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Coronations

From Richard III's lavish wardrobe to Queen Victoria's chaotic ceremony, coronations have a rich and fascinating history.

For some, a coronation is a once-in-a-lifetime public event; for the new king or queen, it is a display which can set the tone for their reign.

In this episode of On the Record released to mark the coronation of King Charles III, our specialists examine records from previous coronations and explore how traditions have formed and changed through the centuries.

This podcast series is part of a season of events and commemorating the coronation of King Charles III on May 6th. Find out more at nationalarchives.gov.uk/coronations

Documents from The National Archives used in this episode: [CAB 21/3731](#), [WORK 21/19](#), [E 42/549](#)

For more information about the records covered in this episode, take a look at our research guides to [Royal Household and Wardrobe](#) and [Seals](#). For help navigating our catalogue, you can watch our [top level tips on using Discovery](#).

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Transcription

Vicky Iglkowski-Broad: Pomp and ceremony!

In this episode of On the Record, we're marking the coronation of King Charles III, set to take place on May 6th. No doubt the ceremony will be steeped in tradition. But how have those traditions changed over the centuries?

This is On the Record at The National Archives: uncovering the past through stories of everyday people. I'm Vicky Iglkowski-Broad.

I'm a Principal Records Specialist in Diverse Histories at The National Archives in Kew, West London. Here at The National Archives, we research, look after, and help people better understand our collections of historical government and public records.

In this episode, I'm hearing from a range of our specialist historians and archivists about King Charles' predecessors — from the fancy robes of Richard III through to the first televised coronation in history.

My guests are all sitting round the table with me. Hi everyone! Let's get going, can everyone introduce themselves.

Sean Cunningham: Hello, I'm Sean Cunningham. I'm head of the Medieval records team here at The National Archives. And I want to talk about the lavish wardrobe and ceremonies of King Richard III.

Jessamy Carlson: I'm Jessamy Carlson, and I'm the head of the community and transport team here at The National Archives. And I want to talk about the somewhat chaotic nature of Queen Victoria's coronation.

Lisa Berry-Waite: Hi, I'm Lisa Berry-Waite and I'm a record specialist at The National Archives. And I want to talk about Elizabeth II's coronation, and why Winston Churchill didn't want it to be televised.

Vicky: Brilliant thank you all. Let's go furthest back in time we're going to for this episode - and maybe to the most important thing a new monarch must consider "What shall I wear?"

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Sean, what did you find in the collections?

Sean: Thanks, Vicky. I was looking for the money trail to see how our records show what was purchased, to make a coronation work, to make kings look regal and kingly. And also, to find out a little bit about if we had anything that told the story of the coronation. The government records are normally about process and business, what was done and how it was paid for. We don't have a lot of narrative stuff but what I did find was a copy of *The Little Device*, which is the book of the precedence of all the coronations. Drawn up in the 17th century, possibly for Charles II, it looks right back to Edward II in 1308. This tells you what was to be done in Westminster Abbey, and the roles of everybody. It was also probably written by a herald, one of the people in the fancy outfits you see at the Royal funerals and coronations, who organised the state ceremonials.

I was looking to see if we could match these two things together. What I did find was a really good book of all of the records of payments for the Royal wardrobe, which wasn't just a cupboard in the castle, it was actually a massive building on Queen Victoria Street in London. It's near where the College of Arms actually is. This was a building where all of the monarch's clothes were kept, but it was also where the tents were kept, the cars, some armour and some weapons. It was a building of supplies really, for furnishing the royal household and for keeping the king and the queen, and the royal family, in the magnificent manner that people expected them to be in the Middle Ages.

This great big book is a compilation of various different state events. It's got a lot about Richard III, Henry VII, Henry VIII, that sort of early Tudor, late medieval period. And it really tells us an awful lot about how a coronation was put together, from a material point of view and from the equipment. As well as the clothing and some of the actual fancy things that were put into the space that the king and the queen would occupy. Because this was a dual coronation, Richard III was already married and he already had a son, he had a Prince of Wales. That changed the dynamic slightly. A lot of monarchs are crowned alone, even if they are married.

