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THE CORONATION OF CHARLES III

Dr Bob Morris

The Constitution Unit

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University College London

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School of Public Policy
University College London
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London
WC1H 9QU
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Tel: 020 7679 4977

Email: constitution@ucl.ac.uk

Web: www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit

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Preface

In the light of the decision announced on 11 October 2022 that the Coronation of King Charles and his Queen Consort will take place on Saturday 6 May 2023, this report is a further edition of the Constitution Unit's May 2018 report *Inaugurating a New Reign: Planning for Accession and Coronation*. Now that the events of the recent Accession are past, it has been revised to record what happened at the Accession Council on 10 September 2022, to look at the state funeral of Queen Elizabeth II on 19 September 2022, and then to concentrate on the future Coronation of her successor, King Charles III. It is published simultaneously with a revised edition of the 2018 report *Swearing in the New King: The Accession and Coronation Oaths*.

Background

In 2016 the Constitution Unit started a project looking at the oaths required of a new sovereign following accession. We looked at past accessions and coronations to consider how the statutory oaths might best be revised, and the coronation updated. It also led us into a much wider project comparing the eight European monarchies published in September 2020 as *The Role of Monarchy in Modern Democracy*.¹

The UK is the only monarchy in Europe to have a coronation. We take it for granted that Kings and Queens must be crowned in Westminster Abbey, in a ceremony going back 1000 years. But the tradition is constantly evolving. In describing every coronation since that of George IV in 1821, Bob Morris's report shows how much the ceremony has changed – and how much it needs to change, compared with the last coronation. His report begins by recording the huge changes of context that have occurred in the UK since 1953. Chapter 2 then reviews the accession and state funeral ceremonies that occurred following the death of the late Queen. Chapter 3 draws on research in the Archives to provide a lot of colourful detail about previous coronations: it demonstrates that for all sorts of reasons, the next coronation cannot be like that in 1953.

The original report concluded with a chapter identifying some of the main issues from accession to coronation which required reconsideration. Because the new King has now succeeded, the main focus of this revised report is on the coronation yet to come. Planning the coronation will not be easy, because so many competing interests are involved. There will be lots of different ideas, and no shortage of critics ready to snipe at the new monarch and his government if they seem at odds or if anything goes wrong. If the coronation defines, as Ben Pimlott stated, not just royalty but British identity, how is that identity best represented in all its 21st century diversity? It is in that spirit that we offer some reflections on the next coronation, and what might need to change.

Professor Robert Hazell
Constitution Unit
School of Public Policy, UCL
October 2022

¹ Hazell R. and Morris B. (eds) (2020) *The Role of Monarchy in Modern Democracy: European Monarchies Compared* (London, Hart)

Executive Summary

The UK is a much more diverse, pluralist and secular society compared with 1952. Half the population have no religious affiliation. Only 6 per cent attend religious services, with only 1-2 per cent being attending Anglicans. In England and Wales, just over 15 per cent are from ethnic minorities.

In 1952 the UK was the head of a global empire. The armed forces numbered over 850,000; now they are less than 150,000. The UK is no longer a major international power; but it still has an international monarchy, with the King being head of state of 14 other countries.

The UK is more clearly a union state, with devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As expected, their governments were involved in the accession ceremonies as the new King visited them before his mother's funeral. The Scottish independence referendum and now Brexit add to pressures on the monarchy to be a symbol of national unity.

Accession Proclamation and state funeral

The proclamation of the new King Charles III and the funeral of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, occurred in the period of mourning that followed the Queen's death in the afternoon of 8 September at Balmoral and the funeral on Monday 19 September. Within 24 hours of demise, Parliament was recalled for parliamentarians to take new oaths of allegiance. An Accession Council was summoned to St James's Palace on the morning of 10 September to proclaim the new sovereign, and - in proceedings televised for the first time - for him to make an inaugural personal declaration, swear the Scottish oath under the Act of Union 1707 to support the Presbyterian form of church government in Scotland, and direct the timings for the lying-in-state and funeral of the Queen.

Before the funeral, the King addressed the nation in a television broadcast on the evening of his mother's death, and visited the capital cities of Edinburgh, Belfast and Cardiff. At Edinburgh – to which the Queen's coffin had been brought from Balmoral to Holyrood House - the King took part in a procession to St Giles's Cathedral for a service of thanksgiving for the life of the Queen.

The King also for the first time took two other important steps: at a new ceremony in Westminster Hall, he accepted and returned thanks for the condolences from both Houses of Parliament; and, in another innovation, he met representatives of faith organisations and made an important statement on how he interpreted his duties to all faiths and even secular, non-believers.²

² The text is at Annex (c) to this report. For a discussion of the King's religion, see *The Conversation* article <https://theconversation.com/king-charles-defender-of-faith-what-the-monarchys-long-relationship-with-religion-may-look-like-under-the-new-sovereign-190766>, published online 20 September 2022.

The state funeral

The Queen's coffin was returned to Buckingham Palace and then removed in procession to Westminster Hall to lie in state for four days during which over 250,000 people filed past the catafalque to pay their last respects. The funeral on 19 September saw the coffin removed in procession to Westminster Abbey for the funeral service for the first time since the 1760 funeral and burial there of George II. It was then processed to Wellington Arch and there transferred to a hearse for the road journey to St George's Chapel, Windsor, for the final service and interment. The solemn proceedings were exceptional in the dignity of their execution. Early BBC estimates from reliable sources were that 66 million people watched the TV coverage throughout the world, including 29.3 million or 43 per cent of the UK population, and as much as 11 per cent of the population of France.

The coronation

The coronation service goes back over 1000 years. The UK is the only monarchy in Europe to retain a religious – and eucharistic – coronation. It signifies the conferment of God's grace on the monarch, who is anointed with holy oil, invested with symbols of authority, receives homage and takes communion. The Queen Consort is also anointed more sparingly.

The 1953 coronation was planned by two committees of the Privy Council: the Coronation Committee chaired by the Duke of Edinburgh, and Coronation Executive Committee chaired by the Earl Marshal. The big decision they made – eventually – was to televise the service, except for the anointing.

The Earl Marshal took control of Westminster Abbey for ten months, to prepare and erect stands for 8250 guests. The Cabinet determined the guest list: to accommodate larger numbers from the Commonwealth, and groups like trade unions; the whole peerage was not invited though peers and their wives still constituted the largest group.

Stands were erected outside for 96,000 paying spectators. The grand procession from the Abbey was nearly 3 miles long, and processed for over 5 miles. More than 40,000 troops took part, with 24 military bands. The subsequent naval review at Spithead involved 190 ships.

The UK no longer has the capacity to mount anything like this spectacle, nor should it do so in straitened times. The next coronation will inevitably be smaller. Archaic elements such as the Court of Claims could be dropped. So should the homage, and thought be given to how the King as head of the nation should be enabled early in the reign to signify support for, and encouragement of, modern civil society. A modernized form of homage could take place, for example, in Westminster Hall, or in a procession on Horse Guards Parade.

Most religious writing assumes that the coronation will continue to be an Anglican service; centred round the eucharist, but finding a place for other Christian denominations and religions. However, a secular ceremony could celebrate the nation's diversity in ways that an Anglican service cannot.

Chapter I: Contextual changes since 1952

Social

1.1 The ceremonies of accession, state funeral and coronation help to define not just the monarchy, but the nation whom the monarch is there to represent. The first chapter of this report seeks to summarise some of the essential features of 21st century Britain, and how much those have changed since the last accession in 1952.

1.2 The UK population is both much larger and more diverse than in 1952. A population of nearly 51 million has risen by about 30 per cent to 67 million in 2021. An ethnic minority population which stood at over 11 per cent according to the 2011 census, in 2019 amounted to just over 15 per cent for England and Wales³, with rather lower proportions in the rest of the UK. Life expectancy at birth in 1952 was 78 years for males and 83 years for females. In 2012 the comparable figures were 91 and 94 years. Levels of formal educational attainment have risen markedly: in 1952 fewer than 5 per cent of age cohorts attended university; in 2016 the proportion was nearly 50 per cent.

1.3 In 1952 the UK was a very different place. It was still recovering from World War II 1939-45. Bomb sites continued to lurk in major cities. Food rationing had been reduced but not yet abolished. The need to carry wartime identity cards was not repealed until 1952. The British Nationality Act 1948 continued the ability of all Commonwealth (including colonial) citizens to travel and settle in the UK free from immigration control. There was still capital punishment for murder and some other very serious offences, and male homosexual behaviour remained criminalised. All plays for public performance had to be submitted for censorship by the Lord Chamberlain, an official of the Royal Household.

1.4 Military conscription was retained in peacetime (until 1963) in a global deployment of armed forces of 863,000 in 1952 in bases in the Federal Republic of Germany, the Mediterranean, Egypt, Cyrenaica, the Persian Gulf, Aden, Hong Kong, the West Indies and Malaya. Total UK regular armed forces in April 2022 were, at 150,800, less than one fifth of the size after the latest rounds of cuts. The regular army (84,500 April 2022) is now smaller than the police service in England and Wales (140,228 March 2022), let alone the UK (163,700 March 2022).

1.5 Active warfare from 1950 in Korea involving UK troops continued until the armistice of July 1953. Anti-insurgency operations lasted in Malaya during 1948-60, and the Mau Mau rising in Kenya was beginning to develop from 1952. In sum, the UK in 1952 was a dowdy, still heavily militarised and war-disciplined society where mining, textiles and heavy industry dominated the economy. The consumer and the permissive societies were still some way off.

3

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/populationestimatesbyethnicgroupandreligionenglandandwales/2019>.

Religion

1.6 Granted the UK monarchy's constitutional association with religion, an important dimension of social change is the degree of secularization that has continued since 1952. The 2011 census showed that 59 per cent described themselves as Christian, a decrease from 72 per cent in 2001. Muslims at 5 per cent constituted the largest part of the 9 per cent belonging to other religions. Those saying they had no religion amounted to 25 per cent in 2011 as opposed to 15 per cent in 2001. Surveys indicate that about 6 per cent of the population actually attend religious services – 1-2 per cent in the case of Anglicans - and that something over 50 per cent of respondents have no religious affiliation.

1.7 Other statistics⁴ underline the decline in support for the Church of England. Baptisms have gone down by over 80 per cent, and confirmations by over 90 per cent, with a decline in live birth baptisms from 672,000 in 1950 to 89,000 in 2019, and in confirmations from 142,000 to 13,400 in 2019. The number of marriages celebrated by the Church has declined from 109,000 in 1990 to 31,000 in 2019. Though not impoverished, the Church struggles to maintain the full parochial ministry it once possessed: in rural areas one vicar can serve half a dozen parishes.

1.8 In 1956 34 per cent of those surveyed thought that the Queen was 'especially chosen by God', the number declining to 30 per cent when the survey was repeated in 1960. It is unlikely that a similar number would do so now.⁵ A 1992 survey, for example, found no spontaneous respondent awareness of the monarchy's religious dimension.⁶

Political

1.9 In 1952 the UK remained at the head of a global colonial empire and sported the necessary large armed forces accordingly. Whereas India had by then become an independent republic, it remained in the association of the British Commonwealth independent countries. These included Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, Pakistan and Ceylon, all of which were monarchies with the UK sovereign as head of state. In 2022, principally as a result of decolonisation, the Commonwealth has grown to 56 members, fourteen of which are 'realms' where the sovereign of the UK is their head of state. Unlike other surviving European monarchies, the UK monarchy is therefore still an international monarchy.

