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**Camille Doublier**

## **The British Monarchy under the Reign of George VI**

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Master's thesis  
MEEF Master in English

# The British Monarchy under the Reign of George VI

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Under the supervision of Dr. Muriel Cassel-Piccot  
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Figure 1 – His Majesty King George VI, wearing his uniform as Admiral of the Fleet. May 4, 1937.  
Photograph.

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## INTRODUCTION

The death of Queen Victoria, who in 1901 was the longest reigning British monarch to ever exist, marked a turning point in the history of Great Britain. After more than sixty-three years of reign, she had turned into a symbol of modern Britain and had been the witness of deep transformations in the country. Between social crises and industrial advances, society as a whole had undergone multiple changes, starting with a profound transformation of industry.

Britain is often referred to as the “birthplace of the Industrial Revolution”<sup>1</sup> in Europe, mostly because of its “politically stable society”<sup>2</sup>. Unlike many European countries, it had indeed undergone no major social revolution – as opposed to France in 1789 for example. Its political landscape had been constant since the Act for the Union of Great Britain and Ireland, drafted in 1800, that brought together Great Britain – which includes England, Wales and Scotland – and Ireland to form the United Kingdom<sup>3</sup>. What is more, the country was also the most powerful colonial empire of the century – it was coined as a “vast empire on which the sun never sets”<sup>4</sup>, referencing its immensity on the world stage. Its possessions stretched out to all five continents and provided many natural resources, which proved to be of great use to the modernisation of industry. As a result, a once rural and agriculture-based society turned into a more modern, more efficient system and saw the rise of mass production, and simultaneously of mass consumption. Transportation was completely revamped, mostly thanks to the steam engine, which gave people the ability to travel great distances in less time. Factories developed at an incredible pace and more and more workers came to live and work in cities, with hopes of decent wages and comfortable lives. With its empire, the country became a major actor in world trade, backed by its huge amount of manufactures and a large network of traders.

However, industrial Britain also experienced a number of setbacks, especially regarding the social conditions of parts of its population, and several tensions arose during Queen Victoria’s reign, partially due to a sudden growth in urban population<sup>5</sup>. Such an event as the Irish Great Famine – because of which at least one million people died between 1845 and 1849

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<sup>1</sup> “Industrial Revolution,” History.com, October 29, 2009, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/industrial-revolution/industrial-revolution>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> “Acts of Union 1800,” Wikipedia, January 18, 2019, accessed January 23, 2019. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts\\_of\\_Union\\_1800](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_Union_1800).

<sup>4</sup> George Macartney, *An Account of Ireland in 1773 By a Late Chief Secretary of That Kingdom* (London, 1773), 55.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Daniels, “Poverty and Families in the Victorian Era,” *Hidden Lives Revealed. A Virtual Archive - Children in Care 1881-1981*, March 2003, accessed January 12, 2019. <http://www.hiddenlives.org.uk/articles/poverty.html>.

– is an indicator of how fragile the conditions of many British subjects were. Victorian Britain was quite a paradox, since it was a period that aristocrats wanted to be elegant and refined, but that was also a society whose quite loose morals tolerated such things as prostitution – known as “The Great Social Evil”<sup>6</sup> – or child labour.

As Queen of the United Kingdom, Her Majesty Victoria – who added Empress of India to her titles in 1876 – represented the epitome of higher society and respectable nobility; and yet she was known as a quite popular sovereign who, in people’s minds, remained a monarch who understood what her subjects were going through. This supposed feature of hers is well-depicted in the television series *Victoria*<sup>7</sup> – in which some would say that her empathy for her people is well-exaggerated<sup>8</sup> – and is also noted by Doctor Bruce Rosen in his article about Victorian history:

Her entire style was such as to define her as a “middle-class” monarch. It was, however, not so much that she was middle-class; clearly she was not, but that she appealed to the constantly growing middle-classes; reflecting their values and morality. Despite the middle-class virtues reflected by the Royal Family, the aristocracy still held sway throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

To explain this time of duality in which the sovereign was as contradictory as the society she ruled, and not as comprehensive as she seemed, the abstract to Matthew Dennison’s book *Queen Victoria: A Life of Contradictions* gives an honest summary of the reality of things:

[...] In her combination of deep sentimentality and bombast; cultural imperialism and imperial compassion; fear of intellectualism and excitement at technology; romanticism and prudishness, she became a spirit of the age to which she gave her name. Victoria embraced photography, railway travel and modern art; she resisted compulsory education for the working classes, recommended for a leading women’s rights campaigner ‘a good whipping’ and detested smoking. [...] Meanwhile she reinvented the monarchy and wrestled with personal reinvention.<sup>10</sup>

When Victoria died, she left behind her a nation that was deeply attached to their monarch, who in a way echoed their wishes for change and evolution. In this society that was

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<sup>6</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (New York: ACLS History E-Book Project, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> *Victoria*, created by Daisy Goodwin (ITV, 2016), television series.

<sup>8</sup> Kate Samuelson, “How Accurate Is PBS’ ‘Victoria’, Starring Jenna Coleman?” *Time*, January 13, 2017, accessed December 12, 2018, <http://time.com/4628353/victoria-tv-show-pbs-masterpiece/>.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Rosen, “The Aristocracy,” *Victorian History*, June 08, 2010, accessed December 23, 2018, <http://vichist.blogspot.com/2010/06/aristocracy.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Dennison, *Queen Victoria: A Life of Contradictions* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2015), abstract.

torn between two visions of morals, Her Majesty's passing came almost at the same time as the turn of the new century, since she died on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1901, and slowed down on the momentum towards novelty that came to be associated with her reign. With the arrival of a new sovereign on the throne, the nation had to find their footings after someone that had ruled for more than sixty years. In that way, Victoria's reign also reflected a sense of stagnation, at least regarding her impersonation of the monarchy<sup>11</sup> as an institution.

After her came her son Edward VII, who embodied a certain change from his mother since they had divergent views on certain matters. A popular prince for the nation, he was not close to his mother: "[...] despite public approval his reputation as a playboy prince soured his relationship with his mother."<sup>12</sup> Though he had conservative views on certain issues such as women's right to vote<sup>13</sup>, he was also more progressive than his mother on others: "At a time of widespread anti-Semitism, Edward attracted criticism for openly socialising with Jews."<sup>14</sup> He seems to have been very high on the popularity ladder of British monarchs, as J.B. Priestley notes in exaggerated words in one of his books: "I was only a child when he succeeded Victoria in 1901, but I can testify to his extraordinary popularity. He was in fact the most popular king England had known since the earlier 1660s."<sup>15</sup> This new embodiment of the monarchy came as a refreshing of the institution, but shook some of the traditional Victorian values up, to the dislike of a few. Yet Edward VII's reign was short, as he died in 1910 and was succeeded by his son George V, a man who was different enough from what his father personified.

King George V arrived on the throne in 1910, while he "had no expectation of inheriting the crown"<sup>16</sup> since he had an elder brother; but the latter died before he became Head of State. George V's reign began at a time of political instability, as a constitutional crisis ended up depriving the House of Lords of a right to veto legislation with the drafting of the 1911

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<sup>11</sup> A monarchy can be considered as the "form of government with a monarch at the head" or as embodying "the monarch and royal family of a country." "Monarchy," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 20 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> "Edward VII," Wikipedia, January 26, 2019, accessed January 28, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_VII](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_VII).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> J. B Priestley, *The Edwardians* (London: Penguin, 2000), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Davenport-Hines, "George V: The Unexpected King and George VI: The Dutiful King – Review," *The Guardian*, December 20, 2014, accessed November 10, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/20/george-v-david-cannadine-vi-philip-ziegler-review-review>.

Parliament Act<sup>17</sup>, after a long opposition between the Conservative majority amongst the Lords and the liberal government, led by H. H. Asquith.<sup>18</sup> The legislative power of the Lords – and so of nobility in general – thus took a blow.

Of course, George V's reign was mostly marked by the First World War, but more generally, he had to step up at a time of deep change in the political structure of the country. As Head of the Empire, he saw slight changes and new tensions arise as the years went by, as well as some extreme thinking and actions develop. The increasing popularity of Fascism, Nazism, Communism started during his reign; and violent independence movements (for example in Ireland) threatened the British nation, society and by extension, the British monarchy.

One notable change in the monarchy was the King's decision, in 1917, to change the name of the Royal Family. Instead of the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha – the name that was inherited from his grandfather Prince Albert's marriage to Queen Victoria, it became the House of Windsor.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 2 – Raven-Hill, Leonard. “A Good Riddance”. *Punch Magazine*. Vol. 152. London: Office, 1917. 422.

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<sup>17</sup> Great Britain, *Parliament Act, 1911* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1931).

<sup>18</sup> *Loc. cit.* Wikipedia, “Edward VII.”

<sup>19</sup> George, R.I., “A Proclamation,” *The London Gazette*, July 17, 1917.

The King thus sent a strong message of separation with Germany, but also symbolically modified the legacy of the monarchy. Doing so, he redefined the meaning of Britishness, rejecting his own heritage against the enemy. Leonard Raven-Hill's drawing reflects the image of the King as a tall, strong man rejecting his own past, his own family, and by extension the nation's past. Seeing the King of the United Kingdom wiping away crowns that look like his own strikes the viewer as a drastic change and sets the tone for the strict, firm reign that was George V's.

His traditionalist conception of life seemed to appeal to the people in this time of uncertainty and instability. He projected the image of a "rather a dull man"<sup>20</sup> who lived a plain life in which his people could see themselves and to which they felt they could relate:

[George V,] if not himself a characteristic example of the great British middle class, is so like the characteristic examples of that class that there is no perceptible distinction to be made between the two.<sup>21</sup>

The impact of the First World War on the country is also to be taken into account. Despite their rather peaceful history and evolution of their political system, Britons found themselves forced into battle, mainly to protect their sea power and their status as world leader<sup>22</sup> – the country being at the apex of its imperial power in 1914. It resulted in an unthinkable number of casualties at the time and it shook up the population's perception of the world, even questioning their vision of institutions and politics: "World War One may not have initiated democratic change, but it determined its timing."<sup>23</sup> Hew Strachan – the author of a BBC History article on the effects of World War 1 in Britain – regards the real beginning of British democracy as being in 1918, when the right to vote was given to every male adult and to women above thirty.

After the War, Britain tried to rebuild. Social and political unrest slowly began to arise in the Empire, the most striking example being in Ireland, where the Irish Free State was first acknowledged as a dominion in 1922. In 1931, the Statute of Westminster<sup>24</sup> was drafted, granting more autonomy to a number of countries that were part of the Empire. This period marked the start of the slow decline of the British imperial superpower over the world,

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<sup>20</sup> Nicholas Best, *The Kings and Queens of England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), 83.

<sup>21</sup> Editors of *Fortune*, *The King of England: George V* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran &, 1936), 33.

<sup>22</sup> Hew Strachan, "History - British History in Depth: Overview: Britain and World War One, 1901 – 1918," BBC, March 03, 2011, accessed January 10, 2019, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain\\_wwone/overview\\_britain\\_ww1\\_01.shtml#three](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/overview_britain_ww1_01.shtml#three).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Great Britain, *Statute of Westminster, 1931* (London: Swift, 1931).

progressively establishing the British Commonwealth – that later became the Commonwealth of Nations – instead.<sup>25</sup>

Obviously, with the loss of power of the nation came the loss of influence of the monarchy in the world. Prior to the Statute of 1931, The Balfour Declaration of 1926 had initiated this decline by lessening the influence of the institution and granting new powers to every dominion – “each of the self-governing territories of the British Commonwealth”<sup>26</sup> – regarding their political organisation. The British monarch no longer was the Head of the Empire, but “became separately monarch of the United Kingdom, monarch of Canada, monarch of Australia, and so forth,”<sup>27</sup> and yet in a way remained the common denominator of all those different nations: “A common allegiance to the monarch was the only formal tie that bound them.”<sup>28</sup> Yet, at home, George V played an important part in bringing the people closer to the Crown, and did more than many sovereigns before him to unite the country – even more so than others in Europe – as it is noted in Richard Davenport-Hines’ article for the Guardian:

He brought the crown closer to his people than any previous monarch. In his reign, the UK became, for the first time, convincingly united: provincial loyalties and regional pride were diminished by a tighter national identity; national newspapers for the first time outsold locals.<sup>29</sup>

When he died, George V thus left a nation that was desperately trying to get itself back up on its feet after a devastating war and a terrible financial crisis – the Great Depression that started in 1929 – to his eldest son, Prince Edward, who then became King Edward VIII.

King Edward VIII is better known for the crisis that surrounded his reign than for his actions as King. Being one of the shortest-reigning monarch in the history of the United Kingdom – with only 326 days on the throne, he was involved in an affair that rattled the whole country, and mostly monarchy in all its representations, from the inner royal family to the public institution and its core values. King Edward’s reputation as a playboy prince rather than a traditional king was what hurt his credibility as a monarch even if, in the end, what cost him his throne, his titles and most of his relationships with his family was his will to marry American divorcee Wallis Simpson.

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<sup>25</sup> “Monarchy of the United Kingdom,” Wikipedia, January 15, 2019, accessed January 16, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_the_United_Kingdom).

<sup>26</sup> *Loc. cit.* *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Dominion.”

<sup>27</sup> *Loc. cit.* Wikipedia, “Monarchy of the United Kingdom.”

<sup>28</sup> Adrian Phillips, *The King Who Had to Go: Edward VIII, Mrs Simpson and the Hidden Politics of the Abdication Crisis* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2016), chapter 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Loc. cit.* Davenport-Hines, “George V: The Unexpected King.”

To the outside world Edward, Prince of Wales and future King Edward VIII, had the air of a golden boy. He was youthful, good-looking and glamorous, a keen sportsman and pilot. He had devastating charm, which melted even hardened observers. He appeared open and engaged. He was the first member of the royal family to have extensive direct contact with the public in Britain and abroad; he became the first celebrity royal.<sup>30</sup>

Even as a young man and prince, Edward had always been seen as a frivolous man by the people as well as his own family. His values and morals were far from those of his father, with whom he had no real relationship and to whom he had always been a sort of disappointment, at least in terms of royal behaviour: “His father clung firmly to the norms of the Victorian era into which he had been born – stern, formal and conservative.”<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, in his short reign Edward succeeded in appealing to the people, especially the youth who saw in him a more modern King who was concerned with the condition of the many, and not just of upper-class society: “As Prince of Wales, Edward’s modernistic appeal struck a chord with the young and the populace at large.”<sup>32</sup> He initiated a shift in the perception of the monarchy: from a respected institution that used to have power and that was seen as a model in society, it turned into a popular topic of conversation that sparked up rumours and gossips about the King’s personal life at the time of what is now known as the Abdication Crisis. The figure of the sovereign entered the celebrity culture. The resolution he showed to marry socialite Wallis Simpson despite the customs of the time, turned out to be irreconcilable with the monarchy’s rules. After eleven months of tensions and failed negotiations between the King, his family and the government (led at the time by Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin), he announced his abdication on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1936 in a famous broadcast: “I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duties as king as I would wish to do without the help and support of the woman I love,”<sup>33</sup> giving his people a closer look at what had been going on in both his private and public lives. Doing so, he went against the Cabinet’s wishes and advice, the latter wanting the King to give up his wish to marry Ms. Simpson so that he could remain on the throne: “the Cabinet had sent the King a message imploring him to reconsider his intention.”<sup>34</sup> His decision marked the first abdication of the British throne in 537 years and cleared the way for his young brother Prince Albert to become King George VI.

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<sup>30</sup> *Loc. cit.* Phillips, *The King Who Had to Go*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> HRH Prince Edward (Prince of Wales), *Abdication of King Edward VIII: Farewell Speech from Windsor Castle* (National Programme: December 11, 1936).

<sup>34</sup> *Loc. cit.* Phillips, *The King Who Had to Go*, prologue.

This crisis of the British monarchy, which was epitomised by the abdication, called for a change in the institution. The arrival on the throne of Edward's brother, King George VI, encapsulates that change thanks to his very different persona, since they had two opposite personalities. Yet, as George VI was a rather conservative figure in comparison to his brother, the new king also went back to more traditional values. Like his father, he was not meant to be a King and did not want to bear this burden. Born and raised as a weak child, he had always lived a simple life. While his brother had a habit of making a show of himself and his private life, Prince Albert believed that "material discomfort improved people's characters"<sup>35</sup> and was described as a "Spartan monarch, duty-bound, sexually repressed, emotionally disciplined."<sup>36</sup> Together with his traditional, strong-minded wife – Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon – he embodied gravity and strength, two qualities that the country would need in the troubled times of the Second World War. As a King, George VI suffered from his stammer, which he saw as a handicap and which prevented him from addressing his government, his people, his nation. This feature of his is what most people remember of the King, because it did not match what was expected of a sovereign. However, it will be interesting to see how his life and impact went beyond that and how, in the end, he can be remembered for much more than just being a disabled monarch.

The man, who is described as "extraordinary in his ordinariness"<sup>37</sup> by historian Philip Ziegler, took it upon himself to be the best King he could, driven by duty and "determined to re-establish the monarchy as the paradigm of decorum, reliability and reassuring staidness that had been during his father's reign."<sup>38</sup> He worried his people because of his image of a feeble, unexpected King who came to reign because of circumstances that were out of his will, and yet he reassured them with his steadiness in times of crisis. Embodying an Empire that was failing, due to its growing demand for independence, and yet was still standing, the King managed to remain unwavering and enabled the country to open up new perspectives in its course towards modernisation and progress.

Facing extraordinary situations and overcoming a large number of ordeals during his reign, especially during the Second World War, the man once seen as weak and shy turned out to be a beloved King who embodied the strength and resilience of Great Britain through tough times. As a result, both the sovereign and the monarchy underwent deep transformations and

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<sup>35</sup> *Loc. cit.* Davenport-Hines, "George V: The Unexpected King."

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Philip Ziegler, *George VI: The Dutiful King* (London: Penguin Books, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> *Loc. cit.* Davenport-Hines, "George V: The Unexpected King."

faced new challenges, while being split between conservatism and modernisation. At the instigation of many European countries that undertook major transformations of their political systems in the twentieth century – with a lot of them abolishing their monarchies – the British Crown had to question where it stood towards the nation. With the developing of a will for larger power to the people, its supremacy was threatened, and that is why the monarchy – that is to say the institution, but also the Royal Family – had to adapt to the changes of the era. Given what was at stake during this period, one could wonder how the British monarchy, as an institution but also as the symbol of the nation, evolved, transformed and survived under the reign of George VI, thus adapting to a society that was being reshaped on social, political and institutional levels. The role of King George VI himself is to be taken into account, as he became the embodiment of a country that was struggling, fighting for freedom, but that remained united through hardships.

As George VI was first and foremost an unexpected King, the figure of the man himself is an interesting starting point for this assessment of his reign. Seeing the man behind the King helps understand how he rose up to the occasion and stepped into a world in which he was not destined to live. On a broader perspective, this analysis will also lead us to have a look at George VI's relations to the world of politics and institutions in the country, and what his views on the evolution of such instances were. Furthermore, on a nation-wide scale, his reign was also a time of social change in which the people, the media, society in general went through very harsh times and were in need of a strong figure that had a special connection to them.

## 1. THE MAN BEHIND THE KING

Before becoming King of the United Kingdom and the Dominions of the British Commonwealth, King George VI used to be Prince Albert, Duke of York, second son to King George V. Though he is mostly remembered as “the king who stammered,”<sup>39</sup> it is useful to go back to his childhood to understand how he came to develop his disability and, more than this, how he showed enough strength of will to overcome it and become a true leader in times of troubles. The study of his early life brings a new light on his kingship, since when he ascended the throne, he had not been destined to such a title, and yet turned out to get by with determination. From a frail child who was often sick and not quite taken care of to a resilient monarch, the first half of Albert’s life demonstrates a profound transformation of the man’s persona.

### 1.1. A weak man from the start

Prince Albert Frederick Arthur George, son of Prince George – future King George V – and Princess May – future Queen Mary – was born on December 14, 1895, a day that matched the thirty-fourth commemoration of his grandfather Albert’s death. That is mostly the reason why his father decided to name him Albert, hoping it would please the baby’s grandmother Queen Victoria – who saw this birth as a “blessing.”<sup>40</sup> The boy, who would turn out to have a rather difficult childhood, thus entered the world under ill omens, and disappointed part of his family from the very day of birth, as his father “had wanted a girl and said so, but the rest of the world saw the birth of a second son as a double insurance to the royal succession.”<sup>41</sup> He had an older brother, Prince Edward, who was a year and a half older than him and who was to be the first in line to become King once their father was crowned.

The two princes grew up in a very stringent environment. Prince George defended very traditional, strict values: “The royal family was not to be seen laughing in public.”<sup>42</sup> They all lived in a world in which the royal family was glorified and deified: “As Sir Charles Cut, King George V’s greatest friend, pointed out, royalty were a race apart: ‘there are three kinds of people in the world: blacks, whites and Royalties [sic].’”<sup>43</sup> This specific way of life resulted in

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<sup>39</sup> German Cheung, “The King’s Speech,” *Crossmen – The Book for You*, no. 48 (2011), 21-22, <https://issuu.com/crossmenhk/docs/crossmen48>.