This is in a time of civil war. Richard wasn't born to be king, so this is an exercise in demonstrating power, and magnificence related to the right to be king. If you look like a king, people are more likely to think you could be a king and a good king as well. Richard's coming from a family that's been contesting the crowns of the nobility in England in the 1450s and 60s, historically he's been quite loyal to his brother, and circumstances change. I'll talk a bit more about that in a minute,

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about why he decided to go for the crown, he's got this extra incentive to look regal and look like a king. The book we have shows that once he becomes king, on the 26th of June, he sends out an instruction on the 28th to the keeper of the great wardrobe, to start to get all of the clothes together that he needs to wear.

First of all, there's a list of the things he will be wearing on the day and what the queen will be wearing on the day. It starts with two shirts to be open to the waist, almost for the anointing, and then various layers of crimson cloth - the colour for the coronation. A lot of the courtiers would be given crimson cloth to make their own gowns too. Suddenly, other household servants would have also appeared in the same clothing colour. It would have looked like a very impressive uniform in that sense, but Richard has these different clothing changes at different stages of the day, and also for the coronation ceremony and procession the day before.

The monarch in the Middle Ages would process from the Tower of London to Westminster Palace through the City of London and you'd need clothing for that. There are all sorts of other rituals attached too, like the creation of new knights of the bath. A new set of knights would be created as part of the coronation or state ceremonies. We've got records of their clothing as well as the other mainly purple and gold items that the king would be wearing. They were literally stitched with gold cloth and gold thread. In a summer coronation in July, this would literally be dazzling to people as they rode past. The whole idea is to literally blind the population with this magnificence.

We've got really good records of all of this, that the wardrobe was an office that buys in the skills of London tailors, embroiderers, merchants and drapers to create these clothing items, but also to actually make the cloth as well. You can imagine them stitching things with golden, silver thread. For that you'd need some pretty specialist people, then you'd have to embroider it with the mottos called 'Reasons'. These were mottos, phrases and poems of the individuals. Richard's motto was called 'loyalty binds me' - in French 'loyalt  me lie'. He's using that motto to show his personal status, as well as all the royal badges, which would have been stitched with gold as well. This is all giving a lot of work in a very short space of time to most of the crafts people of the City of London. There's also an awful lot of really skilled women doing a lot of this embroidery and they get paid in the account. In the records we literally see the creation of these clothing items as the days before the coronation go by.

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It's a fascinating stage setting in a very short period of time. Richard allows himself about 7 or 8 days from 28th of June to the 6th of July. On the 4th of July, he moves to the Tower of London to get ready for the ceremonial procession to the city. So it's not a lot of time for London to get all of this stuff together. The Mayor of London cleans the streets so it looks smart. Then the whole of the city is thronged with people. The accounts of the Heralds' are honest, like journalistic reports of what's happening and we see this all in there. The setting up of the procession, all the different kinds of officers of the royal household, in their formal roles with their white staff, the henchmen and the servants, and the body guards.

Vicky: The organisation sounds truly vast, how were the public involved?

Sean: I think it was a thing that everybody would want to see. A coronation was honestly the most important part of any king or queen's reign, because it set the tone. It gave people an impression of what they'd be like, and they probably wouldn't see them again. So in that sense, London would have been packed out with the people who live there, but also people travelling to see the king and the queen. That's why the mayor would have cleaned up the streets, they would have built galleries for people to watch. A lot of merchants would have leased their houses and balconies so richer people could get a higher view, to get a good sense of all this. It would have probably taken several hours for the procession to move through the city at a fairly slow pace. You would have seen the whole of the court move forward, the queen would be in white satin with her hair long down the back, wearing a gold circlets. She did look very different to the purple and red and gold of the men. It would have been a sight that people probably wouldn't expect to see again, although in this period, there were quite a few changes of king so there were coronations happening every 10 years or so. And there will be a few more before Henry VIII's reign. It's a public spectacle. It's meant to project this idea of royal power. It was very successful in that sense.

From this period, we start to get the first sense of souvenir collecting becoming a part of the ceremony. The king and the queen would have got to Westminster, there would have been a ritual bath the night before the coronation to be purified, ready for the anointing and the religious part of the ceremony. They'd have walked barefoot from Westminster Hall to Westminster Abbey! You can still work out how far that would have been. They walked on Ray cloth laid on the ground Ray and after they passed, it would often be pounced upon by the public to be cut into strips as souvenirs. Actually there's a crush at Elizabeth of York's coronation in 1487 when she was crowned

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on her own, and several people were killed in the scramble to get a slice of this cloth. It gives you a sense of the crowds and the difficulty in keeping them back, the marshal of the royal household and the marshal of England would have been responsible for policing the crowds. They would normally have up to 150 men dressed in uniform, but with staffs to keep the crowds back.

