



KING'S HEATH LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Memories of the Coronation in King's Heath, June 1953

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Memories of the Coronation.

The Birmingham Post Wednesday June 3rd 1953

At Kings Heath a Punch and Judy show was set in one of the park shelters and 50 children and as many adults watched and then moved out into the rain. In all places there was the same scene. Children wearing red, white and blue hats and dresses stood shivering, though entranced, before the puppets and then when it was all over ran home to where it was warm.

Kings Heath Observer Thursday June 4th 1953

With split timing to set up and dismantle stage, props and scratch meals en route between each engagements, such was Coronation Day for Miss Betty Staite, magicienne and entertainer of Kings Heath who gave seven shows in Kings Heath assisted by her able youthful helper.

The first performance was at 12.30 and with each programme lasting 45 minutes to an hour she reached St Agnes Church hall at 3.30 for the "Compass Childrens' Party"

The children were first shown how to do some tricks for themselves; the magic wand brought many surprises from an empty box until a Coronation tableau was built 6ft long by 7ft wide – an attractive colourful tribute to the Queen which drew great applause. This exciting programme was presented to all the seven shows with equal success.

Five minutes to set up and take down the props. Meals? Just sandwiches en route as they travelled between each show – the price a popular entertainer pays – especially on Coronation Day.

Kings Heath Observer Thursday June 11th 1953

The York Road Coronation party was a great success in spite of the weather. The rain kept off during the sports and fancy dress parade and the kiddies enjoyed it to the full (as did the adults).

Tea was held in the school rooms for both children and adults and everyone received a souvenir gift. Everyone was grateful to the committee and all who assisted in making it a grand day but a special word of thanks must go to Mr Marshall, Mrs Dugmore, Mrs Smith, Mrs Yapp and Mr Howell. Dr Forsythe kindly judged the fancy dress parade and received a hearty cheer from the children.

It was a great day and one to be remembered.

Ivor Davies

We had been invited to watch the ceremony on T.V. We hadn't got a television but my brother in law who worked for the B.B.C. borrowed a set for the day. There was great excitement as Stan, Peter and myself travelled to Kings Norton. I don't remember how we got there as we didn't have a car so must have used the bus.

My sister Kay and her husband lived in a small semi detached house in Calverly Road. Joan, my other sister, was there with Andrew aged two and my mother. It was quite a squash to get us all in the front room, sitting on cushions, stools etc.

I remember when the Queen arrived at the Abbey. She looked wonderful and her dress was out of this world. She seemed very relaxed and calm. The music, for me, was the most memorable part of the day and the other when Prince Charles came to stand by his grandma and watch his mother being crowned.

PAGE 1

When they opened the Abbey doors a great roar came from the crowd and I am sure they could hear it at Buckingham Palace. People were laughing, shouting and crying and everyone seemed to be having a wonderful day. We watched the procession move up the Mall and then it was time for lunch. Food was still scarce but we managed to buy a few treats and we all contributed to the meal. Boiled ham and salad was my memory and it was delicious.

After lunch Jane aged 4 was dressed up as a chicken and went off to the street party. We decided to watch the television – perhaps the rain put us off parties.

What a day we had. After so much war and disaster it seemed like the start of a new life.

Stan and Molly Budd

At the time of the Coronation I was living with my grandparents, Thomas and Charlotte Yoxall, and my father Victor Yoxall, window cleaner, at 115 Grange Road. There was a party in the road but as my grandparents were elderly they didn't join in. They were given a present of groceries which I remember touched my Nan and a tear or two was shed for the kindness in thinking of them.

My brother and I had grown up with the Mulingani children and we were all invited to watch the Coronation on their small television. I remember lots of people crowding into their room but it was all very exciting. I remember seeing the Queen of Tonga waving and laughing in her open carriage in the rain.

I didn't stay for the party in the road as I went to Quinton to my boy friend for a party over there. I believe the party in Grange Road was a great success.

Pauline Egginton

My memories of Coronation Day are a little hazy but I can remember that the factory was closed for the day – with pay. This was an opportunity to spend the day in the Cotswolds with two of my work mates pursuing our hobby i.e. geology. Having no interest in the doings of the Royal family we went fossil hunting in several quarries and had a picnic near a convenient pub. As this was our regular routine on most Sundays as well I cannot recall if we found anything significant on that particular day. Sorry folks, but that's all.

