

Crowns and Coronations: A reflection and overview

HM's Crowning No Fairy Tale

by Bruce Patterson

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A year or so ago I was in London for a friend's wedding. Happily, this coincided with the Jubilee weekend, so I was able to attend some of the events related to the celebration, which made it a very memorable visit. For example, although I was well back in the crowd on the Tuesday morning, I was able to catch a glimpse of the gold state coach as it proceeded up Ludgate Hill to St. Paul's. As you might know, in the past half century this coach has previously appeared at only two occasions: at the Silver Jubilee in 1977 and at the coronation in 1953, so the rarity of its appearance made the event very special indeed.

Coronations are themselves rarities, not only because of the long reign of our present monarch, but also because they actually rarely occur in other monarchies. I'll give a brief overview of the service that took place in 1953, with some notes on other coronations at Westminster Abbey as well as in other countries. I'd especially like to focus on the crown itself and other regalia, the essential symbol of the Coronation.

My job is very much concerned with such symbols. I work as a Herald in the Governor General's office, and, as such, I get to design and develop coats of arms for people, municipalities, institutions, churches, associations, schools, universities, and so forth. So I know that there is importance in connecting on a visual basis, whether in an art form like heraldry, or a series of actions like a ceremony. Our office in Canada is only 15 years old, and we concentrate much more on the former than the latter, although perhaps over time we shall find a role to play in national ceremonial. This is the case of my English colleagues, whom perhaps you noticed dressed in their colourful tabards at the thanksgiving service at St. Paul's. I was, as I noted, in the general crowd, but I joined the heralds for lunch at the College of Arms after the service.

Ask any child what makes a king or queen, and the answer will be instant: a crown. Not many people know very much about the Coronation ceremony itself, but everyone knows that a monarch wears a crown, and that a monarch is created by having a crown solemnly placed on his or her head – a coronation. We know this not only from history, but also from storybooks, works of art, school dances, beauty contests, and so forth.

As with most common knowledge, the truth is much more complex. This year we are marking the 50th anniversary of the Coronation of the Queen. Although she became Queen on the death of her father in February 1952, the preparations for the crowning took a considerable amount of time, and nearly a year and a half later, in June, 1953, she was crowned at Westminster Abbey. In many ways this was the greatest Coronation ever at the Abbey, a relief from wartime suffering and austerity, and the first such ceremony to be televised. As a retired English herald, John Brooke-Little, wrote: "It had to be done not just well, but

supremely well."

The event was unique in several ways. Worth noting is the fact that although a number of European countries are monarchies, none except Britain has a coronation ceremony. Some, like Belgium or Castilian Spain, have never had a coronation tradition, whereas others, such as the Scandinavian monarchies, replaced their coronation with inauguration ceremonies in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. In fact, the last coronation that took place on the European continent was that of King Ferdinand of Romania in 1922, in Alba Iulia, a small city in Transylvania that had been transferred to Romania only two years before. There are a few other monarchies around the world that have had coronations this century, such as Ethiopia in 1930 and Iran in 1967. The latter was a sumptuous affair that took place a full 26 years after the Shah succeeded to the throne, with magnificent regalia was created for the event – most of which, perhaps surprisingly, remains on display in Teheran! Coronations have also taken place in Tonga, Nepal, Bhutan, Malaysia, and Thailand.

The crown with which we, as Canadians, are familiar is known as the St. Edward's Crown, and is the essential identifying mark for the monarch throughout the Commonwealth. It is perhaps best known as a printed symbol, for the actual crown has only been worn for a matter of minutes in the past few centuries. Even the use of the Imperial State Crown is limited to the opening of parliament at Westminster each year. Medieval monarchs regularly wore personal crowns – which were different from coronation crowns; however, the regular wearing of any type of crown has not really been practised for the past half millennium. The present-day crowns of the existing European monarchs are sometimes displayed for ceremonial purposes, but they are never actually worn.

