobbing heads of the enthusiastic crowds. Among them was one of the pioneers of British film, Robert Paul, seen here with a camera on a swivel base that he announced he would use for

panning shots. John Le Couteur, with his bulky 60mm Demenÿ camera, was positioned on the steps of St Paul's itself. There were cameramen from European firms recording this most auspicious international event: Gaumont, Lumière, Joly-Normandin from France and Dr J.H. Smith of Switzerland. Hundreds of thousands would see the procession on the day; hundreds of thousands more unable to be there would be able to see it on the motion picture screen.

June 20th opened, the actual sixtieth anniversary of the Queen's reign. She recorded her feelings in her journal:

This eventful day, 1897 has opened, and I pray God to help and protect me as He has hitherto done these sixty long eventful years! I feel sad at the new losses I have sustained, especially the last one of our beloved Liko! God will surely help me on! How well I remember this day sixty years ago when I was called from my bed by dear Mama to receive the news of my accession!

Although a more popular public figure in her later years than had often been the case earlier in her reign, the Queen privately bore many sorrows. As well as suffering the inevitable infirmities of old age, many of her extended family had died, and her son-in-law Henry, Prince of Battenberg (referred to as Liko in her journal entry) was only the most recent. Her daughter the Empress Frederick of Germany was suffering grievously from a prolonged and painful illness. And she had of course, never got over the death of her husband Albert in 1861, although her public appearances in such events as the Jubilees of 1887 and 1897 showed that she had over come her reclusive 'Widow of Windsor' phase.

The Queen celebrated June 20th comparatively quietly, with a service of thanksgiving at St George's Chapel, after which she visited Albert's tomb for a while. The next day she left for London by train. On her departure from Windsor she was greeted by large crowds, a scene captured on film by cameraman Alexandre Promio of the French company Lumière, in these two short scenes.



La Reine Arrivant de Windsor (Lumière, 21 June 1897)

She arrived by train at Paddington and crowds lined the streets all the way to Buckingham Palace. She spent the rest of the day receiving foreign envoys and getting presents from a wide range of assembled relations. The tone of the many addresses and well-wishes that she received at this time may best be gauged by the effort of the notoriously bad Poet Laureate of the day, Alfred Austin. His Jubilee poem, 'Victoria June 20 1837-June 20, 1897' was published on the 18th and was widely reviled even then. Austin's view of the world can be gleaned from the answer he

gave that month to the question, what his idea of heaven might be. He replied that it was

... to sit in an English garden and receive a stream of telegrams announcing a British victory by land and British victory by sea.

Austin had a certain mellifluous gift but absolutely no sense of restraint. Here are the last few stanzas of his heartfelt offering:

*Then to the winds yet wider was unfurled
The Flag that tyrants never could enslave,
Till its strong wisdom governed half the world,
And all the wave!*

*And, panoplied alike for War and Peace,
Victoria's England furroweth still the foam
To harvest Empire, wiser than was Greece,
Wider than Rome!*

*Therefore with glowing hearts and proud glad tears
The children of her Island Realm to-day
Recall her sixty venerable years
Of virtuous sway.*

*Now too from where Saint-Lawrence winds adown
'Twixt forests felled and plains that feel the plough,
And Ganges jewels the Imperial Crown
That girds her brow;*

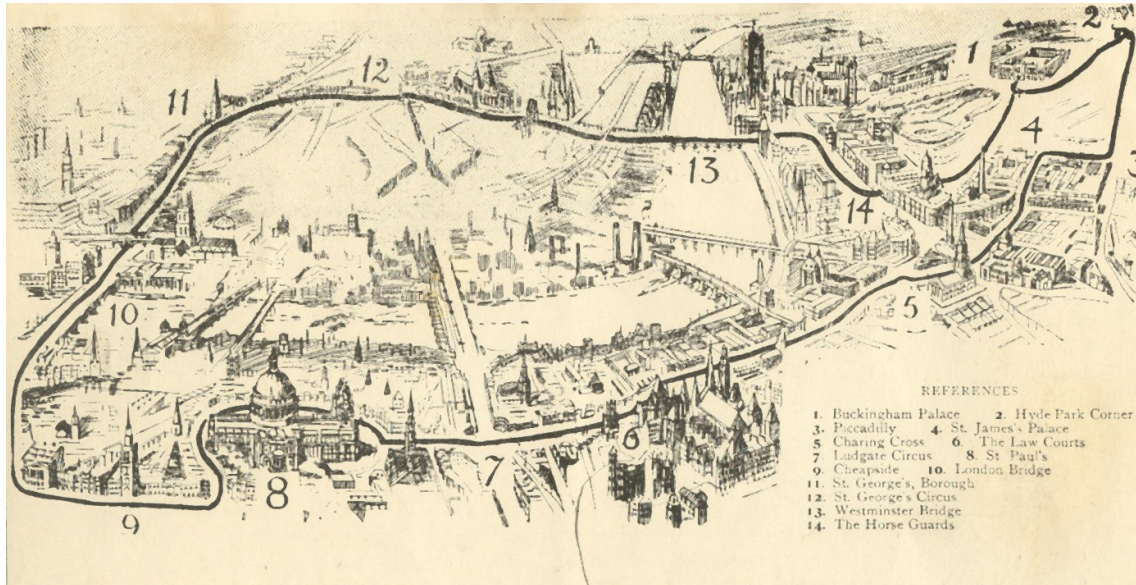
*From Afric's Cape, where loyal watchdogs bark,
And Britain's Sceptre ne'er shall be withdrawn,
And that young Continent that greets the dark
When we the dawn:*