At Prince Arthur's wedding in 1501, young Henry VIII when he was still a prince, was made Marshall of England. Put in charge of policing as a 10 year old, of his own brother's wedding ceremony, because the crowds again were enormous for that. It's a ceremonial role, but has a real purpose, because in a time of slightly less secure certainty about who had the right to be king or queen, there was still an issue around rebellion, a potential disloyalty, which might manifest itself in a big crowd. As you can imagine, people did try to assassinate monarchs throughout history, so this was something that we're mindful of.

It was very much a spectacle the public could enjoy. They would also turn up to the jousting, which was the big public sport, at the time, mainly participated in by courtiers, but obviously a spectacle that people were interested in watching too. They could connect to it in that sense. But this is really about the kind of secular power and religious power coming together, and the public would have been aware of that, and they wanted to see it done properly.

Jessamy: So, in this period of history, mass communication doesn't exist in the way that it does for Victoria and for Elizabeth. How does the average person find out about the coronation at this point in time?

Sean: There were public pronouncements and it's right at the beginning of printing, so here would have been bills posted up in the City of London. The heralds had a role as well, and the lesser heralds, who would have gone to places and made announcements. Once the king comes to the throne before his crown, there's usually a very short window, because politically, this is important to have the religious endorsement of the power that the king assumes. It all has to be done quickly, so there's a mechanism to let the public know that this is happening. Obviously then you need to liaise with civic authorities in somewhere like London to make sure the streets are closed, and shops closed down. There's a real focus on this as an event, in much the same way that we would close off streets today. There's a sort of tumbling of information through the various levels of how communication was done. It would involve sheriffs and sheriffs' officers, constables of

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wards and parishes, telling people so that it would be radiated out from London. People would be given 10 days or so, if they wanted to travel to the capital to see it but that would require some very fast horses to pass the news!

Vicky: So what do these documents in general tell us about the context of Richard coming to the throne and his reign?

Sean: Yes, Richard wasn't born to be king. He was a loyal servant of his brother Edward IV for most of the 1460s and 70s. Even when Edward IV died in April 1483, Richard renewed his oath to see Edward, the Prince of Wales become king. Right up until the end of May, it looked like Edward V would be the next king and not the third. Richard is ruling the North for his brother, he's up in the distant part of the country in Yorkshire. He hears the news of Edwards' death. He comes to London because he wants to be the protector of the young prince while he becomes king and then grows as a king into adulthood. Edward is about 12 years old, and he needs to be looked after, he has the reigns of power taken from him as he learns his role. Richard is the man who wants to do that. There's a bit of a struggle with the family of Edward IV's widow, the Woodville family, who want their own route to power to be secured. There's a little tussle, which turns into a kind of factional fight, and at some point, Richard is either told or reveals the fact that Edward was illegally married. He had had a pre-contract with one woman, and then he'd married Elizabeth Woodville, and they're able to engineer this into a public pronouncement, that all of the children of this marriage are illegitimate.

The prospect of chaos in the realm, again after the memory of quite recent civil wars, means that Richard as the strong man, the loyal brother, the noble everybody knows, puts himself forward to take control of the kingdom to save it from chaos again. Edward and his brother Richard, the princes in the tower, go into the Tower of London, and gradually disappear from view.

Richard strangely enough has an entry in the wardrobe book for the Lord Edward, who is Edward IV's son, the Prince of Wales, but was not called the Prince of Wales and is not called Edward the bastard, which is what he was known as later on when Richard was king. This might be a little reference to Edward possibly being involved in ceremonies, or at least being thought about as being involved in the ceremonies. Pretty soon after this, on 6th of July, the princes disappeared. Richard is suddenly grasping for the throne, but he's doing this from a position of saving it, as they

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saw it. At the time he was petitioned to become king by the commons, saving the round from a slide back into civil war.

This is a sudden shift from the expected next king to a king who wasn't born to be king, therefore you've got to work quickly to get his badges, his mottos, his people involved in the ceremony. *The Little Device*, the precedent book for the coronation, is tweaked with all of the new people who are going to have to perform the ceremonial roles. It's an interesting little window into how the system of government at the time could switch midstream to basically accommodate a different future, to the one they'd all been planning for. Quite chaotic, but Richard moves forward quickly to secure his power, using the coronations as a really strong platform for projecting that power to the country.

