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<td>BBC Written Archive</td>
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<td>LPL</td>
<td>Lambeth Palace Library</td>
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<td>LMA</td>
<td>London Metropolitan Archives</td>
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<td>MOA</td>
<td>Mass Observation Archive</td>
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Abstract

This doctoral thesis examines how the British monarchy negotiated the political and cultural challenges of mass society. The inter- and postwar periods witnessed the rise of democratic politics in Britain and rampant demagoguery in Europe, a rapid expansion in forms of popular culture and the emergence of new kinds of mass media. My investigation analyzes how, at a time when a new media-orchestrated culture of personality was redefining the organization of modern societies, Buckingham Palace officials and news journalists sought to generate political stability and social cohesion by fostering emotional bonds between the public and the royal family. Courtiers and the media worked in tandem, elevating the House of Windsor’s public image between 1932 and 1953 in order to place constitutional monarchy at the centre of national life. Through an examination of both the projection and the reception of the monarchy’s public role, my study charts how images of royal domesticity proliferated after 1932, encouraging the public to forge empathetic relationships with the leading figures of the House of Windsor.

Over five chapters, my thesis examines the 1934 and 1947 royal weddings, the 1937 and 1953 coronations, and King George V’s wireless broadcasts. Using under-researched official sources, media texts and personal testimonies, my study builds on recent scholarship on the history of emotions to assess how British media audiences were encouraged to empathize with the royal family. The thesis identifies a number of important stage managers, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, and key BBC producers and palace press officials who used new forms of mass media to promote the House of Windsor’s more intimate public image. Finally, I explore how the phrases and images crafted by courtiers, clerics and commentators circulated through the media to be repeated in diverse personal testimonies – from voices in crowds noted by Mass Observation personnel, through reports composed by specially-tasked respondents on their participation in royal events, to school essays written by children about royal personalities. By examining how members of the public forged imagined relationships with the royal family, this study extends previous scholarship by arguing that the monarchy’s domestic image played an integral part in shaping the political and emotional economies of the public sphere in the mid-twentieth century.
Declaration

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Introduction

…a royal family sweetens politics by the seasonable addition of nice pretty events. It introduces irrelevant facts into the business of government, but they are facts which speak to “men’s bosoms” and employ their thoughts.


This doctoral thesis examines how the British monarchy negotiated the political and cultural challenges of mass society. The inter- and postwar periods witnessed the rise of democratic politics in Britain and rampant demagoguery in Europe, a rapid expansion in forms of popular culture and the emergence of new kinds of mass media. My investigation analyzes how, at a time when a new media-orchestrated culture of personality was redefining the organization of modern societies, Buckingham Palace officials and news journalists sought to generate political stability and social cohesion by fostering emotional bonds between the public and the royal family. Courtiers and the media worked in tandem, elevating the House of Windsor’s public image between 1932 and 1953 in order to place constitutional monarchy at the centre of national life. Through an examination of both the projection and the reception of the monarchy’s public role, my study charts how images of royal domesticity proliferated after 1932, encouraging the public to forge empathetic relationships with the leading figures of the House of Windsor.

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were encouraged to empathize with the royal family.¹ The thesis identifies a number of important stage managers, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, and key BBC producers and palace press officials who used new forms of mass media to promote the House of Windsor’s more intimate public image. Finally, I explore how the phrases and images crafted by courtiers, clerics and commentators circulated through the media to be repeated in diverse personal testimonies – from voices in crowds noted by Mass Observation personnel, through reports composed by specially-tasked respondents on their participation in royal events, to school essays written by children about royal personalities. By examining how members of the public forged imagined relationships with the royal family, this study extends previous scholarship by arguing that the monarchy’s domestic image played an integral part in shaping the political and emotional economies of the public sphere in the mid-twentieth century.

There have been four main historical approaches to the modern monarchy, all of which have sought to gauge how the institution adapted to the changing nature of the national polity after the advent of mass society.² The first approach has emphasized the symbolic function of the modern monarchy. Most historians have followed David Cannadine’s seminal essay in explaining the crown’s changing role through reference to the rise of royal public ritual: the monarchy exchanged real political power for the symbolic leadership of the democratic state, as manifested in spectacular ceremonial. Cannadine’s essay in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s edited collection on the


² For the most comprehensive overview of scholarship on the modern monarchy see A. Olechnowicz, ‘Historians and the Modern British Monarchy’, in A. Olechnowicz (ed.), The Monarchy and the British Nation, 1780 to the Present (Cambridge, 2007), pp.6-44.
‘invention of tradition’ developed anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s research on the symbols of power in primitive and early modern civilizations, which argued that rulers have used ritual to institute their authority. Cannadine emphasized how palace courtiers staged royal ceremonies more frequently and proficiently between 1870 and 1914 in order to enhance the monarchy’s popular appeal, transforming the crown into an accessible symbol for national veneration.

Andrzej Olechnowicz’s recent edited collection has shed light on the political significance attached to the monarchy’s symbolic leadership of the democratic state. Jonathan Parry’s contribution in this volume complements earlier scholarship on the impact of the ceremonial splendour of kingship. He has argued that the crown’s popularity in the last decades of the nineteenth century also lay in its alignment with a progressive liberal constitutionalism, which saw the monarchy become the national embodiment of political stability, freedom and success. Similarly, Philip Williamson has suggested that George V worked to adapt the monarchy to mass democracy after 1918 by promoting constitutional progress, by stressing the non-partisan nature of his station and by aligning the crown with a broader set of national values, one of which was moral probity. In contrast, royal impropriety formed the focus of Frank Mort’s recent examination of the popular response to the abdication of Edward VIII, which

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has revealed how anxieties about the king’s private life shaped public attitudes to his abilities as constitutional sovereign, both at home and in the Commonwealth.⁶

Taken together, all of these historians have pointed to the way the monarchy’s symbolic function has intersected with its capacity to exercise constitutional political authority. My thesis argues that the palace and media’s elevation of the royal family’s domestic image was designed to generate loyalty to the crown by strengthening the empathetic bonds which linked the public to the House of Windsor. These affective connections consolidated the political system underpinning monarchy and engendered national cohesion around the focal point of the royal family, with the sovereign’s role as guarantor of democratic politics invested with new personal meaning.

By focusing on the royal family’s ‘indirect political significance’, this study aims to complicate the binary divisions erected by a second main body of scholarship on the monarchy. The constitutional historians Vernon Bogdanor and Rodney Brazier have argued that the institution’s real ‘efficient’ power within high politics declined in the first half of the twentieth century, to be replaced by its symbolic ‘dignified’ role.⁷ Bogdanor and Brazier have identified in journalist Walter Bagehot’s 1867 treatise, The English Constitution, an articulation of the crown’s retreat from politics which, they have argued, formalized the sovereign’s controls within the political system and secured the crown’s political neutrality by limiting the influence that it wielded in the machinery of government.⁸ Some historians have contested this narrative of political decline by showing how the crown preserved constitutional power, especially in the

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⁷ For the term ‘indirect political significance’, see Williamson, ‘The Monarchy’, p.234.
empire and Commonwealth. My thesis seeks to move beyond the dichotomy between real and symbolic power by arguing that public identification with the royal family’s domesticity helped foster adherence to the specifically British constitutional system.

Official royal biographers have also emphasized a story of political decline, claiming that twentieth-century monarchs have always tried to discharge their duties within the constraints of their constitutional rights. The studies of Harold Nicolson, John Wheeler-Bennett and, more recently, William Shawcross have all suggested that, in the absence of political power, the constitutional monarchy exercised newer forms of attenuated authority in society, particularly within the area of philanthropic service. In this respect, their analysis supports the conclusions of the third body of historical work on the monarchy, which has argued that the royal family sought to appeal to the British working classes following the extension of the franchise in 1918 by spending more time amongst their subjects, acting in a public service capacity. Ross McKibbin has judged that after 1918 the monarchy’s ‘hold on the popular imagination was much strengthened’, and he has partly attributed this popularity to George V’s concern for working-class people. The sovereign sought to generate social unity through regular interaction with the public and directed his family to do likewise, with all of his adult children performing philanthropic roles. Frank Prochaska has argued that this public

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9 P. Murphy, Monarchy and the End of Empire: The House of Windsor, the British Government, and the Postwar Commonwealth (Oxford, 2013). Murphy’s recent study has examined how Queen Elizabeth II, as the ceremonial head of the postwar Commonwealth, has worked without ministerial advice in order to unite the disparate group of nations. For other studies that complicate the depoliticized story in imperial and British settings, see C. Kaul, ‘Monarchical Display and the Politics of Empire: Princes of Wales and India, 1870-1920s’, Twentieth Century British History 17:4 (2006), pp.464-488; P. Hennessy, The Hidden Wiring: Unearthing the British Constitution (London, 1995); R. James, A Spirit Undaunted: The Political Role of George VI (London, 1998).

10 For example, see H. Nicolson, King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign (London, 1952); J. Wheeler-Bennett, King George VI: His Life and Reign (London, 1958); W. Shawcross, Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother: The Official Biography (Basingstoke, 2009). For discussions of the merits and pitfalls of official royal biography, see D. Cannadine, ‘From Biography to History: Writing the Modern British Monarchy’, Historical Research 77:197 (2004), pp.294-7; Olechnowicz, ‘Historians’, pp.9-15.


service was characteristic of a ‘welfare monarchy’ that became increasingly involved in ameliorative schemes to improve the lives of people from all classes between the wars: philanthropy ‘square[d] deference with democracy’ by ‘enticing the labouring classes into the royal camp.’ Helen McCarthy’s research has shown that, alongside the expansion in royal voluntarism, a thriving civic associational culture characterized the interwar democratic public sphere, which tried to cultivate ‘intelligent, responsible citizenship amongst the mass electorate.’ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska has extended this field of research in her analysis of the Duke of York’s intervention in industrial life through the staging of summer camps for boys from different social backgrounds. The camps witnessed ‘cross-class male bonding which formed part of a wider strategy by the monarchy to strengthen social cohesion.’

The fourth main historical approach to the modern monarchy has emphasized how the royal family’s media-orchestrated public visibility was crucial to producing the crown’s socially unifying appeal, bringing the public into closer contact with the House of Windsor. McKibbin has suggested that newspapers, wireless and newsreels presented the monarchy in more accessible ways after 1918 to enhance its presence, although he has pointed out that George V was personally averse to publicity. My thesis shows how this monarch was actually more forthcoming than has previously been recognized in the way he embraced media exposure. George V’s radio messages and his children’s weddings contributed to a royal image which became renowned for

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16 McKibbin, Classes, pp.7-8.
its public displays of emotion, and this kingly intimacy continued to exert a powerful influence over the way his successors behaved in public long after his death.

Several scholars have begun to examine the change in the royal family’s media image. Luke McKernan has identified how, in the final years of the First World War, newsreel cameramen were provided with more informal access to the monarch and his family, who were thus ‘presented as human beings, seen smiling, being sociable… even offering half-glances to the camera.’ These silent films encouraged audiences to familiarize themselves with the visual personalities of George V and his kin. This thesis examines how the newsreels were permitted even greater access to the domestic life of royalty in the 1930s and 1940s, with technological innovations enabling filmmakers to present their audiences with more intimate, close-up scenes of the family.

In analyzing how newsreels contributed to the staging of royal spectacle, I also build on Gerry Turvey’s research on how cinema viewers were aligned with the ‘culture of the crowd’. Turvey has suggested that newsreels ‘encouraged a similar awed respect in the auditorium because camera and projected image offered film viewers their own clearly defined subject position as respectful witnesses of the photographed event.’ Jeffrey Richards has similarly argued that the arrival of sound in newsreels in the late 1920s enhanced how these films created royal subjects. Scenes of the royal family played to soundtracks and commentary which explained their activities to audiences who were also able to experience some of the aural atmosphere of the crowds that gathered at royal events. My thesis develops these ideas to examine how newsreel

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editors constructed an advanced visual language in the 1930s that was intended to communicate to audiences the crown’s central role to national life.

Equally, this study moves beyond the historiography on newsreels by revealing how members of the royal family exercised significant agency in the creation of their images on film. Historians have noted that the royal star of the early newsreels was George V’s eldest son and heir, Edward, Prince of Wales. Edward’s highly publicized tours of the dominions and empire positioned him as a modern, glamorous celebrity, with the level of media exposure equalled only by that of Hollywood luminaries.20 Rosalind Brunt has suggested that, after his brief reign, the newsreels switched their attention to George VI’s family, presenting cinema viewers with an idealized version of royal domestic life which became a staple of British wartime propaganda between 1939 and 1945.21 My study shows how members of the royal family were actively engaged in fashioning their public images in mid-twentieth-century Britain.

My thesis also tracks a shift towards intimacy in radio and television coverage of royalty after 1932. Historians have noted that the BBC’s broadcast of George V’s address at the opening of the Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 allowed listeners to hear his voice for the first time.22 Scholars have also presented the king’s Christmas broadcasts that began in 1932 as a key development in the mass media’s relationship with monarchy, producing a more personal link between George V and his subjects.23 My study analyzes how the emotional register of royal public language broadcast by

radio changed in this period and how this encouraged closer emotional bonds between royal speakers and British listeners. Equally, this thesis shows how the BBC and the palace choreographed royal ceremonial events to enhance the intimacy of the images carried over the airwaves. I argue that, in the context of the listening cultures that characterized the inter- and postwar periods, royal domesticity was staged both more publicly and more personally than ever before, encouraging audiences to conceive of themselves as a community united around the family events of the House of Windsor. Similarly, whilst historians have previously suggested that the emphasis of the 1953 coronation celebrations was Britain’s relationship with the Commonwealth, I contend that the family image of Elizabeth II was more important to the television coverage of the occasion and that the BBC deliberately elevated royal domesticity in its broadcast to foster personal empathy among viewers.24

In comparison with their counterparts in broadcasting and film, British press reporters were usually the most intrepid when it came to covering royal domesticity. Scholars have shown how photojournalists before 1914 presented newspaper readers with candid pictures of the Edwardian royal family at home, and that a focus on informal images of the House of Windsor continued to influence the press’s portrayal of leading royal actors in the interwar period.25 Though the popular press in particular tried to present its audiences with intimate access to royal home life, the impulse towards revelation existed in tension with a need to maintain the monarchy’s moral authority. As Adrian Bingham has argued, it was only after the abdication crisis and the rise of the popular belief that Edward VIII’s love affair had been deliberately

concealed from the public by Fleet Street that the press began to scrutinize the royal family’s lives more closely in an attempt to regain the trust of readers. My thesis records a similar shift towards more personalized modes of exposure between the inter- and postwar periods, but it argues that the British press consistently presented royal domesticity as a rallying point of national community and social cohesion, in spite of public concerns about some of the leading royal figures. It also argues that newspapers intentionally contrasted a familial image of the House of Windsor with reports of political chaos in Europe, to characterize a British national culture that was united around the common themes of home and family.

The media’s interest in royal domesticity was not a new phenomenon, of course. John Plunkett has argued that Queen Victoria was the ‘first media monarch’ who tried to foster a public image of idyllic bourgeois family life through court portraiture and photographic cartes de visite. John Wolffe has charted how this trend towards royal familialism accelerated into the twentieth century; Edward VII and Queen Alexandra maintained a public image as a happy couple, despite the king’s many infidelities. However, these earlier images of royal domesticity differed from those that arose after 1918 because of the cultural and emotional contexts of the periods. The years between the First World War and the coronation of Elizabeth II witnessed the rise of domestic life as the most important crucible for personal development and self-realization. As

the historian of celebrity culture Charles Ponce de Leon has argued, this meant that domesticity became the focus of human-interest journalism which sought to generate empathy between the public and well-known individuals. More than ever before, the media acted as the key intermediary that facilitated and promoted an affective affinity between audiences and the famous. Against this backdrop, the media’s coverage of royal home life between 1932 and 1953 enhanced the personal connections that linked the British public to the monarchy.

In analyzing the changing media representation and public reception of the royal family’s domestic image, I engage with three wider debates that have become central to the cultural and social history of twentieth-century Britain. First, my thesis supports the argument that the period after 1918 witnessed the ‘feminization’ of British public and private life. While scholars have rightly pointed out that pre-1914 masculinities continued to exert a hold on the public psyche between the wars, a growing consensus exists among historians that the interwar period was characterized by a preoccupation with the traditionally feminine private domestic sphere as the key locus of adult and child socialization. Equally, the structures of feeling that distinguished national life


For recent work which has emphasized the importance of home as a space of socialization between the wars, see M. Francis, ‘The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity’, *Historical Journal* 45:3 (2002), p.637-652.

For recent work which has emphasized the importance of home as a space of socialization between the wars, see footnote 29 above and M. Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (London, 2012); J. Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Identity* (Oxford, 2004).
were reorganized after 1918 around more demonstrative forms of personal intimacy.\textsuperscript{34} By examining how the House of Windsor’s protagonists became more emotionally expressive and more closely defined by their domestic personas after 1932, my thesis contends that the monarchy helped produce a national culture that was increasingly orientated around family and home.

The second historical debate in which this thesis intervenes concerns the way British elites sought to control the public sphere. Historians have shown how media outlets like the BBC and other organizers of the public sphere sought to impose a cultural hierarchy on the populace through paternalistic education initiatives and by staging popular spectacles that drew attention to the British social order.\textsuperscript{35} One of Cannadine’s most significant contributions to this field was his identification of the palace official, Lord Esher, as the architect of the new royal public ceremonial that was staged after 1870 and which emphasized the British adherence to hierarchy.\textsuperscript{36} My analysis develops on this earlier scholarship to argue that courtiers, church leaders and the media worked, sometimes together, sometimes in tension, to foster an empathetic identification with the protagonists of the royal family.

The third debate with which I engage relates to the role of public figures and popular emotion in the creation of modern societies. The way media audiences have interacted with the celebrity status of famous people is under-researched. Historians and theorists have tended to highlight the ‘star quality’, ‘charisma’ or ‘enchantment’ that celebrities have exercised over media audiences in trying to explain the appeal of

modern fame. But as Tom Mole’s recent analysis of Lord Byron’s reputation has recognized, to focus on notions of a transcendent power that influences the followers of celebrity is to flatten the character of what is an intricate three-way relationship between an individual, a media culture and an audience who are actively engaged in the consumption of the celebrity’s image. By offering the first sustained analysis of the public reception of the twentieth-century British monarchy, my thesis shows that the mass media acted as the key conduit through which ordinary people established emotional connections to the royal family, and that changes in Britain’s media culture brought royal celebrities into more intimate contact with the populace. In terms of the broader debate, this study argues that a national emotional community formed around the royal family, the public sharing a common empathy with the House of Windsor.

The period under investigation, 1932 to 1953, encompasses the landmark royal events of George V’s first Christmas wireless message through to the crowning of his granddaughter, Elizabeth II. This periodization is also significant because the position of palace press secretary was officially relinquished in 1931 after only fourteen years

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of operation and it was not revived until 1944. The decision to abandon this role would suggest that the palace wanted to disengage from the links it had established with the media, opting instead for more informal relationships based on less official channels of communication. However, an argument made in the first three chapters of this thesis is that the five year period from 1932 to the 1937 coronation witnessed the professionalization of royal public spectacle as orchestrated by the palace and BBC. The formalization of this relationship between courtiers and broadcasters complicates the notion that this was a period in which the palace sought to distance itself from the media. Indeed, the opposing argument is advanced, namely, that the 1930s saw the palace take an increasingly active role in its relationship with the media in order to better manage the royal family’s public image.

The Royal Archives allows postgraduate students limited access to documents up until 1935, meaning that it is difficult to map this shift towards formalization in the palace’s dealings with the media. Material after 1935 is judged too sensitive for study by doctoral researchers, probably because of the abdication of Edward VIII and the succession of the present monarch’s father, George VI, as king. Neither is a catalogue of the archive’s holdings accessible to researchers. The material from the Royal Archives that is examined in the first chapter on the press arrangements for the 1934 and 1922 royal weddings is rich but limited in terms of the researcher’s rights of access. The role played by courtiers and, to an even greater extent, the royal family themselves in the stage-management of royal spectacle and the monarchy’s image still remains elusive. Researchers are dependent on second-hand accounts of official royal biographers whose partial retellings of events often obscure more than they reveal.

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40 McKibbin, Classes, p.8.
41 For discussions of the role of courtiers and the limits of royal biography, see Olechnowicz, ‘Historians’, pp.18-19; Cannadine, ‘From Biography’, pp.294-6.
The BBC Written Archives and Church of England Record Office provide historians with freer access to primary sources on these institutions’ relationships with the crown – although neither is without restrictions. The BBC records are particularly useful and I have examined copies of communications sent by broadcasters to palace officials, as well as incoming correspondence from courtiers, which reveal how both parties sought to shape the projection of the House of Windsor’s public image. The Written Archives also include production documents that show how the corporation tried to broadcast royal events in increasingly personal ways. Lambeth Palace Library holds the papers of Archbishop of Canterbury Cosmo Lang, who features in the first three chapters of this thesis, which reveal how he played a similar role in promoting the monarchy’s intimate public image. Both archives exercise a set of vetting controls which means that files for the post-1945 period regarding royal family members who are still alive are thinner in content. However, along with the evidence from the Royal Archives, these collections illuminate how royal public spectacle was stage-managed for a modern mass public.

The second group of sources which this study examines are mass media texts including ‘popular’ and ‘quality’ national newspapers, the four main British newsreels from the period, and programmes that were broadcast by the BBC on the wireless and television. This holistic approach to the British media’s projection of the monarchy’s image in the inter- and postwar periods responds to Siân Nicholas’s recent criticism of historians for the way they have tended to treat each medium separately.\footnote{S. Nicholas, ‘Media History or Media Histories?’, \textit{Media History} 18:3-4 (2012), pp.379-94.} By the interwar period, there existed in Britain an ‘interrelated and multi-layered mass media culture’ where ‘engagement in one medium routinely overlapped with others.’\footnote{Ibid, p.390.} By analyzing how the different forms of media presented royal events and personalities,
this thesis reveals how their interaction influenced the image of the monarchy they produced. For example, my examination of George V’s public radio broadcasts shows how press reports drew attention to the personal themes of the messages. This study also investigates how members of the public consumed the media in different ways and how audiences tended to privilege certain sources of information above others.

The thesis argues that the press played a key role in changing the public image of the House of Windsor between 1932 and 1953. Although press coverage responded to an established public interest in royalty, newspapers also stimulated this curiosity by drawing increased attention to the main protagonists of the royal family in order to foster greater public concern for them and their lives. The interwar years witnessed the circulation wars of the major Fleet Street daily newspapers, which had a combined readership of more than 10 million in the mid-1930s. This thesis analyzes a sample of popular and quality titles which reflect a spectrum of class and political affiliations.44 I examine the market-leading papers, including the Daily Express, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, News Chronicle and the left-wing Daily Herald – the latter being the first to achieve a circulation of more than 2 million in 1932.45 The readership of the popular newspapers was ten times greater than that shared by the quality newspapers that are examined here, including The Times, the Daily Telegraph and Manchester Guardian. By 1940, over 80% of all families in Britain read one of the popular London dailies, and this figure continued to rise after the war, with the Mirror and the Sunday News of the World the most popular choices among members of the public.46

45 Bingham, Family, p.19.
Newsreels have been neglected by historians and, by putting them at the centre of my analysis, I aim to shed new light on the role played by this popular media form in public life. The four major newsreels that cinemas presented to audiences in these years were distributed (under changing titles) by Pathé, Movietone, Gaumont and Paramount. The film archives of all four companies have been digitized and are either free to access or available via online subscription services.\(^{47}\) All of the newsreels used in this thesis were located through the British Universities Film and Video Council’s ‘News on Screen’ search facility, which offers researchers a comprehensive database of all available digital newsreel footage.\(^ {48}\) In analyzing newsreels, my thesis considers the technological changes that enabled filmmakers to present audiences with closer images of the royal family, literally and symbolically. Editors manipulated sound and stock footage in order to convey crucial messages to audiences.\(^ {49}\) Scholarship on the audiences who watched newsreels is limited, but it seems that they were an important source of information among British working-class people especially, who frequented cinemas more regularly than any other social demographic in this period.\(^ {50}\) In 1934, the newsreels shared a weekly viewership in England, Scotland and Wales of more than 18.5 million, and this had risen to 20 million by the end of the decade.\(^ {51}\) This thesis utilizes newsreels to argue that historians need to engage more fully with these


\(^{48}\) http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search. All of the newsreels examined in this thesis are referenced using the original titles and dates assigned to them by the BUFVC’s ‘News on Screen’ database.


sources when examining the public’s relationship not only with the monarchy but also with Britain’s broader political culture.  

Radio also played a key part in generating the royal populism that characterized the inter- and postwar periods. This was mainly due to the fact that, by the start of the Second World War, wireless had become an essential part of national life. The 1930s saw a continual increase in the number of British wireless license-holders. Asa Briggs has noted that, when the BBC became a corporation in 1926, there were more than 2 million licenses registered. This figure climbed steeply so that by 1939 there were more than 9 million license-holders in Britain. Briggs has suggested that, by 1935, 98% of the population had access to a single BBC programme, whilst 85% could choose between two programmes, with cheap wireless sets making radio accessible to all sections of the nation.

Between 1932 and 1953, the media usually presented the monarchy as a British, not as an English, institution. The main limitation of my study of media texts is that I have not systematically analyzed sources from the Celtic nations: the restraints of a doctoral research project have meant that this thesis has focused on self-professed ‘national’ media texts – the Fleet Street press, BBC radio and television, and the four major British newsreels. The absence of regional media forms is important because, as Bingham has discussed in relation to Scottish newspaper readers, the Celtic nations have at times proved resistant to London-based media, opting instead for regional sources of information. He has noted that, in 1935, 43% of the Scottish population purchased a Fleet Street daily, while 60% bought Scottish morning papers. There

52 For interesting studies which have recently discussed the role of newsreels in British political culture, see J. Lawrence, Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics From Hogarth to Blair (Oxford, 2009); Beers, Your Britain, pp.194-6.
55 Bingham, Family, p.17.
has been a recent renewal in interest in the way ‘Britishness’ has been presented in the
different media contexts of the four nations. Although parts of this thesis examine
how national media organizations mobilized an inclusive discourse of ‘Britishness’ in
reports on monarchy, further research needs to be devoted to analyzing how regional
media presented royal events and celebrities. This research could productively explore
whether these localized representations conflicted or complemented the public image
of the royal family disseminated by the national media, and to what extent these local
images were regionally tailored to appeal to communities in the Celtic nations.

The third category of sources that I examine here are personal testimonies, most
of which come from the archive of the social research organization Mass Observation.
In his recent overview of the historiography on the modern monarchy, Olechnowicz
noted that historians have failed to engage with the public response to royalty. He
has advised that a future historical agenda should focus on the way the monarchy has
been assimilated into individual subjectivities. This thesis responds to his prompting
by presenting a sustained analysis of the Mass Observation archives on the monarchy
from 1937 to 1953. All five chapters utilize MO evidence, especially Chapters 2 to 5,
which explore large archives of testimonies either for the first time or present new
examinations of material that has previously been discussed.

Mass Observation’s history is integrally linked to the monarchy. Charles Madge,
Humphrey Jennings and Tom Harrison established the organization because of their
concerns that the press and politicians had misjudged public opinion on the abdication

56 For example, see J. S. Ellis, Investiture: Royal Ceremony and National Identity in Wales, 1911-1969
(Cardiff, 2008); C. Morash, A History of the Media in Ireland (Cambridge, 2010); C. Chambers, Ireland in
the Newsreels (Dublin, 2012); M. Johnes, ‘A Prince, a King, and a Referendum: Rugby, Politics, and
57 Olechnowicz, ‘Historians’, p.44.
58 Ibid, p.27 and A. Olechnowicz, ‘“A Jealous Hatred”: Royal Popularity and Social Inequality’, in A.
of Edward VIII. Through ethnographic research into ‘ordinary’ people’s lives, MO set out to assess what the ‘masses’ really thought whilst encouraging their volunteers to engage in the public sphere with enhanced self-awareness. As Penny Summerfield has discussed, this ‘educative urge’ was characteristic of both the founders’ and many participants’ ‘left of centre’ desire to contribute to a movement which was working towards a better understanding of current events. Summerfield and other historians have noted that MO volunteers did not provide access to ‘typical’ experience in their writings but rather presented mediated accounts of everyday life which were inflected and influenced by personal commitments to creative expression and individual self-fashioning. The panel of volunteers mainly comprised of lower-middle-class women and men, as well as some upper-working-class people, and most were English, with fewer contributions coming from people in the Celtic nations.

In spite of its partiality, MO presents historians with a rich source of evidence about the nature of public opinion of the recent past. Although volunteer respondents were exceptional in the way they sought to self-fashion through their contributions to MO, their personal testimonies can offer insight into the emotional economies and social settings that they inhabited. Many recorded highly personal responses to royal personalities or events between 1937 and 1953. And, crucially, a number of important trends can be mapped to link the empathetic responses articulated by MO participants in relation to the royal family. This thesis offers an extensive analysis of the original archival material collected by Mass Observation as part of the studies it conducted on

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the monarchy in order to identify how groups of British people shared in a common emotional experience around the focal point of the House of Windsor. My study also examines the shifts in the affective systems that characterized British society between 1932 and 1953. Within this field, there is very little scholarship on how emotion has intersected with notions of national identity or belonging, so I aim to develop new ideas regarding how popular empathetic identification with public figures has helped engender a sense of shared national community in modern societies.64

The first major study that Mass Observation organized on the monarchy recorded volunteers’ responses to George VI’s coronation day and resulted in a published book, *May the Twelfth* (1937). Coronations and royal weddings were opportunities to gauge respondents’ reactions to major events that were presented by officials and the media as important national occasions, and similar MO archives exist for the 1947 marriage of Princess Elizabeth as well as her crowning six years later. Philip Ziegler produced a study of some of the MO personal testimonies on monarchy to argue that, despite persistent concerns about the costs involved in staging royal family events, the British population has historically warmed to, and engaged in, the celebrations.65 Although Ziegler’s broad examination reveals the variety of ways that the public participated in royal events, it does not systematically analyze how MO respondents articulated their imagined relationships with the House of Windsor. Nor does it take into consideration the large archives of school essays collected by MO regarding royal personalities. Chapters 2 and 5 of this thesis examine essays written by groups of schoolchildren on George V and Elizabeth II respectively. School essays are complex forms of personal testimony but, treated with care, they can reveal something of the dominant narratives

64 See footnote 39.
through which historical subjects made sense of the world around them, and the way young Britons responded to public discourses on the monarchy.\textsuperscript{66}

The first three chapters of this thesis focus on the 1930s, while the latter two chapters take case studies from the postwar period. My analysis has not investigated the royal family’s public role in wartime because, between 1939 and 1945, there were no major spectacular royal occasions. I have instead examined comparable peacetime events that demonstrate how the palace and media generated a new royal populism by staging royal family occasions more publicly, and which yielded large archives of MO evidence. Moreover, while the glamour of royalty ceased for the duration of the war, the House of Windsor also assumed a more visible morale-boosting role between 1939 and 1945, which requires separate thematic analysis from that covered here.\textsuperscript{67}

Chapter One presents an analysis of a royal wedding that has been overlooked by historians. Royal biographer, Christopher Warwick, has suggested that George V’s youngest surviving son, Prince George, and his foreign bride, Princess Marina of Greece, ‘were regarded as the most attractive, popular and, above all, stylish royal couple of their generation.’\textsuperscript{68} The chapter examines the media coverage of their 1934 engagement and wedding to argue that they did, indeed, embody a new form of royal celebrity closely aligned with, but not the same as, Hollywood film stars. I argue that they exercised greater agency in shaping their celebrity status than was common for the royal family, adopting a more active role in courting media attention through intimate public displays of their mutual affection. These forms of romantic expression emphasized their compatibility as lovers at a time when emotional fulfilment in domestic life was gaining traction in Britain, and their media image was intended to

\textsuperscript{66} For a recent discussion on the utility of school essays as forms of historical evidence, see J. Greenhalgh, ‘“Till We Hear the Last All Clear”: Gender and the Presentation of Self in Young Girls’ Writing about the Bombing of Hull during the Second World War’, Gender & History 26:1 (2014), pp.167-83.

\textsuperscript{67} P. Ziegler, George VI: The Dutiful King (London, 2014), pp.53-68.

resonate with female audiences in particular. This chapter also examines how palace officials worked with the media to choreograph the royal wedding as a national event that engaged the British public as a point of social cohesion which contrasted sharply with European fascism.

The second chapter presents the first assessment of the change in the emotional character of George V’s wireless broadcasts. It argues that Archbishop Cosmo Lang played a key role as the king’s scriptwriter, reshaping the monarch’s public language so that it had a personal appeal which helped create the idea of a national community linked together through its empathetic bonds with the sovereign. This chapter also examines how Lang’s royal rhetoric softened the public image of empire, with the king taking on a role as the human link that tied disparate nations together. And, as already alluded to, this chapter analyzes school essays which illuminate the important effect that radio had in bringing the king into closer contact with his subjects.

The third chapter argues that, following the abdication of Edward VIII, the new king, George VI, was greeted with subdued enthusiasm and, significantly, that public concerns about his abilities as monarch persisted beyond his coronation. By offering a re-examination of the original Mass Observation evidence collated in response to the 1937 event, this chapter argues that Edward’s shadow loomed over his brother’s crowning – the new king was perceived as physically weak and lacking the qualities needed in a leader at a time when continental totalitarianism threatened world peace. I investigate how the public instead directed their attention to the sovereign’s mother, Queen Mary, who, as the royal protagonist most closely associated with her husband, signified the continuity of the constitutional family monarchy. This chapter also analyzes how the British media stressed the vitality of the nation’s political culture in order to assuage concerns about the suitability of George VI. I argue that this had the
effect of formalizing public understandings of the pivotal role of kingship within mass society. To complement this narrative, this chapter shows how, with the help of the palace, the media constructed an imagery of the House of Windsor as the emotional focal point of the national community, which included a special effort to engage working-class people from around Britain.

The fourth chapter moves the study forward ten years chronologically to 1947 and the media coverage and public response to the betrothal and marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Prince Philip of Greece. It examines how the media drew attention to the emotional authenticity of the couple’s love story to offset the criticism exposed by a newspaper poll highlighting the prince’s foreign background and the anticipated cost of their wedding. I argue that MO respondents proved receptive to the romantic story – the image of the young couple resonating with popular emotional discourses which emphasized the importance of ‘true love’ to domestic fulfilment. This chapter also shows how a public image of the couple emerged which focused on their ostensibly ‘normal’ qualities, the media joining with the palace and church in aligning royal home life with the postwar culture of domesticity. Yet, the prince and princess’s lives were also deemed unenviable because of the constant public duties they performed which seemed to jeopardize their private emotional fulfilment.

The final chapter presents a new examination of the public response to the 1953 coronation. It focuses on the day surveys completed by Mass Observation respondents on their experiences of the event. It combines these with a selection of school essays written by British children before and after the coronation in analyzing the way television facilitated new modes of interaction between media audiences and the royal family. I argue that, despite these children’s misgivings about the cost of, and hype surrounding, the coronation, the prospect of joining in the event through television
coverage exercised a powerful hold. In regard to coronation day itself, both the MO panel and the children articulated how television created informal and personal modes of royal consumption, and that the presence of family members or friends heightened the sense of collective participation generated around the focal point of TV sets. This chapter also explores how the media portrayed the domestic persona of the new queen and her relationship with her son, Prince Charles.
Chapter 1

‘All the World Loves a Lover’: Emotional Expression, Social Cohesion and the 1934 Royal Romance of George and Marina

This chapter examines a royal romance that stimulated an unprecedented upsurge of media interest in the British monarchy. Following weeks of mounting publicity, on 29 November 1934, Prince George, Duke of Kent and youngest son of King George V, married the fashionable and exotic Princess Marina of Greece in Westminster Abbey. It was the first time the BBC publicly broadcasted a royal marriage service by radio and the press were unanimous in presenting it as a wedding ‘all the world attended’ and as ‘a great day for the nation’. These descriptions were characteristic of a media which was increasingly set on projecting royal family events like births, marriages and deaths as special occasions around which all British people gathered to acclaim the House of Windsor as a symbol of national esteem and of unique British values.

The kind of patriotic hyperbole publicized by the media at the time of the 1934 royal wedding had antecedents that dated back more than seventy years. In his 1867 essay *The English Constitution*, Walter Bagehot had stated that a ‘princely marriage is the brilliant edition of a universal fact and, as such, it rivets mankind.’ He was referring to the 1863 wedding of Edward, Prince of Wales, to Princess Alexandra of Denmark, which had been depicted as a more nationally inclusive event than any previous royal romance. According to *The Times*, ‘no generation of the British-born race ha[d] ever witnessed or ever taken part in such a rejoicing.’ The 1863 wedding was a forerunner of the skilfully choreographed ceremonial created to enhance the role of the Victorian

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yet, it was only after the First World War that royal weddings took on a truly national character. In February 1919, Queen Victoria’s granddaughter, Princess Patricia of Connaught, became the first member of the royal family to be married at Westminster Abbey for over five centuries. Two of George V’s children shortly followed, Princess Mary in 1922 and Prince Albert in 1923, each as part of a more spectacular celebration than the last. However, the 1934 royal wedding of George and Marina outshone all of its predecessors in terms of the couple’s media visibility, with newspapers, newsreels and broadcasters developing innovatory methods to foster affective bonds between the royal family and the public, which, in turn, invested new socio-political meaning in the marital union. This chapter offers the first deep contextual reading of the George and Marina romance in order to argue that the media presented the couple in a more intimate and public manner than ever before, transforming the way that members of the House of Windsor were made accessible to British audiences. These new forms of exposure augmented the imagery of a family monarchy as the centre-point around which ideas of British constitutional democracy were crystallizing between the wars.

6 C. Warwick, Two Centuries of Royal Weddings (Worthing, 1980), p. 31. The last royal wedding that took place in Westminster Abbey was that of Richard II of England to Anne of Bohemia on 20 January 1382.
7 The George and Marina love story has not received critical analysis from historians. Biographers have tended to regurgitate the story from the first overly sentimentalized biography of Marina produced by Grace Ellison before the royal wedding in 1934, unquestioningly retelling it as a disembodied romance. The studies of Christopher Warwick and Audrey Whiting are more compelling in that they reveal more about the personal lives of the royal couple, including the prince’s chequered sexual past and dalliance with drug addiction, as well as the way Queen Mary probably engineered the match between her son and ‘favourite godchild’, Marina. Crucially, however, while both of these studies complicate the older official narrative, it is clear that neither rumours of the prince’s private indiscretions nor his mother’s possible background influence as matchmaker of a ‘sham’ marriage had any negative repercussion on the media image of the royal couple. While gossip may have been traded between society figures like Noel Coward (who professed himself an ex-lover of the prince’s) and Fleet Street newspaper reporters, upper-class social propriety prevented rumours from being made public. I have contacted George and Marina’s two oldest children, Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, and Princess Alexandra, The Honourable Lady Ogilvy, enquiring whether either is in possession of any letters of congratulation written to their parents by ordinary members of the public on the occasion of the 1934 marriage or any memorabilia produced to commemorate the event that they would allow me to view. I have received replies from their respective private secretaries informing me that any such letters are private and personal, and that they do not possess any commemorative items. For
Split into three sections, the first part of this chapter analyzes the new emotional scripts used by the media to project the 1934 royal romance. Although reports drew on the same theme of ‘true love’ that had characterized the marriages of George’s older siblings in the early 1920s, the media presented his relationship with the Greek princess using new affective codes that distinguished it from previous royal love stories. From the moment their engagement was announced in late August 1934, the couple were portrayed as uniquely expressive in their displays of affection for one another, good-looking, and highly modern in their interests. In this respect, George and Marina’s personas were characterized by the kind of celebrity that was more often associated with glamorous film stars, rather than the demure, decorous royals of the past. And, like the stars of the silver screen, the couple took on a more active role in shaping their reputations than previous royal family members, engaging journalists in interviews to create a joint public image which emphasized their love and happiness.


as the formative decades when love became crucial to ‘self-actualization’ among the British public, with new forms of selfhood fashioned in relation to personal emotional fulfilment. Yet, the media coverage of the 1934 royal romance suggests that mutual emotional realization was already an emergent feature in heterosexual relationships. While this companionate vision may have been limited to elite romance, the interwar royal weddings seem to have hastened the advance of public images of mutuality in private married life. And, as the first part of this chapter shows, this focus on emotion and domesticity formed part of a broader media strategy to target a female audience who, news editors deemed, were more receptive to the theme of romantic intimacy.

The second section of this chapter examines how broadcasters and journalists worked in tandem with palace courtiers to try and create an image of a British people united around the focal point of the royal wedding in order to foster social cohesion and produce a more democratic political culture. The 1934 romance had a significant democratizing impulse, as it was the first time the BBC transmitted a royal wedding service live from Westminster Abbey to listeners across Britain. Furthermore, for the first time, the BBC recorded the reactions of working-class people to the celebrations. Historians of radio have suggested that the ‘vox pop’ interview with ‘the man in the street’ allowed the voices of ordinary people to influence public discourse as never before. The wireless coverage of the royal wedding therefore stimulated democratic interventions into public opinion in relation to monarchy whilst allowing the nation’s radio listeners to simultaneously participate in a royal family event.

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The media also used the royal wedding to build a narrative of renewed national community, claiming that the event eased the social hostility that beset Britain in the early 1930s and integrated the population into the constitutional compact around the focal point of the monarchy. Developing Takashi Fujitani’s analysis of the Japanese dynasty, this second section identifies how, in the choreography of new visual crowd scenes from the roof of Buckingham Palace, the media constructed an imagery which was meant to convey that the British public were united through the unique bonds they shared with the royal family.\footnote{11} Aided by palace officials, the media thus fostered signs of social cohesion around the House of Windsor. Notably, letters composed by newspaper readers and correspondence written to the BBC revealed how the media had worked to project an image of a nation that had royal family life at its centre.

This vision of a united Britain stood in stark contrast to foreign news reports from Europe that were presented by the media as the antithesis to the royal wedding.\footnote{12} The third and last section of this chapter assesses how the press contrasted an image of Britain based on the liberal, freedom-loving values epitomized in the coverage of the royal romance with signs of political chaos from the continent. This juxtaposition was meant to endorse the notion of British democratic progress and reaffirm subjects’ sense of their national exceptionalism. Furthermore, the vast congregation of foreign dignitaries who gathered in London to see the English prince married to the Greek princess augmented the image of the British royal family as the lynchpin in a network of monarchies that stretched across Europe, renovating and modifying what Johannes Paulmann termed the ‘royal cosmopolitanism’ of the nineteenth century.\footnote{13} This broad


network of dynasties represented an alternative political movement to rival the one developing around fascism abroad.

1. Royal modernity, celebrity and emotional intimacy

‘All the world loves a lover, especially a royal lover’ proclaimed *British Movietone News* to cinema audiences following the Court Circular announcement on 28 August 1934 that Prince George was betrothed to Princess Marina of Greece.\(^{14}\) This phrase, coined by nineteenth-century philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, had often been used to describe interwar royal romances that were presented as love matches instead of outmoded dynastic associations. With the obliteration of Europe’s largest monarchies in the First World War and George V’s ambition to strengthen the British identity of the House of Windsor, the royal family broke with the traditions of dynastic inter-marriage after 1918 by marrying into English and Scottish noble families.\(^{15}\) Starting with Princess Patricia’s 1919 wedding to Royal Navy Officer Alexander Ramsay, this turn inwards towards so-called ‘commoners’ kindled opinion within the media that younger royal family members were now afforded greater opportunity to choose their spouses according to their romantic desires. Princess Mary and Prince Albert, Duke of York, both purportedly married suitors of their choosing in 1922 and 1923.\(^{16}\) Mary’s relationship was acclaimed ‘a real love romance’ and the supposed authenticity of the ‘real love match’ between Albert and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon received even more press publicity; the *Daily Mirror* remarked how this ‘romantic aspect’ meant it was ‘everybody’s wedding’.\(^{17}\) The inference here that ‘true love’ in royal matrimony allowed subjects to empathize with their rulers drew on a popular emotional culture in

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\(^{14}\) *British Movietone News*, ‘Royal Romance’, 30 August 1934.


\(^{16}\) Warwick, *Two Centuries*, pp.36-48.

\(^{17}\) *Daily Mirror*, 24 November 1921, p.3, 26 April 1923, p.7 and 27 April 1923, p.2.
which romance was increasingly perceived according to freedom in choice of partner. The surge in these emotional scripts was quickened by taglines like ‘All the World Loves a Lover’, first used by a newsreel in relation to the Yorks’ betrothal in 1923.18

Yet, it was the British media’s coverage of two Scandinavian royal love stories that secured the transformation in the emotional economy projected around the House of Windsor. Princes Lennart and Sigvard of Sweden renounced all of their titles and position in the line of succession to the Swedish throne to pursue true love, marrying commoners of their choosing in 1932 and 1934 respectively. In both cases, Britain’s newsreels happily declared how ‘all the world loves a lover’ and emphasized that the princes had contradicted Swedish King Gustaf V’s express wishes in ‘choosing to obey the dictates of [their] heart[s]’.19 The British media eagerly documented Lennart and Sigvard’s marriages, augmenting a royal emotional culture in which fulfilment in private life was presented as essential to self-actualization and, in the Swedish cases, more important than national duty.20 While this new culture almost certainly shaped some of the positive public reactions to the news that Edward VIII wanted to marry the woman he loved in December 1936, it meant it was necessary to present George and Marina’s engagement in 1934 as a union based on free choice and real affection.21

Notably, this royal romantic culture was also sustained by the use of the catchphrase ‘all the world loves a lover’ in relation to the popular London society weddings of the

20 The significance of the Scandinavian royal house to the interwar British media and public portrayal of the House of Windsor is under-researched. Notably, Prince George had been connected amorously to Princess Ingrid of Sweden during a trip to Stockholm alongside his older brother, the Prince of Wales, in 1932. The British national and local media were awash with rumours of a ‘royal romance’ despite official denials of an engagement. For example, see Pathé Super Sound Gazette, ‘With the Princes in Sweden’, 7 October 1932. The close association of the British monarchy with the Swedish royal family was probably mutually beneficial in terms of their interwar popularization and, ultimately, survival.
period. Usually taking place in St. Margaret’s church next to Westminster Abbey, these weddings were presented as downscaled, smaller versions of the interwar royal marriages, energizing Britain’s commitment to social hierarchy and popularizing a language of love firmly rooted in emotional fulfilment.22

When Britain’s newspapers announced George and Marina’s betrothal, several features predominated in their reportage. Their engagement was presented as the climax to a continental holiday romance between two highly modern, fashionable and attractive personalities. Marina was also encircled in mystery that stemmed from her relatively unknown and foreign royal background, adding a further layer of sensation to the reports. These features culminated in the creation of a romance that seemed more fascinating than previous royal love stories. The News of the World’s reporter summed up this mood of expectation:

The engagement, which came as a surprise even in Court circles, is the culmination of a holiday romance. A five-year-old friendship ripened into love amid the idyllic surroundings of the Slovenian Alps, where Prince George and Princess Marina are now staying as the guests of Prince and Princess Paul of Jugo-Slavia.23

This description inflated the romantic nature of the couple’s meeting and the dramatic setting of the prince’s proposal. The ‘surprise’ element was further enhanced with reference to George’s quixotic actions: supposedly, he had on impulse borrowed the Prince of Wales’s aeroplane and flown alone to Yugoslavia to see Marina; that his real intentions had been a ‘well-kept secret’ known only to him and his oldest brother amplified the sense of adventure that characterized the press coverage.24 These events bordered on fantasy, intersecting with the plotlines of popular romantic literary fiction

22 For example, see how the twenty-one-year-old Earl of Jersey married nineteen-year-old Patricia Richards in 1932: Pathé Gazette, ‘All the World Loves a Lover’, 14 January 1932.
24 Daily Express, 29 August 1934, p.1. Also see Daily Herald, 29 August 1934, p.1; Daily Mail, 29 August 1934, p.5
and film, both of which had often portrayed a male hero ‘getting his girl’. 25 However, although a fanciful vision of romance was sustained until their wedding day, George and Marina’s love story was distinguished from previous royal relationships by new forms of media exposure that depicted them in more expressive and accessible ways. They therefore came to exemplify the tension at the heart of interwar royal celebrity. On the one hand, they were presented as extraordinary beings who lived extraordinary lives; on the other, they were cast as ‘normal’ people, who represented the aspirations of a British population increasingly interested in ideas of domestic mutuality.

From the outset, the media presented George and Marina as highly fashionable personalities. The princess’s dress sense was an immediate signifier of her modernity, setting her apart from most other female members of the British royal family:

She has that indefinable quality known as ‘chic’, and the style that she has crafted for herself has been the envy and admiration of all of Paris, where she is a well-known figure. On a formal occasion she can be royally dignified; in private life she is charming, unaffected and friendly. But always she is ‘chic’ – on the mountainside or in the ballroom.26

The way the meaning of ‘chic’ eluded the News of the World journalist shows how Marina’s fashion style was highly modern because it resisted traditional classification. Scholars have acknowledged the princess’s unique elegance: she wore the ‘first royal wedding dress in which line and style were more important than decoration.’27 Her tastes appealed to the period’s sensitivities and visual codes, combining slimline haute couture styles with soft, sensual fabrics that captured the attention of both the London and Paris fashion industries.28 The ultimate moment of recognition of her chic style came in a centrepiece article in elite magazine Vogue, which reviewed her wedding

dress and trousseau.\textsuperscript{29} The media had provided equally assiduous appraisals of the gowns worn by the royal brides’ of the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{30} But Marina’s style broke with this earlier culture because the press made her fashion-sense available downmarket to middle- and lower-class female readers. The \textit{Daily Herald} published a photograph of ‘hats which Princess Marina liked in Paris being tried on in a London store yesterday’ and noted that ‘ones just like them will soon be on sale.’\textsuperscript{31} The \textit{Bolton Evening News} similarly discussed how the princess had inspired a new fashion among young women exclaiming: ‘Marina hats are selling well, and sitting pretty!’\textsuperscript{32} Meanwhile, newsreels showed cinema audiences how the princess had inspired the ‘newest vogue in hair’.\textsuperscript{33} Marina thus became the first member of the British royal family whose fashion style was made available to the mass market. The ability to emulate her style allowed more women to relate to monarchy through the glamour of its new female protagonists.