As many of you will know, the coronation regalia is on permanent display at the Tower of London. The centrepiece of this is the St. Edward's Crown, made for the coronation of Charles II in 1661. It is reputed to have fragments of its predecessor crown within it. This earlier crown was destroyed during the Cromwellian period. The name comes from King Edward the Confessor, the Saxon King who became England's patron saint until that honour passed to St. George in the 15th century. Edward founded Westminster Abbey, the site of all subsequent English coronations, and he instituted much of the Coronation regalia. The crown that he had made was, oddly enough, a second try: in 1051 he had entrusted the original gold and jewels to a monk named Spearhavo, designated as Bishop of London, who then absconded with them.

The St. Edward's Crown is made of gold and set with jewels, none of which have any particular significance, unlike many of the jewels in the Imperial State



The Queen on Coronation Day wearing the Imperial State Crown.

Crown. This crown weighs about 5 pounds and is therefore worn for only a few minutes during the coronation ceremony, after which it is replaced by the Imperial State Crown. This sounds onerous, but the crown of Serbia, made of gunmetal from a cannon, weighs over 9 pounds, and it has been used only once, at the 1904 coronation of King Peter, who was obliged to wear it while riding through the streets of Belgrade. This 60-year old monarch apparently had to remove it several times during the coronation ceremony itself. Even heavier is the crown of the Pacific kingdom of Tonga, last used in the 1968 coronation of the present monarch, who himself is an enormous man.

Returning to the St. Edward's Crown, the story goes that in 1911, the Archbishop of Canterbury set it on George V's head backwards; as a result, in 1938 George VI arranged to have a piece of red thread added to mark the correct way round. This piece of thread, however, disappeared, and the same error was made, much to the chagrin of the Archbishop, who blamed "some officious person" for having removed the thread. In 1953, our present Queen arranged to have two stars placed on the crown to mark its correct placement.

The Imperial State Crown is only half as heavy as the St. Edward's Crown, and it is worn at the end of the Coronation service and at subsequent events. It was re-fashioned in 1938 but was essentially the same as the crown Queen Victoria used at her coronation a century before. Victoria did not use the St. Edward's Crown,

nor, for reasons of health, did Edward VII. Unlike the St. Edward's Crown, which is mainly gold, the Imperial State Crown is composed primarily of jewels held together on a frame. The essential design is the same, however: the rim is set with four crosses patté alternating with four fleurs-de-lis, above which are two arches intersecting at the centre, on

which is placed a small orb topped with a cross.

There are several other crowns kept at the Tower of London, either in the Jewel House or in the Crowns and Diamonds exhibit. The latter includes several crowns used by kings and queens from the 18th to early 20th centuries, many of them only frames, the jewels having been hired out at the time and subsequently returned, a common practice before this century. In the Jewel House are other crowns, including that of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, made in 1937, and which we saw resting on her coffin last year, and the Imperial Crown of India, made from 6000 jewels sent by Marharajahs. This is perhaps intrinsically the most valuable crown, and it has been worn only once, by Edward VII at the Delhi Durbar of 1911. The crowns of England are constitutionally forbidden from leaving the county, so this crown was made instead, and it had four, rather than two, intersecting arches, in the European style.

In heraldry, the crown is an immediately recognizable feature of sovereignty throughout the Commonwealth. It is customarily depicted like the St. Edward's Crown, somewhat simplified. It appears as a part of the Arms of Canada as well as of a number of provinces. Many military unit badges use the crown, as well as law enforcement agencies such as police services, underlying the link between the Crown and the law. A limited number of other bodies, such as those with Royal patronage or Royal designation, are permitted to use the crown by special permission of H.M. the Queen

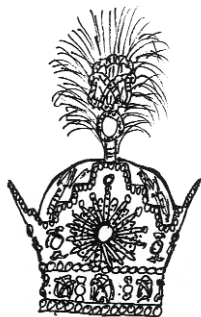
[Ed: this includes the Monarchist League of Canada's Arms], and cities and towns with royal connections (such as Ottawa, Regina, Fredericton, and the Niagara Region) are also sometimes entitled to this honour.

Several Governors General in Canada, including Her Excellency, have incorporated the crown in their personal coats of arms to mark their service as the Queen's representative – they remain the only people permitted to do so.