*From steel-capped promontories stern and strong,
And lone isles mounting guard upon the main,
Hither her subjects wend to hail her long
Resplendent Reign.*

*And ever when mid-June's musk-roses blow,
Our race will celebrate Victoria's name,
And even England's greatness gain a glow
From Her pure fame.*

Crowds of sightseers from home and abroad roamed the streets looking at the decorations. It was a hot night, the night of the 21st, and the Queen got little sleep, partly on account of the noise of those in the park, where indeed many were sleeping who had either no other accommodation or were keen to be the first in line in the morning.

The day of the Diamond Jubilee procession had now come and here we have the outline of the route of the planned procession, starting and ending at Buckingham Palace, taken from the official programme.



The Times that morning set the tone for the day's events:

To-day the eyes of the whole Empire, and of millions of men beyond its pale, will be fixed upon London, and upon the great and inspiring ceremony in which we celebrate the sixty years of the Queen's reign. They will be fixed upon the revered and beloved figure of the woman who for two full generations has represented to so large a fraction of the human race, the principles order, of civilization, and of rational progress. They will be fixed upon one who, in a period of all-embracing change has offered during all these years an extraordinary instance of political and moral stability.

At 7.00 am thousands already lined the streets. It had been cold and wet for weeks, and although the night had been warm the new day looked to be unpromisingly grey.

The Queen rose and dressed, donning a dress of black silk with 'panels' of grey embroidered with silver, with a chiffon cape and a bonnet trimmed with ostrich feathers and an aigrette in diamonds. While she breakfasted with her daughters she watched from the Palace window the first part of the procession set off, the colonial troops, headed by the great hero of the British army Lord Roberts. Shortly after 11.00 she pressed an electric button which relayed a telegraphic

message to the Central Telegraph Office in St Martin's le Grand, and thence to every corner of the Empire. Her message was simplicity itself:

From my heart I thank my beloved people. May God bless them.

She was then helped into the state landau, drawn by eight cream-coloured horses, and sitting opposite her were Alexandra, Princess of Wales and Princess Christian, her third daughter. Her son the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VII) and the crusty Duke of Cambridge, the same age as the Queen, rode behind on either side of her carriage. Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught and chief architect of the procession arrangements, rode behind.

At 11.15 the royal party set off from Buckingham Palace. The procession itself contained 50,000 troops and was in two halves. The first, that of the colonial troops, had already passed the Palace while the Queen breakfasted. The other, of the Home forces, was headed by Captain Oswald Ames, at six foot eight the tallest man in the British Army,

and the stupidest

(according to Princess Alice). The official programme for the day gave people the route, the names of every dignitary in every carriage in the order that they would appear, and detailed line drawings of each of the colonial and home forces represented, from Canadian Hussars to the Dyaks of North Borneo, from Natal Caribiniers to Cypriot Zaptiehs (who were hissed by the crowds who saw their fezzes and supposed them to be Turks). Malays, and Hausas, and Jamaicans and Maoris, and of course pride of place for the many representatives of India, the Jewel in the Crown. The brilliant young journalist G.W. Steevens, who less than three years away would lose his life in the Boer War during the siege of Ladysmith, wrote of this display of Imperial possessions in the *Daily Mail*:

Up they came, more and more, new types, new realms at every couple of yards an anthropological museum - a living gazetteer of the British Empire. With them came their English officers, whom they obey and follow like children. And you begin to understand, as never before, what the Empire amounts to. Not only that we possess all these remote outlandish places ... but also that all these people are working, not simply under us, but with us - that we send out a boy her and a boy there, and a boy takes hold of the savages of the part he comes to, and teaches them to march and shoot as he tells them, to obey him and believe in him and die for him and the Queen ... A plain, stupid, uninspired people, they call us, and yet we are doing this with every kind of savage man there is. And each one of us - you and I, and that man in his shirt-sleeves at the corner - is a working part of this world-shaping force. How small you must feel in face of this stupendous whole, and yet how great to be a unit in it!

As they proceeded slowly up Constitution Hill the first signs of the sun, what was to called 'The Queen's Weather', began to break through. At Hyde Park Corner the procession turned to the right, and it was at this point that the first motion picture camera was positioned. It belonged to an

Englishman with a French-sounding name, John Le Couteur, who was the English representative of the French Gaumont firm. Le Couteur had three cameramen along the route, each operating the Demeny Chronophotographe camera shooting 60mm-wide film.