1.10 Although the UK continues to be a permanent member of the UN Security Council and is the fifth/sixth largest world economy, its relative global position has changed in a world where there were only 50 independent states in 1945 to one where now there are over 190. In addition to belonging to the permanent defence alliance of the North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the UK has formed other associations requiring some pooling of sovereignty, most notably from 1973

⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/research-and-statistics>

⁵ Harris L. M. (1966) *Long to Reign Over Us?* (London, Kimber). The exercise also found that 'The idea of religious leadership... although inherent in certain comments, was rarely raised directly and spontaneously.' p. 29.

⁶ Billig M. (1992) *Talking of the Royal Family* (London, Routledge). A 40-year-old survey made the same point about attitudes as a whole: 'The most important general finding in the monarchy survey is the shallowness of the British response to their Queen'. See Rose R. and Kavanagh D. (1976) 'The Monarchy in Contemporary Political Culture', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 548-576 at p. 566.

until 2019 in what is now the European Union (EU) and also accepting from 1966 the full jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights.

Geopolitics and security

1.11 Britain is said to punch above its weight, a boast which reflects – and admits - that its global reach has declined. Because the sovereign is also head of state in 14 Commonwealth countries, Britain may still have an international monarchy but it is no longer a truly international power. In 1952 the main threat to the nation was thermo-nuclear war with the Warsaw pact. Whilst the collapse of the Soviet Union from 1989 appeared to remove that threat, others have emerged to replace it. Nowadays the UK is compelled to manoeuvre in a more fractious world where post-imperial genies have emerged from old imperial bottles in the shapes of ethnic nationalism and state-sponsored and non-state terrorism not necessarily tied and limited to territories outside the UK. The suicide vest has appeared in the capital though terrorism in Ireland remains at present apparently quiescent.

1.12 In 1952 there seem to have been no such security concerns. Whilst the Metropolitan police undertook a meticulous survey of the coronation routes, the object was to identify possible hazards to public *safety*. The sole mention in available contemporary official papers of public *security* concerned members of the St John's Ambulance Brigade who had volunteered to join that Brigade's lining of the route. Noting that some volunteers came from the Irish Republic, their names were conscientiously forwarded to the Metropolitan police Special Branch (then responsible for Irish terrorism) for vetting.

1.13 There was more concern about the shortage of officers at a time when the force strength of 16,300 was well below its establishment of 20,000. Numbers were made up from 5,000 provincial and City officers, 2,000 special constables and 1,000 military – mostly Royal Military Police. In the end there was a total of nearly 21,000 police involved operating in three 12-hour shifts and being fed at 22 feeding stations where catering was assisted by 400 from the Women's Voluntary Service and 146 scouts.⁷

1.14 Modern state national celebrations require a level of precautionary response light years away from the insouciance of 1952. At least there are likely to be more police officers to call upon.

Constitutional

1.15 In 1952 the UK was a union state where the sole devolved, autonomous government and legislature was in Northern Ireland. Scotland had since the Parliamentary union with England in 1706/7 retained its separate legal and educational systems and its separate church, but was not autonomous. Its secretary of state was a member of the UK cabinet. Wales remained in the condition given it by Henry VIII in 1536: that is, it was joined with England. It did not acquire its own secretary of state until 1964.

⁷ MEPO 2/9243 Metropolitan police post Coronation Review report, August 1953.

1.16 Today there is devolution all round if in different forms. Since the 1990s, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each now has a parliamentary assembly and first minister. A referendum in 2014 on whether Scotland should become an independent state failed but a Scottish National Party government now in power in Edinburgh continues to press the case and wishes to promote another independence referendum. For this and other reasons devolution has made the union feel less stable and the monarchy to be seen more prominently as one of the institutions which operates across the whole of the UK. At the time of writing, the departure of the United Kingdom from the EU has raised radical questions not only about future relations with the EU, but also about the future of the UK's own union.

1.17 There have been important changes to the peerage and the composition of the House of Lords. In 1958, peerages for life, hitherto limited to the most senior members of the judiciary, were introduced for both sexes so that women were enabled to enter the House for the first time. Women who were peeresses in their own right and all Scottish peers (as opposed to a capped number since 1706/7) were allowed to sit under the 1963 Peerage Act.

1.18 The most important change to the Lords was the abolition in 1999 of the right of hereditary peers to sit except for 90 elected by them plus two hereditary officers of state, the Earl Marshal and the Lord Great Chamberlain. This meant the political marginalisation of the hereditary peerage and contributed to a situation where the Conservative party could no longer rely on a permanent Conservative majority in the House. The still unfettered ability of Prime Ministers to recommend the creation of peers has led to a House of over 800 members and no party enjoying an overall majority. Various attempts subsequently to achieve further reform of the House have failed.

1.19 Some of these changes have had implied effects for the monarchy. For example, the political marginalisation of the peerage could be said logically to challenge the hereditary principle of monarchy itself. In practice that has not happened: democratisation seems to have led to the perception of the peerage being anomalous without collateral damage to the monarchy which is perceived – except amongst a growing minority of 18–34-year-olds⁸ – as being above the political fray and retaining useful constitutional functions. Similarly, devolution and its potential for fragmentation has underlined the monarchy's identification with the concept of the whole of the political union of the four nations.⁹

1.20 On the other hand, there have been three constitutional changes directly affecting the monarchy itself, the first two of which have diluted its remaining constitutional powers. These are its roles in selecting the prime minister and in whether to accede to requests for the dissolution of Parliament and consequent holding of fresh general elections. The first discretionary power evaporated in the mid-1960s when it became the settled practice of all political parties to select their own leaders and leave no doubt about who should become prime minister whichever party won an election. Where there was no overall winner, the Cabinet Manual of 2010 set out the rules

⁸ Research indicates, however, that the members of these cohorts become more favourable to monarchy the older they get: see Curtice, 'King Charles inherits crown with support for monarchy at record low – but future not set in stone', *The Conversation*, 12 September 2022, <https://theconversation.com/king-charles-inherits-crown-with-support-for-monarchy-at-record-low-but-future-not-set-in-stone-190448>.

⁹ Put in another way, the absence of political involvement can be seen one of the prerequisites of royal survival. Mulling over the results of Mass Observation surveys in 1956 and 1960, Leonard Harris concluded '...nothing is more certain than that if the monarchy is to survive...it must remain, and be seen to remain, politically inoffensive'. Harris (1966) p. 102. This was also the main conclusion of the Constitution Unit's study comparing the eight European monarchies – see Hazell and Morris (2020) fn 1 above.

for government formation where the responsibility for reaching agreement was a matter for the parties, the outcome to be communicated to the sovereign who was not otherwise to become involved in the process. Finally, the sovereign's use of the prerogative power of prorogation on the advice of the prime minister in a particular instance was overturned and made subject to certain defined criteria by the Supreme Court in 2019.¹⁰

1.21 These diminutions of monarchical power have not led to a loss of the sovereign's popularity: if anything, they have reinforced it by emphasising that the sovereign is clearly non-party political. The rules are now set out explicitly in the Cabinet Manual, which explains the sovereign's role and codifies the key constitutional conventions involving the sovereign. Nonetheless, it is also the case that the monarchy does remain the ultimate longstop in the sense of retaining authority to intervene should existing arrangements break down. This feature almost certainly has low salience in popular appreciation of the position. It does not, therefore, disturb the conclusion that 'the less politically significant a monarch, the better his chances of survival; the more politically active a monarch, the less chance that his throne will survive.'¹¹

1.22 The third constitutional change affecting the monarchy was the Succession to the Crown Act 2013. The main purpose of the Act was to introduce gender equality into the rules of succession: in future the eldest child will succeed, whether boy or girl. But the Act also removed the prohibition on the succession of heirs married to Roman Catholics.¹² The Act did not, however, remove the requirements that heirs should not themselves be Roman Catholics and that they have to be 'in communion with' the Church of England. In an age which is by instinct more ecumenical than in the past as well as less religious, the changes stopped short of removing a religious test for the head of state. Indeed, it is the religious character of the oaths required of the sovereign following accession that are likely to provoke review.

1.23 In these respects, it is relevant to bear in mind the situation in the rest of Europe. While the Scandinavian countries expect monarchs to belong to the local Lutheran faith, such churches are no longer exclusively 'established' in Norway and Sweden. Even in countries like Belgium, Holland and Spain where there are large Roman Catholic populations, there are no religious tests for their monarchs. No European republic has a religious test for its head of state.

Machinery of government

1.24 Finally, there have been significant machinery of government changes which bear on the capacity of government to conduct large national ceremonies. Favourable is the consolidation in the 1960s of the service departments into a single Ministry of Defence. Less favourable is, for example, the abolition of any central works/estate management function following the final dismemberment of the Property Services Agency in the 1990s. On the other hand, it has to be said that the planning that resulted in the immaculate achievement of the accession ceremonies and the

¹⁰ *R (Miller) v The Prime Minister and Cherry v Advocate General for Scotland* (2019) UKSC 41

¹¹ Rose R. and Kavanagh D. (1976) 'The Monarchy in Contemporary Political Culture', *Comparative Politics*, 548-576 at p. 567.

¹² The Act also featured some other changes – such as the range of monarchical consent required for their marriage – of lesser constitutional importance.

Queen's funeral on 19 September 2022 indicated that the capacity of the state to stage large ceremonial events is not exhausted.

1.25 Changes in ministerial functions have also changed the distribution of former ceremonial responsibilities. While the title of Lord Chancellor survives, the holder is now located in a Ministry of Justice. Successive changes have increased the ambit of that minister's responsibilities but, paradoxically, reduced the office's authority and prestige: the Lord Chancellor need no longer be a lawyer, is no longer head of the judiciary, and no longer presides in the House of Lords. Further changes have seen constitutional responsibilities that in 1952 fell to the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department flow to the Cabinet Office, in 1952 a limited secretariat and now an important policy department in its own right. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has picked up certain state ceremonial responsibilities, for example for the Remembrance Sunday Cenotaph service and, at the time of writing, will presumably be in the policy lead for the coronation though the Earl Marshal will retain his responsibility for its organisation.

Chapter 2: Accession of King Charles and funeral of Elizabeth II

Accession ceremonies

2.1 For the first time ever, the meeting of the Accession Council on 10 September was televised.¹³ Also for the first time, and because membership of the Privy Council had long outgrown the capacity of the Palace room traditionally accommodating the ceremony, most Counsellors were obliged to ballot for the number of available places.

2.2 Meeting in St James's Palace on 10 September 2022, this special Council fell into two parts. Part I was a specially augmented Privy Council that unanimously adopted the text (previously agreed by the Cabinet) of a Proclamation¹⁴ that confirmed that, on the death of Queen Elizabeth, her heir had rightfully become King Charles III. Part II was a meeting of Privy Counsellors only¹⁵ with the King where he made a personal declaration,¹⁶ and swore the oath under the Act of Union 1707 with Scotland in which he undertook to protect the Presbyterian form of government of the Church of Scotland. The first public reading of the Proclamation took place in the Friary Court of the Palace: further public readings took place in the City, the other capitals of Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast and in other towns throughout the kingdom.

State funeral of Queen Elizabeth II

2.3 Sovereigns' funerals have only in the last century settled into the pattern observed on 19 September. In Hanoverian times monarchs

were more the head of society than head of the nation. So, the royal ritual that accompanied them was not so much a jamboree to delight the masses, but a group rite in which the aristocracy, the church and royal family corporately reaffirmed their solidarity (or animosity) behind closed doors.¹⁷

¹³ The introduction of television cameras must have been of great assistance to the Lord President of the Council, Penny Mordaunt. In terms of managing so crowded an event, her predecessors had sometimes experienced difficulty in making themselves heard above the throng, and the process of everyone crowding to sign the proclamation has not always been decorous - see PC 12/160 for note of 12 December 1936 recording uncontrolled proceedings after the Royal Princes had signed the Proclamation. Attempts by Macdonald (Lord President) and Hankey (Cabinet Secretary) to regulate matters were unavailing. In contrast, the 10 September 2022 proceedings were conspicuously well managed. The dress code had also been relaxed: Harold Macmillan recorded that in 1952 he had been obliged to hire court dress from a theatrical costumier- Catterall P. (ed.) (2004) *The Macmillan Diaries: The Cabinet Years, 1950-1957* (London, Pan), entry for 8 February 1952, p. 141.