Gordon Price

In February 1952 the king, George 6th, had been ill for some time and many folk knew he hadn't long to live. He had seen his eldest daughter the Princess Elizabeth and her husband Prince Philip off on a plane to Kenya and while they were there the king died so Elizabeth went out a princess and came back a Queen.

Many householders had been putting a certain amount of money into a kitty each week collected at two houses down the road. It was two shillings or half a crown (10p or 12 and a half pence). Many youngsters of today may think that that wasn't much but it was back then. This money had been collected for many months ever since it was known when the coronation would take place. Some days before the date of the party all the men in our road, young and old, had been putting up trimmings, bunting

PAGE 2

and flags, stretching across from house to house. Ours was one of them where the trimming was attached to. It must have been a weekend this took place as most folk would have been at work during the week. I well remember the activities of so many men with ladders and decorations and the kids getting in the way of these men climbing the ladders to attach or hand over the end of the trimmings to a person waiting at an upstairs window. The one attached to our house was tied to the bed rail near the window. That being the biggest bedroom in the house it had a double bed, two single beds, a wardrobe, chest of drawers, two chairs plus chamber pot under the bed for the lads' use (four of them) To get back to decorating Westfield Road everyone helped out and even the lamp posts had decorations of some kind be it flag, photo of the Queen or whatever.

It had been intended to have trestle tables down the centre of the road but not being sure of what weather we would have we accepted the offer of a man down the road who owned a workshop/ garage but it would need a good cleaning due to oil and such like on the floor from lorries kept in there. A few days before the party he got his men to park the lorries round the corner end of the road and the women of the road went in with brooms, buckets and mops to clean up the place. – even the men helped out and they must have sweat blood. The ladies had contributed something in the way of eatables for the party i.e. jellies of different colours and sizes depending on the mould used; tarts; sarnies of all kinds; blancmanges; trifles; cakes etc.

On the morning of June 2nd it was all activity for the adults of our road with setting up the trestle tables and covering them with white sheets as table cloths, bringing out chairs plus stools, benches and anything else to sit on. The tables were laid with the goodies and all covered with more sheets in case of creepy crawlies or spiders from the rafters above and then the big double doors were shut and locked till it was time for the party. All plates, dishes, bowls and cutlery had labels stuck on with the name of the owner except that the cutlery had different coloured wool or cotton tied to it. I don't think we had paper plates then. I don't think anyone felt like eating the midday dinner so most likely it was a snack of some kind. As for the children they were far too excited and were looking forward to the expected party. The ladies who had prepared all the food and laid the tables had a rest while the men went to the pub. I know my dad did, came back drunk and spent the afternoon in bed sleeping it off.

By mid afternoon the fun and games began with most of the men organising races and such like for the children and anyone else who wanted to join in. There was also musical chairs with music from a wind up gramophone, blind man's buff, pass the parcel, hide and seek – you name it they had it. I had gone over to a mate's house and saw some of the coronation on her black and white 9in television. I don't think anyone in our road had a T.V set but it was on the wireless so we heard what was going on in London. One of the commentators, I think it was Richard Dimbleby, got very excited and almost shouted out "and here comes Queen Salote of Tonga riding in an open carriage waving and smiling at the crowd while it is pouring down with rain and the crowds are cheering her" Yes that stands out most in my memories of the coronation. I was able to see it in full when it was shown at the Kingsway, our local cinema (now a bingo hall) I'm not sure but I think it was called "A queen is crowned". Another memory is of my mother's trifle bowl which was a large cut glass one. No one apart from my daughter Carmen could make a trifle like my mom used to do. As this bowl had been handed down from mother to daughter it belonged to my grandmother Tarver and was only used for special occasions like Christmas, weddings, birthdays and such like. This bowl is still in use today and it was also used

on Coronation Day for the trifle at the party. My mom dished out the trifle to the kids and made sure the bowl was returned safely along with other items she loaned.

Later on in the evening after the children had gone to bed with full bellies the grown ups had a booze up of their own at a couple of houses down the bottom of the road with much merrymaking going on amongst those who had organised it all – well who could blame them for after all they had done a good job. So the Coronation Day went off well and a good time was had by one and all

Betty Pace

I remember the morning of the King's death when I had just started teaching. We were summoned to the hall with pupils and teachers alike wondering what we had done wrong but no one guessed what she was going to say. On the day of the funeral we walked to the local church for a short service.