Le Couteur and his team shot many films that day, most of which are now lost. Happily we do have one to show you, shot at Hyde Park Corner by his cameraman on the spot, Gustave Colley.

From Hyde Park Corner the procession passed along Piccadilly, turning right down St James's Street, which was the most spectacularly decorated of all the London streets. Forty Venetian masts capped with the Imperial crown stood on either side of the street, with evergreens hanging from mast to mast. Two huge Corinthian columns stood at either end of the street, one of which can be seen in the next set of films. They were taken by an unnamed cameraman working for the British Cinematographe Company, agents for the French Joly-Normandin camera, which marketed in Britain as being 'Professor Jolly's Cinématographe'. Professor Jolly was positioned at the corner of St James's Street, sadly with all the spectacular decorations behind him, and took several views.



Diamond Jubilee Procession Taken from Apsley House
(John Le Couteur, 22 June 1897)



Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Procession (Joly-Normandin, 22 June 1897)

From St James's Street they travelled along Pall Mall towards the huge crowds waiting at Trafalgar Square and Charing Cross. It was outside the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square that the procession was viewed by Lady Monkswell, an assiduous diarist of the period:

I am still in a perfect maze from my exertions of this morning and can only think of a sea of horses and men, forests of plumes & lances. Of one thing there can be no doubt, the weather has been quite perfect. On Saturday we had a gale, on Sunday it was so cold that we had to have

fires. On Monday Morning the barometer began to rise, and by the evening it was 30 2/10ths, and the day has fulfilled its promise. The sun came out strong just about the time the Queen reached

St. Paul's. We drove to a door at the back of the National Gallery, and were thankful to find ourselves in the cool dark passages, and were at once directed by a brigadier of old Chelsea Pensioners to our seats. If I could have chosen I would rather have been in St Paul's Churchyard to hear the service, but as that could not be our seats were perfect. We were seated right under the right wing of the National Gallery and could see right down Pall Mall as far as the first houses in St James's Street, and right up to Charing Cross. It was overwhelming looking round upon the sea of people - the immense County Council stand was just opposite us, and as far as you could see on either side it was one mass of galleries & people to the very roofs.

We were almost the last to arrive, and had not been seated ten minutes before the fun began. Some bluejackets & soldiers arrived and lined the street just below us. We seem to have been seated no time at all before we saw the head of the procession coming up Pall Mall. It may roughly be divided into three parts. First came the National Brigade with guns, and the ten or twelve Colonial Premiers and their wives in carriages, each followed by the mounted troops of their Colony, such strange fine looking horsemen. The excellent Premiers and their wives who in their continent are quite small people, had never had such a good day in their lives, and were chiefly grinning from ear to ear with joy and pride. They were very well cheered. Secondly came Captain Ames, the tallest man in the British Army, 6-ft 8-in, and his four troopers, seven or eight Batteries of Horse Artillery, divided by what seemed to my aching sight endless Squadrons of Dragoon Guards, Hussars, the Scots Greys, and the 12th Lancers. Thirdly the splendid troops of native Indian Cavalry, the Indian Princes in their magnificent native costumes & riding the most splendid horses. The last, riding alone, was Sir Pertab Singh, A.D.C. to the Prince of Wales, & the great polo player. He looked one mass of gold - and the sixteen carriages ending with the cream coloured ponies, and the Queen.

We did not pay any attention to the first seven carriages, but we woke up very wide when those containing the little Battenberg, Connaught and Albany children came by, the children bowing their little best and beginning to look as if they had had almost enough of it tho' they were as yet not half through. The papers say that the little Duke of Albany fainted before he got home, and I can quite believe it. The last five carriages had four horses and postilions, and were filled with the well-known Princes and Princesses ... We did have an emotion when before our eyes, we beheld the dear old Queen - and what a cheer they gave her, it made the tears come to my eyes. She was sitting quite upright and brisk in the carriage not looking flushed or overcome, but smiling and bowing. She was dressed in grey and black and held in her hand the very long-handled black lace parasol lined with white, give her by Mr Charles Villiers, the oldest M.P. She held it up high so that we could see her face. Now I reflect upon it, her attitude expressing so much vigour, her bows which made so much impression upon me (I got one to myself at a Drawing-room & remember it now, and her keen blue eyes) what she had already done that week and what she had still to do. I cannot believe that she is in her 79th year ... When she was passed and we felt that we had done our Jubilee I had an overpowering emotion of thankfulness and satisfaction that I, with husband and sons, had been present at this great, this tremendous occasion.

At Temple Bar in the Strand, around midday, the Lord Mayor of London presented the City's Sword of State to the Queen, which she touched. The Queen noted later in her journal that, although in full ceremonial costume, he was bare-headed. She did not know that the Mayor, not as accustomed as he might be to riding, had temporarily become separated from his hat when his horse set off at a little too enthusiastic a canter. Crowds cheered when he regained control of his horse and donned his hat once more.