¹⁴ Text at Annex (a)

¹⁵ In 1936, misunderstanding the position, Massey (Canada) and Bruce (Australia) – with Privy Counsellor status in their own Commonwealth countries – protested at their exclusion from the Privy Council meeting when they had attended the Accession Council – PC 12/160, letter 18 December 1936 from Battersby (Dominions Office).

¹⁶ Text at Annex (b).

¹⁷ Cannadine D, (1983) 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual; The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition", c. 1820-1977' in Hobsbawm E. and Ranger T. (eds) (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge, CUP, Canto edition 1992), pp.101-164 at p.116.

2.4 Funerals mostly took place at St George's Chapel, Windsor, and were largely private affairs. The last Hanoverian example was that of William IV in 1837 who disliked public fuss and had had to be persuaded that he should have a coronation in the first place. He lay briefly in state at Windsor for two days but admission was restricted to ticket holders only. Even Prince Albert's funeral in 1861 was not a public spectacle. His funeral procession took place entirely within the curtilage of Windsor Castle. Though viewing facilities were extended to a limited number of the press who responded with extensive witness accounts, the general public were given no place. The funerals of heroes like Nelson and Wellington in 1806 and 1852 by far outclassed royal ceremonial with public lyings-in-state (in Greenwich and the Chelsea Royal Hospital), and great public processions.

2.5 It was Victoria who had planned her own funeral and increased the military content on the basis that she should have the funeral as a soldier's daughter. Having died in Osborne on the Isle of Wight, Victoria's coffin was taken by the Royal Yacht to Gosport and thence by successive trains to Windsor. There was no lying-in-state, and the sole public features were during her travel - the first time for sovereigns - on a gun carriage between the stations and from a Windsor station to St George's Chapel. It was at Windsor station on an extremely cold day that the horses pulling the gun carriage became restive and broke some of the carriage traces. To save the day, ropes were found and Royal Navy ratings present pulled the carriage to the castle, a duty for all such sovereign gun carriage journeys that has been the Navy's ever since.

2.6 Influenced by the arrangements made for Gladstone's funeral in 1898 when he had lain in state in Westminster Hall, and by then a very changed attitude to public ceremony¹⁸ - instanced amongst other things by the Jubilees of 1887 and 1897 - Edward VII ordered the same arrangement in his own case, and lyings-in-state in Westminster Hall followed by public processions to entrain at Paddington and from a Windsor station to the Castle became the established procedure.

2.7 In September 2022, there were a number of variants on previous practice. Because the Queen had died at Balmoral, it was possible to arrange for a new event at Edinburgh before the coffin was flown to London. Accordingly, the King led a procession of the late Queen's coffin from Holyrood House to a memorial service at St Giles cathedral. Following its arrival at Buckingham Palace, the coffin was first processed to Westminster Hall for the lying-in-state and thence to Westminster Abbey on 19 September for the funeral service.¹⁹ Thereafter, the coffin was processed before large crowds and accompanied by the King and members of the royal family to the Wellington Arch. From there the coffin was transferred from its gun carriage to be driven by a motorised hearse to Windsor Castle to permit the public on the route to view her last journey. At Windsor, the traditional route and events unfolded for the service of interment at St George's Chapel.²⁰

¹⁸ See Wolfe J. (2000) *Great Deaths: Grieving, Religion, and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, (London, British Academy), especially chapters 7 and 8.

¹⁹ For the first time since the funeral and burial in the Abbey of George II in 1760. The Abbey was used presumably because of the large Commonwealth and foreign attendance expected of heads of state and other political figures after so long a reign.

²⁰ The changed media situation was signalled, amongst other things, by the public naming of the young Grenadier bearers who had so admirably fulfilled their task, including the perilous ascent of the western steps into the Chapel.

Chapter 3: The coronation

Introduction

3.1 Coronations do not make a sovereign, the law does.²¹ What coronations are said to signify is the conferment of God's grace on the head of state and the symbolic deference of all earthly power to a higher, spiritual authority. In something like their current form, coronations in England date from that of Edgar of Wessex in 973. The sovereign is recognised, and swears a three-part oath to observe the laws, temper justice with mercy and support the church. Traditions of Saxon election and Roman and Byzantine sacerdotalism are fused in a rite which includes anointing with sacred oil, being invested with the symbols of authority, receiving homage and taking communion. It is followed by a grand procession of the crowned sovereign through the capital.

Past coronations

Up to 1838

3.2 Historically, the coronation of George IV in 1821 was the last of the post-Restoration style coronations. Stuart coronations always took place on 23 April, St George's Day. Up to and including 1821, all coronations had included a series of ceremonies in Westminster Hall immediately before the coronation and a following banquet in which services, such as the appearance of the King's Champion, were performed on a lavish occasion. George IV's coronation was unprecedentedly and scandalously costly as well as marred by his refusal to be accompanied by the wife he had failed so recently to divorce.

3.3 As already mentioned, William IV at first declined on accession in 1830 to have a coronation but consented in the end to a much more modest occasion in 1831. This event considerably curtailed proceedings, dispensing with both the procession from Westminster Hall traditionally preceded by maidens strewing flowers and the post-coronation banquet, neither of which have since been revived. Notoriously, there was no rehearsal for Victoria's 1838 coronation and proceedings verged on the indecorous in consequence.

3.4 Dropping the Westminster Hall ceremonies as the immediate prelude to the coronation in the Abbey meant some alternative space had to be provided for assembling the grand coronation procession which had hitherto paraded from the Hall to the Abbey carrying the regalia. The solution found was to erect a temporary if capacious Annexe immediately in front of the west door of the Abbey. This allowed the marshalling of officers of state bearing the ceremonial swords and banners together with the clergy bearing the regalia followed by the sovereign. The Annexe also provided retiring space, including for use after the ceremonies and before the street procession.

²¹ This is why so little is said about the coronation as opposed to the relevant oaths in one of the leading studies of the constitution – Bogdanor V. (1995) *The Monarchy and the Constitution* (Oxford, OUP).

3.5 Victoria's was the last for which there was a public distribution at the coronation ceremony of medals struck for the occasion. Official papers contain much analysis of the practice of striking commemorative gold and silver medals. In 1838 the gold version was 1.5" diameter of which 1,285 were distributed gratis to the Queen, all peers and MPs attending, and foreign ambassadors. Of the 1,112 silver versions, 600 were distributed 'pell-mell in the Abbey and procession'. This was traditionally started during the homage.²² Up to and including 1838, every hereditary peer attending the coronation performed an act of homage. Granted their number, this would have been a somewhat tedious proceeding though much enlivened by the scramble for medals thrown into the congregation. The medals were also put on public sale but the take-up and profitability to the Mint depended on the attractiveness of the particular design. The restrained dismay of the Treasury official in 1901 on discovering this former practice during planning for Edward VII's coronation still leaps off the page.²³

1901-52

3.6 By 1901 Victoria's coronation must have seemed like occurring in a different country. In 1838 there was still no rail route out of London and the economic and social condition of the time would have appeared remote in 1901. Edward VII's accession occurred not long after the 1897 Diamond Jubilee, an event naturally precipitating retrospection. The sense of marvel and imperial pride was well captured by an *Illustrated London News* article by one of the chroniclers of his age, Walter Besant:

... the period seems like a grand Triumphal March. To those of us who can remember English life as it was in the Forties, the changes that have fallen upon the country are nothing short of a Transformation. We are transformed indeed: we no longer think as we did; our daily manners and customs are changed; our views of things are changed; from Peer to Peasant we are, one and all, transformed ... during this long period there has arisen in the national mind such a spirit of enterprise, endeavour and achievement as has no parallel except in the reign of Queen Elizabeth ... there is no longer any party which seriously purposes any change in the Constitution; the whole nation is united in loyalty.²⁴

3.7 Perhaps not everyone would have felt the same though the impending end of the Boer War at Edward's accession in 1901 probably swelled (anxious) imperial pride further. On the other hand, by the time of Edward VII's accession, the state's recent ceremonial experience consisted only of the jubilees of 1887 and 1897. The last-minute postponement²⁵ because of the King's illness of the coronation due in June 1902 led to the departure of invited foreign units and

²² At George III's coronation in 1761 some silver medals were also thrown during the coronation banquet at Westminster Hall. An eye-witness recorded that 'Some of gold was also thrown among the peeresses in the abbey, just after the King was crowned; but they thought it below their dignity to pick them up'. (*The Form and Proceeding of the Royal Coronation of George III*, British Library, N. Tab.2025/8 1761, p. 13.

²³ PC 22/3 – 'It seems to me doubtful whether this large gratuitous distribution should be continued'. Hamilton memorandum 19 October 1901. The distribution during Victoria's coronation had been authorised by a Privy Council order dated 26 May 1838 (PC 22/2). Gold medals seem last to have been struck for Edward VII who insisted on a particularly expensive design – see PC 22/3 for letter of 2 September 1902 from Arthur Ellis of the Lord Chamberlain's Office to Treasury.

²⁴ *Illustrated London News*, 21 June 1897.

²⁵ Fitzroy thought that the postponement saved the ceremony 'as only a miracle in June could have averted fiasco'. He attributed the improvement to the 'practical disestablishment' of the Heralds and their substitution by 'a body of young guardsmen under the direction of Lt Col R. Pole-Carew seasoned to discipline and precision of movement'. Fitzroy, *Memoirs*, pp 96-7.

dignitaries with the result that the coronation became a wholly British and imperial event on Saturday 9 August 1902. The Abbey service was conducted by an aged and infirm Archbishop of Canterbury, Frederick Temple, with some obvious difficulty. For the first time homage by the peers was undertaken only by the senior peer in each order of peerage rather than by all peers individually – a significant saving of time. The post-coronation procession route returned via Whitehall, St James, Piccadilly and Constitution Hill. The *Times* reckoned that about 24,500 troops were involved marching or lining the route plus over 2,000 bandsmen and the employment of more than 4,000 horses. Troops from outside London had encamped in Kensington Gardens, Regent's Park and Battersea Park.²⁶ Amongst the troops were substantial contingents from Dominion, colonial, and Indian forces.²⁷ The coronation was followed on 16 August by a fleet review of just short of 100 warships.

3.8 George V's coronation on 22 June 1911 was managed by the formal government Coronation Committee structure first used in 1901-2 to which the Earl Marshal answered rather than continue to rely on 'the Earl Marshal's department, with its antiquated methods and fancy *cortège* of heralds'.²⁸ The ceremonies followed the style and routes of his father's, and involved nearly 48,000 troops. There was also a fleet review on 24 June when an array of 167 British vessels including 32 dreadnoughts and a full range of other warships was drawn up at Spithead. New was his attendance at the Delhi Durbar on 12 December 1911 when he received the homage of Indian rulers as Emperor of India wearing a newly made crown.

3.9 Also innovatory was his refusal to swear the Accession Declaration oath required under the Bill of Rights 1689. This was on the grounds that its lengthy diatribe against Roman Catholicism and transubstantiation was deeply offensive to his catholic subjects. While his father had made a similar protest but ineffectively, George secured the much shorter declaration prescribed by the Accession Declaration Act 1910.²⁹

3.10 The coronation of George VI on 12 May 1937 followed his elder brother's abdication. Like that of his two predecessors it was an imperial spectacle parading large numbers of dignitaries and troops, the latter accommodated in Royal parks as before but which were much affected by some of the heavy rain that fell over the period. As a result of Edward VIII's lack of personal interest in the planning of his own coronation, his brother and successor had stood in for him at the planning discussions and was, therefore, fortuitously well-prepared for the occasion which went forward on the date originally planned for the elder brother. For the first time, the proceedings were broadcast in the streets. The Spithead naval review on 21 May had a total of 141 British and Dominion warships taking part.

