

ROYAL COUNTIES SHOW

Windsor Castle formed the stately background as in procession stage coaches made their way down the Long Walk to visit the Royal Windsor Centenary Counties Show. Flaming June lived up to its name, the mid-summer sun blazing down as it has not done for a long time. Everything seemed to be uniting to make this in every way a royal Show, an epitome of the English rural-scene at its best.

Concentrated in the arena were exhibits and examples of all that is best in our island agriculture. And as Eton is little more than a stonethrow away, the College hounds made their welcome contribution to the delightful scene. The private driving clubs made a proud show. Forgotten for the moment were great towns and crowded roads. Here was a reminder of what city folk often lose sight of, that agriculture is still our foremost industry. "Hunting Calypso", Albert Nye at the reins, won first prize for Horse and Carriage. It was planned that when the Queen and Duke arrived at the arena they would transfer to individual Landrovers, to inspect the whole show. It was the beginning of a five-hour visit, and even that was no more than adequate, so much was there to see. Who, for example, in this day and age, even dreams of such a thing as a steam-powered lawn-mower - quite a marvel, though, in its day. Meanwhile the Duke was in the company of Christopher Soames, Minister of Agriculture, pausing to admire the Young Farmers' display of vegetables.

One of Her Majesty's calls was at the tent of the women's Institute. She was already discovering, as were many thousands of visitors to the Show, the great variety of the Royal Counties. Wine-making is reviving all over the country, but New Zealand White, a rabbit prize winner, was a surprise to many townfolk, as agriculture has been frowning on bunnies for a long time. That the flower displays were magnificent was to be expected, and expectation was not disappointed.

Now, more rather ancient machinery. A 44-year-old binder. Whether the overtime was necessitated by it we don't know. Anyway, today's machines are as efficient as anybody could wish. So were the traction engines, in the days before steam was finally ousted by oil in farm machinery. Their drivers point out that while almost anyone can drive a modern tractor, steam demanded something more. But enough of machinery, Livestock, perhaps, held pride of place at the show. The Duke asked the experts how they judge cows. He said his own criterion was how much milk they give. In a happy mood he posed for a picture, with one of the judges. Then the prize winning cattle were paraded for general admiration; glorious beasts which never have to worry about keeping their weight down.

The bull bellows, but it's the cow that produces the milk. Among prize-winners was Hursley Riff, owned by the Queen herself. When Her Majesty departed she must have been convinced that in quality, British agriculture can hold its head high in any company in the world.