Vicky: So, I guess that links to some of the kind of iconography that maybe was shown at the time, could you talk about that?

Sean: Yeah, mainly the seals would have been the image that people would have recognized as representative of the power of the king, because obviously, the Great Seal of England has the highest level of power to authenticate documents. Richard really wants control of this, so when there's a rebellion against him in the autumn of 1483, he's really quite concerned to get hold of the seal, because that really puts him in control of the way you can instruct and authorise things. It seals the imagery of the king on horseback as a mounted warrior on one side, and on the other side the king, or the queen, enthroned with an imagery of royalty alongside them. That's quite a consistent thing from much earlier in the medieval period and it runs right through to Elizabeth II's reign. It's still part today, we've inherited this idea of imagery, authenticating power, whether it's lent power, from the monarchy to the government today, or personal power in the past, you need this readily recognised visual image of the monarch. That iconography, that imagery is a consistent factor, which runs alongside the kind of ceremonies of the coronation too.

Lisa: Yeah, I think this idea of imagery is really interesting, because during Elizabeth II's reign, there's lots of kinds of souvenirs for royal occasions, and royal weddings. We have lots of newspaper clippings in our collection during her coronation discussing the various souvenirs. For instance, everything from plates to tea towels to mugs, and what I find quite interesting is that the Board of Trade has to, in a sense, okay, a lot of these souvenirs to make sure that they're kind of

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up to artistic standards. Quite something! I enjoyed reading that when I was looking through the records.

Vicky: A lot of things and battles happen between Richard III's death and the coronation of Victoria in 1838 and that's where we're going to go now. We have to fast forward to the young queen, just 18, when she inherited the throne. Jessamy, what do you have from the records and what does it tell us about Victoria's coronation?

Jessamy: As Sean's been discussing, the collections that we have here for Victoria's coronation are very much of that diplomatic nature. They are a documentary recording of the various aspects of coronation, from who's there, to why they're there. They also include the protocols that have been undertaken in the run up to what happens during the ceremony, and then detail from her reign afterwards. There's a lot of commonality in the documents that we hold, for time immemorial, for all the different kings and queens of rules in this country. It's quite familiar in some ways. It's nice as a historian to see that continuity in terms of the documentation that we have.

However, as Victoria's coronation is comparatively more recent, we have other items that survived from it, that perhaps we don't have for the medieval and early modern kings and queens. One of the things that we have is a ticket of admission, and this is a ticket which allows the bearer entry to the service. It's about A6 in size, maybe slightly smaller. It's a very nice shade of blue, but there's not a huge amount of information on it. We can see that this is the ticket for Lady Frances Cole, who was the daughter, the First Earl of Malmesbury. It's just a brief, brief flicker of insight into that moment. You wouldn't have everyday people necessarily inside that coronation ceremony, but you've got that broader Court of St. James, appearing at the ceremony and this ticket is a reflection of that.

It's that survival of the ephemera that perhaps we don't have as much of for the medieval and early modern period, that we start to see from the Victorian period onwards. It is not that this stuff didn't exist for the previous combinations, it just doesn't necessarily survive in our collections. You can see this one online, we can make sure that the link is in the material that accompanies this podcast.

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Then in other documentation, we have these big boxes with lists of personal petitions. We have quite a lot of correspondence from individual earls and dukes, saying, my family historically has taken on this role in the coronation, this is my petition to do so in honour of that tradition. We get those kinds of items collected, and then they're written up. In the Court of Claims series - a series in the Chancery Series C195 - it holds all the material for the different coronations from the 17th century to Elizabeth II and you see those kinds of documents coming together. Actually with Victoria's, hers is the second coronation within the decade, so her uncle only reigned for seven years before he died. Like Richard, and perhaps also like Elizabeth, Victoria initially wasn't intended to be queen. She inherited the throne from her uncle. Her paternal uncles had no illegitimate children, and had no-one to pass the crown onto, so she was not initially expected to be queen, like Elizabeth. Again, she's inheriting the crown, ultimately from another uncle, obviously, via her father. I guess that's one of the common threads between these three monarchs initially, they weren't expected to be monarch.