On the day of the coronation I went to friend's house along with about 25 others and we spent the day staring at this tiny black and white screen but it was magical to see it all. Our street, Station Road, hadn't arranged a party mainly because we had very few children living there so the fact that it rained didn't affect us. I cannot remember what I did in the evening but probably listened to the wireless.

A fortnight later we took the whole school i.e 300 girls to London. We had coaches to take us to Small Heath station and everyone turned out to see us off and by the look of some faces they didn't expect to see us again. At the station we had a special train which was very pleasant. In London we went to the Mall where we sat in the specially erected seats as the Queen and Duke were driven by going goodness knows where but we had seen THEM. Then to the Houses of Parliament where we had a group photograph with our M.P and then on to one of the parks for lunch assuming the girls hadn't already eaten it. In the afternoon buses took us for a tour of the main sights and then back to the train. We arrived back exhausted and to a rapturous welcome normally given to long distance travellers/

PAGE 4

Margaret Shepherd.



King George VI died at Sandringham on 6th February 1952. He had been ill for some time and was unable to visit Africa, Australia and New Zealand as he had intended so Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip went in his stead. The last the public saw of the king was at the end of January when he stood with the Queen and Princess Margaret on the runway to wave goodbye to his daughter. He looked ill but even so the announcement of his death came as a shock. Elizabeth and Philip were in the Treetops Hotel in Kenya when told and immediately returned to Britain. There were many poignant pictures that week but perhaps two of the most was that of the young queen dressed entirely in black – had she taken them with her just in case? – descending the steps of the aircraft to be met by the prime minister Winston Churchill and other members of the government and the one of the three Queens together, Mary, Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Elizabeth II, waiting, heavily veiled, to receive the body of the king for its journey to the Lying in State in Westminster Hall. More than 300,000 people passed the coffin having queued for many hours.

Those who could listened on the wireless to the description of the funeral procession and service at Windsor or watched the limited T.V. coverage. Most then saw the newspaper pictures or the cinema newsreels. Queen Mary did not attend the funeral but watched the procession from an upstairs window in Marlborough House. She was acknowledged by the Queen Mother in her carriage and the four dukes walking behind the coffin – Windsor, Gloucester, Edinburgh and 16 year old Kent. There was a two minute silence at 2pm at the request of the Queen.

Theatres and cinemas, having been closed, reopened after the funeral. Birmingham was in the middle of the pantomime season and one could see Mother Goose at the Theatre Royal with Tommy Fields and Hy Hazell; Sleeping Beauty at the Alex with Wilson, Kepple and Betty; Cinderella at the Aston Hippodrome with Syd Seymour. At the Birmingham Hippodrome was King's Rhapsody with Jack Buchanan and Zena Dare and at the Rep. was Beauty and the Beast by Nicholas Stuart Gray. Further afield the D'Oyley Carte Opera was in Stratford. At the Kingsway one could see Nigel Patrick in "Encounter"

Other adverts in the Birmingham Mail – cost 2d – were for the Beehive in Albert St where one could purchase a bedroom suite for £51. 18s. 6d (£51. 92p); a lounge suite for £63. 15s (£63. 75p) or a rubber wringer for 79/6d (£3. 97p). In the domestic situation column a family in Pineapple Road was advertising for a maid "fond of children and a good home and wages offered" Another request was for a resident housekeeper and/or cook general for small family with additional help daily at weekly wage of £4.

The coronation was set for June 1953 and there were long discussions concerning the possibility of televising the event. Many were against it but the Queen consented and the sale of T.V sets increased a hundred fold. The cameras were off the Queen for only one part of the ceremony namely the anointing but certainly those who watched on T.V. saw a great deal more than the invited guests in the Abbey. London was decorated for the occasion and thousands camped out for 24 hours to be able to see the procession. Unfortunately it was a cold and very wet day and Queen Salote of Tonga got a special cheer as she insisted on leaving her carriage open so that she could see and be seen. The day ended with the Royal Family including Charles and Anne on the balcony to acknowledge the crowds and watch the fly past. One person missing was Queen Mary who had died the previous March. All over the country despite the weather people celebrated with street parties. We were still trying to recover from the effects of the war - in fact rationing was still with us – so it was a good excuse to forget everyday drabness.