²⁶ *Times*, 11 August 1902. The paper remarked that many were in full dress uniform 'from 3 in the morning till 4 in the afternoon practically without rest or refreshment.' In 1953 NAAFI haversack rations for immediate consumption were delivered by truck to Coronation route liners between 1100 and Noon. The Metropolitan police issued 'hard rations' designed to be carried in their tunic pockets. Interview 16 April 2016 with ex-Trooper Tony Child, 4th Hussars, whose detachment was brought from Germany to be trained for their duties for six weeks before the coronation; and see also WO 32/14721 and MEPO 2/9243.

²⁷ Indian troops in 1902 fed themselves in an encampment at Hampton Court on sheep they slaughtered on the spot in the full view of onlookers. An anxious resident wrote to the Office of Works in 1911 and was reassured that the practice would not be repeated but be properly shielded. WORK 21/29/8, letters of 10 and 12 May 1911.

²⁸ Fitzroy: *Memoirs*, p. 416.

²⁹ Michael Bloch claims that Edward VIII wished to dispense with the Protestant declaration altogether. (In 1910 Asquith had not thought it necessary, HC 27 June 1910, col. 2133). Because Edward VIII abdicated, the matter did not come to the test. Bloch M. (1991) *The Reign and Abdication of Edward VIII* (London, Black Swan), pp 34-5.

The coronation of 1953

3.11 The coronation of 1953 followed a dowdy period of drab post-war exhaustion and slow recovery. The new sovereign was a young, not long married mother of two small children whose husband was a handsome naval officer who had served during the war. Without any apparent consideration of alternatives or variations, the Conservative Cabinet made an early decision that the coronation should follow the 1937 style³⁰, conscious apparently that the event would give an opportunity to outshine their political opponents' sponsorship of the Festival of Britain in 1951.³¹ At the same time, ministers were tasked to explore what savings could nonetheless be made. Accepting the Minister of Works' contention that the celebrations themselves could not be delivered parsimoniously, the Cabinet concluded that at least the special payment in 1937 to benefit claimants should not be repeated.³²

3.12 As an adjunct to the planning of the coronation, by immemorial custom the Court of Claims, presided over by the Lord Chancellor and consisting of the most senior English and Scottish judges, invited and adjudicated upon claims for the right to perform customary services at the coronation. Claims could include the customary right to carry a standard or perform some personal service to the sovereign such as delivering part of the regalia.

3.13 The Court is a hybrid body both executive and judicial in the sense of being simultaneously an emanation of the Privy Council and an august judicial body. In 1952 the Court's operations were helped by the fact that relatively little time had elapsed from the previous coronation. As a result, the Court did not normally require fresh – and expensively mounted – claims to be repeated where there had been no doubt in 1936/7 about whether the claim should be allowed. The fact that the then Lord Chancellor chaired the proceedings reflected the post's then Cabinet seniority and judicial weight. The subsequent decline in the office which has no judicial pretensions calls into question whether the present office of Minister of Justice/Lord Chancellor should continue to chair the Court if, that is, it is desired to preserve that Court's high ceremonial character. Indeed, it is not at all clear what the traditional Court brings to proceedings which, apart from their solemnity and expense, have no modern substance that could not be dealt with administratively.

3.14 By custom, for the main business of arranging the coronation two committees of the Privy Council were instituted. The senior committee – the Coronation Committee – was chaired by the Duke of Edinburgh, the sovereign's husband. It included senior Cabinet representation, the Earl Marshal, the archbishop of Canterbury, and senior members of the Household. Detailed planning

³⁰ 'Anyway, it'll beat the festival of Britain.' Remark attributed to Churchill at a Cabinet discussion on arrangements for the coronation. *Macmillan Diaries*, 11 February 1952, p. 142.

³¹ Churchill – 'anxious to remove all traces (save for the Royal Festival Hall) of his predecessor Clement Attlee's socialist extravaganza' – caused the aluminium Dome of Discovery (its 365-foot span one of the largest ever built) to be sold off to a Fulham scrap merchant. Some of the material resurfaced, apparently, as coronation trinkets. Knevitt C. (2012) *Dome: Ralph Tubbs and the Festival of Britain* (London, Chelsea Space) p. 10.

³² See T 219/479 for the papers of GEN 408, the Cabinet Sub-Committee set up to report what guidance should be given on the scale of Coronation arrangements. The sole significant saving identified was not to repeat the special payments made to the unemployed for one week in 1937. The cost had been £109,000 or £264,000 at 1953 values and £5.7million at 2022 prices. (Upgrading past figures will throughout this paper rely upon changes in the Retail Price Index (RPI) as the most easily understood measure of comparison.)

was undertaken by the Coronation Executive Committee chaired by the Earl Marshal and generally mirroring at executive level the membership of the main committee.³³

3.15 An innovation was the inclusion of the Commonwealth High Commissioners, then limited to a total of six, on the Coronation Executive Committee. Both in 1937 and in 1952/3 there was great concern to find ways of associating Commonwealth countries with accession arrangements following the recognition of their independent national status in the Statute of Westminster 1931. Whereas in 1937 all the Commonwealth states were realms, by 1952 the Irish Free State had become independent outside the Commonwealth in 1949, while India had become a republic but one that joined the Commonwealth and recognised the UK sovereign as head of the Commonwealth. The coronation oath had been revised in 1937 after careful consultation with the then Commonwealth governments and in 1952/3 the representatives of all of the then members with the exception of India were fully engaged in the planning discussions.

3.16 Famously, these included whether and, if so, to what extent the coronation should be televised. It had already been agreed that there could be filming in colour – requiring greater illumination in the Abbey – as well as in black and white as a way of making the event accessible also to people overseas. The sole provider of television at the time was the BBC. Normally deferential, it was determined to make the maximum use of the still new broadcasting medium. In the same way it had pursued the right to broadcast the Cenotaph Remembrance service, a right eventually conceded in 1926. In the autumn of 1952, however, the Cabinet decided that television cameras should not be present at the main arena of the ceremonies. The announcement provoked great public opposition and the Cabinet retreated to the extent that all might be televised except for the anointing and the Queen's taking communion. The archbishop also hoped that there would be no 'close-ups'. In the event, televising the proceedings was an enormous success.

3.17 Sales of television sets boomed and so therefore did the number of BBC television licence holders:

Overall, there is little disputing the conventional wisdom that the Coronation 'made' television in Britain. Not only did anticipation of the event help stimulate licence holders to rise from 1.45 million in March 1952 to 2.32 million by the end of May 1953, but the coverage of the day itself prompted a further rise, up to 3.25 million by March 1954.³⁴

3.18 Declining the offer of the use of the Scottish Office building in Whitehall, the Earl Marshal opted for a quieter venue and with a temporary planning staff based on College of Arms personnel took up station in premises provided by the Ministry of Works in Belgrave Square.³⁵ By Privy Council order, he assumed control of the body of the Abbey at the beginning of 1953 for the main contractors – Messrs Mowlem – to erect the viewing stands, prepare the Annexe and the

³³ The secretary to all the committees was the same Treasury official who had fulfilled the role in 1937, R. U. E. Knox (1888-1965).

³⁴ Kynaston D. (2009) *Family Britain 1951-57* (London, Bloomsbury), p. 301. On the other hand, D.R. Thorpe, the author of a 1989 life of Selwyn Lloyd, thought that it was the televising of the King's funeral that sparked off the mass purchase of sets *in time* for the coronation – see Hennessy P. (2006) *Having It So Good – Britain in the Fifties* (London, Allen Lane), p. 244. The *Times* – 3 June 1953 - thought that the total television viewing audience might have amounted to 20 million. The figure has subsequently been put at 27 million – Pimlott B. (1996) *The Queen: A Biography of Elizabeth II* (London, Harper Collins), p.207.

³⁵ An account of the Earl Marshal's involvement and style by one of his staff is at Brooke-Little J. (1980) *Royal Ceremonies of State* (Feltham, Country Life Books), pp. 46-64.

‘theatre’³⁶, and all the other sub-contractors to install lighting, broadcasting and filming equipment and so on.

3.19 The Annexe³⁷ was a large temporary building of clad steelwork whose design by the Ministry of Works Chief Architect was approved by the Fine Arts Commission and all other possible authorities. Entered by an octagon, it provided not only space for the forming up of the main procession but retiring rooms for members of the royal family and peers, and a dining room for the Queen. There she took a meal after the coronation service before the great procession in the State Coach through central London.

3.20 Planning the detail disclosed the importance of the role of officials otherwise normally uncelebrated. The main beneficiary in this sense was the Minister of Works, David Eccles. Works was normally one of the lowliest in the Cabinet hierarchy but its central role in the physical arrangements gave it a special prominence seized by a personable and competent minister. He was instrumental in, amongst other things, insisting that as few as possible of the troops should be accommodated in public parks both to avoid the damage of previous occasions³⁸ and to maximise public access at all times so far as possible. Encampments were confined to Kensington Gardens and troops otherwise mostly accommodated in civil accommodation with minorities occupying available London barracks.

3.21 Not normally visible at all and not a public figure was the Crown Equerry. An officer of the Household, his duty was to manage the sovereign’s transport, including the equine transport and the vehicles involved. His view became – to the evident irritation of some of the Executive Committee members – determinant in matters of routing the processions from and to Buckingham Palace. Explaining that his charge included then no horses other than those borrowed from the Metropolitan police, he maintained that routing the ‘to’ procession around the north side of Trafalgar Square (which would have given an opportunity for a friendly gesture to the South African High Commission) required too tight a turn for the eight horses of the State Coach. When the Earl Marshal suggested that the supposed difficulty could be tested in a dry run, the Equerry explained that it was not possible because the Coach was under repair and no other vehicle of similar size was available as a substitute. Similarly, the hillier down routes from Piccadilly had to be rejected because the Equerry advised he could not guarantee that the rather primitive brakes on the Coach could be depended upon to hold it.³⁹

3.22 In the event, the routes finally chosen were little different from 1937. The main difference was the inclusion of Northumberland Avenue and the Embankment⁴⁰ in the ‘to’ route and the inclusion of the lower part of Piccadilly in the ‘from’ route which largely traversed the 1937 route but in reverse order.

³⁶ Theatre – the area of the Abbey at the crossing in front of the altar specially arranged and carpeted for the ceremonies.

³⁷ Annexe – up to 1821, coronation processions to the Abbey were formed up in Westminster Hall before proceeding to the Abbey. Marshalling them in the Abbey instead required a temporary expansion of space at the west door. Hence resort has accordingly been made ever since to temporary Annexes themselves quite substantial structures.

³⁸ Caused by the traffic of troops across the ground much exacerbated by heavy rainfalls in 1937. Flooding had been particularly severe in Regent’s Park where it was thought in 1952 that the consignment there of so much bomb damage rubble during 1940-5 should have improved the drainage.

³⁹ PC 22/9, Minutes of meeting 19 May 1952, CJC 11.

⁴⁰ The LCC had stationed 37,000 schoolchildren on the Victoria Embankment in 1937 – PP 22/9, CJC 49 of 9 October 1952.

