

The Queen's Royal Visit to Gander 1953

Everybody who follows royalty and their wanderings knows perfectly well that Her Royal Highness came to visit Canada only three times in the 1950s.

During the first visit, the then Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh toured Canada in the fall of 1951. The Royal couple arrived by B.O.A.C. at Dorval Airport on 08 October 1951, and travelled across the country by train, airplane and naval vessel.

The next Royal visit was when the now Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh came, from 12 to 16 October 1957, to open Canada's 23rd Parliament.

They made another trip to Canada, this time called a "tour" rather than a "visit", during they visited all the provinces and territories and the Queen opened the St Lawrence Seaway.

However I recently acquired a rare envelope (apparently only 100 made and fewer in existence) that is clearly marked "Royal Tour, First Stop Newfoundland" and stamped at the Gander post office on 24 November 1953!



So did the Queen make a Royal visit then or not?

The answer is clearly "maybe".

In fact, it was not a visit to Canada at all but rather a visit of the Commonwealth, going basically to Jamaica, the South Pacific, Australia and back home via the Middle East and Gibraltar. The only Canadian stop was for outbound re-fueling in Gander. Arrival was planned for around 03h00 in the morning with one hour and a half on the tarmac. One could therefore safely say that this hardly qualifies as a Royal visit.

But a bunch of rowdy Newfoundlanders didn't quite see it that way. A gang of them went off to the terminal to see what was going on. When they confirmed that the Queen's plane was on the ramp, they obviously figured it was time for a celebration and among other things broke into a rousing rendition of "For she's a jolly good fellow..."

By now the captain was starting to get worried about these strange people singing, dancing and shouting all around his airplane. Queen decided, after being roused from sleep at 3:20 am by their singing, to address the noisy crowd gathered outside.

So the Queen came to Canada and made a short speech in Gander. Up to you to decide if that merits being called a Royal visit!

I have been wondering though who this crowd might have been. Had it been a Saturday, I would have thought perhaps a crowd late in leaving Lush's cabin down on Deadman's Pond. But this was a Tuesday. So maybe it was transients staying at the Saturn hotel and not Newfoundlanders after all.