Marina was also noted for her attractive appearance. Her good looks were clear from the large photos presented by newspapers on the announcement of her betrothal (Figure 1.1). She was labelled ‘tall, beautiful’ and a ‘charming blue-eyed brunette’.\textsuperscript{34} These portrayals were intended to draw readers’ attention to her physical features in a way that was similar to popular female film stars of the period who were also defined by their looks.\textsuperscript{35} Previously, royal brides had invariably been presented as ‘charming’ or ‘radiant’, the media resisting from drawing direct attention to their bodies or facial features.\textsuperscript{36} George was also presented as attractive, the \textit{Express} characterizing him as

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Vogue}, 28 November 1934; G. Howell, \textit{In Vogue: Sixty Years of Celebrities and Fashion from British Vogue} (Middlesex, 1978), p.107. In its 3 October 1934 issue, \textit{Vogue} had also told readers that ‘the coming royal wedding has already had an influence on London’s fashions, firing women’s imaginations’ (p.77).


\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Daily Herald}, 18 September 1934, p.6. Also see \textit{News Chronicle}, 1 November 1934, p.1.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Bolton Evening News}, 29 November 1934, p.2.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{British Paramount News}, ‘Newest Vogue in Hair!’, 27 September 1934.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Daily Express}, 29 August 1934, p.1; \textit{News of the World}, 2 September 1934, p.10.

\textsuperscript{35} Bingham, \textit{Family}, pp.201-2.

‘tall, blue-eyed and good-looking’, and together they formed the ‘handsomest royal couple in Europe.’\textsuperscript{37} The 1934 romance therefore witnessed an implicit realignment of royal romance with new visual codes of mutual physical attraction.\textsuperscript{38} This focus on the couple’s physicality was also symptomatic of a growing belief among celebrity journalists that the bodily characteristics of the famous offered insights into their real personalities, the \textit{Daily Mirror} notably scrutinizing what it termed ‘one of the most lovable faces’ for insights into Marina’s character.\textsuperscript{39} As with other famous people of the period, the media interrogated the royal couple’s appearances to make sense of the inner forms of selfhood which purportedly lay behind their public personae.\textsuperscript{40}

![Image of Prince George and Princess Marina]

\textbf{Figure 1.1. Daily Mail, 29 August 1934, p.9.}

George and Marina were also distinguished by the fashionable pastimes they shared, which marked them out as part of a celebrated social elite renowned for their

\begin{itemize}
  \item Mary’s and Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon’s physical appearances, see \textit{Daily Mirror}, 1 March 1922, p.12 and 26 April 1923, p.3.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} \textit{Daily Express}, 29 August 1934, p.1; \textit{News of the World}, 2 September 1934, p.10.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} \textit{Daily Mirror}, 29 November 1934, p.6.
\end{itemize}
hedonistic modernity. This aspect of their reputations was exemplified in front-page photographs that were published in the popular press on 30 August: George sat at the wheel of a motorcar with Marina alongside him, the two of them holding lit cigarettes (Figure 1.2). A caption from the *News of the World* was characteristic, stating that ‘typically modern in every way, the princess likes an occasional cigarette.’ Scholars have acknowledged how a woman’s participation in motoring and smoking denoted her ‘feminine modernity’ between the wars. Prince George was also characterized as ‘ultra-modern’. His flight by aeroplane to visit Marina in Yugoslavia in August was not only a dashing gesture but also a striking symbol of his modernity. This portrayal was augmented through other descriptions of his love of speed, the *News Chronicle* noting how George ‘rivals his brother, the Prince of Wales, as the best driver [in the family].’ This comparison with Edward connected the younger prince to the highly modern style of his older brother, with its popular connotations of thrill seeking and glamour. Moreover, Marina’s regular visits to England for the London season, and the pleasure both she and George reportedly took in dancing, art, theatre and cinema marked them out as modern society figures, like the Prince of Wales. Society gossip was a regular feature in interwar newspapers and, during periods of increased interest in the British monarchy, such as the 1934 romance, these columns contained details on the royal family’s movements, sustaining a crossover that fused royal celebrity

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41 Daily Mirror, 30 August 1934, p.1; Daily Express, 30 August 1934, p.1.
42 News of the World, 2 September 1934, p.10.
44 News Chronicle, 30 August 1934, pp.1 and 4.
with upper-class metropolitan elite celebrity. Historians have discussed how Edward represented the apex of the society set. When not fulfilling his public duties, he led a life of pleasure, parties and novel entertainments. George and Marina also belonged to this group, their shared interests highlighting their compatibility as lovers. And, like Edward, they stimulated a reconfiguration of the kind of celebrity associated with the British royal family.

Figure 1.2. Daily Mirror, 30 August 1934, p.1.

However, the celebrity personae of George and Marina were different to that of the Prince of Wales in one significant way. As the oldest son of George V and heir to the throne, Edward’s public image was essentially bound to his constitutional role: he embodied the symbolic continuation of the monarchy and Britain’s link to the empire. Although Prince George had carved out a dynamic image for himself in public life as

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48 D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, 1996), pp.403-5. For examples of this crossover, see Daily Mirror, 30 August 1934, p.9 and 31 August 1934, p.8.
the first member of the royal family to become a government civil servant, he did not carry the weight of a nation’s expectations.\textsuperscript{50} As Frank Mort has discussed, the British media refrained from representing Edward in the same way as film stars and popular celebrities in the 1920s. Respectful of the distance between their camera lenses and the prince, they ensured that, in addition to informal images, he was presented in a more formal and dignified manner as befitting a future king and emperor.\textsuperscript{51} As minor royals, the same set of rules did not apply to George and Marina in 1934. Previously, the royal family had customarily protected their private lives from the limelight; they preferred to court the media’s attention to publicize their public service roles and only occasionally did they knowingly reveal intimate images of royal domesticity, as with Queen Victoria and, later on, with Prince Albert of York’s young family.\textsuperscript{52} However, George and Marina were more active in courting media attention than any previous royal family members, conveying their affection for one another through new forms of exposure to publicize an image that emphasized the mutuality of their love.

In what was proclaimed the ‘first interview with the royal lovers’ at the Hotel de l’Europe in Salzburg, a \textit{Daily Express} reporter recorded that George had admitted how the betrothal was ‘all very sudden and unexpected’, but that he and Marina were very happy.\textsuperscript{53} The journalist stated that, on meeting the couple, they had ‘been sharing a joke – and laughing consumedly over it.’ These revelations emphasized the couple’s emotional compatibility, offering intimate insights into their domestic behaviour. In 1923, Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon had given an \textit{Evening News} reporter an ‘exclusive interview’ remarking how she was ‘so very happy’ following her betrothal to Albert.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Sunday Pictorial}, 25 November 1934, p.10.
\textsuperscript{51} F. Mort, ‘On Tour with the Prince of Wales: Monarchy, Empire and Celebrity Culture in the 1920s’, unpublished paper delivered at the University of Manchester, 26 February 2014.
\textsuperscript{52} Plunkett, \textit{Queen}, pp.144-98; A. Ring, \textit{The Story of Princess Elizabeth: Told with the Sanction of her Parents} (London, 1930).
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Daily Express}, 29 August 1934, p.1.
\textsuperscript{54} Cited in the \textit{Daily Mirror}, 17 January 1923, p.19.
Her biographer has speculated that she may have received some official royal warning to resist the advances of the press, because after this there were no more interviews.\footnote{W. Shawcross, Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother: The Official Biography (Basingstoke, 2009), pp.154-5.} Twelve years later in 1934, official attitudes towards newspaper interviews appear to have relaxed somewhat, for though the popular press proved even more determined to unearth intimate information on George and Marina’s romance than they had done in the early 1920s, the couple exercised greater agency in shaping the trajectory reports took, as the \textit{Express} exposé shows. The \textit{Daily Mail} had scooped the engagement story before Buckingham Palace officially announced it with the reporter describing how he had learnt of the news at a music concert in Salzburg where he confronted the prince who asked that the \textit{Mail} publicly deny the rumours.\footnote{Daily Mail, 27 August 1934, p.11.} While the couple were therefore thrust into the highly modern culture of human-interest journalism, rival news titles vying for knowledge about their private lives, they consequently took control of their image.\footnote{C. Ponce de Leon, Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940 (London, 2002).} First-hand interviews were the most authoritative rhetorical strategies used to convey verisimilitude to readers and the \textit{Express}’s ‘first interview’ with the couple offered a new kind of access to royal romance in which the royal actors narrated their own accounts of their actions and emotions amid this heightened culture of revelation. The \textit{Express} substantiated the authenticity of its personal insights by printing below its interview a photo of George and Marina’s signatures from the Hotel de l’Europe’s guestbook. This article set in motion a wave of exposés with the lovers, their families and their friends, which brought royalty closer to British audiences than ever before.\footnote{Daily Express, 29 August 1934, p.1.}

After their stay in Salzburg the royal lovers drove 200 miles by motorcar to the Bled home of Prince Paul of Yugoslavia, Marina’s brother-in-law. There they allowed \textit{British Movietone News} to record them walking in the gardens of the estate with their
hosts and then presented their first ‘film greeting’ to audiences in Britain (Figure 1.3). Standing side-by-side in front of the newsreel camera, George spoke first: ‘We have received so many congratulations, we want to thank everyone for all their kindness to us.’ Marina then followed suit: ‘I am so very happy and looking forward to come to England’ (sic).\(^{59}\) This was a remarkable innovation. Never before had British royalty directly addressed media audiences through a cinematic greeting. Although George V had spoken directly to his subjects over the radio at Christmas for the last two years, his messages had a political character and avoided direct affective meaning, whereas George and Marina’s cinematic greeting was emotionally intimate in tone, enhancing the story of true love by providing viewers with what seemed to be informal glimpses into their domestic lives.\(^{60}\) Notably, it was also the first time that Marina’s voice was heard, which positioned her as part of a young generation of British royals who were distinguished by the way they regularly communicated with the population in public addresses. The newsreel commentary emphasized the familiarity of the scenes, noting how George and Marina had ‘afforded Movietone special facilities for these intimate pictures.’ This emphasis on intimacy was a motif often deployed by the British media to encourage audiences to feel that they were privileged witnesses to royal ‘normality’ in order to bring them closer to their rulers.\(^{61}\)

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\(^{59}\) *British Movietone News*, ‘Prince George and Princess Marina Send Greetings Through Movietone’, 3 September 1934. I have examined over 100 newsreels that predate this one and I have been unable to locate any in which members of the royal family speak directly to camera in this way. I have contacted Linda Kaye at the British Universities Film and Video Council and newsreel historian Luke McKernan at the British Library, both of whom agreed that this was probably the first time royalty spoke directly to camera. I have found one newsreel that shares a similar intimacy to the *British Movietone* film. In a 1931 *Pathé Gazette* film titled ‘Hear the Prince of Wales Speak’, Prince George and his older brother are filmed onboard a ship bound for Panama and they discuss their journey with the captain of the vessel. However, despite the novelty of this film, neither prince directly addresses the camera.

\(^{60}\) See Chapter Two.

\(^{61}\) *Pathé Super Sound Gazette*, ‘Some intimate picture of HRH Prince George, whose engagement to Princess Marina of Greece has just been announced’, 30 August 1934; *British Paramount News*, ‘First pictures of Prince George and his fiancée Princess Marina’, 24 September 1934.
Of course, these were in reality highly choreographed scenes that corresponded with a film genre that was established in the early 1920s titled ‘The Stars at Home’. This cinemagazine series exposed celebrities’ home lives, projecting scenes of famous people engaged in everyday activities like gardening, exercise and caring for domestic animals. Given these themes, it was perhaps unsurprising that George’s dog made a brief appearance in his master’s arms in the Movietone film. And, as with the earlier cinemagazine series, the 1934 Movietone story was designed for a female audience. A woman delivered the film’s voiceover at a time when female narration on newsreels was unusual, and she went onto provide further voiceovers for Movietone’s coverage of the love story. This shift was striking given how other stories shown as part of the same newsreels remained narrated by men. Again, this was characteristic of the way

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63 For example, see Eve And Everybody’s Film Review, ‘Stars at Home - Miss Nellie Wallace’, 3 November 1921 and ‘Stars at Home - Matheson Lang’, 29 September 1921.
the 1934 romance witnessed the creation of a more intimate and feminine royal style, the media creating unique scenarios to informally expose the lovers’ domestic lives.

At first, Buckingham Palace sought to limit the intimate exposure of the couple. George had told a journalist from Reuter’s news agency that it was ‘strictly forbidden for him to give interviews for the press’ whilst he was in Yugoslavia. The Reuter’s reporter had written to George’s equerry, Major H. W. Butler, questioning whether a purported interview with the prince published by a Yugoslavian newspaper was in fact genuine. A separate letter to Butler suggests that it was probably a forgery, which illustrates the lengths to which sections of the press went to provide their readers with inside information about the royal family. The palace’s desire to shield George and Marina from media intrusion was likely driven by the belief that intimate revelation could damage the public image of the monarchy. King George V’s assistant private secretary, Frank Mitchell, who acted as unofficial palace press officer in this period, contacted Sir Thomas McAra of the Newspapers Proprietors Association to ask him to ‘take what steps you can to stop Journalists and Photographers from seeking interviews, taking photographs and in other ways interfering with the privacy of the Duke and Duchess of Kent [as George and Marina would become known] during their honeymoon.’ It was hoped that the royal lovers would be afforded some respite after their wedding, the palace attempting to stop the press intruding on the traditionally intimate honeymoon period.

67 RA/GDKH/WED/A01 - Letter from D. J. Cowan to Major H.W. Butler, 3 September 1934.
The exaggerated and, at times, wholly contrived media coverage that attended royalty had alerted George V and palace courtiers to the dangers of publicity. In the absence of official communication, the press tended to speculate about royal wedding minutiae and this often had the effect of influencing the ensuing courses of events. George V’s private secretary Lord Stamfordham had, twelve years earlier, had to ask the king to release information about the plans for Princess Mary’s wedding in an effort to suppress media speculation. In 1934, the press again proved determined to influence proceedings, conjecturing when and where the marriage would take place. The *Daily Mirror* suggested that ‘one thing is practically certain... the royal wedding will be solemnized in Westminster Abbey and there will be a drive in full state from Buckingham Palace to the abbey and back.’ Through speculation, these newspapers thus exerted control over the preparations for the interwar royal weddings, ensuring that they were orchestrated as national newsworthy events.

Nonetheless, the palace also performed an active role in fashioning George and Marina’s intimate images. The noted English society photographer Dorothy Wilding was tasked with taking the official pictures of the couple which, with palace approval, were widely publicized via the national press. Once again, these photographs broke with royal tradition. The most informal photos taken of a royal couple to date were those of the Yorks prior to their wedding in 1923: Albert, dressed in a lounge suit, sat resting on a table with his arms crossed so that he and Elizabeth, who was wearing a

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70 RA/PS/PSO/GV/PS/MAN/35056/B/5 - Memo from Lord Stamfordham to King George V, 20 January 1922.
71 For example see *Daily Express*, 30 August 1934, p.1; *Daily Mirror*, 30 August 1934, p.1.
73 RA/GDKH/WED/A01 - Letter from the Editor of The Wireless Press to the palace press officer, 2 November 1934. Assent to request granted on 6 November 1934. Also see letter from D. A. Tuck to Major H. W. Butler, 7 November 1934 and reply on 8 November 1934. For press reproduction of the Wilding photos see *Daily Mirror*, 29 November 1934, p.1; *Daily Express*, 20 November 1934, p.8.
smart dress and pearl necklace, were positioned at a similar height. The *Mirror*’s wedding issue used this photograph and edited in the royal coat of arms between the bridal couple to enhance the dignity of the scene (Figure 1.4). In 1934, Wilding constructed much more emotionally expressive scenes between George and Marina, which were designed to emphasize their modernity and the close affective bond they ostensibly shared. In one of the Wilding photographs, Marina, dressed in a dark sleek dress, sat in an armchair with George – in pin-striped lounge suit – perched next to her, his arm draped over her left shoulder. This relaxed scene conveyed care and tenderness. It was not only reproduced by the media but was also sold as an official souvenir and was used on invitations and menus for commercial events like the dinner dance at the Kensington Royal Palace Hotel to celebrate the wedding (Figure 1.5). At the time of Princess Mary’s wedding, the palace banned the reproduction of the royal crests on menu cards for fear of degrading the crown’s image. Twelve years on, intimate photos of a companionate royal couple became part of an everyday visual culture stimulated by a burgeoning commercial trade in the popular image of the monarchy and by a news media intent on desacralizing the image of the royal family in order to bring them closer to the British public.

74 *Daily Mirror*, 26 April 1923, p.1. For the original, see NPG x130935, Vandyk, January 1923.
75 NPG x35653, Dorothy Wilding, October 1934.
76 LMA/4364/02/022. This file contains over twenty different hotel invitations and menus which used Wilding’s photographs to promote events.
Figure 1.4. *Daily Mirror*, 26 April 1923, p.1.

Figure 1.5. 1934 royal wedding party invitation for the Royal Palace Hotel.
Wilding’s pictures also included scenes of George and Marina standing together with their arms folded on a table as they stared intently into the camera lens in front of them. As with *Movietone*’s ‘greeting’, this image emphasized direct contact between the viewer and the lovers. Another photograph presented the couple in a similar pose but with their heads turned inwards so that they knowingly smiled at each other.78 Again, this image conveyed a unique tenderness designed to heighten the affective bond at the centre of the love story. However, the most notable Wilding photo showed the lovers side-on, George in front, with Marina resting her chin over his shoulder (Figure 1.6). Not only did this picture produce a vision of close equality between the couple, it intersected with other visual codes that elevated its symbolic qualities. In the same month, Wilding photographed the Hollywood lovers Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and Gertrude Lawrence in a very similar pose (Figure 1.7).79 By sitting for Wilding, George and Marina’s personae thus overlapped with the celebrity images of film stars in these years. Wilding’s series of photographs of the couple also incorporated an art deco, stylized modernity that was associated with English society codes of portraiture from this period, their royal celebrity verging on this culture as well. As historian Val Williams has noted, ‘Wilding made women look as they had never looked before – beautiful, starkly elegant and uncompromisingly modern’, hence her great popularity with the famous.80 Given George and Marina’s glamorous personae, it is perhaps no surprise that, after the prince’s sudden death in 1942 in a plane crash, a female Mass Observation respondent likened him to a Hollywood celebrity: ‘He was so popular – I really think he was the most popular member of the Royal Family. His visit to any factory would create excitement. The girls used to think of him as a film star.’81

78 NPG x33897, Dorothy Wilding, October 1934; NPG x46512, Dorothy Wilding, October 1934.
79 NPG x33887, Dorothy Wilding, October 1934. NPG x46508, Dorothy Wilding, October 1934.
81 MOA1/17/8/9.
Figure 1.6. George and Marina. Wilding, October 1934.

Figure 1.7. Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and Gertrude Lawrence. Wilding, October 1934.
The media’s deliberate softening of the dynastic implications of the relationship also enhanced the companionate image of George and Marina’s romance. The *Mirror* was among several newspapers quick to point out that it was ‘a real love match.’ It quoted Marina’s father, Prince Nicholas of Greece, who described how his daughter’s betrothal was based on ‘affection’ and that ‘there [was] nothing political’ about it. A friend of the Greek royal family Grace Ellison agreed, advising the *Daily Mail* that ‘Princess Marina had always made it clear that she would never marry for anything but love.’ By invoking these authoritative voices, newspapers isolated the romance from the dynastic marital ties of pre-war Europe, declaring that ‘royal engagements are no longer political moves.’

Yet, this statement was deceptive. A series of upheavals that sprung from the First World War had led to the expulsion of the Greek monarchy and its replacement with a republic. Marina and her family had lived in exile in Paris after leaving Greece in 1924 and, one-by-one, her sisters had married into other European royal families. Marina’s betrothal to George thus reinvigorated the network of royalty that stretched across the continent, but the press downplayed this geopolitical dimension. Instead, newspapers repeatedly publicized a love match ‘which ha[d] nothing to do with State diplomacy or politics.’ Marina’s inauspicious status as an exiled Greek princess was also moderated. Grace Ellison presented a story of hardship overcome, the princess’s rightful royal status restored through her marriage to an English prince, while the rest of the media deliberately ignored her ‘foreignness’, instead emphasizing how she was...

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82 *Daily Mirror*, 30 August 1934, p.3.  
83 Ibid.  
84 *Daily Mail*, 30 August 1934, p.11. Ellison would go onto prepare the first full biography of the princess to coincide with the wedding and serialized her story in the *Daily Herald*.  
86 On the front-page of the *Daily Mirror’s* ‘royal wedding number’ from 29 November 1934, there was a large photo of the couple with a caption below that again reinforced the romance and expressly denied any political motivations.
an Anglophile; *Gaumont British News* and the *Express* both claimed she was a ‘fluent linguist and speaks English fluently.’ Interviews that were conducted with Marina in Paris by *Pathé* and *British Paramount* contradicted these assertions about the fluency of her language but they did reveal a princess who seemed to embrace her new nation, gladly parting with her past as an exile: ‘I love Paris, but obviously I am so happy to go to England and to become English.’

Some media reports more emphatically rejected Marina’s Hellenic background. The *Mail* claimed that ‘not a drop of Greek blood is in her veins’, while barrister and writer Helena Normanton informed readers of *The Queen* magazine how Marina was also of Danish descent and that her marriage followed a long line of unions between Scandinavian royalty and the British monarchy, the most recent of which had been Princess Alexandra and Edward VII. Marina’s association with Alexandra would, in fact, be recurrently invoked. The latter was still in popular living memory having died aged eighty only nine years before in 1925. They were also visibly connected through the way both were deemed to have brought great physical beauty and a highly fashionable dress sense to British shores. And, Marina’s arrival in England for the first time after her engagement also met with the kind of welcome that was extended to Alexandra when she arrived in London in 1863 to marry the Prince of Wales.

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90 For example, the phrase ‘the princess from over the sea’ was applied to both Alexandra and Marina (*Daily Sketch*, 30 November 1934, p.3). Most notably, the BBC produced a special programme titled ‘Marriage of the Princess’ on the 1863 royal romance that aired the evening before George and Marina’s wedding. Editorial policy for this broadcast demonstrates that it was written to create a sense of continuity between the two weddings. BBCWA/R30/3/3644/1.


92 Plunkett, *Queen*, pp.51-2.
To judge from the media descriptions of Marina’s arrival by ferry at Folkestone in Kent on 16 September 1934, the Greek princess captivated the British people who had patiently waited to see her. The press produced front-page images of her smiling and waving to the crowds, and placed special emphasis on these visible signs of her happiness. The *Daily Mirror* stated how ‘from the first moment she was seen – slim, beautiful and exquisitely dressed – excitedly waving a white handkerchief on the upper-deck of the cross-Channel steamer, the Princess enslaved the wildly cheering spectators massed on the pier.’ Marina’s readiness to engage with crowds by waving to them was, in fact, unique; the frantic waving of an upraised arm or handkerchief was not something associated with the British royal family. The press remarked on how this innovative gesture contrasted with the bowing traditionally used by royalty to acknowledge their appreciation of the crowd’s cheers. The royal wave to which the British public have since become so accustomed had an instantaneous effect on the relationship between the crowds and their rulers. According to the popular press, Marina’s wave endeared her to spectators by creating a more visible gestural dialogue between the royal bride and ordinary people. The *News Chronicle* described how ‘she was soon waving both hands to [the crowd] almost as frantically as they were waving to her.’ Marina’s new physical emotional expression not only ensured the formation of a vision of a royal romance based on mutual affection that resonated with modern concepts of companionate love, but brought her closer to the public who were enabled to connect with her through new informal codes of etiquette and deportment.

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93 *Folkestone Express*, 22 September 1934, p.5.
96 Newsreels show how the Prince of Wales and Duke of York doffed their hats at crowds who turned out to see them. Similarly, the Duchess of York had, on occasion, held up a tentative hand of greeting to spectators. It thus appears that Marina popularized the royal wave to which we have become so accustomed. Similar public enthusiasm had greeted Princess Marta of Sweden when she had introduced the royal wave in her country on becoming the Crown Princess of Norway in 1929.
97 *Daily Sketch*, 26 November 1934, p.12. The article was titled ‘Why Princess Waves’.
The press strengthened the significance of this new visible gestural dialogue by juxtaposing photos of Marina waving with images of excited crowds (Figure 1.8). This kind of representation presented the princess as an exalted celebrity, rather than a retiring royal. The moment that best captured this new informal bond between Marina and British people was when she and George became the first couple to wave to the crowd from the Buckingham Palace balcony after their wedding. The *Daily Sketch* was typical in its description of how ‘again and again [the crowd] cheered, again and again she waved her hand.’ The many press comments like this one indicated how a new relationship was emerging between royals and the British public that was forged on more direct and commonplace forms of communication.

![Image: London Welcome to Princess Marina](Figure 1.8. *The Times*, 17 September 1934, p.16.)

Perhaps even more significant than Marina’s popularization of the royal wave was the way she and George shared the first royal kiss ever caught on photograph and film. When Marina arrived by train from Folkestone at Victoria Station in London she

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100 Photographs like the one on the front-page of the *News Chronicle*, 30 November 1934, show how George and Marina waved, as do newsreels. Comparable photographs and newsreels from the earlier royal weddings in the 1920s show that the other couples did not wave.

101 *Daily Sketch*, 30 November 1934, p.25.
and the prince embraced for a fleeting moment, George kissing her on the cheek. But, to judge from the press commentaries, it seemed it was a much more romantic tryst:

When Princess Marina stepped from the Folkestone boat train at Victoria yesterday Prince George took her in his arms and kissed her. Then she kissed him. For a moment both seemed to have forgotten everyone else – the immense crowd whose cheers were echoing in the station roof, the officials – even Princess Marina’s parents, Prince and Princess Nicholas of Greece, who stood aside, regarding them smilingly.102

In this description, the Express drew special attention to the scene by capitalizing and emboldening the text, epitomizing the response of an ecstatic press that described the kiss at great length. The Sketch termed it the ‘magic moment of the day’ while the Mirror stated that ‘thousands of London people witnessed a true lovers’ greeting.’103

In fact, every popular national newspaper sampled as part of this study alluded to the kiss in their headlines – the Mail even stating that the couple exchanged a ‘whispered word’ of greeting to heighten its emotionally animated portrayal.104 However, none of the newspapers published photographs of the kiss. It is possible that this was because visual images would have failed to do the press’s overly-romantic depictions justice: George’s brief peck on Marina’s cheek was hardly the ‘true lovers’ greeting.’ Yet, it may have been that newspapers deemed it too risqué to reproduce a photograph of the kiss given that it would have been the first time the amorous gesture with its sexual connotation would have been visually portrayed. Nonetheless, the newsreels were less hesitant, Gaumont British News providing cinema viewers with the first ever onscreen royal kiss.105

Having planned her marriage with her own and George’s parents at Balmoral, Marina left for Paris and returned to England a week before the wedding to prepare for the ceremony. Reporting the second occasion that the prince welcomed his fiancée

103 Daily Sketch, 17 September 1934, p.3; Daily Mirror, 17 September 1934, p.3.
back to England at Dover, the popular press went ahead and printed front-page photos of the couple kissing (Figure 1.9).  

The newspapers’ earlier reticence had vanished after the newsreel scoop which dispelled the taboo on the publicizing of royal sexual intimacy. The competitive spirit which stimulated media organizations to present their audiences with scoops, each trying to outdo the other in royal human-interest exposés, created more informal access to the private lives of the royal family. Pathé Gazette’s bulletin used the kiss as the backdrop to its title scene, showing the fleeting embrace twice in an attempt to entice audiences’ attention through these intimate moments.  

![Daily Mirror, 22 November 1934, p.1](image)

**Figure 1.9. Daily Mirror, 22 November 1934, p.1.**

The media’s presentation of George and Marina’s romance appealed to public sensibilities for the way it distinguished the couple from other members of the royal family. George wrote to Prince Paul of Yugoslavia remarking on the crowd’s reaction to Marina’s initial arrival at Victoria train station:

> Everyone is so delighted with her – the crowd especially – ’cos when she arrived at Victoria Station they expected a dowdy princess – such as unfortunately my family are – but when they saw this lovely chic creature –

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107 *Pathé Super Sound Gazette*, ‘Royal Reception to Princess Marina’, 22 November 1934.
they could hardly believe it and even the men were interested and shouted ‘Don’t change – don’t let them change you!’

It is likely that the media’s presentation of Marina’s unique glamour distinguished her from other royal women who were deemed to be more restrained, like the Duchess of York, hence the remark ‘don’t let them change you!’ However, other members of the royal family would benefit from their association with the couple. The new emotional scripts the media used to characterize George and Marina proved infectious when, on arriving at Balmoral, the lovers were photographed laughing alongside King George and Queen Mary. The Times presented readers with these ‘happy’, ‘informal’ images while the Express speculated how the ‘family joke’ at the centre of the ‘delightfully intimate picture’ had originally arisen (Figure 1.10). Indeed, as the next part of this chapter shows, this was the first in a number of incidents in which the media depicted other members of the British royal family in a more familiar and familial way as a result of their sharing in the ostensible happiness of the bridal pair.

Figure 1.10. Daily Express, 19 September 1934, p.20.

Historians who have researched interwar leisure culture have acknowledged the centrality of romance to the hegemonic core of feminine selfhood presented in films, popular literary fiction and magazines. Royal love stories also formed part of this modern culture of romance. As already noted, the media presented the 1934 romance to enable middle- and lower-class women to connect to Marina’s glamorous persona, the journalistic focus on the couple’s style and emotional lives transforming the story into an especially feminine affair. While some of these themes had antecedents in the newspaper coverage of the royal weddings of the 1920s, new modes of publicity like the female voiceovers used by *British Movietone News* also emphasized the gendered dimension of the romance. Notably, women were also employed by newspapers to report on the 1934 wedding, the *Mail* and *Mirror* drawing attention to their ‘special woman correspondent[s]’ as though they offered a unique insight into the story, while the society and cinema journalist Eleanor Smith was hired as the *News Chronicle*’s female royal reporter. Perhaps most significantly, the *News of the World* employed the famous romantic novelist Ruby Ayers to prepare its wedding coverage. While this trend towards the female point-of-view suggests that news editors thought women could offer a more authentic ‘inside’ perspective on the 1934 royal marriage, the role of Ayers is indicative of a broader cross-over in factual and fictional narrative genres, the wedding mobilising popular romantic storylines which predictably climaxed in the kind of ‘happy ending’ for which the author was famed.
Ultimately, George and Marina’s love story stimulated a very positive response from the mainstream media, which positioned the romance as a significant episode in the nation’s cultural and political life through constant news coverage. The romance began to change how members of the royal family were publicly projected. The media developed new affective codes to portray the closeness of the couple’s bond, which was crystallized through the performance of companionate heterosexuality. And, with the help of the couple themselves, the British media provided audiences with informal channels of revelation that facilitated new kinds of access to the personal lives of the royal lovers, as though they were modern celebrities. This was all made possible by the couple’s status as minor royals, George and Marina’s public images spearheading a more intimate and personal vision of royal familialism than was deemed appropriate at the time for either the king or his successor.

2. Broadcasting, social cohesion and national community

This section examines five important innovations introduced by the media and palace to produce an image of an integrated and socially united nation around the focal point of the royal wedding. In the first instance, the media constructed a narrative which stressed how the royal wedding turned London into a magnet for tourism, stimulating economic growth and bringing the British public together. No matter what social class these people were from, they were presented as a united whole. Secondly, to augment this narrative of cohesion the media choreographed images of what they claimed were the largest London crowd scenes to date, which helped produce an image of a British public gathered in common acknowledgement of the royal family. Moreover, palace courtiers helped engineer the creation of this image by allowing photographers and film crews onto the roof of Buckingham Palace for the first time. This augmented the
visual gestural dialogue between royalty and the public that had already been boosted by Marina’s readiness to wave at crowds. Thirdly, although the London crowds were presented as uniform, there were simultaneous efforts by the media to individualize the people of whom the mass was constituted. The BBC radio coverage of the royal wedding incorporated the voices of working-class people as never before, as part of a broader democratizing impulse that sought to illuminate their views. Fourthly, the radio coverage also enabled people all over the country to listen to a royal wedding service for the first time. According to personal testimonies, the temporal simultaneity created through the broadcast heightened listeners’ awareness of a British national community. Finally, this section shows how the palace and the church planned the marriage service to construct a dignified state event that the public could relate to and admire, with special measures taken to prevent unsuitable forms of media coverage.

Beginning with Princess Patricia of Connaught’s wedding in 1919, the media and palace orchestrated royal family occasions as more inclusive events. The wedding processions to and from Westminster Abbey were transformed into more accessible spectacles. At Patricia’s wedding, carriages with large glass windows were used in the procession for the first time to make the royal family more visible to onlookers and, in 1922, palace courtier Clive Wigram arranged for the coach which carried Princess Mary and her bridegroom to travel more slowly along London’s streets, believing that it would ‘give untold pleasure’ to spectators.115 Prince Albert remarked on this new inclusivity in an often-quoted letter to his brother, the Prince of Wales, in which he expressed surprise and concern at the press excitement that had erupted in anticipation of their sister’s marriage:

115 *Daily Mirror*, 28 January 1919, p.5; RA/PS/PSO/GV/PS/MAIN/35056/B/7 - Memo from C. Wigram to Lord Chamberlain, 23 February 1922. George and Marina’s wedding witnessed similar changes, with the procession route specially extended to allow more people to see them (*British Movietone News*, ‘The Royal Wedding’, 29 November 1934).
Mary’s wedding… is causing a great deal of work to many people, and as far as I can make out the 28th is going to be a day of national rejoicing in every conceivable and unconceivable manner… In fact, it is now no longer Mary’s wedding but (this from the papers) it is the “Abbey Wedding” or the “Royal Wedding” or the “National Wedding” or even the “People’s Wedding” (I have heard it called) “of our beloved Princess”.  

Albert’s reaction revealed how the media projected the 1922 marriage as a collective public occasion, even going so far as to describe it as the ‘people’s wedding’. This populist language set the standard on which future royal weddings would be based. In this way, the media mobilized an image of a national community that was organized around a family monarchy. Clive Wigram had earlier expressed the concern that the ‘splash & ostentation’ of the wedding would not suit the national mood, which he judged was unhappy because of unemployment and a worsening ‘labour situation’.  

But this anxiety seems to have dissolved through the staging of Mary’s wedding as a highly public event in which all British people could participate. Twelve years on in 1934, when the country was beset by even greater social unrest, the media projected George and Marina’s wedding more explicitly as a force for class reconciliation.  

By 1934, most British people had weathered the worst of the interwar economic crisis. Yet, industrial conflicts endured alongside violent demonstrations of discontent with the political status quo, as evinced in the bloody break-up of the British Union of Fascists’ London Olympia rally on 7 June 1934. The royal wedding was presented as mitigating some of this social rupture. Press headlines stated that a million people were expected to descend on London to join the festivities, injecting £15,000,000 into tourism and the hospitality sector. More than half a million of these visitors would come from the provinces, boosting the transport industry with special overnight train

116 Cited in Pope-Hennessy, Queen, pp.519-20.  
117 RA/PS/PSO/GV/PS/MAIN/35056/B/4 - Memo from C. Wigram to undisclosed recipient, 29 January 1922.  
119 Sunday Pictorial, 25 November 1934, p.1; Daily Express, 26 November 1934, p.3.
services from as far afield as Northern Ireland and Scotland. The *Daily Express* also presented the wedding as a positive stimulus for trade, describing how ‘hundreds will marry on November 29th’ (the same day as the royal couple) as part of a ‘love boom week’.

The palace also took special measures to maintain the opinion that the royal wedding would benefit the British economy. Marina had asked Edward Molyneux to create her wedding outfits in Paris but this led to a dispute with palace officials, for royal ladies were expected to set an example to the population by ‘Buying British’ to support the economy. In complying with this obligation, Molyneux designed her a wedding dress that would be made in London and, although he would prepare her trousseau in Paris, it would be made out of British materials. This proved a fitting *entente cordiale*, but newspapers went to special lengths to stress that British tailors would benefit from Marina’s fashion choices.

The press also described how the ‘great invasion’ of London for the wedding witnessed a temporary easing of class and political antagonism. Reports focused on the good-natured crowds and how people of different backgrounds gathered together on the procession route the night before wedding day. Geraint Goodwin’s story in the *Daily Sketch* was representative of this kind of report:

> We stood there, an anxious crowd – some of us had been standing there all night – to watch the Royal Wedding. There were nearly a million of us there, and we came from all sorts and conditions of people. We were very rich, and we were very poor. We had many different political views. We did not see eye to eye by any means. But we all stood shoulder to shoulder from four to 20 deep along the kerb of the Royal route. It was a crowd now greater than any that has collected since the Armistice, and we were there to see a bride who, as the Primate so aptly put it, the British people had taken into their hearts.

Likening the atmosphere on the royal wedding procession route to the public reaction to the 1918 Armistice, Goodwin presented it as a unique moment of national cohesion.

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120 *Daily Express*, 3 November 1934, p.3.
122 *Daily Sketch*, 30 November 1934, p.2.
which eased social tensions between different sections of society. More generally, the same sentiment was contained in media reports that presented the royal wedding as ‘the day that made the nation happier’ and as a ‘public event not, for once, depressing – as so much “news” unluckily is in these troubled times.’

Goodwin’s description of the mood on the procession route was also meant to convey an image of a British people united through their connections to monarchy: no matter their class background or political beliefs, different sections of the public could identify with the royal wedding, standing ‘shoulder to shoulder’ as part of a multitude to celebrate George and Marina’s story. The media reproduced this narrative through the dissemination of large photographs of London crowds which evoked an image of a collective group of subjects who had gathered to revere royalty. Since the nineteenth century, the media had communicated impressions of the large crowds that attended royal events. Gerry Turvey has suggested that the early newsreels which focused on royal processions from the viewpoint of spectators probably helped create deferential British subjects, inspiring an ‘awed respect in the cinema auditorium because camera and projected image offered film viewers their own clearly defined subject position as respectful witnesses to the photographed event.’ Whilst images of the processions from the crowd point-of-view appeared in newsreels and photographs of the interwar royal weddings, they were matched in number by scenes of the crowds themselves.

Takashi Fujitani has argued that, in the nineteenth century, Japanese authorities sought to control what they saw as unorderly masses by imposing self-consciousness and physical discipline on them. This was partly achieved through the ‘normalization of behaviour within a crowd, [where] individuals learned to subject themselves to a

123 News of the World, 2 December 1934, p.12; Daily Mirror, 17 September 1934, p.11.
124 Plunkett, Queen, pp.17, 43, 60-67.
viewer’s code of behaviour.\textsuperscript{126} The British media and palace courtiers performed a similar social organizing role in the interwar years, creating images of crowds which visualized a dutiful and ordered public that was centred on monarchy, augmenting the interwar political discourse on the ‘peaceable’ nature of the public sphere.\textsuperscript{127} This was particularly the case with the 1934 royal wedding. For the first time, photographers and cameramen were permitted access to Buckingham Palace’s roof to capture vast visual panoramas of the huge crowds gathered below in front of the building.\textsuperscript{128} These scenes were quite remarkable. Tens of thousands of faces could be seen, the layout of the Mall and the Victoria Memorial instilling a geometric structure in these pictures which emphasized the orderliness of the assembled mass.\textsuperscript{129} Furthermore, newspapers and newsreels juxtaposed these images with scenes of the royal family stood on the balcony, the bride and groom appearing to wave to the crowds below.\textsuperscript{130} This imagery was particularly stark in the \textit{Daily Sketch}’s juxtaposed image of Marina: in her hand she waved a handkerchief that was imperfectly photographed as a blur, emphasizing the special gestural rapport she had developed with the British public (Figure 1.11).

\textsuperscript{126} Fujitani, \textit{Splendid}, p.227.
\textsuperscript{127} J. Lawrence, \textit{E lecting Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics From Hogarth to Blair} (Oxford, 2009), pp.120-7.
Figure 1.11. *Daily Sketch*, 30 November 1934, p.25.

Other media also highlighted the new gestural form of interaction between the royals and the British public in 1934. As the first royal wedding reported by the sound newsreels, editors drew attention to the waving crowds and amplified the noise of cheering which attended the scenes outside the palace in order to achieve symbolic auditory exaltation of the royal couple’s marriage. Newsreel commentators stressed that these were ‘scenes of unbelievable enthusiasm’: ‘surely never before have there been such crowds… Countless thousands awaiting a glimpse of their new princess, a sea of faces expectant turned towards the balcony’. George V added to this vision of a national family monarchy when, for the first time, he lifted up his granddaughter Princess Margaret Rose so that she too could wave to the crowds below the balcony.

As the *British Paramount News* commentator stated, ‘rarely, if ever, has the camera portrayed so intimate a scene of British royalty.’¹³²

This new visual imagery is indicative of how technological developments in the media combined with the greater emotional intimacy of the leading royal actors in the early 1930s to create a powerful vision of a family monarchy as a national focal point. The BBC had also reached a level of technological maturity that enabled it to present its listeners with a soundscape that placed special emphasis on the cheering of the masses that gathered in London, as well as the thoughts and feelings of the individual personalities of which the crowds were comprised. George and Marina’s was the first royal marriage ceremony to be broadcast by radio and a great deal of preparation went into its organization.¹³³ On learning that their wedding ceremony was to take place at Westminster Abbey, the BBC’s controller of programmes, Alan Dawnay, contacted Prince George and the Dean of Westminster to see whether it would be possible to broadcast the ceremony to Britain and the empire. The prince’s comptroller, Major Ulick Alexander, replied to Dawnay on George’s behalf on 24 September stating that the prince had ‘no objection’ so long as the BBC obtained permission from the dean. This was acquired, as was consent to relay the transmission to the empire, Europe and America. However, Alexander had acted too hastily in providing the prince’s consent without referring the matter to the king and his advisors. At the beginning of October, the *Daily Mail* scooped the story that plans were underway to broadcast the service but palace courtiers stated that the BBC had not obtained rightful ‘Court permission’, putting both Dawnay and Gerald Cock, who was head of BBC Outside Broadcasts, in

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¹³² *British Paramount News*, ‘The Duke of Kent Weds Princess Marina’, 3 December 1934. This moment was widely covered by the press as well: see *Daily Sketch*, 30 November 1934, p.30.

awkward positions. Although the king ultimately agreed to the broadcast, it seems likely that this was a forced decision made under the pressure of both press conjecture and the knowledge that the BBC’s preparations were well-advanced. The palace press officer Frank Mitchell suggested that Ulick Alexander receive a ‘discreet warning’ for his failure in tactfulness. Nevertheless, after the news of the broadcast was official, it quickly took on a national and international significance, with the press hankering for any kind of information on what they termed a ‘historic’ event.

BBC editorial policy for the wedding coverage specified that listeners should be able to appreciate ‘crowd scenes’ and would include an ‘eyewitness’ description from Howard Marshall, the presenter specially recruited for the royal wedding broadcast. In his pre-ceremony commentary, Marshall described the ‘hum of the excited crowds’ that had gathered to witness the wedding procession. As well as his portrayal of the masses, the BBC sought the opinion of the people who constituted the crowd scenes, stating that ‘to this [Marshall’s commentary] if it were thought desirable might be added a Cockney’s impressions from the crowd’, noting also that ‘this second speaker might be a woman.’ While the specification of a female working-class voice from London can partly be attributed to the way the media took for granted that women formed the core demographic interested in royal love stories, it also related to the way that the ‘Cockney’ was being transformed into an archetype of national working-class identity used to symbolize new forms of mass participation in Britain’s increasingly democratic public sphere. However, in reflecting this new proletarian voice as part

136 BBCWA/R30/3/644/1 - Internal Circulating Memo from Mr. Adam to Mr. Coatman, 11 October 1947.
137 BBCWA/R30/3/644/1 - Draft of Marshall’s commentary.
138 BBCWA/R30/3/644/1 - Internal Circulating Memo from Mr. Adam to Mr. Coatman, 11 October 1947.
of British public discourse, the BBC’s news editor, Ralph Murray, took precautions to ensure that a suitable candidate provided this novel perspective:

The crowd point of view: Cock has someone called Whittaker Wilson who he says has the right sort of contact with the crowd mentality and might suitably be dispatched into their midst to catch their comments. Or – in the abstract preferably, but practically presenting some difficulty – your solution of getting a Cockney woman in to do it herself. Miss Race could perhaps help us in getting a bright Cockney, as she has an extensive acquaintance with such people.140

This passage, which suggested that special care was needed to prepare for contact with working-class people, demonstrates how this kind of interaction was innovative. The desire to have the ‘crowd point of view’ heard through a representative working-class person shows how the BBC deemed the wedding a suitable moment to explore public opinion in order to augment the vision of a nation united around the focal point of royalty. The BBC’s attempt to literally give voice to this strand of public opinion in response to the wedding anticipated Mass Observation’s ethnographic intervention into British society two and a half years later at George VI’s coronation. In this way, royal events had a democratizing influence, acting as a stimulus for interventions into wider public opinion.141

The BBC also sought to generate an imagined sense of British community in its coverage of the royal wedding service and, according to newspapers, the broadcaster succeeded in integrating listeners into a national community through its coverage. The News Chronicle’s headline was typical: ‘Wedding Service All the World Attended – Triumph of Broadcast from Westminster Abbey.’142 All of the main popular and elite press titles discussed the theme of national and international participation at length:

Princess Marina of Greece made her vows in low, clear tones, which were audible not only to those around her in the wonderful setting of Westminster

140 BBCWA/R30/3/644/1 - Memo from Ralph Murray to the News Editor, 25 October 1934.
Abbey but, through microphones, to the hundreds of thousands of people stretched along the royal route, to millions in offices, factories and homes throughout Britain and to listeners in every land.\textsuperscript{143}

Although children benefitted from a school holiday to mark the royal wedding, it was meant to be a normal working day for the rest of the population. However, this did not preclude enormous crowds forming in the streets of London to participate and nor did it stop people assembling elsewhere to listen to the wireless broadcast together. The\textit{Manchester Guardian} labelled it ‘the listener’s wedding’, describing how people had gone to Manchester’s shops and restaurants to hear the broadcast as collectives:

To a spectator at Lewis’s [one of Manchester’s leading department stores]… it was obvious that the housewife had decided to set apart her morning in order to enjoy by the medium of the broadcast sounds and her imagination something of the great spectacle. The women seated at the tables – often with their rather puzzled children – listened attentively to the beautiful service and the voices of the bride and bridegroom. Although men listened, it was essentially a feminine occasion, as the composition of the crowds testified.\textsuperscript{144}

And the\textit{Bolton Evening News} reported comparable scenes, ‘eager parties at shops and homes… listen[ing] together’. These groups were again largely made up of women ‘who stole an hour from their housework or the preparation of the midday meal, and experience[d] again the thrill of taking part in a wedding ceremony.’\textsuperscript{145} The use of public listening venues like shops prefigured the more intimate reception of the 1937 coronation broadcast, which most people heard in their own homes, or in the homes of friends or family.\textsuperscript{146}

Other pieces of personal testimony reveal how the BBC broadcast worked to try and engender awareness of a British national community. A letter written to the\textit{Daily Mirror} by the popular author Hallie Eustace Miles of Bishops Mansions in London suggested that she ‘was one of the great multitude to have been present at the royal

\textsuperscript{143}News Chronicle, 30 November 1934, p.1.
\textsuperscript{144}Manchester Guardian, 30 November 1934, p.13.
\textsuperscript{145}Bolton Evening News, 30 November 1934, p.3.
\textsuperscript{146}See Chapter Three.
wedding through the wonders of broadcasting.’ She stated how listeners had much to be grateful for, ‘in that we live in this day of miracles, when we can hear the glories we cannot see.’ This language of the imagined collective who instantaneously heard the broadcast also appeared in letters written to Gerald Cock by BBC listeners who commended him on his efforts. Annie Maudsley of Southport, Merseyside, described the clarity with which the radio programme had been broadcast and stated that she did not ‘think I should have heard so well had I been in the Abbey itself… it was just wonderful and would give millions of people the greatest pleasure.’ This awareness of being part of a larger community intimately linked together by the BBC coverage was also evident in a letter written to Cock by W. V. Towlet of Shortlands, Kent. He ‘suppose[d] nearly every British home listened last evening’ to what was, in his mind, ‘the most inspiring and perfect broadcast we have yet known.’

The allusion Towlett made to the British homes that had listened together to the wedding service is revealing of the way broadcasting created a temporal simultaneity – the sharing of time among a people – which could imaginatively unite a national community. This extended to an international community, the imperialist Colonel R. H. Brand, 1st Baron Brand of Eydon, writing to Cock to express how he thought the programme had been the BBC’s ultimate achievement to date and that it would have brought ‘great happiness to millions of homes.’ Brand continued: ‘had I the doing of these things, I should confer a high honour upon you because you did a great service this day, to the nation and Empire and the Royal House.’

