

H.M.S. THUNDERER

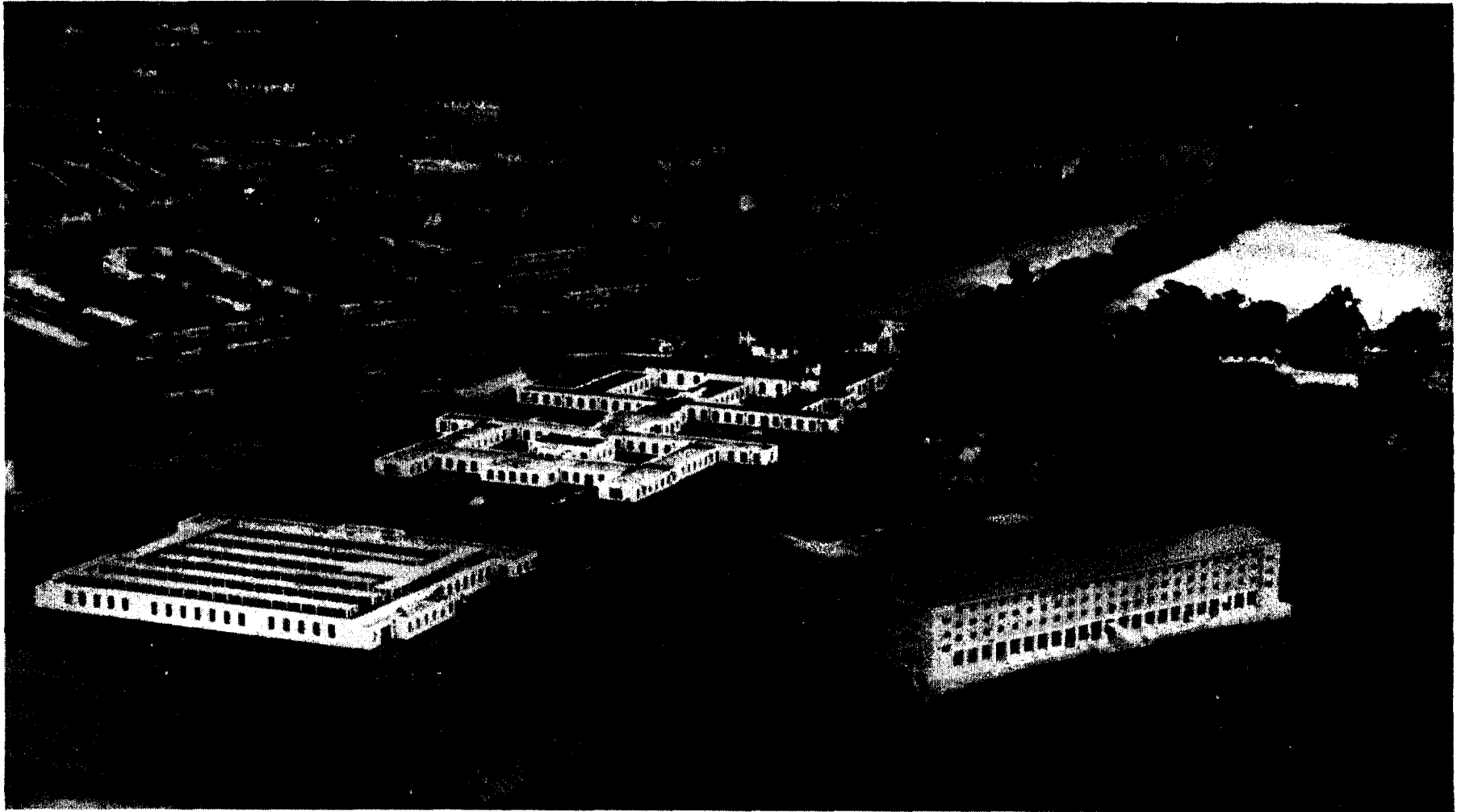
OPENING OF THE NEW MESS AT MANADON

Ever since the Foundation Stone was laid by the First Sea Lord on July 13th, 1956, it had been hoped that Her Majesty the Queen might honour us by consenting to open the New Mess officially on its completion. Thus it was with great pleasure and some excitement that we heard in March of the official announcement from Buckingham Palace that Her Majesty and Prince Philip were to visit Plymouth on July 29th as part of a West Country tour which included the Scilly Isles and Dartmouth. The Royal visitors were to spend the forenoon in Plymouth and after lunching on the Hoe would arrive at Manadon at 1530 and be with us until 1700.