3.23 Some 44,178 servicemen were involved in the ceremonies. Because of the distances and logistical problems otherwise involved in bussing troops in from service accommodation outside London (for example, Colchester), it was decided to accommodate them in London despite there being insufficient barracks. More than 8,000 were accommodated in Earls Court, over 5,000 at Olympia and 3,000 (Royal Navy) at the Clapham Deep Shelter. The sole encampment was at Kensington Gardens which took over 17,000 of whom 3,000 were provincial police officers. As against what happened in 1937, the Gardens were left, the War Office account claimed, in excellent order where only the bleached grass showed where the tentage had been.⁴¹

3.24 The route to the Abbey was 1 mile 770 yards and the longer procession from the Abbey covered 5 miles and 250 yards. Route lining involved a total of nearly 16,000 servicemen and twenty military bands in addition to the twenty-four bands marching in the processions themselves. The military consisted of nearly 2,000 guardsmen, 2,000 Royal and Commonwealth Royal Navy, over 800 cadets from the services' academies, 336 Canadians, nearly 1,500 Royal Artillery, 640 Royal Engineers, 300 Royal Signals, 2,240 line infantry, 4,000 RAF and 640 belonging to other army corps. Considerable sums were spent on providing No 1 Dress for the soldiers.

The coronation rite

3.25 This was the responsibility of the Archbishop of Canterbury who had been told, as on previous occasions, to keep it as short as possible. This meant amongst other things that the sermon – first dropped in 1902 and then revived in 1911 but not in 1937 – was unlikely to survive. Various proposals were made to the Archbishop urging modernization and the inclusion of a Commonwealth dimension perhaps by means of some ceremony in Westminster Hall. Not necessarily an opponent of change – he had himself, for example, argued for the inclusion of the Moderators of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church Federal Council in the late King's Windsor interment – he was not convinced of the case for significant departure from the rite.

3.26 Indeed, this meant he was opposed to the suggestion made by Clement Davies, the Liberal Leader in the Commons, that the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council might be associated with the coronation service in the same way as the Moderator of the Church of Scotland. Archbishop Fisher

said that this point had been most carefully considered and he would have been most pleased if a way could be found to do something of the kind. It would be seen however that in the latter part of the Oath ... there was the question "Will you to the utmost of your power maintain the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law?" It was one of the characteristics of the Free Churches that they were not established by law. Having regard to this it would obviously be extremely difficult to include the Free Churches of England and Wales with the Church of Scotland. The Committee took note accordingly.⁴²

3.27 The upshot was that the rubric followed very closely that of 1937. The Archbishop's suggestion that the sovereign's oath make a generic reference to the Commonwealth realms rather than continue to cite them individually was rejected. Otherwise, apart from the omission of

⁴¹ WO 32/15395, *Summary of Action Taken by the War Office*, Ch.16.

⁴² LCO 6/3522, CCPC 20, Conclusions of 2nd meeting.

reference to India, the substitution of Northern Ireland for Ireland and the addition of mention of Pakistan and Ceylon, the oath was unchanged. As mentioned, the only other innovation was to find a place for the Moderator of the Church of Scotland to participate in the ceremony for the first time.⁴³ The role assigned was to present the bible to the Queen using the traditional formula of presentation, actions formerly discharged by the Archbishop himself.⁴⁴

3.28 The most important point was that the coronation took place within the Anglican service of communion. As Archbishop Lang had pointed out in 1937,⁴⁵ this effectively excluded the participation of other Christian priests let alone – and not thought of at the time – other religions. One of the issues for the future is whether and, if so, how far the Church of England should maintain the same position for future coronations.

3.29 In the event, the ceremony in 1953 passed off very smoothly. The ring, unlike at Victoria's coronation, was not forced painfully on to the wrong finger; nor was the St Edward's crown placed on the sovereign's head back to front as for Edward VII. After processing out of the Abbey, the Queen took a light lunch in the Annexe in a room decorated with a tasteful borrowed landscape.

The spectators

At the Abbey

3.30 Allocating the seating was the responsibility of the Earl Marshal. This was no light duty since it required the construction of an outcome that could be credibly presented – and defended – as reflective of the society of the day. Accordingly, it was of great interest to the Cabinet who had directed that there should be a much larger representation from the Commonwealth than in 1937, the Prime Minister also wanting a substantially increased number of seats for the trade unions. Striving for a rational scheme, the Earl Marshall calculated that it was necessary to address no fewer than 42 categories of eligible persons. Granted that the peerage – then, save for a few law lords, entirely hereditary – of nearly 1,000 expected invitations to include their wives and the Commons likewise expected generous provision, by the time Privy Counsellors were also accommodated there was little room for manoeuvre to fit in enhanced categories. After reducing military and civil service numbers and shaving other groups – the baronets, for example, were reduced from twenty-five to two – the ceiling of just over 8,000 places could not be sustained in a building where every square inch had been commandeered.⁴⁶

3.31 Something had to give and a Conservative government decided that it had to be the peerage. This was achieved by the Lord Chancellor discovering/deciding that, although the

⁴³ PREM 11/31 - The Secretary of State for Scotland wrote to the Prime Minister on 2 May 1952 seeking a place for the Moderator in the Sanctuary, and a Church of Scotland committee suggested a service of dedication in Scotland with the Scottish regalia, at which the Dean of the Thistle suggested the Queen should hold the sceptre. While there was no objection to a Scottish service, it could not appear to be a second coronation – the effect of the Act of Union – and the Dean's suggestion was firmly rejected by the Lord Chancellor's Department in a letter of 17 December 1952. In the event a St Giles service was held; the Queen wore a day dress and carried a handbag (a degree of modesty criticised in some Scottish circles); and the regalia were paraded at the front of an unshowy procession down the nave.

⁴⁴ Carpenter E. (1991) *Archbishop Fisher – His Life and Times* (Norwich, Canterbury Press), pp. 266-267.

⁴⁵ Lockhart J. G. (1949) *Cosmo Gordon Lang* (London, Hodder) p. 416: 'I said frankly that I could not share my traditional duties with other persons; and that the whole Service was within the Order of Communion of the Church of England.'

⁴⁶ Photographs show Abbey stands in the Nave and elsewhere rising up to nine or eleven tiers high.

peerage enjoyed a right of summons to Parliament, it enjoyed no commensurate right to be summoned to a coronation. There were then approximately 736 peers entitled to sit in the Lords within a total peerage of 936 including minors, peeresses in their own right and Irish and Scottish peers.⁴⁷ He announced this by way of a statement in the Lords⁴⁸ and thus cleared the way for the Earl Marshal to propose allocations acceptable to the Cabinet and the Coronation Commission.

3.32 In fact, however, not all the latter committee did agree. The leader of the Opposition, Attlee, supported by the Liberal leader, Clement Davies, attempted a late run in February 1953 to insert homage by the Speaker as representative of the common man.⁴⁹ This proposed innovation was just too much for the planners who claimed the idea really needed greater consideration especially with the Commonwealth and that there was not time enough left to allow for it. A sort of promise was made that the suggestion might be considered separately after the coronation.⁵⁰

3.33 The Abbey seating was made, as in 1937, of tubular steel and wood planking. Great care was taken to protect Abbey furnishings and monuments. Cabling had to be laid for television and sound broadcasting and also for special lighting. Large reflectors were installed as unobtrusively as possible to enhance illumination. The Ministry charged fees to broadcasters for their use of facilities. The latter included for everyone considerable expenditure on lavatories, thus avoiding the humiliation of Samuel Pepys forced to leave Charles II's coronation early. Nonetheless, the Ministry's post-Coronation review concluded that there had been a failure to provide anything like enough for women.⁵¹ In the absence of a modern Health and Safety inspection regime to ensure safety, the Abbey stands were tested by the expedient of using 1,000 guardsmen provided by London District for the purpose.

3.34 In 1937 there had been considerable confusion and delay inflicted on the departure of the Abbey guests. A sub-committee of the Coronation Committee chaired by the Commissioner of Police considered how a repetition of the scenes could be avoided. A scheme was therefore designed to disperse guests radially from the Abbey to locations where they would be offered lunch and orderly arrangements for accessing their vehicles.⁵² Guests were sent variously to Westminster Hall, the New Public Offices in Whitehall and Church House. The 'Gold Sticks' – gentlemen ushers – repaired to a marquee in Dean's Close for refreshments provided by the NAAFI. To assist egress from the Abbey to Westminster Hall a temporary prefabricated pedestrian bridge,

⁴⁷ C (52) 403 Memorandum by the Lord Chancellor, PREM 11/357.

⁴⁸ Hansard, Lords, 27 January 1953, cols 4-13. This brusque treatment of the peerage reflected, amongst other things, a relative decline in its status. It may be contrasted, for example, with the fact that discussion was even entertained in 1937 on the allocation of Abbey seats to the eldest unmarried *sons* of peers over 21. Supported by Churchill, the Earl Marshal thought it not unreasonable that places should be found for as many as 249. Challenged by Atlee, the number was reduced to 50. See PC 22/6, minutes of meeting on 16 March 1937.

⁴⁹ Conclusions of the 2nd Meeting of the Coronation Committee of the Privy Council.

⁵⁰ LCO 6/3525, Report (dated 24 February 1953) of the Sub-committee on the Suggested Special Participation of the Speaker in the Coronation Service. There is no record of the suggestion's receiving post-coronation consideration.

⁵¹ The Metropolitan police concurred as to provision for the public on the route. Although 101 temporary 'conveniences' were supplied, there were more for men than women. 'Long queues were present throughout Coronation eve and on Coronation day, taking as long as two or three hours to reach the toilets.' MEPO 2/9243, August 1953.

⁵² The Prime Minister had been anxious that peers who so wished could be able to attend in their horse-drawn coaches. Although a number thought of doing so, only four actually did. MEPO 2/9243

previously tested offsite, was thrown across St Margaret's Street on the night of 1 June and disassembled swiftly twenty-fours later.⁵³

Outside the Abbey

3.35 The procession routes afforded all sorts of sightseeing opportunities from the pavements upwards for private viewing from windows and stands on private ground. The Ministry of Works was responsible for the erection of all public stands outside the Abbey as well as all stands within. Tasked to do so and to recover a greater proportion of the costs than in 1937, the Ministry erected stands for 96,000 people outside the Abbey and recovered from sales well over half its costs. Seats were not cheap: £6 covered (£127 at 2022 prices) and £4 uncovered (£85 at 2022 prices.). The Ministry stands were concentrated in the area of the Abbey and Whitehall, the Mall, the Victoria monument and environs, and the East Carriage Drive in Hyde Park. Parliament Square was entirely taken up by covered stands, and so were considerable areas facing Buckingham Palace. A few Whitehall stands were reserved at sharp prices for paying foreign visitors. Take up in their case faded close to the coronation date and places were made available to American servicemen based in Britain.

The 'from' procession

3.36 This was the great public hurrah of the coronation. 40,000 British, Commonwealth and Colonial troops and related services were involved marching twelve abreast. From the UK, all military formations were represented and for the first time every infantry regiment detachment carried its colours. The UK Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was the senior of the ten Commonwealth Prime Ministers in open carriages. Wearing as a Garter knight the George given by Queen Anne to his ancestor, Marlborough, and the star that had belonged to Castlereagh, Churchill was escorted by a mounted detachment of his old regiment, the 4th Hussars, who had managed to equip themselves with pre-War full-dress uniforms.⁵⁴ (The rule of the procession was that participants either rode or were pulled by horses or walked.) The full turnout of Commonwealth Prime Ministers included Nehru from India though he had declined to send any troops whereas all the other Prime Ministers had done so. The Queen was escorted by the Household Brigade, senior members of her Household, service ADCs, and senior service officers from the UK and Commonwealth forces. Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke commanded the parade and rode beside the Queen's carriage. There were marching bands and stationary bands along the route which was lined throughout with the troops at 30-inch intervals. The printed operational orders for the military and the police ran into scores of pages. The procession was so long that it took 45 minutes to pass any stationary point. The sole defect was the one no planner could prevent: it was an overcast and showery day.