Vicky: My understanding is that this ceremony wasn't entirely smooth for Victoria, what happened?

Jessamy: This is a five-hour long ceremony, which is quite an intense period of time. Contemporary accounts suggest that this particular coronation service 'suffered from a lack of rehearsal'. It was a bit chaotic. Victoria's coronation ring was forced onto the wrong finger, which sounds quite painful to be honest, as a start. One of the elder peers, Lord Rolle, fell down the steps after paying homage to the queen and another Bishop got confused about where they were in the ceremony and told the queen that the service was over, when in fact, it was not. She had to be escorted back to her seat.

She's a very young queen, she's only 18 When she ascended the throne. I think there's a sense that the queen, and the Lord John Thynne (sub-dean of Westminster acting on behalf of the dean), were really the only two who seemed to have a sense of exactly what they should be doing in the midst of all of this. A core of civility in the midst of a slight chaos around it. We see that in accounts that we hold here, but also in other collections like the Royal Archives, at Westminster Abbey. It's interesting, given how heavily rehearsed we know subsequent coronations were. Perhaps influenced by something from this particular one. It's interesting when we think of a ceremony that has such strict orders or protocols, that actually it didn't all quite come together at the moment.

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Sean: It is interesting, because in medieval periods, the abbot of Westminster (where they keep the regalia) has the precedent book of the ceremony. He's a link in making sure all the bishops and everybody else knows what they're doing, and that becomes the dean of Westminster's role. And then once it's a dean, it's a direct appointment by the monarch, another element of continuity. The ceremonial side is almost safeguarded by the Abbey and then it's the court or household of the monarch that does all the ceremonial and pageantry side of it. It comes together quite well, but clearly not in this case.

Jessamy: It's quite interesting because it is only seven years since the previous one. You wouldn't have thought the turnover would necessarily be that high amongst the protagonists in this, but I was quite interested when I was looking at the coronation role for Queen Victoria in the same box as the one for William IV. He's almost being completely overshadowed by his niece, his role is in the box with her! This is unusual to have the two together. I thought that was quite interesting and obviously subsequent coronations have been quite carefully choreographed in the aftermath. We've had a lot of other royal functions like the royal wedding, again, very carefully choreographed. Obviously, that sense of rehearsal is really held up for something that's quite important now.

Lisa: I think that's definitely the case, like you said, with Queen Elizabeth II, it's very, carefully choreographed, very well rehearsed, very organised. Everyone knows their place and where they want to stand. I think it went a lot smoother than Victoria's.

Sean: You think people would remember when things go wrong. At Henry VII's coronation, I think a seating gallery collapsed in the abbey halfway through the service, and nobody was killed. But there were injuries, obviously and it caused disruption and that's skated over. You'd imagine if you were there at the time, it might be the thing you remembered, as well as the magnificent viewing of the ceremony itself. It certainly wouldn't be something you'd want to take forward if you were a monarch, that people remembered the crush or the depths of the ceremony!

Vicky: Thinking about the visual memories that people have, I believe you've got another item for us Jessamy.

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Jessamy: Yes, one of the items that we have in our collection is in our COPY 1 series and it's actually a photograph of a drawing of Queen Victoria and in her full coronation robes. We're at a point in time where printing is well established but we don't have the scale of mass communication that we have by the time we get to Elizabeth II's coronation. But there is an increasing interest in the queen.

This is a very young woman coming to the throne, she's not yet married. I think the general population isn't entirely sure what to expect from her and she certainly has lots of opportunities to make her way in the world. Really set the tone for her own reign. This is also a point of time from where we start to have more ephemera surviving, as I've mentioned earlier, in terms of that promotion of the public image of the monarch.

COPY 1 is a series where the copyright for particular items is applied for and we have those claim forms. That's the purpose of that particular series of records. This is a drawing by a woman called Miss Isabella Jane Taylor and they are applying for that to be copyrighted, so that she owns it. I think it is quite nice to have a female artist create that image of a young woman, in her robe, so that people who can't get to London can see what she looked like. I think it's a more accessible level of access to it. It's something that most people can probably afford, a postcard. Attendance or travelling to London is probably out of the remit for your average everyday person, whereas a postcard, much more likely to be attainable, I guess.

