

'The complex holiday calendar of 1902: responses to the coronation of Edward VII and the growth of Edwardian event fatigue'

Abstract:

The coronation of Edward VII and events to mark the end of the South African War led to a series of public ceremonies and events in the United Kingdom that had a profound effect on attitudes linked to national occasions and public holidays. This article explores the circumstances surrounding the numerous local and national holidays of 1902. It considers the decision-making process linked to the declaration of a coronation double-bank holiday, which demonstrated the inadequacy of contemporary legislation. The public response to the postponement of the coronation, due to the king's contraction of appendicitis, led to a period of 'event fatigue' in response to further ceremonial events. This showcased how much the British people guarded their right to holiday time and how the coronation had become more synonymous with celebration than with royal ceremony. It also showcased the degree to which the British people had been politicized and were ready to defend what they saw as their rights, in rejection of deference and traditional authority.

Keywords: coronation / bank holiday / event fatigue / celebration

The coronation ceremony is more representative of medievalism than modernity. Yet, the coronation of Edward VII in 1902 – the first since 1838 and arguably the first of the 'modern' age - was defined not by ceremony, but by the conditions in which it took place. This article charts the circumstances surrounding the only coronation of a British monarch to be postponed due to illness and its role in the development of public holidays. Responses to the postponement are explored, highlighting shortcomings in parliamentary legislation and governmental planning processes linked to officially-sanctioned holiday time. As will be demonstrated, the myriad national and local public holidays of 1902 culminated in an apparent feeling of 'event fatigue', revealing a discernable shift in social attitudes concerning the monarchy and other authority structures during the transition from a 'Victorian' to 'Edwardian' society.

Previous consideration of the 1902 coronation has focused on the ceremonial aspects of the occasion, with detailed studies by Peter Hinchliff and Roy Strong.¹ Neville Kirk's study of Edwardian attitudes concerning the monarchy also highlighted socialist responses to the event, with a continuation of popular republicanism from the nineteenth, to the twentieth century.² Otherwise, the coronation has undergone little analysis, despite being an exemplar of change during a transformative period. The question of an 'Edwardian crisis' has been ardently debated for decades, with little consensus apart from recognition that the 1900s were tumultuous for both state and society.³ Most historians concur that if a crisis existed, it steadily built, peaking in the years immediately preceding the First World War. In the words of David Powell, 'it is possible to paint two very different pictures of Edwardian Britain. One is of a society riven by conflicts... the other emphasizes rather the elements of stability and continuity which underlay the superficial

¹ Peter Hinchliff, 'Frederick Temple, Randall Davidson and the coronation of Edward VII,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 48:1 (1997) 71-99; Roy Strong, *Coronation: A History of Kingship and the British Monarchy*, (London, 2005) 421-494.

² Neville Kirk, 'The conditions of royal rule: Australian and British socialist and labour attitudes to the monarchy, 1901-11,' *Social History*, 30:1 (2005) 64-88. This topic was widely explored in David Nash & Antony Taylor, (Eds) *Republicanism in Victorian Society*, (Stroud, 2000); Frank Prochaska, *The Republic of Britain 1760 to 2000*, (London, 2000); Antony Taylor, *Down with the Crown: British Anti-Monarchism and Debates about Royalty Since 1790* (London, 1988).

³ Roy Church, 'Edwardian Labour Unrest and Coalfield Militancy,' 1890-1914, *Historical Journal*, 30:4 (1987) 841-857; George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1983 edition); David Powell, *The Edwardian Crisis: Britain 1901-1914* (Basingstoke, 1996); G.R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886-1914*, 407-473; (Oxford, 2004), 407-473; David Thackeray, 'Rethinking the Edwardian Crisis of Conservatism,' *Historical Journal*, 54:1 (2011) 191-213.

appearance of disorder.⁴ The events of 1902 suggest that while a description of ‘crisis’ was too profound, the social shifts permitting such a scenario to develop were advancing.

The last decades of the nineteenth century had witnessed the increased politicization of the working class. Jon Lawrence highlights the effects of multiple generations residing in the same urban areas (rather than being recent migrants), increased literacy rates, greater opportunities for leisure and the slow removal of barriers (such as property rights) to political engagement, as combining to create a socially-aware and politically-engaged population.⁵ It was these factors, Lawrence argues, which ‘altered the relationship between politicians and the public’.⁶ This was a catalyst for the erosion of the Victorian paternalistic-political mindset, leading to greater democratization. Gradually, the hierarchical relationship between politicians and the public was transformed, creating a situation in which, as will be seen in relation to the coronation of 1902, citizens challenged traditional authority figures.

Yet, Lawrence opposes a concept of gradual modernization which, he suggests, implies a linear progression.⁷ Instead, party politics and locality are viewed as integral to a process of increased working-class political engagement. In the same period, public use of urban space and engagement with civic ritual challenged orthodox Victorian

⁴ Powell, 163.

⁵ Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), 30.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 267.

attitudes regarding respectability.⁸ These changes were counterbalanced with fear of a politically-active, publicly-engaged and socially-aware populace moving towards a 'new order'.⁹ Certainly, the start of the twentieth century did not prompt a revolutionary wave of activism. Instead, British society was increasingly self-aware and vocal in its own defence. If not accruing to a point of 'crisis', this certainly conflicted with prevailing Victorian authority structures. As José Harris has stated, while 'traditional notions of government and society were challenged' in the Edwardian period, the 'extraordinary tenacity with which mid-nineteenth-century principles and practices survived' cannot be overlooked.¹⁰ It was in these circumstances that problems created by the 1902 holiday calendar can be placed. A new-found public 'independence and self-identity' was transforming the definition of popular politics, while challenging the social and political status quo.¹¹ The events discussed in this article were therefore a flash point, where twentieth-century ideas regarding civic rights and expectations clashed with nineteenth-century governance, perceptions of decorum and respectability.