⁵³ The Macmillans viewed the 'from' procession from this bridge, he wearing – Macmillan noted – his Privy Councillor's costume 'hired from Morris Angel, theatrical costumiers!' *Macmillan Diaries*, 1-7 June 1953, p 235. ⁵³ PREM 11/354.

⁵⁴ PREM 11/354

Naval review

3.37 This took place at Spithead on 15 June 1953. It involved 190 vessels and more than 300 naval aircraft. The muster included 1 battleship, 8 carriers, 12 cruisers, 20 destroyers, 40 frigates, 18 minesweepers, 30 submarines, and 62 other vessels.⁵⁵

Cost of coronations

3.38 It is difficult to construct a fully comparable and meaningful list of costs over a long period. In recent times at least, Treasury practice has been to compile a Coronation Vote that included only the direct costs falling to the Household, Ministry of Works and the Government Hospitality Fund (which looked after overseas invitees) against the Appropriations in Aid arising principally from Works' sales of viewing seats, Abbey chairs and materials. A 1963 Treasury review⁵⁶ set out the position on this basis:

£ Estimates 1952/1953		£ Estimates 1953/1954	
<i>Expenditure</i>	<i>Out-turn</i>	<i>Expenditure</i>	<i>Out-turn</i>
367,000	344,000	1,206,000	1,121,000
<i>Receipts</i>	<i>Out-turn</i>	<i>Receipts</i>	<i>Out-turn</i>
135,000	113,000	513,000	561,000

3.39 Works was both the largest spender and source of income. Over the two years it spent £1.26m and received £696,000. At present money values⁵⁷ based on increases in the Bank of England inflation index, these sums may be translated as amounting respectively to £26.7m and £14.7m. Expenditure included stands in the Mall and at the Queen Victoria monument (£4.3m), at Whitehall and Parliament Square (£5.4m), Green Park (£3.5m) and Hyde Park (£3.8m); lavatories cost £143,000. These may seem large sums but the stands were substantial structures. The Metropolitan police calculated that they accommodated about 96,000 people. There were also considerable sums spent on decorative arches across the Mall and street decorations along the routes, especially in Trafalgar Square.

⁵⁵ PC 22/11.

⁵⁶ T 219/30, note of 31 October 1963.

⁵⁷ Present money value 2022 (pmv) for all figures in paragraphs 3.38-3.41.

3.40 Household expenditure was much less than that of Works. The main items were:

Main Household costs 1953/1954	£ pmv 2017
Queen's coronation garments	165,900
Maids of Honour dresses	46,700
Alterations to Imperial State Crown	51,000
Car Hire	232,600
Repairs to State Coach	62,000
Earl Marshal's remuneration	45,600

3.41 Other expenditure, which could be considerable, was left to fall on departmental votes, and there was never - so far as the available records appear to display - any final reckoning of the total net costs.⁵⁸ The War Office found it difficult to persuade the Treasury to agree that some of the War Office expenditure should be borne on the central Coronation Vote within the criterion 'expenditure incurred solely on account of the Coronation'. The War Office concluded that Treasury reluctance was motivated by a wish to avoid embarrassing comparisons with 1937 expenditure.⁵⁹

3.42 One of the War Office's difficulties was funding travel costs of over £6.3m, of which £4.0m fell under 'Conveyance of personnel by sea and air'. In other words, large numbers of troops were brought from abroad especially for the occasion. In addition, Cabinet approval was obtained for the issue to all participating troops of No I Dress, the dark navy (dark green for rifle/light infantry), high collar tunic and striped trouser uniforms (with chainmail epaulettes for cavalry) variously differenced as to corps and regiment. Immeasurably smarter than the normal serge of the then khaki battle dress, it was also much more expensive. Originally estimated at £6m, the final cost was a little over £7m. The costs for works services at the accommodation sites, for restoring Kensington Gardens and for hiring Olympia and Earls Court amounted to £2.73m. Substantial costs would also have fallen to the Admiralty and Air Ministry.

Contemporary reactions

3.43 The coronation was deemed a great success as a spectacle and was supported lustily not only in London but throughout the UK with local celebrations of all kinds from civic solemnities to open air parties primarily for children in decorated streets. Replying to a congratulatory letter from the Prime Minister, the Earl Marshal said:

Thank you for your letter. It was indeed kind of you to write.
I am so glad all went well and the Queen is delighted.

⁵⁸ Hankey's initial minute to the Prime Minister on coronation arrangements put net 1937 costs at £900,000 (£46m pmv) and estimated that the 1953 coronation might come in at about £2m net (£49.7m pmv). T 219/479, Hankey to Churchill, 10 April 1952.

⁵⁹ WO 32/15395 'Coronation of HM Queen Elizabeth II 2 June 1953 – Summary of Action Taken by the War Department', Chapter 43.

That we can still put on a show in this country and to be so clearly connected with it makes me very proud.⁶⁰

3.44 The Archbishop hoped ‘that the traditional Rite could still be given meaning to the secularized millions of Britain and beyond’.⁶¹ In a long *Times* leader, ‘And After?’, the day following the coronation, the author – Dermot Morrah, who had officiated as one of the Heralds – obtruded his *Round Table* sympathies: ‘If the sense of Empire ... had vanished in a breathing space of Time shorter than that of Queen Victoria’s own reign, a feeling of Commonwealth and community had taken its place’. The population was abjured not to continue its ‘holiday from reality’. Referring to the ordeal of ‘the recent thirty years war’ and to the ‘exhaustion and the tiredness, and the barrenness of the victory so far’, the time had ‘come for Britain to find anew her place in the world’. Morrah looked forward to ‘Christian values re-established, morals reasserted, conscientiousness revived, energy renewed, and national unity restored.’⁶² The BBC programme ‘Long Live the Queen’ on coronation day contained messages of loyalty and support from all the Commonwealth prime ministers. Vincent Massey, then Canadian Governor General, made an effusive broadcast reading in part:

During these times of stress and trouble, the Crown, unshaken by disaster, has been ennobled through trial. It helped us to face the dark days. It has been with us to brighten the glad ones. And, therefore, as we have returned once and again to this ancient rite, we have found it enriched with an even deeper meaning.⁶³

Retrospective reactions

3.45 The longer the elapse of time, the more subsequent concerns colour appreciations. The rapid dissolution of the colonial empire after 1953 subtracted meaning from the imperial splendour of the great coronation processions. Hopes that Christianity might strengthen have been falsified by increased secularization on the one hand, and a much greater and more visible degree of religious pluralization. The ‘thirty years war’, Morrah’s encapsulation of the period 1914-1945, has been replaced by the rolling anxieties of terrorism of various stripes in a global environment where, undeniably from the Suez debacle in 1956, Britain ceased to be a world power. One historian has called the coronation ‘A kind of farewell party’⁶⁴, another ‘a magnificent funeral tribute to a world order that was ending’.⁶⁵ Sociologists in 1953-5 argued inconclusively over the ‘meaning’ of the coronation⁶⁶ though they persuaded a later historian that they had accurately perceived ‘that the Coronation was more than mere flummery; and that it helped to define, not just royalty, but the British identity for the next generation.’⁶⁷

⁶⁰ PREM 11/357, letter of 5 June 1953.

⁶¹ Carpenter, p. 265.

⁶² *Times*, 3 June 1953.

⁶³ Idem.

⁶⁴ Kynaston, Chapter 11.

⁶⁵ Pimlott B. (1996) *The Queen: A Biography of Elizabeth II* (London, Harper Collins), p.204.

⁶⁶ For a recent discussion of this controversy, see Bonney N. (2013) *Monarchy, Religion and the State: Civil Religion in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the Commonwealth* (Manchester, Manchester University Press), pp. 54-7.

⁶⁷ The sociologists were Shils E. and Young M. ‘The Meaning of the Coronation’, and Birnbaum N. ‘Monarchs and Sociologists: A Reply to Professor Shils and M. Young’, *Sociological Review*, Vol I.2 December 1953, pp. 63-70, and Vol 3.1 July 1955, pp.13-23. The historian was Ben Pimlott - Pimlott 1996, p. 217.

3.46 Another way of attempting to understand the coronation is to place it in a larger context of the evolution of the UK monarchy since 1953:

...the most marked national transformation since the early 1950s has been Britain's slow, painful and not-yet-completed adjustment to the loss of imperial dominion and great power status; and the most marked royal transformation during the same period has been the slow, painful and yet-to-be-completed adjustment from being an imperial monarchy and great-power throne to something necessarily less and necessarily different.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Cannadine D. (2008) *Making History Now and Then*, pp. 56-7.

Chapter 4: The coming coronation

Introduction

4.1 The UK is the only European monarchy that retains a religious coronation as opposed to a constitutional investiture where – with or without public celebration – the sovereign swears to observe the constitution. It seems, therefore, from practices abroad that a coronation is not an absolute requirement for succession to the crown. Indeed, it has already been observed above that it is the law rather than a coronation that ‘makes’ the sovereign.

4.2 However, now that we know there will be a coronation on 6 May 2023 where the King will be crowned ‘alongside The Queen Consort’⁶⁹, this chapter considers what little public discussion there has been about the nature of a future coronation.

4.3 Archbishop Fisher’s biographer referred to the thought in the wake of the 1953 coronation that its form might be reviewed in the light of the experience. That did not happen: ‘It was rightly felt that conditions would probably be so different at the end of the century that any forward planning so early would consume time to no purpose’.⁷⁰ This warning remains apt because it is the circumstances of the immediate times that will determine the nature of the event. As the announcement of 11 October 2022 itself said:

The Coronation will reflect the monarch’s role today and look towards the future, while being rooted in longstanding traditions and pageantry.

While the statement is very short on detail – perhaps because it is still to be finalised – it seems clear enough that Queen Camilla will be crowned and anointed at the same time as her husband. As to the detail, there will no doubt be political willingness to take the King’s views into account. On the other hand, crucial will be the views of the government, for it is the government that will determine the outcome and control the costs. Moreover, before succeeding to the throne, King Charles had already made it clear that he expected both a quicker and a shorter event – a view likely to be reinforced by the present state of the economy.

Religious voices

4.4 The preoccupation here has naturally been with the form of the coronation service and the character of its religious content, the part of the coronation most susceptible to archiepiscopal influence. A bishop noted for his espousal of disestablishing the Church of England nonetheless thought of the service:

It must, I take it, be recognizably a Church of England rite in terms of personnel, texts, milieu and style even if there are guest appearances within it of other Christians. If it were

⁶⁹ <https://www.royal.uk/coronation-his-majesty-king>

⁷⁰ Carpenter 1991, p. 265.

truly ecumenical, it would cease to recognize or confer a specially protected place in the nation for the Church of England.⁷¹

The author went on to argue that disestablishment would remove the restrictions on the sovereign's own religion without threatening the viability of the monarchy, though at that point glossing over whether a coronation could survive such a change.