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147 Daily Mirror, 1 December 1934, p.11.
148 BBCWA/R30/3/644/1 - Letter from A. Maudsley to G. Cock, 2 December 1934.
149 Ibid. - Letter from W. V. Towlett to G. Cock, 30 November 1934. N.B. The wedding broadcast had been repeated on the evening of 29 November 1934.
150 Fujitani, Splendid, p.28.
151 BBCWA/R30/3/644/1 - Letter from R. H. Brand to G. Cock, 29 November 1934. Similar sentiment is contained in other letters from the 1934 royal wedding BBC file including those written to Cock by W. A. Street who described it as a ‘masterpiece’, J. H. Riley who suggested it was the ‘most effective broadcast ever’ and C. Smith who noted its ‘historic’ nature.
this one show how the royal wedding was positioned as an international event. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, had encouraged an impression of worldwide participation when he alluded in his sermon to the ‘vast company of witnesses’ made present by the wireless broadcast and suggested that the marriage thus involved the ‘whole Empire as wedding guests’. The Daily Sketch stated that in Lang’s description ‘the impressive ceremonial at once seemed doubly impressive [and] you realised that never in history had there been a wedding quite like this one.’ A month later, George V delivered a Christmas speech to Britain and the empire by radio that had been written for him by Cosmo Lang and, following the pattern established at George and Marina’s wedding, it used a heightened affective language that was designed to foster greater intimacy in the bonds linking Britain to the disparate imperial nations. The broadcast of the 1934 royal wedding initiated a trend towards the communication of royal familialism within Britain and the empire that climaxed with George V’s last two broadcasts at his silver jubilee and on Christmas Day 1935.

The Church of England collaborated with the palace in other ways to ensure the wedding was dignified and would appeal to public sensibilities. The Westminster Abbey service was rigorously choreographed to emphasize the religiosity of the event. Historians have noted how an ‘undemonstrative form of Protestantism’ was a pillar of English national identity in the first half of the twentieth century. The Dean of Westminster and Lang both intervened in the preparations for the wedding to ensure that ‘restraint’ characterized the ceremony. After the initial betrothal in August 1934, discussion arose at the palace regarding what role the Greek Orthodox Church would play in the Westminster Abbey wedding service, as this was Marina’s religion.

152 Daily Sketch, 30 November 1934, p.11.
153 See Chapter Two.
Queen Mary suggested that a separate Greek ceremony take place in Buckingham Palace’s private chapel out of sight of the media and the public. Lang was in charge of organizing the abbey service and sought advice from his friend, Canon J. A. Douglas. The latter stated that certain ‘absurd’ rituals that took place at Greek wedding services would detract from the grandeur of the abbey service: ‘the whole thing would border on the ridiculous.’ Queen Mary’s recommendation of a separate service was duly adopted and it was held in the palace’s private chapel, involving only the families of the bridal couple. Furthermore, the media were notably silent on the Greek wedding ceremony, offering little commentary as to its ‘mysterious’ content.

The way the abbey service was presented to the public by film and wireless was also designed to maintain the dignity of the scene. Gerald Cock had to emphasize to abbey officials that the microphones used to broadcast the service would not obtrude on the vision of the ceremony for the abbey audience. He also had to explain that the BBC did not want to broadcast an on-going commentary of the wedding ceremony as it played out, which could interfere with the religious ambience. There was also great consternation among palace and abbey officials about the potential recording of the broadcast of the service. For the previous two years, the gramophone company H.M.V. had produced records of George V’s Christmas messages. On learning that H.M.V. proposed to make a gramophone recording of the royal wedding ceremony, courtier Clive Wigram urgently wrote to Dean Foxley Norris asking him to stop it. Although this issue was resolved amicably with H.M.V. withdrawing, Universal News recorded the section of the BBC broadcast of the ceremony in which the couple exchanged their wedding vows and played this audio over still photos of the abbey.

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155 LPL/Lang/129/311-328.
156 BBCWA/R30/3/644/1 - Memo from Ralph Murray to the News Editor, 25 October 1934.
158 WAL/WAM/OC/2/3 - Letter from Clive Wigram to Dean Foxley Norris, 19 November 1934; Letter from Mr W. Streeton of H.M.V. to Sir E. Knapp-Fisher, 23 November 1934.
service in its newsreel coverage, presenting it as the ‘biggest scoop for years.’ This recording violated the express wishes of Norris who had rejected a formal application to record the transmission from Gaumont British News. The dean wrote to the editor of Universal News threatening him with legal action if he did not oversee the deletion of the offending soundtrack from newsreels that had been distributed to cinemas, and Norris imposed a ban on the film company’s access to future events in the abbey.\footnote{Ibid. - Photo of the advert for the Universal News newsreel in the Daily Film Renter, 1 December 1934.}

The restrictions that abbey and palace officials imposed on the media reveal the concerted efforts to maintain the dignity of the marriage ceremony in spite of the innovative forms of intimate exposure that had typified George and Marina’s romance up until their wedding day. These controls reveal how seriously the crown and church took their close, shared role of spiritual and moral leadership. It is also telling that the palace chose two cameramen to photograph the wedding service in the strict style of the images taken at Prince Albert and Princess Mary’s weddings a decade earlier.\footnote{Ibid. - Letter from F. Norris to C. R. Snape, Editor of Universal Talking News, 1 December 1934.}

In the resulting photographs, George and Marina can be seen stood at a distance up the aisle facing towards Archbishop Lang with their backs to the viewer (Figure 1.12). By refraining from presenting close-up images of the couple’s facial expressions – which would inevitably highlight the human emotions of the scenes – these photos preserved the sanctity of the religious pact the couple were making in front of God’s representative. Many of Lang’s friends and associates wrote to him after the wedding commending his address and the BBC broadcast in general. These correspondents described how he had balanced the ‘ceremonial and intimate’ aspects of the service and praised the ‘dignity and simplicity’ of the occasion.\footnote{Ibid. - Letter from Sir E. Knapp-Fisher to F. Norris, 4 November 1934.} It seems that, in spite of initial official concerns about the pitfalls of broadcasting the wedding ceremony, the

\footnote{LPL/Lang/191/160-173.}
careful planning by church and palace eased the transition from a private cloistered event to a public communal occasion.

3. The ‘happy land’ of Britain and ‘the shadow over Europe’

The vision of mass national cohesion orchestrated by the media and palace around the focal point of the royal family equalled the scale and efficiency of the political theatre of the interwar dictators. As with the image of a German national community fostered by Hitler and the National Socialists at the Nuremburg Party Rallies in the 1930s, the 1934 royal wedding witnessed courtiers and the media collaborating with proficiency

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163 Daily Express, 11 October 1934, p.12.
to produce a vision of a British public united in adulation of the House of Windsor.\footnote{H.-U. Thamer, ‘The Orchestration of the National Community: The Nuremberg Party Rallies of the NSDAP’, in G. Berghaus (ed.), Fascism and Theatre: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925-1945 (Oxford, 1996), pp.172-190.} George and Marina’s wedding was also projected to sharply contrast with the political disorder in Europe in the last months of 1934. On 9 October, fears about a disruption to peace on the continent suddenly escalated.\footnote{The Daily Mirror (10 October 1934, p.12) speculated ‘Is this another 1914?’ Meanwhile, The Times (10 October 1934, p.16) described how ‘the Marseilles crime’ would ‘effect peace in Europe’.} A Bulgarian radical assassinated the King of Yugoslavia, Alexander I, during a French diplomatic mission in Marseilles. The monarch had been working towards a Slavic-Latin pact with the French foreign minister, Louis Barthou, to strengthen the ‘Little Entente’ and unite southern Europe against Hitlerism. The men were sat in a carriage together processing along the streets of the southern French city when the gunman shot them at point blank range. The king was killed instantly, the newsreel cameras famously capturing the moment of his death, while the French minister later died of his wounds.\footnote{For example, see Gaumont British News, ‘Assassination’, 11 October 1934. The showing of these scenes led to considerable public debate about the role of censorship in newsreels.} Only a month earlier, George and Marina had been at Alexander’s home in Bled after their engagement. The princess was a cousin to the Yugoslavian monarch and her brother-in-law, Prince Paul, succeeded to the throne as regent because Alexander’s son, Peter II, was still a minor. Talks took place over whether the royal wedding should be postponed given Marina’s close family links, but it was decided that plans were too far advanced to abandon. However, George and Marina’s love story took on a new dynamic in the media as a result of the assassination. Their romance was presented as signifying the British dynasty’s vitality and its stabilizing effect in national political life, contrasting vividly with the chaos that seemed to reign in Europe.

The \textit{Daily Express} examined the distinction between British political stability and the turbulent events after Alexander’s death in an article on the shooting which
referred to it as ‘the shadow over Europe’. The report compared the ‘outrage’ in France and Yugoslavia with the ‘happy land’ of Britain, the monarchy acting as ‘the keystone for the structure of government which keeps peace for 450,000,000 folks, ensuring order and rule of law over a quarter of the globe.’ According to this view, the British royal family represented the liberty of their subjects and were an essential component in the nation’s and empire’s solidarity. Historians have acknowledged how the monarchy appeared as a symbol of liberty in this period, contrasting with the ‘vulgarities of fascism’. George and Marina’s romance became a crucial symbol, epitomizing the liberal narrative of British national stability: according to the media, their love had formed freely through choice and seemed based on strong emotional affection. This vision swelled when, as the representative of his father, Prince George travelled to Belgrade and met Marina to attend Alexander’s funeral. The *Daily Mirror* described the lovers’ reunion as a tonic to the sombre atmosphere in the Yugoslavian capital: ‘The Duke and Princess kissed affectionately. The princess made no attempt to conceal her joy at seeing her fiancée. The Duke and Princess, both wearing deep mourning, drove away together.’ Hence, the 1934 royal romance was presented as a sign of national optimism and future prosperity, vividly diverging from an image of European politics built on bloodshed and disorder.

This image of the liberal, beneficent British monarchy as channelled through George and Marina’s love story was also popularized through visual juxtapositions used by the press to create a symbolic contrast with the threat of German rearmament. From the couple’s betrothal to their wedding day, newspapers presented articles that celebrated the royal love story next to reports on Hitler’s militarization of German air

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168 Also see *Daily Express*, 10 October 1934, p.4.
170 *Daily Mirror*, 15 October 1934, p.3.
power. The day before their wedding, the *News Chronicle*’s front-page was split between two reports titled ‘All-Night Wait on the Wedding Route’ and ‘Mr Baldwin’s Air Warning to Berlin.’ Equally, the headlines on the *Express*’s cover were ‘German Arms: Surprise Move’ and ‘Royal Bride Greets 800 Guests’ (Figure 1.13). Neither is it a coincidence that, on the day after the wedding was reported, the *Mirror* gave up its entire front-page to a story on Hitler and the crisis in European political diplomacy, instantly dispelling the happiness of wedding week with a bleak reminder to readers of the growing menace of fascism on the continent. It also published letters written by readers in a section titled ‘Monarchy’. This correspondence compared kingship with dictatorship and included a letter from P. F. Riley of Warwick Gardens, which stated that ‘the greatest advantage of monarchy to any country is that the throne stands above Party. No newly-raised up dictator, however able, can command the respect due to Kingship.’ Meanwhile, a letter from ‘S.T.’ noted that ‘a dictatorship obviously doesn’t go with a monarchy. If proof is wanted – look at the Dictator-run countries of Europe today.’ Both writers criticized dictatorship as an inferior form of political governance to constitutional monarchy. In particular, Riley suggested that kingship was preferential as it was non-partisan, showing how the family monarchy had helped create a depoliticized public image through the projection of intimacy at events like the 1934 royal wedding.

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171 For an early example, see *Daily Mirror*, 17 September 1934, p.1.
173 *Daily Mirror*, 1 December 1934, p.11.
The British media also fashioned the 1934 royal romance to emphasize how the House of Windsor was the last remaining great European royal family. Although the nineteenth-century ‘royal cosmopolitanism’ that had linked Europe’s largest dynasties through informal political unions before the First World War disappeared as a result of the conflict, the 1934 royal wedding witnessed a reinvigoration of this transnational culture in a different guise. Newspapers and newsreels devoted extensive coverage to the many visiting foreign royals who attended the wedding and this placed Britain at the centre of an alternate European political network to rival that which had sprung up around fascism on the continent. The News of the World printed a special itinerary that listed when and where all of the foreign dignitaries were arriving and the Sunday Pictorial proclaimed it ‘the greatest gathering of crowned heads in London since the [1911] Coronation.’ More than seventy royal guests attended George and Marina’s wedding, but the press focused on a handful of dignitaries from the most prominent European houses, including the sovereigns of Norway and Denmark. This emphasis accorded with the official order of precedence given to foreign royalties by George V before the royal wedding: the Kings of Norway and Denmark topped his list and were followed by King George of the Hellenes, Prince Nicholas of Greece, Prince Paul

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who was Regent of Yugoslavia and then Prince Valdemar of Denmark. After these followed a line of more minor sovereigns and princes from Belgium, Holland, Spain and Russia, to name a few. The British media’s attention on the crowned heads from Scandinavia and Balkans and the highly publicized signing of George and Marina’s wedding register by these sovereigns stimulated a new style of royal cosmopolitanism that was rooted in liberal democratic monarchism. The British crown represented the hub of this network of monarchies, symbolizing a bulwark against European political disorder, and this was vividly illustrated in the family trees of the bridal couple which firmly placed George and Marina at the centre of this extensive continental system.

Although the 1934 royal wedding service was famously broadcast by radio to the empire, the event did not have the imperial character of George V’s silver jubilee or George VI’s coronation in 1937. Indeed, when the imperial nations sent messages of congratulations to the king and George and Marina following the announcement of their betrothal, most enquired whether they would be expected to send representatives to Britain for the wedding. They were informed by civil servants at the Foreign Office that ‘the foreign royal personages coming to the wedding are mostly relations of the royal family’, and that representatives were thus unnecessary. While this reluctance to turn the wedding into an imperial themed spectacle may be explained in relation to the potential costs incurred by such an event, it may also have been because palace officials sought to retain the European appeal of the event amidst concerns about the increasingly unsettled situation on the continent. This European emphasis was discernible from George V’s letter of thanks to Cosmo Lang for his direction of the wedding ceremony. The king noted he would ‘never forget that beautiful service in the abbey, so simple and yet so dignified, which greatly impressed the foreigners and

178 For example, see Daily Sketch 29 November 1934, p.16; Daily Mirror, 30 November 1934, p.27.
179 NA/FO/141/592/8.
indeed all that were present.\textsuperscript{180} The emphasis that the king placed on impressing his foreign guests suggests that he thought it was important that the ceremony had this effect, instilling in members of other dynasties a high regard for the British monarchy. Having described how deeply he and his family valued the ‘love and appreciation’ that the crowds in the streets and ‘especially the one outside this Palace’ showed for him and his kin, he went onto state how it had been the monarchy and church’s aim to foster social cohesion in Britain:

The Prime Minister and Jim Thomas both came up to me after the breakfast and said, this is a great day for England! If only the politicians would give up their party quarrels and would rally round and support the National Government, what could one not do in this country. We have done our best, it is now for the country to do the same.\textsuperscript{181}

The king stressed that he and Lang had ‘done [their] best’ to ease social tensions and that it was now up to other politicians to support the National Government, of which Ramsay MacDonald and Thomas were part, in order to further the nation’s recovery. The king seemed to have a clear vision of how the 1934 royal wedding could improve the nation’s fortunes and enhance his family’s role as a relevant public institution in the eyes of both ordinary British people and other royalties from abroad. The full extent of George and Lang’s shared aptitude for producing the popular image of the British monarchy would again be demonstrated just three weeks later in his annual Christmas radio broadcast.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The contemporary of George and Marina, journalist Kingsley Martin, emphasized the key role of the British mass media in stimulating interest in the 1934 royal wedding. He judged that the entire episode was ‘journalistically overdone’ and only of ‘passing

\textsuperscript{180} LPL/Lang/318 – ‘Royal Correspondence 1923-45’.
\textsuperscript{181} N.B. The king’s own emphasis on ‘We’ by underlining.
interest’ compared with the ‘strong and widespread’ feelings of public affection and reverence for George V in his silver jubilee year. As editor of the left-leaning *New Statesman*, Martin criticized what he deemed the irrational popularization of the royal family, detecting in the media’s coverage of the monarchy a similar kind of mass hysteria to that which had manifested in Nazi Germany around Hitler. There is little reason to doubt Martin’s belief that the media coverage of George and Marina’s wedding exceeded popular expectations in the scale and range of publicity; or that the different sections of the media helped choreograph the kind of vision of a population drawn together by the magnetic force of kingship that so troubled him. As this chapter has demonstrated, newspapers, newsreels and broadcasters presented the 1934 royal wedding using innovative methods to make the monarchy appear more accessible and more admired than ever before. George and Marina’s love story correlated with the emergent culture of companionate marriage that stressed mutual emotional fulfilment in private life. In this way, the couple’s domesticity corresponded more closely with that of normal British people, who were thus better positioned to empathize with their rulers. Equally, the lovers became known for their glamour and fashionability, which set them alongside popular film stars of the period and the English society set. Like the Prince of Wales, George and Marina helped reconfigure the kind of celebrity status associated with monarchy in this period, simultaneously exemplifying intimate forms of private life but equally distinguished by their unique modernity and the mass media’s overwhelming interest in their activities.

George and Marina proved more willing than other royals to court new forms of media exposure with their first-hand interviews, the princess’s waving, and the

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onscreen kiss all crystallizing a new royal public style that was much more intimate in character. This enhanced royal emotional expression tallied with a broader feminine human-interest news genre and popular fictional forms of romance from between the wars. But at the same time, aided by palace courtiers, the media used the wedding to generate an image of a British nation that was not separated along gender or class lines. Through the broadcast of the marriage service and in the descriptions and visual images of the vast crowds that gathered in London for the event, the media and palace sought to create a sense of social cohesion and national community around the focal point of the lovers. And the media created a participatory vision of the political sphere by integrating working-class voices into public discourse, enhancing the appearance of the nation’s democratic political character. Some people reacted very positively to these developments, acknowledging in personal testimonies a heightened awareness of a national community created through the temporal simultaneity of the broadcast of the wedding ceremony. Equally, letter writers stressed how the British constitutional system was preferential to the forms of dictatorship that had manifested in Europe, which were fast becoming a cause of concern in the media in late 1934.

Ultimately, in spite of the hyperbole and overexcitement that characterized the media coverage of the romance, the royal wedding set in motion a course of events that were engineered by the media, the palace and the church to try and invigorate the royal family’s role as the central beacon around which the British national community was evolving. George and Marina’s marriage was a key moment in the development of constitutional monarchy, signifying more powerfully than ever before how officials and news editors could mobilize royal emotional expression to encourage members of the public to personally identify with the House of Windsor. The 1935 silver jubilee was the next stepping-stone in this series of stage-crafted spectacles that placed royal
intimacy on display to bind together a nation of diverse peoples who could empathize
with the protagonists of the ‘family monarchy’.
Chapter 2

‘A Man We Understand’: George V, BBC Radio and the Interwar Self Within

In the fourteen months after George and Marina’s wedding, the monarchy increased its intimate presence in Britain in an attempt to foster a sense of national community among the population through personal identification with the domesticity of the royal family. As well as the annual Christmas broadcasts delivered by George V, his third son, Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester, married in 1935, and the summer witnessed widespread celebrations in honour of the monarch’s silver jubilee. At the end of the official day of jubilee commemoration on 6 May 1935, the king appeared alongside his consort, Queen Mary, on the floodlit balcony of Buckingham Palace to return the waves of the cheering crowds which assembled below them. The journalist Kingsley Martin judged that the jubilee generated public affection for the sovereign and that his death in January 1936 was subsequently met with ‘emotion’ of a ‘peculiarly personal character’.

As part of the silver jubilee week programme, the king and queen were also driven by car around some of London’s poorest districts and, according to the monarch’s official biographer, met with an ecstatic reception wherever they went. To explain the ‘authenticity of this emotion’ and the purported belief of the ‘populace’ that George V was a ‘friend whom they had known for all their adult lives’, Harold Nicolson claimed that the king’s broadcasts to listeners in Britain and the empire had transformed an ‘unreal and incredible personage’ into a ‘human voice – intimate and

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1 Daily Mirror, 7 May 1935, p.7.
2 George V’s third son, Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester, was married on 6 November 1935 to Lady Alice Montagu-Douglas-Scott, daughter of the Duke of Buccleuch. The wedding had been planned as a large state occasion like that of George and Marina a year earlier; but owing to the sudden death of the bride’s father weeks before the marriage, it was moved to the private chapel at Buckingham Palace. Although the 1935 royal wedding was much less public than George and Marina’s wedding, the couple still enjoyed a short procession through the streets of London and a balcony appearance at which they waved to the crowds. See C. Warwick, Two Centuries of Royal Weddings (Worthing, 1980), pp.55-57.
3 Daily Express, 7 May 1935, p.1. N.B. Following the example set by Princess Marina in the previous year, this seems to have been the first occasion on which the monarchs waved to their subjects, the Express noting how Queen Mary did a ‘strange and unusual thing’ by ‘outstretch[ing] her arms, so that all might see that she was real and human.’
paternal – speaking to them in their own living-rooms, speaking to them from a box on the table between the sewing machine and the mug.\textsuperscript{5} Whilst inevitably wary of the biographer’s hyperbole, this chapter analyzes the changes in the emotional register of the king’s broadcasts to argue that they were designed to strengthen the empathetic bonds that connected him to his people. Cosmo Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury, became royal speechwriter in 1934 and introduced innovative emotional expression to the sovereign’s broadcasts, promulgating an image of George V in which his private self was closely associated with the personal lives of his subjects. To begin assessing the impact of the messages, this chapter also examines a set of school essays written by adolescent boys about George V which include descriptions of how broadcasting enhanced his personal image.

Philip Williamson has offered the fullest analysis to date of how royal public language changed during George V’s reign. As well as recording how it became ‘less elevated’, he has argued that it increasingly focused on a ‘well recognised vocabulary and set of messages’ that were repeatedly emphasized: constitutional progress, social cohesion, religiosity, empire and the self-denying sacrifice made by royal persons in the course of their national duty.\textsuperscript{6} While Williamson recognized that Lang scripted the king’s 1934 and 1935 Christmas messages as well as his silver jubilee broadcast, he did not discuss how the archbishop changed the emotional register of the monarch’s public rhetoric. Again, without identifying Lang’s key influence, Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff have discussed how the ‘stiff and formal’ style of the 1932 and 1933 broadcasts yielded to a more ‘simple, direct and personal’ mode of address to listeners who were, in turn, presented ‘as individuals and friends’ in the later messages.\textsuperscript{7} They

\textsuperscript{5} H. Nicolson, \textit{King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign} (London, 1952), pp.524-6.
have also noted how the king ‘spoke of his own family as familiar [to listeners]… of [his] personal feelings [and] of spontaneous bonds of affection which linked himself and his family to his people.’ Scannell and Cardiff have claimed that George V’s final broadcast on Christmas Day 1935 was ‘the first fully to deploy an interpersonal style.’ This chapter reveals Lang’s crucial role for the first time and shows how he personalized the king’s mode of address in 1934, drawing on themes from the earlier broadcasts. In accordance with broader shifts in radio culture, George V’s messages evolved between 1932 and 1935 to incorporate a more informal language which was designed to heighten the affective bond that linked listeners to him.

Split into three sections, the first part of this chapter presents a contextualized reading of the original drafts of the royal broadcasts written by Cosmo Lang, which are located in the archbishop’s papers at Lambeth Palace Library, to highlight three key changes that he introduced to George V’s public language. First, Lang’s most significant innovation was to draw attention to other members of the royal family to emphasize how the monarch and his listeners shared a common association with the domesticity of the House of Windsor. At a time when British selfhood was defined by a widening gulf between public and private modes of self-fashioning, Lang’s focus on the king’s family seemed to present listeners with authentic insight into the monarch’s personal life and interiorized self. The archbishop increased this familiarity between king and listeners through his second innovation, initiating a more informal and direct manner of communication between George V and his subjects that encouraged public

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8 Ibid, p.283.
9 Ibid.
loyalty to the crown through identification with a familiar monarch. The third change that Lang made to the king’s rhetoric was to develop a theme from earlier broadcasts that stressed how monarch and subjects were united through a mutual affection, which was made more emotionally powerful by the archbishop’s intimate style. The overall effect of these changes was to energize the new social space created by broadcasting which merged national and domestic identities, invigorating what historian of radio Jason Loviglio has called an ‘intimate public’.

Under Lang’s authorship, George V’s broadcasts invited his listeners to conceive of themselves in relation to an imagined national community linked together by the simultaneity of radio listening around the focal point of the king as head of a real and imagined family. As this first section also shows, palace officials responded positively to the archbishop’s innovations, adopting his personalized style in their subsequent redrafts of his messages.

The second section of this chapter examines how the new emotional language introduced by Lang infused Britain’s imperial bonds with powerful affective meaning. Responding to the BBC’s aim to project Christmas as a time of imperial reunion, the first message that the archbishop wrote for the king forcefully rebranded the empire as a family of nations and was the culminating message in a relay of seasonal greetings from British and imperial representatives. Since the late nineteenth century, a cult of monarchy had underpinned the empire with the sovereign recognized as head of the imperial state. The monarch’s power was manifested through a system of symbolic governance based on hierarchical ceremonial display, powerfully demonstrated during royal tours led by the sovereign or members of his or her family.

13 D. Cannadine, Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire (Oxford, 2002), esp. pp.21-2 and Ch.8; C. Kaul, ‘Monarchical Display and the Politics of Empire: Princes of Wales and India, 1870-1920s’,
broadcasts and the reciprocal messages of greeting from imperial subjects around the
world enhanced the image of the constitutional monarch as the personal link binding
diverse peoples together. The vision of an empire connected in close union around the
focal point of the familial king softened the image of British imperialism, presenting
listeners with a peaceful organization of nations that seemed committed to upholding
international order in spite of the worsening political situation in Europe. This pacific
imagery was augmented by George V’s special focus on children in his messages – he
propagated a kind, grandfatherly persona to emphasize that patriotic imperial service
awaited his younger listeners.

The final section offers the first analysis of a selection of school essays which
reveal how some British children thought about George V’s public image. Although
essays are complex forms of evidence, it is possible to use them to examine subjective
experience. The essays are limited to a youthful, middle-class male perspective, but
they offer unique insight into the views reproduced within the classroom environment
by this stratum of society in a period otherwise notable for the dearth of available
evidence on public attitudes to George V and his family. Many of the boys presented
the king as a familiar national figurehead, portraying his attributes using an intimate
language to characterize their empathetic link to him. And, significantly, several boys
acknowledged how the monarch’s broadcasts had popularized his informal persona,
enabling them to identify with him.


14 For a positive approach to the use of school essays as historical evidence see J. Greenhalgh, “‘Till We Hear the Last All Clear’: Gender and the Presentation of Self in Young Girls’ Writing about the Bombing of Hull during the Second World War”, Gender & History 26:1 (2014), pp.167-83.
1. ‘My very dear people’: interwar radio culture and royal intimacy

Historians have tended to presume that BBC radio, as with new types of visual media, increased the monarchy’s popular status by substituting the ‘magic of distance’ with the ‘magic of familiarity’. While broadcasting certainly brought royalty closer to the public, the way royal voices were projected across the radio airwaves and received by British listeners requires further examination. In his recent analysis of the impact of the abdication crisis, Frank Mort has noted how the British public favoured radio as a more reliable medium of communication over ‘the rumour mill of press journalism’, after the news broke that Edward VIII might abandon the throne. Mort has attributed this privileging of wireless as a source of information to its ‘stronger resonances of authenticity’ and the direct way speakers communicated with listeners. Historians have identified how politicians who used radio as a tool for campaigning between the wars similarly benefitted from the direct channel it provided to the electorate and the sense of verisimilitude it conveyed. The Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, was the undisputed master of the airwaves in Britain. Stuart Ball has noted how, following the advice of BBC Director-General, John Reith, the Conservative leader pioneered a new kind of studio talk that he ‘delivered as though he was sitting in the living room with his listeners’ and that this ‘added to his established image of being an honest and sincere figure without artifice or trickery.’ Indeed, Jon Lawrence has acknowledged that many of the voters who wrote to Baldwin expressed a personal trust in him that related to the feeling that he had spoken directly to them in their homes.

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15 Quotation from George V’s silver jubilee broadcast, reproduced in the Daily Express, 7 May 1935, p.1.
19 J. Lawrence, Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics From Hogarth to Blair (Oxford, 2009), pp.96-9. Also see P. Williamson, Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values
across the Atlantic, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was using radio to similar effect: Loviglio has suggested that his famous ‘fireside chats’ fostered a politically conscious American public who backed his ‘New Deal’ social programme.\textsuperscript{20} Notably, Loviglio has argued that Roosevelt’s use of radio created an ‘intimate public’ that blurred the traditional division separating the public and private sphere by suffusing his listeners’ personal space and identities with a sense of national meaning and belonging.\textsuperscript{21}

Between 1932 and 1935, King George V’s radio messages increased in candour, creating an emotional authenticity equal to that of Baldwin to generate an ‘intimate public’ comprised of listeners who were encouraged to empathize with the monarch and his ambition to unite his people. It took several years of coercion from John Reith and palace courtiers to convince the king to deliver a message to listeners by radio. When at last he agreed, British newspapers welcomed the news stressing that it would be the first occasion on which he would speak ‘directly’ to his people, noting also that he possessed ‘one of the best “wireless voices” in the world.’\textsuperscript{22} Before even delivering his first broadcast, the king’s words were thus ascribed extraordinary significance and his voice was presented as uniquely engaging in tone and unmediated in its intimacy, the \textit{Daily Express} even referring to the message as a ‘heart-to-heart Christmas talk’.\textsuperscript{23}

Novelist and poet Rudyard Kipling wrote George V’s 1932 and 1933 Christmas messages; in both broadcasts he sought to perpetuate an image of a monarch in open conversation with his subjects.\textsuperscript{24} The prevailing theme in both Kipling messages was how to overcome the socioeconomic crisis of these years, with the king reassuring his

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\textsuperscript{20} Loviglio, \textit{Radio’s}, p.xiv and Ch.1.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Daily Express}, 25 November 1932, p.1
\textsuperscript{24} Williamson, ‘The Monarchy’, p.228.
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listeners that through cooperation and goodwill, Britain and the empire would prevail over their troubles. For example, in his 1932 message, George V described how ‘the work to which we are all equally bound is to arrive at a reasoned tranquillity within our borders, to regain prosperity without self-seeking, and to carry with us those whom the burden of the past years has disheartened or overborne.’

Kipling used relatively elaborate phrases like this to convey gravitas and moral seriousness through the king. The press afterwards praised the monarch’s ‘grave and measured delivery’ and his ‘beautifully modulated English’, yet Kipling’s messages were overly ornate and lacked the direct emotional codes that would come to typify Cosmo Lang’s later messages.

The archbishop was a trusted friend as well as spiritual counsellor to George V, often offering him advice on how the monarchy could strengthen its popular appeal. Lang’s role as choreographer of George and Marina’s wedding service in November 1934, and his diligence in preserving the dignity of the ceremonial, showed he was in touch with the palace’s concerns to maintain and increase the royal family’s unifying position in Britain and the empire, marking him out as a natural successor to Kipling as the king’s speechwriter. The first crucial innovation that the archbishop introduced to George V’s broadcasts was to include in them references to other members of the House of Windsor.

Lang instigated this focus on family in an allusion to George and Marina’s recent wedding, the king stating how ‘the Queen and I were deeply moved’

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26 *Daily Mirror*, 27 November 1933, p.5; *Daily Express*, 27 November 1933, p.15.
27 Robert Beaken’s recent biography of Lang has shed new light on his extensive impact on the public image of the monarchy. Examining previously unseen correspondence between the archbishop and the House of Windsor, Beaken has shown how Lang, the royal family and the palace shared the belief that the monarchy had a crucial unifying role to play in national life. Beaken has also revealed how Lang sought to improve the public standing of the monarchy long before he acceded to the diocese of Canterbury in 1928. In 1911, as Archbishop of York, he urged the recently crowned George V to spend more time with his subjects in their ‘towns, villages and workshops’, forsaking the pomp and circumstance which usually publicly attended the royal family. Beaken has thus attributed the first modern royal tour of Britain in 1912 to Lang’s prompt. See R. Beaken, *Cosmo Lang: Archbishop in War and Crisis* (London, 2012), esp. Ch. 4 and 5.
by the public response ‘a month ago at the marriage of our dear son and daughter.’

In this way, Lang presented royal family life as a common point of reference shared by the monarch and his listeners. The king’s 1935 messages, which Lang also drafted, heightened the image of a British people united in their regard for royal domesticity. The monarch’s silver jubilee broadcast included a special commendation of the Prince of Wales as ‘my dear son’, while his Christmas message described how the ‘personal link’ that connected sovereign to subjects was reinforced by a mutual appreciation of royal family life and its ‘common joys and sorrows’.  

Whoever it was at the palace that read Lang’s draft messages, be it a courtier or the king himself, seems to have responded very positively to this emphasis on family, editing the drafts to accentuate this focus. Without cross-referencing with files from the Royal Archives, it is difficult to identify who exactly implemented these changes. However, copies of the amended drafts were returned to the archbishop at Lambeth. The palace’s substitutions to part of his 1935 Christmas message are presented below in brackets, with Lang’s original words struck out:

It is this personal link between King (me) and (my) People which I value more than I can say. It binds us together in all our common joys and sorrows, as when this year you showed your happiness in the marriage of another (my) son, and your sympathy in the death of a (my) beloved sister. I feel it (this link) now as I speak to you.  

The intimacy of the king’s references to the marriage of his son, Prince Henry, and the death of his ‘beloved sister’, Princess Victoria, was enhanced by the substitution of the word ‘my’ into Lang’s original draft message, generating a stronger impression of affective attachment to the family members discussed. Similarly, the substitution of ‘King’ for ‘me’ and the inclusion of the word ‘my’ in front of ‘People’ increased the depth of emotional meaning ascribed by George V to the ‘personal link’ between him

30 LPL/Lang/318/33-6 and 40-3.
31 LPL/Lang/318/40-3.
and his listeners, all of whom he singled out using the word ‘you’ in the last sentence to momentarily bind them to him in common acknowledgement of a British culture of domesticity, exemplified by the House of Windsor. The closing lines of the broadcast reinforced this vision of collective domesticity. For the first time, the king extended festive greetings to listeners from his household, which created a vision of a family grouped around him:

Once again as I close I send to you all, and not least to the children who may be listening to me, my truest Christmas wishes, and those of my dear wife, my children and grandchildren who are with me today. I add a heartfelt prayer that, wherever you are, God may bless and keep you always.32

Here, Lang’s words heightened George V’s persona as paterfamilias of the House of Windsor, symbolically conflating his position as constitutional sovereign with his role as husband, father and grandfather.

Lang’s focus on family and home corresponded with wider changes in British radio culture which created stronger resonances of verisimilitude between speaker and listener. The conversational mode of address for which Baldwin was renowned was emulated by other popular broadcasters, who developed rhetorical styles that drew on the language of the domestic space of listeners’ homes to connect more intimately with them.33 Maggie Andrews has studied the programmes of the BBC’s broadcasting gardener, C. H. Middleton, better known as ‘Mr. Middleton’, who was celebrated for his ability to convey a reassuringly familiar image across the airwaves, often referring to his ‘homely surroundings’ to link an image of his own domestic situation to that of his audience.34 At a time when the private sphere of home was increasingly perceived as the key locus for self-actualization, this domestic imagery seemed to offer listeners

32 Ibid.
access to the ‘real’ personality of the speaker. Cosmo Lang’s attention to the king’s domesticity therefore presented listeners with what appeared to be behind-the-scenes insights into the sovereign’s private life.

Kipling had included in his 1932 Christmas message a reference to how George V spoke ‘from my home and from my heart to you all’, and this phrase was positively received by the *Daily Mirror* for the way that it enhanced the impression that the king was speaking ‘personally’ from the ‘privacy of his Sandringham Home’ to listeners. However, Kipling’s message the following year made no further allusion to the king’s home life. Lang revived an image of the private space of the king’s home with which listeners might identify in his 1934 broadcast: ‘As I sit in my own home I am thinking of the great multitudes who are listening to my voice whether they be in British homes or in far off regions of the world.’ These words summoned an image of George V sat at Sandringham contemplating his relationship with his people, and Lang invoked the same vision of British homes joined around the domesticity of the royal family in his 1935 messages.

The palace appears to have recognized some benefit in promoting this image of the king at home as well because in 1934 the press was permitted to photograph George V sitting at his desk in front of an encased microphone, apparently talking to his people (Figure 2.1). Newspapers published the photo to communicate informality: the king was dressed in a lounge suit and in the background was a fireplace, providing readers with a familiar representation of the monarch’s domesticity to complement the

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36 *Daily Mirror*, 27 December 1932, pp.3 and 11.
portrayals of home in his broadcasts and in other press descriptions.\textsuperscript{38} Ten days before George V’s first broadcast in 1932, the king’s assistant private secretary, Alexander Hardinge, wrote to the Head of Outside Broadcasts, Gerald Cock, to state that, while the sovereign did not mind the BBC photographing ‘the apparatus in position in the room where the King will broadcast on Christmas Day’, the picture must be ‘retained for the private use of the BBC only, and… not given to the Press in any form.’\textsuperscript{39} Thus, the king took exception to the publication of photographs of the microphone through which he would broadcast in 1932. Just two years later, however, he proved ready to pose in front of it for the cameras. This change in official attitude should be ascribed to the way the palace and Lang constructed an intimate image of a king who seemed happy to communicate with his subjects in an attempt to unite them around a shared vision of British home life.

![Figure 2.1. George V at the microphone. Taken by a photographer from The Times in 1934.](image)

Lang’s second major innovation as royal speechwriter was to encourage a more personal connection between sovereign and listeners through the implementation of a

\textsuperscript{38} For example, see Daily Mirror, 24 December 1934, p.17; Daily Mirror, 27 December 1935, p.5; The Times, 21 January 1936, p.25. For press descriptions of the king’s domesticity at Sandringham, see Daily Mirror, 23 December 1932, p.3.

\textsuperscript{39} BBCWA/R30 - ‘Outside Broadcasts – Sandringham – General’. Letter from A. Hardinge to G. Cock, 14 December 1934; also see reply from Cock to Hardinge, 23 January 1933.
simpler, more informal rhetoric than that previously used by Kipling. The welcoming opening line of the 1934 Christmas broadcast, penned by the archbishop, established the tone of this candid emotional register: ‘On this Christmas Day I send to all my people everywhere my Christmas greeting.’\textsuperscript{40} This was the first time George V began a message by directly greeting his audience; in previous years, his festive wishes had been reserved for the end of his broadcast. Under Lang’s authorship, the king also referred to his listeners in more familiar terms. In the silver jubilee broadcast, George V addressed listeners as ‘my very dear people’ for the first time.\textsuperscript{41} Lang’s draft of the Christmas message composed later that year shows that he included the same phrase in its opening line: ‘I wish you all, my dear People, a happy Christmas.’ Once again, the palace returned a copy of his draft that included amendments, the word ‘people’ replaced with the word ‘friends’.\textsuperscript{42} Broadcasting on 25 December 1935, the king thus opened his message by delivering his festive greetings to an audience who he affably termed ‘my dear friends’. Following Lang’s lead, the palace thus fostered the king’s connection to his people by producing an image of a familiar sovereign.

The personalization of the language with which the king described his subjects received widespread attention in the popular press. As already indicated, newspapers like the \textit{Express} and \textit{Mirror} interpreted the Kipling broadcasts as providing a unique link between the king and his people. This personal emphasis continued to inform the press coverage of Lang’s messages, newspapers emphasizing the intimate way the monarch characterized his audience. For example, the day after George V gave his silver jubilee broadcast, the \textit{Express} presented as its front-page headline the king’s reference to listeners as ‘my very dear people’ (Figure 2.2).\textsuperscript{43} Similarly, the \textit{Mirror}
précised the sovereign’s 1935 Christmas message with the tagline ‘my dear friends’. In this way, the popular press helped immortalize the image of the benign, personable sovereign, their reports shaped by the rising influence of human-interest journalism which sought to create an empathetic interface between readers and the public figures they read about in newspapers.

Lang also personalized George V’s public language by increasing its inclusive qualities. Kipling had used the words ‘our’ and ‘we’ in his messages in order to align the monarch’s aims with his audience’s sensibilities. For example, in 1932, George V remarked how ‘it may be that our future will lay upon us more than one stern test. Our past will have taught us how to meet it unshaken.’ On ascending to the position of speechwriter, Lang accentuated both the directness with which the king spoke to his listeners and the sense of shared national experience conveyed in his broadcasts. The archbishop constructed a rhetorical framework that oscillated between a highly

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44 Daily Mirror, 27 December 1935, p.5.
46 Quoted in Fleming, Voices, p.11. N.B. My italicized emphasis.
personalized register, in which the monarch regularly referred to himself in the first-
person, and an active register that highlighted how, working together, sovereign and 
subjects would ensure Britain and the empire’s future prosperity. For example, in the 
1934 Christmas broadcast, Lang used the image of a family to create a vision of a 
British and imperial people linked around the king:

The world is still restless and troubled. The clouds are lifting, but we have still 
our own anxieties to meet. I am convinced that if we meet them in the spirit of 
one family we shall overcome them, for then private and party interests will be 
controlled by care for the whole community. It is as members of one family 
that we shall today, and always, remember those other members of it who are 
suffering from sickness or from the lack of work and hope; and we shall be 
ready to do our utmost to befriend them.47

This passage demonstrates how Lang used this personalized vocabulary to punctuate 
George V’s messages to his people, instilling in his sentences a greater sense of action 
between the king and subjects and uniting them under a dictum of collective progress. 
Whereas the meaning contained in Kipling’s longer sentences was often concealed in 
metaphor and symbolism, Lang used more direct, expressive language to produce the 
public image of a king who seemed closely involved in the lives of his people.

The third change Lang made to George V’s royal public language was to dwell 
at much greater length on the mutual bond that ostensibly connected king and people. 
As already noted, in Lang’s messages the monarch symbolically spoke of a ‘personal 
link’ shared by him and his listeners that fused around the idea of a common domestic 
culture exemplified by the family life of the House of Windsor. In the 1932 and 1933 
messages, Kipling had avoided such direct references, but did state that the king’s 
connection to his people was based on a mutual system of support between monarch 
and people. For example, in 1932, George V told his listeners that his ‘life’s aim’ had 
‘been to serve’ his people in order to better their lives, and that their ‘loyalty’ and

47 N.B. My italicized emphasis.
‘confidence’ in him had been his ‘abundant reward’ for this service.\textsuperscript{48} The king thus
mobilized a language that bound sovereign and people together in common enterprise. In Lang’s hands, the idea of mutual support took on more potent emotional meaning. The archbishop merged the ‘personal link’ that fused around the theme of domesticity with a uniquely intimate imagery of a bond between George V and his subjects that was characterized by deep mutual affection.

Lang’s innovation was especially apparent from the 1935 silver jubilee message he prepared for the king. It was much more contemplative in its tone than the Kipling broadcasts and produced an image of George V reflecting on his link to his listeners:

> At the close of this memorable day I must speak to my people everywhere. Yet how can I express what is in my heart? As I passed this morning through cheering multitudes to and from St. Paul’s Cathedral, as I thought there of all that these twenty-five years have brought to me and to my country and my Empire, how could I fail to be most deeply moved? Words cannot express my thoughts and feelings. I can only say to you, my very dear people, that the Queen and I thank you from the depth of our hearts for all the loyalty and – may I say? – the love with which this day and always you have surrounded us. I dedicate myself anew to your service for the years that may still be given to me.\textsuperscript{49}

The introspective register in the opening lines of this broadcast conjured a vision of a contemplative king, brooding on his mood at the end of the silver jubilee celebrations. Though the monarch’s allusion to the sentiment in his ‘heart’ had precursors in earlier messages, his rhetorical discussion of his emotions was unprecedented and conveyed to listeners an image of a king who was able to share his feelings. Then, declaring that he could not put into words his ‘thoughts and feelings’, implying that he was too overwrought to vocalize the level of his emotion, he announced, in Lang’s most direct and intimate linguistic flourish to date, his gratitude to his subjects for the loyalty and, extraordinarily, the love, which they had supposedly shown for him and Queen Mary during their reign together. Kipling had characterized the bond between monarch and

\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in Fleming, \textit{Voices}, p.11.
\textsuperscript{49} LPL/Lang/318/33-6.
people as one based on the public’s ‘loyalty’ to and ‘confidence’ in their king. Lang rebranded this bond as one based on ‘love’, and it was fitting that, having stressed how this relationship between sovereign and people relied on the latter’s provision of emotional sustenance for the former, the monarch emphasized that he would continue, so long as he was able, to fulfil his end of this socio-moral contract, rededicating himself to the service of his people.

This imagery of the sovereign performing his service in return for his subjects’ love was not entirely unique. The royal proclamation of accession and coronation oath that dated back more than three centuries contained phrases that emphasized how the monarch could expect to receive their people’s ‘affection’ in return for dutiful service on behalf of their subjects. What was new was the king’s vocalization of this mutual relationship to the public in a period when this lexicon of affection had deeper, more personal resonance. Under Lang’s influence, the British monarch spoke openly for the first time of the way his people’s affection acted to compensate for his onerous role. George V’s explicit articulation of the unenviable nature of royal service in his final broadcast on Christmas Day 1935 was unique, and it became a theme that was revisited again and again in the public language of his successors:

The year that is passing – the twenty-fifth since my accession – has been to me most memorable. It called forth a spontaneous offering of loyalty – and I may say – of love, which the Queen and I can never forget. How could I fail to note in all the rejoicings not merely respect for the throne, but a warm and generous remembrance of the man himself who, may God help him, has been placed upon it?

The king’s description of his burdensome role, for which he implored God’s help, and his restatement of the ‘love’ that connected his people to him, once again envisaged a mutual bond linking monarch and subjects that was based on affection and support.

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By re-invoking the word ‘love’, Lang normalized this highly expressive vocabulary. This language encouraged British listeners to conceive of their relationship with the king through informal forms of devotion, and imagine themselves as part of a national community joined in common emotional identification with the monarch. The theme of collective empathy was reiterated by the *Mirror* in its description of George V as ‘A Man We Understand’, borrowing from Lang’s portrayal of the king in his oration at the jubilee service of commemoration on 6 May 1935 in St. Paul’s Cathedral.\(^{52}\) Never before had the media presented a sovereign in such informal terms.

Lang’s intimate royal public language was well matched in the speaking voice of George V, which also encouraged members of the public to empathize with him. Harold Nicolson suggested that the king had a ‘wonderful voice – strong, emphatic, vibrant, with undertones of sentiment, devoid of all condescension, artifice or pose.’\(^{53}\) Listening back to the broadcasts, it is immediately apparent that the king did, indeed, deliver all of his messages in a measured and rhythmical way, speaking slowly and with precision to his listeners. The king’s other biographer, Kenneth Rose, described his accent as that of an Edwardian country gentleman.\(^{54}\) While his accent would have definitely conveyed his elite status to listeners, his upper-class tones were not deemed out-of-touch in the way those of his granddaughter, Elizabeth, were twenty years on.\(^{55}\) Rather, George V possessed a very human radio voice: afflicted by a bronchial cough, it was noticeably gruff in character and commentators remarked how this enhanced its personal appeal. In 1932, *The Spectator* celebrated the fact that the king’s cough had interrupted the flow of his Christmas broadcast: ‘A King who reads a message into a microphone from a manuscript may be just a King. A King who coughs is a fellow

\(^{52}\) *Daily Mirror*, 7 May 1935, p.7.

\(^{53}\) Nicolson, *KGV*, p.526.

\(^{54}\) Rose, *KGV*, p.394.

human being.' While listeners were almost certainly aware that the king spoke from a script, it does seem likely that his coughing, which was repeated in both of his 1935 messages, added to the sense of spontaneity and personality he communicated over the airwaves. In his last two broadcasts, the monarch also spoke in noticeably quieter and slower tones, conjuring a vision of a more elderly gentleman in conversation with his listeners. In respect of this shift in manner, the special emphasis he placed on his enunciation of the word ‘love’ in both broadcasts conveyed deep emotional meaning. Ultimately, the king’s distinctive mode of address was rooted in intimate expression and a quiet sincerity, which encouraged listeners to empathize with him because of its familiarity. The calmness he communicated over the airwaves contrasted with the loud and aggressive rhetorical displays of the European dictators in the early 1930s.

2. ‘One great family’: intimacy, imperial cohesion and children

Simon Potter has acknowledged how, as the king’s unofficial speechwriter, Kipling sought to communicate through his initial Christmas broadcasts a moment of imperial communion to strengthen the connections between Britain and the empire at a time of international unease prompted by the Great Depression. This vision of imperial union accorded with the BBC’s own ambition to present Christmas Day as a celebration of empire reunion; the corporation worked with the public broadcasting authorities set up in Canada, New Zealand and Australia in the 1930s, to bind the white dominions more closely to Britain after their change in status to self-governing ‘autonomous communities’, as established by the 1931 Statute of Westminster. The BBC’s controller of programmes, Alan Dawnay, considered George V’s broadcasts to be the

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56 Quoted in Fleming, *Voices*, p.9.
57 *Daily Mirror*, 27 December 1934, p.11.
58 Potter, *Broadcasting*, pp.55-64.
‘essential climax and the most important part’ to its empire-themed Christmas Day activities.\(^{59}\)

In the 1933 message, Kipling presented empire using the metaphor of ‘family’ for the first time. The king remarked how it was his ‘privilege to speak directly to all the members of our world-wide family.’\(^{60}\) The vision of a family of different British peoples connected around the focal point of monarchy was not new. Linda Colley has identified how, at the start of the nineteenth century, George III’s golden jubilee was celebrated for its inclusive qualities, the king described as the ‘Father of his People’ who were, in turn, presented as ‘one great family’.\(^{61}\) However, Cosmo Lang drew on Kipling’s example, and put the theme of kinship unambiguously at the centre of his 1934 broadcast, to popularize the notion that the empire was a family.\(^{62}\) He sent the first draft of this message to Clive Wigram, private secretary to the king, for palace approval on 10 December and the courtier replied the following day stating that ‘His Majesty… wishes his warmest thanks conveyed to you for all the personal trouble and thought that you have bestowed upon it. The King has read your draft through once and is quite delighted with your main theme of the Family, of which His Majesty is the Head.’\(^{63}\) Wigram’s response reveals how the archbishop had, following Kipling’s lead, redesigned George V’s image to present him as head of an international family of nations. The symbolism ‘delight[ed]’ the king in its novelty and was immediately converted into a conventional wisdom, Wigram’s words integrating this vision of an imperial family group into the monarch’s constitutional identity. The private secretary informed Lang that ‘when the King has a little more time he will go carefully into

\(^{59}\) BBCWA/R34/862/1 - ‘Royal Family Policy’ - Letter from Alan Dawnay to Clive Wigram, 13 July 1934.