We can thus see that in addition to the actual physical crowns, symbolic crowns or artistic depictions of them also have an important role to play as emblems of the monarchy. To an extent, depictions of crowns are sometimes even more real than what they represent. When Germany became an Empire in 1871, a coat of arms was created on which was placed a new type of crown. What is surprising is that this crown was never actually made, and its existence was only on paper. Even crowns that did exist were never actually used at official ceremonies. The magnificent crown of Imperial Austria, which I saw in the Schatzkammer Museum, never played a role in a coronation, although Emperors sometimes had their portraits painted wearing the crown.

Something that might be even more surprising is the notion that a crown does not necessarily have to represent a monarchical government, but instead a notion of sovereignty. A case in point was the brief period of the English republic in the 1650s. Oliver Cromwell's coat of arms as Lord Protector was topped by a

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The Pahlavi Crown, Iran 1925
Sketch by Bruce Patterson



Crown of the German Empire



The St. Edward's Crown in Canadian Heraldry: Royal Arms of Canada from the CHA Letters Patent

Coronation Day Broadcast, June 2, 1953

by the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, Governor-General of Canada

Tonight we all of us have in our minds a picture. We see a slight and graceful figure wearing a glittering diadem, emerging from the great church of Edward the Confessor, entering her golden coach and moving slowly away through the crowded London streets.

This was but one act of a superb spectacle which, in one fashion or another, has been enjoyed as a spectacle by mil-



lions everywhere. All the world loves pageantry, and we are happy to think that today so many have looked gladly and kindly at the solemnity by which the venerable and now truly venerated monarchy of Britain has renewed itself in the person of our young Sovereign. So great a pageant, reflecting so many centuries of history, speaks to every nation.

But to Canada, to all Canadians, it means much more than a spectacle. The Coronation is, indeed, the greatest and most moving historical pageant of our time. But to us it is something more than that – more even than the history which is our history. It is part of ourselves. It is linked in a very special way with our national life. It stands for qualities and institutions which mean Canada to every one of us and which for all our differences and all our variety have kept Canada Canadian. How much the Crown has done to give us our individual character as a nation in the Americas! It shapes our contribution to Western democracy. The Crown itself, as a golden object, may repose in London, but as a cherished symbol it plays and did play a unique role in our national life long

before our Sovereign became officially The Queen of Canada. Great truths are brought home to us by what we have seen and heard today — the sense of continuity, of oneness with the past derived from our ancient monarchy; the unifying force which comes from that something in our Constitution which stands above all our diversity, and which every one of us can respect. This great and moving ceremony means for us, then, certain things which are blended, and set forth in the dignity and splendour of the Crown itself, and in the simplicity and the sincerity of the Person who wears it.

Many of us can say tonight that we have now witnessed in one way or another, four Coronations. These four occasions have marked a period of revolutionary change — one which has seen moments of the greatest peril for our nation, for the Commonwealth, and even for civilization itself. During these times of stress and trouble the Crown, unshaken by disaster, has been ennobled through trial. It has helped us to face the dark days; it has been with us to brighten the glad ones. And, therefore, as we have returned once again to this ancient rite, we have found it enriched with an ever deeper meaning. Each time we witness it, we see more clearly the true nature of our national heritage and its historic links with the Crown. I should like, as one who has the great honour of acting as the representative of our Sovereign in our country, to try to tell you very briefly something of what I believe the Crown means in Canada. In doing so, I should like to speak particularly to the young Canadians who may be among my listeners.

First, the Sovereign wearing the Crown is associated with the rule of law. To some, law is merely a matter of prohibitions and penalties. But a thousand years ago, when Anglo-Saxon kings gathered and recorded with reverent care the customs worked out in the common assemblies of the people, law meant that and far more. It was understood in its full meaning of security; security for peace and justice against violence and wrong. It is the

glory of the Crown that it stands first for justice through law. This was the ancient boast of the ancestors of our Queen; and she has this day solemnly renewed, in the hearing of many of you, that ancient promise — the promise to rule according to the “laws and customs” of her peoples.

Out of our law has grown liberty. The two are often set against each other, but they are inseparable. They are really two faces of the same shield. This is nowhere better shown than in the long story of law and liberty in England. They have grown side by side and they have grown in our traditional way; first, in close association with the Crown; and also through the contribution of men and women of many tongues and in countless places who, in the name of law and liberty, have offered to our Crown their willing homage. I need not, I am sure, remind you of how our two great Canadian races have together upheld the Crown and cherished the Sovereign. In our law which is the frame of our liberty, French and English names are as intricately mingled as are French and English customs and ideas.

