

ROYAL CORONATIONS

Early next month, King Charles III will be formally crowned, wall-to-wall coverage of which will be watched by millions. To celebrate the occasion, towns and villages throughout the country are planning events.

The coronation ceremony dates back for generations but, in years gone by, few people were able to witness it. No doubt ordinary people marked the occasion in their own way, ringing the church bells and drinking the monarch's health. It is only relatively recently that we know much about how people celebrated. For Queen Victoria's coronation in 1838, there were, surprisingly, no publicly organised celebrations in Windsor and Eton, although events were recorded in other places round about. It was a Thursday and a public holiday was granted. The church bells were rung and a royal salute fired; the inmates of Windsor workhouse feasted on roast beef and plum pudding and local tradesmen dined together at the Star and Garter Inn. In London, crowds started gathering before dawn to line the route from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey, and in the evening there were fireworks and fairs in the parks and free entry to theatres.

By the time of the next coronation, Edward VII in 1902, Windsor had a well-oiled system of committees which had served it well in organising Queen Victoria's Jubilee festivities and the celebrations planned followed a familiar pattern. They could not have foreseen that the coronation planned for June was postponed at the last minute until August because the King was unwell, and as this fell in the school holidays, the events for children had to be further delayed until September. As with the Jubilees, the children from Dorney were included in the arrangements for Windsor and neighbouring schools, and 77 pupils with 5 teachers made the journey to the Great Park for an afternoon of games and sports, followed by fireworks and sustained by milk and buns, meat pie and cake. Each of the six thousand children was given a commemorative medal depicting the King and Queen and a collection of coloured pictures of the royal family, and finished by singing the National Anthem. In June, the Dorney children had also each been given a coronation bible by Mrs Boyle and Mrs Quinn from Huntercombe Manor.



For Coronation Day itself, most of the original plans for Windsor were fulfilled although not on quite the scale envisaged. Bells were rung at the parish church, where there was a special service, and at the Curfew Tower of Windsor Castle, and a royal salute of guns was fired in the Long Walk. Perhaps because of the earlier postponement, it was noted that there were no events in some of the adjoining villages and so there were big crowds in Windsor. In the afternoon there were aquatic sports on the river and later a Venetian fete. Hundreds went to the Long Walk to view the bonfire on Snow Hill which *"lit up the country for miles around"*. The streets were full of people until after midnight, enjoying the decorations and illuminations and the extended pub licensing hours.



The coronation of George V in 1911 involved a similar programme of festivities on the day itself, with a larger celebration a week later when the King and Queen drove in state from Slough through Eton to Windsor. Dorney held its own event on Coronation Day, in the grounds of Dorney Court. The arrangements were planned by a committee of local worthies including the vicar Rev Arthur Sharp, the doctor John Waters, the two village grocers Bertram Barksfield and William Grove, and Colonel Ferris, a retired Indian Army officer living in Dorney House. Some 300 village adults sat down to a lunch

of cold meat and salad, while 30 children had tea after an afternoon of sports supervised by the school teachers. Each child was presented with a coronation medal and a Doulton mug. There were races too for the men (including boys who had left school) and a few for the women. Cricket and dancing were "*indulged in freely*" and the men's sports concluded with a tug-of-war between ex-army men, led by Colonel Ferris, and civilians, who won the contest. Of course, the National Anthem was sung and the day finished with "*a fine display of fireworks*".

Dorney school pupils again took part in the fete for 6,000 local children held in Windsor Home Park on 1 July 1911, 45 of them with two teachers transported there in the local farmers' wagons. As on previous occasions, there were sports, refreshments and entertainment such as Punch and Judy shows. The youngest child of the King and Queen, five year old Prince John, was brought to see the fun. At the end of the afternoon, all 6,000 children were lined up along the route to witness the arrival of the King and Queen at the Sovereign's entrance to Windsor Castle, cheering and waving their handkerchiefs as the procession passed.



The coronation of George VI took place on 12 May 1937, originally planned as the date of the coronation of Edward VIII before he abdicated. This was the first coronation broadcast live on radio and even on television - an estimated 50,000 people were able to watch the event on television, many in specially created public viewing rooms. Radio sets were widely available and the newly crowned King used the medium to address his people live after the ceremony. Street parties and patriotic decorations were the order of the day. Dorney pupils joined the children from the Eton schools in lining the High Street to cheer the King and Queen on the occasion of their State Drive a month later.

By 1953, more than 2 million people had a TV licence and so the coronation of Elizabeth II was viewed live by many more people than before. Friends and family were invited to watch by the lucky few who possessed a television and the streets of Windsor were notably empty. Memories of the way the occasion was marked were revived a year ago when we celebrated the late Queen's platinum jubilee. Although it was early June, the weather was cold and many parties were moved indoors. Villages like Burnham organised programmes of activities lasting a week or more - processions and parades, carnivals and displays, sports and games and hundreds of teas. As after previous coronations, the subsequent state entry into Windsor was a big event locally, with thousands of children lining the streets. Home Park was reserved for school children only to join in the celebrations and cheer as the carriage went by. Dorney commemorated the coronation in a lasting way, by installing the organ in the gallery of St James' church; the Queen made a donation towards the cost.

The coronation of Charles III in May will include traditions old and new. Windsor will play a special part again when the castle hosts a coronation concert the following day and Big Lunches will take place in neighbourhoods across the country. A new feature involves dedicating the extra bank holiday to volunteering and in the evening Windsor racecourse is offering a free race night. Bunting and flags will be rolled out; cheering crowds and the National Anthem will echo the past. God save the King!

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