\(^{60}\) Fleming, *Voices*, p.12.


\(^{62}\) LPL/Lang/318/17-20 and 26-7. Lang’s papers include copies of both Kipling messages, suggesting that he used them as a base on which to develop his own ideas.

\(^{63}\) LPL/Lang/318/26-7.
each sentence, and I know you will not mind if His Majesty wishes them shortened a little, as when speaking through the microphone the King prefers short sentences.’

But the archbishop’s draft remained almost unchanged and George V referred to the empire as a family seven separate times as part of his 1934 message, softening the image of British imperialism by infusing it with a domestic imagery which was more broadly characteristic of Lang’s royal public language.

The imagery of the imperial family was quickly popularized. Although he does not identify Lang’s role in the development of this language, Philip Murphy has noted how ‘family’ became a regular motif in royal speeches in this period with the king’s 1934 Christmas message striking a popular chord in presenting the Christian holiday as the ‘Festival of the Family’. The significance of Lang’s position in promoting this theme is discernible from the press reaction to the 1934 message. In an editorial titled ‘One Great Family’, the Mirror remarked that the king’s broadcast ‘became a symbol not only of the Christmas spirit of individual family happiness, but of a worldwide Imperial fraternity.’ Equally, an editorial in The Times, with its strong associations with empire, drew special attention to the way ‘the head of the family’ had spoken to the ‘members of the British family… from his own home.’

Wigram wrote to Lang again in January 1935 to convey George V’s gratitude for the archbishop’s draft, noting it had been ‘acclaimed the most moving message that the King has delivered by wireless to his People.’ As well as receiving very positive reviews in the national press for its focus on family, the 1934 Christmas message was

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64 Ibid.
66 Daily Mirror, 27 December 1934, p.11.
67 The Times, 27 December 1934, p.11.
68 LPL/Lang/318/32.
also commended in readers’ correspondence published by newspapers. The *Express*’s postbag contained a letter from a man in Thames Ditton, Surrey:

To be the father of an empire family, to sound like one, to be constructive, convincing, and to convey the impression of intense sincerity, is surely a task that few living men could undertake with success. In his twenty-five years’ reign the Empire has passed through its greatest crisis, yet King George remains a leader whom everyone can respect and love.\(^69\)

For this correspondent, the intimate rhetoric devised by Lang seems to have amplified the emotional bond connecting him to the king. He used the word ‘father’ to describe his relationship to George V, despite the fact that the king avoided using this word in portraying his link to his people. The palace edited Lang’s 1935 Christmas message to moderate an explicit reference to the king as a paternal figure. The archbishop’s draft included the line ‘my words will be very simple but spoken from the heart like the words of the father of a family speaking to his children (on this family festival of Christmas).’\(^70\) The palace’s excision of Lang’s original depiction of the king as ‘the father of a family speaking to his children’ suggests it was perceived as too direct and, possibly, cloying in its description of the king’s paternal image. It may also have been interpreted as condescending in its vision of the subjective connection between king and people, and was replaced with the allusion to the ‘family festival’, which allowed more imaginative space for listeners to interpret his words for themselves. It was left to other observers to draw attention to the king’s paternal qualities, as Lang did in his jubilee sermon when he suggested George V had become ‘the Father of his people’.\(^71\)

A programme of relayed spoken greetings from across the empire preceded the king’s 1934 Christmas broadcast. These ‘ordinary’, representative voices augmented an image of a British imperial race united around the sovereign’s headship. A *Mirror* editorial noted how these voices ‘clarified and accentuated’ the meaning of empire:

\(^69\) *Daily Express*, 27 December 1934, p.8.
\(^70\) LPL/Lang/318/40.
\(^71\) Quoted in the *Daily Mirror*, 7 May 1935, p.7.
When the obscure shepherd in a Cotswold village can greet the loneliest settler far across the seas, when a Canadian fisherman can tell us of his life, when loyal voices reach us from Britons in the Dominions and natives in South Africa, the meaning of unity has a direct and personal appeal.  

These chains of greetings between imperial subjects had begun before the king’s 1932 Christmas broadcast and, in 1933, incorporated for the first time salutations from specially selected ‘ordinary’ voices from around the empire, presented under the title ‘Absent Friends’. From 1934 onwards, the annual imperial relays were also designed to evoke images of the family culture shared by listeners in different parts of the world in an effort to induce in them a more personalized connection to the king. Referring again to the Cotswold shepherd who spoke in the 1934 broadcast, the *Daily Mail* remarked how his role in the relay was particularly ‘moving’ because, speaking in a ‘typically homely way’, he appealed to his long-lost brother in New Zealand to get in contact with him if, at that point, he was listening to his voice. The broadcast therefore assumed a greater poignancy around this informal image of an actual family reunion, the shepherd then heralding the king’s message by wishing listeners a happy Christmas and bestowing the empire’s blessing on his monarch. Just as the ‘Cockney’ voice from the crowd at George and Marina’s royal wedding was meant to convey to listeners how ordinary British people were intimately bound to the royals and actively participated in the public life of the monarchy, so the shepherd’s voice was used to create an impression of inclusion around the focal-point of the home-loving king.

Deliberately building on Lang’s 1934 descriptions of familial imperialism, the BBC titled its relay of greetings for the king’s final Christmas message in 1935, ‘This

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72 *Daily Mirror*, 27 December 1934, p.11.
73 *Daily Mail*, 8 December 1933, p.11. Also see Potter, *Broadcasting*, p.63.
74 *Daily Mail*, 26 December 1934, p.9.
75 See Chapter One.
Great Family'.

BBC editorial files reveal the special lengths to which broadcasters went in locating ‘representative types’ of voices from across Britain and the empire to provide a range of dialects which, it was believed, would prove ‘very pointed’ when juxtaposed together. Indeed, to accord with the more personalized imagery of family reunion inspired by the 1934 relay, one BBC producer even advocated locating the Cotswold shepherd’s brother in New Zealand to return a message to his family in the mother country. Although the brother could not be found, this did not prevent the theme of family predominating in the series of greetings transmitted across the world on 25 December 1935. Voices were heard from the four home nations, the dominions and India, including those from an ‘industrial home’ in Sheffield, a family in Ottawa, a children’s hospital in Aberdare, Wales, with the final segment from two children in London calling their grandfather who lived in New Zealand.

The familial codes contained in the BBC’s Christmas programmes softened the popular vision of British imperialism in the 1930s. The image of children interacting with their grandfather was one of the most explicit references to the way in which the empire seemed to be built on family connections that stretched over the entire world. In this way, Britain’s imperial heritage was reoriented around a domestic story which tempered the empire’s militaristic legacy. While the media celebrated Kipling’s 1932 and 1933 messages for the way they tied the imperial nations closely together, Lang’s broadcasts were celebrated for the way they presented the empire as an international stabilizing force and as a peaceful community of people united through understanding and shared kinship.

77 Ibid. - Internal Circulating Memo from Felix Felton, 31 July 1935.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid. - Memo circulated by Felix Felton, 17 December 1935.
A backdrop of escalating political tension in Europe enabled the archbishop and the king to present the empire as a pacific influence. Interpreting the 1934 Christmas broadcast as a ‘peace message’, the *Daily Mail* drew special attention to George V’s statement that ‘the clouds are lifting… I am convinced that if we meet our anxieties in the spirit of one family we shall overcome them.’ The article also acknowledged that the Pope and Nazi leaders had made similar ‘fervent appeals in special Christmas messages that the spirit of peace might prevail throughout the world.’ In this context of international anxiety, the idea of the ‘family empire’ allowed George V to present a cozy and personalized view of British and imperial nationalism through reference to his own domestic situation.

The outward virtue of this peaceful vision of imperialism was most palpable in George V’s discussion of the personal bond which he believed connected him and the British Empire’s children. Starting in 1932, the king ended his Christmas broadcasts by either making an individual reference to children or by delivering special festive wishes to the young people listening to him. In his jubilee message, the monarch’s persona as a benign king was explicitly communicated through his direct appeal to his young listeners:

> To the children I would like to send a special message. Let me say this to each of them whom my words may reach: the King is speaking to you. I ask you to remember that in days to come you will be the citizens of a great Empire. As you grow up always keep this thought before you. And when the time comes, be ready and proud to give to your country the service of your work, your mind, and your heart.

Addressing his audience in the most direct register that Lang had fashioned as royal speechwriter, the king presented himself as a kind of senior relative to those children listening to him, stressing his personal connection to them in order to encourage them

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81 *Daily Mail*, 26 December 1934, p.9.
82 LPL/Lang/318/33-6. N.B. Lang’s italicized emphasis and also note that the king placed stress on the word ‘you’ in his broadcast as well. Also see *The Listener*, 30 January 1936, p.196.
to take an active role in the life of the empire. The intimacy of his appeal reveals how he sought to integrate his subjects into the public sphere through their empathetic link to him. Empire was thus redefined in the king’s broadcasts through the creation of a vision of a peaceful union of peoples who were linked to him in a shared respect for home, family and childhood.

3. Schoolboys’ perceptions of George V

The Mass Observation archive houses 512 school essays titled ‘The Finest Person Who Ever Lived’ that were written in late 1937 by middle-class boys aged 8 to 18 at fee-paying schools in Westhoughton, near Bolton, Lancashire, and Middlesbrough, in north east England. Either under instruction or on their own initiative, 46 schoolboys wrote about George V, detailing the various characteristics that marked him out as an especially ‘fine’ person. He was the second most popular choice after Jesus, on whom 80 essays were written, while Lord Nelson and Sir Francis Drake were the third and fourth most popular respectively. Although there is no evidence available that sheds light on the conditions in which these essays were composed or what guidance the schoolboys received from their teachers, it is possible to detect from the large range of figures discussed that the boys were given some degree of choice in selecting who they wrote about. Without knowing what kind of pedagogy took place in preparation for this exercise, it has to be assumed that the compositions reveal a kind of ‘cultural circuit’ at work, writers’ subjective descriptions reflecting wider discourses consumed.

83 The 512 essays referred to here is the number quoted in the Mass Observation handbook that was published to accompany this collection of essays. However, this is an approximation in that the booklet only lists 45 essays on George V whereas I have consulted the original hardcopies of the essays in the Mass Observation archive and located 46 written on him. SxMOA1/2/59/4/F-H: ‘The Finest Person Who Ever Lived’ handwritten essays, Westhoughton, Middlesbrough, 1937-38; Mass Observation, ‘Children’s Essays, 1937; ‘The Finest Person That Ever Lived’, No.4 Mass Observation Teaching Booklets Series (University of Sussex, 1988), pp.1-30. Available at: http://www.massobs.org.uk/downloads/Childrens_Essays_1937.pdf [Accessed 21/6/14].
inside and outside the classroom. This section identifies how the schoolboys who chose to write about George V emphasized three main themes in presenting him as a ‘fine’ figure. The first quality they ascribed to him was how he showed selfless care for his people irrespective of their social class. The boys expressed great admiration for the king’s egalitarian character and described his bond to his people as one based on love. The second theme the boys focused on was how the monarch’s broadcasts had brought him closer to his subjects, crystallizing his personal image. Finally, this section examines how the boys focused on George V’s moral virtue as a family man. His domestic life impressed them and, at a time when private life was deemed an important indication of a person’s character, the king’s ostensible love of family allowed the schoolboys to closely identify with him.

The theme of selflessness prevailed in the essays written on the two most widely chosen figures, Jesus Christ and George V. Many of the 80 essays written about Jesus discussed his self-sacrifice on behalf of Christians, whilst over three quarters of the 46 essays on the king focused on his compassionate reputation and the way he had tried to improve the lives of his people. While it is entirely possible that teachers instructed the boys to think in altruistic terms when writing their essays, this emphasis on the monarch’s selflessness could equally be revealing of the popular impact that the royal public language of service had in these years:

This venerable old gentleman who reigned over his beloved people for twenty-six years is in my estimation one of the finest persons whom anyone could meet. He had a quiet dignity which at once made a person feel at home in his presence and he could walk with and talk to the common people without losing any interest in them and their humble dwellings. During the fateful

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85 N.B. 34 of the 46 essays written on George V were numbered 1-34 (H1-34) and can be located in SxMOA1/2/59/4/H. One further unnumbered essay on the king can be located in file H, referred to here as ‘H0 (Brass)’. Three essays on the king can be located in SxMOA1/2/59/4/F and a further eight can be found in SxMOA1/2/59/4/G. Where identifiable, other essays are referenced using the surname of the schoolboy and relevant file letter.
years of the Great War he visited the Western front and mingled freely with soldiers a thing no king has done since time of William III (sic). He visited the wounded in the hospitals and gave them words of hope to cheer them on the long road to recovery. It was to him the nation looked for a lead and never did he fail them. The nation could only try to express their thanks in May 1935, his Silver Jubilee. The nation’s mourning was expressed from all the Empire on his death for not only did he take a keen interest in home affairs but in Empire affairs. Amongst the countries of the Empire which he visited, his visit to India in 1911 stands out. He will be remembered as Britain’s greatest King and the World’s Perfect Gentleman.86

This teenage boy’s portrayal of George V was typical in the way it characterized his selfless demeanor using superlatives and hyperbole, as captured in his description of the monarch as the ‘world’s perfect gentleman.’ These gentlemanly traits manifested in the sovereign’s ‘quiet dignity’ and readiness to interact with ‘common people’, in spite of their ‘humble dwellings.’ Over half of the 46 school essays written on George V also remarked how he had spent time motivating soldiers on the Western Front and initiating philanthropic schemes to aid ex-servicemen. This suggests that the legacy of the First World War and the king’s leadership in those years endured as a crucial part of his public reputation after his death.87 Similarly, more than half of the essays noted the monarch’s charitable work on behalf of poor and sick people.88 The class status of these public schoolboys may have shaped their discussions of this patrician version of philanthropy and their identification with the king’s charitable persona.

A common image also emerged of George V’s egalitarian attitude towards his people. One twelve-year-old remarked that he ‘helped the poor people in many ways, and there was no difference of class between him and the poor.’89 Another boy, aged thirteen, agreed, commenting how the monarch ‘was more like ourselves rather than a King for you generally find that the kings of other countries mix very little with their

86 G (Cranston). Although the age of this boy is undisclosed in the essay, comparable essays written by his classmates in ‘UVG’ or ‘U5G’ that are contained in folder G suggest he was fourteen or fifteen.
87 For example, see F (Rigby), G (Archibald), G (Shufflebotham), H4, H6, H16.
88 For example, see F (Ashworth), G (Archibald), H0 (Brass), H31, H21.
89 H21.
fellow men. By involving himself in the lives of the poor, George V thus seems to have fashioned a reputation as a uniquely unassuming yet compassionate ruler. One fourteen-year-old conjured an image that was more explicitly paternalistic, stating that he ‘used to talk and joke with the workers as if they were his own children.’ One fifteen-year-old boy produced a similar vision of the king’s affection for his people: ‘He was popular with all classes of English because when he did a thing it was in the service of England. A king is looked upon as the Head of his country and the father of his people. George V was each of these and a great part of his time was spent among poor people in slum districts.’

While the king’s ability to convey personal care for his subjects through his actions marked him out as an especially ‘fine’ person, the emotional expression that he projected in his radio messages augmented this popular impression. One fifteen-year-old quoted George V’s last broadcast to portray the king’s close link to listeners:

He did not treat his subjects as people who were there to be taxed or not worth bothering oneself about but when he broadcast for the last time on Christmas Day 1935 he opened his speech with the words “My dear friends”. He was a true Christian treating every man to whom he spoke as a personal friend.

The boy’s quotation in his essay of the monarch’s exact opening words from his 1935 Christmas message revealed the powerful effect that the directness and familiarity of this kind of address had on some of his listeners: he was more a ‘personal friend’ than an imposing and aloof ruler. The extract also showed that the boy was comfortable describing the old king using highly personalized terms that highlighted an emotional bond between monarch and subject articulated through an intimate language of amity. A pupil from the same school also noted the levelling effect of George V’s broadcasts when he wrote that ‘during his talks over the wireless on Christmas Day [the king]
used to address us as “Fellow Countrymen”. Meanwhile, another boy remarked that one of the ways the king ‘showed himself to be a kind man who loved his subjects’ was when he wished them ‘all the best of Christmas (sic)’ in his wireless broadcasts. It seems quite possible that Cosmo Lang’s accentuation of the emotional expression contained in George V’s broadcasts thus helped shape how these boys perceived the king, encouraging them to create personalized imagined relationships with him.

One schoolboy, in particular, noted the important role of radio in enhancing the king’s familiar image. He stated how ‘it was at the latter part of his reign that people took more notice of him… for, on his annual Christmas Day broadcast, millions of people, the wide world over, would listen with reverence and true sincerity. It was an act which made itself felt in the very hearts of the people.’ This description emphasized how broadcasting facilitated personal identification between the king and a community of subjects ‘the wide world over’, the ‘sincerity’ of this bond enhancing the level of affection between speaker and listeners. In a similar vein, a fifth of all the essays on George V used the word ‘love’ to characterize the bond between king and people – the same language the monarch himself had used in his final two broadcasts. The highly personal image created when the boys used this affective rhetoric was typified by a fourteen-year-old boy’s account of how ‘when they heard of [the king’s] death people were heartbroken because they each loved him as a brother.’ This description is one of several which illuminated the intimate register of the language used by these adolescent schoolboys to convey their attachment to the king, as well as the way they thought they formed part of a national community linked together through personal identification with him.

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94 H14
95 G (Hodgkinson).
96 H0 (Brass).
97 H5. For other examples, see G (Hodgkinson), G (Bulmer), H0, H8, H9, H12, H20 and H22.
The final key aspect of the king’s public image portrayed in the essays related to his happy home life. Essays from the collection written on other figures revealed the importance ascribed to domesticity in shaping the ‘fine’ qualities of public figures. One fifteen-year-old who weighed up the attributes of different men including Jesus, Sir Francis Drake and Lord Nelson, wrote of the latter that ‘in spite of his bravery and brilliant commanding power… his home life was always a tragedy to me. His lust for fame, even at the expense of his wife, seems to give him a blacker character.’\(^9\) This boy thought a virtuous home life was essential to defining a person’s qualities, private life superseding public action in its importance. In essays on the king, his partnership with Queen Mary was noted as an important aspect of his public image; two fourteen-year-olds noted that she ‘was a great help to him in many ways’ and how ‘during his reign he was helped by a faithful queen.’\(^9\) A twelve-year-old boy, meanwhile, stated that ‘one of the most happy moments of his life was when he celebrated his Silver Jubilee with Queen Mary’, which again indicated how the king’s married life was closely intertwined with his appeal as a public figure.\(^1\)

A seventeen-year-old who chose to write about Jesus Christ also reflected on the importance of private life as a crucial aspect of a ‘fine’ character:

All the famous men of whom we read in the annals of history or of whom we read in our newspapers are not necessarily fine. This does not mean that I do not include fame as a component of a fine character, but many of those famous men may have been evil and corrupt in the inner man. We do not know of them because we cannot read of their private lives.\(^1\)

This schoolboy suggested that the exposure of a person’s private life was important to determining their ‘inner’, authentic self. This analysis corresponded closely with the increasingly popular belief that it was in the private, domestic sphere of home where

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\(^9\) F (Tempest).
\(^9\) H6 and H11. For other references to Mary see G (Archibald) and (Wilson).
\(^9\) H18.
\(^1\) G (Wilcockson).
the core of personal identity was located. In light of personal testimonies like these, it would seem that George V’s candid descriptions of his family life and the publicity surrounding the domesticity of the House of Windsor helped create a personal image of the king with which members of the public could identify. Indeed, a thirteen-year-old boy who described the king as ‘the finest person who ever lived’ noted that ‘in his own family he was extremely kind to his children and his grandchildren.’

Conclusion

Writing in his own hand to Cosmo Lang five days after he delivered his final radio broadcast to his people, George V thanked his archbishop ‘for all the trouble’ he had gone to in drafting the message: ‘Everyone said it was the best I have done yet. What more could be said in its praise? I suppose it does give pleasure, but it is rather an effort for one. No doubt it brings me into close touch with my peoples all over the world and that of course I am very keen about.’ The king ended his letter to Lang signing, as was now commonplace, ‘your sincere old friend.’ This chapter has shown how the archbishop sought to bring his monarch into closer touch with British people at home and abroad through the creation of an intimate royal public language that was less elevated and more personalized in order to heighten the affective affinity between wireless listeners and the king. In a period when popular broadcasters were using more informal modes of address to connect to audiences who increasingly perceived private life as a site of authentic selfhood, Lang transformed George V’s broadcasts to present a royal emotional code that seemed to provide listeners with privileged access to the personal thoughts, feelings and domestic setting of their king. Palace officials seem to have regarded these changes positively, in that they helped to popularize the

102 H14.
103 LPL/Lang/318/45.
sovereign’s familial persona. Lang’s language also softened the empire’s reputation by infusing the link between mother country and dominions with affective meaning, recasting British imperial culture through domestic, pacific imagery.

George V expressed this new royal language to try and enlist the support of his audiences and integrate them into the royal public sphere through a direct empathetic link to him. His last Christmas broadcast maintained a vision of mutual affection and care between king and subjects, while his reference to the ‘personal link between me and my people’ amplified the concept of a relationship in which he was sustained in his burdensome role (‘may God help him!’) by his people’s ‘loyalty’ and ‘love’. In light of the attitudes recorded towards the old king by British schoolboys writing after his death, it seems possible that Lang’s innovations as speechwriter helped produce an image of a kindly monarch closely attached to his subjects that they had internalized. As the next chapter will discuss, George VI’s inability in mobilizing the royal public language of mutual personal affection led to some uneasiness about his capabilities as king. Although the palace busily sought to connect an image of the new sovereign as a family man to the domesticity of his father, courtiers could not fashion the kind of reassuringly personal and benevolent persona that had characterized the old monarch in the final years of his reign. The difference in public affection for the two kings was neatly captured by a fourteen-year-old boy who chose to write about George V as the ‘finest person who ever lived’ at the start of December 1937. He commented that he ‘hope[d] that King George VI will be as well loved as George V’:

I am sure we will not get another king like George V for a long time, but all the same I hope that George VI will procure the love of his people, because at the moment not all the people are sincere to him, but I think that is because he did not inherit the throne from George V and will pass in time. I hope that the love of King George will linger in the hearts of his people for a very long time and that they will try to love his successors.\footnote{H8.}
Chapter 3

‘This is the Day of the People’: The Coronation of George VI, Mass Observation and the Media Orchestration of Constitutional Democracy

This chapter combines the first comprehensive examination of the media coverage of King George VI’s coronation, with a re-assessment of the Mass Observation reports that were written in response to the event. It challenges the current narrative that the monarch was broadly welcomed on his coronation day by a British people who rallied around a public image of him as a family man and a reluctant yet dutiful sovereign. I survey the public discourse promoted by the media and palace officials leading up to George VI’s crowning as well as the behaviour of media audiences and crowds on the day, to argue that the king’s personal virtues did not account for the positive response to his coronation. Instead, the event was acclaimed as a symbol of national continuity at a time of growing concern about British political culture and the threat posed to it by European authoritarianism. Building on Jonathan Parry’s work which has stressed that British constitutional democracy symbolized a crucial liberal counter-narrative to continental dictatorship between the wars, the chapter reveals how the media carefully orchestrated the coronation as a statement of the nation’s constitutional tradition and political progress. While George VI was portrayed as an adequate stand-in for the morally flawed Edward VIII, the new king’s personal merits paled into insignificance against this assertion of national political tradition in a troubled international context.

The first section examines the conflicting media coverage of George VI in the weeks before his coronation on 12 May 1937. On the one hand, the media and notable

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1 Daily Express, 12 May 1937, p.10.
public figures diligently supported the palace’s strategy to build a stable image of the king which emphasized continuity between his new reign and that of his father, King George V. Newspaper articles and newsreels described both men’s shared qualities at length, whilst Archbishop Cosmo Lang mounted a public relations campaign to stress how the onerous duties of kingship had passed to George VI. Yet, Lang’s orations on the burdens of kingship also fed into a subversive media narrative that surfaced in the week before the coronation, questioning the new king’s strength of character. Royal biographers Sarah Bradford and John Wheeler-Bennett have discounted as ‘idle and malicious gossip’ and ‘an undercurrent of doubt’ the concerns regarding George VI’s abilities. Yet, these anxieties had a greater prominence in certain media outlets than has previously been recognized, and influenced some sections of public opinion.

In contextualizing the disquiet about George VI’s abilities, the first section also assesses how persistent media coverage of the activities of the previous king, Edward VIII, now Duke of Windsor, overshadowed his younger brother’s coronation. In his analysis of the 1937 Mass Observation coronation reports, Philip Ziegler did not fully acknowledge how the approbation that respondents recorded for Edward compared with the lack of enthusiasm registered for George VI. The re-examination of the MO reports conducted for this chapter has exposed how Edward was still held in higher esteem than any other member of the royal family, and that admiration for the new king was notably muted in contrast. This absence in Ziegler’s analysis is illustrative

4 Bradford, GVI, pp.270-5; Wheeler-Bennett, KGVI, p.308-10.
5 P. Ziegler, Crown and People (London, 1978), pp.52 and 60. On p.60 Ziegler states that ‘among those who actually watched the procession such remarks as the passing of George VI provoked were generally flattering – ‘There’s the right man for the job’. ’ This is the only example Ziegler gives which presents the new king positively and, in fact, it was one of just five comments from the MO coronation reports or May the Twelfth (see below) which described the new king with some degree of optimism.
6 For this chapter, a complete re-examination was conducted of the 132 surviving reports collected by Mass Observation for the 1937 coronation and which now form part of the digital online MO archive (http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk). The digitized reports are unsystematically numbered in the archive as ‘day survey’ files from ‘019’ to ‘576’. There is another ‘unidentified’ day survey file that contains approximately 30 of the reports. These 132 reports can be located through the online key word search ‘1937 coronation’. There were three different kinds of reports collected by Mass Observation in 1937. The first
of the limitations of a study that used MO to reinforce a predetermined historical account of national rupture with the abdication crisis in 1936, which was followed by constitutional repair and consolidation through George VI’s family line.\(^7\)

Ziegler’s conclusions have also suffered from the same kind of generalizations as Mass Observation’s own published study that was based on its coronation findings, *May the Twelfth* (1937). This book comprises of a montage of extracts presented to illuminate the views of a British people who seemingly formed a diverse but unified nation that joined together to celebrate the coronation.\(^8\) Whilst it offers a useful guide to the original personal testimonies collected by Charles Madge, Humphrey Jennings and their panel of researchers, *May the Twelfth* is a problematic document because it did not quantify the contrasting expressions of public support for Edward VIII and the unease about George VI. The second section of this chapter examines the original MO coronation reports to uncover public anxieties related to the weak image of the new sovereign. It builds on the recent argument of Andrzej Olechnowicz, who noted how public expressions of sympathy for the monarch might have translated into a subdued kind were solicited from a panel of 47 volunteers who agreed in early 1937 to make a note of their activities and observations on the 12\(^{th}\) day of each month to create a context against which their descriptions of the coronation celebrations on 12 May could be situated. These were labelled the ‘CO’ section and are referenced here in this chapter using their original CO number (1 to 47). The second kind were reports solicited by MO after the event through leaflets and advertisements that were placed in the *New Statesman*, enquiring: ‘where were you on May 12\(^{th}\)?’ Mass Observation wants your story’. This campaign yielded approximately 100 further reports from members of the public and these files were given the label ‘CL’. While some CL files can be located in the numbered day surveys from the key word search results, most can be found in the ‘unidentified’ day survey file and, illogically, in day survey file ‘175’. They are referenced here using their original CL number. The third kind of report collected by MO were those prepared by a specially tasked ‘Mobile Squad’ of 13 observers in London who took shifts in observing events in the capital as they unfolded on coronation day. Labelled ‘CM’, the Mobile Squad mainly comprised of students from the University of Oxford, but also included MO co-founder Humphrey Jennings. These reports are referenced here using their original CM number. For further information on the three different types of file see the MO publication based on the coronation reports *May the Twelfth: Mass-Observation Day-Surveys 1937 by Over Two Hundred Observers* (London, 1987: first published 1937), pp.89-91. Note that the number of 200 observers is misleading, as indicated by the index to the respondents’ reports (pp.439-40), and that the outline of the numbers of reports received and archived by MO on pp.89-91 is also incorrect. There are, in fact, a miscellany of additional reports that were probably received later on (mainly in the CL section) that were not included in *May the Twelfth*. Additionally, there are 27 further reports referenced in *May the Twelfth* that have since been lost and are not available through the digital archive. Where personal testimony from these additional reports is used in this chapter, it is referenced that it comes from *May the Twelfth*.

\(^7\) Ziegler, *Crown*, pp.42 and 68.

form of support for him. The section goes on to examine the very positive reactions recorded by MO respondents for the king’s mother, Queen Mary. Historians have not analyzed the meanings attributed to her central role on coronation day and this section reveals how the media and palace elevated her public persona to ease the transition to the new reign through emotional identification with her image.

The third section examines how, in the absence of a charismatic sovereign, the media and members of the public celebrated the coronation as a statement of national political stability. Newspapers, newsreels and BBC radio mobilized powerful images of constitutional tradition and democratic evolution in their coverage. Between the wars, Britain’s political culture was remodelled through a public language of ordered freedom, progress and shared national heritage. With one voice, the media asserted that the new monarch’s coronation represented the climax of this democratic story, crystallizing the symbolic fusion of kingship and political progress against a backdrop of illiberal dictatorship in Europe.

The fourth section explores how the media orchestrated scenes of a mass public gathered in reverence of George VI to support its vision of national political progress. Reports emphasized the participation of working-class British people in the festivities, the celebration of monarchy enabling new forms of engagement in the public sphere. Meanwhile, the visual media created mass crowd panoramas to intensify the image of the king as the focal point of society, while wireless heightened the sense of national participation that audiences experienced around radios by placing special importance on the soundscape of the coronation procession in London. As Takashi Fujitani has

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noted in relation to the modern Japanese monarchy, one of the consequences of this kind of media choreography was to increase listeners’ awareness of their identities as a highly disciplined citizenry, joined around the hub of the sovereign and his family.\textsuperscript{11}

1. The public images of George VI and the Duke of Windsor

David Cannadine presented a candid description of George VI’s shortcomings and the public pessimism which greeted his accession: ‘lamentably ill-educated, blighted by poor health, devoid of presence or glamour, and further hampered by overwhelming shyness and a debilitating stammer, George VI was initially greeted with muted enthusiasm verging on resentful disappointment.’\textsuperscript{12} Yet, the king’s official and semi-official biographers have smoothed over the anxieties regarding his personal qualities by presenting his coronation as the ‘crucial test’ through which he proved himself worthy of his role, silencing his critics, and stabilizing the monarchy’s place after his brother’s abdication.\textsuperscript{13} Bradford has suggested that the coronation’s ‘historic ritual obliterate[d] the sad, sordid memories of recent months and elevate[d] the idea of kingship’; similarly, Wheeler-Bennett has claimed that the crowning met with broad public enthusiasm, as ‘a wave of gay celebration and joyous thanksgiving’ swept the nation.\textsuperscript{14} Ziegler’s analysis of the MO coronation reports supported these optimistic portrayals, noting that George VI’s crowning strengthened the monarchy’s place in society and that afterwards ‘British people felt more affectionate towards the King and Queen and, above all, far more committed to them.’\textsuperscript{15}

Such accounts have helped perpetuate the official pre-coronation narrative of continuity. However, they have obscured how concerns about the new king persisted

\textsuperscript{12} D. Cannadine, History in Our Time (New Haven, 1998), pp.59-60.
\textsuperscript{13} Bradford, GVI, pp.270-86; Wheeler-Bennett, KGVI, pp.310-14.
\textsuperscript{14} Bradford, GVI, p.283; Wheeler-Bennett, KGVI, p.313.
\textsuperscript{15} Ziegler, Crown, pp.48 and 68.
after his accession. Only five MO reports out of more than 150 that were collected by the organizers of the 1937 coronation project contained some statement of admiration for George VI, and just two recorded expressions of unequivocal support for him.\textsuperscript{16} Whilst it would be wrong to generalize about how most British people felt about the new king based on the MO reports alone, the paucity of positive portrayals is striking. Despite their often left-wing political views, the MO respondents submitted generally positive reports about their experience of coronation day, which makes the absence of enthusiasm for the new king even more surprising. Moreover, the plentiful admiring descriptions of his older brother exposed widespread doubts about George VI’s ability to lead a country threatened by the robust masculine figures of the European dictators.

From the moment George VI acceded to the throne he was disadvantaged. The crucial motif that permeated his father’s public language on the burdens of royal duty seemed fully realized in his person. Yet, while George V mobilized a strong personal image in his broadcasts to assuage the concerns of his listeners, this identity was not available to his second son. Equally, the masculine persona cultivated by Edward VIII was not attainable to George VI. Frank Mort has shown how Edward’s public image merged the benevolent traits that characterized his father’s persona with a ‘forceful and forward looking style of manhood’, which was perceived as appropriate by many at a time when more authoritarian modes of leadership were proving so successful on the continent.\textsuperscript{17} Cosmo Lang inadvertently undermined George VI’s masculine image when, three days after the latter’s accession on 13 December 1936, he delivered his own public abdication broadcast. The archbishop explained to his listeners how ‘in manner and speech [George VI] is more quiet and reserved than his brother… when

\textsuperscript{16} For the two unusually positive reactions to George’s actions on coronation day see respondents CL39 and CL63, both of whom were quite exceptional in their fervent patriotism and support of the king. For the other three relatively positive portrayals of him see CL12, CL25, CL40.

his people listen to him they will note an occasional and momentary hesitation in his 
speech."\(^\text{18}\) Although Lang had delivered this message in order to introduce the king to 
his people and to downplay his infamous stammer, it almost certainly had the reverse 
effect. It marked George VI out as lacking the crucial vocal abilities that had defined 
his father in the final years of his reign and may have even characterized the new king 
as psychologically weak. In accordance with the psychologization of science between 
the wars, _The Lancet_ medical journal had published an exchange of expert opinions 
on the causes of ‘stammering’ at the start of 1936. Views converged on the conviction 
that stammering was a neuropathic condition which stemmed from nervousness in 
childhood; it was judged not just a ‘disorder of speech, but a disorder of personality, 
an emotional disturbance.’\(^\text{19}\) At a time when psychological modes of thinking about 
self-development were undergoing popularization, the king’s subjects may well have 
perceived him as an emotionally defective personality.\(^\text{20}\)

Nevertheless, the palace and media tried to create a narrative of commonality 
and continuity between the reigns of George V and his second son. A _Sunday Express_ 
headline from a month before the coronation was typical, proclaiming that, whilst in 
residence at Windsor Castle, ‘The King Plans [his] Day Like His Father’. The report 
discussed how George VI split his time between his state responsibilities among his 
private secretaries and family pleasures, ‘rid[ing] in the Great Park with the two little 
Princesses, or walk[ing] in the gardens with them and the Queen.’\(^\text{21}\) These portrayals 
of the king as equally dutiful and domestic echoed the public persona of George V. 
News stories like this were often accompanied by photographs in which the new king

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\(^{18}\) Quoted in Bradford, _GVI_, p.272. The king’s biographers agree that this inclusion in Lang’s broadcast 
probably had a negative effect on George VI’s public image. Also see Wheeler-Bennett, _KGVI_, pp.309-10.
\(^{20}\) M. Thomson, _Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain_ (Oxford, 
2006), Ch.1; N. Rose, _Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self_ (London, 1999).
\(^{21}\) _Sunday Express_, 11 April 1937, p.23.
featured with his father and grandfather, Edward VII, the spectre of his older brother conveniently absent from the visual frame to emphasize continuity through the order of succession.\textsuperscript{22} Newsreels created similar narratives, \textit{British Movietone} producing a special ‘Retrospect of the King’s Life’ which presented its viewers with an in-depth character profile of the new ruler.\textsuperscript{23} It linked George’s childhood to the reign of his great-grandmother, Queen Victoria, used images of him walking as part of the funeral cortège of Edward VII and, stated that, following his father’s example, he engaged in many kinds of public service – not least of which was his Duke of York’s camps.

As Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska has argued, George VI’s association with the physical fitness regimes of his annual boys’ summer camps meant that he embodied a form of normative masculinity that fused around ideals of sporting prowess, courage, strength and endurance, which carried a cross-class appeal.\textsuperscript{24} Zweiniger-Bargielowska has suggested that the king’s persona incorporated the kind of ‘temperate masculinity’ that would characterize ‘good’ male citizenship in Britain during the Second World War, and that this also stemmed from his image as a ‘bourgeois’ family man.\textsuperscript{25} Indeed the final segment of \textit{Movietone}’s profile of the king presented close-up scenes of his wife and young daughters, noting ‘how fortunate we are in this domestic family’, and that the nation entertained ‘great hopes… of the two princesses.’\textsuperscript{26} As the climax to a film that had extensively explored the British monarchy’s heritage through the king’s predecessors, the implied message contained in these final scenes was clear: with the new royal family the dynasty would continue and flourish.

\textsuperscript{22} For example, see the \textit{Daily Sketch}, 5 May 1937, p.17.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{British Movietone News}, ‘A Retrospect on the King’s Life’, 29 March 1937.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{British Movietone News}, ‘A Retrospect’.
This vision of George VI as family man was widely reproduced in newspapers and newsreels before his coronation. The *Sunday Express* was typical in its full-page report on ‘Our Happy Family King’, which included a picture of his family playing with the royal corgis in Princess Elizabeth’s life-size play cottage in the gardens at Windsor. This carefully arranged image was designed to appear as a ‘normal’ family photograph and was undoubtedly taken with the support of courtiers who permitted its distribution through various channels, like the *Weldon’s Ladies’ Journal* (Figure 3.1). It complemented a media narrative that stressed the everyday family life of the king: he was a ‘loving husband’ and a model of companionate, middle-class domesticity; he took his family on Sunday drives in the car and his ‘favourite hobby’ was gardening. It is difficult to gauge how popular this public image of the family king was from the personal testimonies available. Only one MO respondent referred to this aspect of his persona, noting how her neighbours liked him ‘because he is a family man’.

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29 CL12.
The family image of the new king was also linked to the reputation of his father through the royal public language both men were seen to use to characterize their role within the empire. Returning the addresses presented to him by the dominion prime ministers and envoys of India at Buckingham Palace on the day before his coronation, George VI remarked how, after his father’s death, it ‘pleased God to call me to be the head of this great family.’ He then echoed George V’s words on the burdens of royal duty: ‘heavy are the responsibilities that have so suddenly and unexpectedly come upon me, but it gives me courage to know that I can count on your unfailing help and affection.’ Having thus entreated the support of his subjects, he offered his reciprocal loyalty as part of the recognizable social compact which connected ruler and people: ‘for my part I shall do my utmost to carry on my father’s work for the welfare of our
great Empire. The sub-heading used by the Manchester Guardian in its report on this speech proclaimed how the ‘King Speaks as Head of a Great Family’ and in bold, capitalized font declared that he had followed ‘HIS FATHER’S EXAMPLE’. This language evoked images of familial unity, domestic life and duty, linking George VI to the pattern of kingship established by his father, and it continued to characterize media coverage long after his coronation.

Figure 3.2. Daily Mirror, 8 May 1937, p.1.

Such positive news features on George VI were, however, complicated by other stories in the week before his coronation. The popular press provided constant updates on the Duke of Windsor’s looming reunion with Wallis Simpson at Chateau de Candé in France. It would be the lovers’ first meeting since Edward’s abdication six months

30 Manchester Guardian, 12 May 1937, p.11.
31 Ibid.
earlier. On 4 May 1937, the *Daily Mirror*’s leading front-page story commented how, ‘laughing and joking, happier than he had been for months, the Duke of Windsor is speeding… from Austria to France – to Mrs. Simpson, at the Chateau Cande, Tours (sic).’

In the following days, numerous articles appeared that praised the couple’s reunion, while large photos of them posing arm-in-arm and grinning cheerfully at one another dominated the front-pages of the *Mirror* and *Daily Express*, with captions that commented how, at long last, they were ‘happy’ and ‘smiling’ again (Figure 3.2).

These upbeat portrayals of the couple’s meeting were significant because they suggested that kingship was unenviable and that it did not lead to fulfilment in private life. The implication was that only by relinquishing the throne had Edward realized true emotional happiness with the woman he loved. This depiction of the duke clearly accelerated the public discourse on the burdensome nature of royal service. Indeed, one MO respondent noted during a conversation she had with an elderly woman in Manchester that the latter had thought Edward ‘too fond of life’ to be a ‘competent’ king.

The media knowingly compared the figure of the contented duke to his dutiful younger brother, as in the juxtaposition on the front-page of the *Daily Herald* on 8 May, four days before the coronation (Figure 3.3). The left side of the page was taken up by a report on how parliamentary representatives from Britain and the empire had gathered the previous day in Westminster Hall ‘to do honour to the King on the eve of his crowning.’

The headline declared the meeting ‘The Answer to Dictators’ and the first sub-heading stated that the ‘King and Premiers [were] Pledged to Democracy’. Meanwhile, the right side of the page was taken up by another smiling photograph of Edward and Simpson with the caption ‘Very Happy Together’. The implied contrast

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34 CO36.
between these forms of reportage was meant to reinforce in the minds of readers the distinction between responsible and irresponsible kingship: Edward had put personal gratification ahead of his national responsibility. Yet, while these articles could be interpreted as a veiled criticism of the former king, they also appeared to celebrate the lovers’ reunion, and for Edward’s supporters acted as a stark reminder of the personal determination that had characterized his brief reign. Moreover, the sheer scale of the reports on the couple’s reunion drew attention away from the new king and his family in the crucial days before his coronation.

![Daily Herald, 8 May 1937, p.1.](image)

Some journalists stated that the constant coverage of the lovers’ meeting cast a shadow over the coronation. The *Daily Sketch*’s Henry Newham, who wrote under the pseudonym ‘Candidus’, told his readers how, at the Allied Newspaper Corporation’s coronation party, the Mayor of Manchester ‘said publicly something which most of us have been thinking and many of us saying in private. There has been far too much in the newspapers about Mrs. Simpson and the Duke of Windsor.’ Newham suggested it was ‘definitely against the public interest’, complaining that Simpson had been turned into a ‘heroine’ who stood ‘in the light of the true heroines’, namely the new Queen Elizabeth and George VI’s mother, Queen Mary.36 Yet, only a fraction of the public

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36 *Daily Sketch*, 7 May 1937, p.6.
opinion recorded by the Mass Observation coronation study agreed with Newham that reports on Edward’s reunion were in poor taste. One young man from Hertford wrote how, on the morning of the coronation, his ‘grandmother was indignant that there was a short column about the Duke of Windsor on the front-page of the News Chronicle’, but such criticism was rare.\(^{37}\) The prevailing attitude noted by MO respondents about Edward was that he was sorely missed and that the coronation was lacking on account of his absence.\(^{38}\)

A member of the MO ‘Mobile Squad’ stationed in London on coronation day recorded a conversation she had with a man she described as ‘lower-middle class’ and a ‘strong partisan of Edward’. The man ‘wanted a come-back’ and seemed ‘very half-hearted about the coronation’. He complained about the lukewarm coronation service he had attended at church the previous Sunday, and agreed with the interviewer ‘that many people [were] far less spontaneous about [the] coronation than [the] Jubilee.’\(^{39}\) Other people from across Britain shared this belief that Edward’s absence dampened the coronation mood. A respondent in Birmingham heard a group of girls singing the song ‘God Bless the Prince of Wales’ (as Edward had been known throughout most of the interwar period), which prompted the comment ‘we’d a seen something if it was him today.’\(^{40}\) Another MO respondent who sat by a ‘working-class man’ on a train in the Midlands discussed with him the celebrations he had attended that afternoon in Leicester and Nottingham. He considered that there was ‘not much heart in it this time, not like the Jubilee. The Duke of Windsor was very popular… [he] took all the shine out of it… (wistfully) I practically loved him.’\(^{41}\) The highly personal language this man used to depict his emotional connection to the previous monarch shows how

\(^{37}\) CO18b.  
\(^{38}\) For example, see CM4, CO12, CO19, CO28, CO31, CO32, CO37, CO41, CO43, CL24, CL30, CL40.  
\(^{39}\) CM6.  
\(^{40}\) CO35.  
\(^{41}\) CO24. Only in May the Twelfth, p.307.
his regret about Edward detracted from his appreciation of George VI’s coronation. The sense of anti-climax was compounded in his indifferent response to the new king: ‘He didn’t really want it. I saw him once in Halifax. He looked dreadfully tired.’

The belief that a strong king had been replaced with a weak one was a common sentiment recorded by the Mass Observation panel. A schoolgirl from Port St Mary in the Isle of Man commented that whilst ‘everyone [she] knew was very keen on the coronation… there was much comparison of the present king with his brother, the Duke of Windsor, and most people seemed to agree that Edward VIII was a stronger and better king.’

A respondent in Beer, Devon, noted the remarks of a female café proprietor who had told him that ‘we have lost a good king – one who had sympathy with the working classes and that is largely why he had to go. They got rid of him.’ Others agreed that Edward had been forced off the throne because Stanley Baldwin or Cosmo Lang had considered him too outspoken, while some expressed the belief that George VI was the archbishop’s ‘puppet’, again implying weakness.

Negative rumours about the new king increased in the week before the coronation. Newspapers reported that an old friend of George VI had spoken out against what he termed the ‘malicious gossip’ concerning the monarch’s health. The Reverend Robert Hyde had worked alongside the king at the Duke of York’s camps. At a public lunch, he refuted that the king suffered from epileptic fits, a bad heart and that ‘he may fail at the last moment.’ He also sought to rid George VI of the ‘rubber stamp’ label that had been applied to him – that he had little power and was unable to make his own decisions – by drawing attention to how he had once witnessed the king’s bad temper, implying that he would not stand to have his opinions ignored.

42 Ibid.
43 CL40.
44 CO1.
45 CO23, CO15, CO18, CO22, CL56.
46 Daily Mirror, 7 May 1937, p.36. Also see Daily Express, 7 May 1937, p.1.
As Bradford has discussed, Hyde’s speech probably did more harm than good, its widespread dissemination via the national press heightening the belief that the king lacked the strength of character required to fulfil his role. Indeed, the story would have received even greater coverage had British newspapers not announced that the Hindenburg zeppelin had blown up at Lakehurst in the USA on the same day. All the same, Hyde’s speech was notably presented as the headline story on the back-page of one of the most widely read newspapers of the period, the Daily Mirror (Figure 3.4). Contrary to Adrian Bingham’s suggestion that British newspapers patriotically rallied around the new king, it seems that doubts about his abilities persisted among editors.

Cosmo Lang may also have inadvertently stimulated public anxieties about the monarch’s character just before the coronation. The archbishop initiated a national publicity campaign that was intended to integrate the new sovereign into the pattern of kingship that he had created alongside George V. Lang often used the Canterbury Diocesan Gazette as his principal vehicle for public communication, with his words subsequently disseminated through other newspapers and periodicals. Writing at the beginning of May, the archbishop highlighted the coronation’s religious background.

47 Bradford, GVI, p.273. Also see Wheeler-Bennett, KGVI, p.309.
He stated that in preparing for the event the public would ‘surround and support’ the new king and queen with prayers for their welfare. This emphasis on the power of prayer was meant to facilitate spiritual communion between rulers and people:

On the previous Sunday evening [before coronation day] multitudes in their churches or in their homes throughout the land… will be remembering the King and Queen in their prayers. They will like to know that at that very time their Majesties in their own personal prayers will be associating themselves with the prayers of their peoples.49

Lang engineered this moment of communion between rulers and subjects, writing to the royal chaplain to suggest that ‘their Majesties might let it be known that they were taking part in a service in their own private chapel.’50 To amplify his vision of a nation congregated in support of their rulers, Lang also oversaw the publication of three Forms of Service that were distributed nationwide, one of which was for use on the Sunday before the coronation.51 Lang led this service from the BBC Concert Hall and delivered a sermon titled ‘The King Comes Not Alone’ to an audience of special guests and, via the wireless, to listeners in their homes and at church services.52 In his address he emphasized the great responsibility that had been laid on George VI and his consort, not least of which was enduring a coronation service the ‘whole world’ would observe.53

As with Reverend Hyde’s misjudged public intervention to defend George VI’s health, Lang’s emphasis on the need for public prayer to sustain the king and queen perpetuated an image of the new monarch as physically or mentally fragile. The last time special prayers of intercession such as these had been offered up for a member of

49 The Times, 3 May 1937, p.9.
50 LPL/Lang/22/372-5.
51 One of the three main distributors claimed to have sold one and half million copies of the Forms of Service, which included servicing one-tenth of all the parishes in England. See LPL/Lang/22/308-10.
52 BBCWA/R30/444/1 - Confidential Memo: Coronation Week Programmes Committee.
53 Ibid. For a reproduction of Lang’s address also see The Listener, 12 May 1937, pp.903-4 and 938.
the royal family was during the grave illness of George V in the winter of 1928-29.\textsuperscript{54} The archbishop’s campaign, whilst instigated to generate support for George VI, drew inadvertent attention to what seemed to be a more profound shortcoming in the new king’s health and character.