<sup>40</sup> Sarah Bradford, *George VI: The Dutiful King* (London: Penguin, 2011), 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

the construction of a very restrictive, narrow-minded vision of the world for the children, who mostly developed in a circle of adults and noble people who had identical points of view and functions. Their world was both figuratively and physically constricted, since they were brought up together, in the same estates, with the same governesses... Like most children at the time, they did not have a close relationship with their parents, who did not take much care of them and delegated a lot of the caring and tending to the personnel, as it is explained by biographer Sarah Bradford: "For Prince Albert and his brothers and sister, [...] their parents were 'Olympian figures', part of a dimly perceived, grown-up universe. For them the real world was their nursery and the servants and nurses who looked after them."<sup>44</sup> Their mother, Princess May, was never able to build a real relationship with her sons, mostly because she was said to be incapable of understanding what being a child implied. Some think that her inability to forge a bond with them had a clear impact of the boys' future lives: "Prince Albert and Prince Edward were both to seek, and to find, mother-figures in their wives."<sup>45</sup> She was still affectionate with them, but was not as close to them as one could expect from a parent.

Albert's childhood was characterised by inflexibility and mistreatments. He spent most of his days with his nurses, some of whom were incredibly harsh with him, making him cry on purpose in order to make him look bad in the eyes of his parents. He had different governesses, and then preceptors throughout his childhood, and they overall seem to have been particularly severe with Albert, in addition to being partial to his brother Edward, as he would potentially become King. Because he was forced to wear splints in order to straighten his legs, Albert was in physical pain most hours of day and night and became a difficult child to educate, according to the servants that took care of him. Left-handed, he was also forced to write with his right hand, as at the time, the left was commonly associated with vice and ill luck. He was emotionally neglected, as he was seen as a rather troublesome child by some of his tutors, especially in his first years of instruction – an agitation that some think to be linked to him being in almost constant pain.<sup>46</sup> He had an unstable health and mood swings, which made him sort of an 'ugly duckling' to those around him, especially in comparison to his livelier and more outgoing brother Edward.

The servants were not the only ones who mistreated the prince. One of the most complex relationships that Albert had was with his father Prince George. The latter was perceived as a rather gentle, shy, loving man by his relatives and the exterior world. Yet, he had very rough

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

manners with his children, and especially Albert. He used violence and physical punishment as a way to reprimand him, which was in opposition to what most people saw of his temper. Since George had had a difficult relationship with his father, he thought it best that his children feared him too: “my father was frightened of his mother, I was frightened of my father, and I am damned well going to make sure that my children are frightened of me.”<sup>47</sup> He had a clear idea of whom his son should become from a very young age, and did not allow him to live as he wanted to: “[George’s] own children were not expected to behave like children.”<sup>48</sup> Like his wife, he is believed not to have understood clearly the specific needs of his offspring and as a result, the latter lived a rather dull life: “[George and Mary] did not succeed in making their children happy.”<sup>49</sup> The people that brought most joy to their children were King Edward and Queen Alexandra, their grandparents, with whom they could enjoy a breath of fresh air and have more fun. Albert in particular relished spending time outdoor, since “he was a natural athlete.”<sup>50</sup> When he reached adolescence, he was in perfect physical health – with perfectly straight legs.



Figure 3 – Morgan, Frederick and Thomas Blinks. *Queen Alexandra with Her Grandchildren and Dogs*. London, 1902. Photogravure.

As he grew up, Albert’s relationship to his brother also became more complex. Their personalities were quite opposite from the start, and their differences only accelerated the growing distance between them as the years went by. Since Edward was destined to a more noble future and a higher position than his brother, he acted as if he had the upper hand on his

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

younger brother – a thing that was not to the latter’s liking: “It was not long, however, before Prince Albert began to resent his elder brother’s assumption of authority, and as the brothers approached puberty there were signs that [Albert] was no longer easy [for Edward] to manage.”<sup>51</sup>

As a result of those mistreatments and isolation Prince Albert underwent during his childhood, he was perceived as “a shy, sensitive, highly strung child.”<sup>52</sup> By the age of eight, he had developed what would become the most difficult disability he would have to overcome in his life: his stammer. It is highly likely that this was the result of the psychological and physical oppression he endured, on top of his natural shyness. It gave him an unjustified image of a debilitated man, who would later be afraid of public speeches. Because of this, he developed a certain awkwardness regarding his entourage and his social life, and became a rather lonely boy, and then teenager. According to Sarah Bradford, it led to a “sense of helpless isolation,”<sup>53</sup> a feeling that would only be more present when he started school.

After years of being home-schooled, Albert finally started school when he was thirteen. He was sent to Royal Naval Colleges and yet again received a strict education. The main difference with his instruction at home was that he was in contact with other students, who were not particularly nice to him and made him feel estranged and different: “There was not a great deal of bullying, but what there was seems to have been concentrated on the unfortunate Princes, whose royal birth and secluded upbringing marked them out as ‘different’.”<sup>54</sup> His royal blood was of no use to him amongst other children, who regarded his peculiar upbringing as a way to distance themselves from the prince rather than as an opportunity to develop a relationship with royalty. His frail looks had students laugh at him: “The Prince was small and fragile in physique, which led to his being nicknamed ‘Sardine’.”<sup>55</sup> Later on in his life, Albert would keep a bitter memory of his time in school: “I had a miserable time in the Navy.”<sup>56</sup>

When the First World War (WW1) broke out in 1914, the prince enlisted. He had different ranks throughout the conflict, but because of his poor health and multiple surgeries, he did not take part in many fights. A young adult, he realised that the world in which he was born was changing at an incredible pace, especially on an international scale. WW1 was the

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>56</sup> *Quoted in Ibid.*, 53.

first important fracture of the fragile balance that kept the world in relative peace. It had an impact on Great Britain as a whole, including its empire:

For the first time it was clear that the British Army was not invincible; it was the first fissure in the monolithic but ill-assorted structure of the British Empire, whose accelerating dissolution was to be a major issue of Prince Albert's future reign.<sup>57</sup>

When the war ended, he then went on to university, where he studied history and economics. In 1920, he received new titles from his father, including that of Duke of York, as which he would be referred to until he became King.

## **1.2. The unexpected King (or was he?)**

After quite a rough start in life, Prince Albert was brought up as a member of the royal family, but not as heir apparent like his brother Edward. Therefore, he did not have the same responsibilities lying ahead of him and was kept away from the spotlight. Public attention focused more on his dazzling brother than on him, which allowed him to grow up with a lesser burden on his shoulder.

Upon the day of his father's death, Edward VIII became King and started what would turn out to be one of the shortest reigns of British history. His apparently care-free personality and tendency to speak out about matters with which he was concerned were in contradiction with the traditional vision of a British monarch. He impersonated a wind of change for the monarchy: "Edward had become King in the midst of hopes that this glamorous, charming and handsome figure would usher in a new style of monarchy in Britain."<sup>58</sup> The King was quite high in the esteem of the people. He drew his popularity from his outgoing personality and his apparent closeness to the nation, to whom the news of his abdication came as a shock.

However, Edward VIII was also a source of indignation for the institution, as he often got noticed because of his inappropriate behaviour. As it would later be confirmed with his acquaintances amongst the Nazis, he was racially prejudiced and believed in white supremacy, as it can be read in a letter he wrote to his lady friend Ms. Freda Dudley Ward about Australian Aborigines: "[...] they are the most revolting form of living creatures I've ever seen! They are

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>58</sup> *Loc. cit.* Phillips, *The King Who Had to Go*, prologue.

the lowest known form of human beings & are the nearest thing to monkeys [*sic*].”<sup>59</sup> He went against his duty of neutrality when he spoke out in an infamous intervention in South Wales during which – while he was already King – he declared that “something must be done” about the coal miners’ poor living and working conditions. His stands were problematic regarding his role and statute, as it is explained in Adrian Phillips’s book about how the Abdication unfolded:

Had Edward been a wealthy aristocratic playboy and nothing more, none of this would have mattered to anyone but friends and family, but he was the heir to the throne, and in the first half of the twentieth century, the monarch played a far more important part in politics than today, even though it was very restricted and hidden to the general public. This gave a further edge to worries about Edward’s flaws: the fear that he might not be up to the job.<sup>60</sup>

That is why, to some, his abdication in late 1936 didn’t come as a surprise. Even his own father had predicted his downfall when speaking with Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, as quoted in Philip Zeigler’s book: “After I am dead, the boy will ruin himself in twelve months.”<sup>61</sup> The end of Edward’s reign had also been foreshadowed by Scottish politician Keir Hardie, as he once said:

From his childhood onward this boy [...] will be taught to believe himself as of superior creation. A line will be drawn between him and the people he is called upon some day to reign over. In due course, following the precedent which has already been set [...] the end of it all will be the country will be called upon to pay the bill.<sup>62</sup>

The fact that politicians – and even his own family – did not expect much of Edward as a King says a lot about his personality. His own father wished that Edward’s brother and niece would carry on the legacy of the royal family: “I pray God that my eldest son will never marry and that nothing will come between Bertie and Lilibet and the throne.”<sup>63</sup> Even Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin ultimately advised Edward to abdicate. Had he stayed on the throne and decided to marry Wallis Simpson, the government would have resigned.

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<sup>59</sup> Rupert Godfrey, *Letters from A Prince: Edward to Mrs. Freda Dudley Ward 1918–1921*, “11 July 1920,” (London: Little, Brown & Co, 1998).

<sup>60</sup> *Loc. cit.* Phillips, *The King Who Had to Go*.

<sup>61</sup> *Loc. cit.* Ziegler, *George VI: The Dutiful King*, 199.

<sup>62</sup> *Quoted in* Bradford, *George VI*, 3-4.

<sup>63</sup> *Loc. cit.* Ziegler, *George VI: The Dutiful King*, 199.



Figure 4 – Unknown. Future King Edward VIII (right) and the Duke of York, c. 1900. Photograph.

If Prince Albert and his brother were to be compared, it would be obvious that they were opposite. Unlike his outgoing brother who was the focal point of most of the attention, Albert was a rather private person. His difficult childhood had turned him into a shy young man who wanted to live as simply as possible. His concerns were actually far from those of a monarch who was supposed to live a public life and embody a nation. He did not share most of his brother's hobbies and interests. One of the most striking comparisons can be made on their romances and relationships to women: while Edward was a known Casanova who enjoyed female company, the only relationship public opinion associates with Albert is his and Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon's. He pursued her for a long time before she eventually agreed to marry him, and he even had to show his love for her on multiple occasions, as he had to propose to her three times before she said yes.<sup>64</sup> After their wedding in May 1923, they started a family and welcomed Princess Elizabeth on April 21, 1926 and Princess Margaret on August 21, 1930. Albert grew close to his daughters and had a loving bond with them, unlike his own relationship with his father.

Future King George VI was in no way a “wealthy aristocratic playboy”<sup>65</sup> – a phrase that was used by Adrian Philips to describe Edward VIII. Instead, he is rather depicted as a “Spartan monarch, duty-bound, [...] convinced that material discomfort improved people's characters.”<sup>66</sup> His beliefs in simplicity and humility, believing in the less rather than the more, opposed him to his extravagant brother and, instead of giving him the regal statute he would have to acquire, made him an ordinary man. Quoting Philip Ziegler, Richard Davenport-Hines summarizes the idea: “He was, Ziegler concludes, ‘extraordinary in his ordinariness’, exactly what his subjects wanted.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> William Shawcross, *The Queen Mother: The Official Biography* (London: Macmillan, 2009), 150.

<sup>65</sup> *Loc. cit.* Phillips, *The King Who Had to Go*, chapter 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Loc. cit.* Davenport-Hines, “George V: The Unexpected King.”

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite their numerous differences, there is one common point that binds the two brothers: both were “reluctant Kings,”<sup>68</sup> however not for the same reasons. Edward VIII saw his status as a burden: he did not want to have that many responsibilities and hoped to live his life as he wanted, not as his birth dictated him to. On the other hand, Albert was not meant to be King, and the news that he would have to step up and sit on the throne was in contradiction with his personality, his vision of life and his difficulties with public exposure. However, a trait that is often acknowledged in him is his sense of duty. Even though he was not keen on taking his brother’s succession, he took it upon himself to try his best to honour the monarchy and the nation: “he took his duty to his people to his heart.”<sup>69</sup>

### 1.3. The process of becoming a leader



Figure 5 – Unknown. *The Year of the Three Kings* postcard. Public domain, 1936.

The announcement of Edward VIII’s abdication on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1936 came as a sizeable surprise for the nation. The night before, the King had officially signed his declaration of abdication and on the 11<sup>th</sup>, the news was made official and was disclosed to the whole country through an Act of Parliament.<sup>70</sup> From there on, the King of the United Kingdom and its empire was Prince Albert, now known as King George VI, who had to take immediate measures

<sup>68</sup> “1936 – The Three Kings,” British Monarchist Society and Foundation, accessed December 01, 2018, <https://bmsf.org.uk/1936-the-three-kings/>.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Great Britain, *His Majesty’s Declaration of Abdication Act* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1936).

to take the throne and establish his authority. One of his main struggles was not just to become King, but to succeed his brother who, despite having renounced the throne, was still very much present and had the firm intention not to be forgotten. George had to find his place as King after Edward, who had made quite an impact in such a short period of reign. The rivalry between the two men was still palpable, and one of their first topics of discord was the titles Edward would be given, as he no longer was King but still wanted to be recognised with an official, royal status. He was granted the title of Duke of Windsor, which some considered he had automatically regained after his abdication, but the main bone of contention occurred regarding Wallis Simpson's titles, as the monarchy refused to grant her the style "Her Royal Highness". Carolyn Harris, who is quoted in a BBC article about Edward VIII, explains:

The duke was "eager to carve out a new role for himself and ensure that his wife was treated as a full member of the Royal Family even though she had not received the title of Her Royal Highness - an issue that was of great concern to the duke".<sup>71</sup>

The former king was furious about this, but also about the financial compensations that he wanted for himself and his future wife. The British government did not agree to put him on the Civil List, which meant he could not get money from the institutions and did not receive an allowance. Some reports say that the Duke flooded the new King with calls to try and get money or more titles from his brother.<sup>72</sup> Eventually, George VI ended up personally paying an allowance to Edward, but the tensions remained. The King forbade members of the royal family from attending Edward and Wallis' wedding in France, and the relationship between the two brothers stretched thin.

After the crisis faded, George VI had to step up as an individual to stand out against the image of his brother. He needed to differentiate himself from Edward VIII and to start his reign as a new figure of the royal family. As he had a very different vision of what the public representation of the monarchy should be, his way of being and values allowed him to impose himself on the throne, while the turmoil of the crisis was eventually erased from people's minds: "Within months, if not weeks, Edward was fading from people's memories."<sup>73</sup> Because of his more reserved personality and stringent upbringing, he was not one to promote celebrity-like

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<sup>71</sup> Carolyn Harris, *quoted in* "When the Duke of Windsor met Adolf Hitler," BBC, March 10, 2016, accessed March 12, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-35765793>.

<sup>72</sup> *Loc. cit.* Ziegler, *George VI: The Dutiful King*, 349.

<sup>73</sup> *Loc. cit.* Phillips, *The King Who Had to Go*, prologue.

behaviours, and thus he developed a new version of the monarchy's public image, based on his conservative values and his strong belief in simplicity.

He perhaps drew his main strength from his firm faith in family. He and his wife's relationship transuded support, understanding and fortitude. They had already been considered as a modern couple because of Elizabeth's none-royal blood: "Albert chose Lady Elizabeth to be his wife without the permission of his family or the church and as Lady Elizabeth was not of royal blood this was considered a modernizing move."<sup>74</sup> During his whole reign, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon was of the utmost importance to the King, both in his public and private life, as it is explained by Philippe Chassaing in his essay about the monarchy during times of war: "La reine, en effet, avait été un pilier de la monarchie dès l'accession de son mari au trône en 1936, en lui apportant le soutien moral qui lui était indispensable; son apparence avait fait l'objet d'une mise en scène très recherchée."<sup>75</sup> She became an important part of the picture the monarchy depicted of a close-knit royal family. Everything about her – her behaviour towards her husband, her looks, her clothes – was precisely analysed and was a topic of conversation for the media and the people.<sup>76</sup> As their daughters – Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret – were growing up, they also took part in the construct of this representation of a new, appeased King who believed in traditional values that appealed to the many. This was even more so the case in times of tensions in the country:

La dimension « familiale » de la monarchie sortit donc renforcée de l'état de guerre : présente dès le début du XXe siècle, elle fut soulignée dès l'accession de George VI, par opposition aux « errements » d'Édouard VIII [...]. Cet élément tint une part cruciale de la « communication » monarchique pendant le second conflit mondial, et, en outre, correspondait aux sentiments profonds du roi, très dépendant pour sa stabilité émotionnelle de sa femme et de ses filles.<sup>77</sup>

As the British Monarchist Society website summarises it: "they were a team."<sup>78</sup>

One of the essential points on which Elizabeth helped George the most was his disabling stammer. As depicted in Tom Hooper's 2010 movie *The King's Speech*<sup>79</sup> and different accounts

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<sup>74</sup> Toni Ford, "The Monarchs: George VI (1936-1952) – The Unexpected King Who Led a Nation Through War," *Anglotopia.net*, August 19, 2015, accessed October 13, 2018, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Philippe Chassaing, "La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre, 1914-1945," *Histoire, économie et société* 23, no. 2 (2004): 186.

<sup>76</sup> *Loc. cit.* Shawcross, *The Queen Mother*, 470.

<sup>77</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaing, "La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre," 186.

<sup>78</sup> *Loc. cit.* British Monarchist Society and Foundation, "1936 – The Three Kings."

<sup>79</sup> *The King's Speech*, directed by Tom Hooper (United Kingdom: Momentum Pictures, 2011).

of his speech therapist's descendants<sup>80</sup>, the new king suffered a lot from this difference. Fearing public outings and speeches, he found himself incapable of overcoming his trouble on his own and, under the influence of his wife who strongly encouraged him to seek help, he had started a speech therapy in 1926 with Lionel Logue, a man whose unconventional methods proved useful and with whom George VI kept a close, professional and friendly relationship until his death. This initiative turned out to be a difficult but necessary journey for the King who, in the process of becoming a leader, succeeded in reducing his hesitations and pauses when he spoke.

After a rocky start in life and a difficult childhood, a man seen as weak and not really fit to be King all of a sudden found himself on the throne, having to take on the responsibilities that it implied. George VI faced some difficulties settling in, especially given the interior crises that took place within the monarchy after the departure of his brother. Having to manage his and the monarchy's public images while dealing with his own personal relationships, the year 1936 remained a turning point in the man's life, as well as in the nation's history. As he became a leader, he soon had to step up and get involved in his new role as well as in the life of the United Kingdom, while remaining as neutral as possible in the politics of the country, at a time when the country underwent pretty important changes in the political landscape. Though he doubtlessly had some strong opinions about what was going on in British society, and on a broader scale in the world, he had to keep some distance in order not to interfere with a matter he had no right to influence.

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<sup>80</sup> Mark Logue, and Peter Conradi, *The King's Speech* (London: Quercus, 2010).

## 2. THE POLITICAL RESHAPING OF THE COUNTRY'S INSTITUTIONS

The figure of the sovereign was not the only change in the country at the time. The political landscape of the 1936-1952 period was not as stable as it once had been in the previous century: because of the globalisation of the world interactions and the progression towards a more finance-oriented system of exchanges, the UK could not move forward if they maintained the status quo. WW1 had shaken things up, but it really was WW2 and the progressive extinction of the British Empire that echoed the need to evolve according to the global tendency. Facing all these challenges at once, George VI witnessed the shift that occurred in internal politics, with for instance the arrival after the war of a Labour government, to whom he was not particularly favourable. Amidst all the tensions and the challenges that the era represented, the King's duty was to defend the monarchy, that is to say his position on the throne but also the institution of which he was the Head. Moreover, the growing discontent that overwhelmed the Empire forced him to take a new order of things into consideration and to consider the transformations the country was undergoing as part of a process he could not resist.

### 2.1. The King's relationship to politics and government

When Edward VIII abdicated and George VI ascended the throne, Britain had been undergoing some profound changes in its political system. The deepest transformations obviously came from the unfolding and the outcome of the First World War. The whole country had taken a blow to its strength and economy, and the 1920s were a time when Britain was mostly on the mend. With the apparition of new political principles abroad, the United Kingdom saw its way of legislating progressively evolve, and the country slowly transformed into a society of consumption.<sup>81</sup> Because of the war and the sudden rise in power of the USA, Britain's status as a leader of the world trade and as the first actor on the global economic stage was fading: unemployment rates were rocketing, and divisions between different parts of the UK increased significantly, especially between the south of England and the northern areas of the Union.<sup>82</sup> What is more, even after the disastrous consequences of WW1 eventually stabilised, the Great Depression of 1929 added another hit to the economic development of the country. As a result, the country's finances remained fragile until the war, and unemployment went back up at an

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<sup>81</sup> W.R. Garside, and J.I. Greaves, "Rationalisation and Britain's Industrial Malaise: The Interwar Years Revisited," *Journal of European Economic History* (1997).