Preparations

Planning could now begin in earnest. A programme covering every minute of the visit had to be worked out and submitted to the Palace for approval, but this was not as easy as it looked. There was a great deal that we wanted the Queen and Prince Philip to see and do during their ninety minutes' visit, but the main object was formally to open the New Mess. The traditional way to do this was for Her Majesty to unlock the doors, and in fact Messrs. Costains, the Contractors, had already intimated that they intended to provide a gold key for this purpose to be presented to the Queen on the day. The difficulty was that, short of erecting stands on the grass opposite the New Building to accommodate the 900 guests we expected, only a very few people would be able to see the unlocking ceremony. Reluctantly this had to be accepted and the visit was planned on the basis of the main body of guests being seated in the Mess for the Thanksgiving Service and subsequently attending a reception on the car park where Her Majesty and Prince Philip would join them after their tour of the building. It was also arranged that as many as possible of the guests should see the arrival and unlocking of the doors, some being outside the doors and some in the hall. After unlocking the doors it was proposed that Her Majesty should unveil a stone in the Hall commemorating her visit and then sign the Visitors' Book with Prince Philip before attending the Service of Thanksgiving. After the Service the Queen and Prince Philip were to go on separate tours of the building during which they each were to plant a copper beech tree in front of the building. Due to the demands of nature these trees had to be planted some months before the visit but skilled deception by the gardening staff made it appear on the day that they had not long been in place. It is doubtful, however, whether the Duke was deceived judging by the expert fashion in which he wielded his spade. After Prince Philip's tour he was to present the Duke of Edinburgh's trophy medallion to Lieutenant Allen of 42 Commando Royal Marines. This ceremony was added to the programme at the request of the Major General, Royal Marines, Plymouth, as it was the only occasion on which Prince Philip could present the medal in person. After this presentation Her Majesty and Prince Philip were to retire to the staff ante-room for private refreshments before joining the reception where they were to spend about fifteen minutes before their departure. This programme was approved by the Palace with the small alteration that Her Majesty would like to visit Manadon House before starting the main part of the programme.

Many other things had to be considered—not least of which was the weather. Despite confident predictions in the early stages that it would be a blazing hot day, as the summer progressed it became apparent that no faith could be



AERIAL VIEW OF THE NEW MESS AND COLLEGE BUILDINGS

pinned on the weather doing anything other than rain, and a detailed wet weather routine was worked out. As it happened it was not required on the day, though it was touch and go and there were many fingers surreptitiously crossed throughout the visit.

Detailed planning continued and although it was still many weeks to the visit, the time seemed to fly and there was still much to do. A certain staff officer was frequently to be heard asking for Buckingham Palace on the telephone. In the early stages he was somewhat diffident about this, but as time progressed it became a matter of course until one day in a burst of over-confidence he asked for 'the Palace' and promptly found himself connected to the booking office of a local theatre! After that he asked for Whitehall 4832, which much to his surprise he discovered was in the London telephone directory. Many were the queries ranging from what the Queen likes for tea to whether she would still inspect the Guard and plant the tree if it was wet ; the answer to the latter incidentally, being a very firm Yes.

Once officers had been allocated to the large number of duties envisaged on the day, a detailed programme of rehearsal was worked out and the typing staff were kept very busy with the large quantity of paper which began to appear under the heading 'Royal Visit'. However, they managed it all and remained cheerful even when minor amendments to the programme approved by the Palace necessitated it being typed for the ninth (or was it tenth ?) time.

A special instructional routine was adopted enabling rehearsals to be carried out during the lunch hour and these began in earnest about half-term. Despite the daily curtailment of eating and drinking time, a lot of amusement was had from the rehearsals. Two distinguished college actors were engaged to play the part of the Royal couple and many officers kindly lent their cars to represent those in the various processions. On more than one occasion what can only be described as a 'typical College vehicle' just managed to deposit the 'Lord Mayor' or the 'Commander-in-Chief' at the New Building though it is not on record that any actually had to be pushed away after dropping their distinguished passengers.