Seated in the Strand was one of the most notable spectators along the route, the American author Mark Twain. His account of the Jubilee is a curious work, the first half of which is given over to a reverie where Twain imagines a comparable pageant held in 1416 to mark the English victory at Agincourt. Returning to 1897, Twain found himself overwhelmed by the spectacle, to the point where he felt it defied his descriptive abilities as a writer.

I got to my seat in the Strand just in time – five minutes past 10 – for a glance around before the show began. The houses opposite, as far as the eye could reach, in both directions, suggested boxes in a theatre snugly packed. The gentleman next to me likened the groups to beds of flowers, and said he had never seen such a massed and multitudinous array of bright colors and fine clothes. These displays rose up and up, story by story, all balconies and windows being packed, and also the battlements stretching along the roofs. The sidewalks were filled with standing people, but were not uncomfortably crowded. They were fenced from the roadway by red-coated soldiers, a double stripe of vivid color which extended throughout the six miles which the procession would traverse.

Five minutes later the head of the column came into view, and was presently filing by, led by Captain Ames, the tallest man in the British Army. And then the cheering began. It took me but a little while to determine that this procession could not be described. There was going to be too much of it, and too much variety in it, so I gave up the idea. It was to be a spectacle for the kodak, not the pen.

Presently the procession was without visible beginning or end, but stretched to the limit of sight in both directions – bodies of soldiery in blue, followed by a block of soldiers in buff, then a block of red, a block of buff, a block of yellow, and so on, an interminable drift of swaying and swinging splotches of strong color sparkling and flashing with shifty light reflected from bayonets, lanceheads, brazen helmets and burnished breastplates. For varied and beautiful uniforms and unceasing surprises in the way of new and unexpected splendors, it much surpassed any pageant that I have ever seen. I was not dreaming of so stunning a show. All the nations seemed to be filing by. They all seemed to be represented. It was a sort of allegorical suggestion of the Last Day, and some who live to see that will probably recall this one if they are not too much disturbed in mind at the time ...

... At last, when the procession had been on view an hour and a half, carriages began to appear. In the first came a detachment of two-horse ones containing Ambassadors Extraordinary, in one of them Whitelaw Reid, representing the United States; then six containing minor foreign and

domestic princes and princesses; then five four-horse carriages freighted with offshoots of the family. The excitement was growing now; interest was rising towards the boiling point. Finally a landau driven by eight cream-coloured horses, most lavishly upholstered in gold stuffs, with postilions and no drivers, and preceded by Lord Wolseley, came bowling along, followed by the Prince of Wales, and all the world rose to its feet and uncovered.

The Queen Empress was come. She was received with great enthusiasm. It was realizable that she was the procession herself; that all the rest of it was mere embroidery; that in her the public saw the British Empire itself. She was a symbol, an allegory of England's grandeur and the might of the British name.

Along Fleet Street, past Ludgate Circus (where the Queen noted that survivors of the Charge of the Light Brigade were positioned), the procession continued through an unending crescendo of cheering as it made its way to the highpoint of the day, the service at St Paul's Cathedral. As the Queen's own carriage approached the Cathedral the procession was often stopped as the crowds broke out into singing 'God Save the Queen'. G.W. Steevens described the arrival of the royal party at St Paul's:

Already the carriages were rolling up full of the Queen's children and her children's children. But we hardly looked at them. Down there through an avenue of eager faces, through a storm of whitewaving handkerchiefs, through roaring volleys of cheers, there was approaching a carriage drawn by eight cream-coloured horses. The roar surged up the street keeping pace with the horses. The carriage passed the barrier; it entered the churchyard; it wheeled left and then right; it drew up at the very steps of the Cathedral; cheers broke into screams and enthusiasm swelled to delirium ... and there ... and there ... So very quiet, so very grave, so very punctual, so unmistakeably and every inch a lady and a Queen. Almost pathetic, if you will, that small figure in the middle of these shining cavaliers, this great army this roaring multitude; but also very glorious.

Around 15,000 people were crammed into the small space around the front of the Cathedral. To the left an entire warehouse had been demolished and a special stand erected for the most distinguished guests. St Paul's was obviously the most desired location for the film companies, and dotted around (having clearly spent large amounts of money for the privilege of such advantageous sites) were Robert Paul and his assistant Mr Hunt, John Le Couteur with his 60mm camera, and others. One of those cameramen, who is probably Mr Hunt, can be spotted in one of the still photographs taken of the scene.



Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (Robert Paul, 22 June 1897)

The service that was the centrepiece of the day took place on the steps of the Cathedral. The Queen was far too lame to be able to climb the steps and she had wisely vetoed a plan for a ramp to be built and for she with full carriage and horses to be driven inside and positioned underneath the dome of the Cathedral. Thus, practically, if a little disappointingly, her carriage stopped at the base of the cathedral steps. Here she was met by two archbishops, the Bishop of London, the prime minister Lord Salisbury, A.J. Balfour, Joseph Chamberlain, other members of the government, 500 choristers and two bands. Also positioned among all this lot was cameraman John Le Couteur, a man who had clearly used his known good social contacts to the full. Stills from the films that he took from his privileged position at the top of the steps give very close views of the ceremonies.