<sup>82</sup> R. J. Unstead, *England: A Century of Change: 1837 - Today* (Black, 1963).

impressive rate: at some point, up to 25% of the population did not have a job in some parts of the country – especially in the North.<sup>83</sup>

Most of the Prime Ministers (PMs) that had been in power in the interwar period were members of the Conservative Party – except for Liberal leader David Lloyd George from 1916 to 1922 and Labour PM Ramsey MacDonald in 1924 and between 1929 and 1935. Yet, the decade following WW1 also saw a rise of interest in the implementation of the welfare state<sup>84</sup>. Ever since the election of Liberal PM George in 1916, politicians had opted for more socialist measures trying to rebuild Britain after the war. They had implemented new laws, mostly regarding housing and unemployment, for instance with the Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act<sup>85</sup> of 1919 and several Unemployment Insurance Acts, in particular in 1920 and 1921. Those pieces of legislation aimed to improve the living conditions of the British population by providing new, modern housings and ensuring various allowances for some unemployed Britons.

At the time of Edward VIII's abdication, the PM in office was Conservative Stanley Baldwin, who had been elected in 1935. Baldwin is said to have played an important part in the debate over whether Edward VIII should abdicate. He strongly opposed him marrying Wallis Simpson, because of the political consequences it implied but also because of his own conception of morals:

The offence lay in the implications of [the King's] attachment to Mrs. Simpson for the broader public morality and the constitutional integrity which were now perceived — especially by Baldwin — as underpinning the nation's unity and strength.<sup>86</sup>

He felt significant disdain for Mrs Simpson, reckoning that at best she could be called a “respectable whore [sic]”<sup>87</sup>, but certainly not “Queen Wally”<sup>88</sup>. He was backed by Labour and Liberal politicians, and the House of Commons in its whole considered that the wedding could not take place as long as Edward was King. Baldwin was partial to George V and felt that his

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<sup>83</sup> Stephen Constantine, *Social Conditions in Britain 1918–1939* (Methuen, 1983).

<sup>84</sup> Welfare State is defined as “a system whereby the state undertakes to protect the health and well-being of its citizens, especially those in financial or social need, by means of grants, pensions, and other benefits” *Loc. cit.* *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Welfare state.”

<sup>85</sup> Great Britain, *Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act, 1919* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1919).

<sup>86</sup> Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 326.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

worthy successor could only be his younger son Prince Albert. At the end of the crisis, the PM considered Edward's abdication as a success for himself, because he had overcome the hardships and felt that the transition between the two Kings had been rather smooth. He thought of the event as the epitome of his political career: "This is making history and I'm the only one who can do it."<sup>89</sup> After everything calmed down, he decided that he wanted to be remembered for his management of the whole crisis and that he would go out at the top of his popularity. He announced his retirement after George VI's coronation, in 1937.

The political landscape of interwar Great Britain also saw a rise in power of extremes in the country. First and foremost, communism was considered the main enemy of traditional parties. Because of the war and its financial demands, a part of the population thought of communism as a positive alternative to capitalism<sup>90</sup>. They saw it as a way to avoid another crisis, and in the 1920s, the newly created Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) – founded in 1920 – gained many defenders. This new movement raised a lot of suspicion and defiance from traditional politicians and was the focal point of multiple fantasist theories and conspiracies – one of the most famous being that of the forged Zinoviev letter<sup>91</sup> in 1924, four days before the general election, which aimed to discredit the CPGB by implying that it had been involved in some rebellious schemes against the population.<sup>92</sup>

A few years later, Nazism started to grow in size and importance, and not just in Germany. Indeed, at first Nazi thinkers saw Great Britain as a potential ally in their quest for expansion and decided to try and court the British population and empire so that they would join them.<sup>93</sup> The Brits did not respond to the appeal and observed a certain distance from them, while promoting 'appeasement', that is to say not confronting Nazi leaders such as Hitler and trying to keep them pleased. The last example of this attempt to appease Germany occurred with PM Neville Chamberlain's signature of the Munich Agreement along Adolf Hitler, Edouard Daladier and Benito Mussolini in 1938<sup>94</sup>, sacrificing Czechoslovakia in an attempt to maintain peace, with the full and not so discreet support of George VI: "He made overt public gestures

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<sup>89</sup> *Loc. cit.* Phillips, *The King Who Had to Go*, prologue.

<sup>90</sup> Capitalism is defined as "an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state" *Loc. cit.* *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Capitalism."

<sup>91</sup> Great Britain's National Archives, extracts from the *Zinoviev Letter, 1924* (2009).

<sup>92</sup> "Russia and the British Voter: the 'Zinoviev Letter', 'Red Scare' and 1924 General Election," Warwick Library, accessed March 25, 2019.

<sup>93</sup> "Nazi propaganda and the United Kingdom," Wikipedia, May 23, 2018, accessed March 15, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi\\_propaganda\\_and\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_propaganda_and_the_United_Kingdom)

<sup>94</sup> Neville Chamberlain, Edouard Daladier, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, *Munich Agreement* (Munich, 1938).

of support for Neville Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler."<sup>95</sup> Chamberlain – who succeeded to Baldwin – had King George's sympathy. George VI expressed his confidence and affection in the PM when he asked him to appear on the balcony of Buckingham Palace alongside his wife and himself, after Chamberlain had returned from the ratification of the Munich agreement.



Figure 6 – (From left to right) Neville Chamberlain, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, 1938. Photograph.

This gesture proved that the King did not only support the Conservative leader because of his constitutional obligation to do so, but that he also genuinely shared his views, at least about his decisions regarding foreign policy. For a long time, Chamberlain kept hoping that the Munich Agreement would be enough to settle durable peace in Europe. Unfortunately, Hitler did not see it that way, and less than a year later, the Second World War broke out. After managing its beginnings, Chamberlain faced some backlash and strong disagreements from parts of the government and eventually resigned on May, 10 1940. When he tendered his resignation to the King, he is said to have praised Churchill as his legitimate successor.<sup>96</sup>

After Chamberlain came the emblematic PM Winston Churchill. When he still was a Member of the Parliament (MP), he had been one of the few supporters of Edward VIII regarding his marriage and potential abdication. He had tried to dissuade the latter from renouncing the throne and when the King eventually gave up his position, Churchill's credibility in Parliament took a blow. He was suspected of plotting to overthrow the government or gain more power from his support of the King, even though today, his motives still are not clear.

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<sup>95</sup> *Loc. cit.* Davenport-Hines, "George V: The Unexpected King."

<sup>96</sup> Robert Self, *Neville Chamberlain: A Biography*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 428.

Though a member of the Conservative party, he was not considered as a politician with very traditional values and stood out from some of the party's oldest members. This trait of his was not exactly to George VI's taste, since he was a rather conservative man who believed in tradition, and the King had rather mixed feelings when Churchill became PM, even if he kept them to himself:

[...] même si George VI était *in pectore* peu favorable à l'accession au pouvoir de Winston Churchill en mai 1940, et lui aurait préféré un lord Halifax plus « classiquement » conservateur, il n'en manifesta rien et lui apporta tout au long de la guerre le plus total soutien.<sup>97</sup>

Because of his status as King and the reserve that came with it, George VI could not intervene in the country's political life *per se*. He certainly had some personal views regarding some political figures or decisions but could not express them. Indeed, according to William Bagehot's famous recommendations regarding the role of a British sovereign, the latter has "the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, the right to warn,"<sup>98</sup> but not to directly take part in the political decisions that were made for the country.

George VI eventually grew fond of Winston Churchill, and in a context of extreme tensions and violence because of the war, they became close on a professional, but also on a personal level. Both defending the country in times of hardships, they developed what is now called "the closest personal relationship in modern British history between a monarch and a Prime Minister."<sup>99</sup>

When the war ended and the country began its slow, tough reconstruction, Britons decided that Churchill represented too many painful memories and was a man of the past. They elected the Labour Party to government, with its leader Clement Atlee undertaking the task of being the PM of the after-war. The left-wing views of the new government were in clear opposition with George VI's, whom by the time people had identified as being attached to very conservative values. Yet, again respecting Bagehot's principles and according to his natural reserve, he did not oppose any of the changes that were suggested by Atlee:

En 1945, tout en considérant que les Britanniques avaient été fort ingrats en désavouant leur Premier ministre à peine l'Allemagne battue, et bien que la nature réactionnaire de ses vues politiques fût connue de tous, il respecta la

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<sup>97</sup> *Loc. cit* Chassaing, "La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre," 183.

<sup>98</sup> William Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1867), 75.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Rhodes James, *A Spirit Undaunted: The Political Role of George VI* (London: Little, Brown and Co, 1998), 195.

règle désormais bien établie du *non partisanship* et ne s'opposa pas aux réformes mises en œuvre par les travaillistes.<sup>100</sup>

George VI was thus not a man who enjoyed political tensions and, since he had some personal views he could not share, he decided to focus on the case of the monarchy instead.

## 2.2. Defending the monarchy

When George VI stepped on the throne in 1936, the number of monarchies in Europe had been plummeting. A large number of sovereign-based political systems had gradually turned into new forms of government. WW1 in particular acted as a powerful accelerant for Europeans' wish to see what was considered as an old-fashioned conception of the world disappear. After the war, a large number of countries initiated a transformation in their political regime. Monarchy as a political system was thus threatened, and its moment of glory was quite certainly coming to an end.

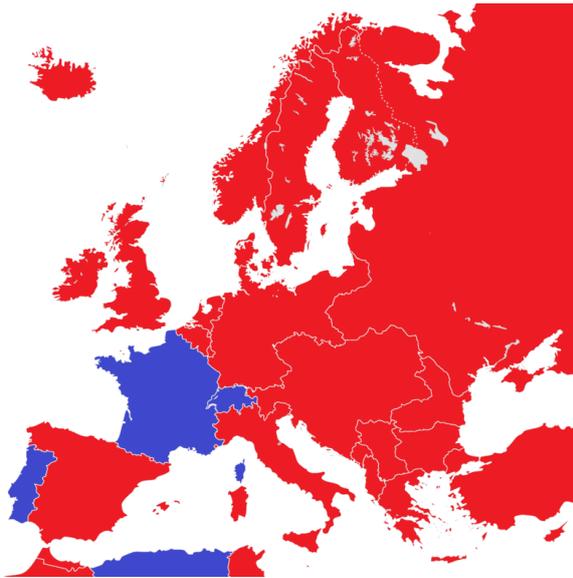


Figure 7 – Leeuw, Nederlandse. Monarchies (in red) and republics (in blue) in Europe on 28 June 1914. 2015 Map.

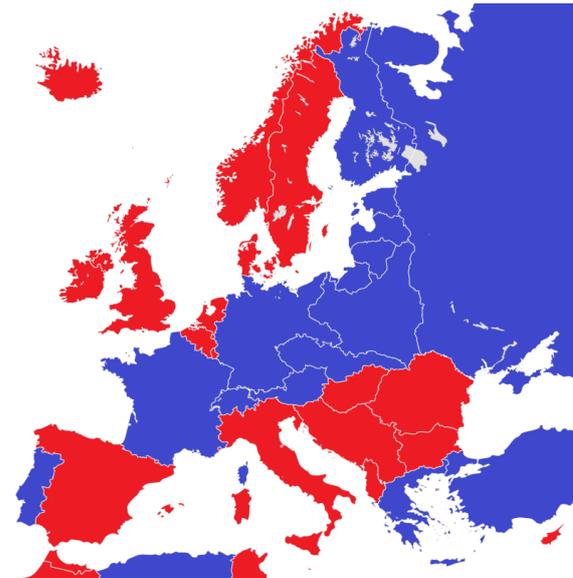


Figure 8 – Leeuw, Nederlandse. Monarchies (in red) and republics (in blue) in Europe in 1930. 2015. Map.

One illustration of this shift in politics was Russia, a case that is particularly interesting to study since the last Russian Emperor happened to be Tsar Nicholas II, the first cousin of George V – George VI's father. Because of the hardships the country had to endure during WW1, unrest started to grow amongst the Russian people. Harsh living conditions and extreme poverty

<sup>100</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaing, “La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre,” 183.

in some parts of the country led a share of the population to rebel in what is now referred to as the February Revolution of 1917.<sup>101</sup> The Tsar and the way he led the country were direct targets of the revolutionaries' claims, as they considered him to have failed his people. While some only wished for Nicholas' replacement, others were plotting a strategy to get rid of the monarchy as a whole. Nicholas II eventually had to renounce the throne on March 15, 1917. He abdicated in *lieu* of his son and passed on the throne to his brother Michael, but the latter turned it down. Nicholas was then held captive by the transitional government that was put in place after him. Some of his partisans sought exile for him and his family, including in the United Kingdom where it was thought that they could find refuge with Nicholas' first cousin George V. PM David Lloyd George's Conservative government granted the Russian family asylum, but George V, although he was on good terms with his cousin, refused to welcome him to his country, fearing that it would put Britain at a disadvantage regarding the war and the rising tensions in Russia. What is more, the discontentment that was voiced by the Opposition and the population after the announcement that a Russian family would come to Britain dissuaded the sovereign from agreeing to receive them.<sup>102</sup> As a result, the Tsar and his entire family were murdered by the Bolsheviks.

This episode, in addition to proving that monarchy as an accepted ideology was failing, was a good example of the way British monarchs of the twentieth century had to put the safety of the British nation first, before their own interests and even before others' lives. After George V came George VI, who also had to defend the Crown. The inter-war period, the Second World War and the post-war era were challenging times for the country, but also for the institution that was the monarchy. Besides having to protect it from the inside – during the Abdication Crisis – the monarch also had to make sure that outside circumstances would not affect the institution in such a way that it would result in its dissolution. In times of hardships, it was considered by some as “the sacred institution that bound the people of Britain and cemented an Empire that spanned the globe.”<sup>103</sup>

Yet, like its European neighbours, the UK underwent some ups-and-downs in its relationship with monarchy. Because of the advance in industry and technology, new ideologies and ideals started to develop in people's minds. Since the old world had eventually burst into flames during WW1, a part of the British population did not want to go back to a system they

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<sup>101</sup> John L.H. Keep, “Nicholas II,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, January 28, 2019, accessed April 10, 2019.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Loc. cit.* Phillips, *The King Who Had to Go*, prologue.

believed was outdated and was not efficient anymore. As the beginnings of the British monarchy could be traced back to the eleventh century,<sup>104</sup> it was definitely considered as an old institution. Antiroyalist feelings had started to grow bigger during the late years of Queen Victoria's reign – when she chose to withdraw from public life – and Edward VIII's renunciation of the throne harboured the Republicans' hope of abolishing the status of the King and the political system altogether.<sup>105</sup> They even tried to pass what they called a 'Republican amendment' in 1936 so that they could establish a British Republic, with an elected President at its head. However, the bill was significantly rejected by the Parliament, gathering the support of only five MPs.<sup>106</sup> This is proof that even though the monarchy was in jeopardy, Britons were not ready to let go of this traditional institution that distinctively represents the country. In fact, these abolitionist sentiments did not actually pose a real threat, partly because the bond with the people had been strengthened. This is what P. Chassaing explains here: "Le fait que la monarchie a servi de point de ralliement [...] explique que tout le XXe siècle ait été exempt de mouvement républicain notable."<sup>107</sup>

The twentieth century also saw the weakening of the House of Lords' influence over the general politics of the country. The House, which – thanks to its traditionally noble members – had been mostly favourable to the concept of monarchy and believed in more traditional values, gradually lost power to the other chamber of the Parliament, the House of Commons, the members of which are elected by the citizens thanks to a 'first-by-the-post' voting system.<sup>108</sup> The most significant alteration of the Lords' influence might have been the Parliament Act of 1911.<sup>109</sup> On a more global scale, the passing of powers to the House of Commons had a symbolic meaning: from the hands of noblemen and acquaintances of the Royal Family, power passed down to those of the people's representatives. Even though it did not directly affect the monarchy as an institution, it definitely was a token of the general spirit at the time, that is to say the wish for more power to the people and for a nobility that was less involved in politics.

As a result, the image of the Crown was not quite as dazzling as it had been in its glorious days. When George VI was made King, the interest the people took in the monarchy was plummeting, partly because the war had shifted the focus on matters that were deemed more

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<sup>104</sup> If William the Conqueror is considered as the first real monarch to have reigned in England.

<sup>105</sup> "Republicanism in the United Kingdom", Wikipedia, April 10, 2019, accessed April 10, 2019.

<sup>106</sup> Denis Judd, *King George VI* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 157.

<sup>107</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaing, "La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre," 188.

<sup>108</sup> Defined as "an electoral system in which a candidate or party is selected by achievement of a simple majority." *Loc. cit.* *Oxford English Dictionary*, "First-by-the-post."

<sup>109</sup> *Cf.* Introduction, 7.

important, but also because the once golden image of a splendid, dignified Royal Family had taken a blow with the saddened figure of Queen Victoria, and then with Edward VIII's abdication. The latter, even though he was not King anymore and did not even live in the UK, kept on feeding the image of a controversial monarchy when he developed ties with Nazi Germany. Although George VI tried to prevent his brother from parading around such hated figures, Edward and his wife Wallis made friends with some Nazi officials and were pictured conversing with them or accompanying them to meetings. In an effort to avoid tarnishing the already fragile image of the Crown, the British government asked Edward not to live in the public spotlight, but because he wanted to keep on representing the monarchy, he did not listen to the advice. Since Edward was known to be anti-Semitic – another feature of his that did not favour a decent image of the monarchy – it is not a complete surprise that he developed such connections. For Carolyn Harris, Edward became a “liability”<sup>110</sup> to Britain during WW2, given his complex position *vis-à-vis* the two rival countries. He and his wife were even accused by some of being Nazi spies, sparking some conspiracy theories with regard to the couple – theories that still exist today.<sup>111</sup> Fortunately for the Crown, Edward was not the sovereign anymore, and the task to try and restore the monarchy's image fell upon George's shoulders.

To George VI, defending the monarchy also meant promoting it and its values. Since the Royal Family could see that they were progressively losing their influence, they thought it best to expand their range and considered increasing their perspectives. Therefore, the King took it upon himself not only to start touring the Empire, but also to reach out to other countries. One of his most important visits was the one he and his wife made to North America in 1939. They first decided to travel to Canada to try and make sure that the newly acquired status of Dominion was well-understood. They also wanted to assert their positions as monarchs of the whole Empire, and not just Britain. Yet, perhaps the most interesting leg of this visit was the United States. Setting a precedent, King George VI became “the first monarch to ever set foot in the USA.”<sup>112</sup> More than just a courtesy call, this trip represented a way to promote the British vision, which the monarchy represented: “la visite d'État de George VI et de la reine Elizabeth aux États-Unis en avril 1939, qui suscita un intérêt considérable [...] avait en fait été planifiée [...] comme un moyen de faire évoluer l'opinion publique américaine dans un sens moins

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<sup>110</sup> *Loc. cit* Carolyn Harris, *quoted in* BBC, “When the Duke of Windsor met Adolf Hitler.”

<sup>111</sup> Several forums and websites offer a possibility for believers of those theories to express their opinions regarding this matter, such as: “Was Wallis Simpson a Nazi sympathizer?” Quora.com, 2016, accessed March 15, 2019, <https://www.quora.com/Was-Wallis-Simpson-a-Nazi-sympathizer>.

<sup>112</sup> *Loc. cit.* Ford, “The Monarchs”, 5.

isolationniste.”<sup>113</sup> As the United States’ power over the world was increasing at an incredible pace – especially after WW1 – it was important for Britain to have them as allies rather than opponents.

The meeting of George VI and Queen Elizabeth with American President Franklin Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor had a strong symbolic meaning, but it also marked the beginning of a genuine mutual liking between the two couples. More than a friendship, this relationship would later turn out to be a very important bond not only between the King and the President, but also between the two countries. This royal visit did much good for the future alliance with the USA during the Second World War. The personal connections between the two men fostered a better political understanding and alliance between the two nations, since it aimed to prevent a policy of isolationism and reservation from the American government. Yet, the King’s sense of friendship was not the only asset that was used to promote the monarchy during the state visit. In the course of the trip, it was also clear that Queen Elizabeth became a focal point, especially for the media, who liked to comment on her sense of fashion, as she was always dressed up to the nines and exuded warmth and amiability. She endorsed a more accessible, more likeable version of the monarchy while respecting its grandeur, and she was widely approved of.<sup>114</sup>

These efforts to promote a more modern, yet still prestigious monarchy were quite a success. According to Adrian Phillips, the Empire stuck together because of their common allegiance to the Crown, whose symbolic importance as the common denominator of all the countries within the Commonwealth increased after the Statute of Westminster.<sup>115</sup> Despite the failures of multiple European monarchies in the twentieth century and the multiple, worldwide conflicts, the British Crown held steady and ended up being stronger under the reign of George VI than at the beginning of the century: “The people had endured the desperation and loss of World War Two and saw the influence of imperial power wane and yet public faith in the monarchy was high.”<sup>116</sup> Because public opinion was more favourable to the figure of the King than it used to, it tended to soften his relationship not only with the British nation, but also with the whole Empire at a time when it became more and more difficult to keep it together as one entity.

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<sup>113</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaing, “La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre,” 184.

<sup>114</sup> *Loc. cit.* Shawcross, *The Queen Mother*, 470.

<sup>115</sup> *Loc. cit.* Phillips, *The King Who Had to Go*, prologue.

<sup>116</sup> *Loc. cit.* Ford, “The Monarchs”, 6.