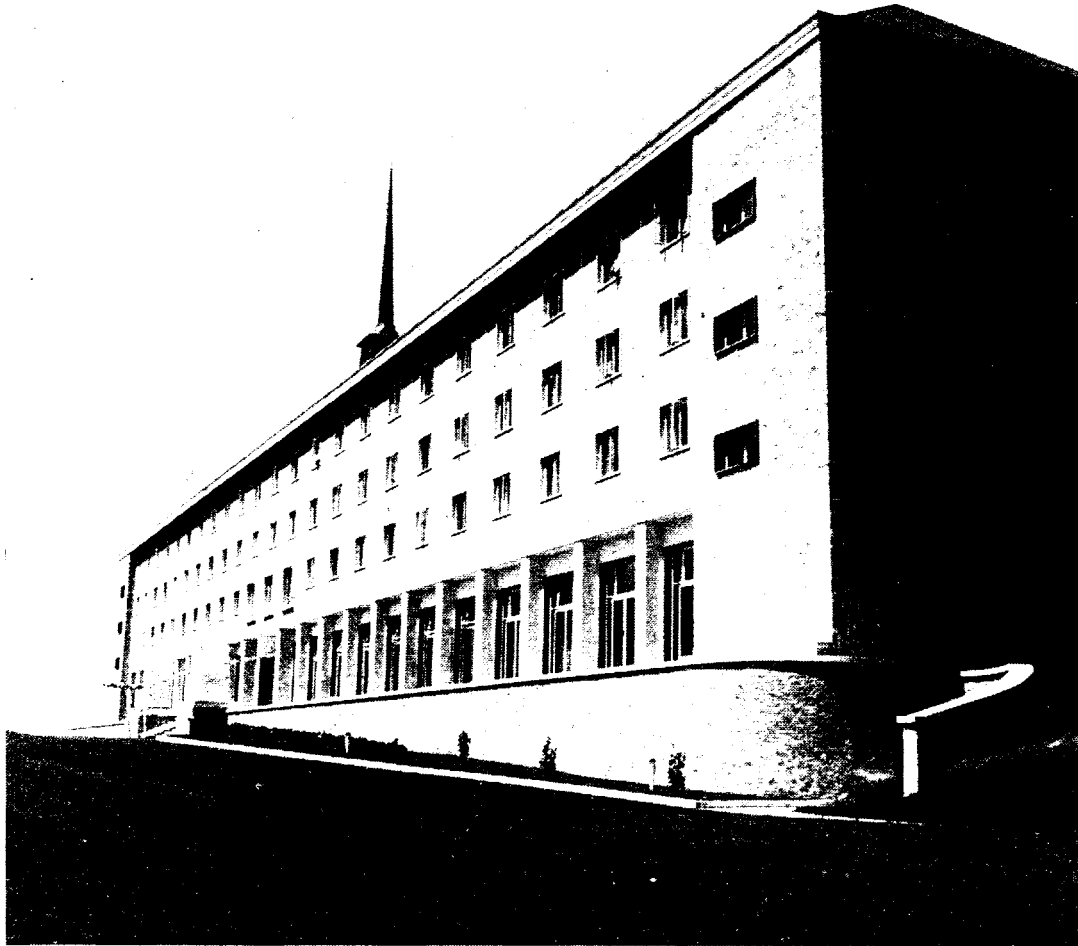
Rehearsals continued, the invitations were sent out, printing of programmes, tickets and instructions to guests were in hand, and many other detailed arrangements were going ahead satisfactorily by the beginning of July when we heard to our great dismay of Her Majesty's illness. All the arrangements continued, as at that time it was hoped that she would still be able to visit us, but on Monday, 21st, it was announced that Her Majesty, on the advice of her doctors, had regretfully decided to cancel all her engagements until the end of the month. This was a shattering blow, although not altogether unexpected in view of the earlier announcement of the Queen's illness. Disappointing as it was, however, there was no doubt that the Queen was only now recovering from a very painful illness and no-one would have expected or wished her to undertake a strenuous programme such as that planned for her in Plymouth until she was fully recovered.