The service was kept short, it being agreed that twenty minutes was enough for the old Queen. A *Te Deum* was sung, then the Lord's Prayer was recited. The Bishop of London spoke a special Jubilee prayer, summing up succinctly the sentimental British view of the achievements of the past sixty years.

O Lord, our Heavenly Father, we give Thee hearty thanks for the many blessings which Thou hast bestowed upon us during the sixty years of the happy reign of our gracious Queen Victoria. We thank Thee for progress made in knowledge of Thy marvellous works, for increase of comfort given to human life, for kindlier feeling between rich and poor, for wonderful preaching of the Gospel to many nations, and we pray Thee that these and all other Thy gifts may be long continued to us and to our Queen, to the glory of Thy Holy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The Archbishop of Canterbury then pronounced a benediction, before the 500-strong choir and all 15,000 in the square and beyond sang *The Old Hundredth*, with some extra verses:

('All People That On Earth Do Dwell')

*In years to come, whate'er may be
'Mid joy or sorrow, good or ill
May she, O Lord, Thy goodness see,
Keep and defend and guide her still.*

*Grant her Thy peace, long may she reign.
And when at length Thy call shall come,
If so Thy will be, free from pain,
Take her to Thine eternal home.*

What the Queen's opinion was of having a massed choir before her singing of the manner of her death, she did not record. The service ended with the singing of the National Anthem. The Queen shed a tear or two, and thanked the bishops. Finally, the Archbishop of Canterbury

impulsively called for three cheers, which were so loud they could be heard as far away as Trafalgar Square.

And so the procession moved on, down along Cheapside towards the Mansion House. Seated somewhere along Cheapside at a window was a young woman, shortly about to be married, eagerly watching the procession with friends. Many years later Molly Hughes was to write a classic series of memoirs of her Victorian youth, and in *A London Home in the 1890s* she gives one of the most atmospheric accounts of the day:

In the summer of 1897 the whole country seemed given up to gaiety. The 'Queen's weather' of glorious sunshine began to work in the early part of the year and was repeating the glories of 1887. People from all parts were pouring into London, all the public buildings and shops were vying with one another in their decorations, and the coming Jubilee was the main topic of conversation. The lucky owners of windows overlooking the route of the procession were making small fortunes by letting seats.

A seat was quite beyond my means, and I was too old a Londoner to think of jostling among crowds in the street. But luck, as usual, came my way. My ever-constant friends, M'Jane and Yetta, went to the great expense of hiring two rooms in Cheapside, high up, with windows giving good views of the road. This astonished me, for they were always ostentatious about their radical views, and it seemed inconsistent to pay money merely to watch homage being paid to some one who after all was only a fellow mortal. But at heart they were as conservative as anyone, and almost fanatically loyal to the Queen, whose joys and griefs they had always seemed to share. With great forethought they invited some quite young cousins to see the procession, because these would be able to remember such an historical event when they were old. And for no good reason I was asked to share the fun.

And great fun it was. We all started off in two four-wheelers, M'Jane cumbered with two big baskets. We had to arrive early, for the streets were closed to traffic some hours before the ceremony. But there was no dull moment. Cheapside is historic enough when empty, but the overpowering interest now was to watch the increasing crowds getting wedged together and full of good-tempered excitement. Still more amusing was the way in which every available peep-hole in Cheapside had its spectator: roofs, window-sills, some very perilous-looking ledges, and even chimneys. I guessed that Shakespeare must have seen something of the kind, probably in that very road - always the London route for a triumph ...

... We watchers became aware that service was over and that the procession had left the cathedral, from the indefinable stirring among the crowds below, very much as one becomes aware of the approach of a train from the behaviour of the people on the platform. The rumour, 'They're coming!' seemed to spread from nowhere. We could see the extra craning of necks and could hear the distant cheering, getting ever louder. Presently Captain Ames appeared. He had been chosen to lead the procession because of his great height and fine bearing. After him came long lines of soldiers and sailors of every kind, and from all parts of the Empire. No such

representative procession had ever been seen in England before. As each fresh contingent appeared cheers poured forth. At last a roar of almost alarming strength told us that the Queen was at hand. I had not seen her since the early seventies, when she drove along Essex Road (for some obscure reason) and I had been held up to get a view. I then saw a little lady in black and had been rather disappointed that she looked like anybody else. And now the quarter of a century didn't seem to have made much difference to her. It was the same little lady in black, but now she carried a parasol - a merciful protection not only from the blazing June sunshine but also from the sight of so many people perched in perilous spots. Specially engraved on my memory was her personal escort: on one side of her carriage rode her son, our long-beloved Prince of Wales, and on the other side her grandson, the Kaiser - both of them in resplendent uniforms, mostly white. All the brilliance of her surroundings merely emphasized the majesty of the little lady in black.