### 2.3. Keeping the Empire together: a challenge at a time of tensions and protest

The twentieth century was most certainly the century in which the British Empire experienced its most profound changes, since it eventually disappeared – some historians consider the actual end of the Empire to be the loss of Hong Kong in 1997<sup>117</sup>. Because of the slow shift in world power from the UK to the US, the Empire gradually lost its influence and some unrest started to rise within the colonies. One of the triggers that kindled this wish for change was the First World War, during which the Dominions – former colonies that now had sovereignty over almost every aspect of their legislation, except for foreign policy – showed how loyal they were to Great Britain: “Les Dominions firent preuve d’un loyalisme incontestable tant en paroles qu’en actes concrets (aide militaire, matérielle et financière).”<sup>118</sup> Because they rose up to the task and proved themselves worthy, they started to demand more power within the British world organisation, with a clear wish to be acknowledged as real actors, and not as states that were subdued by one country: “De ce rôle accru découlèrent certaines exigences nouvelles, à commencer par l’égalité de traitement diplomatique ou la volonté de ne plus se voir entraînés dans un nouveau conflit européen sans consultation préalable.”<sup>119</sup>

With the 1931 Statute of Westminster,<sup>120</sup> more powers were given to Dominions of the British Commonwealth – the former name of what is now known as the Commonwealth of Nations (see Appendix A for the territories and populations of the British Empire in 1931). This Act initiated a shift in the power the UK had over the world, both geographically and politically speaking, with a will for more independence from the countries of its empire. However, even though the relationships between these nations were bound to change because of the Statute, the Commonwealth also represented a lasting unity, proving that even though the hegemony of Great Britain was coming to an end, there still was a wish for cohesion within the members of the institution. They shared a common language and some elements of culture, and all of this was embodied by the monarch, who was – and still is – common to all the countries of the Commonwealth. Yet since the empire was spread all around the world, it was difficult for all states to agree on all matters. Because of its very nature, the Commonwealth could also be a source of disagreements and tensions between the states, especially in troubled times such as the abdication crisis.

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<sup>117</sup> Hong Kong – which had been a British colony since 1842 – was sold back to China in 1997.

<sup>118</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaigne, “La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre,” 183.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Loc. cit.* Great Britain, *Statute of Westminster*.

The ties that bound the countries together were perceived as being of two different natures: some believed in the *inter se* doctrine; others in that of the “Divisible Crown.”<sup>121</sup> Citing J.E.S. Fawcett in his article about the Commonwealth and the impact the abdication crisis had on it, Donal Coffey explains the differences between the two visions, by first defining the *inter se* conception:

a) It only applied to the self-governing members of the Commonwealth, and not colonies;

b) It was based upon the traditional constitutional principles of the unity and indivisibility of the Crown and the common allegiance owed to it by its subjects in the Commonwealth, though it was directed outwards, to securing the unity of the Commonwealth in its international relations; and

c) It was developed to standardise treaty practice and no general form of the doctrine was accepted.”<sup>122</sup>

To summarise this, the *inter se* doctrine defined the Commonwealth as an ensemble of countries forming one united entity – a vision that was widely defended in the 1930s, since it implied that the empire remained united around Great Britain and around one sovereign, the King. On the other hand, the “Divisible Crown” conception considered every state of the Commonwealth as being a single entity, and the King as being the sovereign of each nation separately (for instance, he was King of South Africa, King of Canada, King of Australia etc., and not King of the British Empire or King of the Commonwealth). This opposition between the two visions was quite important in 1936. Indeed, it was crucial for the defenders of the *inter se* doctrine to have the majority consider the Commonwealth as a unified block, so that the decision regarding whether Edward VIII should marry Mrs. Simpson and remain King would be made in unison.<sup>123</sup> Thanks to the Statute of Westminster, the abdication could not take place without the agreement of the Dominions, since it was a change in the order of succession for the throne and it affected every state within the organisation. Because of the political peculiarities and intricacies involved in the content of the Statute, all Dominions had to rule on the decision and pass legislation that would recognise the change in the line of succession. They all agreed to the abdication, except one: The Irish Free State:<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Donal K. Coffey, “British, Commonwealth, and Irish Responses to the Abdication of King Edward VIII,” *Irish Jurist*, no 44. (2009): 101.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>124</sup> Irish Free State (Saorstát Eireann), *Executive Authority (External Relations) Act* (Dublin, 12 December 1936).

L'expression de «commune allégeance envers la Couronne» n'était pas qu'une simple formule oratoire: toute modification de l'ordre de succession au trône devait être sanctionnée par les représentations nationales des différents Dominions, en sus du Parlement britannique, disposition qui trouva une application quasi-immédiate lors de l'Abdication d'Édouard VIII et de l'accession au trône de son frère George VI (décembre 1936): l'État libre d'Irlande prit le prétexte de ne pas reconnaître cette succession pour distendre un peu plus ses liens avec le Royaume-Uni (External Relations Act, décembre 1936).<sup>125</sup>

The abdication of Edward VIII and the accession of his brother George VI to the throne were indeed yet another bone of contention with Ireland, who at the time was doing everything they could to distance themselves from British input in their affairs: "The abdication crisis was perceived in the Free State as an opportunity to remove the Representative of the Crown from the internal affairs of the State."<sup>126</sup>

After the three-year long Irish War of Independence from 1919 to 1921, the Irish Free State had been established in 1922, under the statute of Dominion within the British Commonwealth. It covered what is nowadays known as the Republic of Ireland. The Irish Free State lasted until 1937, when Ireland ('Éire' in Gaelic) was officially created and its constitution drafted. The country experienced tensions with Great Britain under the reign of George VI, as they tried to take as much independence from the main land as they could. The King actually had no prerogative over what was decided or how legislation was made; the monarch was only mentioned in official texts, but had no real importance to the Irish people's eyes. Ireland eventually left the Commonwealth in 1949 when it became a republic, following the inhabitants' wish to be completely free from British influence.

In the midst of all this change, the new monarch – who first had to deal with his position as King – had to rule over an empire that was in constant evolution. George VI's reign is said to have represented the transition of the British world from the Empire to the Commonwealth. Whereas before, there was no doubt about the supremacy of Great Britain all over the world on political, economic, social scales, it slowly started to fade, and the once spectacular Empire gradually became an ensemble of countries that got along politically, but that no longer shared a common interest in remaining together under Britain's control. Though they were willing to maintain a bond between countries of similar histories, most of the nations that were part of the Empire felt that they needed to be independent and to evolve as countries of their own, and

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<sup>125</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaing, "La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre," 184.

<sup>126</sup> *Loc. cit.* Coffey, "British, Commonwealth," 95.

not as sub-nations of the United Kingdom. In this regard, WW2 acted as a formidable accelerator since, after it ended, more and more countries made the decision to leave the Commonwealth and officially became independent. The 1940s saw the first ‘important’ departures from the Commonwealth in that of Ireland in 1949, but also those of Burma and Palestine (including the state of Israel).

Other countries evolved in their statuses regarding Great Britain. In 1947, the British India colony turned into a Dominion of the British Commonwealth and was divided into two distinct states, India and Pakistan. As a result, the British monarch, that is to say George VI, lost his title of Emperor of India – seventy-two years after it had been created by Queen Victoria – and became separately King of India and King of Pakistan. He then relinquished the designation ‘King of India’ in 1950 when India became a Republic.

The biggest change in appellation to happen during George VI’s reign occurred in 1949. Because some countries of the Empire did not want to acknowledge the British monarch as their own anymore, but still wanted to be part of the Commonwealth, the 1949 London Declaration<sup>127</sup> put forward a new title referring to the King’s position. Ever since this Act was issued, the British sovereign has been recognised as Head of the Commonwealth – a title that covers the entirety of the responsibilities the monarch has towards each state, but that is not restrictive enough to refrain some countries from being part of the organisation. Overall, this decision was supported by politicians – like Winston Churchill – and by the King himself, who acknowledged that it would favour better relationships with India, who wanted to become a republic, and other countries who were hesitant regarding whether they would remain in the Commonwealth.<sup>128</sup>

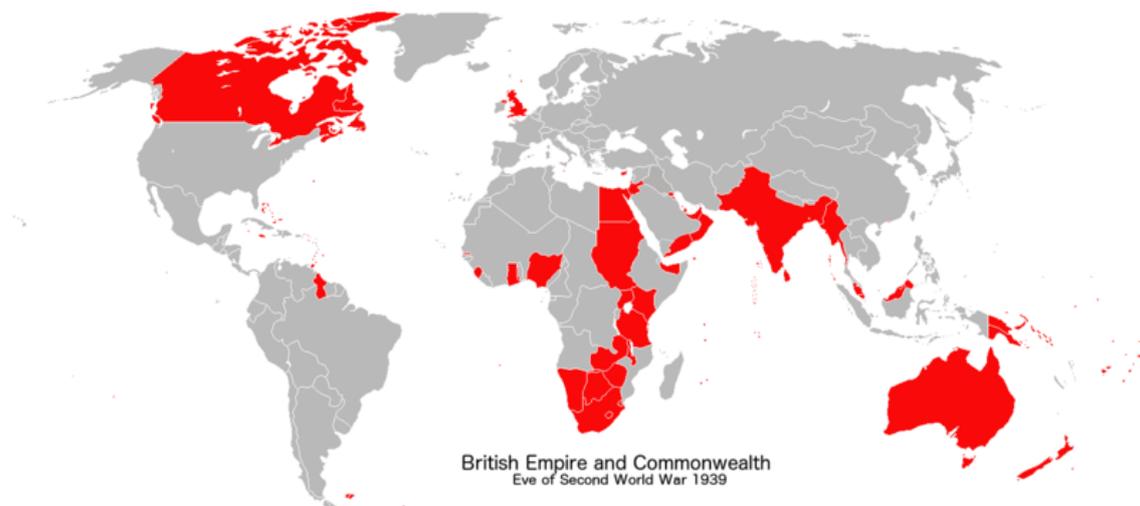


Figure 9 – Brukner, Robert. *The British Empire and Commonwealth in 1939*. 2016. Map.

<sup>127</sup> The Commonwealth, *The London Declaration*, 26 April 1949, archived from the original on September 27, 2012.

<sup>128</sup> Peter Marshall, “Shaping the New Commonwealth, 1949,” *The Round Table*, no. 350 (April 1999).

As British influence was slowly fading away, the Empire found itself weakened by the strong reactions of the states it included. The latter demanded more power: as the world organisation was changing, British society also had to adapt, and since the monarchy ought to follow the nation in its transformations, George VI's reign turned out to be a time during which the institution substantially evolved. Along with the rise of mass media coverage, a shift in its relationship to people was observed. The people felt more entitled to have a glimpse at the private life of their monarch. A need for closer ties with their sovereign developed, especially during WW2, during which the bond between George VI and the nation was truly heightened. Though terrible, the event contributed a lot to a newly-found proximity between the monarch and his people, in Great Britain and throughout the world, thanks to the feeling that they were fighting for the same cause together. Except for Ireland, who were trying their best to get out of Britain's influence, what remained of the Empire came together as one united front – an idea that was suggested in the King's speech on September 3, 1939 when the war broke out. He appealed for a global answer to his call and wanted to gather each state of the Commonwealth: "my peoples across the seas, who will make our cause their own."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> HM King George VI, *Empire Broadcast Message By H.M. King George VI* (Home Service September 03, 1939).

### 3. THE KING'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE NATION

The fact that George VI was focused on uniting the Empire proved to be useful rather quickly. Indeed, the dawn of the Second World called for the coming together of every state so that they could resist the attacks of an ablaze world. The conflict gave George VI the opportunity to step up and take charge of the task that lay ahead of him. As Toni Ford explains it, he went and tried “instilling the public with a strong sense of British identity,”<sup>130</sup> a feature that was essential to muster forces and appeal to everyone. To do so, he relied on the various media that developed at the time and adapted to the transformations of British society, so that he could remain updated of what was going on in his country and foster a bond with his people.

#### 3.1. “La figure tutélaire de la nation,”<sup>131</sup> or the beloved King that got Britain through war

After years of rising tensions, especially with Nazi Germany and the figure of Adolf Hitler, who gained more and more influence over Europe, the prospect of war became inevitable. The conflict, which is now known as the deadliest war the world has ever known, started with the invasion of Poland, who called their allies, including the UK, to the rescue. On September 3, 1939, Great Britain declared war on Germany alongside France, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>132</sup>

Once again, Britain found themselves having a major role in a world conflict and, once again, the British Empire as a whole was asked to fight as well. In order for the news to be officially announced to the country, it was decided that King George VI would make a speech to the British people, on September 3. This declaration, which marked the beginning of a new, dark period for the nation, was important since it represented the communion of the Crown with the nation. The importance of those speeches was only met by how difficult they were to deliver for George VI, because of his stammer. Incidentally, the preparation of that particular moment is pictured in Tom Hooper's 2011 movie *The King's Speech*,<sup>133</sup> which gives a rather insightful, accurate representation of the struggle the King went through to be able to deliver such a declaration without too much hesitation. The final outcome was regarded as a success,

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<sup>130</sup> *Loc. cit.* Ford, “The Monarchs”, 5.

<sup>131</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaigne, “La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre,” 185

<sup>132</sup> “World War II,” History.com, March 18, 2019, accessed March 29, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/world-war-ii-history>.

<sup>133</sup> *Loc. cit.* Hooper, *The King's Speech*.

since the monarch accomplished his goal of delivering a grave, solemn speech during which his hesitations and pauses only added to the seriousness of the situation. The fact that the sovereign was able to overcome his trouble and directly address his people in such sombre times reflected the image a strong-minded monarch who was willing to stand together with the country.

The content of this declaration is also to be taken into consideration: calling for unity, the King also explained the reasons of the conflict to the population. He depicted Britain not as being the instigator of the war, but rather as a collateral victim of a situation that called for their intervention: “we have been forced into a conflict.”<sup>134</sup> The King also evinced some clarity from the start, as he anticipated that this would not only be a war, but a total war, when he declared: “war can no longer be confined to the battlefield.”<sup>135</sup> The conflict would indeed call for the mobilisation of the entire country and its empire, thus becoming “the people’s war,”<sup>136</sup> as Philippe Chassaing calls it. This notion is important, because it embodies the union of a whole country around the same cause which, instead of solely affecting the Army, involved the UK – and its Empire – as one entity. Moreover, this rallying of forces did not only affect the population, but it also concerned the Crown. Such circumstances, as dark as they were, created a new kind of connection between the two sides of the country and, as a result, “the people’s war gave birth to a people’s monarchy,”<sup>137</sup> meaning that the British population ended up feeling closer to their monarch while in the meantime, the monarchy started to accept the idea of a stronger, more open bond with the nation.

This strengthening of the relationship with the population thanks to speeches continued to develop for the whole duration of the war *via* the King’s annual Christmas messages, which allowed him to keep a connection with the country, but also with the Empire. They acted as a focal point to which people could turn in order to feel comfort and unity: “les messages royaux diffusés par le *BBC External Service* constituèrent un lien puissant avec les habitants d’un Empire qui se retrouvait de nouveau en guerre aux côtés de la métropole.”<sup>138</sup>

Throughout the war, a general transformation in the public persona of the King was noticed. The monarch, who was at first perceived as a weak man with not much influence, succeeded in stepping up and rising up to the task that was ahead of him. He won his spurs in the heart of his people thanks his relentless work during wartime:

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<sup>134</sup> *Loc. cit.* HM King George VI, *Empire Broadcast Message*.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaing, “La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre,” 181.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

George VI, à son avènement, ne jouit pas d'une popularité immédiate : ses premières apparitions en public furent marquées à tout le moins par une réelle réserve de la part de ses nouveaux sujets et il n'est pas exagéré de dire que c'est la Seconde Guerre mondiale qui lui donna sa place dans le cœur de ses sujets.<sup>139</sup>

With his wife Elizabeth by his side, he showed a certain strength of character and refused to leave his people on their own, even in the worst times of the war. The fact that people such as the King and Queen of Great Britain refused to leave London and its inhabitants meant that they truly cared about the fate of their subjects. The royal couple almost died in a violent attack that targeted Buckingham Palace during the Blitz, in September 1940. As they were both inside the palace when it was bombed, they had a brush with death that traumatised them. This event, putting the Royal family at the same level as any other British citizen, turned them into heroic figures, as it is explained in Caroline Davies' article for *The Guardian*: "an event elevating the reluctant, stammering monarch to hero king in the eyes of the people."<sup>140</sup> From then on, the two Royals relentlessly visited the population. Pictures of them stepping on ruins to assess the amount of damage following the consecutive attacks made them become very popular, and only deepened the affection Britons had for their monarch.



Figure 10 – Associated Press. King George VI and Queen Elizabeth inspect the grounds of Buckingham after its bombing on September 10, 1939. Photograph.

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>140</sup> Caroline Davies, "How the Luftwaffe bombed the palace, in the Queen Mother's own words," *The Guardian*, September 13, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/sep/13/queen-mother-biography-shawcross-luftwaffe>.

The presence of the sovereign amongst the population who had to build the country back up after each attack inspired the many and, in times of hardships, some consider that the influence of the monarch's visits to his subjects and their incentive mustn't be neglected:

Les visites aux villes ou quartiers endommagés par les bombardements ennemis jouèrent aussi un rôle clef au cours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale [...]. Dans le même ordre d'idée, les visites de soldats, d'hôpitaux, d'usines jouèrent un rôle essentiel dans la mobilisation des esprits, et l'assertion selon laquelle, une fois les souverains partis, la productivité enregistrait un réel accroissement, ne doit pas être prise à la légère.<sup>141</sup>

There is little doubt that these visits were a way to put forward an image of Royals that were present for their people and concerned about their fates; yet the King's dedication to the cause seems to have been total and genuine. Driven by a will to do good and once again following his idea of being a duty-driven sovereign, he put his heart and soul in his work and interaction with the people, even though he did not always get the recognition he desired:

In wartime, he read top-secret material, including Ultra transcripts, and was tireless in touring blitzed districts, clambering through debris, and giving his condolences to people in their wrecked homes. 'The royal presence still had near-magical properties to raise the spirits and enhance the self-respect of those who had been left sorely battered by the war,' reports Ziegler, who suspects that the king in wartime must have 'resented the fact that it was Churchill, Churchill, Churchill all the way while the head of state was left to pay a secondary role'.<sup>142</sup>

Because of the reserve that came with his position as King, George VI did not have the ability to be the leader in this conflict, and as PM Winston Churchill was contributing to fighting the war with his government, the King could not strictly speaking be in the front row.

On a larger scale, the whole family was involved. Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret began accompanying their parents to various events, giving them the opportunity to display the image of a close-knit, wholesome family who was close to their people – and they were. Elizabeth in particular, being the heir presumptive to the throne, stepped into the spotlight as she grew up. Even though she potentially was the future Queen of England, she participated in the war effort, as a driver and mechanic in the British Army in the later years of WW2, once again highlighting the idea that even the Royals played their part in the fight for freedom.

The King thus lived the whole duration of the war like any other British citizen – or at least that was what the population could see, since he and his family had security at all time

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<sup>141</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaigne, "La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre," 186.

<sup>142</sup> *Loc. cit.* Davenport-Hines, "George V: The Unexpected King."

and slept away from London and the bombs, in Windsor.<sup>143</sup> The clear-cut separation between the people and the Royals, though still existent, became more blurred, and the united front that Britain presented to the world was not just a façade. The soldiers fought abroad to try and win the war, while civilians patiently awaited peace and hoped not to be attacked in their own homes. So when the surrender of Germany was finally announced on May 8, 1945, the whole country was overwhelmed with jubilation, and Victory in Europe Day (VE Day) was widely celebrated. The speech the King made on that very day<sup>144</sup> is a not only a token of his satisfaction about victory, but also of the close relationship the sovereign had with his people, as he united the nation around one joyful event – the end of the war – but also around his persona. The way he talked was itself an illustration of the evolution the monarch had undergone since the beginning of his reign: it was clear that he had worked on himself and his disability, since his voice was calmer and radiated more strength, more wisdom. Unlike Churchill’s speech,<sup>145</sup> which was much more factual, the King’s was heartfelt and endearing. This difference can be seen as the result of all those years of war, during which the two men’s relationships to the people did not evolve in the same way. Since the monarch tried to get closer to the nation, his speech appears to have been directed towards the same people he had visited during the war, as if he wanted to acknowledge their efforts and thank them for their patience and loyalty. Always insisting on unity, he made sure to include every individual who participated in the war effort, including women, who played a key part in wartime, holding up the fort and making sure the country was still running while men were mobilised in the Army: “let us remember the men in all services and the women in all services.”<sup>146</sup> The fact that he specifically dissociated men and women enabled him to acknowledge the role of each and every citizen in the war – something that was not that common at the time. He did not forget to include the entire Empire in his declaration: “the ordeals which you have endured throughout the Commonwealth and the Empire,”<sup>147</sup> so that he could also emphasise the unwavering unity of British territories, all over the world. His use of the pronoun “we” to refer to himself and his wife enhanced this idea of proximity, since he mentioned his private life in a public declaration. It insisted on the concept of them being in this together, royalty or not. Because he wanted – and had – to focus on the strength and glory of the country, he placed Great Britain as the saviour of the world on multiple occasions in his speech: “In defending ourselves we were defending the liberties of the whole

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<sup>143</sup> *Loc. cit.* Shawcross, *The Queen Mother*, 527.

<sup>144</sup> HM King George VI, *Speech on Victory in Europe Day*, May 08, 1945.

<sup>145</sup> Winston Churchill, *Speech on Victory in Europe Day*, May 08, 1945.