Lang’s portrayal of the burdensome coronation service fed into a broader media discourse on how the experience of the ceremony would exhaust its protagonists. The \textit{Sunday Express} used a sub-heading to emphasize the way the coronation would be ‘Played to a World Audience’, the ‘modern inventions’ of cinema, radio and, for the first time, television ‘intensify[ing] a thousandfold the strain of the day for the figures around whom the pageantry is massed.’ The article finished by stating that these were ‘the penalties of those set high above their fellow men.’\textsuperscript{55}

During the coronation service itself, BBC commentator Howard Marshall and director of religious programming Reverend F. A. Iremonger presented listeners with elaborate descriptions, conveying an impression that the service was an arduous and uninviting experience for its protagonists. When the king and queen took communion, Iremonger delivered his own prayer across the radio airwaves in which he beseeched God to help the royal couple stay strong ‘as they spend their lives for their people’.\textsuperscript{56} Immediately after the ceremony finished, Marshall’s concluding message augmented the vulnerable image of the new monarch, with the commentator depicting the unique ‘loneliness that surrounds a king’.\textsuperscript{57} In this vein, the \textit{Daily Mirror} editorial published the day after the coronation projected apprehension onto George VI, stating that he had ‘anxieties to face and delicate tasks to perform’ and deserved ‘all our sympathy’.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Sunday Express}, 9 May 1937, p.9.
\textsuperscript{56} BBCWA/R30/443/5 - Extract from Commentary in Westminster Abbey by Howard Marshall and Commentary on the Coronation Service by Rev. F. A. Iremonger.
\textsuperscript{57} Cited in \textit{The Listener}, 19 May 1937, pp.958 and 970.
Evoking the title of a song that had been specially commissioned for and performed at the coronation, the *Mirror* encouraged the king to ‘be strong and play the man!’\(^{58}\)

### 2. Mass Observation respondents’ reactions to George VI and Queen Mary

Public opinion recorded in the MO coronation reports echoed the media portrayals of the exhausting nature of the ceremony and the king’s weaknesses. Many respondents described the service as an ‘ordeal’, remarking on the fatigue of its main protagonists. Others even suggested that George VI would succumb to a fit before it ended.\(^{59}\) A farmer from King’s Lynn, Norfolk, told his friend that he ‘was sorry for the King and Queen having to go through all that ceremonial.’\(^{60}\) In a similar vein, an eighteen-year-old girl from the Isle of Man noted that ‘several people have said “I’m glad I’m not the King and Queen to have to go through such a ceremony without a break”.’\(^{61}\) This kind of personal testimony revealed that the media and figures like Lang had primed members of the public to sympathize with George VI.

According to the MO reports, the king’s speech to Britain and the empire on the evening of the coronation also seems to have met with a relatively uniform response, with expressions of sympathy for George VI predominating. A teenager from Chelsea was typical in her account. She ‘felt sorry for the man, and vaguely uncomfortable; I sat there on tenterhooks, expecting him to stutter or dry up at any minute. It moved so hesitatingly and slowly.’\(^{62}\) A young man from Ilkley in West Yorkshire logged similar comments that he overheard whilst walking home: ‘well, he got through pretty well’ and ‘I was glad when he finished. It made me nervous.’\(^{63}\) The discomfort some people

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\(^{58}\) *Daily Mirror*, 13 May 1937, p.15

\(^{59}\) For example, see CM6, CO3, CO10, CO18, CO22, CO25, CO28, CO32, CL9, CL16, CL34, CL35, CL63, CL65.

\(^{60}\) CO6.

\(^{61}\) CL41.

\(^{62}\) CO23. Also see CO22, CL24, CL56, CL61, CL64.

\(^{63}\) CO3.
experienced listening to the king’s speech meant that they noted a sense of relief once he had ‘got through it’. Occasionally, the MO panel recorded more encouraging appraisals of George VI’s broadcast. A speech therapist from Swansea enquired of her mother’s charwoman what she had thought of the speech. The older woman replied:

“[The king] thank[ed] everyone for their kindness to him and the Queen… [He said] that he’d do his best for everyone.” This was followed by a reference to the fact that he did not stutter but that he stopped periodically. “You know you’d think he’d finished and then he’d go on again… he couldn’t pronounce his ‘R’s’”. She reported that several people had commented on it to her as very noticeable. She remarked however that in view of the strain of the day etc “He did very well”.

The sympathetic tone of the charwoman’s account revealed the difficulty people had in presenting a positive interpretation of the new king’s abilities. It was ‘only in view of the strain of the day’ that he ‘did very well’. It is also clear that many people who listened to George VI’s broadcast were preoccupied with the fact that he managed to successfully deliver his speech, rather than concentrating on the actual meaning of the words that he had spoken.

MO respondents who attended cinemas on coronation evening to hear the king’s message sometimes recorded more positive experiences. One schoolmaster from west London who accompanied his family to a cinema in Hammersmith documented how:

The lights lowered discriminately, and created an atmosphere of intimacy. Everyone listened intently. At the end, we stood as the National Anthem came through, being played and sung, a little too lengthily. Then the film programme was resumed.

Other respondents recorded that their fellow cinema audience members listened with interest to George VI’s speech. The comments of the aforementioned schoolmaster

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64 Also see CL1, CL35, CL107.
65 CO28. For an almost identical response see CO32.
66 Listeners’ preoccupation with George’s vocal pronunciation is reflected in various comments from the MO reports and probably accounts for the absence of any real recorded appreciation of what he had said, aside of the charwoman’s recollection that he would ‘do his best for everyone.’ For comments on the king’s voice and diction see CO14, CO20, CO22, CO24, CO25, CO32, CL8, CL107.
67 CO17.
help explain the more attentive reactions in cinemas. The lights in the Hammersmith cinema were dimmed to conjure a sense of immersion and to direct the audience’s attention to the aural focal point of George VI’s voice. The silent social etiquette and spatial arrangement of cinema auditoria similarly worked to achieve a momentarily unifying effect. This contrasted sharply with the experiences recorded by those who spent coronation day in other communal environments like pubs and cafés where other forms of social behaviour were permitted and where the attention of those present was not spatially directed at the king’s voice. They often noted how the people around them were apathetic to the events unfolding in London; the coronation broadcast played as ‘background noise’ and the majority of people paid little or no attention to the radio, engaging in normal conversation instead. These accounts were also notable for descriptions of very half-hearted attempts to join in with the coverage of the national anthem. A number of respondents noted how they and those around them often felt coerced into singing ‘the King’ (as it was also known) by minorities of stalwart patriots.

Occasionally, the MO panel recorded comments that conveyed how those who listened detected a similarity between the king’s voice and that of George V. One striking comment was that George VI’s voice sounded ‘homely, like his father’s.’ However, in light of the other expressions of anxiety that George VI’s speech induced in respondents and those around them, it seems more likely that these optimistic reviews stemmed from a desire to prove the media’s likening of father and son true. On comparing the kings’ manners of radio address, it is clear that George VI sounded very different to his father. While the new sovereign spoke with the same accent as

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69 CO4, CO18, CO29, CO31, CO35, CO44, CL1, CL100.
70 CO32, CO35, CO18, CO27, CL16.
71 CO36. Also see CO44, CL12, CL19, CL107.
George V, he delivered his coronation broadcast in a slow, disjointed and monotone manner, which lacked the measured emotional expression of his father’s broadcasts.\textsuperscript{72}

Andrzej Olechnowicz and David Pocock have both suggested that sympathy for George VI was the prevailing emotional reaction recorded in the 1937 MO reports.\textsuperscript{73} Pocock has judged this concern as indicative of a public belief that, on ceremonial occasions, royal family members appear ‘peculiarly vulnerable’, whilst Olechnowicz has claimed it as evidence of the way British people perceived the lives of royalty as unappealing. The other emotion that clearly predominated among the MO panel was anxiety about the new king’s strength of character. Taken together, this sympathy and uncertainty can also be interpreted as proof of the impact of the new public discourse on George VI’s shortcomings that the media and figures like Lang generated before the coronation. George V’s radio messages had renewed the emphasis on the burdens of royal duty and now, in the figure of his second son, this discourse was accentuated to augment the impression that kingship was an unenviable responsibility.

Queen Mary played an important and previously overlooked role on coronation day, providing a physical and emotional link between the figures of her husband and George VI. Historians and biographers have often presented Queen Mary as an aloof and imperious figure of the Victorian period, old-fashioned and highly conservative in her opinions.\textsuperscript{74} She certainly embodied the monarchy’s past, but it also seems she was a potent emotional symbol of its present and future. While public displays of affection for George VI appear to have been muted, the queen mother’s presence on coronation day elicited genuine enthusiasm among the public. This was partly the result of the

\textsuperscript{72} See Chapter Two and ‘Radio broadcast of the Coronation of King George VI & His Majesty’s Coronation Speech – 12 May 1937’. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCGe_CUqmA [Accessed 10/04/15]. In its themes, however, the 1937 coronation broadcast was very similar to the earlier messages delivered by George V, bearing many of the usual hallmarks of Lang’s authorship.
palace and media’s elevation of her popular image prior to and following the event. The day before the coronation, the Duke of Kent addressed an audience at the service of intercession for the new king and his consort at Queen’s Hall in London. The press emphasized that he had asked those people gathered to ‘think of my mother’. The duke declared how ‘many will be thinking of the King and Queen but they will also be thinking of my mother. As a boy I can remember the Coronation of my father. She will have deeper and more personal memories of that day.’ These comments invoked visions of Queen Mary’s coronation in 1911 and the grief she experienced with the death of George V. The press acclaimed the prince’s words as ‘deeply moving’. His speech also evoked links to Queen Mary’s ‘message to the nation and empire’ after George V died, which was published as a front-page news story on 30 January 1936. She offered her ‘deepest gratitude’ from ‘[her] heart’ for the sympathy of the peoples of Britain and the empire, remarking how she and all of her husband’s subjects had ‘shared’ in a ‘personal sorrow’ together. Written for her by Cosmo Lang, the message drew on similar emotional scripts to the broadcasts of George V to stress the intimacy of the bond between royal protagonist and subjects: ‘God bless you, my dear people, for all the wonderful love and sympathy with which you have sustained me.’ The queen had remained more remote from public life than her husband, but this message after his death, as with the Duke of Kent’s speech ahead of the coronation, brought her into a closer personal relationship with the nation.

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76 For example, see Daily Sketch, 12 May 1937, pp.6-7.
78 LPL/Lang/192/352-3 and Lang/223/233.
79 Queen Mary had kept a careful distance from overly familiar forms of public interaction. Her voice had only once been captured on film at the launch of the HMS Queen Mary in September 1934, and she had turned down the opportunity to deliver a radio message to the nation in the early 1930s, having been personally beseeched to broadcast by members of the public and the BBC. BBCWA/R34/862/1; Daily Mail, 10 October 1934, p.14; British Movietone News, ‘Movietone Presents the Launch of the “Queen Mary”’, 24 September 1934.
Queen Mary thus represented the tangible link between her husband and second son. Her embodiment of this continuity was also conveyed in press reports that linked her to her young granddaughters. On 6 May, she made what the *Daily Mirror* referred to as a ‘surprise visit’ to Westminster Abbey ‘to watch coronation rehearsals in which Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret took part.’ The newspaper claimed that two thousand spectators had cheered her arrival and that ‘memories of her own coronation twenty-six years ago must have crowded upon [her]’ during the rehearsal.\(^{80}\) Queen Mary’s grandmotherly persona highlighted the permanence of the monarchy through generational family ties and it was integral to the palace’s planning of coronation day; she rode alongside the two young princesses on the return procession to Buckingham Palace after their father’s crowning. The media portrayed this journey of grandmother and granddaughters as a key part of the day’s itinerary. The *Sunday Express* informed readers how, ‘the luckiest moment of all was enjoyed by just a few hundred people in Northumberland Avenue’ when there was a brief pause, during which the coach that carried the queen and princesses halted: ‘for a minute or two it was clear they became just grandmother and grandchildren.’\(^{81}\) The newspaper enhanced this scene of family normality when it noted how ‘little Margaret Rose – “just like your child or mine” – could not resist giving way to her excitement and fidgeting.’\(^{82}\)

It also became publicly known that Queen Mary had succumbed to tears during the coronation ceremony. *British Movietone* cameramen had captured scenes of her in distress as part of their coronation film footage from inside Westminster Abbey. On the strict instructions of Lang and the Earl Marshall who controlled the censorship of the film, these scenes were suppressed from the final edit, the archbishop stating that

\(^{80}\) *Daily Mirror*, 7 May 1937, pp.5 and 18. Also see *Daily Mail*, 7 May 1937, p.8.

\(^{81}\) *Sunday Express*, 16 May 1937, p.6.

\(^{82}\) Ibid.
they ‘intruded upon [the queen’s] most natural emotions.’

But the press learnt of the incident and in the following days it was widely reported that Queen Mary had cried during the service, which possibly helped generate sympathy for her among Mass Observation respondents who wrote about the coronation.

The old queen’s presence at the coronation service broke with royal protocol: as dowager queen she was not, according to tradition, meant to attend the coronation of her husband’s successor. However, her biographer suggests that she decided to break with constitutional convention and attend in order to increase the ‘sense of solidarity with which the whole Royal Family was facing the new reign.’ It proved a shrewd modification to the programme. In MO personal testimonies she was by far the most positively commented on member of the House of Windsor to partake in the event. The new king’s consort, Queen Elizabeth, and children, Elizabeth and Margaret Rose, were the recipients of notably fewer positive comments.

The unique enthusiasm with which Queen Mary met on coronation day deserves closer historical attention. In the first instance, the response of the crowds gathered on the processional route to her was exceptional. A nurse and self-professed royalist from London noted the crowd’s jubilant greeting for the old queen:

There was a sudden stir of excitement and the Procession began. Shaving mirrors, hand mirrors small and large were held high and Periscopes appeared miraculously. I held on to mine and with its aid I saw everything quite plainly. Princess Margaret Rose looked very much a little princess from a storybook, I thought, and the Queen looked really charming. There was a real genuine

83 LPL/Lang/218/255.
85 Pope-Hennessy, QM, p.584.
86 As with George VI, there were just a few positive comments recorded about his consort, Queen Elizabeth, in the Mass Observation reports; see CM6, CO32, CO36, CL25, CL40. Indeed, the new queen met with as much hostility as praise; see CM3, CM4, CO27, CO30, CL8. The MO respondents recorded no criticism of either Princesses Elizabeth or Margaret. When mentioned, they were described using words such as ‘sweet’, ‘well trained’ and ‘excited’. See CM2, CM3, CM12, CO28, CO32, CL73.
87 Ziegler, Crown, pp.56 and 60.
excitement and feeling when our beloved Queen Mary passed through, also for Princess Marina and the Duke of Kent.\textsuperscript{88}

As well as illuminating the high esteem in which Prince George and Princess Marina were popularly held, the nurse implied that the public shared a strong emotional link to ‘our beloved Queen Mary’, noting how she was welcomed with special enthusiasm by the crowds. Several other respondents reported the unusual warmth of the greeting extended to the old queen. A female typist stated that she encountered a ‘lift girl’ who spectated from the procession route and who told her ‘I think [Queen Mary] got most cheers of all, everyone likes her much more than the others.’\textsuperscript{89} Some respondents who listened to the coronation broadcast also recalled how they were very moved when they learnt that the old queen had appeared as part of the parade. A woman in her late thirties from Forest Hill, London, wrote how her eyes filled with tears as she heard the crowds, ‘especially when Queen Mary appeared on the scene.’ She then explained her reaction:

I saw her recently quite close-to, and was rather repelled. She seemed just a disagreeable old lady, very bad on her feet. Nevertheless, as Queen Mother, with her children and grandchildren around her, her regal bearing, and some sort of “see-it-through” air about her, she moves me.\textsuperscript{90}

The emphasis this respondent placed on the old queen’s motherly and grandmotherly image revealed the impact that the media’s generational family-centred narrative had on members of the public: she was deemed to be the matriarchal head of the dynasty. Similarly, a teenage boy was overheard by one MO respondent telling his friends how ‘Queen Mary is the nicest of the lot. She’s had so many sorrows to bear.’\textsuperscript{91}

Taken together, these comments suggested that Queen Mary’s family image had helped foster public empathy for her. Other respondents stated that her matriarchal

\textsuperscript{88} CL25.
\textsuperscript{89} CO33. For other examples, see CO9, CL1, CL2, CL41, CL61, CL73.
\textsuperscript{90} CO41.
\textsuperscript{91} CO32. For almost identical examples also see CO33 and CO36.
presence stimulated support for George VI. One woman from Olton, Warwickshire, who listened to the broadcast with her mother, recorded how, at the climactic balcony appearance, ‘the crowd cheered when Queen Mary seemed to “present” the Royal Family to the people.’ The respondent clearly invested this moment with ritualized significance: it was by the old queen’s assent and ‘presentation’ that legitimacy was conferred on George VI and his family. Indeed, most national newspapers published the picture of the five family members assembled on the balcony on the day after the coronation, and the *Daily Express* and *Daily Sketch* presented it as a large front-page image (Figure 3.5). This photograph was the central visual icon following weeks of coverage that had amplified the narrative of continuity through the figure of the old queen and her second son. She represented the permanence and tradition of monarchy – values threatened by Edward VIII’s brief reign. And, as matriarch of the House of Windsor, she exemplified how the essence of British constitutional kingship lay in its domesticity.

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92 CO14.
3. Constitutional evolution, political stability and social cohesion

The uncertainty which characterized reactions to the public performance of George VI meant the British media presented more dynamic messages about the continuation of the monarchy and the advancement of the democratic constitution as the main themes of the 1937 coronation. In the lead up to 12 May, commentators repeatedly stressed how the ceremony symbolized a crucial moment in the evolutionary formation of the relationship between crown and people: the coronation was presented as proof of the superiority of constitutional democracy at a time of international political uncertainty.

In many reports, George VI was a background figure to his own coronation, coverage instead focusing on ‘the British people’ as the central actors in the story of democratic progress. Jonathan Parry and Ben Pimlott have both argued that the 1937 coronation symbolized the renewal of the compact between people and sovereign, and that the crown’s position as protector of political liberties took on heightened meaning against
the backdrop of dictatorship in Europe. This section develops on their analyses to show how the media used the coronation to mobilize validatory statements about the nation’s socio-political character in a period when democracy seemed threatened by authoritarianism. This tumult of media coverage wedded constitutional monarchy to ideas of political stability and social cohesion, which, as this section reveals, were internalized by members of the public and reproduced in Mass Observation reports.

Historians have noted how the interwar period witnessed an eruption of public discourse about the ‘national character’. Peter Mandler has investigated how, with the advent of democracy after the Fourth and Fifth Reform Acts, the political elite sought to maintain their hold on power by mobilizing a renovated language of ‘Englishness’, highlighting the ‘common sense, good temper, ordered freedom [and] progress’ which supposedly characterized the national psyche. One notable proponent of this creed was Conservative party leader and Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. He constructed an image of Britain using his own model ‘Englishman’ to foster cohesion between the industrial working classes and the state, and to unite them through a vision of shared national heritage. Philip Williamson and Bill Schwarz have also emphasized how Baldwin reinvented a ‘constitutional tradition’ in which the newly enfranchised mass electorate was depicted as the keystone of parliamentary democracy and electoral reform as the core tenet of political progress. The monarchy played an integral role in this constitutional drama: anchoring political evolution across time, the sovereign acted as the safeguard of the individual freedoms of the British public. As Mandler has noted, against a backdrop of social and political volatility in Europe between the

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96 Mandler, The English, pp.150-1.
97 Ibid. Also see Williamson, ‘The Doctrinal’, p.190.
wars, Britain’s relatively stable constitutional democracy became increasingly key to definitions of national character.\(^{100}\) And, with the rise of continental totalitarianism, the monarchy’s symbolic defence of the public’s political liberties and the extension of these freedoms through the arteries of the empire and Commonwealth took on even greater importance.\(^{101}\)

Scholars have tended to underestimate the extent to which these ideas about the crown’s relationship with democracy were fluid and unstable in the 1930s.\(^{102}\) While Baldwin was a vocal advocate of this constitutional vision, Britain’s political culture remained a highly contested terrain that underwent continual adjustment at the hands of various stylists of national character. Given this instability, it is particularly notable that every mainstream British media outlet joined with commentators from across the political spectrum in declaring the 1937 coronation a victory for British democracy, crystallizing monarchy’s political function in mass society. One of the main themes of George V’s silver jubilee in 1935 had been ‘constitutional progress’ and now, two years on, after the disruption in this story of evolution by Edward VIII’s abdication, the crowning of George VI was hailed as clear proof of the vitality of democracy.\(^{103}\)

Much discussion in the press centred on the sovereign’s unique bond with his people and the way constitutionalism was closely intertwined with nascent concepts of democracy. A *Daily Express* coronation day editorial stressed ‘The People’s Part’:

> This is the day of the People. The people are the source of power and wealth and glory. They lift up the King to be the leader...We have found it convenient to take our Kings in hereditary succession when we could, but in the ultimate possession the throne of England is the property of the people of England.

\(^{100}\) Mandler, *The English*, pp.151-2.


This day is a ceremony wherein each citizen takes his part. The King swears to defend our liberties and we take vows to make and keep him king.  

This simplified vision of how constitutional monarchy operated to guard the freedoms of British people and the way in which the sovereign was ultimately answerable to his or her subjects was reworked in the liberal News Chronicle in an article titled ‘What it all means’. The journalist A. J. Cummings stated that ‘there is nothing wonderful (we shall freely admit) about [George VI]. We don’t even know him very well… [But] he is a modest and sensible king.’ He then claimed that the abdication crisis had proven there were ‘two conditions, upon which, in a democracy, the sovereign maintains his position and popularity… The king’s mode of life must be approved by his subjects and his name must not be used for political or party advantage.’ This report presented an implicit criticism of the right-wing faction in the Conservative party who had made political headway associating themselves with the goals of Edward VIII at the time of the abdication, Cummings articulating how the political liberty of British people was intrinsically bound to the non-partisan nature of kingship. Crucially, Cummings also stated that the public’s approval of the sovereign’s ‘mode of life’ was now requisite to justifying the monarch’s political authority, integrating royal moral virtuosity into the crown’s constitutional identity. The contingent relationship between a common moral code, British people’s political freedoms and the sovereign’s constitutional authority was also conveyed in a comment Cummings quoted from a conversation he had with a ‘hard-bitten Member of Parliament’, who informed him that ‘we shall be crowning not only the King… we shall be crowning ourselves as well.’

The left-wing Daily Herald presented its own discussion of how monarchy had become connected to Britain’s political progress as a symbol of the mass electorate’s democratic spirit. As part of a series of articles titled ‘Crown and People’, the Labour

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104 Daily Express, 12 May 1937, p.10.  
peer, Lord Arthur Ponsonby, expressed approval at the way constitutional kingship had overseen democratic progress, noting how recent rulers had ‘shown conspicuous fairness in accepting, with no trace of protest, Labour as the alternative Government.’ He suggested that there was ‘little sign of any antagonism’ between ‘the tradition of monarchy and practice of Socialism.’\textsuperscript{106} Indeed, despite its previously anti-imperialist stance, it was the\textit{Herald} which styled the meeting of George VI and his dominion prime ministers on 7 May 1937 at Westminster Hall as ‘the answer to dictatorship’, proclaiming that the new king and his premiers were ‘pledged to democracy’.\textsuperscript{107} The newspaper placed special emphasis on the egalitarian qualities of the congregation:

They sat at lunch where Simon de Montfort assembled his first Parliament, on the spot where, century after century, Britain gradually evolved her system of Liberty – and they represented all the races, colours and creeds over which the British flag flies. A foreigner from a dictator country would have stood aghast at such an assemblage, its democracy, its friendliness, its equality.

This shift in the\textit{Herald}’s attitude to Commonwealth and empire shows how pressures created by the rise of fascism in Europe had ensured that even the political left felt it was necessary to reconcile itself to constitutional monarchy as a progressive mode of governance. As Pimlott has stated, ‘the Empire was unblinkingly described as if it were a democratic, almost a voluntary, association.’\textsuperscript{108}

The link between Britain’s democratic freedoms and the empire’s international peacekeeping role was a recurrent theme utilized in media reports. They emphasized that the crown’s symbolic embodiment of the liberties of its many subjects contrasted sharply with the way European dictatorships eroded the rights of their peoples. The\textit{Daily Mirror} and\textit{Daily Mail} reproduced the coronation message of South African imperialist statesman, Jan Smuts, to convey this contrast. For him, the Commonwealth

\textsuperscript{106}\textit{Daily Herald}, 10 May 1937, p.10.  
\textsuperscript{108}Pimlott,\textit{The Queen}, p.43.
was a ‘league of peace’, ensuring ‘safety from war’ and succeeding where the League of Nations had failed. Smuts described democracy in conflict with authoritarianism:

Parliamentary government is being abandoned, personal liberty derided and the basic principle of government by consent of the governed is being replaced by the principle of dictatorship or Caesarism. Our Commonwealth stands on guard for the ideals of democracy."^{109}

Smuts’s appraisal resonated with the opinions voiced by some of Britain’s most noted politicians in the lead up to the coronation on the relationship between the monarchy, political liberty and empire. In a series of BBC radio talks titled ‘The Responsibilities of Empire’ that were broadcast in April, May and June of 1937, Winston Churchill, David Lloyd George and Stanley Baldwin were among a number of statesmen to take to the airwaves to celebrate British democratic progress and the impact this evolution had on the Commonwealth. The last lines of Baldwin’s opening broadcast was typical of what followed in the other talks and was in keeping with the constitutional vision he had created during his political career: ‘The British peoples have always set before them the ideal of freedom, and more than ever today it is their duty to maintain and to justify that ideal.’^{110} Again, these wireless talks bridged political divides. The Labour peer, Lord Snell of Plumstead, told listeners in the second of these broadcasts how his party had reconciled itself to the aims of the ‘new Empire’ and that he perceived it as the ‘most hopeful factor of the modern world’ and a ‘great witness to the stabilising power of freedom.’^{111}

Across the country, MO respondents commented on the way they and those around them interpreted the coronation as a symbol of Britain’s liberal political values and national character. They both implicitly and explicitly compared British freedoms with dictatorship and discussed how the state of the Commonwealth exemplified this

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^{110} Reproduced in *The Listener*, 21 April 1937. Also see *The Listener*, 3 May 1937 and 9 June 1937.

^{111} *The Listener*, 28 April 1937.
democratic image. In Beer, one respondent noted a speech made by his local baker on the community’s coronation celebrations. The baker had announced:

that we had gone through a unique experience that day and it reminded us that there was no country on earth where there was so much happiness, prosperity and freedom as in England and that we should show ‘the foreigner’ in no unmistakable terms that we valued our happiness and freedom... There was no mention of the King and it seemed as if all mention of him was kept in the background as far as possible and when mention was made, it was in the direction of implied apology – e.g. his deeper voice, and his sincerity.\footnote{CO1.}

The Mayor of Manchester also focused on Britain’s unique freedoms in his message to the city’s people on coronation day. He described it as a ‘great day in the history of a freedom-loving community’, proclaiming that ‘we are able to rejoice in the liberty of the subject, freedom of thought, vote, and action, in which this old country stands supreme.’\footnote{Manchester Guardian, 12 May 1937, p.12.} The emphasis on British political exceptionalism intersected with a more diffuse patriotism recorded by MO respondents who remarked on how foreign visitors would return to their countries and ‘say how impressed they were’ with Britain.\footnote{CM6, CO16, CL15, CL22, CL39.} A schoolteacher who escorted a number of his pupils from Northumberland to London to see the procession expressed how he thought the coronation had shown the world that British national life had managed to continue after the abdication crisis:

From a conservative point of view the welcome given not only the King but to the people who stand for tradition and the maintenance of the status quo was most gratifying. It must have been obvious to any foreign visitor that the respect and veneration of the Crown by the people of this country had not been lessened by the unhappy events leading to the abdication of Edward VIII.\footnote{CL63.}

The teacher conflated reverence for monarchy with a broader respect for what he saw as traditional British values and was pleased at the reception extended to George VI.

Portrayals of Britain’s unique political culture were also communicated through descriptions of the nation’s and empire’s stabilizing roles. A retired man from County

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{CO1.}
\item \footnote{Manchester Guardian, 12 May 1937, p.12.}
\item \footnote{CM6, CO16, CL15, CL22, CL39.}
\item \footnote{CL63.}
\end{itemize}
Durham stated that the coronation benefitted the country ‘as it helps us to realise the unity of the Empire with its privileges and responsibilities.’\textsuperscript{116} The man was repeating the exact words used by Baldwin in his BBC wireless talk before the coronation, in which he told listeners that ‘ten years ago I made a broadcast speech on the Privilege of Empire’ and that ‘tonight I am able to speak on the Responsibilities of Empire.’\textsuperscript{117} Other respondents were more explicit in their conflation of empire with world peace. Writing on the potential benefits of the coronation, a young chemist who worked in Brighton suggested that it was ‘a clear factor for peace that a group of nations like the British Commonwealth should “hang together”’, while the Northumberland teacher suggested that George VI was not only doing his best to ‘preserve the stability of the Crown’, but also of ‘the Empire and therefore the greater part of the world in these days of general lack of sound guiding principles (sic).’\textsuperscript{118} The ‘empire-mindedness’ of these people suggests that imperialism and its popular role might have had a greater hold over British minds in this period than some historians have acknowledged.\textsuperscript{119}

Occasionally, the pacific message, which suggested that monarchy, liberty and international peace were bound up together, coalesced with a more bellicose vision of the military power of the empire. For example, one of the MO Mobile Squad reporters who stood in the crowds on the procession route in London recorded a conversation she had observed between a ‘middle-class’ man and woman, which included:

“how right it was to have the Coronation at this time – foreigners would return home and say how impressed they were with England; what a move for peace this was; that the increase in armaments was an excellent thing, how stirring it was to see all the might of British arms...”\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{116} CL99.
\textsuperscript{117} The Listener, 21 April 1937.
\textsuperscript{118} CL65 and CL63. Also see CM6, CL33, CL34, CL40.
\textsuperscript{120} CM6.
The topics that the pair discussed and the transitions in their discussion revealed how conceptions of peace at times intersected with a belief in British military strength.\textsuperscript{121} This conflation of Britain’s peacekeeping role with imperial military power was also noted by a respondent who was a socialist and had, at the insistence of his friends at Mass Observation, taken up the opportunity to spend the day watching the procession from a stand on Oxford Street among a group of people whom he termed as ‘most loyal and patriotic’. He described how a ‘very large Cornishman’, who was part of the group with whom he sat, exclaimed as the Household Guards marched passed, “‘Look at the way they hold their rifles. Look at ‘em! Now we’re showing that not only Hitler can have soldiers. We’ll show ‘em. We’ll show the World.’”\textsuperscript{122} The man was drunk but his outbursts on how the British would not be militarily upstaged by the dictators resonated with other views recorded by the MO panel on the way the coronation inspired national confidence at a time when it seemed threatened by dictatorship.\textsuperscript{123} These opinions support David Edgerton’s analysis that British militarism was framed through public discourse on peacekeeping and defence during these years.\textsuperscript{124} Some of the MO panel perceived the militarism on display as alarming – one respondent stated that ‘the military element is altogether too prominent; it has the psychological effect of dressing war preparations in fancy dress and making it look attractive.’\textsuperscript{125}

A final way in which perceptions of British liberty and stability were expressed on coronation day was through descriptions of the orderly character of the crowds that had assembled in London. Mass Observation respondents often presented portrayals of British social cohesion in direct contrast with the discordance that characterized

\textsuperscript{122} CO19b.
\textsuperscript{123} CO6, CO42, CL15, CL16, CL22, CL103.
\textsuperscript{125} CO16. Also see CO18, CO19b, CL16, CL22, CL69.
contemporary European politics. For example, one of the Mobile Squad reporters who conversed with a man from Huntingdonshire and another from Wales, noted how they all agreed that the French were a ‘very excitable’ people, stirred up by the doctrine of republicanism.126 Similarly, the Cornishman who witnessed the procession in Oxford Street was observed speaking to a Canadian woman and, gesturing ‘to those massed at the edges of the processional route’, said:

“look at the crowd outside there. Look how patient and good-humoured they are. Some of them have been waiting all night, and yet they can still laugh. Why, in Russia or France there’d be no organisation; there might be disorders and fighting if they had to wait like that.”127

This kind of sentiment was also recorded in reports which noted relief that no ‘fiascos [had] tak[en] place’ or ‘bombs… been thrown’.128

Helen McCarthy has discussed how the new mass electorate was imagined in opposition to the rowdiness of the Edwardian years and the unruly political cultures of other nations, thereby creating a vision of a ‘peaceful’ and ‘phlegmatic’ citizenry.129

On the day of George VI’s coronation, The Times reported how the crowds that had gathered in London in anticipation of the event were ‘happy crowds’: ‘The English crowd is known to be always good-tempered and humorous, ready to snatch at any chance for a laugh and a cheer.’130 To judge from MO evidence, it seems that some members of the public assimilated and reproduced this contrasting imagery of the British and foreign ‘masses’. Other scholars have also stressed how the 1930s was beset by British anxieties about the way psychological propaganda had been used in Germany to mobilize a nation in support of Hitlerism.131 Critics of fascism, like editor

126 CM8.
127 CO19b.
128 CO6, CO23, CO27, CL16.
130 The Times, 12 May 1937, p.13.
131 S. Jonsson, Crowds and Democracy: The Idea and Images of the Masses from Revolution to Fascism (New York, 2013), pp.16-20, 51-4, 171-4. Jonsson has noted that mass psychology was associated with the
of the *New Statesman*, Kingsley Martin, popularized psychological ways of thinking about ‘the masses’ as a political body that lacked individual consciousness. Many MO respondents, some of whom had replied to advertisements in the *New Statesman* to partake in the 1937 coronation survey, used a psychological lexicon to describe the crowd’s behaviour. As Nick Hubble has noted, in using these terms, respondents were defining their own sense of middle-class individualism against a negative image of ‘the masses’. While some members of the MO panel expressed their concerns about the potentially destabilizing effect that ‘the masses’ could inflict on British society if their energy was misdirected, most advocated that the coronation presented a safe and vital outlet for popular fervour, uniting the nation around the focal point of monarchy.

One MO respondent who was a teacher and farmer in Sussex described what she deemed to be the coronation’s role in channelling the ‘emotions’ of ‘the masses’:

> I think the monarchy is to some extent a support in the maintenance of our political liberties but also it is the bulwark of class division and social privilege. A great corporate act is a powerful national experience and is good or bad as it is used. The jubilee drew the nation together in sincere admiration for a man who had lived up to a high ideal of service. Mass emotion, even if centred on a worthy object, is dangerous because it can so easily get quite out of control. For an unworthy object – e.g. anti-Jewish, it could degrade terribly. I have heard the opinion that democratic Germany made a mistake in having practically no pageantry which the Germans love and missed (they have had their fill since!!)

This extract showed how, despite the respondent’s personal objections to the social hierarchy that the monarchy symbolized, the institution could be seen as a safeguard against dictatorship and as a symbol of political freedom. Her criticism of the way ‘mass emotion’ had been exploited in Germany to foster anti-Semitism suggested that

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134 CO16.
she perceived constitutional kingship and its ‘high ideal of service’ as an appropriate channel for mass veneration. A teenage girl from Chelsea agreed, noting that ‘people must have some kind of outlet for their emotions... The English, in particular, are so bottled up in this respect, that it no doubt does them some good to have an excuse to cheer, celebrate and shout once in a while.’ The monarchy provided a ‘fairly harmless safety valve, instead of following the example of Italy or Germany.’

Others echoed her ‘safety valve’ analogy and her belief that the coronation provided a harmless vent for mass emotion which, as a ‘very dangerous human characteristic’, could otherwise be exploited by dictators ‘for their own advantage’.

MO respondents imagined a British mass society that centred on constitutional monarchy as a democratic focal point. On the one hand, they drew on an imagery that belittled the mass public, implying it was emotionally susceptible to the draw of royal spectacle. However, their descriptions also conveyed how British political culture was influenced by fears about dictatorship, left-wing respondents accepting monarchy as an alternative to totalitarianism. They perceived the crown as a stabilizing force in mass society, harnessing narratives of continuity, political evolution, social cohesion and peace at a time of escalating chaos elsewhere. It seems likely that, in their beliefs, the MO respondents were influenced by the British media and public dignitaries, who came together in 1937 and, with one voice, extolled the advantages of constitutional monarchy as the defender of democracy and liberty, cementing the crown’s position at the heart of national political life.

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135 CO23.
136 CL1. Also see CM2, CM10, CO29, CO38, CO41, CL8, CL15, CL22, CL46, CL66, CL101, CL107.
4. Royal democratic subjects

This final section examines how the palace worked in tandem with the British media at the time of the coronation to construct a vision of national participation around the focal point of the House of Windsor to complement the democratic political discourse mobilized by politicians and journalists. First, it examines how British working-class people were encouraged to play a more visible part in the coronation than at any other royal event, the celebration of monarchy facilitating new modes of engagement in the public sphere among the working population. Secondly, it analyzes the way that BBC radio producers tried to heighten the sense of national participation that their listeners experienced as part of the coronation programme, and how MO respondents reacted to what they heard. Finally, the section discusses how visual media communicated to viewers a greater scale of participation than anything previously witnessed in Britain.

The palace and media first created a heightened sense of national participation by emphasizing the role of working-class people in the festivities. The day before the coronation, the Daily Herald proclaimed in its front-page headline that ‘All Classes Honoured in Coronation List’. As well as famous individuals from ‘stage, sport and literature’, the paper reported how the coronation honours rolls included ‘railmen, clerks, housemaids [and] ship workers.’ The palace also chose four working-class people from across Britain to attend the coronation ceremony. Gaumont British News made a newsreel about the ‘four guests whom the King has specially invited to the Abbey.’ The film emphasized the visible contrast of the industrial areas from which these people came. Having opened with scenes of coronation decorations along the Mall in London, the film switched to a northern colliery near Chesterfield where ‘pit boy’, Leslie Pollard, was filmed grinning, having ‘been honoured’ with an invite to

138 Ibid. Also see Daily Mirror, 11 May 1937, p.3.
the ceremony (Figure 3.6). The newsreel then moved on to the other three guests: first, to a woman in a Glasgow textile factory who had helped make the carpet for the coronation service; then to a man based at a steelworks in South Wales who had been one of the first boys to attend the Duke of York’s camps; and, lastly, to a woman in Birmingham. As part of this final sequence, the woman told viewers how ‘very proud and very happy’ she was ‘to be representing’ her city. The message communicated in this newsreel was the same as the one mobilized by the palace through its allocation of coronation honours: the monarchy valued all of its subjects, including those in the Celtic fringes. Nevertheless, some press commentators viewed the royal propaganda with suspicion. Lord Ponsonby told readers of the Daily Herald that the invitation of the four working-class people to the coronation service was just ‘a patronising sop’. 140

![Figure 3.6. ‘Pit boy’, Leslie Pollard, Gaumont British News.](image)

The same Gaumont British newsreel ended in a short interview with an eighty-two-year-old woman from the East End of London. Having presented images of local people decorating a courtyard, the film cut to the woman, who informed viewers that she was the oldest resident there and had seen Queen Victoria’s jubilee and Edward VII’s and George V’s coronations. Placing a party hat on her head, she said she hoped

140 Daily Herald, 10 May 1937, p.10.
to enjoy herself at the new king’s coronation with ‘knees up mother brown’ (Figure 3.7). The mention of this famous song, which was widely associated with London’s working-class drinking culture, helped characterize the speaker and her local setting. As with the BBC’s interview with the ‘Cockney woman’ at the 1934 royal wedding, this Gaumont British newsreel established a new precedent by interviewing working-class people for the first time, exposing their voices and opinions. The celebration of monarchy again witnessed the democratization of the public sphere, the palace and media facilitating working-class people’s engagement in national life in new ways.

![Figure 3.7. Eighty-two-year-old East End inhabitant, Gaumont British News.](image)

In anticipation of George VI’s coronation, the newsreels also presented viewers with images of the preparations taking place around the country. In a similar vein, the BBC created an inclusive British story through the differing national and regional accents of its coronation commentators. Editorial files reveal how producers carefully selected the commentary team to ensure that English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh voices

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141 Gaumont, ‘Coronation Preparations’.
142 A search of all the newsreels catalogued in the BUFVC digital archive reveals that this was the first film in which ‘ordinary’ British people were interviewed. Prior to this moment, the ‘interview’ ranged from a short film sequence in which famous people discussed their activities in front of the camera to a non-verbal sequence of close-up images of famous people.
143 Pathé Super Sound Gazette, ‘The Stage is Set 1937’, 10 May 1937.
all contributed to the broadcast. Producers also instructed commentators that they should not ‘use “English” when [they] could use “British”’, and to ‘always keep in mind a listener who is of reasonable intelligence, who has no great education and who has never been to London’, so that the broadcast could have a wide popular appeal.

The same ‘atmosphere microphones’ used at the 1934 royal wedding and 1935 silver jubilee were deployed along the processionary route to capture the noises made by the crowds in order to immerse listeners in London’s coronation festivities, and producers told commentators to ‘let cheering speak for itself whenever possible.’ A number of MO respondents recorded that they, or those around them, were especially moved by the sounds of the cheering crowds that the BBC broadcast in its coverage of the coronation procession or climactic balcony appearance. For some listeners, the sound of cheering enhanced their sense of involvement, increasing their excitement and the ‘national’ experience of the occasion. One respondent listened to the radio with her mother in Sussex and they agreed that it was the BBC’s ‘best broadcast yet’, conveying the ‘scene and colour of the procession’ in such a way that they enjoyed ‘a bit of the thrill with the crowds.’ Similarly, another respondent from Forest Hill in London described the pull of the crowd noises:

I was surprised how much I responded to the atmosphere of the crowd, the cheering, etc. I felt a definite pride and thrill in belonging to the Empire which in ordinary life, with my political bias, is just the opposite of my true feeling… Yet I felt a definite sense of relief that I could experience this emotion and be in and of the crowd.

In portrayals of this sort, the cheering of crowds enlivened these women’s emotional register, stimulating in them an intensified awareness of British community. Although

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144 BBCWA/R30/443/3 - Various memoranda, including Internal Circulating Memo, 1 March 1937, from S. J. de Lotbinière.
145 BBCWA/R30/443/4 - Schedule for Coronation Broadcast, 8 April 1937, p.9; BBCWA/R30/443/5 - Schedule for Coronation Broadcast, 5 May 1937, p.12.
146 BBCWA/R30/443/4 - World-Radio, 7 May 1937; Schedule for Coronation Broadcast, 8 April 1937, p.9.
147 CO14, CO16, CO23, CO33, CO41, CO43, CL7, CL8, CL11, CL34, CL64, CL101.
both women were self-professed socialists and cynical about monarchy’s allure, when listening to the BBC broadcast they felt that they belonged to something greater.

Takashi Fujitani has analyzed how ‘national simultaneity’ – the sharing of time among a people – has played a key role in the creation of modern national identity.\(^{150}\) The BBC coronation broadcast generated temporal concurrence between listeners and the events unfolding in London through its focus on the people who had assembled as part of the crowds on the procession route. It also achieved this unifying effect in its continuous coverage of the progress of the main royal actors moving to and from Westminster Abbey. For the first time ever, palace officials granted the BBC access to report from inside the Buckingham Palace forecourt. This allowed a commentator to present an eyewitness account of the king’s movements from the moment he left the palace to the moment he returned.\(^{151}\) Through a sequence of key ‘handovers’ between commentators, the BBC reported on George VI’s progress through London’s streets, right up to the moment when he stepped out onto the palace balcony at the end of the day.\(^{152}\) This very early example of rolling media coverage was meant to heighten the temporal simultaneity experienced by radio listeners through the precise mapping of the movements of the royal family.

The powerful effect of the sounds of the crowds ensured that the final balcony appearance at Buckingham Palace took on heightened significance. A number of the MO panel noted how they eagerly listened as the large crowds that gathered outside the palace called for the king to appear on the balcony.\(^ {153}\) Some respondents stated that they had worried that George VI would not appear at all and were overcome with


\(^{151}\) BBCWA/R30/443/2 - Letter from S. J. de Lotbinière to Sir Hill-Child, Master of the Household, 4 February 1937 and reply from Hill-Child to de Lotbinière on 5 February 1937.

\(^{152}\) BBCWA/R30/443/2 - Letter from S. J. de Lotbinière to J. Edgar, 16 January 1937; BBCWA/R30/443/4 - Schedule for Coronation Broadcast, 8 April 1937; BBCWA/R30/443/5 - Schedule for Coronation Broadcast, 5 May 1937.

\(^{153}\) CO14, CO16, CO33, CL15, CL34, CL40, CL56.
a sense of relief when he and his family finally did walk out onto the balcony. The BBC staged this moment as a crucial act of recognition between the new royal family and the assembled crowds, production documents again disclosing how cheering was to ‘speak for itself’. The broadcast of the sound of cheers with which the king met as he stood looking out across the thousands of faces that had massed outside the gates of his home was designed to act as an audible chorus of assent to his rule. The final scripted words of the BBC’s radio broadcast stressed the importance of the balcony scene as an act of recognition between monarch and subjects: ‘the long windows have been closed and still the crowd is cheering. We’ll let those cheers be the last thing you hear as we leave Buckingham Palace, at the end of the Coronation ceremonies.’ After these closing words, the volume of the cheering was raised for fifteen seconds, after which the programme faded to silence. This soundscape was stage-managed by the BBC to symbolically install the king at the centre of society through what sounded like popular consent and, in its expertly crafted choreography, was comparable to the auditory political propaganda developed in fascist Germany and Italy in this period.

Newsreel and press photographers also presented the royal balcony appearance as the climax of the coronation celebrations. As with the visual images of the balcony set-piece after the 1934 royal wedding, editors of both media intentionally juxtaposed images of ‘the masses’ alongside scenes of the royal party on the balcony, creating a visual dialogue in gesture between George VI’s family and their subjects (Figures 3.8-9). One MO respondent journeyed into London on coronation evening to stand with the throng of people waiting expectantly at the palace gates for the king to reappear.

154 CL56.
155 BBCWA/R30/443/5 - Schedule for Coronation Broadcast, 5 May 1937, p.10.
156 C. Birdsall, Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933-1945 (Amsterdam, 2012); D. Thompson, State Control in Fascist Italy: Culture and Conformity, 1925-43 (Manchester, 1991).
157 For example, see Daily Mail, 13 May 1934, p.24; Pathé Super Sound Gazette, ‘Pathé Gazette Has the Honour to Present the Coronation of Their Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth’, 13 May 1937.
The respondent described the very loud reception with which George VI met when he emerged as well as the ‘amazing way [that] the moment the King put up his hand in recognition of the applause the shouting suddenly became twice as enthusiastic and loud.’ This excerpt is testament to the power of the innovative gesture of the wave that Princess Marina had popularized three years earlier in generating enthusiasm for the royal family. However, the most significant feature of the visual images from the 1937 coronation was the sheer scale of popular participation they conveyed. Typical was *Gaumont British News*’s coronation film. It opened with a panning shot, filmed from the roof of Buckingham Palace, of the crowds gathered around the Victoria memorial, together with a commentary which described that ‘the heart of a nation is at Buckingham Palace and with Queen Mary on the coronation of her son.’

![Newsreel taken from the roof of Buckingham Palace showing massed crowds waving hands, hats and handkerchiefs outside the palace gates. Pathé Super Sound Gazette.](image)

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158 CL30.
The 1937 coronation witnessed a final significant visual innovation that added to the heightened sense of national simultaneity generated on 12 May. It was the first royal event recorded by the BBC’s television cameras for its growing TV audience. Gerald Cock had moved from his role as Head of Outside Broadcasts in the wireless department to Director of Television, and oversaw the recording of scenes from the coronation route – Cosmo Lang and the Earl Marshall having rejected John Reith’s request that the BBC be allowed inside Westminster Abbey to televise the coronation ceremony. Cock went to Buckingham Palace and asked George VI to smile at the TV camera stationed at Hyde Park Corner as he passed in the golden state coach, offering television viewers ‘the proximity and sensation of real life that the crowds craved.’

The BBC estimated that 10,000 people watched its TV coverage with the transmission relayed as far as Ipswich and Brighton. Although these images were seen by far fewer people than those who watched the coronation newsreel coverage or listened to the radio broadcast, the temporal immediacy of television allowed viewers to participate

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in a royal event as though they were there in person on the day, and anticipated the widespread sense of nationwide participation experienced around television sets at the 1953 coronation.

**Conclusion**

In the postscript of the reprinted version of his book *The Magic of Monarchy*, which was published after the coronation of George VI, Kingsley Martin described how the media had built up the new king ‘in the image of his father’ and that, to the writer’s surprise, their efforts had been ‘slightly more successful than [he had] expected.’\(^{161}\)

While this may well have been the case, this chapter has shown how public anxieties persisted about the abilities of George VI after his succession to the throne and that these concerns were compounded by conflicting media reports on the strength of his character in the lead up to the coronation. The negativity surrounding his image was also due, in part, to the forced absence of his older brother who, to judge from MO reports, remained the most popular member of the royal family. As Martin discussed, Britain was ‘haunted by the memory of Edward VIII’, with George VI’s coronation overshadowed by the constant coverage of the Duke of Windsor’s reunion with Wallis Simpson. Yet, it seems the media’s portrayal of George VI’s weaknesses may have helped generate support for him. A number of respondents recorded concern for the new king, and his vulnerable image seems to have encouraged the belief that royal life was a burden. Martin quoted a ‘north-countryman’ to portray the public’s attitude to the coronation: ‘if it had been Edward the nation would have gone mad. As it is, we would still prefer to cheer Edward, but we know that we’ve got to cheer George. After all, it’s Edward’s fault that he’s not on the throne, and George didn’t ask to get there.