Molly Hughes's memory is a little at fault - the Kaiser was not present at the Jubilee; the person she saw was the Duke of Cambridge.

The film we shall see now unfortunately cannot be identified either as to location or to filmmaker. It appears to have been taken in the City area, and so we are fitting it in here. What it does give is the clearest picture of all of the films that survive from this day of the Queen's carriage, with the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge following dutifully behind.

At the Mansion House the Lady Mayoress presented the Queen with a silver basket of orchids. The procession turned southwards and moved down King William Street towards the Thames. They processed over London Bridge and into South London along the broad arc of Borough Road, where many of the Queen's poorest subjects lived.



Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (unknown filmmaker, 22 June 1897)

Less was reported of this part of the journey, oddly enough, and there were few film cameras positioned along this southern portion. One who did place himself there was the enterprising R.J. Appleton of Bradford, who stood outside St George's Church in the Borough, took his films; then, in a specially adapted van developed and printed his film on the train journey back to Bradford, and courtesy of a giant screen hung outside the offices of the *Bradford Argus*, was able to show films of the procession to the inhabitants of Bradford that same evening. This remarkable achievement was rewarded with crowds of tens if not hundreds of thousands over the week that it was shown. Sadly, Appleton's film, which is reported to have shown the Queen smiling, does not survive.

Also located on the Borough at St George's Circus, was the Lumière film company from France. Their cameraman was Alexandre Promio, who had already travelled far and wide for Lumière, taking many of the first films produced in countries across the world. Promio took some of the clearest views of the procession, as we shall now see.



Le jubilé de la reine Victoria, (Lumière, 22 June 1897)

Moving along Westminster Bridge Road, passing from Southwark to Lambeth, the procession came towards Westminster Bridge itself, where at the junction with York Road, just before the bridge begins, one of Robert Paul's cameramen (name unknown) was in position.



Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Procession (Paul, 22 June 1897)



On the other side of Westminster Bridge, at the corner of Parliament Street and Great George Street, overlooking Parliament Square, was E.P. Prestwich, filming for the Prestwich Manufacturing Company. These scenes are believed to be those taken by him.

Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Procession (Prestwich, 22 June 1897)

The procession was now on the homeward stretch. Most of the eyewitness reports are from newspapers, and are gushing in the extreme. G.W. Steevens clearly felt that he had reached the limits of what the poor English language could describe:

Scarlet and gold, azure and gold, purple and gold, emerald and gold, white and gold always a changing tumult of colours that seemed to list and gleam with a light of their own, and always blinding gold. It was enough. No eye could bear more gorgeousness, no more gorgeousness could be, unless princes are to clothe themselves in rainbows and the very sun.

Not all eyewitnesses, thankfully, were quite so in awe of gold and glory. The painter Edward Burne-Jones, who had seen the procession as it passed Westminster and moved up Whitehall, was not impressed with the purple prose of the newspapers, and later that afternoon passed on his impressions to his studio assistant Thomas Rooke:

It was all surprisingly successful - but all the boasting of the newspapers is so dreadful; it makes one wonder that a thunderbolt doesn't fall upon London ... And all this enthusiasm spent over one little unimportant old lady in the one effort of imagination of the English race. It's curious, but rather pretty. There was one set of men near where we were, that won great favour. It was a regiment that kept the ground in front of Downing Street - the Seaforth Highlanders. They were in the highest good humour with everybody, and the pipers puffed away and kept walking backwards and forwards swelling with such pride and excitement that their naked calves seemed to turn upwards - making such a beastly row that I loathe and detest above all others - till I nearly went mad - for as you know the noise of Scotch bagpipes is the one sound I can't bear. Such savage, barbarous people they looked. Excellent people no doubt and in the best of tempers they were, but in that dress with tight plaid trousers and huge headdress of ostrich feathers they looked like South Sea Islanders altogether. There was an old boy on horseback who kept riding up and down and screaming at them and you could see his ridiculous bottom as he sat on his saddle. And he had brass-coloured eyebrows and moustaches and a pink face. Literally brass-coloured his hair was. He was a sight! It is said she (the poor old Queen) was very pleased with it all and wanted to go and see the illuminations, but [they] wouldn't let her. Ah, now we can go to work quietly once more - once in a lifetime's enough for a Jubilee.

Down Whitehall they passed on the left, at Horse Guards, the huge Biograph camera operated by William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson (whose films do not survive), while on the right was the giant stand seating 4,000 with its smoking gallery, ladies room, luncheon room and single telephone. They then turned down the Mall to Buckingham Palace. The journey had been six miles, it had taken the Queen three hours, and at 1.45 she was back. She rested until tea, then in the evening a family dinner party was held in the Palace, at which on the Queen's table a display of nearly 60,000 orchids from every part of the Empire were arranged in the shape of a crown. At 11.00 pm, before retiring, the Queen dutifully recorded her impressions of the day in her journal:

A never-to-be-forgotten day. No one ever, I believe, has met with such an ovation as was given to me passing through those six miles of streets, including Constitution Hill. The crowds were quite indescribable, and their enthusiasm truly marvellous and deeply touching. The cheering was quite deafening, and every face seemed to be filled with real joy. I was much moved and gratified.