<sup>146</sup> *Loc. cit.* HM King George VI, *Speech on Victory in Europe Day*.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

world;”<sup>148</sup> “We knew that the enslaved and isolated peoples of Europe looked to us; their hopes were our hopes;”<sup>149</sup> “[We were the] last remaining barrier against a world-wide tyranny.”<sup>150</sup> While he was right about the fact that Britain played an important part in WW2, the last affirmation is to be nuanced with the growing power of the USA – which was threatening to that of the UK at the time and may have been the reason why he tried to glorify Britain in the first place.



Figure 11 – Unknown. (From left to right) Princess Elizabeth, Queen Elizabeth, PM Winston Churchill, King George VI and Princess Margaret on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, waving at the crowd on VE Day. May 8, 1945. Photograph

After such horrific times for Britain and for the world, the German surrender came as a relief. However, the rejoicing and celebration could only last so long. The aftermath of the war and the reconstruction of the country would lead to incredible hardships for the country – for instance, rationing only ended in 1954 in the UK – but the strong bond that had been forged between the people and the monarchy carried on beyond the conflict, up until George VI’s death in 1952. When studying the population’s reaction to their sovereign’s passing in her article on royal deaths, Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska mentioned several testimonies of people who were truly affected by the loss of their dear sovereign, such as this one: “The older woman agreed,

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

‘Same as if he was a father, really.’<sup>151</sup> This is proof of the people’s attachment to the sovereign, who had succeeded to win their fondness, and not just when they needed him but as a lasting feeling that would then transfer to his daughter Queen Elizabeth II.

When the war ended and the number of visits in the field decreased, the monarchy went back to its position as the supreme institution of the country. The link with the people, though still there, was different and began to be filtered through a third party: the media. With the diversification of the means through which information could be spread, the content and form of the articles and reports evolved, and the Royals, who had heated up passion and fascination during the war, were no exceptions to the rule.

### **3.2. The monarchy and the media: a “will they, won’t they?” relationship**

When talking about the past of the company, the BBC official website states that the 1930s were “the decade that changed everything.”<sup>152</sup> After the apex of written press in the late nineteenth century, the interwar period – that is to say the 1920s and the 1930s – saw some major changes in the media landscape. Interestingly enough, 1936 – a key date in the life of George VI – also made its mark in the history of the British media. Indeed, it was during that year that a British newspaper was printed in colour for the first time.<sup>153</sup> What is more, on November 2, 1936, that is to say roughly a month before Edward VIII’s abdication, the BBC started to regularly broadcast programmes on television, thus setting a certain consistency in the diffusion.<sup>154</sup> Though today those two events could be regarded as being of lesser importance given the formidable advances that have been made since then, they are evidence that the various media were blooming and that there was a true enrichment of the possibilities the population had to get informed. This breakthrough in technology progressively set new standards regarding the spreading of information, but also regarding the contents of the news themselves. Because people gained a quicker, easier access to what was going on in the world, this progress called for a broader, more varied offer, and this transformed the relationship between the media and the British nation. In like manner, this transformation also had an

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<sup>151</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Royal Death and Living Memorials: The Funerals and Commemoration of George V and George VI, 1936-52,” *Historical Research* 89, no. 243 (2015), 164, doi:10.1111/1468-2281.12108.

<sup>152</sup> “History of the BBC – 1930s”. BBC. Accessed March 29, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/timelines/zqbfyrd>

<sup>153</sup> “History of British Newspapers.” News Media Association. Accessed April 2, 2019. <http://www.newsmediauk.org/history-of-british-newspapers>

<sup>154</sup> “A Short History of British Television”. Science Media Museum. April 7, 2011. Accessed April 2, 2019. <https://blog.scienceandmuseum.org.uk/chronology-british-television/>.

impact on the Crown, who had to rethink their strategy regarding the press and adapt to the new order of things that was progressively implemented.

King George VI's coronation, which took place on May 12, 1937 at Westminster Abbey, embodied a milestone in the evolution of the relationship between the monarchy and the people, since it was "the first major electronic television outside broadcast."<sup>155</sup> Television acted as a true medium of connection between the Crown and the population, because it theoretically allowed the entire country to witness the event. In reality, since it was only the very beginnings of television, not all Britons were able to virtually attend the coronation, but there was still an important boost in the sales of television sets: more than 9,000 were bought around London at the time, so that people would be able to follow the whole ceremony.<sup>156</sup> The monarchy acknowledged this opportunity to reach more people and in a way, agreed to break the distance between Royals and commoners: "Changes in technology were clearly significant and the monarchy assiduously embraced the new mass media."<sup>157</sup>



Figure 12 – British Pathé. King George VI's coronation procession enters the Abbey. May 12, 1937. Video capture.

The sacred nature of the ceremony was still preserved, as the cameras did not directly intrude into the processions: they filmed from above and respected the moments of secret that could not be deconsecrated. That is why, for instance, the viewer was not able to watch the Anointing of the King – a part of the coronation during which he received sacred oil, away from intrusive eyes since he was hidden under a canopy.<sup>158</sup> The camera either recorded footage of the audience during this part of the ceremony, or was turned off for a few moments. Still within

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Loc. cit.* Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Royal Death and Living Memorials," 160.

<sup>158</sup> *Coronation of King George VI & Queen Elizabeth: Reels 3 & 4 (1937)*, British Pathé, 1937, Broadcast.

the goal of keeping a certain dignified dimension regarding the coronation, the broadcast was fully reviewed by close acquaintances of the Royal Family, their first fear being that it would be too embarrassing for the monarch: “It was censored before being broadcast by the archbishop of Canterbury and the Duke of Norfolk, fearful that the new king’s stammer might affect the broadcast. It did not do so, but they did cut a shot of his mother Queen Mary brushing away a tear.”<sup>159</sup> The fact that they censored something as innocent as a mother moved by such an event is proof that the glorified image of the monarch was not be altered in any way, even for the sake of appealing to the many, and that the Crown was not ready to be perceived as anything other than the supreme, glorious instance of the country.

Television was not the only medium to have covered the event. Newspapers abundantly reported the unfolding of the ceremony in the days following the coronation. Some issued special editions, like the respected *The Times*, the readership of which was considered to be intellectual and inclined to read about politics. So as to celebrate the national festivity, the paper released an exceptional, colour-printed edition on May 20, 1937 – less than a year after the first colours were added in a newspaper.<sup>160</sup>

In the 1930s, about 70% of the population read a newspaper on a daily basis,<sup>161</sup> and almost everybody read the Sunday issue.<sup>162</sup> This means that, even with the arrival of new media and the formidable progress that was made at the time regarding the way citizens could get access to information – with the gradual rise of radio, then television – people still trusted the written press more. That being said, the newspapers owners and press barons feared the introduction of these new media and made sure that some restrictions would be implemented so that the press could thrive.<sup>163</sup>

However, not all papers were trustworthy, since the twentieth century also saw the apparition of multiple tabloids, the goals of which being not so much to inform people thanks to facts as to make sure to write sensationalist articles and speculations about the private lives of celebrities – including those of the Royal Family.

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<sup>159</sup> Stephen Bates, “King Edward VIII Abdication: The Newspaper That Never Was,” *The Guardian*, (December 9, 2011), <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/dec/09/king-edward-viii-abdication-london-news>.

<sup>160</sup> This coloured illustration of the coronation can be found on the front-page of *The Times* (London), May 20, 1937.

<sup>161</sup> Adrian Bingham, “Monitoring The Popular Press: an Historical Perspective,” *History & Policy* (May 2, 2005), <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/monitoring-the-popular-press-an-historical-perspective>.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

The spectacular growth of the daily press in the inter-war years owed something to the simultaneous rise of cinema, and editors moved quickly to satisfy public curiosity about the stars of the silver screen. Indeed the Royal Commission on the Press noted with distaste in 1949 that many papers presented ‘the matrimonial adventures of a film star as though they possessed the same intrinsic importance as events affecting the peace of a continent’.<sup>164</sup>

The goal of these lighter, more flippant news was to counter the serious, heavy information that was conveyed by traditional papers, and to try and reach new audiences, such as lower social classes. This is what Adrian Bingham explains in his article about popular press in the UK:

The *Daily Mirror* further reduced its coverage of politics when it sought to reach a broad working-class audience from the mid-1930s. The Royal Commission found that in 1937 the *Mirror* devoted four times as much space to sports than it did to ‘serious’ news about politics, society, and the economy.<sup>165</sup>

The announcement of King Edward VIII’s abdication came amidst all these evolutions regarding the definition of what written press was. Yet, contrary to what one could think, the media reaction to the abdication was quite curbed. This restraint can be explained by the fact that the political brains who were involved in the whole organisation of the possible abdication feared a revolution would take place, had the people known about this too early. This is explained in Chassaing’s article:

Tout au long de la crise de l’abdication, les membres de l’*Establishment* craignirent que ses sujets, auprès de qui Édouard VIII était immensément populaire, ne déclenchassent des émeutes, sinon une révolution, en sa faveur. C’est ce qui explique le blackout médiatique sur la question au cours de l’automne 1936.<sup>166</sup>

As a result, the media – in particular the newspapers – were asked not to publish anything about the matter until it was sure that the King would renounce the throne, and that is why the news of the abdication came as a shock for most people, since the first accounts of the situation occurred about ten days before the act was officially signed: “[The news] only emerged in the British press 10 days before the abdication when the appositely-named Bishop Blunt of Bradford publicly attacked the king’s unspecified behaviour.”<sup>167</sup> Those in charge of the (non-) communication with the press about the whole affair considered the operation a success: “Garfield Williams, the dean of Manchester, told the *Guardian* that the press had been ‘perfectly

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaing, “La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre,” 187.

<sup>167</sup> *Loc. cit.* Bates, “King Edward VIII Abdication.”

marvellous' for not reporting the looming scandal."<sup>168</sup> What is surprising is that even the less serious newspapers and tabloids – such as the *Daily Mirror*, which published less reliable articles and focused on the sensationalist vision of an event – did not really attempt to dramatise the crisis and, although they did focus on the character of Wallis Simpson, did not drag Edward VIII's name through the dirt that much. This can either be seen as the result of a strongly-led campaign on behalf of the monarchy to try and stop publications, or as the reflection of the affection the population and the media had for King Edward. Either way, comments on the crisis were quite reserved, and mainly consisted in factual accounts in the mainstream media, such as *The Guardian*, which, on the day following Edward's official decision, mostly published facts and timelines to guide the reader through the event that had taken place – one example of this being their article called "The Crisis from Day to Day,"<sup>169</sup> which aimed to state point by point the different steps in the unfolding of the abdication. The broadcast Edward VIII decided to record following his stepping down the throne aroused more interest, but even the tabloids remained rather subdued. Some did romanticise the story in order to appeal to most of the population, promoting love, despair and oppression to sell more papers. For instance, on the front-page of the *Daily Mirror* on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1936, one of the biggest titles that can be read is an extract from Edward VIII's declaration: "I can't go on without the woman I love,"<sup>170</sup> and it is facing an extract of his mother Queen Mary's declaration: "Distress that is filling my heart."<sup>171</sup> Other than that, the references to the crisis were rather neutral, and at least respectful: *The Guardian* referred to the broadcast as being "moving", *The Sun* considered the whole thing to be "a sad story". After that, as the population and the monarchy went on rather quickly to other affairs, so did the media.

When WW2 broke out, the importance of the media in general really increased, because they made it possible for the nation to be kept informed of what was happening on the battlefield. Yet, television did not get to play any role in the broadcasting of the war news. Indeed, because it was feared that its signals could be used by the enemy to guide their airplanes over the country, it was decided that there would be no television broadcast for the whole duration of the war.<sup>172</sup> That is why, from September 1, 1939 to June 7, 1946, television was abandoned, and the population turned to the radio and newspapers to get information. As seen

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<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *The Guardian*, "The Crisis from Day to Day," December 11, 1936.

<sup>170</sup> *Daily Mirror*, Front-page, December 13, 1936.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> "The Day the BBC Closed Down," Teletronic, accessed April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019, [https://www.teletronic.co.uk/pages/history\\_of\\_the\\_bbc\\_7.html](https://www.teletronic.co.uk/pages/history_of_the_bbc_7.html).

in the previous part of this thesis, the whereabouts of the Royals were under deep scrutiny during the war, because they conveyed a comforting image of a normal couple who cared for the population. Their public outings were widely documented, especially in newspapers, since they could provide illustrations – and thus proof – of these visits. As it was known that the King believed in strong familial bonds, one of the strategies of the Crown to try and get more interest from the population was to put these ties forward.<sup>173</sup> Since he was often surrounded by his daughters and wife, the population, and thus the media, started to take an interest in the whole Royal Family, bringing out the monarchy at large: “Les deux guerres mondiales ont accentué le déplacement de la focalisation de la seule personne du souverain vers le cercle familial monarchique (les *Royals*).”<sup>174</sup>

The radio also played its part, bringing the monarch closer to his people as he addressed various issues regarding the country. The King himself realised the full potential of this tighter bond with the population, as it can be heard in his speech about the beginning of WW2 on September 3, 1939: “I send to every household of my peoples, both at home and overseas, this message [...] as if I were able to cross your threshold and speak to you myself.”<sup>175</sup> The comparison he made does strike a chord: whereas before the monarchy was a very secretive institution on which the population had but rare glimpses, they now were able to listen to their sovereign in the comfort of their own homes. The fact that the most symbolic figure of the UK could directly talk to them – as if they were in a private conversation – revolutionised the vision most people had of the Crown.

After the war, no major advances reformed the media. Television continued its slow progression, but not quite as quickly as one could have expected – probably because it was a time of reconstruction for the nation, who had lost a lot during the war and had been left devastated, both literally and figuratively.

When King George VI passed away on February 6, 1952, almost 75% of the British population had a radio set in their homes.<sup>176</sup> Nearly every Briton had the ability to listen to the radio, whether it was at home, at relatives’ or in public places. Between 1937 – at the time of George VI’s coronation – and 1952 – when he died – the equipment rate of British households had increased, and the country had finally begun to recover from its wounds. Newspapers were

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<sup>173</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaigne, “La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre,” 186.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>175</sup> *Loc. cit.* HM King George VI, *Empire Broadcast Message*.

<sup>176</sup> *Loc. cit.* Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Royal Death and Living Memorials,” 165.

still going strong, but television and radio had found their places in the habits of the wealthiest parts of the population.

The media played a big part in the national mourning that overwhelmed the nation. The mass coverage of the King's funeral gathered the population around their television and radio sets, and the media ended up having a role to play in the way people grieved: "[...] the B.B.C. structured people's days of mourning."<sup>177</sup> Every inhabitant of the Commonwealth who wanted to take part in the ceremony but could not attend the national gathering in London depended on their radio or television devices to feel close to one another in this difficult time. The fact that the ceremony was televised not only allowed each citizen of the Empire to participate in the surge of affection in their own way, but also opened the doors of a once rather private, solemn service for the whole world to see: "[...] live broadcasts offered a close-up, nationally shared experience. The B.B.C.'s broadcast of the procession [...] cemented a 'more immediate' contact with the monarchy."<sup>178</sup> The very organisation of the funeral had to take the presence of the media into account: "The most important change in 1952 [in comparison to 1936, when George V died] was the need to accommodate 'greater' press and B.B.C. requirements, and in addition to live radio broadcasts there was also 'some provision for television'.<sup>179</sup> It is interesting to consider this as a shift in the power that was gradually granted to the media in society. They used to be means of accounting for what was happening when information was not accessible to everyone but, paradoxically, as the offer became more and more diverse, the focus became less and less about facts *per se* and more about telling something, anything. By reinforcing the link between the monarchy and the people, the media became a fully-fledged actor in British society, acting as the third member of this relationship and connecting people of different backgrounds together. Their rise in influence occurred at a time of profound transformations in the country, since the twentieth century saw British society evolve into a more modern, more open version of itself.

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.3. The transformation of British society

Concurrently with the evolution of the monarchy, British society as a whole met with deep transformations. This is explained in Chassaing's article, in which he mentions that this momentum had set off in the nineteenth century: "Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle avait vu le fort recul de la "prérogative royale", c'est-à-dire de la capacité d'initiative politique effective du souverain, avec l'affirmation des pouvoirs au Premier ministre et de la responsabilité gouvernementale devant le Parlement."<sup>180</sup> This quote illustrates the gradual transfer of power from the elitist, aristocratic world to the people – represented by an elected Parliament and government. Just like the Crown and their gradual acceptance of new values, the British people – who, up until then, had known and promoted rigorous, traditional Victorian values – progressively opened their minds to other visions. In a way, the two World Wars forced their hands, as they found themselves confronted to ideologies that were different from theirs. The globalisation of interactions and the transition towards a more connected world shifted points of view. The twentieth century was that of progress and technological advances, and the country, like most European states, underwent a clear modernisation, especially under George VI's reign, which epitomised the acceleration of this process. After the time of industrial revolution came that of social evolution, even though it did not always go smoothly, since it was interrupted twice by major world conflicts.

Whereas the Victorian Era implied a rather dreadful, yet realistic picture of the lower classes, by the time of the accession of George VI the gap between the poor and the middle-class was not as oppressive as it once had been. The images that were often associated with society under Queen Victoria's reign – such as extreme poverty, misery, prostitution and loose morals, which were in total contradiction with the strictness of what Victorian values were – still existed, but they had faded away, the lines between the different parts of the population being less marked out.

Great Britain is quite the epitome of a country that is defined by a discriminatory classification of its population. As writer George Orwell once stated, "England is the most class-ridden country under the sun."<sup>181</sup> Indeed, the division of society between different social classes was – and in a way, still is – at the core of Britons' conceptions of their country. Yet, classes in the UK is a more complex concept that one might think, the frequent misconception being that the division only consists in three classes: the working class, the middle class and the upper

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<sup>180</sup> *Loc. cit.* Chassaing, "La société britannique, la monarchie et la guerre," 183.

<sup>181</sup> George Orwell, "Why I Write," *Gangrel* (summer 1946).

class. In fact, it is difficult to identify clear-cut separations within the population. David Cannadine, a British historian, wrote about this division of classes in his book *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*:

The development of capitalism in the seventeenth century, the industrial revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the rise of new technologies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the growth of consumer-oriented industries during the interwar years, and the decline of the great Victorian staples since 1945: all these phases of economic change turn out, on closer inspection, to have been extremely complex, varied, and gradual developments. In turn, this meant that changes in the economy were never so momentous, so straightforward, or so pervasive as to make possible or bring about the creation of those homogeneous, self-conscious classes of landowners, capitalists, and laborers locked in perpetual conflict with each other.<sup>182</sup>

This was even more so the case in the twentieth century. The two World Wars mobilised all men who were deemed fit to fight in the battlefield. Even though in the beginning, the upper classes had a choice about whether they would enrol in the military, by the time the soldier shortage started to be critical, everyone was called to serve, regardless of their social statuses. WW2 truly went down as the coming together of all social classes in order to overcome the ordeals of the conflict. Upper and lower classes, men and women, the youth and elderly people – everybody participated in the war effort in one way or another. Moreover, the acceleration of globalisation and world capitalism in the second part of the century made it even more difficult to stick to a strict definition of social classes. As a result, some considered classes to be an outdated concept altogether: “Some see the 20th century as the period when individuals became more important than wider society. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher even said: ‘There is no such thing as society... There are individual men and women’.”<sup>183</sup> This corroborates the perception of today’s world as being an individualistic one, the progression towards which had started in the twentieth century.

The two World Wars did more than blurring the lines between social divisions. They also enabled the recognition of the plurality of forces in the country, especially the one that women represented. King George VI was known for believing in “equal rights for all men and women.”<sup>184</sup> As it was seen earlier in this thesis with the speech he gave on VE Day, he did not

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<sup>182</sup> David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), chapter 1.

<sup>183</sup> “Everyday life in the 20th century,” BBC, accessed April 5, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/bitesize/guides/zqgj6f/revision/4>.

<sup>184</sup> *Loc. cit.* Ford, “The Monarchs”, 2.

forget to take women into consideration, thus following the global impetus towards the acknowledgement of women's place in British society.

When WW2 broke out, jobs that were once thought impossible for women to have became accessible. This was not so much for the sake of gender equality than for the reason that, as men were leaving for the battlefield, the nation still needed labour force so that the factories could provide essential resources for the conflict, such as weapons. With the men who were not fit for combat and children, women constituted the 'home front', that is to say the civilians who stayed at home during the war, but still took part in the war work so that Britain could win. Because they had to manage both their new jobs and their lives as 'housewives', they became more respected than before.

During the War, the number of women that were employed reached 27% of the female population,<sup>185</sup> and a feeling of confidence spread amongst them, as they were now needed by their country and not only deemed worthy of staying at home and taking care of the children. They were still discriminated against and were paid way less than men, but it is believed that this participation in the war effort lessened the intolerance of men towards their female counterparts and enabled the beginning of a slow, gradual process of acknowledgment of women's worth.<sup>186</sup>

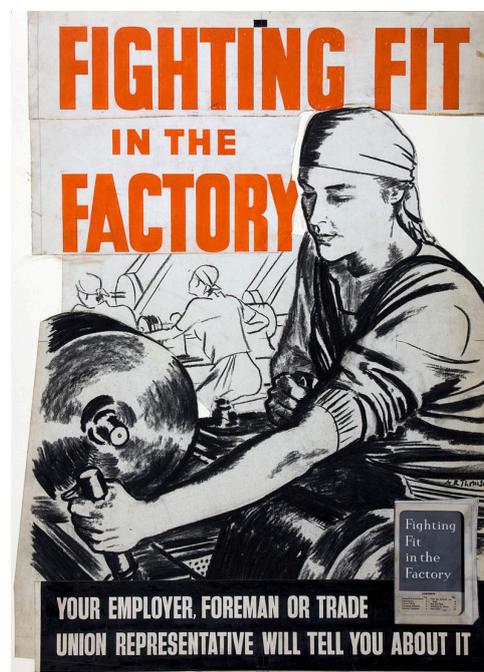


Figure 13 – Thomson, A. R. *Fighting Fit in the Factory*. 1939 - 1946. War Poster.