It's that growing emergence in terms of public access to the monarch. Queen Victoria's not as within public life in the way Elizabeth has been subsequently, but she's perhaps more accessible than her predecessors. And there's a great public interest in this young woman, and what she's doing and where she's going. Plus her subsequent marriage to Prince Albert. We see that within the material that survives beyond the broader kind of diplomatic commonality of the material that we hold here. We see it in those other series where those types of materials start to emerge within our collections here.

Vicky: This is very much the start of Victoria's reign, but she reigned for a long time, 63 years. How did public interest change over that period?

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Jessamy: I don't know that it's necessarily that the public interest changed but Victoria's reign is a period of tremendous social and technological change. The way that people perhaps interact with the royal household is changing in the way that society is changing. You've got the emergence of newspapers, you've got improvements in literacy... The House of Commons still isn't particularly... MPs are not that accessible to their constituents in the way that we think of them now, where people are interested in this young woman and what she's doing. We've not had a queen reigning in her own right for some time at this point. So it's, it's a new thing to have a woman on the throne in this period of history. It's interesting to see how society wrapped around and obviously those big technological changes and newspapers becoming more common. Your average person has more of a sense of where the queen is going and what she's doing.

Obviously, though, Albert died in 1861 and Victoria went into a really prolonged period of mourning. She was absolutely devastated by the loss of her husband, and she shut herself away for a really long time. She's known as the Widow of Windsor, because she stayed at home, just all in black, really setting the tone for that Victorian trend of mourning. That prolonged type of mourning behaviour that became more fashionable after Albert died, this is what the queen is doing. She's set the fashion for how you mourn and we see that rippling through the rest of the Victorian period. There have always been strict rules around morning, but they're really enforced in this period and I think that's quite an interesting trend that we see. Her influence appeared in more ways than one across her reign.

Lisa: I think what you were saying there about the technological change, for Victoria's coronations, is really interesting, because there's so many parallels to Elizabeth II's. Particularly with it being - I'm sure we'll talk about this later - but it being the first coronation to be televised, and how those kinds of technological advancements enabled members of the public to engage in a coronation. Engage in a completely different way than previous coronations.

Jessamy: Yeah absolutely, there's some really interesting parallels, I think, between Victoria and Elizabeth II. They're both young, very young women when they come to the throne. They both reign for a really long time. They're both quite intensive periods of social and technological change within their reigns, so I think it's quite interesting to look at them alongside each other. Obviously, we're at different points in time, but there is a lot in common between them, I think.

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Sean: You can also see that with printing. Henry VIII's coronation is one of the first to have dreadful, doggerel poems written and printed and circulated with woodcut images, which will be fairly cheap to buy from a London station. There's a public element of passing on a memorial or a remembrance of the event, even if it's in something, which is not very... not very artistic, but it's still something. Something that would be purchased and held onto so we've got some good examples of those in the British Library.

Jessamy: And we see that as well with Victoria's jubilees, not so much with her coronation. We've got a great series in PP, there's a whole variety of commendations to Queen Victoria, on the occasion of her jubilee, starting from her silver all the way through to her diamond, and they are sent from all over the world. From communities, from towns, cities, all over the world sending commendations, literally illuminated manuscripts to the queen, on the occasion of these various jubilees. Some of them are absolutely huge!

The one for Liverpool comes in a box that's about 12/15 inches high and about 30 inches wide. It's vast, and it's wrapped up in this big wax sheet and then it's within a Morocco bound velvet lined box. It's one of the blingiest things that we hold here. You open up this beautiful dark blue box and inside it are these heavily gilded, hand illuminated manuscripts, sending the City of Liverpool's commendations to the queen, for her jubilee.

What I find really interesting about those particular commendations is the imagery that each place has chosen to celebrate the queen. For Liverpool, they've picked the Three Graces, but they've also picked the concert hall and the library and the town hall. It's interesting that they've chosen those very civic buildings, to be the things that represent what's good and special about Liverpool. I think that's quite interesting from its material history point of view that we have those collections of those types of documents, as well as the slightly more mundane roles of coronation, which are pretty standard issued government books. As far as I can see the handwriting, between William IV and Victoria look identical, to the point that I'm relatively convinced it's the same person writing. I know that there is a common government hand still in use in this period but I'm looking at these two books going, it's got to be the same person and it's only seven years apart. So it's entirely plausible that it is the same clerk doing the piece of work, but it's really interesting that they are so alike in terms of the diplomatic structure.