The next day she received loyal and fulsome addresses from members of parliament and civic dignitaries, in four separate and no doubt quite gruelling ceremonies, and late in the afternoon went back to Windsor, where further addresses awaited her at almost every turn. Finally at the foot of Castle Hill, she received a final address from the Mayor and Corporation of Windsor, then she halted while 10,000 schoolchildren positioned on special stands, having been suitably bribed with sticky buns and sweets, sang the National Anthem. She finally made it to Windsor Castle at eight.

The Jubilee celebrations continued for some days yet. There were many side-shows, from the conference of Colonial Premiers organised by Chamberlain, to the Diamond Jubilee feasts for London's poor initiated by the Princess of Wales, and given initial funding of £25,000 by Sir Thomas Lipton. Eventually 400,000 people were fed 700 tons of food at various of these feasts, served by 10,000 waiters. Elsewhere in London and the provinces there were any number of street parties, receptions, unveilings, processions, speeches, balls, concerts and other entertainments. Naturally there were celebrations throughout the Empire as well, though these were muted in India where both plague and famine raged, and even countries most hostile to Britain took stock and admired what it had achieved.

Most significant among the subsequent celebrations in Britain, politically speaking, was the massive Naval Review at Spithead on June 26th, since the might of the Empire and Britain's unique status as a world power was very much defined by its naval power. But the films that were taken of the event do not survive, and the Queen herself did not attend.

What she did attend, however, was a garden party at Buckingham Palace on June 28th which we shall cover because it was filmed extensively by John Le Couteur, single images from whose films survive if not the films themselves, and by Adolphe Langfrier of the Velograph Syndicate, a film of whose does exist. The Queen described the day in her journal in plain terms.

Reached Buckingham Palace half past one. Before going up to my room I planted a tree not far from the one I planted ten years ago. At a few minutes past five, got into my victoria with Vicky for the garden-party, all the rest of the family and foreign royalties being on foot. Drove about my guests, to many of whom I spoke, but I could not see many whom I wished to. Alix changed places with Vicky part of the time. Had tea in the tent.

The party was a magnificent affair, with foreign royalty, politicians and stars of the stage such as Henry Irving and Ellen Terry in attendance, and the attentive Lady Monkswell surveyed the scene:

The Queen's Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. There was so much to see and do that I feel I have not half lived up to my opportunities ... The Queen got into a large Victoria drawn by two greys, an outrider on a very quiet sensible knowing old grey went first. She went all round the garden, everybody crowing round and curtsying in a way that must have satisfied her inmost heart. I caught glimpses of her when she started and saw her very well when she had been all round. She was bowing and looking very happy; the Princess of Wales was sitting with her. She then went and sat in a large black tent banked up with flowers; it was wide open - all the front - and her faithful subjects could see her taking tea and having her toast buttered by the Indian servant.



*The Queen's Garden Party at Buckingham Palace,
(Velograph, 28 June 1897)*

Although London and the country at large were in the grip of a kind of patriotic mania, there had been a few dissenting voices. William Gladstone, leader of the deposed Liberal Party, was a staunch anti-Imperialist and privately expressed the wish that the Queen would choose the occasion of the Jubilee to abdicate. Beatrice Webb, the pioneering Socialist, avoided London on the 22nd, but noted sardonically in her diary on the 28th:

Back in London. Imperialism in the air, all classes drunk with sightseeing and hysterical loyalty.

A more extended critique from the Left was provided three days before the Jubilee procession by Kier Hardie, President of the Independent Labour Party, who, writing in *The Labour Leader*, saw in the celebrations not a tremendous affirmation of Empire, but an inevitable stage in the unstoppable process of political change:

Symbolically, the world will be united in a common rejoicing over an event rare in the history of nations. To the visitor from Mars two things might seem to be incontrovertible - first, that the world was at peace; second, that the thrones of the world were firmly embedded in the heart of a loyal and grateful people. And yet the Martian visitor would be totally mistaken. The cheering millions would be there and cheer just as lustily if the occasion were the installation of the first President of the British Republic; the soldiers are there because they are paid for coming, and nine out of every ten of them will heartily curse the whole affair as a disagreeable and irksome additional duty; the statesmen are there because Empire means trade, and trade means profit, and profit means power over the common people. Modern loyalty is born of one of two states - fear of the common people or toadyism. There is no third explanation possible ...

Every such show as the present hastens the end. Millions will go out on Tuesday next to see the Queen. What they will see will be an old lady of very commonplace aspect. That of itself will set some a-thinking. Royalty to be a success should be kept off the streets. So long as the fraud can be kept a mystery, carefully shrouded from popular gaze, it may go on ... The workers can but have one feeling in the matter - contempt for thrones and for all who bolster them up, but none the less a genuine desire to bring the nations of the earth closer together in unity - not on the basis of a royal alliance, nor on a commercial vision, but on that of a desire to live in concord. King and diplomat and trader are each, all unwittingly, preparing the way for the consummation so devoutly to be desired.