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<sup>185</sup> Ian Gazeley, "Women's Pay in British Industry During the Second World War," *The Economic History Review* 61, no. 3 (2008), doi:10.1111/j.1468-0289.2007.00412.x.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

However, women did not only hold the fort from home. Some also directly participated in the war by joining the Army, even though they were not authorised to fight on the battlefield. Princess Elizabeth served as a mechanic and became an example in the last years of the conflict. Like her, some women enrolled in the military, mostly as machine operators or clerks. They lived in the same conditions as men but could not access the frontline.<sup>187</sup> When the war ended, soldiers and the nation in general were thankful for the women who had stepped up during the conflict, thus setting off an overall better vision of the assets women could be in a modern society. However, the fight for equality was far from being over, since when men came back from the frontline, it was considered obvious than women would go back to their previous occupations, that is to say tending to their houses and children:

As the war ended, however, printed publications took for granted the return of women to the home. It was understood throughout the war that what Britain's women were doing was really 'a man's job'. So many of them were dismissed from their work once peace was declared. Government policy encouraged men to return to their pre-war occupations [...]; some women were kept on - not least because they were cheaper to employ than men.<sup>188</sup>

Although the war did enable the female population to thrive and achieve greater things that they would have normally been able to do with the restrictions that were imposed on them, it only instated a feeble momentum towards equality, if a broader point of view is taken into account. This did not mean that this time did not matter after all, but it definitely meant that the road to genuine acknowledgement was still long.

After the end of the WW2, Great Britain was left in a state of desolation and needed reconstruction. The problem was that they lacked workforce to build the country back up: many men had either been killed in the war or incapacitated by their battle wounds, and women went back to their housewife statuses. When the time came to start rebuilding, the government found that it would be almost impossible to achieve without external help. That is why, in 1948, they decided to implement the British Nationality Act<sup>189</sup>, which opened the floodgates of immigration. The act authorised the population of the Empire to work and live in the UK without needing a visa. It thus attracted many inhabitants of the Commonwealth and set off a significant rise in immigration in the UK: "New Commonwealth immigration rose from 3,000 in 1953 to 46,800 in 1956 and thence to 136,400 in 1961. These were largely economic

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<sup>187</sup> Carol Harris, "Women Under Fire in World War Two," *BBC*, February 17, 2011, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain\\_wwtwo/women\\_at\\_war\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/women_at_war_01.shtml).

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> Great Britain, *British Nationality Act* (London: J. A. Dole, 1948).

immigrants, rather than asylum seekers.”<sup>190</sup> This marked the beginning of a real multiculturalism in the country, since many people from many different nationalities and cultures converged towards the UK, beginning a new diversity amongst the population.

The Second World War aside, King George VI’s reign can be considered as being a rather calm one regarding the internal tensions in the country. It was not a time of pomp and ostentation either. Like his father George V, the new King promoted a simple, traditional vision of life, the best embodiment of which being himself and his family. Rather than endorsing different standards depending on the social class or gender one was born in, he put forward equal expectations for everybody: “[George V and George VI] made mid-20th-century Britain into a nation that was conventional, stable, prudish, dingy and insular.”<sup>191</sup> His and his father’s reigns – which are sometimes referred to as the Neo-Georgian Era – set principles of rigour, hence the lack of major civil strife within the UK during George VI’s time on the throne: “Neo-Georgian Britain was nothing if not self-respecting and therefore law-abiding.”<sup>192</sup> He was particularly attached to exercising and enjoying the outdoors, hence why he was so keen to advocate for more physical activity for the country in general: “[He believed] in the physical, moral and social benefits of outdoor recreation.”<sup>193</sup> Even before he was King, George VI contributed a lot to the promotion of the great outdoors, as he was a believer in the fact that it helped people live a healthier, more righteous life. He was particularly concerned with the youth – who he thought needed a push towards better physical exercise – and was known for it: “[Churchill] highlighted the king’s concern about young people’s welfare, not just ‘fun and sports... but their whole outlook and spirit’, in short their ‘upbringing as good citizens’.”<sup>194</sup> He became a true ambassador of sports, making sure to donate time and energy to the cause. He was the embodiment of what is now called the “concept of the welfare monarchy,”<sup>195</sup> that is to say that “the British royal family has forged a new and popular role for itself as patron, promoter, and fund-raiser for the underprivileged and the deserving,” as it is defined in the abstract to Frank Prochaska’s book *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy*.<sup>196</sup> His efforts did make an impact on the nation’s relationship to physical activity, and they begot the

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<sup>190</sup> “Modern Immigration in the United Kingdom,” Wikipedia, April 7, 2019, accessed April 8, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern\\_immigration\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_immigration_to_the_United_Kingdom).

<sup>191</sup> *Loc. cit.* Davenport-Hines, “George V: The Unexpected King.”

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Loc. cit.* Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Royal Death and Living Memorials,” 158.

<sup>194</sup> *Loc. cit.* Davenport-Hines, “George V: The Unexpected King.”

<sup>195</sup> *Loc. cit.* Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Royal Death and Living Memorials,” 161.

<sup>196</sup> Frank K Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

creation and patronage of various institutions, so that this vision of his would become a reality for the many.

He served as president of the National Playing Fields Association (N.P.F.A.) from its inception in 1925 until his accession in 1936. The N.P.F.A., which brought together representatives from sports governing bodies, youth, welfare and public health organizations, trade unions and local authorities, campaigned for more playing fields and playgrounds. The prince of Wales supported the association's fundraising efforts.<sup>197</sup>

Even when he was King, George VI kept on making sure that his vision for the youth was implemented, and it eventually turned out to be part of his legacy. When he died, playing fields and sports facilities were built in his name, under the supervision of his daughter Queen Elizabeth II or his wife the Queen Mother, who considered them the best way to remember him.<sup>198</sup>

It is true that the Second World War really contributed to the transformation of British society under George VI's reign. Because of its very nature, the conflict disrupted many advancements, and its aftermath slowed down progress in the country – but since all of Europe was affected too, Britain did not fall behind. However, quite paradoxically, the war also enabled some advances in the way the country worked together, and prompted some changes in the way society functioned as a whole. King George VI, a more open-minded monarch with a steady mind-set, also played his part in the modernisation of the country, offering a refreshing vision of what the nation should do in order to live in harmony and avoid tensions.

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<sup>197</sup> *Loc. cit.* Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Royal Death and Living Memorials," 169.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

## CONCLUSION

On paper, timid, frail Prince Albert did not look much to step in the shoes of the monarch of one of the most powerful countries and Empires of the twentieth century. He led “a ghastly life,”<sup>199</sup> was quite neglected as a child in comparison to his brother; and his health problems made him an insecure, vulnerable man who looked as though he could never rise up to the task of governing Great Britain. Yet, he succeeded in proving his critics wrong and turned out to be a considerate sovereign who cared for his country, even though at first he baulked at the idea of assuming the throne.

What this thesis tried to focus on was how the evolution of the British monarchy occurred concurrently with that of the country upon which the sovereign exercised his authority, while taking into account the influence of the monarch himself on this process. The British monarchy has been, and still is, an institution that is renowned in most parts of the Globe for its secular existence and its symbolic figures. In many regards, it has remained the same throughout the centuries, following rules that did not evolve that much and that, still today, can be found as guiding principles of the organisation of the monarchy. However, the twentieth century revolutionised many aspects of the political and social lives of most states, not just in the British Empire but in the world at large. From that, it is only natural to consider the monarchy as an entity that grew, evolved and transformed together with the nation.

Without the existence of the nation, the Crown would have no one to lead, and thus the study of the relationship between the institution and the population is crucial to understand what was at stake at the time. Yet more than that, the bond that was forged between the King himself and his people was particularly interesting to analyse. Even though the Crown works as one entity, the role of the monarch – who is the figure that represents royalty – is not to be undermined. In George VI's case, it is indeed his persona and his opinions that commanded the respect of his people – even though it took them some time to bestow their trust upon him. Had he not considered his accession to the throne as a duty to honour and respect, his reign could have gone in an entire other direction. His determined character – a trait best illustrated by his resilience regarding his stammer – allowed him to face times of grave troubles in the country. Standing steady in the face of adversity, he in a way embodied the beacon of hope that his people needed to keep on going. What is striking is that even though, in some ways, the institution needed him to represent this new, more caring version of the Crown, and his visits were certainly a way to show that the institution stood with the people, the King – and his wife

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<sup>199</sup> *Loc. cit.* Ziegler, *George VI: The Dutiful King*.

– did not seem to play a part when they were in direct contact with the population. This is a very good example of the progressive opening of minds of the Royals, who had no choice but to try and find a balance between the regal and the popular image they passed on to the nation.

British society was not only reduced to the King and the population. Considering the different changes that occurred in the political system, it is safe to say that on a global scale, British politics modernised and followed other European countries' tendency to grant more power to the people than before. The progressive loss of influence of the royal court and of the nobility is proof that the population expected to have a say regarding the policies in the country. Ever since the right to vote had been extended to all women and men above twenty-one,<sup>200</sup> it had become clear that the political world could not keep on making decisions for the people without including them. Consequently, this new vision of politics and decision-making also affected the monarchy: age-old institutions were not particularly looked on with a favourable eye, and their influence upon the social and political life of the country took a blow.

Twentieth century Britain also saw the apparition of new actors in society, thus disrupting an established order of things that had been considered the norm up until then. After the industrial revolution and its ground-breaking advances in the second part of the nineteenth century, the following years focused more on the rise of finance and capitalist systems, thus shifting the perspective of what was at the core of British society in the twentieth century. Paradoxically, it was also a time when a welfare state was instituted in the country, meaning that the government still had a role to play in its political life and was not ready to give in to the attractive prospect of privatisation. The progress in technologies gave new media an opportunity to thrive, with a major downside being that they were granted more and more importance in the social landscape, reaching for new heights in terms of influence over the population and their perception of what surrounded them – including the monarchy. The fact that the Crown decided to embrace these new means of communication is surprising, given its reputation as an outdated institution that was too distant, too superior to the people to do such a thing. This is one of the reasons why the twentieth century was truly an accelerator of the transformation of the monarchy. It was only about eighty years ago that Edward VIII had to abdicate so that he could marry a divorced foreigner. Yet, during his niece Elizabeth II's reign in the second part of the century, divorces happened within the monarchy and directly affected members of the Royal Family – for instance, that of Princess Margaret, the Queen's sister; or that of Prince Charles, her son. The instigation of a new wind of change within the institution during George VI's reign proved to have been a success quite quickly. Along with the growing

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<sup>200</sup> Great Britain, *Equal Franchise Act* (London, 1928).

media exposure came a modernisation of the monarchy, at least regarding its tolerance and opening to the world.

While this project tried to include as many aspects of George VI's reign as possible, some parts of what went on as he was Head of State did not make it to the final cut. Though interesting, the pre-war years, that is once the 1936 abdication crisis had passed, were not thoroughly analysed in this thesis, since they did not really bring a new light on the reign of the monarch. They mainly consisted in a time of adjustment for the King and his family, and since the bond with the population still had to be built, it was also a time where the Royals did not particularly interact with the nation. The prospect of war becoming more and more obvious, the Royal couple did visit France, meeting with officials in order to make sure of their support and alliance should a conflict break out.<sup>201</sup> However, in hindsight, it really was the Second World War that forced them to come out of their shells.

Relationships with Europe also widely developed at the time. Post-WW2 Europe was a chaotic collection of devastated countries that needed rebuilding, and the emergence of American influence over the continent played an important part in the reconstructions of the nations. Though the official creation of the European Union (EU) would not occur until the 1957 Treaty of Rome<sup>202</sup>, the presages of the future European Union were set at the end of the war, with the need of a united group of states who could count on one another for financial and strategic support. Winston Churchill even praised the creation of the United States of Europe, following the American model<sup>203</sup> even though, some ten years later when the EU would be created, the UK would not be a member. It only entered the EU in 1973.

Other organisations, encompassing more countries throughout the world, were imagined at the time of George VI's kingship, the best example of this being the United Nations (UN). Established in 1945, its main goal was to unite most of the world's nations so that together, they could maintain lasting peace. The UK got to play an important part in this regard, since it became one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, alongside France, the URSS, China and the United States. The interest in improving relationships with different actors related not only to the British government, but also to the King, who incidentally was the

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<sup>201</sup> *Loc. cit.* Bradford, *George VI*, 269.

<sup>202</sup> Belgium, *et al*, *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union* (Rome, 1957).

<sup>203</sup> "European Union," Wikipedia, April 15, 2019, accessed April 15, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union).

first official visitor of the UN, in January 1946.<sup>204</sup> This again was consistent with the idea of a new doorway to the world, branching out to new horizons and new ties.

In one word, George VI's reign could be summarised as being that of 'opening'. Either with its own people or regarding the world and the Empire, Great Britain overcame a great number of ordeals between 1936 and 1952 and, when one could think that this would have led them to cut themselves from the outside and reject change, it in a way forced them to evolve and follow the course of the ever-changing world. The King was a figure of this new era, and even though today he is not remembered as one of the most beloved or one of the greatest monarchs in British history,<sup>205</sup> he left his mark thanks to his reaction to such troubled times. René Massigli, a French Ambassador who is quoted in Sarah Bradford's work, stated after the King died: "If the 'greatness' of a King [...] can be measured by the extent to which his qualities correspond to the needs of the nation at a given moment in its history, then George VI was a great King, and perhaps a very great King."<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> *King George VI Visits Central Hall in London*, United Nations, London, January 9, 1946, Broadcast.

<sup>205</sup> When looking at different rankings of what monarch people considered as the greatest of history, George VI's name does not appear often, contrary to his daughter Queen Elizabeth II for example.

<sup>206</sup> René Massigli, quoted in *Loc. cit.* Bradford, *George VI*, xvii.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### The British Empire in 1931

<u>Territories</u>	<u>Area (square miles)</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Population per square mile</u>
<u>United Kingdom</u>	94,728	44,200,000	469
<u>Dominions</u>			
Canada	3,684,723	9,787,000	3
Australia	2,974,581	5,436,000	2
New Zealand	104,225	1,500,000	14
Union of South Africa	471,917	6,929,000	15
Irish Free State	26,600	2,972,000	112
Newfoundland	152,734	264,000	2
Southern Rhodesia	149,000	1,033,000	7
Malta	122	225,000	2,000
<i>Dominions Sub-Total</i>	<i>7,658,180</i>	<i>72,346,000</i>	<i>9</i>
<u>Indian Empire</u>	1,805,332	318,942,000	177
<u>Colonies</u>			
Colonies in Europe	2	21,000	10,500
Colonies in Asia	320,931	13,708,000	43
Colonies in Africa	3,199,357	42,435,000	13
Colonies in Americas	170,757	1,091,000	6
Colonies in Oceania	200,111	1,140,000	6
<i>Colonies Sub-Total</i>	<i>3,835,250</i>	<i>59,395,000</i>	<i>15</i>
<u>British Empire Total</u>	13,355,015	450,402,000	34

SOURCE: Alcock, James. "The British Empire in 1931". *Historical Atlas of the British Empire*. 2016. Accessed March 15, 2019. <https://www.atlasofbritepire.com/second-world-war-1.html>.

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## EXPLOITATION DE PISTES DIDACTIQUES

### INTRODUCTION

Dans le cadre de ce mémoire, il nous est demandé d'envisager la mise en application de notre sujet d'étude avec les classes dans lesquelles nous exerçons cette année. Professeure stagiaire au collège Jean Rostand de Craponne, je prends en charge l'enseignement de l'anglais pour deux classes de 4<sup>ème</sup> et une classe de 5<sup>ème</sup>. Ces deux niveaux s'inscrivent dans le cycle 4 des programmes de l'Éducation Nationale, qui tend à viser l'autonomie des élèves dans une situation de la vie courante, tant en compréhension qu'en expression. Le niveau du Cadre Européen Commun de Référence en Langues (CECRL) visé en fin de cycle est le niveau A2 dans toutes les activités langagières, ainsi qu'au moins deux d'entre elles validées au niveau B1. Après avoir appris les fondamentaux de la langue en 6<sup>ème</sup>, les élèves de 5<sup>ème</sup>, puis de 4<sup>ème</sup> complexifient peu-à-peu leur expression en enrichissant leur vocabulaire, en approfondissant leurs compétences orales et écrites et en s'ouvrant sur le monde anglophone et ses différentes cultures. Dans cette optique, l'enseignant se doit de leur proposer des séquences pédagogiques qui leur permettront de progresser dans ces domaines, tout en exploitant des supports didactiques adaptés à leur niveau et aux objectifs visés sur l'année. Les séquences pédagogiques s'ancrent dans quatre notions spécifiques au cycle 4 :

- Langages
- Voyages et Migrations
- École et société
- Rencontre avec d'autres cultures

Aussi, l'étude du règne du roi George VI se prête particulièrement à l'enseignement de l'anglais au collège, puisque le roi incarne l'histoire de la Grande-Bretagne. La monarchie britannique en tant qu'institution qui a évolué au fil des années est aussi un aspect de ce mémoire qui correspond aux objectifs pédagogiques d'une classe de collège. Typique de la Grande-Bretagne, c'est un symbole du pays dont les élèves ont potentiellement connaissance, puisqu'aujourd'hui, la famille royale est l'objet de toutes les attentions, notamment depuis l'avènement des réseaux sociaux, qui permettent à la Couronne d'être connectée au monde entier. Même si l'évolution historique de la monarchie n'est pas nécessairement connue des élèves, ils ont parfois quelques notions sur son organisation de base.

Dans le cadre de ma progression pédagogique avec mes classes de 4<sup>ème</sup>, ma deuxième séquence de l'année a porté sur la monarchie britannique. Elle visait à étudier la monarchie en

tant qu'institution ainsi que son rôle dans la société, mais permettait aussi aux élèves de découvrir des figures emblématiques de l'histoire de la royauté. Elle n'incluait pas l'étude de George VI à proprement parler, puisque sa biographie a uniquement servi de support à l'évaluation de fin de séquence. Cependant, après avoir étudié son règne et l'évolution de la société à cette époque, je compte à l'avenir ré-exploiter ce chapitre en incluant des supports liés à cette période, afin que les élèves puissent également découvrir ce monarque. La présentation ci-dessous prend donc en considération ces modifications : elle fait d'abord état de la séquence telle qu'elle a été présentée aux élèves, puis telle qu'elle a été repensée et modifiée afin d'inclure une étude de George VI et de son temps.

### **OBJECTIFS DE LA SEQUENCE**

Cette séquence, intitulée *This Is Royal!* a été la seconde séquence de l'année. Elle a été mise en œuvre avec mes élèves de 4<sup>e</sup> au mois de novembre et a duré environ quinze séances, évaluation sommative<sup>207</sup> comprise. C'est un chapitre qui a été entièrement créé par mes soins et qui n'est pas inspiré d'un manuel scolaire. Elle s'inscrit principalement dans la notion *Rencontre avec d'autres cultures*, puisqu'elle familiarise les élèves à la culture britannique, mais elle pourrait également entrer dans les notions *École et société* (puisque'elle sensibilise les élèves à l'organisation sociale et politique d'un pays étranger) et *Voyages et migrations* (grâce à la découverte d'un pays étranger).

Un tableau récapitulatif présentant de manière synthétique les objectifs de la séquence telle qu'elle avait été originellement imaginée est disponible en annexe 1.

### **Objectifs culturels**

L'objectif de cette séquence est avant tout culturel. Ainsi, le but premier pour les élèves est qu'ils se familiarisent avec la monarchie britannique dans son ensemble, c'est-à-dire à la fois en tant qu'institution, mais aussi en prenant en compte les monarques emblématiques qui l'ont inscrite dans l'histoire. Les élèves ont donc l'occasion de découvrir quel rôle tient la monarchie dans la société britannique, et de comprendre que la reine Elizabeth II, qu'ils connaissent pour la plupart, ne dirige pas le pays et n'a pas vraiment de pouvoir politique à proprement parler. Dans la séquence originale, les élèves étudient également le roi Henry VIII, la reine Victoria et

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<sup>207</sup> Une évaluation sommative intervient en général en fin de séquence et permet d'attester des acquis des élèves. Elle est la plupart du temps notée.

la reine Elizabeth, en raison de leurs vies sulfureuses et/ou de leur impact, positif ou non, sur l'histoire de la monarchie britannique. Dans l'optique d'intégrer l'étude de la personne de George VI, il est tout à fait envisageable de l'inclure dans la séquence, le roi étant intéressant tant sur le plan personnel (*via* son image de roi faible qui n'était pas destiné à régner) que sur le plan historique, puisqu'il a permis une transformation de la relation entre la Couronne et la nation.