With all our pride of history, we can claim no monopoly of law and of liberty. We are, however, peculiarly, I can even say uniquely, happy in holding these blessings not merely in our courts and legislatures, but as completely represented by a family and in a person. Other monarchies have disappeared and are disappearing in this age of violence and strife. Our Crown lives on, not as an historic survival, but as a living and enduring thing, a central element in the life of the Queen's peoples, more personal and for that reason, more firmly based than ever before. “Affection has been joined to reverence.” And if we ask what has given this ancient institution its perennial youth, its renewed vigour, in an age when so many former things are ceasing to be, the answer is, I think, not far to seek. It is to



be found in the high character of our Royal House and in the steadfast determination of its members to live and move as a part of contemporary life and as a symbol of their peoples' ideals. The Queen is the head of our nation, and our nation, as we contemplate her Headship, becomes a household itself.

At the beginning of this talk, I spoke of the glittering Crown worn by the Queen. I would ask you to remember that it is not only a splendid jewel and a glorious symbol. It is symbolically a heavy burden. We give our Sovereign all honour and affection. She gives us in return the example of unremitting labour and of steady self-discipline. We impose on her not only a heavy load of constitutional duties but also a personal participation in the life of all those realms which owe her allegiance. Our new Queen, it is true, is surrounded by loyal and devoted service, but she has dedicated herself today to a stern and solitary task.

Many will remember that at the crowning of His Majesty King George V, the Archbishop who preached the Coronation sermon chose as his text: “I am among you as he that serveth.” The very splendour of our monarchy serves to show forth the compelling force of these great and simple words.

The Coronation, may I remind you in closing, is a religious act, a solemn sacrament. It represents the dedication of the Sovereign to the people, and of the people to the Sovereign. The Queen has this day pledged herself not as a passive symbol, but as a living embodiment of our national heritage of law and of liberty, of humanity and of faith. It is for us to join her in this personal dedication — as we promise her our fealty and service. And, as we see her moving away from the Abbey in the splendour of her office, and with the burden of her task, let us follow her with the ancient and familiar prayer,

Endue her plenteously with Thy heavenly gifts; grant her in health and wealth long to live. GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!

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depiction of the crown. Even more surprising is the fact that a crown was created to be displayed with his body lying in state.

An obvious example of this in the modern world is the very distinctive crown of Hungary, the Crown of St. Stephen, which has had some incredible adventures through the centuries. Its famous tilting cross on the top was the result of one of these mishaps. In this century, it was used to crown the last King of Hungary, Karl IV, in 1916 (as I mentioned before, he was never crowned Emperor of Austria). It was smuggled out of the country as the Russians took Budapest in 1945, and it fell into the hands of the Americans occupying Austria, who took it to Fort Knox, stating that it was not to be returned to Hungary while a Communist dictatorship held power. President Carter eventually relented, and it was returned to the National Museum, where it remains on display today.

This crown of St. Stephen is seen by the population as a symbol of Hungarian statehood, and it is shown ensigning the traditional coat of arms of Hungary, which was restored in 1991. It is also placed on the coat of arms of the capital, Budapest. Although Hungary is a republic, the use of the crown, which is almost as old as the nation itself, is a supremely important symbol of the nation, its history and its independence.

There are many more stories about various crowns around the world, but perhaps we should return to the subject of the Coronation itself. The actual crowning is only a small part of the coronation service, although perhaps the most dramatic. The order of the service has changed over the centuries, and no doubt the next coronation will incorporate many changes.

A mediaeval feature was a procession from the Tower of London to Westminster Palace the night before a coronation. Now the procession of the Sovereign to the Abbey takes place on the day of the coronation, and since the time of Queen Victoria, this has been from

Buckingham Palace in the Gold State Coach.

Following the monarch's entrance into the Abbey, the Acclamation takes place. Derived from the ceremony of creating a Roman Emperor, this developed into a form of election of the Sovereign, and is now a recognition of a Sovereign's established right. Influenced by Byzantine ceremonial, the next stage is the Oath, which has existed since in the 9th century. This is an undertaking by the Monarch to rule justly. In the 1953, a Bible was presented to the Queen by the Moderator of the Church of Scotland.