But a sense of unease and change underlay the enthusiasm of even the most unabashed Imperialist, and the person who detected it, gave expression to it, and in the process gave Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee its most lasting monument, was the poet of Empire himself, Rudyard Kipling. Contemplating the events of June 22nd, Kipling found the phrase, 'Lest we forget' haunting him, and he eventually wrote the stanzas that became one of his best known poems, 'Recessional', published in *The Times* a month later. Kipling, with customary genius, saw not triumphalism but humility in the Diamond Jubilee, and tapped into general but largely unspoken fears of an uncertain future. The poem's impact was huge.

*God of our fathers, known of old -
Lord of our far-flung battle-line -
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine -
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget!*

*The tumult and the shouting dies -
The captains and the kings depart -
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget!*

*Far-call'd our navies melt away -
On dune and headland sinks the fire -
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget!*

*If, drunk with sight of power we loose
Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe -
Such boasting as the Gentiles use*

*Or lesser breeds without the Law -
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget!*

*For heathen heart that puts her trust
In reeking tube and iron shard -
All valiant dust that builds on dust,
And guarding calls not Thee to guard -
For frantic boast and foolish word,
Thy Mercy on Thy People Lord!*

Kipling's fears were justified. Although military triumph of just the right kind was to follow in 1898 when Kitchener triumphed in the Sudan, 1899-1900 saw the unimaginable disaster to British arms of the Boer War, a clear sign that in the new century the tide would turn against the plans of the British Imperialists. Queen Victoria's last years were greatly darkened by the Boer War calamity, as well as continued sadness in her private life, notably the death in 1900 of her son Alfred. She died on January 22nd, 1901, and all the motion picture cameras came out once again for her funeral.

Which brings us just about to the end of this recreation and celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, one hundred and fifteen years ago, almost to the day. For as the entertainment trade journal of the period, *The Era*, noted, thanks our modern scientific age and the miracle of motion pictures, it was possible then and is still possible now for those who could not be there nevertheless to attend the Jubilee:

Those loyal subjects of her Majesty who did not witness the glorious pageant of the Queen's progress through the streets of London to the thanksgiving service at St Paul's on June 22nd, should not miss the opportunity of seeing the wonderful series of pictures at the Empire, giving a complete representation of the Jubilee procession. We owe much to the recent development of scientific photography; and by the invention of the cinématographe a means has been discovered for the preservation of what is to all intents and purposes living representations of memorable events. Our descendants will be able to learn how the completion of the sixtieth year of Queen Victoria's reign was celebrated in the capital of the country.

But these moving images that have been passed down to us are black-and-white, static, silent, and almost wholly lacking in atmosphere. They show us something, and they undoubtedly meant much at the time, but we need the word to impart what it all meant to the general mass of folk in 1897. Amid all the often quite absurd purple prose that the Jubilee generated, the hysterical loyalty that so disturbed Beatrice Webb, there can be some passages to tell us what it all meant to an age over a century and a vast gulf away from our own. So, a final quotation from W. Macqueen-Pope, remembering the scenes that he had witnessed as a boy:

That Middle Class boy whose memory records these things now recalls it all so plainly, so vividly. He was to see many more sights; he was to see that Golden Age go down in war, and another less stable, less prosperous age succeed it until war burned that up too. He was to see and experience war, and many other pageants of peace, to meet and speak to great personages to Royalty of all nations. But it was never the same thrill.

He knows now what he did not know then - that he witnessed on the 22nd June, 1897, the very summit and topmost pinnacle of the age of the sovereign, of the greatness and grandeur of his country. Many more years were to pass on, years of richness, plenty and security, before the end came; before his class was numbered amongst the things which had been - but he had seen, and remembers, that day of days when a great Sovereign rode amongst her people, and when all was as golden as that golden sovereign which gave the nation peace, security and might - which passed from it slowly but surely when that coin, which was the standard of England, died in the first shock of the First World War, when the whole world changed for ever.

The End

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Video links

DIAMOND JUBILEE PROCESSION TAKEN FROM APSLEY HOUSE (Gaumont / Le Couteur)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VG55kEokxL8>

QUEEN VICTORIA'S DIAMOND JUBILEE BRITISH CINEMATOGRAPHE (British Cinematographe / Joly-Normandin)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTG9NJTZFKk>

QUEEN VICTORIA'S DIAMOND JUBILEE (ST PAUL'S: NORTH 1) (Paul)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udxoYiikhEQ>

QUEEN VICTORIA'S DIAMOND JUBILEE (unknown filmmaker)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pmuk-uRAJ4>

QUEEN VICTORIA'S DIAMOND JUBILEE (YORK ROAD) (Paul)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4PDxc3acyg>

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnip7RRc3Q4>