## **Objectifs linguistiques**

### *Objectifs grammaticaux*

La monarchie étant une institution ancienne, et les monarques étudiés étant pour la plupart décédés, l'utilisation du prétérit simple s'est imposée comme objectif grammatical principal de la séquence. Grâce à l'étude de biographies et faits passés, les élèves ont été amenés à mobiliser le prétérit afin d'être à mêmes de comprendre les documents qui leur étaient donnés, mais également afin de pouvoir s'exprimer sur les différents sujets traités. Cette approche du passé s'est faite de manière progressive : les élèves ont d'abord utilisé la forme affirmative, puis la forme négative, et enfin la forme interrogative. Cela leur a permis d'appréhender de manière globale l'utilisation de ce temps, tout en leur laissant le temps d'assimiler petit à petit les différentes règles d'application.

Le prétérit et ses différentes formes représentant un travail d'assimilation important de la part des élèves, ils ont représenté la majorité des objectifs grammaticaux de la séquence. C'est pour cela que l'autre attente de ce chapitre était moins exigeante : il s'agissait de faire comprendre aux élèves que le déterminant THE n'était pas utilisé avant un titre royal – et plus généralement une profession – si celui-ci est suivi du nom de la personne désignée (par exemple, la différence entre « The Queen » et « Ø Queen Elizabeth »).

### *Objectifs lexicaux*

La présence de dates de naissance, règne et décès des différents souverains dans les documents a été l'occasion de réviser la construction de celles-ci avec les élèves (tant les jours et les mois que les années).

Le chapitre a également permis de mobiliser le champ lexical de la royauté, ainsi que le vocabulaire lié à la monarchie en général : « sovereign, monarch, King/Queen, monarchy, title, power, crown, jubilee... ». C'est un lexique qui est peu connu des élèves, car ils le rencontrent

globalement peu au cours de leur scolarité. Afin de décrire les différents monarques étudiés, les élèves ont également eu à mobiliser des adjectifs correspondants à l'apparence physique ou à la personnalité des souverains : « Henry VIII was cruel ; he looked proud ; Victoria looked sad/depressed... ».

Enfin, le dernier objectif lexical de cette séquence était de sensibiliser les élèves aux différents éléments qui constituent une biographie et permettent de raconter la vie d'un souverain : « be born on/in, die, reign, celebrate, become, coronation... ». Ils se sont également familiarisés avec certains connecteurs logiques, qui leur permettent de relier des phrases entre elles – un objectif qui correspond aux attentes du CECRL concernant l'expression écrite de niveau A2 (en annexe 2) : « and, but, then, after that, so... ».

### *Objectifs phonologiques*

Au travers des différents échanges oraux en classe, les élèves ont eu la possibilité de produire de nombreux énoncés, pour lesquels une certaine correction phonologique est nécessaire. Ainsi, l'objectif phonologique principal de la séquence a été la prononciation de la terminaison –ED à la fin des verbes au prétérit affirmatif régulier. Travaillée au cours de la séquence avec les élèves, elle a été formalisée en fin de chapitre à l'aide d'une activité ludique que les élèves ont appréciée : poser sa main sur ses cordes vocales et « ressentir » leur vibration ou non, afin de déterminer si le phonème correspondant à –ED était [d] ou [t].

En parallèle, les élèves ont pu travailler la prononciation des nombres cardinaux, au travers des différentes dates rencontrées, mais aussi ordinaux, lorsqu'ils se trouvaient confrontés au nom d'un roi ou d'une reine : « Elizabeth II, Henry VIII... ». Une attention particulière a également été portée à la prononciation de certains mots-clés du chapitre. Ainsi, l'accentuation des mots « monarch, monarchy, sovereign » a fait l'objet d'un temps d'analyse et de répétition accru, afin que les élèves l'assimilent et la retiennent.

### **Objectifs pragmatiques**

Toutes les activités langagières ont été travaillées dans la séquence, à savoir :

- L'expression écrite (EE)
- La compréhension écrite (CE)
- L'expression orale en continu (EOC)
- L'expression orale en interaction (EOI)
- La compréhension orale (CO)

La compréhension écrite a été l'activité langagière principale de la séquence, et ce en raison de la prévalence de la biographie comme objet d'étude. De ce fait, l'étude de textes a constitué un objectif pragmatique majeur, afin de permettre aux élèves d'apprendre à repérer les informations clés dans un texte, même sans qu'ils en aient une compréhension exhaustive. De même, ils ont pu réfléchir aux moyens de contourner d'éventuels obstacles lexicaux afin de comprendre le sens global d'un énoncé (en décomposant les mots, en passant par le contexte...). Enfin, l'étude de biographies leur a permis de se familiariser avec ce genre, qu'ils ont dû par la suite imiter lors de leur tâche finale.

### **Tâche finale**

La tâche finale de la séquence consistait en la rédaction par les élèves de la biographie d'un monarque célèbre. Afin que ce soit une réelle production de la part des élèves, et non un simple exercice de copier-coller, seules des informations factuelles leur ont été données, et c'était à eux de rédiger des phrases grammaticalement justes qui remobilisaient le lexique appris au cours de la séquence et qui, mises ensembles, formaient une biographie en bonne et due forme. La tâche finale a été évaluée et notée, puisqu'elle faisait partie de l'évaluation de fin de séquence donnée aux élèves. En l'occurrence, le souverain sur lequel les élèves devaient rédiger leur biographie était George VI, qui ne faisait alors pas partie des monarques étudiés dans la séquence et avait seulement été mentionné lors de l'étude de la vie d'Elizabeth II. Les informations le concernant ont été données sous la forme de simples faits, d'images ou de schémas. Le document qui a été donné aux élèves est présenté en annexe 3.

Afin de préparer les élèves à cette tâche finale, l'une des séances du chapitre a été l'occasion de leur faire réaliser une tâche intermédiaire, à savoir une activité en binôme qui leur a permis de remobiliser toutes les structures du prétérit et a favorisé l'expression orale en interaction. Le but de la tâche intermédiaire était que les élèves aient une biographie complète d'Elizabeth II en fin d'heure. L'activité s'appuyait sur le principe de *l'information gap*, c'est-à-dire que les deux élèves du groupe ne disposaient pas des mêmes informations et devaient, pour avoir une vue globale de la vie d'Elizabeth II, poser des questions à leur binôme. Pour répondre à leur camarade, chaque élève disposait d'un document comportant des faits à propos de la reine. En cela, la séance a fait l'objet d'une différenciation pédagogique pour les élèves, puisque les deux documents étaient de natures et de difficultés différentes. Les deux élèves devaient

être en mesure de remplir entièrement la fiche qui leur avait été distribuée. Les documents donnés à l'occasion de cette séance se trouvent en annexe 4 (document 11a, 11b, 11c).

## EXPLOITATION DES SUPPORTS

### Présentation et exploitation des supports de la séquence d'origine

La séquence n'est composée que de documents authentiques, au nombre de dix dans le chapitre qui a été fait avec les élèves. La liste des documents utilisés se trouve en annexe 1, dans le tableau de présentation globale de la séquence ; les documents en eux-mêmes sont présentés en annexe 4.

Comme anticipation du thème de la séquence, et pour que les élèves se familiarisent et déduisent eux-mêmes le sujet d'étude du chapitre, une première approche d'anticipation a été effectuée au cours des trois premières séances.

Pour ce faire, la photographie de la famille royale sur le balcon de Buckingham Palace (document 1) a été projetée au tableau. L'un des rituels d'analyse que les élèves ont acquis consiste à se poser des questions sur ce qu'ils ont devant les yeux. Cela permet de leur faire travailler la formulation de questions simples et incite les élèves les plus faibles et/ou timides à prendre la parole. Cela donne donc des productions telles que : « *Who are they? / Where are they? / What are they doing? / Why are they here? ...* ». Des prompts (*Why? What? Who? Where? ...*) sont écrits au tableau et permettent ensuite de guider les élèves.<sup>208</sup> Une fois cela fait, les élèves ont pu décrire la photographie : ils ont reconnu certaines personnalités, mais pas toutes, et cela a été l'occasion pour eux de s'exprimer sur les liens généalogiques qui liaient toutes ces personnes. La multitude de personnes sur l'image a facilité l'étude des différents titres royaux (« *Prince, Duke, Queen, Duchess, Princess...* ») que les élèves ont pu élucider grâce à un exercice de *matching* entre les portraits des personnes et leurs titres. C'est également à ce moment qu'a été vue la règle selon laquelle c'est le déterminant zéro, et non THE, qui est utilisé avant un titre royal qui est suivi du nom de la personnalité.

L'étude du document 2 (un extrait de la présentation du rôle de la monarchie sur son site officiel) a permis de dégager les tenants et les aboutissants de ce en quoi consiste la position de souverain. Les élèves ont compris que ce n'était pas la reine qui prenait les décisions pour le

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<sup>208</sup> Ce rituel, qui est utilisé à chaque étude d'un document iconographique, sera par la suite mentionné dans ce mémoire sous l'appellation « rituel par les questions ».

pays, et qu'elle avait un rôle symbolique plus que réellement décisionnel. Afin de compléter le document, et pour que les élèves disposent d'une vision globale de ce qu'est le système politique en Grande Bretagne, ils ont dû, dans le cadre de leurs devoirs à la maison, chercher ce qu'était le pouvoir exécutif, et qui le détenait au Royaume-Uni.

Enfin, pour clore l'étude générale de ce qu'a été, et est encore la monarchie, ils ont pu étudier une frise chronologique des différents monarques britanniques dans l'histoire du pays (document 3). Le but de ce document n'était bien sûr pas qu'ils connaissent la liste exhaustive de tous les souverains, mais qu'ils prennent conscience de la multitude de personnalités qui ont fait l'histoire de la Grande-Bretagne. Cela a aussi eu l'avantage de leur faire comprendre ce que sont les dynasties – sens qu'ils ont déduit grâce à la présence de diverses couleurs sur la frise. Au terme de ces trois séances, les élèves ont su conclure que le thème du chapitre serait la monarchie britannique.

La séquence s'est ensuite poursuivie avec l'étude d'un premier monarque emblématique : Henri VIII. J'ai trouvé doublement intéressant de se concentrer sur sa vie : d'une part, sa personnalité sulfureuse était susceptible de plaire aux élèves ; d'autre part, son impact sur l'histoire britannique a été conséquent, puisqu'il a créé l'Église anglicane, et reste à ce jour l'un des monarques les plus détestés. Trois documents ont été utilisés pour avoir une vision d'ensemble de son histoire ; ils ont nécessité cinq séances d'étude.

Premièrement, une peinture représentant Henry VIII en habits de cour (document 4) a été projetée. Après l'étape du rituel par les questions, les élèves ont pu décrire l'image. Ils ont su remarquer le caractère ancien du document, et ont repéré l'air supérieur du roi, ce qui a permis de rebondir sur le document suivant.

Le document 5, une courte biographie comprenant les faits les plus marquants de sa vie, mentionne en effet sa cruauté et son sens de supériorité. En plus de dégager les points importants du texte, le document a été propice à la formulation de la règle de construction du prétérit affirmatif. Les élèves ont vivement réagi à l'étude de ce document. Le fait qu'il ait eu six femmes et qu'il ait créé sa propre religion leur a fait prendre conscience du caractère sulfureux du roi et a capté leur attention.

Puisque les élèves avaient réagi à la nature provocatrice d'Henri VIII, la transition avec le document 6 (la chanson parodique retraçant les six mariages du roi) s'est faite assez naturellement. Après la projection d'une capture d'écran de la vidéo afin que les élèves émettent des hypothèses sur le contenu, le document a été projeté une première fois dans son intégralité. Le caractère grotesque du document a tout de suite séduit les élèves, mais cela a également desservi le traitement de la chanson. En effet, ils ont plutôt eu tendance à se focaliser sur sa

nature humoristique que sur son contenu. Malgré tout, le document a permis de se familiariser avec les différentes épouses du roi et leur destin, grâce à une étude segmentée de la parodie. L'exploitation de ce document a marqué la fin de la partie sur Henri VIII.

La reine Victoria a été le sujet d'étude suivant. Ce segment de la séquence a mobilisé trois documents et nécessité cinq heures de cours.

L'étude de sa personne a commencé avec le document 7 (un portrait de la reine, âgée, portant le deuil). Après être passés par le rituel par les questions, les élèves ont trouvé la reine triste et sévère, et m'ont demandé la raison derrière cela. Je leur ai donc brièvement résumé son histoire d'amour et mariage avec le Prince Albert, ce qui les a dans l'ensemble intéressés.

Le document 8 (un regroupement de faits sur la vie de la reine) a donné lieu à un exercice d'entraînement pour les élèves. A partir de ces faits, et parce qu'ils avaient désormais acquis la construction du prétérit affirmatif, ils ont dû rédiger la biographie de Victoria, ce qui leur a à la fois permis d'assimiler une vue d'ensemble de sa vie, mais aussi de s'entraîner à la rédaction d'une biographie (l'objet de la tâche finale). A partir de cela, un jeu de *two truths and a lie* (document 8 bis) a été organisé avec les élèves : ceux-ci devaient deviner quelle affirmation concernant la reine était fausse. C'était un moyen ludique pour eux d'en apprendre plus à son sujet tout en se familiarisant avec la forme négative du prétérit, qu'ils ont manipulée en reformulant les affirmations mensongères.

Enfin, puisque l'époque victorienne était un temps emblématique de l'histoire britannique, les élèves ont pu étudier un texte qui en résumait les principales caractéristiques (document 9). L'étude de ce texte a donné lieu à un véritable questionnement des élèves sur les stratégies à mettre en œuvre pour analyser un texte même si l'on rencontre des obstacles à la compréhension. Les élèves ont apprécié cette séance, car ils ont été globalement intéressés par les petites anecdotes que je leur racontais sur les thèmes abordés dans le document (par exemple, sur le manque d'hygiène de certains, caractéristique de l'époque).

Pour clore la séquence, c'est la reine Elizabeth II qui a été au centre de l'attention des élèves. Puisque de tous les monarques étudiés, elle était celle qu'ils connaissaient le plus, deux documents et deux séances ont été suffisants pour étudier sa personne.

Le premier document, une photographie de sa statue de cire au musée de Mrs. Tussauds de Londres (document 10), a été présenté aux élèves de manière segmentée. Ils ont d'abord pu décrire la reine, puis son époux, et enfin l'image dans son intégralité. Ils ont eu un peu de mal à comprendre que ce n'était pas la reine en personne : j'ai dû beaucoup les guider pour qu'ils se

rendent compte que ce n'était pas normal qu'une femme puisse être si proche et toucher les cheveux de la reine en public, et c'est comme cela qu'ils ont fait le lien avec la statue de cire.

Enfin, la deuxième séance a consisté en l'activité de groupe de la tâche intermédiaire présentée plus haut (à l'aide des documents 11a, 11b et 11c). Elle a permis l'étude de la forme interrogative du prétérit et a encouragé la prise de parole en interaction.

A la suite de cela, la séquence en elle-même était terminée, et une évaluation sommative des acquis des élèves a été réalisée, tout comme la tâche finale.

### **Supports supplémentaires à ajouter à la séquence originelle**

#### *Modifications apportées à la séquence*

Comme précisé plus haut, la séquence originelle n'incluait le roi George VI que lors de l'évaluation sommative. Or, après avoir travaillé sur sa personne et son règne pour ce mémoire, j'estime qu'il serait intéressant de l'intégrer à part entière dans cette séquence. Ainsi, en gardant à l'esprit que les élèves de 4<sup>e</sup> ne sont pas particulièrement sensibles aux évolutions sociales en Grande-Bretagne et qu'ils ne connaissent que très peu George VI (sur les 57 élèves qui ont travaillé sur ce chapitre, aucune n'en avait entendu parler), il me semble important de leur proposer une approche du souverain *via* ce qui est frappant chez lui pour un œil peu averti : son image d'homme faible qui n'était pas destiné à être roi. Pour ce faire, j'estime qu'il serait intéressant d'ajouter trois documents à la séquence, ce qui ajouterait environ cinq séances au chapitre (cela signifierait que la séquence serait plus longue et fastidieuse, point sur lequel je reviendrai par la suite). Les documents que je compte ajouter à la séquence sont disponibles en annexe 5.

#### *Présentation et exploitation des supports*

Dans un premier temps, il sera intéressant que les élèves comprennent la représentation que la plupart des gens avaient du roi quand il est arrivé sur le trône, à savoir celle d'un homme faible qui n'avait pas la carrure pour représenter un pays. Pour cela, j'utiliserai un portrait de lui qui représente bien la dichotomie entre son statut de roi et son apparence dégingandée et chétive (document A).<sup>209</sup> J'attendrai des élèves, une fois le rituel par les questions passé, qu'ils puissent décrire le roi et qu'ils prennent conscience de l'image peu sûre de lui qu'il renvoyait. Son regard et la manière dont il se tient devraient les guider, tout comme la comparaison qui

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<sup>209</sup> Cette photographie se trouve être également l'illustration sur la couverture de mon mémoire.

pourra être faite avec les portraits des précédents souverains étudiés (notamment Henry VIII, qu'ils auront identifié comme étant fier et fort).

Pour continuer dans ce sens, le document B, à savoir un extrait de son discours au commencement de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, sera un moyen pour les élèves de se rendre compte des conséquences de son bégaiement, et de ce que cela implique pour un roi. Bien que le contenu du message soit important et devra être analysé, c'est bien la prosodie du roi qui sera au centre de l'attention. Outre le fait qu'elles apportent de la solennité au discours, les pauses et hésitations qui sont entendues dans le document sont assez nombreuses et audibles pour les élèves les relèvent. L'étude de cet audio permettra donc de travailler un point phonologique clé avec les élèves : l'intonation et la musicalité de l'anglais, chose qu'il est difficile pour les apprenants de maîtriser, et qu'ils considèrent parfois comme peu importante. Les élèves pourront découvrir les notions de groupe de souffle et/ou de sens, d'accentuation et de rythme. Grâce à un travail de répétition, on peut imaginer un exercice de prononciation au cours duquel les élèves devront remettre en voix le discours de George VI, en prêtant ainsi attention à tous les éléments qu'ils auront travaillé auparavant.

Une fois les principales caractéristiques de la personnalité de George VI dégagée, il s'agira de faire comprendre aux élèves les enjeux qui découlent de ce handicap pour le roi, car bien qu'ils aient compris quelle en était la teneur, il est probable qu'ils n'aient pas tout à fait pris conscience de ce que cela représente pour le souverain de l'un des pays les plus influents du monde. Afin que ce problème soit résolu, il sera pertinent de les faire travailler sur la bande-annonce officielle du film *The King's Speech*, réalisé par Tom Hooper en 2011 (document C). Le film – du reste assez réaliste au regard de l'Histoire – ne pouvant pas diffusé en classe pour des raisons de droit d'auteur, la bande-annonce permettra d'avoir une vue d'ensemble des problématiques de l'époque et de leur lien avec le trouble du roi George VI. En effet, en plus d'illustrer la thérapie du langage que le monarque avait décidé de suivre auprès de l'orthophoniste Lionel Logue, la vidéo présente le contexte de tension et de crise dans lequel s'inscrit le discours pour lequel le roi devait se préparer. Grâce aux images et aux indications linguistiques au cours de la bande-annonce, il sera aisé pour les élèves de comprendre que le roi se devait de mener son pays en temps de chaos, et pour cela, avait besoin d'imposer son autorité au travers de son discours.

### *Résultats et conséquences des modifications*

L'étude de ces supports aura l'avantage de familiariser les élèves avec l'histoire de George VI et de ce qui était en jeu lors de son règne. Il semble cependant difficile d'approfondir davantage l'étude de cette période dans le cadre de cette séquence, et ce pour trois raisons :

- Premièrement, s'attarder sur un même sujet pendant un nombre élevé de séances peut rapidement s'avérer lassant pour les élèves, qui seront par conséquent moins investis dans l'étude des supports.
- Deuxièmement, les élèves de 4<sup>e</sup> n'ont ni le bagage culturel, ni les outils linguistiques et lexicaux nécessaires pour entrer dans les détails d'une époque complexe pendant laquelle de nombreux enjeux nationaux et internationaux se sont entrecroisés.
- Enfin, l'ajout de trop nombreux documents appesantirait la séquence.

Cette question de la longueur du chapitre est à prendre en considération. En effet, si la séquence originale, déjà chargée, n'était pas modifiée, et la partie sur George VI était simplement annexée aux autres, cela porterait le nombre total d'heures passées sur le chapitre à vingt, sans prendre en compte les évaluations. Cela représenterait un trop grand nombre de séances qui, d'une part, ne favoriserait pas la concentration des élèves, et d'autre part signifierait un trop grand nombre d'informations à découvrir et assimiler en un seul chapitre. C'est pour cette raison qu'il serait judicieux de retravailler la séquence d'une manière ou d'une autre. Dès lors, deux solutions sont envisageables :

- Le retrait de l'étude d'un souverain dans son ensemble permettrait de diminuer de manière significative le nombre de séances allouées à ce chapitre, même si cela signifierait que l'un des aspects de la séquence serait complètement omis. Dans ce cas de figure, il serait peut-être logique de ne pas étudier Elizabeth II, puisque c'est elle que les élèves connaissent le mieux, même si son règne est à lui seul un exploit puisqu'il bat tous les records. On pourrait également envisager de ne pas traiter la vie d'Henri VIII et de se concentrer sur les monarques les plus récents, mais cela serait dommage, car les élèves ont apprécié son comportement qui détonne, en comparaison avec ce qu'il est attendu de la part d'un roi.
- Il est également possible de réduire le nombre de documents, et donc la quantité de temps passée, sur chaque monarque. Ainsi, tous les aspects pourraient être traités sans pour autant alourdir la séquence. Cette solution, qui semble plus judicieuse, nécessiterait néanmoins de s'assurer que les documents qui seraient retirés ne

contiendraient pas d'éléments clés qui, s'ils n'étaient plus mentionnés, viendraient limiter l'apport de connaissance pour les élèves.