The T.V. coverage was a great success although most people watched a tiny screen and only black and white. One needed the cinema and the magazines for the colour. There were five cameras on the processional route but only one in the Abbey with Richard Dimbleby as commentator. Those outside the Abbey ranged from Canadian born Bernard Braden to Brian Johnstone, Max Robertson and Mary Hill as the only lady.

The wireless commentators in the Abbey were John Snagge and Audrey Russell. The coverage began at 10.15am and ended at 5.20pm. The Queen and Duke left the Palace at 10.26 and arrived at the Abbey at 11.00. After the service and a short rest period they left at 2.50pm and arrived back at 4.30. The broadcast finished after the fly past. In the evening T.V. showed an edited tele recording of the day's events and a short talk in sound only by Winston Churchill. Following the news there was a look at the fire works on the banks of the Thames with a final close down at 11.30pm. The radio programmes in the evening consisted of "Long Live the Queen"; "Land of Hope and Glory"; "Coronation Day across the World" and the fire works at Lambeth. On Thursday June 4th the Light Programme (now radio 2) re issued some old favourites including Hi Gang with Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels; Waterlogged Spa with Eric Barker; Riders of the Range; Ignorance is Bliss; Much Binding in the Marsh with Richard Murdoch and Kenneth Horne and Variety Bandbox with Frankie Howerd, Derek Ray, Vanessa Lee, Semprini and Billy Ternent and his orchestra. The following evening Wynford Vaughn Thomas went down river with a galaxy of stars including Max Millar, Bob and Alf Pearson and the Joe Loss orchestra. The week's celebrations ended on Saturday with a cavalcade of Light Music featuring four light orchestras while T.V. presented Commonwealth Cavalcade from London's Gala Theatre.

On Coronation Day in Birmingham it was possible to see the T.V. coverage either in the Town Hall or the Midland Institute from 10am onwards. At midday a Royal Salute was fired in Cannon Hill and Handsworth parks. Bells were rung at the Cathedral, St Martin's and St Chad's. Children's entertainments were provided in various parks plus band concerts and evening fire works. Cannon Hill had Jack Cooper's "Kabaret Follies" and Billy William's "Stars of Today" with fire works at 10pm. A floodlit fountain was installed in the boating lake and the illuminations extended from the main entrance in Edgbaston Road to the Pershore Road entrance. At 2.30pm in Kings Heath park could be seen Punch and Judy with fire works at 10pm. There were also fire works on Billesley Common. The celebrations continued all week with a Festival of Music involving the C.B.S.O. at the Town Hall; an organ recital by Dr George Thalben - Ball, the city organist; a children's concert; music in the cathedral; Humphrey Lyttelton Jazz band to finish the week. The main conductor of the C.B.S.O was Rudolf Schwarz and some of the soloists were Yehudi Menuhin, Phyllis Sellick, Gwen Catley and Dennis Noble. Also in the Town Hall on Friday June 5th was an Old Time Dance (Tickets ten shillings for two or six shillings for one) and a Coronation Barn Dance on Saturday June 13th (Tickets seven shillings for two or four shillings for one)

A coronation air display was held at Elmdon airport on Whit Monday May 25th at 2.30pm. Admission was one shilling or six shillings for the special enclosure with refreshments and ample parking facilities. On Saturday June 6th there was a ceremonial parade and march past including some of the troops used in the actual coronation procession. About 6,500 took part including 18 bands. The march went from the West End car park and passed the saluting base outside the Council House at

at 3pm. All three services took part + cadets, colonial contingents, ex service associations, First Aid, Civil Defence, Salvation Army and the Boy Scouts..

For the sports minded the Warwickshire County Amateur Athletics Association held a track and field events championship at Perry Barr on Saturday June 6th and a special coronation trophy was offered for the one mile flat race.

£60,000 was allocated to the above events but babies, children and old people were not forgotten. All babies born on Coronation Day were given a gift of two guineas i.e £2.10p in the form of an account opened at the Municipal Bank. All school children up to the age of eleven received a mug and a tin of chocolates. All secondary head teachers could choose between a mug, a glass tumbler, a Bible, a propelling pencil, a pen knife, a sweet dish, spoons or a brooch. All elderly people received a coronation souvenir canister containing 8oz of tea and a caddy spoon.

The city centre was well decorated with richly coloured drapes, heraldic shields and crowns. At night the whole area was flood lit.