The next day it was learned with pleasure that Prince Philip would still be visiting us and that he would carry out the Queen's programme throughout. The Captain wrote to the Queen's Private Secretary as follows :—

'Please convey my humble duty to Her Majesty and the deep regret of all the naval and civilian personnel at the Royal Naval Engineering College that she will not now be able to visit us on July 29th. They all join me in wishing her a very speedy recovery.'

The following reply was received from Her Majesty's Private Secretary :—

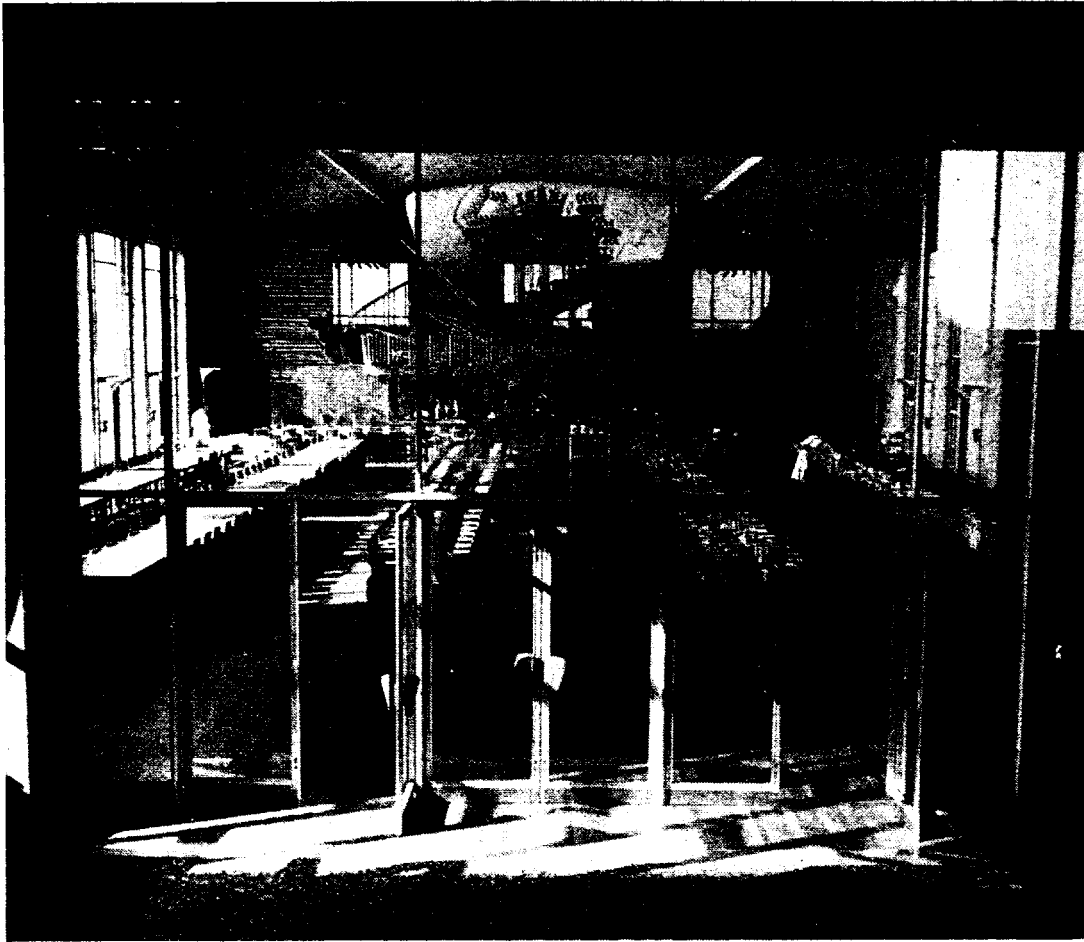
'The Queen was so much pleased to read your letter of 24th July. Would



FRONT OF THE NEW WARDROOM MESS

you please convey her thanks to everyone at the Royal Naval Engineering College for their kind message.'

