

How I almost bumped into two famous men (1937 and 1950s)

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As one of the very few King's Scouts in the country I was invited to join the British contingent of Scouts attending the coronation of King George VI in London in 1937. Just before Coronation Day I had started work at the Board of Control but my bosses understood that this invitation was a rare honour and let me have the time off.

On the afternoon before the great day I reported to the Scout Association representatives at the Royal Horticultural Hall London which was going to house us all. They came from all over the world principally from the countries of the Commonwealth (then called the British Empire) and I quickly chummed up with the contingent from the West Indies. They were only too pleased to have me as their companion and guide who knew London. I did not let them down. As soon as we had settled in I took them on a tour of the sights of London and brought them back exhausted and each bearing a few cheap souvenirs we had bought. We dumped them in our sleeping spots and started to descend the stairs, some of us sliding down the banisters as youths do, when we ran into a crowd of fellow Scouts surrounding Lord Baden Powell who was visiting to see that we were housed comfortably. I leapt off the banisters right by the great man. He smiled at me and said "Steady lad". I was struck dumb but as I reflected later my hero had spoken to me.

Several decades later when I was Assistant Private Secretary to the Minister of Health I was walking down a corridor in the House of Commons carrying some papers for my Minister who was speaking in the Chamber of the House and as I turned the corner I just avoided bumping into the Prime Minister Winston Churchill. I apologised and he growled and said "Hrrrupt". I had been spoken to by the greatest Briton of all time.