Dans tous les cas, l'ajout de quelques séances sur George VI et son règne devra se faire logiquement dans la continuité du chapitre, à savoir chronologiquement. La partie sera donc insérée à la suite de celle sur la reine Victoria, ce qui sera d'autant plus intéressant que les deux monarques sont de dignes représentants des enjeux de leur époque respective, et permettent ainsi de prendre conscience de l'évolution de la société britannique au fil du temps.

## CONCLUSION

Lors de la création de cette séquence pour mes élèves, je venais d'entamer les recherches qui me permettraient de rédiger ce mémoire. Étant particulièrement attirée par la monarchie britannique et son histoire, il me semblait intéressant de travailler cela avec mes élèves et d'essayer de leur transmettre cette passion. En réfléchissant aux monarques que l'on pouvait considérer comme ayant marqué l'histoire, les trois noms d'Henri VIII, Victoria et Elizabeth II me sont venus assez naturellement. L'idée d'intégrer George VI à cette séquence ne me semblait pas illogique, mais je n'étais pas certaine de la manière dont je pouvais le lier au reste du chapitre, puisque je souhaitais pouvoir être en mesure de faire prendre conscience à mes élèves de ce que sa personnalité et son règne représentaient. Mais, n'ayant pas encore rassemblé assez d'informations à son sujet et, il faut le dire, étant prise par le temps en ce début d'année chargé, j'ai décidé d'utiliser des éléments de sa vie uniquement dans mon évaluation sommative. C'est après avoir rédigé ce mémoire que je me suis rendu compte de la manière dont George VI pouvait s'insérer dans le chapitre, et c'est une modification que je compte prendre en compte l'année prochaine, si j'ai l'occasion de retravailler cette séquence.

Les élèves ont globalement été intéressés par la séquence, même si certains n'ont pas été inspirés par le caractère quelque peu 'ancien' des personnes étudiées. À mon sens, ce qui les a le plus motivé a été le personnage d'Henri VIII, et en particulier la chanson parodique : elle a suscité de vives réactions de leur part, tant par sa forme que par son contenu. J'ai remarqué un certain essoufflement de leur part lors de l'étude de la vie d'Elizabeth II, que j'attribue à la longueur de la séquence, et qui me fait dire qu'en cas de modification, c'est un paramètre qu'il sera important de prendre en compte.

La proposition de séquence présentée dans ce mémoire était directement en lien avec ma pratique professionnelle cette année, et c'est pour cela que j'ai choisi de l'exposer ici. Mais en réalité, l'histoire de George VI peut être étudiée dans beaucoup d'autres contextes. De nombreuses séquences pourraient inclure quelques heures de cours sur le monarque, puisque sa vie comme son règne comprennent de multiples facettes qu'il serait intéressant de découvrir avec les élèves. Pour n'en citer que quelques exemples, voici d'autres pistes d'exploitation qui pourraient être envisagées :

- L'étude du trouble de George VI dans un projet pédagogique sur le dépassement de soi.
- L'intégration de son histoire dans une séquence sur les préjugés et les stéréotypes.
- L'histoire de la Grande-Bretagne pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale et la figure d'un roi qui a su s'affirmer et mener l'exemple pour son pays.

Une chose est sûre, l'étude du roi George VI permettrait dans tous les cas aux élèves de découvrir un pan de l'histoire britannique qu'ils ne connaissent presque pas, et son profil offrirait une palette de personnalités royales encore plus grande et variée.

ANNEXES

Annexe 1 – Tableau de présentation de la séquence

<p align="center"><b>TITRE DE LA SEQUENCE : <i>This Is Royal!</i></b>                      Manuel de base – Aucun.</p> <p align="center"><b>NOTION = Rencontres avec d'autres cultures - (2<sup>ème</sup> séquence pédagogique.)</b></p>				
<i>Objectif culturel</i>	<i>Objectif grammatical</i>	<i>Objectif lexical</i>	<i>Objectif phonologique</i>	<i>Objectif pragmatique</i>
. Découvrir 3 grands monarques britanniques, leurs vies et leur impact sur le pays. . Connaître le fonctionnement de base de la monarchie et son impact sur la société.	. Prétérit simple, régulier ou non. → Affirmation, négation, interrogation. . Pas de THE avant le titre suivi du nom ( <i>the Queen, Queen Elizabeth</i> ).	. Les dates. . La monarchie, les monarques, les titres de la famille royale. . Les éléments biographiques et connecteurs entre les phrases ( <i>then, but, so, and, after that...</i> ).	. La prononciation des dates. . Les noms de monarques ( <i>Henry the Eighth, Elizabeth the Second...</i> ). . L'accentuation de <i>monarchy, sovereign...</i> . Prononciation du – ED.	. Repérer des informations dans un texte, même sans compréhension exhaustive. . Contourner les obstacles pour dégager le sens. . Familiarisation avec la biographie.
<p><b>Activités langagières travaillées : C.E. + E.E. + E.O. + E.O.I + C.O.</b></p>				
<p align="center"><b>DOCUMENTS UTILISES :</b></p> <p><u>Anticipation &amp; première approche :</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>PICTURE:</b> Photo of Royal Family during Trooping the colours – 2018.</li> <li>- <b>TEXT:</b> Screenshot of the official page « The Role of Monarchy » - <a href="http://www.royal.uk">www.royal.uk</a>.</li> <li>- <b>PICTURE:</b> Chronology of English and British monarchs.</li> </ul> <p><u>Henry VIII :</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>PICTURE:</b> Portrait of Henry the VIII - <i>King Henry VIII, 1560-1573?</i> Hans Eworth, after Holbein. Chatsworth House.</li> <li>- <b>TEXT:</b> Abstract of Henry VIII's biography – <i>BBC History</i>.</li> <li>- <b>SONG + MUSIC VIDEO:</b> “Divorced, Beheaded, Died” song.</li> </ul> <p><u>Victoria :</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>PICTURE :</b> Portrait of Queen Victoria.</li> <li>- <b>TEXT:</b> Quick Facts about Victoria.</li> </ul> <p><u>Elizabeth II :</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>PICTURE :</b> The Queen at Madame Tussaud's (<i>Let's Step In 4<sup>ème</sup></i>)</li> <li>- <b>TEXTS :</b> Two documents about Elizabeth's life.</li> </ul>			<p align="center"><b>TACHES :</b></p> <p><i>Tâche intermédiaire – C.E. + E.O.I. :</i></p> <p>Activité en groupe. Les élèves doivent poser des questions et construire des réponses afin de rassembler des faits sur la vie de la reine Elizabeth II.</p> <p><i>Tâche finale – E.E. :</i> Les élèves doivent rédiger la biographie du roi George VI à partir d'informations factuelles données.</p>	

Annexe 2 – Descripteurs généraux du CECRL

<b>Utilisateur Expérimenté</b>	<b>C2</b>	Peut comprendre sans effort pratiquement tout ce qu'il/elle lit ou entend. Peut restituer faits et arguments de diverses sources écrites et orales en les résumant de façon cohérente. Peut s'exprimer spontanément, très couramment et de façon précise et peut rendre distinctes de fines nuances de sens en rapport avec des sujets complexes.
	<b>C1</b>	Peut comprendre une grande gamme de textes longs et exigeants, ainsi que saisir des significations implicites. Peut s'exprimer spontanément et couramment sans trop apparemment devoir chercher ses mots. Peut utiliser la langue de façon efficace et souple dans sa vie sociale, professionnelle ou académique. Peut s'exprimer sur des sujets complexes de façon claire et bien structurée et manifester son contrôle des outils d'organisation, d'articulation et de cohésion du discours.
<b>Utilisateur Indépendant</b>	<b>B2</b>	Peut comprendre le contenu essentiel de sujets concrets ou abstraits dans un texte complexe, y compris une discussion technique dans sa spécialité. Peut communiquer avec un degré de spontanéité et d'aisance tel qu'une conversation avec un locuteur natif ne comportant de tension ni pour l'un ni pour l'autre. Peut s'exprimer de façon claire et détaillée sur une grande gamme de sujets, émettre un avis sur un sujet d'actualité et exposer les avantages et les inconvénients de différentes possibilités.
	<b>B1</b>	Peut comprendre les points essentiels quand un langage clair et standard est utilisé et s'il s'agit de choses familières dans le travail, à l'école, dans les loisirs, etc. Peut se débrouiller dans la plupart des situations rencontrées en voyage dans une région où la langue cible est parlée. Peut produire un discours simple et cohérent sur des sujets familiers et dans ses domaines d'intérêt. Peut raconter un événement, une expérience ou un rêve, décrire un espoir ou un but et exposer brièvement des raisons ou explications pour un projet ou une idée.
<b>Utilisateur Élémentaire</b>	<b>A2</b>	Peut comprendre des phrases isolées et des expressions fréquemment utilisées en relation avec des domaines immédiats de priorité (par exemple, informations personnelles et familiales simples, achats, environnement proche, travail). Peut communiquer lors de tâches simples et habituelles ne demandant qu'un échange d'informations simple et direct sur des sujets familiers et habituels. Peut décrire avec des moyens simples sa formation, son environnement immédiat et évoquer des sujets qui correspondent à des besoins immédiats.
	<b>A1</b>	Peut comprendre et utiliser des expressions familières et quotidiennes ainsi que des énoncés très simples qui visent à satisfaire des besoins concrets. Peut se présenter ou présenter quelqu'un et poser à une personne des questions la concernant - par exemple, sur son lieu d'habitation, ses relations, ce qui lui appartient, etc. - et peut répondre au même type de questions. Peut communiquer de façon simple si l'interlocuteur parle lentement et distinctement et se montre coopératif.

SOURCE : <https://lecafedufle.fr/cecr/>, d'après le Cadre Européen Commun de Référence en Langues (CECRL).

**Annexe 3 – Évaluation sommative de fin de séquence, incluant la tâche finale**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

/1

**Test nr 5 – Chapter 2 (This is royal)**

/25

= /20

**Exercise 1:** Conjugate the verb with the correct form

/5

1. During the Victorian era, women (*not – wear*) \_\_\_\_\_ short dresses.
2. (? - *have*) \_\_\_\_\_ Queen Victoria \_\_\_\_\_ a lot of children?
3. Henry VIII (*become*) \_\_\_\_\_ King in 1509.
4. Henry's wives (*not – be*) \_\_\_\_\_ lucky.
5. (? – *be cruel*) \_\_\_\_\_ Henry \_\_\_\_\_?

**Exercise 2:** Here are facts about a British King. Write his **biography**.

/19

- Organise the facts: be **logical**. /2
- Make **12** sentences **minimum** (positive and negative). /12
- Use **8** different verbs **minimum**. /2
- Ask **3** questions about the King (what do you want to know?) /3



George VI

- Home = Buckingham Palace
- Blue eyes
- Dynasty = Windsor
- Become King = 1936
- Reign = 1936 – 1952 (16 years)





- ~~Jubilee~~
- Birth = 14 December 1895
- Death = 6 February 1952
- ~~public speeches.~~
- Family:



George VI





Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon



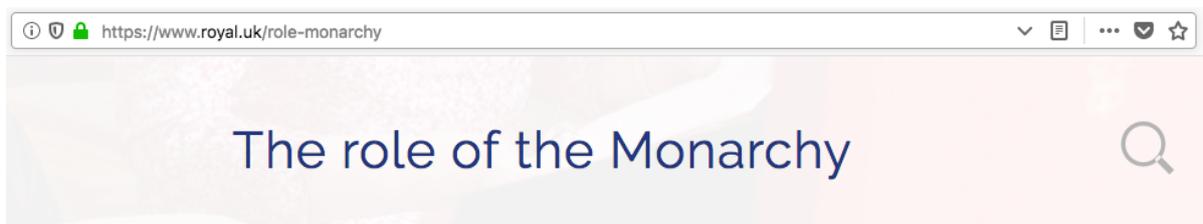
Elizabeth II

## Annexe 4 – Supports utilisés dans le cadre de la séquence

DOCUMENT 1 – Photographie de la famille royale à l'occasion de la célébration *Trooping The Colour*, 2018.



DOCUMENT 2 – Extrait de la présentation du rôle de la monarchie sur le site Internet [www.royal.uk](https://www.royal.uk).



Monarchy is the oldest form of government in the United Kingdom.

In a monarchy, a king or queen is Head of State. The British Monarchy is known as a constitutional monarchy. This means that, while The Sovereign is Head of State, the ability to make and pass legislation resides with an elected Parliament.

Although The Sovereign no longer has a political or executive role, he or she continues to play an important part in the life of the nation.

DOCUMENT 3 – Frise chronologique des monarques britanniques depuis 1066. Via le site Internet *Air Freshener*. <https://airfreshener.club/quotes/english-1066-monarchy.html>

**BRITISH MONARCHY THROUGH THE AGES**  
1066 - PRESENT DAY

**Legend:**  
 ■ Norman ■ Stuart  
 ■ Plantagenet ■ Interregnum  
 ■ Lancaster ■ Hanoverian  
 ■ York ■ Jane-eoburg-goths  
 ■ Tudor ■ Windsor

**Row 1 (1066-1377):** William the Conqueror (1066-1087), William II (1087-1100), Henry I (1100-1135), Stephen (1135-1154), Henry II (1154-1189), Richard I (1189-1199), John (1199-1216), Henry III (1216-1272), Edward I (1272-1307), Edward II (1307-1327), Edward III (1327-1377), Richard II (1377-1399).

**Row 2 (1399-1689):** Henry IV (1399-1413), Henry V (1413-1422), Henry VI (1422-1461), Edward IV (1461-1483), Edward V (1483-1483), Richard III (1483-1485), Henry VII (1485-1509), Henry VIII (1509-1547), Edward VI (1547-1553), Mary I (1553-1558), Elizabeth I (1558-1603), James I (1603-1625), Charles I (1625-1649), Oliver Cromwell (1649-1660), Charles II (1660-1685), James II (1685-1689).

**Row 3 (1689-1952):** James II (1689-1689), William III and Mary II (1689-1702), Anne (1702-1714), George I (1714-1727), George II (1727-1760), George III (1760-1820), George IV (1820-1830), William IV (1830-1837), Victoria (1837-1901), Edward VII (1901-1910), George V (1910-1936), Edward VIII (1936-1936), George VI (1936-1952), Elizabeth II (1952-present day).

DOCUMENT 4 – Portrait of Henry the VIII. King Henry VIII. 1560-1573? Hans Eworth, after Holbein. Chatsworth House.



DOCUMENT 5 – Biographie résumée du roi Henry VIII. Adapté de *BBC History*.



### Henry VIII (1491 – 1547)

Henry VIII is one of the most famous kings in English history. He was the second Tudor monarch and was well-known for having six wives. His break with the papacy in Rome established the Church of England and started the Reformation.

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/people/henry\\_viii](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/people/henry_viii)

DOCUMENT 6 – Chanson parodique. “Divorced, Beheaded, Died”. *Horrible Histories*.

<https://multimedia-english.com/videos/esl/henry-viii-song-horrible-histories-1764>

DOCUMENT 7 – Photographie de la reine Victoria dans les dernières années de son règne.

<https://www.pinterest.fr/pin/332281278737791848/>



DOCUMENT 8 – Biographie factuelle de la reine Victoria. Adapté de *BBC History*.

**QUICK FACTS**

NAME

Queen Victoria

FULL NAME

Alexandrina Victoria

OCCUPATION

Queen

BIRTH DATE

May 24, 1819

DID YOU KNOW?

Queen Victoria was tiny.

DID YOU KNOW?

Reign = 63 years

ADDRESS

Buckingham Palace, London.

DEATH DATE

January 22, 1901



Adapted from <https://www.biography.com/people/queen-victoria-9518355>

DOCUMENT 8 BIS – Support créé pour que les élèves puissent jouer à *Two Truths and a Lie*

**Play two truths and a lie !**

Find the lie in those 3 sentences.

1. She had blond hair.
2. People tried to kill her six times.
3. She had nine children.  1. She **did not** have blond hair (she had brown hair).

1. She proposed to her husband.
2. After 1861, she wore only black clothes.
3. She loved being pregnant.  3. She **did not** love being pregnant (she hated it!).

1. Queen Victoria was tall.
2. She married her cousin.
3. She played the piano very well.  1. She **was not** tall (she was less than 1.50m !).

*NB : Les phrases qui suivent les flèches rouges étaient révélées une fois que les élèves avaient émis leurs hypothèses et que la classe avait voté pour la phrase qu'ils estimaient être le mensonge.*

DOCUMENT 9 – Texte expliquant les caractéristiques de l'époque victorienne. Adapté de <https://classroom.synonym.com/fun-facts-about-the-victorian-era-12084015.html>

## THE VICTORIAN ERA (1837-1901)

### Inventions

There were a lot of inventions during the Victorian era. People didn't have a television, but they invented the camera, toilet, sewing machine, vacuum, train and stamp

### Morals and Conduct

During the Victorian Era, there were extremely strict codes of morals and conduct. For example, a lady did not wear a dress that showed her ankles, and men did not call a single woman by her first name unless they were engaged.

### Social Structure

The Victorian Era included the upper class, the middle class, and the working class.

### Hospital, Surgeries and Health

When a person needed to have surgery, there was no painkiller or anesthesia provided meaning that operations were hours of unbearable pain and agony for patients.

*Adapted from <https://classroom.synonym.com/fun-facts-about-the-victorian-era-12084015.html>*

DOCUMENT 10 – Photographie de la statue de la reine Elizabeth II au musée de Mrs. Tussauds.



**DOCUMENT 11** – Ensemble de documents utilisés pour la réalisation de la tâche intermédiaire

*DOCUMENT 11A* – Fiche de renseignement que les élèves avaient à compléter

## Elizabeth II

Remember : to ask questions, use  
(WH) + Aux. + S + V + ... ?



**Date of birth :**

**Parents :**

**Became Queen :**

**Diamond Jubilee :**

**Became longest reigning monarch :**

**90th birthday :**

**Sapphire Jubilee :**

*DOCUMENT 11B* – L'un des deux documents que les binômes avaient en leur possession :  
une biographie factuelle de la reine Elizabeth. Adapté de *BBC History*.

Elizabeth II :

**Date of Birth**

April 21, 1926

**Family**

Father = King George VI.

Mother = Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon.

**Became Queen**

February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1952

**Diamond Jubilee** (=60 years of reign)

February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012



*DOCUMENT 11C* – L'autre document que les binômes avaient en leur possession : une description des différents événements célébrés par la reine. Adapté du site Internet [www.royal.uk](http://www.royal.uk).

## Longest Reigning Monarch

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On 9th September 2015 The Queen became Britain's Longest Reigning Monarch.

## The Queen's 90th birthday

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The Queen celebrated her 90th birthday on 21 April 2016 and her official birthday on 11 June 2016, the second day of three days of national celebrations.

## The Sapphire Jubilee

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6 February 2017 marked 65 years since The Queen acceded to the throne, becoming the first British Monarch to mark their Sapphire Jubilee.

**Annexe 5** – Ensemble des documents qui pourraient être utilisés pour inclure la vie de George VI dans la séquence

**DOCUMENT A** – Sa Majesté le roi George VI, en uniforme. 1937. Photographie.



**DOCUMENT B** – Extrait (0:45 – 1:48) du discours prononcé Sa Majesté le roi George VI le 3 septembre 1939. (HM KING George VI. *Empire Broadcast Message By H.M. King George VI*. Home Service. September 03, 1939).

**DOCUMENT C** – *The King's Speech Official Trailer*. Directed by Tom Hooper. United Kingdom: Momentum Pictures, 2011. Trailer. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSw6ei5tdbg>.

Figure 14 – Getty Images. *(From left to right)* HM George VI, Princess Elizabeth, Queen Elizabeth, Princess Margaret. 1937. Photograph.

## **Abstract**

When Queen Victoria died in 1901, the British population was deeply attached to their monarch, who echoed their desire to see the country evolve and thrive. As her son, Edward VII, and grandson, George V, succeeded her, Great Britain underwent the beginning of a new century, and then the First World War, which completely changed the country's organisation and set new standards. After it had recovered some stability, King Edward VIII – whom some nicknamed “the playboy King” because of his impulsiveness and outgoing personality – decided to abdicate the throne, as otherwise he could not marry the woman he loved. This crisis of the British monarchy called for a change in the institution. The arrival on the throne of Edward's brother, King George VI, encapsulates that change thanks to his very different personality. Yet, the new king was more conservative than his brother, and so he went back to more traditional values. Raised as a weak child and considered a feeble man, he had always lived a simple life and was not meant to be King. He did not want to bear this burden, but took his duty to his heart and tried his best to step into a monarch's shoes. This thesis will study how, from a man that no one deemed worthy of being a sovereign, he turned into a cherished monarch who went through the Second World War, the decline of the British Empire and the transformation of society, finding a difficult balance between his personal, traditional convictions and the transformations Great Britain experienced.



## **Key words**

George VI – Great Britain – Monarchy – Transformation –  
Relationship – War – Empire – Nation