Next comes the Anointing, which since the 10th century has been done to the antiphon “Zadok the Priest,” which links this action to Biblical precedents. Handel's famous setting has been used in English coronations since that of George II. This is the most solemn aspect of the Coronation, and involves the anointing of the Sovereign's hands, head, and breast with specially made oil, essentially a religious consecration of the new monarch. This part of the ceremony has gone through many interesting changes

through the years. Henry IV followed the French coronation custom by also being anointed on the elbows and shoulder blades, and Edward VI had his feet anointed by Archbishop Cramner.

The oil is applied by a spoon, which dates from the 12th century and was the only part of the Coronation regalia to survive the Cromwellian period. Since 1625, fresh oil has been prepared for each coronation, made of oils of orange, jasmine, roses, cinnamon, and other scents. From the 14th to the 16th centuries English monarchs were anointed with oil reputedly given to St. Thomas Becket by the Blessed Virgin Mary. After several centuries, however, this oil had become thick and rank.

The Insignia is then bestowed on the monarch. The vestments were originally those of Edward the Confessor, but these were destroyed in 1649. Thereafter, new clothing was made for each coronation up to Victoria's in 1838. These include spurs, swords, rings, bracelets, sceptres, and the orb.

The culmination of the bestowal of

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insignia is the crowning itself, usually done with St. Edward's Crown. At this moment all the peers and peeresses also place their coronets on their heads. This is done seated on the Coronation chair, which Edward I commissioned to incorporate the Stone of Destiny from the Abbey of Scone, on which the kings of Scotland sat for their coronations. Since the restoration it has been used as the Coronation chair. A few years ago, the Stone was returned to Scotland, on the understanding that it would be brought back to the Abbey for each Coronation.

The monarch is enthroned and homage is paid by the senior peer of each of the five grades of the peerage, plus the Royal Dukes and the Archbishops, the latter of whom pay fealty. Until 1902, all peers paid homage by kneeling, swearing an oath, kissing the Sovereign's cheek, and touching the crown. Needless to say, this part of the service was wisely curtailed. Holy Communion follows, and then the new monarch departs the Abbey.

A feature until George IV's coronation in 1821 was the Feast. This last coronation was perhaps the most extravagant in history, and it cost upwards of £400,000, much of it paid by French war reparations from the Napoleonic wars. The flamboyant George IV designed many of the costumes worn at the coronation, and Westminster Hall was packed with participants and onlookers who enjoyed vast quantities of food. A number of official functions were connected with the feast, the most famous of which is the King's Champion, who offered to fight anyone who denied that the King or Queen was the rightful monarch. In 1761 a hush fell over the crowd when the challenge had been issued, for a rumour was circulating that Bonnie Prince Charlie had returned to England to challenge the Champion. For George IV's coronation, the Champion rode in on a horse hired from a circus, and he wore armour hired from an antique dealer.

There is a fair relation between the Coronation and my daily work, which deals with symbols. It would be a mistake to see heraldic symbols as quaint or antique. Time and again, I discover how powerful good symbolism can be. The Coronation ceremony is an evolving form the elements of which have developed over centuries and, in some cases, millennia. I was reminded of its significance last year when the Royal Canadian Mint promoted its 50 cent Jubilee coin, an excellent idea. In my view, the Mint may have missed a good educational opportunity by having cast the Coronation as a fairy tale. Certainly there is much to remember fondly in the coronation of a young queen, and we can be justly impressed by the pageantry involved. The Coronation, however, is more than that – it is a significant rite, not only for its constitutional role, but also for the fact that it is a link in a chain stretching back through history. It fulfills a strong symbolic role, and effective symbols, especially those that have developed through history, matter a great deal.

Bruce Haig, of Lethbridge, AB advises *CMN* that in 1953 he journeyed to England with other Canadian students selected to attend Coronation festivities via the Commonwealth Youth Movement. Material recalling this memorable experience may be found on-line at http://www.ourheritage.net/Great_Adventures/1953_Coronation/Index.html