During the days that followed the newspapers and magazines were full of pictures, descriptions and comment. The Illustrated which cost 6d (2p) had H. V. Morton the travel writer to describe the scene in the Abbey: "In the north transept were 200 peeresses who, in their red and ermine robes, looked like a bed of clove carnations in a snow storm and opposite was a scarlet House of Lords nursing it's coronets. The heralds were like a pack of cards moving in their quartered tabards with batons in hand. Among the members of the Royal Family was one of the most striking figures in the Abbey. She wore the smoke grey habit of a Greek nun and her only decoration was a large pectoral cross. She was Princess Alice of Greece and mother of the Duke of Edinburgh. She had left her convent on the island of Tenon where she is the Mother Superior to attend her daughter in law's coronation." One member of the Royal Family not present, of course, was Queen Mary who had died in March.

Lord Kilbracken the Irish Peer described his day and outfit: "The day began at 5am. The Queen had commanded me to be present but the Earl Marshal's contribution was more precise as I had to be in my seat by 8am and the doors of the Abbey would be closed at 8.30. It took some time to get dressed (all hired from Moss Bros) – black velvet knee breeches; stockings; black velvet coat; white silk waistcoat; sword; scarlet and ermine robes; coronet; stiff white shirt; white bow tie and wing collar; silver buckled black shoes and studs and cuff links. A friend took me in the car but I took a change of clothing as afterwards I went home by tube. Just before the Queen came into the Abbey there was an incongruous incident in the sudden arrival in the gorgeous spruce theatre round which all the nobility and clergy were now disposed of a team of energetic white clad women with brushes and vacuum cleaners removing any slight speck of dust that less exalted feet might have carried in."

There were inevitably descriptions of past coronations. Queen Victoria's was called the Penny Crowning as it was done on the cheap. There were no rehearsals; the ring was too small and the Orb too heavy and Disraeli decided that it wasn't worth going. Queen Anne was gouty as well as fat so when she stood up someone had to hold her. Her consort, George of Denmark, was excluded. Queen Elizabeth 1st chose January 15th after consulting her astrologers. There were religious difficulties as she had no support from the archbishops and bishops as they were Roman Catholic and so refused to attend a Protestant crowning. One bishop was persuaded to crown her. Perhaps the most memorable was that of George IV who, unsure of his popularity, had a body guard not of pages but of boxers led by Gentleman John Jackson who was celebrated for being able to sign his name with an 84lb weight hanging on his little

finger. One person refused entry was Queen Caroline. She did come but having no ticket had to go away again.

Beside the coronation the papers also carried the advertisements of the time. In the Daily Mirror Cranford Co. of Alma Street Smethwick advertised motor and cycle accessories and Parker Hale of Whittall Street advertised everything for the shooting man including auto pistols and sporting rifles. A Pedigree pram cost £14.19s.6d or a pack of 15 Minor cigarettes for two shillings (10p). An eight day holiday in Paris cost 17 guineas (£17.80p). A full page advert suggested seeing historic England in this historic year by using a Hercules cycle. Nearer home a Hoover electric washing machine cost £30 + purchase tax and either Persil or Oxydol could be used in it as both "washed whiter than white". Lucozade was 8d (3p) with a returnable 2d on the bottle. The film of the day was Genevieve

1953 was a memorable sporting year. On the actual day it was announced that Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tensing had climbed Everest. Liverpool with Stanley Matthews in the team won the F.A. cup; Gordon Richards won the Derby riding Pinza; Roger Bannister set a new record for the mile and England won the Ashes at the Oval in August. The first triumph for twenty years. It was an eight wicket victory and the team consisted of Trevor Bailey; Peter May; Tom Graveney; Jim Laker; Tony Lock; Johnny Wardle; Fred Truman; Bill Edrich; Alec Bedser; Len Hutton (captain); Dennis Compton and Godfrey Evans.

The recording industry went all out producing music for the event which included the Queen Elizabeth Waltz; the Coronation Waltz and a Celebration Rag. The two that have lasted are Ronald Binge's Elizabethan Serenade and Sir William Walton's Orb and Sceptre March. One that has not lasted was recorded by Dickie Valentine and Billy Cotton but it did reflect the feelings of the time:

In a golden coach
There's a heart of gold
Riding through old London Town.
The sweetest Queen
The world's ever seen
Wearing a golden crown.
As she rides in state
Through the palace gate
Her beauty the whole world to see
In a golden coach
There's a heart of gold
That belongs to you and me.