4.5 A former Dean of Westminster agreed that the service had to remain Anglican. While stressing the adaptable character of the rite, Wesley Carr emphasised the centrality of the eucharistic nature of the service:

To plan a coronation without a eucharist would require a massive break with history. That alone would imply a long study of the intention behind a coronation at all, its venue and basic structure.⁷²

4.6 Further, in the light of the changed social and religious context to which Carr was fully alive, he wondered whether a modern coronation should not be accompanied by a new, secular event. Referring to talk in 1937 and 1952 that Westminster Hall – dropped from coronation day events after 1821 – might be reincluded in the festivities for some modern species of homage, he saw use of that venue as ‘a suitable way for the Crown to affirm the ethnic and religious plurality to which the social reality points within the continuity that the nation seeks’. He also in the same article questioned the former dominant numbers of hereditary peers in the Abbey congregation and advanced the case for the inclusion of representation from the devolved legislatures.⁷³

4.7 In the revised edition of a book originally published in 2002, Dr Ian Bradley of St Andrew's University, a minister in the Church of Scotland, put forward the counter-cultural proposition that the monarchy still has a vital role and that this role is primarily spiritual:

It involves symbolizing spiritual values, embodying the sacred, representing and defending religious faith against unbelief and secular materialism, promoting order in the midst of chaos standing for the public good against private gain, and acting as a focal point for unity in a society which is increasingly fragmented and fissiparous.⁷⁴

On the other hand, Bradley had a more radical approach to the coronation rite than Wesley Carr:

The coronation must retain its sacramental character and its central element of the consecrating and anointing of the new sovereign. It is not absolutely central to this sacramentality that it remains embedded in the Anglican communion service.⁷⁵

4.8 He also argued for revisions of the Coronation Oath that would align it more specifically with traditions of fairness and tolerance in government, and combine support for Protestant establishment with support not only for the Christian religion as a whole but also with a

⁷¹ Buchanan C. (1997) ‘The Next Coronation’ in Bradshaw P. (ed) *Coronations, Past, Present and Future* (Cambridge, Grove Books), p. 41.

⁷² Carr W. (2002) ‘This Intimate Ritual: The Coronation Service’, *Political Theology*, pp. 11-24 at p. 22.

⁷³ Carr 2002, pp. 22 and 14.

⁷⁴ Bradley I. (2012) *God Save the Queen: The Spiritual Heart of the Monarchy* (London. Continuum), p.250.

⁷⁵ Bradley (2012), p. 259.

commitment to the defence and safeguarding of faith more generally.⁷⁶ Controversially, in a non-eucharistic rite, he would be prepared to see the Roman Catholic cardinal share in the anointing with the Archbishop of Canterbury in a still Christian ceremony that found ways also to involve other Christian groups. After the coronation, Bradley would favour an ecumenical event in Westminster Hall which could include new and extended forms of homage:

At this ceremony, the monarch, wearing crown and robes, would be symbolically enthroned by leading members of the government, politicians from across the political spectrum and across the UK, Commonwealth prime ministers and senior officers in the armed forces.⁷⁷

4.9 More recently the religious thinktank *Theos* published a report, *Who wants a Christian Coronation?*⁷⁸ Relying on a telephone survey⁷⁹, the report maintained that there were no majorities for a secular coronation or for the view that a Christian coronation would alienate those of other faiths or none. A majority (57 per cent) thought the ceremony should be Christian compared with 19 per cent who thought it should be multi-faith and 23 per cent who thought it should be secular. The authors also noted that there were majorities saying they would not feel alienated by a Christian ceremony even among religious minorities and those of no religious faith.

4.10 The report concluded that there was a case for modernising the ceremony and making it in some ways more inclusive. It quoted a number of Anglican clerical sources and remarks by the Queen herself as expressing open mindedness on the possibility though all stopped short of welcoming participation as opposed to the presence of other religions.⁸⁰ The survey revealed solid majority support for the monarchy across all age groups but more variation on the religious questions and in some cases fairly high proportions of Don't knows.

4.11 Younger age groups, for example, were more evenly divided than older ones on the alienation issue with a small majority feeling that alienation would occur whereas older groups all had majorities dismissing the possibility. It will be interesting to see how opinion in the younger groups matures in the future and in the cohorts that replace them.⁸¹

4.12 The report had views also on the scale of the Abbey event:

The next coronation would do well to be shorter: the three or so hours of 1953 is surely twice as long as any contemporary coronation could or should be. It could also be a smaller affair. The 8,250 guests of 1953 seem somewhat excessive (not least given the size of the

⁷⁶ Some of these arguments were first aired in a 2002 article, 'The Shape of the Next Coronation: Some Tentative Thoughts', *Political Theology*, pp. 25-43. Bradley has, however, retreated in 2012 from his earlier position arguing for the removal of the constitutional ban on the sovereign being a Roman Catholic.

⁷⁷ Bradley 2012, p. 263.

⁷⁸ *Theos*, 1 September 2015 at <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/publications/2015/09/01/who-wants-a-christian-coronation>, accessed 9 June 2016.

⁷⁹ *Theos - Coronation Polling*, ComRes, *Theos - Coronation Polling*, ComRes at <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/publications/2015/09/01/who-wants-a-christian-coronation>, accessed 9 June 2016.

⁸⁰ The *Theos* writers had amongst other things the Westminster Abbey Commonwealth Day service in mind. This certainly has a multifaith presence and participation (delivering prayers, for example). But it is clearly an Anglican occasion and, above all, not like the coronation Eucharistic rite. See the order of service used in 2022 at <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/media/14992/commonwealth-day-2022-order-of-service.pdf>.

⁸¹ *Theos*, pp. 23-26.

Abbey) and a congregation closer to that of the recent Royal Wedding (c. 2000 people) seems appropriate. (Report, p. 56)

4.13 Before leaving this discussion, it should be borne in mind that, with the exception of the voice from the established Church of Scotland, the voices recorded above are largely Anglican and all English. Nonconformist churchmen, and especially non-English nonconformists, see things differently. Pointing out that in 1953 the Church of England ‘appeared simply to take the service, the occasion and its own part in it, entirely for granted’, Daniel Jenkins⁸² went on to argue that:

Many people in the world suspect, and some believe, that the Church of England is little more than a thinly-disguised adaptation and distortion of the Christian faith to serve the purpose of English nationalism, and English nationalism at its most self-satisfied, uncritical and sanctimonious.⁸³

4.14 Arguably, greater Anglican sensitivity to this dimension would seem desirable on the next occasion especially considering, at present, how English nationalism has become more prominent. In his excellent study of past coronations, Roy Strong quoted with – perhaps nostalgic – approval 1953 remarks by the Anglican liturgist E. C. Ratcliff that ‘the English Coronation Service symbolises national continuity considered *sub specie Christianitatis*.’ Ratcliff was adamant on the point:

‘...the Coronation is no mere ceremonial parade. It is a Service of the English Church and State. To consider it otherwise is to miss or mistake its meaning.’⁸⁴

While true historically, its confident synecdoche of assuming that England can stand for the whole nation and, at that, also under one particular religion does not wear well for our present society and, indeed, nowadays indicates how far the times have moved.⁸⁵

Secular voices

4.15 There has been little public discussion and it has shown no preoccupation with the content of the religious ceremony as opposed to what political significance should be given to accession and coronation in greatly changed times.⁸⁶ Some of this discussion has taken place consciously or otherwise with regard to the concept of ‘civil religion’. This is the sociological concept with roots in the Enlightenment understanding that a state may manifest collective non-specific quasi-religious language that reflects shared moral beliefs without being anchored in any particular

⁸² Daniel Thomas Jenkins (1914-2002), born Dowlais, Congregationalist/United Reformed Church minister and prominent Nonconformist theologian.

⁸³ Jenkins D. (1975) *The British, Their Identity and Their Religion* (London, SCM Press), pp. 74 and 80. See also Morris R. M. (ed.) (2006) *Church and State: Some Reflections on Church Establishment in England* (London, Constitution Unit) for some other Christian non-Anglican attitudes to the Church of England, especially chapters 2-4.

⁸⁴ Ratcliff, E. C. (1953) *The Coronation Service of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II* (London, SPCK), pp.23 and vii respectively, the first quoted in Strong R. (2005) *Coronation: A History of Kingship and the British Monarchy* (London, HarperCollins), p. 501.

⁸⁵ Such perspectives are also sensitively explored by the Roman Catholic writer, Catherine Pepinster, in her *Defenders of the Faith: The British Monarchy, Religion and the Next Coronation* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2022), especially Chapter 9.

⁸⁶ A possible exception is the religious affairs journalist Andrew Brown who has argued for keeping the coronation service (including the oaths) untouched and leaving people to take their own meaning from it whether they regard the ritual as religious or not – rather like a theology of don’t ask, don’t tell. See Brown A., ‘Charles will be sorely tempted to overhaul the coronation. Here’s why he should resist.’ *Prospect*, September 2017.

religion. Particularly noticed in the USA as related to the constitutional ban on religious establishment, the phenomenon is less apparent in the UK because of the religious establishment here of a kind which in its mild and undemanding Anglican form shares similar social functions.⁸⁷

4.16 Another preliminary to further discussion arises from the record above of what was done *outside* the Abbey in 1953. It is simply inconceivable, for example, that the UK state now has the wish, let alone the capacity, to mount the extent of the last coronation's festivities. There would not be the numbers of servicemen to line the streets let alone parade twelve abreast in a column nearly three miles long accompanied by enough bands stationary or marching to be audible to the marchers and the spectators.⁸⁸

4.17 Constitutional changes call into question whether any hereditary peers who are not relevant office-holders or amongst the ninety elected to the House of Lords from amongst their ranks should attend the Abbey service at all.⁸⁹ It may also in the event become unclear whether the 1953 emphasis on the Commonwealth, including at the Abbey, remains viable. Taken together with the increasing degree of religious disaffiliation, a combination of these and other factors may lead to a situation where, as Wesley Carr anticipated, the balance between the religious and secular aspects of accession and coronation might be changed.

Adding a civil ceremony in Westminster Hall, or on Horse Guards Parade

4.18 One way of responding to these uncertainties would be to develop a new venture of 'recognition' of the new monarch outside the religious canopy.⁹⁰ In 1953 the *Round Table* mooted removing the secular ceremonies of fealty and homage from the Abbey service to a modernised equivalent event in Westminster Hall as a way of finding also a larger place for the Commonwealth in the ceremonies. Archbishop Fisher strongly opposed the proposal: 'Bearing in mind the whole tendency of the modern age, which is always to transfer significance from the religious to the secular...it is essential to keep the ceremony in the Abbey alone and there to keep everything subordinated to the religious service.'⁹¹

4.19 So far, most religious commentators have not thought beyond retaining the coronation's eucharistic character if placing it in a more ecumenical context. However, Wesley Carr, when Dean of Westminster, suggested a series of ceremonies involving a progress starting with an ecumenical,

⁸⁷ For a review of these considerations see Bonney N. (2013) *Monarchy, religion and the state*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press).

⁸⁸ The Arthur Rank coloured film of the coronation can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKzlKwpm17U> accessed 30 March 2016.

⁸⁹ Similarly, it would be difficult to justify any places for the baronetcy.

⁹⁰ The fact that, traditionally, a mixed group of about thirty - largely religious and academic organizations - 'The Privileged Bodies' - are permitted to present addresses at an audience with the sovereign on select, auspicious occasions has not been overlooked. Although the tradition may be regarded as a possible precedent, its content and purpose falls well short of the proposals discussed above. The Royal website contains an example of one of the audiences of the Privileged Bodies - <https://www.royal.uk/queens-reply-loyal-addresses-privileged-bodies-27-march-2012>.

⁹¹ 'The Coronation and the Commonwealth IV - Some Overseas Opinions', *Round Table*, December 1953, 57-64. The December article was the last of four on the Commonwealth and the coronation during 1953, all of which are thought to have been written by the journal's long-standing editor, Dermot Morrah. The *Round Table*, founded in 1910, describes itself as a journal of Commonwealth and international affairs and Britain's oldest international affairs journal. See also Carpenter E. (1991) *Archbishop Fisher - His Life and Times* (Norwich, Canterbury Press), pp. 248-253.

civil ceremony of acclamation for the new sovereign in Westminster Hall as a prelude to the coronation proper shorn perhaps of the homage which might be displaced to a Parliamentary acclamation/homage in St Margaret's Westminster, with a final return to Westminster Hall for an inter-faith inauguration.⁹²

4.20 Ian Bradley (see 4.7-8 above) preferred a Westminster Hall event *after* the coronation which mixed ceremonies of homage and allegiance attended by political, judicial and civil state representatives.⁹³ It is for consideration whether such ceremonies should precede rather than follow the coronation: the former would stress the civil and perhaps multi-faith character of the nation's acclamation, but the latter would put the coronation at the centre of the celebrations. Alternatively, a civil ceremony could be on a different day altogether: it would be less tiring for the participants, and less challenging for the organisers, to separate the two occasions.