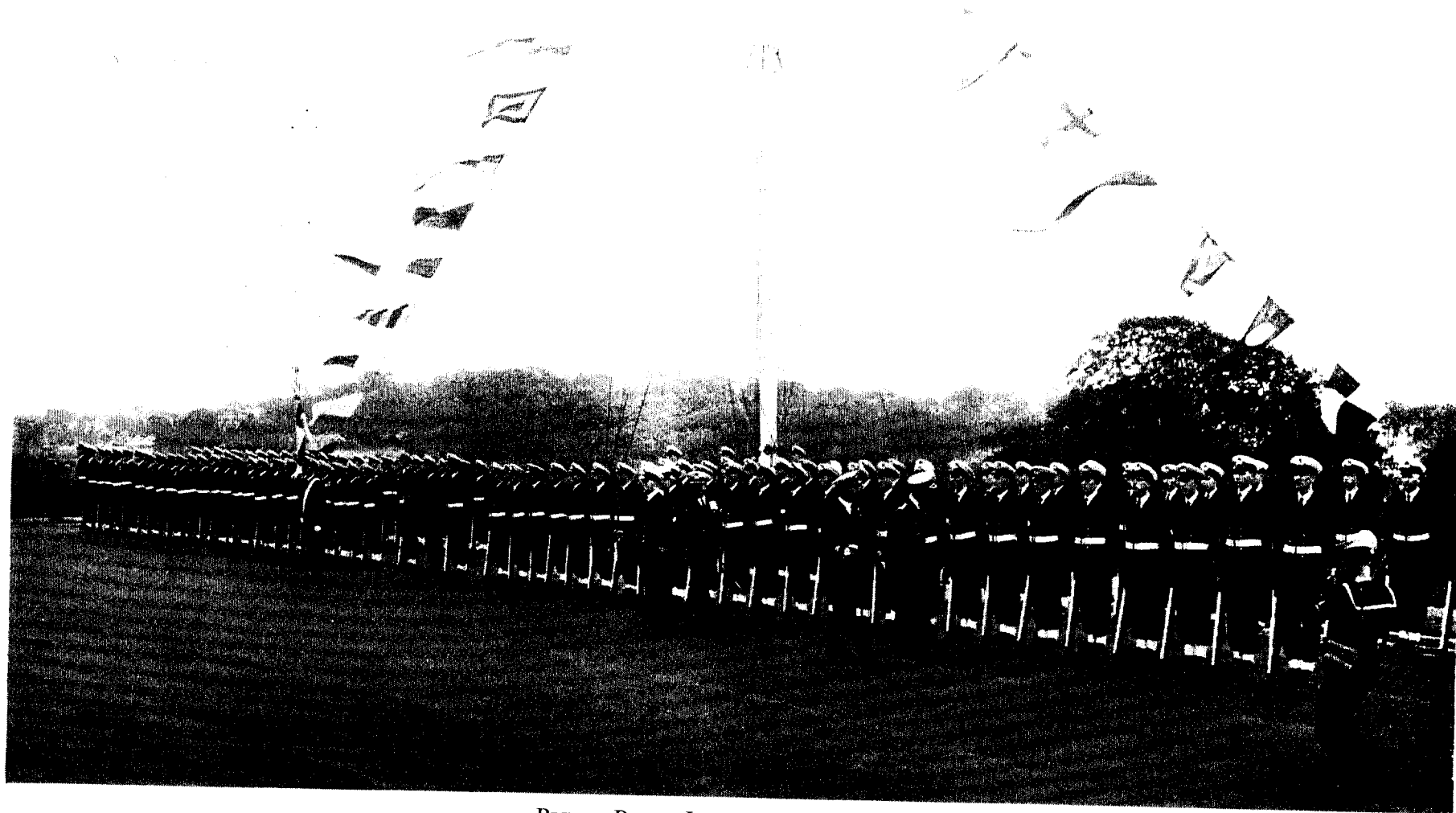
There were now many last minute adjustments to be made in the organization although the programme remained substantially the same. The major difficulty was the question of the Stone, the wording of which was now quite unsuitable for the occasion. After consultation with the Ministry of Works and the Palace it was decided to omit this part of the programme and at some later date substitute another stone suitably re-worded to commemorate Prince Philip's visit. Fortunately, the inscription on the gold key was worded in such a way that His Royal Highness could still perform the ceremony of unlocking the door and accept the key on Her Majesty's behalf. One other sad occurrence was to mar this great event to which we had looked forward so much. On the Saturday evening Lady Walsham was taken ill and had to be removed to hospital for an operation. Although this operation was entirely successful and at the time of writing she is making excellent progress, the disappointment of the Captain and Lady Walsham after they had looked forward so keenly to welcoming a reigning Sovereign to Manadon House, was shared by everyone in the College.