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He’s only doing his duty, and it’s up to us to show that we appreciate it.’ However, on the day, Queen Mary was the recipient of a larger number of positive comments from MO respondents than the king or his immediate family, her matriarchal public image providing a dignity and emotional continuity to the proceedings.

This chapter has also shown that, despite the fact that the king’s character was a cause for public concern, the coronation witnessed a wider celebration of Britain’s democratic evolution and social unity that had little to do with the monarch’s personal attributes. Against a backdrop of socio-political anxiety evoked by the continued rise of the European dictators, the media, politicians and members of the public celebrated the coronation as a statement of constitutional progress – of Britain’s liberal political character, social cohesion and international strength. The charisma vacuum created by George VI meant that this essentially political discourse on the role of monarchy and its relationship with the public sphere and empire assumed greater prominence. Even socialist commentators and MO respondents embraced constitutional kingship as the politically progressive alternative to the continental totalitarianism that they believed threatened social order and world peace.

In support of this democratic message, the media worked with palace officials to orchestrate an image of a British people gathered in loyal support of the monarchy. As well as presenting working-class people and the Celtic nations in new ways which visibly integrated them into the national community, audio and visual media stressed the enormous scale of national involvement conjured by the coronation, heightening the sense of temporal simultaneity that linked audiences together as subjects of the crown.

162 Ibid.
Chapter 4

‘A Real Princess, Really in Love with a Real Prince’: The 1947 Royal Wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip

The 1947 royal wedding of Princess Elizabeth to Prince Philip of Greece has received more extensive historical analysis than the interwar marriages of George V’s children. Scholars have situated Elizabeth’s wedding against the backdrop of postwar austerity, while royal biographers have supported Winston Churchill’s portrayal of the wedding as a ‘splash of colour’ which brightened hard economic times and acted as a British propaganda triumph against Soviet totalitarianism at the onset of the Cold War. Historians who have studied Mass Observation records and opinion polls from before the wedding have, however, noted some popular dissent, including initial indifference and criticism of the event’s anticipated cost at a time of rationing and controls. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska and Philip Ziegler have both suggested that this hostility was characteristic of a deeper opposition to royal privilege that gained ground during the Second World War. Their argument is that members of the public distrusted the ‘fair shares for all’ story created by palace officials around the royals in wartime, which maintained that George VI’s family experienced similar material deprivations as the British population. Nevertheless, Ziegler has emphasized that the 1947 royal wedding stimulated a renewed enthusiasm for the House of Windsor, with public hostility waning as the event approached to be replaced by popular excitement.

This chapter presents the first sustained examination of the media coverage of Elizabeth and Philip’s betrothal and wedding, and the first analysis of over 360 Mass

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Observation reports on the event. It reveals how the media emphasized the authentic nature of the love story to foster empathy for the couple among the public and offset criticism about the prince’s foreign upbringing and the cost of the wedding. MO respondents proved receptive to the romantic story. The media image of the young couple resonated with popular emotional beliefs that stressed the importance of ‘true love’ to domestic fulfilment. A number of historians have noted how the 1940s were characterized by official convictions that national family life was in decline. This chapter shows how the palace worked in tandem with the Church of England and media to produce a romantic vision of the royal couple in an attempt to consolidate the crown’s moral authority in a more democratic society. Beginning with the 1947 wedding, the House of Windsor’s home life was presented as more representative, to encourage popular identification and provide a domestic model for emulation by the nation.

The first part of the chapter examines the opinion poll conducted by the Sunday Pictorial in January 1947 which sought to assess the public response to early rumours of the royal engagement. Framing its investigation into the romance as part of its self-professed duty to express the views of the British people, the newspaper championed the role of the media as key arbitrator in the democratic sounding of postwar public

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5 More than 360 MO respondents answered the question ‘how do you feel about the royal wedding?’ It was the last question in a four-part directive sent out to the MO panel in December 1947, which also included questions on the topics of the cost of living, funny jokes and Christmas festivities. As is always the case with MO, it seems likely that answering these initial questions, especially the one on the respondent's financial resources, affected how participants answered the question on the royal wedding. This might account for some of the concerns expressed by over 60 respondents about the cost of the wedding. The directive replies can be located in the online Mass Observation archive using the keyword search ‘1947 royal wedding’ and are filed under ‘Directive Questionnaire December 1947’. They are referenced here using their respondent numbers. The responses can also be found as hardcopies in the MO archive at the University of Sussex, see SxMOAI/3/106.


opinion. As such, it marked a significant break with the way the British political elite had previously interpreted public opinion before 1945. The Pictorial poll found that there was some concern about the Greek prince’s suitability as husband to the future queen, with criticism aimed at his association with a disreputable dynasty that had fascist links. These dissenting voices were ultimately drowned out by a louder chorus of approval for the princess’s desire to marry someone she loved. The examination presented here of the enthusiasm for the love story substantiates Claire Langhamer’s argument that romantic self-actualization was deemed to be fundamental to personal development in postwar Britain. That a majority of the poll’s respondents thought Elizabeth’s emotional fulfilment to be of greater consequence than the constitutional implications of her marriage to a Greek prince, reveals the strength of the empathetic bonds which members of the public established with the House of Windsor.

The Pictorial’s poll stimulated other public scrutiny of the 1947 royal wedding which focused on its anticipated cost. The second section of the chapter shows how public criticism of both Philip and the anticipated cost of the marriage spurred the monarchy’s image-makers into action. In the build up to, and following, the official announcement of the couple’s betrothal in July 1947, mainstream media outlets were supported by the palace in fashioning images of Elizabeth and Philip designed to appeal to the public. Newsreels and newspapers emphasized the dutiful nature of the princess, the burdens of her royal life and her desire to find romance. Meanwhile, the prince was transformed into a likeable young man, with reports stressing he was more English than foreigner and that he exercised an extraordinary common touch.

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The third section examines the Mass Observation personal testimonies written after the royal couple’s marriage in response to the question ‘how do you feel about the royal wedding?’ MO respondents remarked on the impact that media coverage had on them in engendering empathy for the couple, which neutralized concerns about Philip’s foreign past and the expense of the wedding. I go on to analyze in the fourth section how the MO panel perceived the royal lovers’ public lives as unenviable. The intrusive media coverage of their honeymoon generated sympathy for the couple among respondents, who believed that Elizabeth and Philip were entitled to a private domestic life.

The final section assesses how the palace, Anglican Church and media enhanced the image of the royal lovers as an archetypal couple through the radio broadcast of the wedding ceremony in Westminster Abbey. The service was orchestrated to create an imagined emotional community focused on the wedding. MO respondents noted how the emphasis on the ‘normal’ elements of the royal nuptials heightened their appreciation of a national domestic culture that endorsed the centrality of marriage.10

1. ‘Should our Future Queen Wed Philip?’11

Rumours of a marriage between Elizabeth and Philip had first arisen in 1941, when Henry “Chips” Channon, Tory politician, gossip and man-about-town, commented on a story circulated by the Greek royal family that the prince was intended for the princess.12 A friendship blossomed between the couple in 1943 with the ambitious Lord Louis Mountbatten staging meetings between his nephew (Philip was his sister’s

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10 Pimlott has presented the most nuanced reading of the 1947 royal wedding, noting how supporters of the monarchy constructed this image of ‘normality’ around the princess. But he did not discuss at length the role of the mass media within this process of ‘normalization’, (The Queen, pp.85-122, esp. 119-121).


12 For a discussion of the Greek royal family’s reputation in this period and the negotiations between the British government, the House of Windsor and Lord Mountbatten regarding Philip’s naturalization, see Pimlott, The Queen, pp.94-101.
son) and Elizabeth, the heiress presumptive. Mountbatten also made the prince apply for British citizenship. Philip had enjoyed a distinguished career in the Royal Navy after 1939, and was a strong candidate for British nationality. But as Ben Pimlott has noted, when the government discussed the prince’s naturalization in October 1945, British Balkan diplomacy prevented his application from progressing. It was believed that if he was naturalized it would be construed either as an act in support of the Greek royalists, who were then engaged in a civil war with Greek communists, or as a sign that the Greek royal family wanted to flee abroad. On 1 September 1946, a plebiscite officially reinstated the Greek monarchy, but the vote only drew attention to George II of Greece’s authoritarian reputation, complicating any union with the Greek royal family and further delaying Philip’s naturalization.

William Shawcross has suggested that Elizabeth and Philip became ‘unofficially engaged’ during a holiday at Balmoral around this time, with rumours of a betrothal quickly filtering into newspaper gossip columns. In the wake of these rumours, Britain’s liberal press called for greater public transparency in relation to any proposed marriage alliance with the Greek monarchy. The Manchester Guardian commented that if ‘such an engagement were contemplated the Government would have to consider the political implications, and at present these would be vexatious since Greek affairs are the subject of so much controversy.’ The newspaper argued that Clement Attlee had to make his government’s opinions known to George VI and that the dominions also needed to be consulted. The News Chronicle’s political commentator, A. J. Cummings, also smuggled in a critique of the rumoured betrothal under cover of safeguarding the ‘strong links of mutual confidence’ between Britain and the dominions, and added that the royals would welcome their subjects’ thoughts.

13 W. Shawcross, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother: An Official Biography (Basingstoke, 2009), p.625. For example of press rumours, see Daily Express, 9 November 1946, p.2.
14 Manchester Guardian, 2 January 1947, p.4.
on the engagement: ‘the King and Queen, it cannot be doubted, are fully conscious of
the wisdom of learning in due course what is the public sentiment on the proposal of
the Heiress Presumptive.’

This invocation of ‘public sentiment’ as a barometer on issues of national
interest was not new. The Chronicle had been the first newspaper to publish British
Institute of Public Opinion (BIPO) surveys under the heading ‘What Britain Thinks’
in 1938. Laura Beers has charted how the increased commercialization of the press
after 1945 and the political parties’ growing interest in the demographics that they
claimed to represent combined to enhance the influence attributed to public opinion in
postwar Britain. And, as Adrian Bingham has noted, after the 1936 abdication crisis
both the Daily Mirror and Sunday Pictorial became more critical of monarchy and of
other older hierarchies which they accused of obstructing the war effort and inhibiting
social progress. In this atmosphere of declining deference and burgeoning interest in
the views of ordinary people, the Pictorial responded to the Chronicle’s invitation to
test public opinion on the princess’s rumoured betrothal, posing the direct question to
readers in a front-page headline: ‘SHOULD OUR FUTURE QUEEN WED PHILIP?’
(Figure 4.1)
The significance of this poll should not be underestimated. It was the first time that a newspaper had purposely canvassed readers’ opinions on a royal family issue.\textsuperscript{20} But despite its bold headline, the \textit{Pictorial} was cautious in its criticism of the crown; its guarded approach was indicative of how unusual any scrutiny of the monarchy was in this period. It hid behind the \textit{Guardian} and \textit{Chronicle}’s editorials, quoting them at length, backing their ‘demand for a franker approach to the whole question’ of the rumoured betrothal. In establishing its motives for testing public opinion, the \textit{Pictorial} also referenced a \textit{Guardian} article that had quoted Stanley Baldwin’s speech from the House of Commons debate on Edward VIII’s abdication ten years before: ‘the King’s wife was different from the position of the wife of any other citizen in the country; it was part of the price which the King has to pay.’\textsuperscript{21} By quoting this passage, the \textit{Pictorial} signalled its agreement with the \textit{Guardian}, namely, that the same rules applied to the heiress presumptive and, again citing Baldwin, that ‘it is essentially a matter in which the voice of the people must be heard.’

\textsuperscript{20} I have contacted Adrian Bingham whose research has focused on the popular press in this period and he has confirmed that this was the first time that a newspaper had deliberately canvassed its readers’ opinions on a royal family issue.

\textsuperscript{21} Quoted from the \textit{Sunday Pictorial}, 5 January 1947, p.1.
In its discussion of the constitutional underpinnings of Elizabeth’s engagement, the *Pictorial* highlighted ‘the political consequences of so strong a link between the British and Greek Royal House at this stage.’ In particular, the newspaper expressed unease about the Soviet Union’s reaction to a possible engagement. As already noted, Greek royalists were embroiled in a civil war with Greek communists at this time, and it was felt that a betrothal between Elizabeth and Philip would signal British support for the Greek king and his fascist legacy, offending the Soviets in the ‘game of Power Politics’. Yet, while the *Pictorial* recognized in the royal betrothal the same political complexities as the liberal *Guardian* and *Chronicle*, it projected the engagement as a true romance between the couple: ‘many people believe that if the Princess and Prince are in love, then nothing should be allowed to stand in the way of their marriage.’ The *Pictorial* established the social binaries through which the British public would be consistently encouraged to make sense of the engagement: true love was presented as reason enough to overlook the political ramifications of the betrothal. This argument partly echoed the Duke of Windsor’s love story with Wallis Simpson a decade earlier. But, whereas Baldwin had disregarded public support for Edward VIII in 1936, the *Pictorial* proclaimed that ‘above all, the loyal people over whom the young Princess will one day rule as Queen must also be afforded the opportunity of expressing their views.’ And, using capital letters to emphasize its point, the newspaper asserted that the public’s views needed determining ‘NOT AFTER THE EVENT, AS WAS THE CASE WITH ANOTHER ROYAL CRISIS IN 1936, BUT BEFORE IT.’

As Bingham has stated, this was ‘a powerful rhetoric of popular democracy’, the left-wing *Pictorial* and its sister paper, the *Mirror*, campaigning for a more equal society in which ‘the palace and the politicians would not be able to ignore the voice

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of the people.” Indeed, the Pictorial’s poll represented a decisive break with the way public opinion had previously been managed and represented. In the interwar period, Conservative politicians and leading journalists had conceived of public opinion as something that was interpreted and moulded by the parliamentary system. Beers has noted how this elitist approach ‘mask[ed] a more practical fear about the implications of opinion polling for the British political process.’ Moreover, when the government finally trialled more representative forms of opinion polling during the Second World War, it did so in order to support official propaganda. It was only after the war that popular newspapers began to fully champion their role in the democratic sounding of public opinion. The Pictorial’s 1947 poll was a key landmark in this chronology of increasingly representative opinion polling. Just as the media facilitated new modes of popular engagement in the public sphere through its exposure of royal family events in the 1930s, it now publicized ordinary people’s personal beliefs on what monarchy meant to them.

Bingham has discussed how the Pictorial’s poll caused a furore in Fleet Street, which was evidence of its radical ambition. The proprietor of Picture Post, Edward Hulton, was ‘one of those appalled by the exercise’:

The journalism of the Sunday Pictorial has reached a new low. It is difficult to write with any restraint about this latest effort by this self-appointed voice of the people, which is as genuinely mischievous and politically harmful as it is in gross bad taste, and infinitely wounding to the feelings of all those concerned.

The language Hulton used to criticize the Pictorial reflected the high esteem in which he held the royal family’s private life and his view that ordinary people had no right to cast judgement on their social superiors. The royalist Daily Mail also criticized the Pictorial’s decision to canvass public opinion on a royal family matter, remarking that

25 Bingham, Family, pp.244-5.
27 Ibid, pp.189-90.
28 Bingham, Family, p.245.
‘the days are past when dynastic marriages meant Power politics... The King and Queen... can surely be trusted to safeguard the future of their elder daughter, who will one day be our Queen.’

Downplaying the international political context at the centre of the episode, the Mail suggested that the engagement was a private family issue. But replies to the poll poured in from all sections of society and, on the following Sunday, the Pictorial declared that 55% of respondents favoured the marriage on the condition that it was indeed a love match, 40% were opposed to it, and 5% believed Elizabeth should not be prevented from marrying the Greek prince for political reasons, but should nonetheless renounce her right to the throne (Figure 4.2).

Once again, the Pictorial was careful in the way it communicated criticism of the crown. Both the headline of the report, ‘The Princess and the People’, and the large photograph of Philip smiling next to it conveyed the impression that the public

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29 Daily Mail, 6 January 1947, p.2.
agreed that he was a suitable match for Elizabeth. The opening lines of the article also softened any critique of the monarchy: ‘The huge number of letters received confirms beyond all question the immense popularity of the Royal Family as a whole and of the Princess in particular.’\(^{31}\) The newspaper also announced that it had omitted fifty seven ‘irresponsibly anti-Royalist’ letters to underline its pro-monarchy stance. Defending its ambition to conduct the poll, the *Pictorial* argued that it was ‘among the functions of a newspaper in an ordered democracy’ to present ‘the truest reflection of public opinion on the controversies of the day.’\(^{32}\) The *Pictorial* stressed that the survey formed part of its political responsibility, with the newspaper crystallizing the press’s role as the key intermediary in the canvassing of public opinion.

Over a central double-page spread the *Pictorial* offered ‘a full analysis of the results so far achieved’ and a ‘representative sample’ of the letters it had received.\(^{33}\) Women formed an ‘overwhelming majority’ of those who supported the marriage – ‘provided the two young people are in love’ – and this ‘feminine support’ tended to come from those aged 14 to 30 and older than 50. The stipulation that the couple had to be in love supports Langhamer’s argument on the primacy accorded to the romantic ideal in postwar private life.\(^{34}\) Special emphasis on the love story also indicated that some respondents believed the princess’s emotional happiness to be more important than the betrothal’s political implications.\(^{35}\) The *Pictorial* noted how ‘strong objection is taken by the majority of those readers (in favour) to any “appeasement” of foreign

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\(^{31}\) Ibid, p.1.
\(^{32}\) Ibid, p.1.
\(^{33}\) Ibid, pp.4-5. It is possible that the *Pictorial* fabricated the results published, either to make the betrothal seem more contentious than it actually was, or to disguise overwhelming hostility to the marriage in order to avoid the Palace’s disapproval. However, given the sensitivity of the topic, it seems likely that the newspaper would not have risked excessive manipulation for fear of discovery, and I have therefore interpreted the results at face value.
\(^{35}\) Frank Mort has shown how this was also the case with some progressively-minded people who wrote to Edward VIII to encourage him to retain the throne and marry the woman he loved a decade earlier. See F. Mort, ‘Love in a Cold Climate: Letters, Public Opinion and Monarchy in the 1936 Abdication Crisis’, *Twentieth Century British History* 25:1 (2014), pp.45-7.
Powers in this “purely domestic” issue.\textsuperscript{36} It described how phrases such as ‘the right to live their own lives’, ‘a purely private matter’, and ‘no interference in the dictates of Princess Elizabeth’s heart’, recurred in many letters. These sorts of expressions revealed how some supporters of the engagement believed that the princess’s private life should not impinge on her role as a political symbolic figurehead.

The ‘representative’ letters published by the \textit{Pictorial} in support of a betrothal also revealed how some respondents took a democratic stance on the betrothal. The Mayor and Mayoress of Winchester, Mr and Mrs Charles Sankey, professed a liberal, egalitarian attitude to the engagement: ‘Let Royalty be the same as their subjects in “affairs of the heart” – let them choose for themselves.’ Nancy Harman from Hastings agreed, stating that Elizabeth ‘should be able to marry the man she loves whether he be of Royal Birth or a commoner’, and included the caveat that ‘in her choice of a husband she should be guided only by her father and mother.’ Mrs D. Morson of the London suburb Thornton-Heath neatly summarized this belief when she compared Elizabeth to her own kin, describing how, as a family, they agreed that she ‘should have the same privileges as our own daughters – of choosing her own husband with her parents’ advice and consent.’\textsuperscript{37} The parallels between the princess and other young women in these letters showed how great importance was attached to the ability to choose one’s partner, Elizabeth’s efficacy in achieving true love conforming with wider postwar feminine desires, which made her seem more normal in her tastes. This section of public opinion also demonstrated how the House of Windsor could be primarily defined according to the personal lives and losses of its main protagonists, respondents to the poll utilizing emotional scripts to display personal familiarity in their characterization of Elizabeth and her family.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Sunday Pictorial}, 12 January 1947, p.4.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, p.4.
Some respondents contested this domestic, depoliticized image of the betrothal. The *Pictorial* noted that letters it had received opposing the engagement had mainly been written by ‘politically-minded people, men just outnumbering women.’ Of the 40% against the marriage, ‘one letter in six was from a soldier or an ex-Serviceman who has fought overseas’, often writing on behalf of barracks or clubs to declare ‘let’s have no more foreigners in England.’

Other respondents were particularly against allying with Greece or any foreign dynasty, many arguing that the days of royal intermarriage were over, with an ‘impressive majority’ claiming that the engagement was a ‘political move’. In this respect, opponents also seemed to be committed to a love match, but not with a foreign prince. They refused to believe Elizabeth was in love and advised that she ‘follow in the footsteps of her father’ by marrying a commoner.

Letters from respondents averse to the engagement were printed to support this position. While some critics were simply xenophobic and opposed the betrothal on grounds of Philip’s ‘foreignness’, others took aim at the political standing of Greece, noting how it ‘will always be in trouble with someone’, or that a marriage was unwise ‘in view of the present world situation.’ For example, a London correspondent echoed the *Pictorial’s* concern about the Soviet Union’s attitude to the betrothal, stating that any link with the Greek royal family would be ‘eyed with suspicion’ abroad, creating international tension. This author claimed that ‘the ruler of England and the British Empire has to make certain personal sacrifices for the benefit of the people. Where a match such as this one occurs the choice for Princess Elizabeth will be to sacrifice love for the future of her people.’ This correspondent formulated a critique of the betrothal that resonated more widely with discourse on the burdensome

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38 Ibid, p.4.  
39 Ibid, p.4.  
40 Ibid, p.4.  
41 Ibid, p.5.  
42 Ibid, p.5.
nature of royal status: the princess’s future role as the nation’s symbolic figurehead demanded that she sacrifice private emotional fulfilment. Yet, many respondents in favour of the engagement took the opposite view that her personal happiness was necessary for her to perform her difficult public role. A teenage girl from Portsmouth decided with her friends that Elizabeth ‘should be free to marry whom she pleases if she loves him [because] we think a happy queen is a good queen.’ Phyllis Jones of London similarly noted that ‘if her private life is happy it is reasonable to suppose that Princess Elizabeth will make a better Queen than if she were unhappily married.’ These comments revealed how Elizabeth’s constitutional role was framed by strong affective meanings: only through the realization of true love and happiness in private life would she achieve her full potential as Britain’s future monarch.

In its summary of the results gathered after the first week of the poll, the _Pictorial_ reaffirmed the divide along which the royal betrothal would be judged: once again, it was a story of true love versus constitutional politics. The newspaper asserted the validity of romance when it continued its poll a second week and, aiming to obtain ‘the truest possible reflection of mass opinion’, issued its readers with a coupon that gave them only two answers to choose from: ‘Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip should marry if they are in love and no obstacle should be placed in their way’; or, ‘there should be no royal marriage between Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip of Greece.’ This narrowing of options consolidated a story supposedly split between romance and duty, which was again amplified when the newspaper revealed the final results of its ‘royal poll’ the following Sunday: 64% of respondents supported the marriage, if it was a love match, and just 32% opposed it. The _Pictorial_ published a

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43 Ibid, p.5.
44 Ibid, p.4.
selection of mainly positive letters from the ‘thousands upon thousands’ it claimed to have received ‘from all classes’ to restate the same set of messages from the previous week. One letter focused on the nascent theme that Elizabeth’s private fulfilment would make up for the demanding tasks she faced as a royal public servant. Mrs M. I. Tebble from Shropshire presented love as a reward for royal responsibility:

If Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip are in love and wish to marry they should be allowed to do so. Princess Elizabeth, both now and later as a ruling Queen, will have to give up much of her time to State affairs and will also be expected to have children as heirs to the Throne. Therefore her home life should be as happy as possible. Prince Philip seems a healthy, intelligent man. If he is allowed to marry the Princess and can fulfil his duties as well as the Duchess of Kent he will no doubt become very popular with the British people.

As well as noting the high regard she had for Princess Marina, Mrs Tebble expressed the view that Elizabeth’s private emotional fulfilment would compensate for a life of public service. One of the duties she identified was the requirement to produce heirs, revealing how Elizabeth’s gender shaped the constitutional expectations that members of the public placed on her. As a young woman who entertained domestic aspirations, Elizabeth may have been better placed to get her way in these circumstances than a male heir apparent would have been. Emotional control was deemed to be vital to public deportment in the masculine world of high politics, and a male heir apparent might have been expected to forsake love and place national political responsibility ahead of private fulfilment.

What clearly emerged from the Pictorial’s poll was the popular belief that the princess’s role was unenviable, her future happiness hinging on her finding love. As the royal romance played out over the course of 1947, this consolatory motif became increasingly important to the official projection and the public assimilation of the love

48 Ibid. N.B. The newspaper’s italicized emphasis.
story – crystallizing an empathy for Elizabeth and her family, which centred on the necessity of emotional fulfilment. This kind of empathetic identification was new and showed how personal realization in domestic life had become closely integrated into the constitutional identities of the protagonists of the House of Windsor. It also seems the *Pictorial* poll created a more socially inclusive royal populism. The paper notably praised its readers for rendering a ‘valuable service to our democratic system [having] provided the authorities with a gauge of popular feeling should a marriage with Prince Philip be contemplated.’

Although the *Pictorial* ultimately found that popular opinion favoured the royal romance, the poll initiated a new wave of public scrutiny of the monarchy’s national position as represented by the press’s mediation of ordinary people’s views. When the royal engagement was finally announced in July, the popular press scrutinized other potentially contentious aspects of the wedding arrangements via the same medium of public opinion. The *Daily Express* ‘invited’ its readers to take part in a ‘national poll’, asking ‘should the Princess’s wedding day be selected as the first postwar occasion to restore to Britain the traditional gaiety of a gala public event’ or ‘should the Princess be an austerity bride?’ Four days later, unsurprisingly, the royalist *Express* declared that for every six replies it received ‘overwhelmingly in favour of a gala wedding’, it received just one against. The battle lines were drawn. Shortly afterwards, the much less deferential *Daily Mirror* published its own interpretation of public opinion. It presented a selection of readers’ letters that questioned the expense of the wedding, protesting at the civil list annuities that were to be granted to Elizabeth and Philip, and expressing concern that the princess would receive additional ration coupons from the

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government for her wedding dress.\textsuperscript{53} To judge from the Mass Observation reports compiled at the end of 1947, it seems that some of these material concerns persisted. More than thirty respondents opposed the royal wedding on the basis of the excessive amount of money spent on it, while a further fifteen expressed their unease with either the new home, allowances or wedding presents given to the bridal couple.\textsuperscript{54} These writers believed that the privileges enjoyed by royalty did not suit the hardships that characterized the austerity of the immediate postwar years.

2. The public images of Elizabeth and Philip

In the wake of the generally enthusiastic reaction to the rumoured royal betrothal, the palace and British media built on the positive appraisals identified by the Pictorial’s poll to try to foster greater public support for Elizabeth’s choice of husband. Retuning the established discourse on the burdensome nature of royal public life to the sacrifice the princess would make on behalf of her country, the media asserted that she, like all women of her generation, should be able to choose whom she married. In this way, the postwar belief in the centrality of romance to self-actualization coalesced with the established theme on the hardships of royal responsibility to produce an image of an emotionally sensitive princess with whom members of the public could empathize. According to this burgeoning narrative, Elizabeth could achieve self-fulfilment in the pleasures of a normal domestic life, offsetting the personal oppression that supposedly came with royal duty. As this section demonstrates, this aspiration for ‘normality’ was enhanced through media coverage which presented more ‘normal’ portrayals of both Elizabeth and Philip. This ‘normalization’ of monarchy’s public presence through the figures of the princess and prince existed in tension with the ‘extraordinariness’ of

\textsuperscript{54} For example, see 1079, 2427, 3848, 3116, 3827, 3820, 4213, 4022, 3524, 3808, 3653, 3667, 4301.
their royal status: with the increasing democratization of love post-1945, the royal couple were presented as emblematic of a national culture of domesticity designed to have a cross-class appeal.55

At the end of January 1947, Elizabeth left London with her family for a four-month tour of the Union of South Africa. Arriving in Cape Town in mid-February, George VI and his kin embarked on an extensive tour of South Africa in an effort to placate the rising tide of nationalism that had undermined the country’s political stability. Pimlott has commented how the royal trip demonstrated the monarchy’s value as a ‘link in an association of nations and territories whose ties had become tenuous, because of war, British economic weakness, and nascent nationalism.’56 As a youthful symbol of the vitality of the monarchy, Princess Elizabeth, like her uncle Edward, who had toured the white dominions as his father’s ambassador, helped propagate an image of the crown as the single link that bound together disparate imperial peoples.57 Her twenty-first birthday fell on 21 April, three days before she was due to return to England. As the climax to the royal visit, she broadcasted a special message to the empire and Commonwealth, which Pimlott suggested became the most important public address of her life.58 The message was written for her by the king’s private secretary, Alan Lascelles, who was probably one of the main collaborators along with Archbishop Cosmo Lang on the last broadcasts given by George V, and it contained all the main features of the royal public language that had been crafted in the 1930s. Also recorded by newsreel cameras, the princess told both

55 Langhamer, The English, p.4. As Pimlott has noted, the princess’s public image did not always tally with reality, her actual tastes – which included horse breeding and deer shooting – being anything but ordinary (The Queen, pp.106-8).
56 Pimlott, The Queen, p.118.
58 Pimlott, The Queen, p.115.
listeners and viewers how the Commonwealth had to work together to ensure the prosperity of its constituent nations. She finished by discussing the theme of service.

In the vein of her father and grandfather, she pledged her life to the empire and its peoples, emphasizing that she required their mutual support as well:

I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great Imperial family to which we all belong, but I shall not have the strength to carry out this resolution alone unless you join in with me, as I now invite you to do. I know that your support will be unfailingly given. God help me to make good my vow and God bless all of you who are willing to share in it.59

Projecting an image of the burdensome life that lay ahead of her, Elizabeth’s speech echoed those made by her predecessors.

Pimlott has suggested that the princess’s account of the enduring vitality of imperial relations inspired British audiences who were ‘exasperated by restrictions, and worn out after the added hardships of a terrible winter.’ But Pimlott did not note how her speech was calculated to bolster her public reputation in anticipation of the announcement of her engagement to Philip. The congratulations extended to Elizabeth by British newspapers on her birthday also aimed to engender public support for her. The Daily Express discussed the tiresome nature of royal duty: ‘The happiness of being a lovely young woman in an admiring world will be tempered more and more by the demands of the office for which she is destined.’ The other leading popular royalist paper, the Daily Mail, similarly reported that she ‘faces a vocation and a career without parallel in the world today.’ This article also cited the new biography of Elizabeth that had just been completed by one of the most notable royal chroniclers

59 Ibid, p.117.
60 Ibid, p.118.
61 Daily Express, 21 April 1947, p.2.
of the mid-twentieth century, Dermot Morrah.\textsuperscript{63} He had accompanied the royal family to South Africa to report on the tour on behalf of \textit{The Times} and had been granted unprecedented access to document Elizabeth’s life. The result was a piece of royal propaganda which presented the princess as representative of all young women of her generation.\textsuperscript{64} The \textit{Mail} quoted Morrah on how she was ‘a girl of the age’, enjoying modern pastimes like dancing, theatre, cinema and dining out. The implied message contained in the press reports was clear: despite the public criticism of her rumoured fiancé exposed by the \textit{Pictorial} in January, Elizabeth should, like all young British women, be allowed to fall in love and choose who she married, especially in light of the sacrifices she was to make on behalf of the nation and empire.

These descriptions of the princess’s normality chimed with an egalitarian image of Philip. Back on home shores, following a protracted campaign headed by Lord Mountbatten, the prince was finally naturalized as a British subject in March 1947.\textsuperscript{65} Renouncing his royal title and claim to the Greek throne, he took his uncle Louis’ name to become Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten. The British royal family had initially expressed concern about Philip’s personality.\textsuperscript{66} Sarah Bradford quotes a courtier who claimed that ‘the family were at first horrified when they saw that Prince Philip was making up to Princess Elizabeth. They felt he was rough, ill-mannered, uneducated and would probably not be faithful.’\textsuperscript{67} Indeed, during their courtship, Philip penned several letters to Elizabeth’s mother apologizing for his behaviour during their stays together. In late 1946, he wrote to the queen, contrite for a ‘rather heated discussion’ he had started at dinner with the royal family, stating that he hoped she did not think

\textsuperscript{64} Pimlott, \textit{The Queen}, p.120.
\textsuperscript{66} On the royal family’s attitudes to Philip see Bradford, \textit{GVI}, pp.556-9; Pimlott, \textit{The Queen}, pp.86-105; and Shawcross, \textit{Queen Elizabeth}, pp.623-6.
\textsuperscript{67} Bradford, \textit{GVI}, p.556.
him ‘violently argumentative and an exponent of socialism.’ Yet, while forthright and progressive in his views, Philip’s matter-of-fact demeanour proved popular with the media when, on 9 July 1947, his betrothal to the princess was finally announced.

The media reaction to the royal engagement was very positive with nearly every popular newspaper announcing the betrothal in a front-page headline (Figure 4.3). The only notable exception was the Daily Mirror which, in line with its own and the Pictorial’s less deferential attitude towards the hierarchical social order, published a front-page editorial calling on readers to work together in order to save the economy; the implied message was that Britain was run by its people, not the social elite. The press and newsreels otherwise largely overlooked the expressions of opposition to the match which had arisen six months earlier. Philip was referred to using only his new British-sounding name and, like his first cousin Marina in 1934, his credentials as an anglophile were repeatedly emphasized. However, whereas Marina had, as a figure on

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68 Shawcross, Queen Elizabeth, p.625.
69 For example, see News Chronicle, 10 July 1947, p.1; Daily Sketch, 10 July 1947, p.1; Daily Herald, 10 July 1947, p.1.
70 Daily Mirror, 10 July 1947, p.1.
the fringe of the royal family, been able to remain a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, this was not an option open to Philip who was marrying the future supreme governor of the Church of England. As Pimlott has noted, later in September, Philip’s ‘transmogrification into an Englishman was completed with his formal reception into the Anglican Church by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the chapel at Lambeth Palace.’ British newspapers seem to have toed the official line that he was English in all but birth, downplaying his links with a foreign religion. The *Daily Sketch*’s coverage was typical: whilst at school at Gordonstoun, he had ‘always attended Church of England services, and regard[ed] himself as a good member of the Church.’ The *Sketch* added that ‘since the rumours of the Royal engagement became prevalent there has been much discussion about his Greek associations, but although he was born on the island of Corfû, that is his only real link with Greece.’

Despite its initial criticism of the rumoured engagement back in January, the *Guardian* also stated that, although Philip was Greek by birth, he was ‘half English and half Danish, and has enjoyed a typically English education to which his career in the Royal Navy, in which he holds a permanent commission, is a natural and fitting outcome.’ Both the popular and elite press also reproduced photographs of him in which he smilingly posed in his naval uniform. These carefully constructed pictures almost certainly came from what Pimlott termed a ‘biographical information pack’, circulated by either Lord Mountbatten or palace courtiers before the announcement of the engagement.

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71 Current restrictions on the Archbishop of Canterbury Geoffrey Fisher’s files in Lambeth Palace Library regarding Elizabeth II and Prince Philip prohibit any investigation into the official discussions concerning the latter’s reception into the Church of England.
73 *Manchester Guardian*, 10 July 1947, p.3. The *News Chronicle* similarly softened its original criticism of the rumoured royal betrothal in January, see 10 July 1947, p.2.
75 Pimlott, *The Queen*, pp.100-1.
presented by the *Daily Express*, which mapped Philip’s development from childhood to the present. These images included the prince as a baby, as a schoolboy performing in a quintessentially British re-enactment of Macbeth, as a bearded sailor, alongside Princess Elizabeth, and playing skittles with men at his ‘local’, the Methuen Arms, which was close to his shore station in Corsham, Wiltshire (Figure 4.4).

![Figure 4.4. Daily Express, 10 July 1947, p.2.](image)

This image of a classless prince who easily crossed traditional social boundaries was also promulgated in the final scenes of the *Pathé* newsreel story on the betrothal. A cameraman and reporter journeyed to the Methuen Arms to interview the villagers with whom Philip had played skittles. The commentator remarked that ‘all the locals knew him – and our reporter learnt how much they admired him.’ *Pathé*’s scenes inside the pub showed the interviewer drinking from a pint of beer with a man named Joe who then, speaking directly to the camera, remarked how Philip was ‘the most charming fellow’ and that they had enjoyed ‘many a tussle’ on the skittles alley
together (Figure 4.5). The reporter then asked a man called Paul what he thought of the prince’s engagement; he replied that he was ‘highly delighted to hear about it’ and the men then toasted the royal couple’s good health. Another skittles player described Philip’s unassuming qualities, stating how he had visited the pub ‘for about three or four weeks before [he] knew he was a prince.’

The pub sequence presented Philip as an affable, everyman figure who enjoyed the company of ordinary men. Pathé’s publicization of the men’s opinions on Philip again shows how the news media took a lead role in assessing public attitudes through the analysis of ‘ordinary’ people’s views, and the villagers’ first-hand descriptions of the prince heightened the verisimilitude of their appraisals.

The press and newsreels perpetuated this public image of the sociable, equitable and handsome prince through to his wedding day. The media regularly commented on his good looks, which reflected a growing fixation with physical attraction as an

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important factor in British romantic culture.\textsuperscript{78} The \textit{Daily Sketch} remarked how the American press had labelled Philip ‘a handsome guy’, while the usually sober \textit{British Movietone News} referred to him as Elizabeth’s ‘very good looking husband-to-be’.\textsuperscript{79} His physically attractive image sat comfortably alongside his persona as a glamorous modernizer who enjoyed the pursuits of driving, dancing and drinking cocktails. This public image drew on the symbolic economy of ‘romantic Toryism’, which elevated military prowess and patrician elegance.\textsuperscript{80} The \textit{Sunday Express} compared the prince’s fashionability to that of the late Duke of Kent, who, the newspaper claimed, had been ‘one of the most popular of the Royal Family.’\textsuperscript{81} And, as with Prince George’s royal celebrity, Philip’s charm lay in his lack of reserve. The newsreels which filmed him at work at the navy training school in Corsham presented viewers with scenes of him joking with his colleagues over lunch. The \textit{Gaumont British News} voiceover stated how, ‘chatting with fellow officers in the wardroom, Lieutenant Mountbatten seems glad to be back at work again after a very happy leave.’\textsuperscript{82} A \textit{Pathé} producer prepared a list of filmed camera shots for the same news story which suggested that he thought this scene conveyed a natural image. He noted that it contained ‘good informal shots of Philip in the wardroom, chatting to companions between mouthfuls of food.’\textsuperscript{83}

Combining an elite glamour with a common touch, the media constructed Philip’s public image using traditional and newer forms of royal celebrity, creating a persona that was distinguished by its modern style and its egalitarianism. He seemed to mix as


\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Sunday Express}, 16 November 1947, p.2. For other media examples of Philip’s modern persona see \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 10 July 1947, p.5; \textit{Daily Herald}, 10 July 1947, p.2.


\textsuperscript{83} http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/index.php/document/101910_shotlist [Accessed 12/08/14].
easily with West Country villagers as with the royal family at Buckingham Palace. The tension that characterized his celebrity image had precursors in the depictions of interwar royalty, both the late Duke of Kent and Edward, Prince of Wales, having fused fashionable fast lives with what appeared as more ordinary public selves.

Princess Elizabeth’s public image mirrored some of the features of her fiancé’s celebrity. The Daily Mail asserted that they were ‘youthful, happy, well-matched and good looking’. The princess blended everyday qualities, most notably that, to judge from reports, she was ‘as romantic as any girl’, with the extraordinary characteristics bestowed on her by her constitutional position and the stylish pastimes she pursued.

For example, on the evening that her engagement was announced, she dined with her friends at the stylish Dorchester Hotel and then, according to the press, danced until the early hours of the morning at the home of the Duke of Wellington. However, it was the way she was depicted as symbolic of a generation of young women who were supposedly fixated with love that both her and Philip’s personae were distinguished from their interwar predecessors. As part of the egalitarian reconstruction of family life in postwar Britain, the media projected the couple as the embodiment of idealized emotional domesticity.

Historians who have examined the nature of postwar companionate marriage in Britain have noted how it was based on mutual emotional and sexual satisfaction, and located within an increasingly privatized understanding of the home. The idealized

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84 Daily Mail, 10 July 1947, p.1.
85 Sunday Express, 13 July 1947, p.2. Also see Daily Mail, 10 July 1947, p.1; Daily Telegraph, 10 July 1947, p.1; Manchester Guardian, 10 July 1947, p.4.
86 Daily Herald, 10 July 1947, p.1; Daily Express, 10 July 1947, p.1.
projection of companionate royal family life was most visible in the media discourse collectively propagated and backed by the palace. The *Sunday Express* presented an intimate portrayal of the princess to highlight the emotional reality of her romance:

All girls discuss young men, and Elizabeth and her friends were no exception. So it soon became common knowledge that a tall, blond and handsome naval officer called Philip was her favourite. Luckily his appearance came up to the high standard she had once set herself many years before when she said, “when I marry, my husband will have to be very tall and very good-looking.” Some time later, when a friend pointed out that she might have to marry for political reasons, she replied, “I couldn’t marry a man I didn’t love.”

These alleged first-hand insights into Elizabeth’s ideas on love were very innovative. For the first time, a journalist ascribed direct speech to the princess to augment an intimate image of her. This kind of revelation was used to emphasize the normality of the princess’s desire to find love: like ‘all girls’, she discussed her feelings with her friends, her romantic ambitions seeming more important than constitutional politics.

The media also used visual images to try and convince audiences that it was a real love match. Whereas in 1934, George and Marina had directly addressed cinema viewers through the newsreels to comment on their happiness after their engagement, Elizabeth and Philip declined from issuing any kind of public statement. Instead, the day after the engagement was announced, royal officials arranged for the couple to be filmed and photographed at a special sitting at Buckingham Palace. All four major newsreel distributors used the same footage from this sitting. New kinds of emotional gesture were introduced on film that would have been seen as inappropriate a decade earlier: the couple posed arm-in-arm, exchanged smiles and inaudibly laughed and talked with one another between glances at the camera (Figure 4.6).

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89 For example, see *Daily Express*, 10 July 1947, p.4; *Daily Telegraph*, 10 July 1947, p.1; *News Chronicle*, 10 July 1947, p.2.
90 *Sunday Express*, 13 July 1947, p.2.
91 For example, compare *Gaumont British News*, ‘The Royal Engagement’, 14 July 1947 in which Philip and Elizabeth stroll arm-in-arm, with the film of George and Marina from 1934 that shows the couple walking side-by-side but not physically touching one another: *British Movietone News*, ‘Royal Honeymoon’, 6 December 1934.
soundtracks heightened the atmosphere of these scenes, which included close-ups of the engagement ring the princess wore on her finger. The *British Movietone News* commentator, Lionel Gamlin, drew special attention to Elizabeth’s facial expressions: ‘in these, the first special studies of the pair since the news of their engagement, it’s easy to see the radiant happiness of the princess, as she and her very good looking husband-to-be pose for the cameras in the Palace.’ The princess’s smile also received extensive press coverage, popular and elite newspapers regularly commenting on and illustrating how happy she looked.92

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 4.6. Pathé News, ‘The Royal Romance’, 14 July 1947.**

3. **Mass Observation respondents’ reactions to the royal romance**

This section examines how the vision of companionate love which the media created around Elizabeth and Philip seems to have encouraged public support for the couple. Mass Observation respondents expressed pleasure that the princess appeared to have found emotional happiness and this offset their concern that the match may have been

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politically motivated. In particular, the MO panel described the powerful influence of visual media in convincing them it was a love match. Although some doubts persisted about the Greek prince’s suitability, the insights into popular attitudes contained in MO reports suggested that his reputation as a likeable, handsome Englishman was generally welcomed.

Many of the MO respondents who replied to the royal wedding question in the December 1947 directive testified to the importance of the authenticity of the emotion between the lovers in piquing their interest in the event. Out of 360 directive replies, more than fifty respondents recorded their support for the royal romance based on the relationship being a true love match. It was noted that the couple ‘suited one another’, that it was ‘not of political significance’ or ‘an arranged marriage’, but the outcome of ‘genuine’ affection between Elizabeth and Philip. These personal testimonies were all the more significant because the question asked of the MO panel – ‘how do you feel about the royal wedding?’ – did not contain any reference to either Elizabeth or Philip, yet it evoked from respondents descriptions of the characteristics of the lovers and their relationship. The account of a fifty-five-year-old woman from Morecambe in Lancashire was typical: ‘I’m very pleased that it is a real love match and not a diplomatic one; and I think they really are a lovely couple.’ A woman from Truro in Cornwall similarly noted that she was ‘glad Princess Elizabeth was marrying someone she loved [instead of] having one of these arranged marriages which has so often been the lot of heir and heiresses to the throne.’ One of the twenty men who expressed his admiration for the romance described how, despite having originally been troubled by Philip’s Greek background, he realized ‘political marriages were out of date and could no longer determine political allegiances.’ He concluded that ‘Elizabeth was lucky to

93 For example, see 3840, 1325, 2984, 3796, 4008, 4223, 3121, 4292, 4267, 4246, 3005, 3806, 3810.
94 2675.
95 4247.
find a man with whom she was in love and who was eligible to marry her.\textsuperscript{96} The fact that the couple were believed to be truly in love pleased these respondents who could easily relate to the importance of free choice and emotional fulfilment in romance.

Responses of this kind indicated that the binary first erected by the \textit{Sunday Pictorial} in its January poll – between ‘true love’ and politics – continued to shape how British people interpreted Elizabeth and Philip’s romance. The recurrence of positive expressions like these in the MO files suggests that the media’s sustained emphasis on the emotional reality of the romance may have dissipated most concerns about potential political motives that had brought the princess and prince together. Only eleven MO respondents expressed uncertainty over whether Elizabeth and Philip were in love (and, indeed, most hoped they were) and just three expressed complete disbelief that it was a real romance.\textsuperscript{97}

A number of MO respondents acknowledged that the media’s exposure of the couple’s intimacy had an influential effect on their belief in the romance. A woman from London noted how ‘the little I have read about the Royal Couple gives me the impression that they are genuinely in love.’\textsuperscript{98} A man from Nottingham who stated he was ‘pleased and proud that a Princess of England… had married someone of her choice’ similarly remarked that whilst he was ‘naturally sceptical of this true love in Royal marriages… eventually the Daily Press broke a lot of that down. The newsreel in the cinema also helped… Gradually there emerged a feeling that behind the pageantry there was just a domestic family celebrating a great event in their private lives.’\textsuperscript{99} A female respondent also described how visual media had evoked in her a loyalty towards Elizabeth and Philip. Despite misgivings about Britain’s new link to

\textsuperscript{96}2068. \\
\textsuperscript{97}For example of uncertain respondents, see 3913, 2475, 1099. For disbelievers, see 3009, 3667, 3789. \\
\textsuperscript{98}4202. \\
\textsuperscript{99}4303.
Greece, she noted how, ‘when I look at their photographs they look such a nice couple – I just have to wish them joy.’\textsuperscript{100}

Some members of the public discerned from the images they saw of the princess that she had experienced emotional transcendence through her romance. A seventy-two-year-old widow from London stated how visual images communicated to her an impression of the emotional life of the royal protagonists: she was ‘glad Princess Elizabeth married such a good man, for rumour had it that he was objected to at first, hence the sullen looks when abroad. Her happy marriage has completely changed her look.’\textsuperscript{101} This woman had detected from pictures of Elizabeth taken during the South Africa tour that she was ‘sullen’ because of complications with her engagement and contrasted this downcast appearance to her happier ‘look’ since her marriage. This example demonstrated how audiences comprehended Elizabeth’s inner feelings from visual images. Such testimonies also suggested that the emphasis commentators like Movietone’s Lionel Gamlin placed on the princess’s smile following her engagement may have helped influence public attitudes.

The media was equally influential in generating a popular image of Philip. Twenty MO respondents remarked on him positively, invoking in their descriptions the same words and phrases used in newspapers and newsreels. One thirty-year-old female secretary stated that ‘I think Philip an ideal choice – a Prince, and far more important an English gentleman in education and career.’\textsuperscript{102} Similarly, a London man described how ‘Philip… even tho’ Greek by birth is probably as British as any of us by reason of his upbringing and for my part I look on him as English.’\textsuperscript{103} While Philip’s schooling at Gordonstoun and Royal Navy career appealed to some on the

\textsuperscript{100} 4161.  
\textsuperscript{101} 1015.  
\textsuperscript{102} 4223.  
\textsuperscript{103} 3887.
MO panel who readily overlooked his foreign links, other respondents focused on his egalitarian public image. One woman from Wembley approved of him as he was ‘young and personable and not too rich’, whilst a female civil servant commented that ‘I think Philip is very suitable as he is very handsome and a good sort. He seems to have a great sense of humour, he isn’t a snob and I think he will keep Elizabeth in her place if she gets carried away by her important position.’ Several MO respondents revealed how they too had deduced Philip’s character from the way he appeared in visual images: he ‘looked’ a ‘delightful person’, a ‘nice lad’, a ‘decent chap’ and a ‘sport’. But, most of all, he looked ‘attractive’ and ‘handsome’.

A minority of twelve MO respondents recorded either a mild uncertainty about Philip, or a stronger dislike of him. There was some cynicism about how the media had tried to disguise his foreign connections. One man stated that he did not believe the ‘drivel’ published about Philip. Similarly, a man from Thetford in Norfolk thought it was ‘strange… that Prince Philip, who, despite his relationship to the Royal Family, is a foreigner, should be so readily acclaimed as one of the figureheads of all that is British, because he happens to marry the Heir to the throne (sic).’ Some MO respondents were more explicit in criticizing his Greek political links. A forty-two-year-old domestic worker from Dartmouth in Devon noted how she was ‘disgusted’ with the royal wedding, labelling Philip ‘a Greek of the parasitic class’:

Because of him and his relative Marina, Duchess of Kent, this country finds itself against the Greek patriots. The royal couple will be over-paid and under-worked and live luxuriously; also they will breed child parasites who will be granted huge allowances and be reared expensively.

