

A Right Royal Knotting Session

Knotting is one of the basic skills in Scout training and I learned one of the most useful knots in an unusual fashion – at Buckingham Palace. In 1946 I was on the staff of Scout HQ in Buckingham Palace Road, right opposite the Royal Mews. It was an interesting place because in the summer the ladies on the staff would sunbathe nude on the flat roof next to ours. Unfortunately there was an eight foot wall between us, but it is amazing how high you can get from a standing jump!

At ground level there was a very up-market photographic studio and on the staff was a very attractive young lady, the subject of great interest to all our staff. I never found out her name at the time but when we moved to Dolton in 1993 I discovered she had become Gladys Foster and was an established Doltonian. (I mustn't enthuse too much over this because on the Scout HQ staff there was a very very attractive young lady and as we now have seven grandchildren)

Anyway, back to the knotting. King George VI held the first post-war garden party in 1946 and it was traditional that members of the Scout HQ staff were drafted in to help. With my friend Bill I was one of the lucky ones and we found ourselves inside the entrance to the Palace collecting the tickets of the guests, under the watchful eye of a morning-suited official. We had to count the tickets into batches of 20 and then tie them up with a length of string, which we finished with a neat Reef Knot.

After the first couple of batches the official strode forward and took the string from my hands. "Don't they teach you Scouts anything?" he demanded. "You need a Packer's Knot for this." He proceeded to tie one and made us practice until we got it right. Despite the advent of Sellotape, the Packer's Knot is still one I find I constantly need.

When our stint at the door was finished we were allowed out into the garden to mingle with the crowd. We were still in the austerity era but the hundreds of ladies present had taken a lot of trouble over their appearance and it was a highly colourful scene. We were suddenly grabbed by an Army officer (a Brigadier-General, Bill informed me, though how he knew I've no idea). "Right, got a job for you chaps" he barked, and took us right to the front of the crowd. "Keep this lot back". I'll swear he winked as he said it.

All the guests had formed wide gangways along which the King and Queen, followed by the two Princesses, were walking and chatting to the guests – and we were right at the front. As they came opposite us the King and Queen were on the far side of the path but the two Princesses, having both been Girl Guides, were looking straight at us in our Scout uniforms.

Now I want to make one thing absolutely clear: if you ever meet my friend Bill he will tell you that Princess Elizabeth smiled at *him*. She didn't – she smiled at *me*!

Fred Reeve