THE GREAT HALL OF MANADON

JULY 29th

The last few days before the visit were, to say the least, somewhat hectic, but somehow by about 1330 on July 29th it was all done thanks to the mighty labours of the heavy gang, cleaners and stewards, catering and gardening staff and many of the officers who helped with rigging the Mess and doing sundry last minute tasks. The main concern now was the weather. The previous two days it had rained heavily and continuously but this had ceased by the morning of the 29th and though it was cloudy it looked as though it might hold off. As the wind was westerly it was possible to get hourly reports from Culdrose and these were encouraging. It was decided to hold the reception outside on the car park but to clear all the chairs out of the Mess after the Thanksgiving Service so that should it start to rain all the guests could be got back under cover and the reception could continue inside. In fact, apart from one attempt at a shower which lasted a very short time, it did not rain at all and the sun even shone for a moment or two while Prince Philip was at the reception. It did, however, start to blow rather strongly just before Prince Philip arrived and there was much holding of hats on the way up from the main car park: indeed, a report that two flying saucers had been seen over Manadon was circulating at one point, but it was subsequently found that two ladies had been a little unwise in their choice of hats. The wind was at its worst in the front of the building, and some ladies had one or two uncomfortable moments there but the car park was fairly well sheltered by the screen round it and the west end of the building itself.



PRINCE PHILIP INSPECTING THE GUARD

(Tom Molland Ltd., Plymouth)

Arrivals

Apart from one or two cars going in the wrong direction, which is perhaps to be expected on an occasion such as this, things went smoothly enough during the arrival of the main body of guests. Many arrived early and chatted in the Hall or had a quick look round until it was time to take their seats at 1500. At 1510 a rather alarming message was received that Prince Philip was 15 minutes early and would be arriving very shortly. The short visit to Manadon House now proved itself a blessing in disguise as it gave a breathing space in which to get the Guard and Colour in position and the Senior Officers of the Services in the Port up to the New Building. The latter had been waiting in the guest house and their procession was not due to leave for another ten minutes. However, by holding back the Civic Procession they were all enabled to arrive in the right order without undue haste and by the time Prince Philip left Manadon House some ten minutes early, just before 1530, all was ready at the New Building.

Royal Salute and Inspection of the Guard

At last the great moment had arrived when the Royal car drew up at the steps of the New Building and Prince Philip alighted accompanied by the Lord Mayor of Plymouth. He was followed by Members of the Household and the Second Sea Lord who attended in place of the First Sea Lord who was unfortunately unable to be present. As he stepped out of his car to be received by the Commander-in-Chief, Prince Philip's personal standard was broken at the masthead. After the Captain had presented the Commander, His Royal Highness took his salute from the Guard and Band on the dais. The Guard, which was commanded by Lieutenant-Commander D. J. Lean, R.N., the Senior Ordnance Engineer, with Lieutenant (E) W. H. Atwood, R.C.N., as Second Officer of the Guard, consisted of one hundred Sub-Lieutenants drawn from ten of the eleven nations serving at the College. Navies represented were the Royal Navy, Royal Canadian Navy, Royal Australian Navy, Royal New Zealand Navy, South African Navy, Indian Navy, Pakistan Navy, Burmese Navy, Imperial Iranian Navy and the Colombian Navy.