4.21 On the other hand, when the discussion involves a wider group of participants, it quickly becomes evident that there is little real agreement. For example, a BBC discussion on the sixtieth anniversary of the 1953 coronation,⁹⁴ disclosed a range of opinion: the House of Commons Speaker's Chaplain preferred to leave the text untouched; another religious speaker claimed that the ceremony should continue to signify the accountability of earthly government to a higher power; and a humanist argued that the coronation oath's support for the Church of England was contentious when that Church was attended by only two per cent of the population. The support for the symbolism and mystique on the one hand was countered by the view that it was possible to have pomp and ceremony without religion in a situation where such things should be tailored to the spirit of the age.

4.22 None of the proponents of a civil ceremony has offered any detail about who would be invited, or what they would do. The King's meeting with parliament in Westminster Hall on 12 September shows the nature of the space and the limitations which it imposes. Will participants be called up one by one or in groups to pay homage to the King seated on a throne on the steps? Or will a space be cleared in the centre of Westminster Hall to allow for musical and artistic performance? The risk is of a tedious and uninspiring event, which cannot begin to compete with the pageantry of the coronation.

4.23 One possible alternative, which could be less formal and a lot more festive, would be to have a procession on Horse Guards Parade, of the kind held to celebrate the Queen Mother's 90th birthday on 28 June 1990. That involved the military and military bands, but most of the procession consisted of representatives of the extraordinarily wide range of organisations sponsored by the Queen Mother as their patron.⁹⁵ On floats or marching on foot, they included bodies one might expect, like the Girl Guides, St John's Ambulance, Mothers' Union, Royal College of Nursing; but also the Poultry Club, her racehorses, bulls from the Aberdeen Angus Association, and fishermen with their rods from the Salmon and Trout Association. King Charles has patronised an equally wide range of causes; a parade with all the organisations which he has supported could be an equally joyful occasion reflecting all the diversity of modern Britain. There might also be something

⁹² Wesley Carr, 'Crown and People: Reflections on the Spiritual Dimension of Establishment', Westminster Abbey Lecture, 16 September 2002.

⁹³ Bradley I. (2012) *God Save the Queen: The Spiritual Heart of the Monarchy* (London, Continuum), pp. 262-3.

⁹⁴ 'Beyond Belief', chaired by Ernie Reay on 27 May 2013.

⁹⁵ The BBC recording can be viewed at [Queen Mothers 90th Birthday Parade - YouTube](#). It begins with a military parade; the procession of civilian organisations starts 25 minutes in.

to learn from the celebratory lunch at the Banqueting House on 20 November 1997 to mark the late Queen and her husband's 50th wedding anniversary. A most eclectic guest list was assembled to reflect the full range of the modern UK on a happy and relaxed occasion.

4.24 Where we seem to be at present on the eve of decisions that must soon be taken on a 2023 coronation is as follows:

- It is known that there has been for some time a Whitehall planning committee for 'Operation Golden Orb' and that Archbishop Welby has convened a panel of experts to advise him on the rite with a view, amongst other things, to shorten it. Some rumours have estimated that a revised service could be up to half the length of the 1953 coronation, that is about 90 minutes long.
- While Buckingham Palace on 11 October announced that the next coronation would be on 6 May 2023, the statement was opaque on any detail saying only that 'The Coronation will reflect the monarch's role today and look forward towards the future, while being rooted in longstanding traditions and pageantry'.
- Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to assume that it will remain a rite where a coronation is wrapped around a communion (eucharistic) service. Although the celebrants will be Anglican, places will be found for both representatives of other Christian denominations and, most importantly, representatives of other religions now present in the UK. (Westminster Abbey has grown familiar over several years with managing such ceremony mostly in the case of the annual Commonwealth services in March.)
- There appear to be no current plans for any accompanying, separate ceremony where the King met representatives of civil society in, say, Westminster Hall or elsewhere.
- It has become assumed – correctly or otherwise - that the Abbey service congregation will be very significantly reduced from the 8,250 of 1953 to something more like the 2,000 who attended the Queen's funeral; and thus without the scaffolding and tiered seating of 1953.⁹⁶

4.25 What is not known, and perhaps not yet decided, is the scale of the royal processions, the composition of the guest lists and the means of locomotion, for example the place of horses in the ceremonies, and whether – as on the last occasion – there will be a temporary but substantial Annexe erected at the West door of the Abbey. All that said, the impressive and affecting character of the recent state funeral could prove the benchmark for what could be achieved in the next coronation.

⁹⁶ Some parts of the media are already preparing their customers for such an outcome on the basis that it will be necessary in any case because of changed Health and Safety requirements.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Maintaining that in principle change should occur is, of course, a very different matter from deciding actual arrangements in practice. In the end that will be for the Cabinet in the circumstances of the day to lead and decide.

5.2 That said, this exercise's principal conclusions are:

- Compared with 1952 the UK has been transformed socially and politically, including as to its place in the world. The union itself is under strain.
- Amongst the social changes are both a notable decline in Christian belief and observance, and a considerable growth of non-Christian religions.
- It follows that, as the King himself indicated in his address to faith leaders, it is desirable that ways should be found to recognize and celebrate the consequences of the changes in order to affirm that the state embraces all its citizens equally.
- This also implies that the homage should cease to have any place in the next coronation. It is not part of the religious rite but a hangover from the feudal constitution. It is all the more redundant following the exclusion – save for a rump - of the hereditary peerage from the legislature.
- If the sovereign is to be enabled to reach out to civil society on a much wider basis than hitherto, then government and Parliament will need to sponsor fresh thinking about how that might be signified at least for future reigns if there is not time before the next coronation to act on a fitting solution.
- Finally, in addition to ensuring that the next coronation should be on a more modest scale, it should also be less Anglo and less overwhelmingly Anglican.

Annex

Accession proclamation

Whereas it has pleased Almighty God to call to His Mercy our late Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth the Second of Blessed and Glorious Memory, by whose Decease the Crown of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is solely and rightfully come to The Prince Charles Philip Arthur George: We, therefore, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal of this Realm and Members of the House of Commons, together with other members of Her late Majesty's Privy Council and representatives of the Realms and Territories, Aldermen and Citizens of London, and others, do now hereby with one voice and Consent of Tongue and Heart publish and proclaim that The Prince Charles Philip Arthur George is now, by the Death of our late Sovereign of Happy Memory, become our only lawful and rightful Liege Lord Charles the Third, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of His other Realms and Territories, King, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, to whom we do acknowledge all Faith and Obedience with humble Affection; beseeching God by whom Kings and Queens do reign to bless His Majesty with long and happy Years to reign over us. Given at St. James's Palace this tenth day of September in the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-two.⁹⁷

GOD SAVE THE KING

King's Personal Declaration at the Privy Council on 10 September 2022

"My Lords, Ladies, and Gentlemen. It is my most sorrowful duty to announce to you the death of my beloved Mother, The Queen.

I know how deeply you, the entire Nation - and I think I may say the whole world - sympathise with me in the irreparable loss we have all suffered. It is the greatest consolation to me to know of the sympathy expressed by so many to my Sister and Brothers and that such overwhelming affection and support should be extended to our whole family in our loss.

To all of us as a family, as to this kingdom and the wider family of nations of which it is a part, my Mother gave an example of lifelong love and of selfless service.

⁹⁷ This language has been repeated in virtually the same form since at least 1625. Two conspicuous alterations on this occasion were to omit the preface 'High and Mighty' from the first citation of the new King's Christian names; and to substitute 'others' for 'other Principal Gentlemen of Quality'. The alterations reflect, of course, acknowledgement of Britain's changed place in the world, and the way in which it is thought by the Privy Council politic to refer to a more flattened social hierarchy.

My Mother's reign was unequalled in its duration, its dedication and its devotion. Even as we grieve, we give thanks for this most faithful life.

I am deeply aware of this great inheritance and of the duties and heavy responsibilities of Sovereignty which have now passed to me. In taking up these responsibilities, I shall strive to follow the inspiring example I have been set in upholding constitutional government and to seek the peace, harmony and prosperity of the peoples of these Islands and of the Commonwealth Realms and Territories throughout the world.

In this purpose, I know that I shall be upheld by the affection and loyalty of the peoples whose Sovereign I have been called upon to be, and that in the discharge of these duties I will be guided by the counsel of their elected parliaments. In all this, I am profoundly encouraged by the constant support of my beloved wife.

I take this opportunity to confirm my willingness and intention to continue the tradition of surrendering the hereditary revenues including of the Crown Estate to my government for the benefit of all, in return for the Sovereign Grant, which supports my official duties as Head of State and Head of Nation.

And in carrying out the heavy task that has been laid upon me, and to which I now dedicate what remains to me of my life,⁹⁸ I pray for the guidance and help of Almighty God."

The King's Address to faith leaders

My Lord Archbishop, Dean, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am very grateful to have had this opportunity to meet you all, so soon after my Accession, in what are inevitably the saddest of circumstances for me and my Family. I have been touched by your kind words of condolence more than I can possibly say. They mean a great deal to me.

I also wanted, before all of you today, to confirm my determination to carry out my responsibilities as Sovereign of all communities around this country and the Commonwealth and in a way which reflects the world in which we now live.

I am a committed Anglican Christian, and at my Coronation I will take an oath relating to the settlement of the Church of England. At my Accession, I have already solemnly given—as has every Sovereign over the last 300 years – an Oath which pledges to maintain and preserve the Protestant faith in Scotland.

I have always thought of Britain as a 'community of communities.' That has led me to understand that the Sovereign has an additional duty – less formally recognized but to be no less diligently discharged. It is the duty to protect the diversity of our country, including by protecting the space for Faith itself and its practice through the religions, cultures, traditions and beliefs to which our hearts and minds direct us as individuals. This diversity is not just enshrined in the laws of our country, it is enjoined by my own faith. As a member of the Church of England, my Christian beliefs have love at their very heart. By my most profound convictions, therefore – as well as by my position as Sovereign – I hold

⁹⁸ This has been taken to indicate that King Charles does not intend to abdicate.

myself bound to respect those who follow other spiritual paths, as well as those who seek to live their lives in accordance with secular ideals.

The beliefs that flourish in, and contribute to, our richly diverse society differ. They, and our society, can only thrive through a clear collective commitment to those vital principles of freedom of conscience, generosity of spirit and care for others which are, to me, the essence of our nationhood. I am determined, as King, to preserve and promote those principles across all communities, and for all beliefs, with all my heart.

This conviction was the foundation of everything my beloved mother did for our country, over her years as our Queen. It has been the foundation of my own work as Prince of Wales. It will continue to be the foundation of all my work as King.

The UK is the only monarchy in Europe to retain a religious coronation. Kings and Queens have been anointed with holy oil and crowned in Westminster Abbey in a ceremony which goes back 1000 years. But although ancient, the tradition is constantly evolving. In describing every coronation since that of George IV in 1821, this report shows how much the ceremony has changed – and how much it needs to change, compared with the Queen’s coronation in 1953.

About the Constitution Unit

The Constitution Unit is a research centre based in the UCL Department of Political Science. We conduct timely, rigorous, independent research into constitutional change and the reform of political institutions. Since our foundation in 1995, the Unit’s research had significant real-world impact, informing policy-makers engaged in such changes – both in the United Kingdom and around the world.

About the Authors

Dr Bob Morris is Senior Research Associate at the Constitution Unit.

Web: www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit

Blog: www.constitution-unit.com

Twitter: [@ConUnit_UCL](https://twitter.com/ConUnit_UCL)