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Vicky: We've already touched quite a bit on Elizabeth II's coronation, nearly bringing us up to date, even though it happened in 1953. It was the most recent coronation, so let's delve deeper into that moment. Lisa, what did you find in the collections?

Lisa: We've got a lot of interesting records about Elizabeth II's coronation from 1953 and I think one of favourite records is a collection of tickets for admission for the coronation. They're really brightly coloured, they're really bold. We've got ones that are bright pink, ones that are blue, and kind of yellow. They're slightly smaller than Queen Victoria's tickets that Jessamy described previously and they've got the monarch's coat of arms at the top. Then they have the seat number, and what entrance they should go to. A lot of the tickets that we also hold are for press, so photographers, or people working for the BBC, who would have been admitted to the coronation as well.

Vicky: That's quite a change from the previous eras and the attendees there?

Lisa: Yeah, definitely.

Vicky: So, what did attendees experience on the day?

Lisa: The National Archives doesn't hold any personal accounts of those who attended the coronation. But it's likely that it would have been a really busy and exciting day for guests, like I said, we can see on the tickets that it would have their seat number and what entrance they needed to go into. They would have had to arrive in plenty of time, it would have been a very organised and well rehearsed ceremony. Guests probably would have been in Westminster Abbey for quite a long time as well. The coronation ceremony itself lasted almost three hours, and they would have been sitting down in their seats well before Elizabeth II entered Westminster Abbey. So yeah, I think it would have been a really exciting day for guests to celebrate.

Vicky: And what about those people that attended remotely? That average person may be watching from home for the first time?

Lisa: I think it's really exciting that Elizabeth II's coronation is the first ceremony to be televised, so people will have been able to watch it in real time, from home and other public places. For

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instance, in cinemas, in town halls and things like that, so I think you really get this sense of people coming together. A sense of community, of people celebrating, and watching it on TV.

Jessamy: It's a real moment in social history in the mid-20th century, isn't it, it's that point for a generation of people who vividly remember it, because they were watching it on television. And TVs aren't as commonplace by any stretch of imagination as they are now. I know my dad was 11 in 1953 and he remembers the one house in the street that had a television, and all the grownups were crammed into the front room when the kids were all watching through the window. They raised the windows up, sash windows up, so that the kids could look through and see it from there. That cramming together, coming together, as a community to see it on the television. I think that for that generation, it's a real moment. And there's a broader interest in the royal family in this period, there's a lot of glamour associated with the queen and Prince Philip. I know that Elizabeth and Philip are both really common middle names in this period, lots of people were sort of inspired by the queen, the Princess Elizabeth as she was, and then the queen in this period. It's that sort of glamour in the aftermath of the war, you've got colour and vibrancy in the midst of some really dark times. It's really positioned as a moment of national celebration, coming together as this nice thing that's happening in the aftermath of the war.

Sean: I think that the jubilees, the platinum one we had and then the one we had in 1977, give us an echo of what it was like in the past to have a figurehead who had real power, and real gravity, as somebody who was leading the country. We can see that in all of the colour and the pageantry, it is very memorable. It sticks in your mind from being a child, you know, a young 'un in the 70s or, or even last year when the platinum jubilee stuff happened. So I think if you think back to the past, and maybe things like when Charles II came back to the throne after the interregnum, he really invested a lot of time in recreating and rebuilding the imagery of monarchy. The crown jewels were remade, and his coronation was a throwback at the high point of medieval pomp and ceremony, because he wanted to renew that sense of personal leadership again. I think that that's echoed in how the country still remembers some elements of that, in the way that modern monarchs are celebrated even though they haven't gotten that same level of power.

Vicky: Clearly the visual elements of this, the way it was broadcast, was really key but I believe that wasn't necessarily inevitable?

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Lisa: No, it wasn't. One of the records I find really interesting in the collection is a memorandum produced by the cabinet from October 1952, which was led by the Conservative Prime Minister Winston Churchill. So just to provide a bit of context, there was a lot of discussion at the time as to whether the coronation would be televised and if so, which parts. It was initially agreed that only a small section of it would be televised. But there was a strong public feeling that more of it should be televised. So this memorandum shows cabinet ministers discussing the extension of the television and discussing the pros and cons, which from our modern day viewing is quite interesting, I think.