The Command Queen's Colour was also paraded, borne by Lieutenant R. A. A. Dean, R.N. and with Lieutenant N. McK. Walker, R.N.Z.N., Lieutenant B. R. Bambrick, R.A.N. and Lieutenant (E) C. P. Tisdall, R.C.N., as Colour Party.

It was an impressive sight and a great pity that more guests could not see it, though they did have the opportunity later of seeing the Colour returned and the Guard and Band march off.

Prince Philip subsequently expressed his pleasure at the smartness and bearing of the Guard as did many other visitors.

After his inspection of the Guard, Prince Philip mounted the steps leading to the New Mess and the Commander-in-Chief presented the Engineer-in-Chief and Mrs. Dalton. The Captain then invited His Royal Highness formally to open the New Mess which he did with the gold key offered to him by the youngest officer under instruction, Cadet Carnie, of the 'Eagle' division of Air Cadets. On entering the Hall a number of guests and College officers and their wives were presented to Prince Philip by the Captain.

On completion of these presentations all those in the Hall, with the exception of the Household, the Commander-in-Chief, Second Sea Lord, Engineer-in-Chief and the Captain, took their seats in the Mess while Prince Philip signed the Visitors Book. After signing the book the Captain asked him to accept on Her Majesty's behalf two table lamps for use in the Royal Yacht. These lamps were made in the workshops, and all who saw them agreed that they were



(Dermot P Fitzgerald, Plymouth)

ENTERING THE BUILDING AFTER UNLOCKING THE DOOR

a fitting present and their fine workmanship truly represented the many talents of the workshop staff who made them.

Thanksgiving Service and Tour of Inspection

On the way from the Hall to the Thanksgiving Service the Captain presented the Chaplain of the Fleet and the Chaplain of the College at the entrance to the Mess. The Chaplains then preceded Prince Philip on to the dais for the Service and the main body of guests were able to see His Royal Highness for the first time.

After the Service Prince Philip left the Mess to carry out his tour of the building accompanied by those on the dais, the Commander and the Director of Engineering, Mr. Bedford, the Chief Architect of the Ministry of Works and Mr. Furse, the Senior Architect, who had been responsible for the building. Others who had been present in the Hall on Prince Philip's arrival also left to watch him plant his tree, while the remainder of the guests moved on to the car park in readiness for the reception and to allow our expert team of furniture removers to clear the chairs from the Mess.

The first part of the tour went very swiftly. Prince Philip visited the staff ante-room and the east ante-room where Mr. Foster, the Head Wine Steward, was presented and then proceeded to his tree where the Captain presented Mr. Dinham, the Head Gardener. After planting the tree Prince Philip returned to the front of the building where he was received by Major-General Madoc. His Royal Highness then presented the Duke of Edinburgh's trophy medallion to Lieutenant Allen, R.M. After this presentation Prince Philip returned to the east end of the building and continued his tour. He visited cabins and the writing room on the first floor and then departed from his route to inspect the west ante-room, the galley and the guest rooms. The four Civic mace bearers who were guarding the robes in the small guest room were taken somewhat by surprise and Prince Philip lived up to his reputation, obviously enjoying these deviations from his set route. Fortunately the clearing of the chairs was practically finished by the time he visited the galley where the organization of supplying tea for the reception and preparations for the Ball to follow in the evening were in full swing.

On completion of his tour, which had taken longer than expected and absorbed the ten minutes in hand due to the early arrival, Prince Philip returned to the staff ante-room for a short time for private refreshments.

The Reception

After these private refreshments Prince Philip proceeded to the reception via the Mess and large podium steps and was greeted by a pleasing sight on the car park. The flags of our eleven nations were flying (more or less freely) and the eight hundred guests nicely filled the car park without appearing overcrowded, though there was an understandable tendency to concentrate near the carpet laid across the centre and along which Prince Philip would presently walk. A large number of serving and retired engineer officers and old friends of the College were present and it was observed that many enjoyed the opportunity of meeting old friends on this great occasion.

On arrival at the reception the Captain presented many staff officers, officers under instruction and civilian employees and their wives to Prince Philip.