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104 3034 and 4271.
105 For example, see 4203, 4273, 3015, 3121, 3642, 3816, 3434, 4153.
106 3841.
107 3808.
108 1642. For other concerns about Philip’s Greek background, see 3893, 1980, 2567, 3790.
While couching her criticism of the prince as part of a broader socialist condemnation of the House of Windsor’s privileges, this woman thought that, because of the royal wedding, Britain had found itself politically aligned against the Greek communists – referred to here as ‘patriots’. Significantly, the *Daily Mirror* maintained an ambiguous attitude towards Elizabeth’s marriage from the announcement of the engagement until the wedding day.\(^\text{109}\) Given its very high circulation figures, it is notable that, ten days before the wedding, the *Mirror* published front-page photographs of beheaded Greek communists, executed by royalist forces in the civil war (Figure 4.7).\(^\text{110}\) Carrying the headline ‘What Are We British Doing’, the *Mirror’s* report complained that British troops stationed in Greece were ‘standing by’ as these ‘cruelties and atrocities [were] taking place around them.’ This coverage could be interpreted as a coded criticism of the prospective royal wedding, in the way it implicitly questioned the marriage links between the British and Greek royal families. In a similar vein, the *Mirror* was the only newspaper to publish an old picture of Philip wearing traditional Greek national dress on the day of the wedding.\(^\text{111}\)

Philip Ziegler’s claim that there was ‘widespread’ belief that the Greek prince was ‘amiable but dim’ is not supported by the MO reports. Descriptions of Philip’s ‘dimness’, or similar traits, simply did not feature in the MO testimonies. Equally, anxieties about Philip’s German connections (all of his sisters had married German aristocrats) remained the concern of the few, rather than the many – just two MO respondents criticized his ties to Germany.\(^\text{112}\) This silence over the prince’s Germanic links is significant. It seems the mainstream media, possibly under pressure from the palace, avoided discussing his German relatives. In all of the 1947 news reports

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\(^\text{109}\) See footnote 70 above.  
\(^\text{110}\) *Daily Mirror*, 10 November 1947, p.1. Also see the front-page on 11 November 1947.  
\(^\text{111}\) *Daily Mirror*, 20 November 1947, p.1. For a discussion of the circulation of the *Mirror* in these years see Bingham, *Family*, pp.7-9 and 16-20.  
\(^\text{112}\) 1654 and 3893. On elite concerns about Philip’s German links see Pimlott, *The Queen*, pp.104-5.
surveyed, there were just four references to the prince’s German associations, all from the left or liberal press and published either before the engagement or on the day that it was officially announced.\textsuperscript{113} The German links did not form part of the image that the media subsequently produced for Philip. Indeed, one respondent on the MO panel remarked how the \textit{Daily Mail} conveniently erased from its illustration of his family tree the relatives ‘who helped Germany during the war’.\textsuperscript{114}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure4.7.png}
\caption{Daily Mirror, 10 November 1947, p.1.}
\end{figure}

4. The burdens of royal status and the invasion of the royal honeymoon

In contrast with the occasional criticism levelled at Philip, it was significant that many more MO respondents expressed admiration for the personalities and domesticity of the bridal couple. This section examines how many favoured what they perceived as Elizabeth’s normal longing for romance because of her unenviable ‘life of service’.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{113} Sunday Pictorial, 19 January 1947, p.7; \textit{Daily Mirror}, 7 March 1947, p.5; Manchester Guardian, 10 July 1947, p.3; News Chronicle, 10 July 1947, p.2.

\textsuperscript{114} 3893. This might have referred to the family tree presented in the \textit{Daily Mail}, 10 July 1947, p.4.

\textsuperscript{115} 3388. For other examples, see 4223, 4186, 4299.
Moreover, older narratives on the burdens of royal duty merged with new discourses on the oppressive nature of constant media exposure, respondents sympathizing with Elizabeth and Philip because of the public intrusion of their honeymoon.

More than forty respondents asserted that Elizabeth deserved romantic fulfilment because of her unenviable position as a royal public servant. Indeed, two respondents explicitly used the phrase ‘public servants’ to characterize the princess and her family, revealing the power of this discourse.116 One woman from Watford acknowledged that she supported the royal romance because of the princess’s South African birthday pledge to serve her peoples:

I find the Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh an attractive couple, I believe it is a love match and I feel that after her ‘dedication’ of herself to our service on the occasion of her 21st birthday the Princess is deserving of the best that this country and its people can give her. Theirs is no enviable task and the public is very thoughtless in its demands.117

This writer identified how Elizabeth’s pledge to serve her subjects and the unenviable nature of her role had elicited sympathy for the princess’s ostensible plight. This respondent’s allusion to the ‘thoughtless’ nature of the public also demonstrated how royal lives were perceived as lacking privacy. Other respondents argued that because the princess was constantly in the media limelight she had a ‘rotten job’ and a ‘rotten sort of life’, ‘trying public duties’ and a ‘harder task than any previous ruler’.118

The single feature most commented on in all of the MO personal testimonies written in reply to the December 1947 directive was the way the media coverage of the royal wedding had intruded on Elizabeth and Philip’s private lives. Nearly seventy respondents recorded sympathy for ‘the couple having to suffer all that publicity’, expressed revulsion at the ‘vulgar curiosity’ of the media in a ‘purely private family

116 3426 and 3945.
117 3418.
118 For example, see 1061, 3388, 4221, 4223, 4241, 1095, 4235, 3434, 1034, 4161, 4279, 3900, 2511.
affair’, or vehemently castigated the publication of ‘sordid details’. This criticism of the publicity on the royal couple’s private lives formed part of a wider disapproval voiced by MO respondents on the scale of the coverage on the royal wedding, but it was also revealing of a British culture of domesticity in which privacy was critical. This was particularly the case with issues of sexuality and, it is notable that, within the chorus of criticism contained in the MO reports, there were forty comments aimed at the public interest in the couple’s honeymoon.

Elizabeth and Philip left London on the evening of their wedding day for Lord Mountbatten’s Broadlands home in Romsey, Hampshire. But, the media persisted in reporting their movements. Under the enticing headline, ‘My Wonderful Wedding’, which tried to attract readers’ attention through its presentation of what purported to be Elizabeth’s personal thoughts on her marriage, the Daily Mail provided exhaustive coverage of the royal couple’s arrival at Broadlands:

Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip jumped out of the car at the door of Broadlands like ‘teen-agers, before the chauffeur could open the car door for them. Hand-in-hand they ran up the five stone steps to the open glazed doors of the south wing. They were greeted with smiling courtesy by the butler Mr. Frank Randell. As they crossed the threshold the Princess squeezed the Duke’s hand. “It’s been a wonderful wedding but it’s lovely to be here at last,” she said.

This up-to-the-minute reportage was followed by extensive descriptions of the layout of the house and the food the couple had eaten on arrival, providing readers with an insider’s perspective into the honeymoon retreat. The intimacy of these insights was best captured in the alleged conversation between Elizabeth and Philip published by the Mail. It is very unlikely this conversation ever took place but it provided a highly personal view into the princess’s emotional state, and this type of coverage persisted.

119 For example, see 1682, 3810, 3891, 4172, 3856, 3891, 2142, 4308, 4236, 3895, 2979, 3960, 4247.
120 Szreter & Fisher, Sex, pp.36–4 and 348–62.
for several days in the popular press. Yet, it was not to everyone’s tastes. A twenty-year-old respondent who studied at Bristol university stated that, what made her ‘really cross’, was ‘the pursuing of the Duke of Edinburgh and the Princess at Broadlands. The “Daily Mirror” was guilty of the most deplorable lack of taste in publishing descriptions of the Royal couple’s room, their arrival, and hour-by-hour accounts of the first few days after their arrival. Equally, a male MO respondent who attacked the media’s ‘nauseating publicity’ ironically commented that the prince and princess should have gone ‘to bed together in the Glass Coach in full public view’, in an effort to satiate the press’s interest in their honeymoon activities. Meanwhile, a housewife from Buckingham criticized those who had shown an interest in the couple’s private lives, stating she was ‘sure that many would have entered the bedroom before their curiosity had been alleviated – if then.’ These responses demonstrated how some respondents vilified the prying of press and public into the lovers’ conjugal privacy.

Two days into their honeymoon, the BBC revealed that Elizabeth and Philip would be attending the local Sunday church service at Romsey Abbey. As one MO respondent noted, this was a ‘mistake’, because tens of thousands of people flocked to the abbey to participate in the service with the princess and prince. As the Mirror described, ‘when regular church-goers reached the Abbey they found that enthusiastic sightseers from all parts of England had forestalled them. Many were unable to get into the service, because visitors filled the pews.’ Most of those who had travelled to the abbey found they were spectators to the event, newsreels showing how swarms

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122 For similar examples see Daily Mail, 31 October 1947, p.3; Daily Sketch, 21 November 1947, p.1; Daily Mirror, 22 November 1947, pp.1 and 8.
123 4170.
124 3806.
125 4260.
of people clambered on gravestones and climbed up trees in order to glimpse the royal couple on their entry to and exit from the service. The voiceover from the *British Paramount* newsreel informed viewers that the prince and princess ‘might well have resented a mass intrusion on their honeymoon but very graciously accepted it all as perfectly natural. To be royal is to be denied the full advantage of private life.’ This perspective, which sought to normalize the intrusive nature of the media coverage of the royal honeymoon, claimed that Elizabeth and Philip accepted such an invasion as a normal part of their everyday lives. But MO files revealed how respondents voiced their opposition to the kind of public invasion witnessed at Romsey.

One schoolmistress from London declared that she ‘deplored the bad behaviour at Romsey Abbey’ whilst a schoolmaster from Manchester noted that it was a ‘pity’ that the Romsey church service became an event for a ‘sightseeing mob’. A twenty-one-year-old man from Nottingham recorded his disapproval in similar terms:

> I deplore the publicity given to the young couple’s romance and to the prying, sightseeing and reporting carried out on their honeymoon. To spoil the privacy of two young people – who probably would gladly be common citizens rather than royal personages – just for the sake of tradition and “glorious” ceremony is cruel.

This respondent remarked how he saw royal life as unenviable because of its public nature and the way continual media exposure limited a normal existence. One teacher from Brighton was among several on the MO panel who expressed similar views, recording that he was ‘sorry for the couple honeymooning “in a gold-fish bowl”’. These sorts of comments showed how some MO respondents sympathized with the royal family because of their lack of privacy.

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128 4246 and 1118. For other similar examples, see 3462, 2267, 1066, 2475, 4186, 3799, 1014, 4419.
129 3820.
130 3920. For similar examples, see 1054, 3913, 3841, 4260, 2694, 3856, 4186.
Such compassion was most personally communicated by four women, all aged below thirty, who each recorded how they would ‘hate to have been born in to such a public position’ as Elizabeth.\(^{131}\) This sympathy was symptomatic of a broader concern recorded by women respondents, aged about thirty, regarding the princess’s domestic fulfilment. A thirty-year-old woman from Oxford expressed how she was ‘glad that Princess Elizabeth has married young and apparently happily so that she can have some home life and probably be with her children before she need assume even greater responsibility.’\(^{132}\) In a similar vein, a twenty-nine-year-old Cambridge woman stated ‘there seems little doubt that [Elizabeth and Philip] are in love. This makes me glad for the Princess’s sake, for her job is difficult enough and her chance of privacy and personal joy so small it is good to know she has someone for whom she has an affection to stand by her.’\(^{133}\) This respondent was heartened by the loving partnership she detected between the royal couple, believing that their emotional fulfilment would compensate for the princess’s difficult situation. A middle-aged woman from Watford agreed: ‘the young couple should be very happy, the bridegroom seems gay, looks attractive and should be a source of strength to the Princess as she undertakes more of the causes of the State.’\(^{134}\) This writer believed that the bridal couple had formed a companionate marriage and, like some respondents to the *Pictorial’s* January poll, suggested that Elizabeth’s ability to perform her public role hinged on her finding happiness in her private life.

MO respondents invested Princess Elizabeth’s constitutional position as heiress presumptive with emotional meaning which centred on her achieving fulfilment as a wife and mother. Women of a similar age to Elizabeth mainly expressed this kind of

\(^{131}\) 1668. Also see 4161, 3462, 4247.
\(^{132}\) 4299.
\(^{133}\) 4186.
\(^{134}\) 4203.
empathy because they identified more closely with the princess’s domestic ambitions. However, it also connected with a broader public belief, uninfluenced by gender, that royalty had a right to experience private life. Notably, more than double the number of Mass Observation respondents criticized the intrusion of the royal honeymoon than opposed the expense of Elizabeth and Philip’s wedding, revealing the high degree of concern that members of the public had about the princess and prince’s private lives. As the final section argues, this anxiety was symptomatic of the way respondents invested special importance in the sanctity of domesticity at a time when ideas about national character were reforming around the exceptionalism of British family life, with the royal family projected as exemplars of this culture.

5. Forging a national emotional community

Postwar reconstruction emphasized the significance of the family to concepts of social order and citizenship, with the home presented as an essential space for both adult and child socialization. Claire Langhamer has quoted the words of a general secretary of the National Marriage Guidance Council in 1946, which emphasized the centrality of domesticity to national character: ‘Britain has always been proud of her family life. It has been the backbone of her national greatness.’ The secretary believed that these domestic values were under threat stating that ‘the only lasting foundation for a sound national life is sound family life.’ This diatribe was broadly illustrative of official public discourse in this period that sought to impress upon the British working classes especially, the value of nuclear family life in order to reverse the rises in divorce, illegitimacy and population decline. The journalist Harry Hopkins noted how the monarchy’s image in the postwar years accorded with this emphasis on family life: ‘in

a febrile world of apparently collapsing moral values, the unselfconscious picture of domestic normality [the royal family] presented was inevitably reassuring. The projection of a symbolic royal familialism at the time of the 1947 royal wedding was designed to make monarchy more emotionally and morally meaningful to the public.

This section examines how the palace and media jointly choreographed events on Elizabeth and Philip’s wedding day to forge a national emotional community centred on the bridal couple. New broadcasting techniques combined with the media’s propagation of a common family story to involve audiences in an unprecedented way. Mass Observation respondents attested to the way the stage-management of the radio coverage involved them in the event, generating an empathetic connection between audiences and the bridal couple which simultaneously heightened their awareness of a nation united around the royal family. The wedding coverage also instilled in the MO panel a more profound respect for the monarchy’s domestic image. Respondents noted how they conflated royal family life with the symbolic continuity of national life. The Church of England also assisted in the orchestration of the wedding and in the dissemination of family-orientated messages in an attempt to re-establish its own authority in Britain at a time when its relevance was in question. Church leaders used the event to emphasize Christianity’s meaning in society through its association with the morality of the family monarchy.

Files from the BBC written archive reveal the protracted discussions that took place between palace officials and broadcasters regarding the possibility of televising

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the Westminster Abbey wedding ceremony. The BBC even offered to acquire new highly sensitive Orthicon cameras to appease the palace’s request that any artificial lighting used in the abbey be kept to a minimum. However, negotiations stalled when, in mid-September, George VI decided that, although he would allow the ceremony to ‘be recorded by still photography and by broadcast’, he did ‘not wish the Service to be televised or filmed.’ The palace’s Press Secretary, Richard Colville, had told the BBC’s Charles Ian-Orr Ewing that the king ‘considered the wedding of his daughter to be a private and religious matter which should not, under present conditions, form a subject to be taken by newsreels and television cameras.’ In striving to maintain the dignified character of the wedding, George VI insulated Princess Elizabeth from media exposure and, by proscribing the filming of the full ceremony, helped foster an image of a wedding that was relatively modest and intimate. This accorded with a vision that was more domestically British and distinct from both the European-themed spectacle of the 1934 royal nuptials and the imperial theme of the 1937 coronation. Elizabeth and Philip’s marriage was presented in a way that encouraged audiences to relate to it personally as it was purposely presented as devoid of geopolitical meaning.

The BBC, palace and newsreels eventually reached a compromise that allowed both the broadcasters and newsreels to film the wedding procession down the aisle after the marriage ceremony had ended. However, the overriding restrictions on the filming of the event meant that the BBC’s wedding day focus was firmly on its radio programme. Seymour de Lotbinière, who had succeeded Gerald Cock as Director of Outside Broadcasting, managed the operation. He oversaw the installation of thirty-two microphones in the abbey, which was roughly the same number used during the

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140 BBCWA/R30/845/1-3 and T14/1350/1. This is the first time these files have been examined as part of a historical investigation.
141 BBCWA/T14/1350/1 - Letter from C. I.-O. Ewing to Buckingham Palace Press Secretary, undated.
142 BBCWA/T14/1350/1 - Private memo from C. I.-O. Ewing, 8 September 1947.
143 BBCWA/R30/845/3 - Letter from R. Colville to B. E. Nicolls, 1 November 1947.
Whereas just one microphone had been used at the wedding of George and Marina to record the words they recited in reply to Cosmo Lang’s prompts, four microphones were installed in 1947 to cover Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher’s voice and the couple’s replies. The microphones were also more prominently displayed allowing for better sound transmission than at the 1937 coronation, because there was no need to conceal them for fear they would be caught on film. The wireless arrangements were important for the diffusion of the intimate soundscape between Elizabeth and Philip that would define many listeners’ experience of the event. The improvements in the quality of the broadcast created a more personal connection between the public and the couple as they recited their marriage vows.

Historians who have examined soundscapes have suggested that listening differs from viewing in the way that sound places the subject at the centre of the sensory experience, while the visual form is always consumed from a peripheral position, looking on. In this respect, the radio can offer a more immersive quality than visual media which positions the subject as spectator to the event. Thus, it is significant that over twenty MO respondents recorded how the broadcast of the wedding service had an especially powerful effect. Several noted that they were ‘moved’ by it while others described how they were ‘touched emotionally’ by it. As with the 1937 coronation, the sounds of the London crowds impacted on listeners. A Glaswegian housewife who was cynical of royalty’s allure described how, to her ‘astonishment’, she was affected by the broadcast: ‘so tense and so electric was the emotion of the crowds, that the microphones picked it up and transmitted it, so that I, doing a prosaic morning’s

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144 BBCWA/R30/845/2 - ‘Royal Wedding Notes on Engineering Arrangements’, undated.
145 Ibid.
147 For example, see 3815, 3371, 3589.
ironing in Glasgow, was moved to tears. Elizabeth’s marriage vows were the most commented on feature of the broadcast, eliciting empathy for the princess among listeners. One housewife from Truro recorded how she became very interested in the marriage as the wedding day approached, planning her work so that she ‘could listen to almost all of it’ on the radio:

This I did and found myself going through the whole ceremony with her. I thought how if I were her I should at this moment feel a pit in my stomach. I also felt that it brought back to all the millions listening their own wedding-day, and all their young ideals and hopes and aspirations. For the first time I understood the fascination of weddings for older people – especially women – something I had never quite understood before.

This respondent revealed how her experience of the broadcast generated empathy for the princess and evoked an optimistic nostalgia about marriage in general, which she believed she shared with ‘millions’ of other people who she imagined were listening. The broadcast also amplified her awareness of the appeal of weddings to older people and women in particular.

The experience of a London woman who was ‘just a bit’ older than Elizabeth and who listened to the service at home in Twickenham also revealed the affective qualities of the broadcast. She believed that ‘Princess Elizabeth, through no particular inherent quality of her own, but through being born to the right parents, had had the sort of wedding that every girl dreams of but few obtain.’ She described how the broadcast had quickly dispelled her jealous thoughts:

While listening to the ceremony envy disappeared in the sentimental glow one felt at the thought that a young girl was going through the most important ceremony of her life – provided she really is in love with Prince Philip and somehow one feels she is. The radio served us gallantly on this occasion, as on so many others, and my husband and I sat enthralled for an hour listening alternately to the cheering crowds, the lovely music, the frightened schoolgirl “I will”, and the strong pleasant voice of Prince Philip. I’m alternately swayed by the arguments on both sides as to whether public money should have been more or less lavishly spent on the Royal Wedding. The Socialist in me says
should not have been so extravagantly done at a time of national crisis, but the woman in me says “don’t spoil her happiness by bickering about amounts of money which, compared [to] our debts, are infinitesimal” – I think the woman wins!\footnote{150}

This respondent’s descriptions of Elizabeth as a ‘young girl’ and of her ‘frightened schoolgirl “I will”’ show how this writer empathized with the princess because of the vulnerable image that was conveyed over the radio as she recited her marriage vows. A forty-four-year-old woman from Beckenham echoed this description: ‘[hearing the princess] say the response in rather a trembling voice, I realised for the first time that she is only just twenty-one, and the whole thing must have been a bit of an ordeal for her.’\footnote{151} Both these respondents attested to how the BBC’s radio transmission allowed them to experience the intimate moments of the service; the audial exposure of the princess’s emotions intensified the strength of the empathetic connections which these members of the public drew on to identify with her.

The personal moments of the marriage service communicated by wireless also helped foster belief in the romance. A sixty-year-old woman recorded that she thought the ceremony a ‘heart-warming showing of a natural and necessary stage in the life of Elizabeth and the Royal Family as to remind us of their humanness. All married women knew how she felt and all parents with married daughters knew how the King and Queen felt.’\footnote{152} The respondent’s allusion to the royal family’s ‘humanness’ and the ‘natural and necessary stage’ of marriage revealed how members of the public identified with the House of Windsor through the common rites of passage which royal protagonists shared with themselves. The media exposure of these moments of royal private life acted to ‘remind’ audiences that royalty was, after all, human. A sixty-year-old woman from Coventry noted how she thought that ‘the Royal Wedding
demonstrates a hunger for something beautiful and real as against the eternal phoney sentiment of films. A real princess, really in love with a real prince, married with a real service.\footnote{153} For her, the emotional pull of this domestic event set it apart from the ‘phoney sentiment’ communicated to viewers in popular films. She even invoked the old adage that the media had repeatedly used to describe interwar royal love stories when she summed up how she and two elderly female friends had tearfully listened to the broadcast together by proclaiming that ‘all the world loves a lover’.\footnote{154} 

Approximately two thirds of the respondents who remarked on the emotional influence of the broadcast were women. The gendered disparity in reactions partially reflected the straightforward fact that, for most men and some women, royal wedding day was a working day like any other. The Labour government had decided that a public holiday to celebrate Elizabeth’s marriage would have seemed out-of-step with the economic times. This meant that a greater number of women, like the housewife from Truro who scheduled her activities around the broadcast, were able to listen to the marriage ceremony in their homes. As we have seen in Chapter Two in relation to George V’s radio messages, the ability to listen to broadcasts in a domestic space with one’s family or friends encouraged personalized forms of listening. This private experience contrasted with some of the modes of listening witnessed at the 1934 royal wedding, when members of the public visited venues like department stores to hear George and Marina state their marriage vows. Those listening in the privacy of their homes in 1947 could relax and emotionally engage with events in London unfettered by the demands imposed by public decorum. 

Additionally, women, more than men, were targeted as an audience. For the first time in 1947, the BBC recruited a female commentator, Audrey Russell, to ‘give

\footnote{153} 1644. N.B. The respondent’s own underlining. 
\footnote{154} For similar tearful examples, see 1032, 1644, 4153, 4383.
a woman’s point of view. As with the women’s voices used by *British Movietone* in its royal wedding newsreels in 1934, Russell’s commentary was used to frame the 1947 wedding as a feminine event, and she was tasked especially with describing the dresses worn by royal women. The MO wedding files contain over thirty remarks, sometimes expressed pejoratively, about women’s unique interest in the marriage.

The church and other media outlets, as well as the BBC, worked to produce a national emotional community around the focus of the royal wedding ceremony. The Archbishop of York delivered the sermon, broadcast live to listeners, which claimed that the royal lovers were no different to other British couples:

> In the presence of this congregation and in the hearing of an invisible audience in all parts of the world, you have now become man and wife. Notwithstanding the splendour and national significance of the service in this Abbey, it is in all essentials the same as it would be for any cottager who might be married this afternoon in some small country church in a remote village in the dales. The same vows are taken; the same prayers are offered; and the same blessings are given.

Building on the normal public images of Elizabeth and Philip which were established by the couple’s earlier press coverage, the archbishop’s famous likening of the royal wedding to that of a ‘cottager’ received extensive attention in popular newspapers the day after the service. As well as printing the archbishop’s sermon, the *Daily Mirror* presented another article that highlighted the ‘simple story’ at the centre of the royal wedding. It began by stating that ‘a young English girl was married yesterday in the family church.’ Through this kind of depiction, Elizabeth’s experience was again equated with that of ordinary young women, with Westminster Abbey presented as the nation’s ‘family church’, and the wedding representative of all British marriage

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155 BBCWA/R30/845/3 - Memo, ‘The Royal Wedding’, from Miss Joyce Rowe to Mr Glassborow - undated.
156 BBCWA/R30/845/3 - ‘Draft Layout for Royal Wedding Broadcast’, p.3.
157 For example, see 3855, 3815, 2923, 4309, 3635, 2923, 4202, 1032.
158 Quoted in *The Times*, 21 November 1947, p.4.
159 For example, see *Daily Mirror*, 21 November 1947, p.2; *Daily Mail*, 21 November 1947, p.2.
celebrations. The Daily Herald journalist Hannen Swaffer explicitly acknowledged that the royal family shared in a common domestic culture with their subjects when he compared Elizabeth to a ‘grocer’s daughter’, stating that her royal wedding ‘differed’ from those of the interwar period because, ‘in spite of the pageantry and pomp, there was such an emphasis laid upon the fact that the marriage, in its significance, differed in no way from one in which two of the humblest folk were united in matrimony.’

The archbishop’s sermon and the accompanying press coverage helped foster the impression that this kind of family event was uniquely British in character. Newsreels also contributed to this idea through new narrative devices and imagery. Although it was prevented from filming the marriage inside the abbey, Pathé juxtaposed footage of normal-looking domestic scenes alongside still photographic images of the royal wedding service. Choral music from the ceremony played over these scenes to create a seamless story that connected the royal wedding ceremony to the domestic life of an ordinary British home. The accompanying newsreel shot list shows how the newsreel editor deliberately constructed this image of normality through the scenes he selected:

A woman’s hand, with wedding and engagement ring, resting on a man’s (sic).

A married couple, and small daughter listening to the service. Fire burns in the grate (a typical family scene) (Figure 4.8).

In this way, newsreels conveyed to audiences that the royal wedding symbolized a national culture of domesticity. This theme was accentuated through the countless press and newsreel descriptions of how the royal marriage was quintessentially British.

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in nature and heritage. *British Movietone’s* account was typical: ‘this day will long be remembered as a vivid and important episode in the story of the nation’. 163

![Figure 4.8. Pathé News, ‘The Princess Weds’, 21 November 1947.](image)

Over twenty MO respondents noted either explicitly, or more often, implicitly that the 1947 royal wedding symbolized a national moral culture that was focused on family and home. A twenty-seven-year-old research worker remarked that he thought ‘regarding Royalty mainly as a symbol of Respectability and Permanence and Family Institutions seems the most sensible attitude.’ 164 A schoolmistress from East Sussex similarly identified the ‘symbolic value’ of the royal wedding as ‘family life, of youth growing up and taking responsibilities, of plans for the future.’ 165 She then went on to describe how this symbolism had been communicated to her by the radio:

The BBC broadcast was remarkably good, and contributed a great deal to the feeling I have tried to express, that it was an event that mattered to ordinary people, and particularly to-day when death and destruction seem commoner than marriage and new life.

164 3434.
165 4256.
The schoolteacher described how, in the shadow of wartime losses, the symbolism of Elizabeth’s marriage evoked optimism in her through its representation of family and ‘new life’. She recorded how listening to the BBC broadcast had made her aware of a community of listeners constituted of ‘ordinary people’ to whom she thought the wedding really ‘mattered’.

Other respondents were more overt in characterizing this emotional community as a unique national phenomenon. A twenty-six-year-old man described the wedding as ‘part of that great British family tradition’, whilst a forest worker of the same age who came from Newmarket remarked of the royal wedding that ‘I think these things tend to endear the family to us, and that in turn strengthens and supports the British way of life.’ These portrayals merged with wider expressions of patriotism which highlighted how the royal wedding was symbolic of national tradition. A fifty-four-year-old ‘farmer’s wife’ from Wrexham noted that she and her husband ‘listened to the broadcast from start to finish and were very impressed and found it very moving. The whole thing was so completely British and would only have happened here.’ In a similar vein, a middle-aged chemist who, despite having mixed feelings about the monarchy’s role, described how he thought the royal wedding signified the ‘backbone of stability and an atmosphere of tradition and history in times of change.’

MO respondents also consolidated their understandings of this family-centred national theme by contrasting images of British exceptionalism with foreign national cultures. A twenty-four-year-old Cambridge student described her sense of pride in the wedding through this mode of comparison:

We, Britain, could produce something lovely and fairy tale in spite of war and aftermath that the U.S.A. with all wealth and self-assurance just couldn’t (sic).

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166 1388 and 2511.
167 3371.
168 3009. For similar examples, see 4098, 4186, 4182 4202, 4269, 4383.
Of course the whole thing was lit up from within by the fact that Liz and Phil seemed so gorgeously happy and genuine about it.\textsuperscript{169}

This respondent described how Britain’s unique identity was located in its celebration of a ‘lovely’ and ‘genuine’ love story, which could not be replicated by any other nation. Her commentary was characteristic of more than twenty MO remarks on how British national identity was distinguished by its emphasis on domesticity and love.\textsuperscript{170}

MO respondents who criticized the domestic symbolism produced by the royal wedding also revealed the pervasive nature of images of ‘typical’ royal family life. A twenty-two-year-old GPO engineer remarked that he thought ‘the whole performance is staged by Church and State to enhance the concept of family life, yet what relation the general standard of family life has to a couple who start with every circumstance of wealth and luxury is never questioned.’\textsuperscript{171} The respondent’s perspective revealed how he believed that officials had deliberately created the image of royal domesticity to set a moral example which the British public could emulate. A thirty-five-year-old journalist similarly stated that she thought ‘royal functions’ were designed to ‘foster fake sentiments’ and that the ‘symbols of family [were] all nonsense.’\textsuperscript{172} However, most Mass Observation respondents were not as critical about the meaning of the wedding, instead commenting positively on the ‘real family feeling’ it created, which showed how the princess’s marriage helped crystallize a sense of national emotional community that was focused on companionate love.\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{169} 3005.  
\textsuperscript{170} For example, see 3878; 4271; 3015; 2746; 4236.  
\textsuperscript{171} 3795.  
\textsuperscript{172} 3320.  
\textsuperscript{173} 3900. Also see Ziegler, Crown, pp.83-4 and 4221.
Conclusion

This chapter has shown how, in a postwar period that witnessed increased public scrutiny of the monarchy’s role in society, the palace and the media presented George VI’s family in more intimate and informal ways, which, in turn, encouraged closer emotional identification with the House of Windsor than before 1939. Popular support for the 1947 royal romance, as illustrated by Mass Observation reports, revealed how members of the public identified with royalty in relation to the postwar culture of domesticity. MO respondents detected in their reading of the royal family’s relationships the same kind of emotional bonds they shared with their own families and personally related to Elizabeth and Philip’s companionate romantic aspirations. The Sunday Pictorial’s pioneering opinion poll identified some concerns about the prince’s foreignness, but these seem to have been alleviated by the visually attractive, glamorous and, most notably, ‘normal’ media images of the couple, which stressed their outward desire for emotional realization in their personal lives. The couple’s personal fulfilment was perceived as compensation for their ostensibly burdensome public lives. The constant exposure of the lovers during their honeymoon especially, helped consolidate the public belief that royalty was entitled to a degree of privacy. After 1947, the palace would exercise tighter control over the exposure of the couple, regulating media access to them by sponsoring Pitkins’s famous line of royal souvenir magazines, which were designed to satiate public interest in the private doings of the royal family.

The domestic morality of the postwar family monarchy was a direct answer to the challenge posed to the House of Windsor by the more critical voices of the Daily Mirror and the Pictorial, both of which claimed to speak for a different version of ‘the people’. This chapter has shown that most other media outlets stood by the palace
and the Anglican Church in fashioning a royal public image that was distinguished by its normal, intimate qualities, which, in turn, complemented a vision of British society centred on family life and domesticity. Notably, the BBC communicated to its royal wedding listeners a soundscape that encouraged close emotional identification with the lovers, while the newsreels and press followed the Archbishop of York’s lead in emphasizing the typical characteristics of the marriage ceremony in the abbey. In this respect, the constitutional role of kingship was invested with new affective meaning that focused on private life and personal fulfilment, as shown by the *Pictorial*’s poll which revealed how a majority of respondents believed Princess Elizabeth’s romantic realization was more important than the political implications of her engagement. As the next chapter will show, the princess’s domestic image as a wife and, later, as a mother, remained integral to her constitutional persona when she acceded to the throne in 1952.
Chapter 5

‘This Time I was THERE Taking Part’: The Television Broadcast of the 1953 Coronation

This chapter examines how both the temporal immediacy of television as a mode of communication, and the domestic settings in which British viewers tended to watch it, transformed the emotional dimensions of the experience of mass-mediated monarchy on coronation day 1953. It presents a new analysis of 163 Mass Observation directive reports written by respondents about their experience of the coronation and more than 200 school essays composed by adolescents between the ages of twelve and sixteen on their involvement in the event. These personal testimonies reveal the effect that the television coverage of Elizabeth II’s coronation had on British viewers. This chapter builds on Ben Pimlott’s argument that the TV broadcast allowed a greater number of people to participate in the event and that this participation engendered a heightened sense of national community among audiences.\(^1\) The televised coronation, which was generally watched within the informal atmosphere of the home alongside friends or family, evoked intimate and highly personal responses among audiences. This chapter examines how the BBC also intensified the empathetic structures of feeling generated by its TV broadcast by emphasizing the familial aspects of the coronation story. MO personal testimonies revealed how audiences responded positively to maternal images of the queen on the day of her crowning, adults and children expressing loyalty to and affection for her that related to her sacrifice of private life for a life of public service.\(^2\)

The 1953 coronation has received more historical attention than any of the case studies so far examined. Scholars have interpreted the event as a moment of national

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\(^1\) Quotation from Mass Observation respondent 7/H/099, in response to ‘Coronation Day Panel Survey’.


\(^3\) Elizabeth II will be referred to as ‘the queen’ in this chapter, whilst her mother, also known as Queen Elizabeth, will be referred to as the Queen Mother or Queen Dowager. Queen Mary died in March 1953, so George VI’s consort was the only member of the royal family known as the Queen Mother by the time of her daughter’s coronation in June.
rebirth following the Second World War; the youthful queen personified the postwar generation’s hopes for a brighter, more affluent future, and her crowning on 2 June exemplified a set of uniquely British moral and spiritual values.\textsuperscript{4} Recent scholarship has emphasized the Commonwealth theme of the occasion, with Wendy Webster and Thomas Hajkowski both noting how the British media projected a renewed vision of a group of imperial nations that remained united in their mutual links to the crown.\textsuperscript{5} The suggestion has been that the coronation acted as a reassertion of Britain’s global role after 1945 and the rise of the USA and USSR on the world stage.\textsuperscript{6} The narrative of national renaissance fused established traditions with newer, modern symbols, like the television broadcast of the ceremony.\textsuperscript{7}

Historians have devoted more attention to the public’s response to the coronation than to any other aspect of the reception of modern monarchy. In particular, scholars have sought to test contemporary arguments made by the sociologists Edward Shils and Michael Young that the event was ‘an act of national communion’, in which the public joined with the queen in reaffirming the moral values at the heart of society.\textsuperscript{8} Contesting the functionalism inherent in this analysis, Henrik Örnebring has analyzed Mass Observation reports to identify sites of conflict that reveal diverse and often

\textsuperscript{8} Shils & Young, ‘The Meaning’, p.66-7.
contradictory public attitudes towards the event. Frank Mort has joined Örnebring in recognizing how regional identities also competed with ideas of national community. Some MO respondents complained that the coronation was London-focused and that their locations were too far removed geographically to participate in the event. In his overview of television viewership on coronation day, Joe Moran has recently assessed the varying reactions of MO respondents to the BBC coverage, which ranged from awed attentiveness, through irreverent derision, to indifference.

In contrast, Philip Ziegler and David Kynaston have suggested that television coverage of the coronation stimulated a social conservatism among the public, which broadly corresponded with Shils and Young’s idea of national communion. Notably, Shils and Young’s work has informed the research of media theorists Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, who argued that televised royal ceremonies have worked to ‘integrate societies in a collective heartbeat and evoke a renewal of loyalty to the society and its legitimate authority.’

This chapter complicates the argument between those who have advocated that ceremonies renewed national consciousness and those who have uncovered forms of popular dissent. The first section argues that, in spite of conflicting attitudes towards the event, the prospect of the television broadcast of the coronation exercised a very powerful hold over members of the public and it helped generate enthusiasm for the occasion. I analyze more than 200 school essays, most of which were written in the

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months before 2 June. The essays come from a very large collection held by the MO archive, and those examined here were mainly written by girls at grammar schools in west London and Cheshire, and by boys from schools of unknown status in Bury St. Edmunds and Surrey. All of the essayists were aged between twelve and sixteen. As noted in the Introduction and Chapter Two, school essays reflect a kind of ‘cultural circuit’ of social experience informed by discourse inside and outside the classroom. All of the compositions examined here contain traces of a pedagogic influence in the form of repeated themes, but there are no accompanying documents that shed light on the activities or discussions on which the essays were based – nor is it always clear what questions the adolescents were responding to. Yet, there are many personalized features in these essays that revealed how the girls and boys considered television to be a new conduit of mass participation through which they expected to share in the

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14 Approximately 500 school essays are contained in the Mass Observation online archive under the file reference TC/69/3/A-E. These can be located through the keyword search ‘1953 coronation’ that leads to the coronation study, all of which has recently been digitized. With its vast ambitions, MO’s 1953 coronation project yielded an unwieldy amount of information, most of which is yet to receive historical analysis. This chapter revisits two sets of records, both of which have been touched on by Kynaston and Ziegler in their respective studies on the 1953 coronation. It focuses on the first seven sets of essays contained in files TC/69/3/A and B, batches A to G. These include essays written before and after the event by girls aged thirteen to sixteen at a grammar school in west London (A, F and G), by girls of the same age at West Kirby Girls’ Grammar School in Cheshire (B and C), by a group of boys aged fourteen to sixteen at a school of unknown status in Surrey (D), and by a group of boys aged twelve to fourteen at an unknown school in Bury St. Edmunds (E). Essays from other batches (H to P) are sometimes used to support the arguments posited in this chapter, but the analysis presented here has focused on the first seven batches due to the large size of the archive and because they reflect the opinions of girls and boys of roughly the same age. The essays are separately numbered in the archive and are referenced here using their file reference, batch letters and numbers, e.g. 3/A/A1. The second group of records examined here are the directive replies to the day survey for 2 June 1953, located in TC/69/7/A-H. 76 women and 87 men replied to this survey, discussing what they did over the course of coronation day as prompted by a set of questions that also asked them to report on any local celebrations, the most ‘stirring’, ‘peculiar’ and ‘funniest’ incidents of the day, whether those watching or listening to the BBC programmes remained silent for the anointing of the queen, and how they thought the 1953 coronation compared with that of George VI in 1937. These questions shaped the responses recorded by the MO respondents, and this influence is considered throughout the analysis presented in this chapter. Some of the 163 directive replies include index numbers and, where this is the case, they are referenced using their file letters (A-H) and index number, e.g. 7/A/2077. Where there is no index number, the reports are referenced according to their file letter and occupation when stated, e.g. 7/A/Youth Employment Officer. The original hardcopies of both sets of records can be found in the MO archive at the University of Sussex under the references SxMOA1/2/69/3 and 7.


16 For a thorough discussion on the utility of school essays as historical sources see J. Greenhalgh, ‘“Till We Hear the Last All Clear”: Gender and the Presentation of Self in Young Girls’ Writing about the Bombing of Hull during the Second World War’, Gender & History 26:1 (2014), pp.167-83.
coronation. This national dimension generated interest among the adolescents who envisaged themselves as forming part of a privileged viewership.

The second section analyzes how Mass Observation respondents and schoolgirls assimilated television images of the coronation. Examining the directive replies to the MO coronation day survey and essays written by the girls from the west London and Cheshire grammar schools after the event, it gauges the extent to which the television coverage of the ceremony enabled viewers to experience first-hand what had hitherto been an exclusive occasion. Both adults and children remarked how TV allowed them to feel as though they had participated in the service. The section then examines how the domestic settings in which most respondents and essayists watched the coronation shaped their experiences of the event. Everyday domestic rituals and conversations overlapped with the way audiences saw the unique images, producing more informal codes of consumption whilst enhancing the sense of involvement created around the focal point of the television through shared identification with the royal protagonists.

The third and last section of this chapter examines the many descriptions in the MO records of Elizabeth II’s domestic role on coronation day. It begins by analyzing the symbolic visual economy of the queen and her young children as constructed by Pitkins’s official royal souvenir magazines and the British press. It then moves onto examine how the BBC choreographed images of the queen’s relationship with her son and heir, Prince Charles, on coronation day, and the way these scenes evoked a large number of comments from MO respondents and school essayists. This section argues that these public reactions to royal familialism reflected the special investment adults and children had in the maternal role of the queen and that the BBC’s deliberate focus on this aspect of her public image was designed to encourage personal identification among viewers, invigorating a national community who empathized with her. In their
discussions of the coronation, respondents and schoolgirls also notably remarked that the queen had to sacrifice personal emotional fulfilment in order to serve her peoples.

1. British children’s understanding of television

In reply to the question, ‘what do you think about the coronation?’, a thirteen-year-old girl at a west London grammar school wrote that ‘the government is always having a moan about housing, but never thinks of ways in which it can cut down in pomp and ceremony and save money for more important things.’ But despite her criticism of the cost of the coronation, she expressed a keen desire to participate in it:

Although I say all these things against it, I am longing to see it. It gives me a thrill to think that in so many days and so many weeks we will see the queen ride down to Westminster Abbey. I think the queen has been very gracious in letting us see her Coronation on television. It will be the first time in History that the ordinary people have seen one and it will be a great thrill.17

The themes contained in this quotation are characteristic of those that shaped many of the essays written by adolescent children on the meaning of the coronation. First, this schoolgirl was typical in opposing government expenditure whilst nevertheless stating a strong desire to see the coronation.18 To explain this contradiction, the thirteen-year-old invested the event with special historical meaning which related to the fact it was the first time ‘ordinary people’ could see it.19 Other children similarly characterized it as the ‘greatest occasion’ or ‘spectacle’ they would ever see because of the innovatory televisualization of the coronation: it signified a landmark moment in a longer royal tradition.20 The girl also believed that television would create a national community around the focal point of the coronation, using the collective pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’

17 3/B/G22
to convey the inclusive nature of TV viewership.\textsuperscript{21} Children explicitly articulated this understanding of a national community in their assertions that ‘everywhere’, ‘all over Britain’, ‘everyone’ would join in the celebrations for the coronation.\textsuperscript{22} The account of one fourteen-year-old schoolboy from Surrey was typical: ‘the coronation is being televised (sic) and then projected on to the cinema screens throughout the country so that practically everybody will hear or see the coronation.’\textsuperscript{23}

The essayists’ desire to participate in the coronation via the television broadcast was informed by a popular belief that it would offer privileged access to the spectacle. In this way, their expectations of the event were shaped by the wider public discourse on the unique opportunities created by TV. A number of the west London schoolgirls claimed that television offered a preferable means of joining in with the coronation, rather than spectating from the procession route. One fourteen-year-old girl typically stated that ‘as we are lucky enough to have a television, I will be watching the screen for most of the day. I would very much like to see the Procession in life, but I know that I would only see a very little after waiting many hours.’\textsuperscript{24} She suggested that TV offered superior and more comfortable access to the coronation spectacle and one of her classmates reiterated how television offered comprehensive coverage:

\begin{quote}
On Coronation day, I shall have my eyes glued to the Television set, so that I do not miss one single thing… I expect that if I did go [in person] I would hardly see anything. But by going to my friend’s house, I shall be able to see everything and to hear everything as well.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

These two responses were characteristic of other reactions from the girls at the west London grammar school which were informed by a shared belief in the obstructive

\textsuperscript{23} 3/A/D4. N.B. My own italicized emphasis.
\textsuperscript{24} 3/B/F6.
\textsuperscript{25} 3/B/F13. For similar examples, see 3/B/F/4, 3/B/F/8, 3/B/F/10, 3/B/F/11, 3/B/F/14, 3/B/F/16.
nature of the crowds on the procession route and, more notably, by the pervasive idea that television had created new and improved opportunities for popular spectatorship.

The desire to publicly participate through the televised coronation coverage was particularly acute among schoolchildren who lived far away from London and whose families did not intend to travel there to see the event. In contrast with their London counterparts, pupils at West Kirby Girls’ Grammar School in Cheshire tended to think it was preferable to see the coronation spectacle first-hand, and that TV coverage was ‘the next best thing’.26 One schoolgirl from Cheshire, whose family had planned a trip to London for the procession, remarked that she would be ‘one of the lucky people who will be in London’, which revealed the social prestige attributed to her position.27 The Cheshire girls’ value system was informed by their provincial status; their desire to participate in person differed from the attitudes of the schoolgirls in the capital who took for granted their access to central London. For the girls from northwest England, television therefore represented the key conduit through which they could experience a sense of national inclusion and it took on a powerful imaginative role. One fourteen-year-old girl was typical in her description of the sense of expectation that she and her peers ascribed to the TV broadcast:

As this will be the first Coronation in my time I naturally feel a great thrill and I think all the many preparations and colourful decorations are very exciting. But I wish I could go to London and actually see the Coronation and the procession in all the magnificent colour and glory. I think however that it is very fortunate that many people who cannot see the Coronation in London will be able to watch it on Television.28

This girl was enthused by the coronation preparations that she perceived taking place in London but lamented that her location meant she was unable to join the festivities in the capital. Her repeated longing for ‘colour’ typified the responses of schoolgirls

27 3/A/C3.
28 3/A/C7.
from Cheshire, some of whom recorded that television’s monochrome pictures would not fully convey the coronation spectacle – a complaint that could be interpreted as a symptom of the austere nature of the early postwar period and the longing for more affluent times.\(^{29}\) For adolescent girls like this one, TV offered privileged access to an event from which they otherwise felt excluded and the prospect of her participation via television was crucial to sustaining her enthusiasm for the coronation.

Against this backdrop of anticipation, children who did not expect to be able to watch the televised coronation experienced a sense of exclusion from the imagined national community of viewers. One of the girls at school at West Kirby grammar was typical in the way that she articulated this anxiety: ‘we are not lucky enough to have a television, but I am hoping that a kind friend of mine will let me watch hers. I would be very disappointed if I missed it.’\(^{30}\) An essay written by the same girl after the event revealed that she managed to watch TV on coronation day and the opening sentence of her composition showed the sense of inclusion she experienced seeing it: ‘we saw everything very clearly, and I only wish it was in colour.’\(^{31}\) One of her classmates was not so fortunate. Out of all the girls at the Cheshire grammar school who wrote essays before the coronation, just one unequivocally criticized the occasion. Her disapproval might have stemmed from the fact that she did not expect to be able to see television, although she did not freely admit this was the case. She complained that ‘there is too much display about [the coronation]’ and ‘too much “hero-worship” about the royal family.’ She thought she would spend 2 June ‘either out for a country walk with [her] family, or gardening, or going to the nearest baths’:

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\(^{29}\) On the austerity of the immediate postwar period and public concerns about its continuation in the 1950s, see I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford, 2000), pp.60-98. For other examples of schoolgirls who were concerned about television’s lack of colour, see 3/A/C2, 3/A/C3, 3/A/C4, 3/A/C27, 3/A/C29, 3/A/C30.

\(^{30}\) 3/A/C14. For very similar examples, see 3/B/F27, 3/C/I4, 3/C/J19.

\(^{31}\) 3/A/B17. N.B. My own italicized emphasis.
We are not listening to anything connected with the Coronation on our radio, or going to neighbours television (sic). The seats for the route are too dear to waste money on and I can think of far more pleasant things to do than stand in a crowd, which I hate anyway all pushing for a view.\textsuperscript{32}

But her objections to the coronation had softened by the time she wrote her second essay after it. She had, in fact, spent all of 2 June listening to the wireless broadcast of the event whilst knitting, and she described how she had been captivated by the event:

The service was quite a nice one, the singing was lovely, especially the first anthem. The description of the dresses and uniforms was fascinating. I would have loved to have seen the colours and decorations.\textsuperscript{33}

Her participation as a listener and her longing to have seen the colour and pageantry revealed how, she too, wanted to experience the event, and suggested that her original criticism of the coronation may have partly sprung from a sense of exclusion from the televised spectacle.

Some schoolchildren were more cynical of what they perceived as the pressures to partake in the event. Eight boys aged fourteen to sixteen, in a class of sixteen boys at a Surrey school of unknown status, complained that the coronation had become a focal point of national curiosity, criticizing the popular attitude to spectatorship on the procession route in London. One fourteen-year-old boy’s essay was typical:

I for one would not get crushed and trodden on just to get a glimpse of a horse drawn carriage going by. Many people will get badly hurt in the crowds that will go to see the coronation and those that see it will just be able to talk to others and say, “I saw the coronation.”\textsuperscript{34}

The way a number of his peers reiterated this theme in their essays indicates that their opinions were influenced by an in-class discussion that preceded the writing exercise. Nevertheless, this quotation illustrated how some adolescent children were critical of what they deemed as the self-gratifying motivations behind the popular interest in the coronation. They thought that those who would go to see the procession would do so

\textsuperscript{32} 3/A/C18. 
\textsuperscript{33} 3/A/B22. 
just so they could tell other people they had ‘seen it’, a theme famously played on by
the 1950s Trinidadian calypso artist, Young Tiger, in his popular song ‘I Was There
(At The Coronation)’.  