For instance, a lot of the pros were discussing the strong public feeling that people should be able to be involved and engaged in the coronation and be able to watch it themselves. And also, there was a discussion that television was here to stay, so if it wasn't televised, the government would be criticised for not moving with the times. Looking at the cons list, many people believed that televising it "would impair the dignity and sanctity of the ceremony." There was also discussion on whether the religious parts of the coronation should be televised or not, and whether the public would be satisfied by just watching the film of the coronation as well. But I think the last quote I find most interesting and it says, "if the coronation ceremony is televised, what argument will remain for refusing television facilities for royal funerals, weddings, religious services, and even proceedings in the House of Commons." So of course today, the royal weddings are televised and so are other proceedings in the House of Commons. I think it's quite interesting to look back to this record from 1952, where they're almost worrying about this and if the queen's coronation is televised, what will that mean for other public events?

Vicky: What about in the House of Commons?

Lisa: Yeah, so at the time, Winston Churchill was getting a lot of questions in the House of Commons debates from MPs asking what was happening with a televised nation. He said "it would be unfitting for the whole ceremony to be presented as if it were a theatrical performance." He had a lot of MPs then questioning him saying, Oh, well, my constituents actually really want to be able to see the ceremony televised and also kind of feel part of it. Joseph Reeves, who was MP for Greenwich stated in a House of Commons debate, "there was a general public feeling throughout the country that people should be able to see the coronation service in the same way [as those] who are privileged who have a special right to be present." So I think from this, you really get the

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idea of how MPs were advocating for their constituents and what they wanted. Also this idea that members of the public should be allowed to see the ceremony as if they were sat in Westminster Abbey themselves

Vicky: This kind of idea that it's democratising access to these ceremonies but how many people actually had a TV at the time?

Lisa: Yeah, that's a really good question, and Jessamy touched on it earlier. So it was obviously very different to today in terms of 1953, so not everybody had one. But it is quite interesting, because sales of televisions did increase in the lead up to the coronation. For instance, the number of BBC television licence holders was 1.45 million in March 1952 but this actually increased to 2.32 million by the end of May in 1953, the month before the coronation. I think this really shows that the correlation really marks the coming of age of television, as well as the modernisation of monarchy.

Vicky: How else do people engage in Elizabeth's correlation?

Lisa: If people didn't have a television themselves, they could watch it at the cinema or in town halls and other public places. A newspaper clipping I found in the *Banbury Advertiser*, which is in Oxfordshire, said that a television set was actually installed in a local school hall so that village children could watch the ceremony. This was then followed by a muddy cross country race, tennis tournaments, tea dancing, a bonfire and fireworks. I think this is a really nice newspaper clipping and how everyone was coming together to celebrate, and if you didn't have a television, you could kind of still engage in the ceremony and watch it.

Vicky: And what about the impact of this TV recording to the wider world?

Lisa: Yeah, so a press release that we hold in our collection, actually discusses how their television recording (which would have been stored in film canisters afterwards), on the evening of the coronation was actually flown to Canada and the United States for members of the public there to watch it. I think the fact that it was flown the evening of the coronation just really highlights how urgent it was that people overseas wanted to be able to watch the coronation of Elizabeth II and feel like they were involved in it.

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Vicky: How many people watched in the UK and elsewhere?

Lisa Berry-Waite: Yeah, so a huge amount of people. 27 million people watched it in Britain, as well as millions around the world. I think if we compare it to recent events, the royal marriage of Will and Kate had similar figures to those that watched the coronation.

Vicky: Thank you all for your contributions. That's been fascinating.

Lisa: Thanks, Vicky.

Jessamy: Thanks for having us, Vicky.

Sean: Thanks very much Vicky

Vicky: Thanks to everyone for taking part in this episode and bringing this rich history to light again.

This episode is part of a season of events and activities commemorating the coronation of King Charles III on May 6th. To find out more, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/coronations.

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Even though coronations are steeped in tradition, it's fascinating to compare their differences. I wonder how Charles' III's coronation will be different from the coronations we have covered in this episode...

Vicky: Thanks for listening to On the Record from The National Archives. To find out more about The National Archives, follow the link from the episode description in your podcast listening app or visit nationalarchives.gov.uk. to subscribe to On the Record at The National Archives so you don't miss new episodes, which are released throughout the year.

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