On completion of these presentations the Captain conducted Prince Philip to the far side of the car park where drawings of the proposed extension to the New Mess and models of the sculptures for the entrance were on view. Also displayed was a magnificent cake consisting of a model in great detail of the New Mess, every bit of which was edible. The cake was made as a gift by a well-known local firm and was much admired by many guests and by College officers perhaps with some anticipation. It was afterwards given to the hospital for spastic children in Plymouth for which the hospital authorities were most grateful.

On the way to and from the far corner of the reception, groups of guests and College officers and their wives were presented informally to Prince Philip by the Captain.

Departure

After chatting for a few minutes longer, Prince Philip finally left the reception just after 1700 to take his final salute from the Guard and Band who had marched back 'silently' from the workshops and were now in position again. After farewells Prince Philip entered his car and drove off via the Western Approach road, No. 1 Hangar and the Recreation Block where many civilian employees, Ship's Company and Royal Marines and their families were gathered to watch his arrival and departure. The Western Approach road was lined by officers under instruction and those guests who managed to get there in time and three cheers were called as His Royal Highness' car passed. He was followed in procession by the Civic dignitaries and the Commander-in-Chief. As soon as this procession had left, the Colour was returned to the Colour Escort and the Guard and Band marched off along Prince Philip's departure route providing a fitting finale for the guests remaining on the car park. The remainder of the guests then either left or toured the building while work began almost immediately preparing for the Ball which was to follow in the evening. This was a great success and all credit goes to the organizers and helpers who had so little time in which to prepare the building.

This had indeed been a memorable day for the Royal Naval Engineering College and its success was due to hard work on all sides. Those concerned are far too numerous to mention but practically everyone in the College had a job to do and did it cheerfully and well.

The following signals were made by the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth :—

To *Thunderer*:

Well done.

To 'General at Plymouth' :—

Prince Philip was very pleased with everything the Navy did today and commented particularly on the smartness and bearing of the two Royal Guards.

2. I congratulate all concerned with the arrangements for the Royal Visit which helped to make it such a success.

3. Make and mend leave may be granted tomorrow Wednesday.

The following letter was received from Her Majesty's Private Secretary :—

'The Duke of Edinburgh is away at the moment but before I took leave of him he told me to convey his warm thanks to you and to all under your command in H.M.S. *Thunderer* for the way in which you arranged his visit last Tuesday.

'His Royal Highness was greatly interested in the new buildings and was particularly glad to be able to meet and speak to so many of the officers at present under instruction.

'The Queen was extremely sorry to have missed such an agreeable afternoon, and she has accepted the gold key and the pair of table lamps which the College sent her with great appreciation. As the key is now separated from the only door which it is capable of unlocking, Her Majesty wonders whether the College would like it back on permanent loan so that it can be exhibited as a memento of the opening ceremony. If so, please let me know and I will send it.

'Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh hope that you have better news of Lady Walsham and that she will soon be completely well.'

Needless to say Her Majesty's kind offer has been gratefully accepted and the key will be placed on display in the New Mess.

There was, of course, great regret that Her Majesty could not come and that Lady Walsham was unable to be present but it was still a great occasion and it can only be hoped that Her Majesty may honour us with a visit at some future date.

TO FRESH FIELDS AND PASTURES NEW

The following exchange of signals took place on the final closure of Keyham as part of the Royal Naval Engineering College :—

From : C.-in-C. Plymouth *Date* : 30.6.58

To : D.G.M. 648

Info : Admiralty (Personal for E.-in-C. of the Fleet)

With the final transfer today of the main buildings of the R.N.E. College, Keyham, from the control of H.M.S. *Thunderer*, engineer officers past and present lose a home with long and cherished associations and the Navy relinquishes its oldest officers' mess.

(2) I take this opportunity of sending my best wishes to the new *Thunderer*, confident that the fine traditions of the older establishment will be maintained in the future.

300705Z

From : Admiralty *Date* : 1.7.58

To : C.-in-C. Plymouth

Info : *Thunderer*

(Personal from Engineer-in-Chief of the Fleet)

On behalf of all engineer officers past and present I thank you for your kind message of 300705Z/June and send you assurances that the spirit of Keyham and the fine traditions built up over the past 80 years will continue at the new Manadon.

We are happy and proud to continue our long association with the Plymouth Command.