The superior tone of the schoolboys’ criticism was probably revealing of their
social status. Their disdain for the behaviour of what they implicitly presented as the
self-indulgent masses echoed the contempt that was noted by some middle-class Mass
Observation respondents for the behaviour of British crowds at the 1937 coronation. This kind of class-focused condescension was even more apparent in the set of essays
written by a group of boys at a school of unknown status in Bury St. Edmunds. One
fourteen-year-old captured the tone of many of these essays:

I feel that the crowning of our Queen should be taken seriously and reverently;
not like a Saturday afternoon football match or the pictures, as entertainment.
During the Queen’s prayer and the other really holy parts, the television will
be turned away, not because it is too holy, but because the majority of people
will not realise it is a service of tremendous importance, but will take it like
any entertainment.

Discussing the television’s desacralization of the religiosity of the coronation service,
this boy claimed that a ‘majority of people’ did not appreciate its spiritual importance.
One of his classmates recorded that he and his peers had had two history lessons and
three scripture lessons on the ‘religious side’ of the event, which probably
informed their outlook. Several alluded pejoratively to the ignorance of what they perceived
as the ‘majority’ by comparing them to football spectators – a theme echoed in school
essays written by girls at the grammar school in west London. These condescending
sentiments were indicative of wider elite and intellectual anxieties about television as

36 See Chapter Three.
38 3/B/E4.
39 3/B/F14, 3/B/F18, 3/B/F27.
symptomatic of a ‘low’ mass culture, which allegedly debased public life.\textsuperscript{40} However, like their female counterparts, despite having reservations about mass spectatorship, most boys at Bury St. Edmunds still expressed a longing to watch the TV coverage, so that they did not miss out on what they deemed a unique national event. A thirteen-year-old acknowledged this tension when he stated that ‘Televievers are lucky it is to be televised’, although he added ‘some viewers might take it as an entertainment, not as… a religious service.’\textsuperscript{41}

The school essays reflected adolescent children’s beliefs – instilled either inside or outside the classroom – that most British people planned to join in the coronation, TV facilitating a mass popular involvement. While some essayists expressed concerns about the cost involved in staging the event, the obstructive crowds on the procession route, the distance that separated them from the London-based celebrations, or the character of the mass spectatorship which television would generate, they also noted their longing to personally participate via the TV coverage of the coronation. In this way, the new medium and its innovatory significance offset other criticisms about the coronation and stimulated broad interest among media audiences, which ensured that a national viewership gathered in expectation around TV sets to watch the crowning of Elizabeth II.

2. Adults and children’s responses to the televised coronation

On 2 June 1953, there were 2.7 million television sets operating across Britain with an average of seven and a half adults to a set. The BBC estimated that 20.4 million adults


saw at least half an hour of the service, which was almost double the radio audience. This equated to 56% of Britain’s adult population – these figures excluding children.42 This section shows how adults and children who watched the coronation on television thought they were sharing in a special moment as part of a collective national event. It also reveals how TV viewing was simultaneously defined by highly personal codes of consumption and how a tension between national and more intimate experience seems to have been the defining feature of the televised event. This tension was animated by the domestic settings in which most viewers watched the coronation, as well as by the people with whom they saw it. Commonplace activities and conversations overlapped the extraordinary scenes transmitted from Westminster Abbey, with viewers engaging with the live moving images in new ways. Notably, home-based royal spectatorship witnessed audiences collectively identify with the lead royal protagonists, fostering a shared emotional experience around the focal point of Elizabeth II and her family.

Out of the 76 women who documented their coronation day activities for MO, 35 noted that they watched the television procession and ceremony. This was roughly proportional to the number of male respondents who saw it – 40 out of 87 men stating that they had watched the TV broadcast. That almost half of all MO respondents saw the coronation coverage is, in itself, indicative of the mass participation produced by television. A further 30 women and men listened to the service by wireless. A striking feature in all the directive replies is the negligible levels of opposition or apathy noted by respondents about the occasion; only 15 in 163 expressed a disinterest or disregard for it. Given MO’s progressive, anti-establishment origins in the 1930s, this dearth of criticism was significant.43 As with the correspondence written by angry readers to the Manchester Guardian censuring David Low’s derisive ‘Morning After’ cartoon, or

43 N. Hubble, Mass Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory (Basingstoke, 2006), pp.4-8.
the letters sent to Kingsley Martin criticizing the *New Statesman*’s flippant coronation commentary, the MO reports indicated that a broad consensus existed that the queen’s crowning was an important national event, which should be treated with respect.44

Some of the MO respondents who watched television were influenced by their belief that the coronation met with broad admiration among the public and that the nation was united in celebrating it. The description of a thirty-six-year-old male clerk was typical. Comparing the 1953 coronation of the queen to that of her father in 1937, he recorded that it was distinguished by ‘the fact that the whole nation joined in.’45 He described how ‘radio and TV made this an awe-inspiring ceremony. In 1937 I was an eavesdropper by radio, but this time I was THERE taking part.’46 For this respondent, television facilitated a more national and more intimate royal experience, the temporal simultaneity of the images from central London enhancing his personal engagement, whilst also heightening his awareness of a British community of viewers. A man from Cheshire who watched the television with his children also commented that they ‘took part in the actual service’ and, contrasting the 1953 coronation to that of George VI, remarked that he ‘remember[ed] little of the 1937 Coronation as it was a thing apart – not like this one where one was actually present through T.V.’47 Like the clerk above, this man expressed how he felt more involved through television and that by watching he had joined in an occasion that was not ‘a thing apart’ like the previous coronation, but something that was accessible to the entire country. The socially integrative effect that television had in overcoming regional differences was most explicitly articulated by an accountant from Sheffield when he stated: ‘this year we seem to have actually

44 For a discussion of the indignant public response to Low’s cartoon and the *New Statesman*’s coverage of the coronation, see Kynaston, *Family*, pp.306-7.
45 7/H/099.
46 N.B. The respondent’s own capitalization.
47 7/F/Chief Inspector. For an almost identical response, see 7/H/Agricultural Researcher, and for similar examples which stressed a personalized sense of participation as well as a national dimension to their television experience, see 7/A/01, 7/A/0161, 7/B/793, 7/B/Retired Civil Servant, 7/B/Housewife, 7/D/202, 7/E/4019, 7/F/4037, 7/F/Lecturer, 7/G/4137, 7/H/2, 7/H/03.
taken part in the ceremony, and it was not just something that happened in far away London for the benefit solely of the inhabitants of that city.' This MO respondents argued that television had connected a national community gathered in celebration of the coronation, whilst acknowledging a personal sense of participation as well. The tension in these descriptions between the collective and the intimate experience of TV viewing was succinctly described by a schoolteacher from Weald in Sussex, when she reflected that ‘this Coronation was much more intimately and deeply shared by the whole people.’

Adolescent schoolgirls who wrote essays about their coronation experience also discussed how television heightened their personal sense of involvement in the event. Asked to record how they had spent coronation day, one girl from the grammar school in Cheshire responded at length:

On Coronation day, after an early breakfast, I went to my friend’s house, as I had been invited to see television. We all sat in a group around the television and watched the picturesque procession make its way from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey. Thanks to the wonders of science we were able to see, like millions of British and continental viewers, the impressive Abbey service, the anointing and the crowning, and to really feel Elizabeth is Queen. The magnificent procession on the return route was so perfectly transmitted, that we were able to feel we were too, were taking part (sic). We saw, also, the cheering, excited crowds, who had waited patiently for the wonderful moment of seeing their newly crowned queen pass in the State Coach, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, her husband, who looked very proud of the fairy-tale Queen at his side. I shall always remember the way I spent my first coronation day, and I will have in my mind forever the day I saw new history being made.

This full and complex response showed how the girl thought a national community had been formed around the focal point of the televised coronation, and that European viewers shared in it too. She stated that she and ‘millions’ of others had experienced a personal sense of immersion in the event, the ‘perfectly transmitted’ images allowing them ‘to really feel Elizabeth is Queen’, and that they also ‘were taking part’. As with

48 7/F/093.
49 7/C/Teacher.
50 3/A/B4.
those who had listened to the radio broadcasts of previous royal events, her sense of participation seems to have been enhanced by the images and sounds of the ‘cheering, excited crowds’ – a feature regularly noted by the schoolgirls who wrote about their coronation experience. Furthermore, her description of the occasion as ‘new history’ in the making corresponded with the earlier essays which had invested the coronation with special status because of its landmark meaning. Adults and children also sought to memorialize the TV broadcast by photographing the screens of television sets as the coronation played in front of them. One man in Essex photographed his TV set, which invested the coronation broadcast with special historical meaning by creating a material record through which he could later commemorate the event (Figure 5.1.).

Figure 5.1. A photograph of a television screen showing the coronation service, taken by a man from Essex on 2 June 1953.

**51** For an adult respondent’s interesting description of the immersive quality of the 1953 coronation wireless broadcast, see 7/F/Retired Farmer. For children’s essays that describe the experience of seeing and hearing crowds on TV, see 3/A/A4, 3/A/A12, 3/A/A24, 3/A/A30, 3/A/A31 3/A/A34, 3/A/A35, 3/A/A37, 3/A/A40.  
**52** One of the schoolgirls from Cheshire noted that a boy at her television party was taking photographs of the TV screen (3/A/B27), while the photograph presented here in Figure 5.1 comes from the private collection of Ben Knowles, taken by his grandfather on coronation day 1953. For a useful analysis of commemorative processes and photography, see A. Kuhn, ‘Memory texts and memory work: Performances of memory in and with visual media’, *Memory Studies* 20:10 (2010), pp.1-16; F. Trentmann, ‘Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices and Politics’, *Journal of British Studies* 48:2 (2009), pp.283-307.
The one grievance occasionally expressed by adolescents about the television coverage, which detracted from their sense of involvement, related to the lack of colour images.\textsuperscript{53} Schoolgirls from Cheshire complained about this more often than the pupils in west London, probably because they knew it was unlikely they would get to see the colourful decorations on the procession route. Adult MO respondents rarely complained about the TV coverage, with just a handful of criticisms aimed at the size of television and its inability to fully convey the scale of the coronation spectacle.\textsuperscript{54} Most of those who saw it instead commended the engaging qualities of the broadcast, its captivating effect notably recorded by a thirty-nine-year-old housewife, who stated that, when ‘the camera caught [the queen] as she waved out the window and smiled, two women [with whom she sat] spontaneously and quite unself-consciously waved back as though they had been present (sic).’\textsuperscript{55} Clearly, television had the capacity to engross audiences, who impulsively responded to the visual images they consumed.

The domestic settings in which most people watched the televised coronation and the company who they saw it with were crucial factors in shaping the experience reported by many of the MO respondents. One seventy-one-year-old woman who saw the coronation on TV with her tenant and his relatives stated that she had worried before the event that she might not have been invited to watch television. On the day itself she wrote with pleasure that whilst watching ‘a sense of the continuity of history gripped me, and I felt glad that I belonged to this country, and was no outsider.’\textsuperscript{56} The feeling of national involvement she experienced while watching television needs to be interpreted in relation to her inclusion in her tenant’s TV party. As well as the sense of collective viewing produced around television sets, MO respondents who saw the

\textsuperscript{53} For example, see 3/A/A32, 3/A/A36, 3/A/A40, 3/A/B12, 3/A/B14, 3/A/B17, 3/A/B19, 3/A/B22.
\textsuperscript{54} For example, see 7/A/1462, 7/C/023, 7/C/1971, 7/F/050, 7/H/School Teacher.
\textsuperscript{55} 7/A/53.
\textsuperscript{56} 7/C/023.
coronation in their own or others’ homes alongside family or friends experienced a heightened awareness of personal involvement because of the informal atmosphere of domestic settings. Mass Observation had asked respondents to ‘give a short hour-by-hour description of [their] day’ on 2 June and, although this meant they listed their normal activities alongside the more unique aspects that related to television viewing, their reports revealed how the special qualities of the coronation were transformed by the constant influence of everyday domestic rituals.

One forty-seven-year-old housewife who lived in Scotland hosted a television party for twenty people at her home. Her pre-occupation over the course of coronation day was providing hospitality for her guests and she concluded her report noting how ‘although I had felt anxious about feeding all the guests I felt we had all had a happy day and that television had indeed made all the difference.’\(^{57}\) One of the schoolgirls from London also revealed in two sentences the ease with which television viewers transferred their attention from the coronation scenes to ordinary home life:

> When I switched the television on my family were all silent. We listened with interest until I went outside into the kitchen and put the vegetables on the gas. All through the Coronation I thought how right it was for Princess Elizabeth to be the Queen. When the Queen was anointed my mother and I put the dinner onto plates and took it into the dining room. We ate it while we were listening to the singing.\(^{58}\)

Mealtimes, like this one, interrupted the experience of the TV coronation for a lot of adults and children who watched the broadcast in domestic environments. Women, in particular, stressed how they spent a lot of time preparing food, and girls often stated that they helped female relatives prepare for the day’s events. In this respect, it seems that gender helped determine how people experienced the coronation. One forty-one-year-old male agricultural researcher from Crawley noted how, at his television party, the ‘womenfolk busied themselves before viewing commenced with the preparation

\(^{57}\) 7/A/Housewife.
\(^{58}\) 3/A/A20.
Meanwhile, one twenty-seven-year-old housewife from Portsmouth, who spent some of 2 June listening to the radio coverage, stated how her other coronation activities revolved around her domestic work and two young children, which included feeding her baby, washing nappies and keeping her toddler entertained.

The potential for desacralization generated by the television broadcast of the coronation worried palace officials and church leaders who thought that the spiritual significance of the ceremony might be lost on viewers. It became publicly known that the very sacred moments of the coronation service would not be shown on TV – the most important of which was the sovereign’s anointing. As Moran has discussed, newspapers also issued readers ‘pious instructions’ to join in the prayers and spoken ritual with the congregation in the abbey. But MO personal testimonies showed that reverent silence was not always observed in front of television sets. The schoolgirl from London was typical when she noted how she and her mother used the moment of anointing to plate up the family’s dinner. MO respondents were asked whether they and the group with whom they watched television had observed silence as officially requested. In accordance with Mass Observation’s longstanding policy to reveal how the public’s behaviour differed from its official representation, the question elicited a range of replies, most of which suggested that viewers paid little heed to the call for silence. Where quiet did prevail, it was usually out of respect for other guests who were watching. One forty-year-old accountant, who was one of the few respondents to visit a public venue to watch the coronation on TV, stated how he, and the strangers

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59 7/H/Agricultural Researcher.
61 Pimlott, The Queen, pp.211-12.
62 Moran, Armchair, p.78.
63 3/A/A20.
64 For examples of television parties that did not observe a silence, see 7/A/01, 7/A/School Teacher, 7/A/Youth Employment Officer, 7/A/757, 7/B/0177, 7/C/Teacher, 7/D/0857, 7/E/Chain Store Executive, 7/E/4250, 7/E/4019, 7/E/0708, 7/G/School Master, 7/G/4566.
around him, maintained their silence for the duration of the broadcast. Viewing at a large television party at a primary school in Heaton Mersey, he recorded how, during the queen’s anointing, ‘the whole hall was silent… apart from the children who had become bored and were running up and down in the corridors.’

Just down the road in Northenden, an Anglican vicar commented that at his television party ‘there was a reverent silence during the anointing but [he thought] with most ordinary people it would have been more so had it been visible.’

A similar complaint was levelled by several of the respondents at the way the BBC censored the communion – the other sacred moment of the service – from its viewers. Experiencing a sudden sense of exclusion from the ceremony, they remarked that they and their company had deemed it a fitting moment to engage in their own activities. An accountant from Sheffield recorded how he and his brother’s family had used the ‘awkward part [with] the blank at the sacrament… to exchange ideas about what had happened’, whilst a twenty-five-year-old student who watched with seven of his friends commented that the moment of communion ‘was considered suitable for handing round cigarettes.’

Clearly, TV had the potential to desacralize the spiritual meaning of the coronation, official efforts to protect the sanctity of the service sometimes, ironically, encouraging an increase in everyday activity among viewers.

The level of informality that characterized television parties was always greatest when those present were all close family. A railway clerk who watched with his wife, baby and his brother’s family in Ealing, London, recorded the comments made by the whole group during the TV broadcast:

The old Duke swears to her “Not rude words I hope” “Look at moth-holes at the back” – of cloaks. To be lifted into throne “Want to see that – what if they drop her – hope they’re strong” “Here she comes – looks like her mother –

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65 7/G/4137.
66 7/E/1948.
67 7/F/093 and 7/F/Student. Also see 7/H/School Teacher and 7/H/1478.
calmer look” “Very disappointing” – as they don’t lift her. To baby “Here’s your queen, oi!” “Thought Duke would pay homage first – only a relative” “Nice close-up” – as he kisses left cheek. “Duke of Gloucester – looks so old now” “Duke of Kent – bless his little heart – I like that kid – ordeal for a youngster” “Norfolk – don’t like him”.68

The familiar tone of these remarks showed how television allowed media audiences to engage with monarchy in a new way. They could consume television images without paying undue attention to the official soundtrack, instead offering their own audible running commentary. Unlike cinema and radio where silence was imperative, those who gathered to see the BBC’s coronation programme were usually sat upright in a cluster or ‘viewing circle’ around TV sets and could thus openly converse and discuss the experience as events unfolded in front of them.69 The remarks made by this Ealing family revealed how emotional reactions to the coronation became embedded in the affective economy of everyday life, the group’s conversation undermining the sanctity of the ceremonial through irreverent banter which focused on the character traits and foibles of the royal protagonists. Their commentary suggested a personal familiarity with the royal family, observations like ‘looks like her mother’ and ‘looks so old now’ showing how the speakers casually indicated to one another their knowledge of the House of Windsor’s main actors.

Although more respectful in tone, the directive reply of a retired civil servant from Lancaster, who watched the TV coverage with a group of her friends, was also revealing of the spontaneous communal reactions inspired by the television broadcast:

We were so much impressed… by the dignity and grace and composure of the Queen – someone remarked on her clear responses, and someone on the grace with which she sat down. One or two said how grave and unsmiling she was – but we felt this was fitting to the solemnity of the occasion. (At the end, when the coach turned into Buckingham Palace she was smiling and someone said, “That’s the best smile we’ve seen). We all thought how small and how young

68 7/E/4250.
69 For the term ‘viewing circle’, see 7/H/Agricultural Researcher and 3/A/B27.
she looked and thought of the weight she had to carry in the crown – all the regalia and heavy robes.  

This quotation revealed how the civil servant and the company with whom she saw television underwent a shared experience. Just like the family in Ealing, they vocally discussed, contested and affirmed one another’s opinions about the visual images in front of them. This woman’s sense of participation was conveyed in her recurring use of the word ‘we’ to describe her inclusive experience of TV viewing – a rhetorical device often used by MO respondents and schoolgirls. This shared yet personal type of conversation united audiences around the television set, the consumption of mass-mediated royalty crystallizing around more informal codes as audiences collectively picked over the meaning of monarchy together.

The television coverage of the coronation generated a more intimate and more inclusive sense of participation in a royal ceremony than ever before. MO personal testimonies revealed how respondents and schoolgirls from across the country thought they formed part of a collective British viewership. While the informal atmosphere of the domestic settings in which most audiences watched TV transformed the spiritual dimension of the coronation service, the conversational mood that characterized these spaces encouraged increased personal identification with Elizabeth II and her family. The Ealing and Lancaster TV parties were typical in their focus on the personalities of the royal actors, who formed a common point of reference. A national community of viewers was thus united through their mutual empathetic ties to the queen and her kin and, as the next section shows, the BBC elevated this familial element to energize the emotional bonds that linked members of the public to the House of Windsor.

70 7/B/0137.
3. The symbolic visual economy of Elizabeth II’s domesticity

The photographic coverage devoted to Elizabeth II’s children had antecedents in the intense visual exposure of the youthful Edward, Prince of Wales, in the 1910s, as well as in the images of her own childhood that were popularized in the 1920s and 1930s. But these did not compare in volume or quality to the photographs of Prince Charles and Princess Anne that were produced for public consumption in the late 1940s and early 1950s. An entire souvenir magazine industry developed around the monarch and her children. The publisher Pitkins, about which very little is known, first produced a pictorial souvenir magazine to celebrate Princess Elizabeth’s twenty-first birthday in 1947, and another shortly followed to commemorate her and Prince Philip’s wedding. However, it was the birth of their first son, Prince Charles, in 1948, which initiated a sustained campaign in semi-official commemorative memorabilia that focused on the younger members of the House of Windsor. Pitkins’s photographers were provided with special access to him and later to his sister as babies and then as toddlers to produce what became known as the annual ‘Golden Gift Books’ of the royal children. The photographs in these souvenirs ranged from formal shots in which Charles and Anne sat together in front of the camera, to more natural images of them playing, to pictures of them posing happily alongside their mother and father (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). The message conveyed by these souvenirs, which replicated the visual codes from family photographs of ordinary British people during the 1950s, was that Charles and Anne were ‘normal’ children and that their mother and father loved and cared for them like any other parents would.
Figure 5.2. Pitkins, *The Second Golden Gift Book of Prince Charles and Princess Anne* (London, 1952), p.3.

The Pitkins souvenirs also regulated the exposure of the royal children. It seems quite possible that palace officials were haunted by the media feeding-frenzy that had upset the royal honeymoon in 1947 and thus tried to exercise tighter control over the media’s access to the royal family’s private lives.\textsuperscript{72} The souvenirs created an idealized visual iconography that simultaneously drew attention to the royal group’s ‘normal’ characteristics by presenting them in informal, domestic poses. Britain’s newspapers and magazines helped popularize this iconography, reproducing an idealized image of the queen and her children. In the weeks before the coronation, they published many stories and photos that presented Elizabeth II in her maternal role and emphasized that Prince Charles and Princess Anne were ordinary children.\textsuperscript{73} For example, the \textit{Daily Mirror} dedicated a central spread to three large photos of the queen playing ‘in-and-out-the-window’ with Charles and Anne at Balmoral (Figure 5.4).\textsuperscript{74} In its caption, the \textit{Mirror} explained to its readers what was taking place in the ‘wonderful new pictures’, providing a dialogue between the queen and her children to animate their personalities and relationship. In view of this idealized vision of the royal family, the MO directive report written by a Manchester university student was pertinent. He noted that, whilst on a half-mile-walk through ‘side streets’ in the city, which he suggested were ‘all more or less slums’, only ‘2 front-room windows were not decorated with a picture of the Queen, and/or [her] children’, with ‘the Duke less in evidence’.\textsuperscript{75} The implication of this respondent’s comments, that the people in these homes celebrated images of the queen and her children, is indicative of the postwar culture of royal maternalism that had been generated around Elizabeth II.

\textsuperscript{72} See Chapter Four.
\textsuperscript{73} For example, see \textit{Daily Express}, 14 April 1953, p.1; \textit{Picture Post}, 2 May 1953, p.27; \textit{Woman}, 9 May 1953, pp.10-11; \textit{Woman’s Own}, 28 May 1953, pp.24-5; \textit{Modern Woman}, April 1953, pp.41-3.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Daily Mirror}, 1 May 1953, pp.8-9.
\textsuperscript{75} 7/G/1873.
In light of the extensive media coverage of the queen’s maternal image before her coronation, it was unsurprising that the BBC drew special attention to her children on 2 June and particularly to her bond with her son and heir in its television broadcast. In doing so, the BBC encouraged personal identification between audiences and the leading royal actors, elevating a common reference point to unite viewers around the relationship between mother and son. The MO respondents and school essayists noted that, on three separate occasions during the day’s broadcasting, they or those people with whom they watched reacted very positively to the televised scenes of the prince.

The first time adults and adolescent children reacted positively to Charles on 2 June was when he first appeared during the coronation service. In the week before the coronation, the media speculated whether he would be present in Westminster Abbey to witness his mother’s crowning.\textsuperscript{76} This speculation had raised some concerns among the public, one fourteen-year-old schoolgirl from west London writing in an essay that she thought ‘Prince Charles… ought to see his mother’s actual crowning as it would

\textsuperscript{76} Daily Express, 2 June 1953, p.12; Daily Mirror, 1 June 1953, p.6.
show the significance that his mother is Queen. One of her classmates also thought he should be present as it would ‘prepare [him] for his.’ The queen’s maternal role and Charles’s position as heir influenced how the BBC designed the scene in which he appeared during the service. Outside Broadcast producer, Peter Dimmock, learnt that the prince would be present in the royal box with the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret at the moment the queen was crowned. Dimmock instructed his cameraman, B. P. Wilkes, who was in charge of filming the royal box, to focus in on Charles and, immediately after the Archbishop of Canterbury finished the prayer that followed the queen’s crowning, the television broadcast cut to a scene of the prince looking down at his mother. The implication was clear: here was the heir to the throne watching his mother undergo the ritual that he would one day himself experience.

Figure 5.5. A photograph of a TV screen showing Prince Charles and the Queen Mother in the royal box, taken by a man from Essex on 2 June 1953.

Charles’s sudden appearance on television screens around the country elicited powerful reactions from viewers. Schoolgirls from Cheshire and west London noted

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77 3/B/G8.
78 3/B/G3.
79 BBCWA/T14/869/2 - ‘The Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II: Producer’s Script’, p.16.
in their essays that they thought his arrival in the royal box was particularly exciting, one remarking that ‘when we saw Prince Charles sitting with the Queen Mother ready for the crowning it was certainly one of the happiest moments.’80 Although this essay writer confused the order of scenes, she clearly acknowledged how Charles’s arrival had stimulated viewers’ interest. Several adult respondents also suggested that the TV images of the prince in the abbey were the ‘most stirring’ or ‘touching’ they saw on 2 June, whilst others made sense of these scenes through the maternal story on show.81 For example, the retired civil servant who watched at a television party in Lancaster recorded that ‘we were all pleased when we saw Prince Charles in the Abbey and someone said she wondered whether the one time when the Queen looked up for a moment was when he came in.’82 The media actively mobilized this story of motherly care through these scenes, BBC TV commentator, Richard Dimbleby, stating at a later point in the abbey broadcast that the queen had briefly glanced at her son and, on the next day, the press also claimed that her fleeting look aside had been at Charles.83 One MO respondent identified as one of the ‘most stirring incidents’ she witnessed on 2 June ‘the one and only sideways glance and smile [of the queen], the only moment which television showed us when she was not wholly engrossed in the ceremonial. This according to newspapers was directed to her son perhaps as he was leaving the Royal Box.’84 Notably, viewers also chose to photograph their television sets whilst Charles was on screen, which suggests that they thought these were special moments worth recording for posterity (Figure 5.5).85

80 3/A/B16. For other examples, see 3/A/A28 and 3/A/A4.
81 For example, see 7/A/0219, 7/B/anon, 7/D/195, 7/E/4250, 7/F/806, 7/F/RAF Engineer Officer.
82 7/B/0137.
83 For example, see Daily Mirror, 3 June 1953, p.5; Daily Express, 3 June 1953, p.12. Also see Ziegler, Crown, p.111.
84 7/B/631.
85 Also see footnote 52.
The second time the prince appeared as part of the TV coverage also prompted
enthusiastic responses from British viewers. As already indicated, he left the royal
box and returned to Buckingham Palace before the coronation ceremony ended. Two
hours later, the BBC was televising scenes of his mother inside the gold state coach as
she completed the final stretch of her return journey from Westminster Abbey. As the
procession rounded the Victoria memorial at the end of the Mall, the TV transmission
switched to images of Charles and Anne looking down from the palace windows,
pointing at the queen’s carriage. The British media had frequently reproduced this
image of the royal children watching their mother perform her public role in the early
1950s.86 One girl, in a class of eight- and nine-year-old children at Northumberland
Heath Junior School in Kent, recorded in an essay written about what she anticipated
seeing on coronation day, that ‘the two children will be looking at [the queen] through
the palace window.’87 This girl acknowledged how this type of image of Charles and
Anne was part of the recognizable canon of photographic scenes associated with the
House of Windsor in this period. Several of the adolescent schoolgirls from London
and Cheshire commented how they particularly enjoyed these images on coronation
day, one typically recording how she ‘liked it when Prince Charles and Princess Ann
(sic) saw their mother come home. Princess Ann got very excited and Prince Charles
kept banging on the window.’88 Adult respondents also expressed pleasure in relation
to these scenes, a thirty-four-year-old religious minister recording his ‘delight’ at the
‘unconscious reactions of the royal children as caught in the window by the TV

86 For example, see Daily Mirror, 28 April 1953, p.9; Daily Mirror, 1 June 1953, p.16; Pitkins, The Second
87 3/D/N2/N27.
camera.' A female teacher from Hertfordshire was even more enthusiastic, making a special point about these images:

I should like to mention Prince Charles’ (sic) excitement when he caught sight of the Coach from the window. He kept pointing as if he would like to push through the glass, as much to say “Look, there’s my mummy in her coach. My mummy is coming back.”

This respondent empathized with the royal actors, investing the images with special emotional meaning which focused on the children’s desire to be reunited with their mother. As the religious minister stated, the charm of the scenes lay in their appearing natural and ‘unconscious’, Charles and Anne behaving as though they were normal children. The images, of course, had a deeper symbolic significance to which the MO evidence attests. These scenes of the children watching their mother from the palace windows, expectantly waiting to be reunited with her, acted as a stark reminder of how the queen’s public duties prevented her from fulfilling her domestic role, as she was unable to be at home with her children. Charles and Anne’s separation from their mother and their happiness on her return home thus amplified the public discourse on the burdensome nature of royal status and the sacrifices it required of its protagonists. The ostensible duties imposed on the House of Windsor also symbolically manifested through Prince Charles’s presence in the abbey on coronation day. It was unusual for a child aged only four to be present at such a service, but the images of him with his grandmother, the queen dowager, acted as a stark reminder that a long life of public service lay ahead of him.

The final time the MO respondents and schoolchildren reacted enthusiastically to scenes of the prince and his interaction with his mother was the climactic balcony appearance after the latter’s return to Buckingham Palace. Charles’s behaviour on the balcony received more positive comments from adults and adolescents than any other
aspect of the royal family’s conduct on 2 June. A thirty-four-year-old printer from Newtown, mid-Wales, was typical in his remarks on ‘the antics of Prince Charles on the balcony’ as the ‘funniest incident’ of the day, the heir to the throne grasping at his mother’s bracelets as she and her family waved to the crowds gathered below them. Again, it was the ‘natural’ quality of this scene, the prince’s unplanned antics lacking royalty’s usual formality, which appealed to viewers. A housewife from Leeds also suggested that the ‘funniest incident’ from 2 June was the moment ‘on the balcony before the fly-past [when] Prince Charles reached over, took his mother’s right hand and put it up, as much to say, “Practice what you preach” – and she waved.’ As with the queen’s sideways glance that was caught on camera during the coronation service, TV viewers invested these scenes with emotional meaning to emphasize an affection between mother and son. And, to augment the British public’s personal identification with the royals, the popular press published stories and photographs on the prince’s behaviour on the balcony which used an intimate language to animate the relationship between him and his mother. The Mirror was typical in using the caption ‘Mummy – Mummy’ to create this informal royal image (Figure 5.6). 

91 For example, see 3/A/A27 3/A/A30, 3/A/A38, 3/A/B6, 3/A/B14, 3/A/B17, 3/A/B21, 3/A/B27, 7/D/1090, 7/H/Schoolteacher.
92 7/E/Printer. Also see 7/E/4019 and 7/F/Minister of Religion, for almost identical responses.
93 Also see 7/E/4250.
94 7/D/0143. Also see 3/A/A30.
95 For example, see Daily Express, 3 June 1953, p.12; Daily Mirror, 4 June 1953, pp.8-9.
On the one hand, the BBC’s television coverage of Prince Charles’s interaction with his mother clearly encouraged viewers to identify personally with scenes of royal maternalism, invigorating a national community of viewers who empathized with the domesticity of the House of Windsor. On the other, this focus on royal familialism accentuated the public narrative on the unenviable character of royal life. In a similar vein to the coronation of her father sixteen years earlier, media audiences expressed special concern for the queen’s wellbeing during the coronation ceremony. But their reactions were shaped by her feminine persona as a mother and wife. For example, a group of thirteen-year-old girls from the grammar school in west London recorded in their essays that they thought Prince Philip should be with the queen in the service to support her.\footnote{3/B/G18, 3/B/G19, 3/B/G20. For a similar adult view, see 7/A/1605.} One of these girls couched her concern in broader terms relating to the personal sacrifice made by the queen: ‘I don’t think that the Queen should be always working. Many others will agree that the Queen has a hard time, after all she is a
human being. The Royal Family are not together enough, is what many say.\textsuperscript{97} This kind of anxiety, which focused on the personal sacrifices made by Elizabeth II, was communicated implicitly by MO respondents and essayists who expressed disquiet that she was separated from her family during the coronation service, several stating that she looked ‘lonely’ or ‘weighed down’ by the crown on her head.\textsuperscript{98} As Moran has noted, although palace officials had expressly prohibited television close-ups before the event, the BBC quickly disregarded this rule, presenting their audiences with large images of the queen’s face to create a more intimate experience.\textsuperscript{99} In respect of these close-ups, it is unsurprising that respondents and schoolgirls noted concerns about the queen’s ‘youth’ and the way she ‘looked very nervous’.\textsuperscript{100} These reactions should be interpreted in relation to the popular belief that the queen was placing public duty before personal ambition, sacrificing fulfilment as a young woman to undertake her role as sovereign.

A large number of school essayists specifically focused on this story of sacrifice. Reflecting on previous classroom discussions on the meaning of the coronation, girls at the Cheshire and London grammar schools wrote how they thought the queen was ‘dedicating her life’ to the ‘service of her people’ and ‘her country’, and that she was owed ‘our loyalty and support’.\textsuperscript{101} Some explicitly asserted that the queen’s dedication involved her forsaking her personal ambitions – a fourteen-year-old girl stated that ‘she must always put other people’s desires before hers, no matter how she feels about it.’\textsuperscript{102} These examples showed how adolescent children were educated on the meaning of the coronation and that this helped popularize the discourse on the

\textsuperscript{97} 3/B/G18.
\textsuperscript{98} For example, see 7/A/1462, 7/A/4398, 7/E/1858, 7/F/Minister of Religion, 7/H/048.
\textsuperscript{99} Moran, Armchair, pp.73-4 and 80. Also see Pimlott, The Queen, pp.190-1 and 205.
\textsuperscript{100} For example, see 3/A/A34, 7/C/023, 7/C/HW, 7/C/0142, 7/D/2029, 7/E/4250, 7/G/948, 7/E/1948.
\textsuperscript{102} 3/A/B22. Also see 3/A/F3.
burdens of royal life. These essays also revealed how members of the public envisioned the queen’s national duty in relation to the constraints it placed on her personal development, and this generated empathy for her at a time when fulfilment in domestic life was deemed a central tenet of postwar selfhood.¹⁰³

Conclusion

Queen Elizabeth’s domestic role was more integral to her public presentation on her coronation day than historians have previously acknowledged. While the media and other public voices heralded a New Elizabethan Age and the dawn of Commonwealth, MO sources suggested that public attitudes to the queen on 2 June focused primarily on her personality and family life. The respondents who partook in the 2 June survey had also participated in an earlier survey which asked them whether they ‘ever [had] personal thoughts about the Queen [and] if so, what sort of thoughts [these were]’.¹⁰⁴ It is a shame that all but one of the original replies to this survey have since been lost, but the one surviving reply, oddly enclosed with the 2 June responses and written by the same retired civil servant who watched the coronation at a TV party in Lancaster, illuminated the strong empathetic connection facilitated by the mass media between members of the public and the royal family:

I do think in personal terms about the Queen. I regard her with affection and pride and admiration, much as I might do a distinguished younger member of my own family or circle of acquaintances. I suppose it is rather foolish, seeing she is so far removed from me. But we see so many photos and read and hear so much of her intimate personal family and private life that one can’t help feeling that one knows her personally – even without seeing her in the flesh.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ TC/69/2/A – ‘Code List Survey 167’, p.3.
Clearly recognizing the key role of the media as the organizing force in her emotional attitude to the queen, this woman was among a number of respondents who expressed loyalty to the monarch that was based on the ability to identify with her personally.\textsuperscript{106}

For some, it was this intimate identification which distinguished Elizabeth II from her father. Many MO respondents noted, when comparing the 1953 coronation to that of George VI, that the abdication of Edward VIII had tarnished the 1937 event, but a forty-two-year-old primary schoolteacher went a step further when she expressed that whilst Elizabeth II was ‘young and the family appeared romantic’, her father had been ‘a sincere but not a romantic figure’.\textsuperscript{107}

This chapter has shown how the British media and BBC television, in particular, played a crucial part in generating a popular appeal around the postwar royal family. The prospect of watching the TV broadcast of the 1953 coronation offset other public criticisms about the event, adolescent schoolchildren acknowledging a strong desire to participate in what they perceived as an important historic occasion. On the day itself, television facilitated new modes of participation in the imagined national community, MO respondents and school essayists recording how they experienced an increased sense of involvement as part of a collective British viewership. This chapter has also argued that the informal domestic settings in which most people watched television enhanced both the shared and more intimate qualities of their coronation experience, because it encouraged them to relate personally and as part of groups to the images they consumed. The BBC also elevated the familial elements of the coronation by focusing on the queen’s maternal domestic image, which stimulated mutual emotional identification among its national viewership and fostered sympathy for the monarch’s ostensibly onerous public life.

\textsuperscript{106} For example, also see 7/A/0161, 7/A/anon (Edenbridge), 7/C/Housewife, 7/C/anon (Brighton).

\textsuperscript{107} 7/A/0161. For other examples that discuss the negative impact of the abdication crisis on the 1937 coronation, see 7/B/Housewife, 7/B/0137, 7/B/924, 7/C/0214, 7/D/1587, 7/G/Schoolmaster, 7/H/055.
Conclusion

This doctoral thesis began by analyzing how the British sovereign’s role as guarantor of democratic politics was invested with new symbolic meaning in the first half of the twentieth century. As David Cannadine originally argued, a new emphasis on royal ceremonial enhanced the monarchy’s public role by transforming the crown into a focal point of collective identification in the context of mass society.¹ My thesis has argued that the crown’s symbolic presence should also be examined in relation to the House of Windsor’s increased media visibility in the period from 1932 to 1953, and the changes in the nation’s emotional economy and culture of celebrity.

The media and Buckingham Palace’s elevation of the royal family’s domestic image increased the monarchy’s popularity by strengthening the empathetic bonds that linked members of the public to royal personalities. At a time of significant socio-political transformation, these bonds helped stabilize the social hierarchy, generated support for the constitutional political system and enhanced the concept of a national community centred on the monarchy. From the early 1930s, the media presented more intimate images of the royal family, encouraging audiences to identify with them. Innovations in Britain’s media culture helped to foster this illusion of intimacy, with the public able to consume royal domestic life first via radio and, later, via television. In projecting this informal image, the media was aided by courtiers who actively sought to present royal home life in more recognizable ways.

I have analyzed how royal romance was staged in the 1930s and 1940s. In Chapter One, I argued that coverage of Prince George and Princess Marina’s 1934 love story initiated a shift in royal emotional expression. Newspapers and newsreels created a narrative which was informed by a burgeoning emotional culture that had at

its core a more demonstrative form of popular romantic love.\(^2\) The palace and lovers themselves also emphasized the mutual affection of their relationship, fostering an image which incorporated companionate elements. In a striking series of innovations, George and Marina became the first royal couple to deliver a public message through a newsreel film, the first to be photographed kissing and the first to wave to crowds from Buckingham Palace’s balcony. Their glamour and accessibility was spectacular, and was tailored to appeal to female audiences in particular, making them seem more like film stars than royalty.

Romance persisted after the Second World War as one of the principal tropes used by the media and palace to characterize royal love stories. Chapter Four argued that amidst concerns about Princess Elizabeth’s rumoured betrothal to Prince Philip of Greece, courtiers, journalists and newsreel editors highlighted the love match between the couple in order to foster public empathy for them. In accordance with wider shifts in coverage of emotional culture, the 1947 story took on a further dimension, with the princess’s personal development taking centre stage.\(^3\) At a time when domesticity was widely perceived as a fulfilling aspect of modern selfhood, the intense focus on the princess’s personal feelings consolidated popular support for her choice of partner and gave new affective meaning to her public role. Furthermore, the Mass Observation reports examined in the fourth chapter revealed a distinctive cultural circuit at work; the phrases crafted by commentators and officials passed through the media into personal testimonies which emphasized the importance of the love match and the couple’s compatibility.\(^4\)


By mapping the changes in the way royal intimacy was publicly staged, I have charted how the projection of the House of Windsor’s domestic image mirrored the broader feminization of British culture in the mid-twentieth century. As Chapter Two noted, Cosmo Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury, created a more personal image of George V by drawing attention to his family and home life in the radio broadcasts he wrote for the monarch. The king’s domestic persona correlated with a wider cultural emphasis on the private sphere as a site of personal enrichment. Through my analysis of school essays written by boys from northern England, I also argued that the king’s personal image brought him into closer contact with his subjects, promoting a bond of trust between monarch and people. These empathetic links continued to inform public opinion after George V’s death. Chapter Three argued that his wife, Queen Mary, was the recipient of considerable public sympathy on coronation day 1937 because of her association with the old king and her personal ordeals.

After 1945, royal familialism was presented as an explicit symbol of a national culture of domesticity. The media, palace and Church of England projected Princess Elizabeth’s marriage as symbolic of all British nuptials and, as Chapter Five revealed, the photographic iconography that surrounded her and her children presented them as a ‘normal’ family. My thesis has argued that the image of normality created by these organizers of the public sphere was key to generating popular support for monarchy. On the one hand, it made the House of Windsor seem more relevant at a time when there was increased emphasis on nuclear family values. On the other, it encouraged identification between the public and royalty. Respondents to the Sunday Pictorial’s

poll on the 1947 royal engagement and MO participants who answered the directive on Princess Elizabeth’s wedding described how they believed she merited happiness in her domestic life because of the burdens of her public role.

This kind of empathy relied on the impression that the princess wanted to marry a husband whom she loved and the idea that her public responsibilities threatened her personal happiness. In relation to this mode of emotional identification, my thesis has developed recent work on royal public language to identify how courtiers developed a rhetoric in the 1930s which emphasized the burdensome nature of royal duty.7 The royal speechwriters of George V’s radio broadcasts incorporated new references to the personal sacrifices the sovereign made on behalf of his subjects. Cosmo Lang also introduced descriptions of the way the king was sustained in his role by his people’s love and support. Schoolboys who wrote about the king as ‘the finest person who ever lived’ identified him as a benevolent figure who had selflessly worked to improve the lives of his subjects and shared a close emotional link with all sections of society.

Building on the themes of personal sacrifice and the burdens of royal duty, the third chapter examined how public commentators contributed to an image of George VI which emphasized his vulnerability following his impromptu accession. Again, I identified how these concerns seem to have circulated in the media and impacted on the public, with MO respondents noting their concerns about the new king’s strength of character. After the war, coverage of Princess Elizabeth drew on a similar rhetoric that stressed the burdens of royal life. As Chapter Four argued, two interweaving public discourses thus explain the loyalty expressed for royalty in this period. At a time when personal fulfilment was gaining in importance, the House of Windsor’s protagonists seemed to strive for more normal domestic lives, but were increasingly

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seen to place their public duties ahead of their own happiness. The *Pictorial* poll and MO evidence showed how this image of sacrifice evoked empathetic reactions from the public who thought the royal family deserved a normal home life. Between 1932 and the early 1950s, this tension was formalized as part of the repertoire of images associated with royalty, as was discernible from the words of the *British Paramount* newsreel commentator who reported on the invasion of Princess Elizabeth’s 1947 honeymoon: ‘to be royal is to be denied the full advantage of private life.’

Palace officials and the media elevated an intimate public image of the House of Windsor in the 1930s as a symbol of Britain’s unique political culture. George and Marina’s wedding saw courtiers and journalists produce a royal spectacle on a scale similar to the mass political theatre of the European dictators. The couple’s marriage service was the first the BBC broadcast live to listeners from Westminster Abbey, allowing people around Britain to join in the celebrations in London. With the help of the palace, newsreels and the press also created vast visual panoramas of the crowds that massed in the capital, producing an image of the family monarchy as the hub of national life. The media also juxtaposed George and Marina’s romance with reports of political disorder from the continent to heighten the impression that the House of Windsor represented the centre of a stable version of public life.

Pictures of George V holding up his granddaughter, Princess Margaret Rose, for the crowds gathered below Buckingham Palace’s balcony epitomized this family intimacy. The old monarch also communicated an image of the family-centred nation through his broadcasts to his subjects in Britain and the empire at Christmas and his silver jubilee, his low, mellifluous tones contrasting sharply with the grandiloquence

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of the dictators. But it was his son’s coronation that witnessed the crystallization of
the family monarchy as the focal point of public life. In the third chapter I argued that,
amidst rising concerns about German and Italian militarization, George VI’s crowning
was orchestrated to emphasize Britain’s national vitality. A chorus of public voices
from across the political spectrum attested to the advantages of liberal democracy and
constitutional monarchy. In support of this narrative, the media and palace worked in
tandem to produce an inclusive vision of a British public, incorporating a greater
number of representatives from working-class settings and the Celtic nations. And, as
the chapter revealed for the first time, Queen Mary brought an emotional continuity to
the event, which helped overcome broader concerns about the new king’s abilities
following Edward VIII’s abdication.

My thesis has also demonstrated how new technologies enhanced the emotional
dimensions of royal public spectacle, facilitating new distinctive interactions between
British people and the royal family after 1932. Radio broadcasting generated a wider
national participation by allowing audiences to participate in royal events from the
comfort of their own homes and the BBC sought to communicate aural images of the
cheering crowds in London to boost listeners’ sense of involvement. In response to
the soundscapes projected into their homes at the 1937 coronation and 1947 royal
wedding, MO respondents notably recorded that the sounds of cheering they heard
immersed them in the event, intensifying their emotional feelings towards monarchy.
Coupled to the imagery of mass participation were soundscapes of the intimate scenes
in Westminster Abbey, the BBC using new recording equipment in the 1930s and
1940s to transmit the words spoken by royal personalities into homes around Britain,
evoking empathy among audiences.
As Chapter Five revealed, radio was dramatically superseded by television as the medium of popular participation at the 1953 coronation. Before the event, television generated enthusiasm among schoolchildren who anticipated joining in what they perceived as an important national occasion via an innovative technology. There were some elite anxieties that ‘the masses’ would fail to appreciate the meaning of the coronation, but for most school essayists and MO respondents television overcame regional differences, offered a preferable means of spectatorship to watching from the procession route, and offset broader concerns about the costs involved in staging the event. In relation to coronation day itself, adult MO respondents and school essayists noted a heightened sense of participation around TV sets, the temporal simultaneity of the images they consumed from London creating a more intimate and a more national experience. I suggested that the tension inherent within these personal-cum-collective descriptions was animated by the domestic settings in which most people watched the television coverage. Informal, everyday domestic rituals overlapped with the unique scenes on TV, group commentaries and activities desacralizing the spiritual qualities of the event whilst enabling collective emotional identification with its leading royal protagonists. The final chapter also analyzed how broadcasters elevated the domestic persona of Elizabeth II, drawing special attention to her relationship with her son and heir, Prince Charles, which evoked empathy among viewers.

Finally, my thesis has examined how the crown’s changing role in the inter- and postwar years stimulated new forms of ethnographic investigation into British public and private life. This included the BBC’s aim to get ‘a Cockney’s impression’ from the crowd on George and Marina’s wedding day, the newsreel ‘interviews’ with the four working-class people that George VI invited to his coronation, the Pictorial’s pioneering poll on Princess Elizabeth’s rumoured engagement and, of course, through
Mass Observation’s analysis of royal family members and events. In this respect, the monarchy had a continual democratizing influence, motivating new interventions into public opinion. Moreover, and crucial to my examination, these studies of ‘ordinary’ people’s attitudes uncovered how members of the public were avid consumers of the royal family’s media image, forging powerful empathetic relationships with a small group of actors whom they did not know and did not expect to meet. The schoolgirls who wrote essays about the 1953 coronation revealed how interest in royal figures started early in life; media audiences identified common points of reference between their own experiences of birth, childhood, romance, marriage and parenthood, and the experiences of the royal family.

Further research could examine how the image of the nuclear royal family of 1953 changed over the course of the decade and the early 1960s. Queen Elizabeth II gave birth to two more children in her early thirties and Prince Charles and Princess Anne grew into teenagers just as new, popular youth cultures emerged in London and other British cities. At the same time, Princess Margaret’s celebrity lifestyle became the subject of intense media scrutiny. More work is required on how palace officials responded to these changes in a period which witnessed a steep decline in traditional codes of deference.  

This doctoral thesis has explored the monarchy’s successful adaptation to mass society from the 1930s to the early 1950s. The metamorphoses of the second-half of the twentieth century await further investigation.

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LPL/Lang/129
LPL/Lang/191
LPL/Lang/192
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LPL/Lang/318
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SxMOA1/2/59/4
SxMOA1/2/69/2
SxMOA1/2/69/3
SxMOA1/2/69/6
SxMOA1/3/6
SxMOA1/3/106

National Archives, Kew
NA/FO/141/592/8

Royal Archives, Windsor
RA/GDKH/WED/A01
RA/LC/LCO/SPECIAL
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B. PUBLISHED SOURCES

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Daily Express
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Sunday Express
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**National Portrait Gallery Photographs**

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