Alongside this increased 'democratization' was a twin narrative of pervasive commercialization, transforming perceptions of free time. The mid-nineteenth century was a demarcation point for the British holiday calendar. Industrialization left little opportunity for the agrarian calendar's festivals, with only four dates regarded as public

⁸ For a review of recent literature relating to public ritual and display, see Ben Roberts, 'Entertaining the community: the evolution of civic ritual and public celebration, 1860–1953', *Urban History* [Forthcoming] 2017.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 163; 265.

¹⁰ José Harris, 'Society and the State in Twentieth-Century Britain' in F.M.L. Thompson, (Ed.) *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950 Volume III*, (Cambridge, 1990), 63-117; 69.

¹¹ Lawrence, 65.

holidays from 1834: Good Friday; 1 May (May Day); 1 November (All Saints Day); and Christmas Day.¹² With the addition of the August Bank Holiday in 1871, the restricted holiday calendar was bolstered, presenting more opportunity for leisure and recreation. The Bank Holidays Act, a rare governmental intervention into the provision of public holidays, made a significant contribution to the development of the leisure industry.¹³ It also served as a replacement for traditional 'wakes holidays', which had been suppressed by the prevailing drive for rational recreation.¹⁴ Therefore, the revised holiday calendar was closely linked to notions of progress and personal freedoms. Yet, public holidays were also commercialized, becoming occasions not just of leisure, but of consumption. This became particularly true of holidays associated with the monarchy.

While additional holiday time was frequently sanctioned by local authorities for specific municipal celebrations, the declaration of a national holiday was uncommon. This was partly attributable to a lack of royal celebrations following Queen Victoria's retreat from public life after Prince Albert's death in 1861. There was also little to nationally commemorate until the queen's Golden and Diamond Jubilees of 1887 and 1897 respectively. As Britain has never had a national day such as Independence Day in the United States of America, or Bastille Day in France, national celebrations have tended to be linked to the monarchy or the cessation of warfare. Provincial observance of such

¹² For a detailed analysis of the traditional calendar, see Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1994).

¹³ Douglas A. Reid, 'Playing and praying' in Martin Daunton (Ed.) *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain Vol. III 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), 754-757.

¹⁴ Susan Barton, *Working-Class Organisations and Popular Tourism, 1840-1970* (Manchester, 2005), 189.

occasions rarely had a uniformed approach, with every municipal authority utilizing different planning models.

Local commemorations allowed civic leaders 'to demonstrate their status and public spirit', not only through potential munificence, but the extent to which they provided for their constituents.¹⁵ Such occasions also embraced festivity and frivolity, turning formal municipal ceremonies into meaningful public events. Participation was encouraged through variety performances, competitions, games, and entertaining parades, permitting what Michael Woods has termed 'sanitized rebellion', as recreational festivity broke from societal norms, under the auspices of elite figures.¹⁶ Local celebrations were also indicative of the extent to which consumerism was transforming even the most traditional aspects of the British state. As Frank Trentmann and Vanessa Taylor have recognized, 'consumer societies' develop with a shift from 'basic needs like food and shelter to material wants'.¹⁷ This process was firmly entrenched in Britain by 1902 and, following widespread consumerism associated with Victoria's jubilees,¹⁸ the coronation was the next step in the commercialization of the monarchy. Significantly, this also allowed the

¹⁵ Jonathan Parry, 'Whig monarchy, Whig nation: crown, politics and representativeness, 1800-2000', in Andrzej Olechnowicz, (Ed.) *The Monarchy and the British Nation 1780 to the Present*, (Cambridge, 2007) 47-75; 71.

¹⁶ Michael Woods, 'Performing power: local politics and the Taunton pageant of 1928,' *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25:1 (1999) 57-74.

¹⁷ Frank Trentmann & Vanessa Taylor, 'From users to consumers: water politics in nineteenth-century London', in Frank Trentmann (Ed.) *The Making of the Consumer* (Oxford, 2006) pp. 53-79; 54.

¹⁸ Thomas Richards, 'The image of Victoria in the year of Jubilee,' *Victorian Studies*, 31:1 (1987), 7-32.

public to stake a claim to an event which was at the very heart of British statehood, reinforcing Lawrence's assertions of an emerging 'new order'.¹⁹

The press played a significant role in this 'royal commercialization'. The modern monarchy was dependent on newspapers; without publicity, the institution's 'symbolic role' was harder to justify - something that became increasingly true over the course of the twentieth century. The press also needed the monarchy, as the institution's continued popularity guaranteed sales. This relationship commenced with the 1897 jubilee, in line with the event's consumerism.²⁰ It was then the 'New Journalism' style of reporting which defined newspaper coverage of Victoria's death and the accession of Edward VII, making them not just constitutional events, but media ones too.²¹ As will be shown, national the public relied on newspapers in the summer of 1902 to stay informed of both the king's health and local developments linked to coronation festivities. It was also the press which characterized and prompted local sentiment and emotion linked to the event, even though in some cases, sentiment was misrepresented. This was the function of local newspapers: to inform the public but also to be representative of public feeling.²² Newspapers are therefore this article's principal source, as they permit greater access to public responses to the coronation and give an understanding of how opinions were

¹⁹ Lawrence, 265.

²⁰ Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy, *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present* (Oxford, 2015), 98-100.

²¹ Plunkett, 242.

²² Andrew Walker, 'The Development of the Provincial Press in England c. 1780-1914', *Journalism Studies*, 7, (3) (2006), pp.373-386.

shaped. Constant reporting of ceremonial events and public occasions also undoubtedly contributed to the growing feeling of event fatigue, due to their sheer volume.

Rituals associated with royalty occupy unique ground in relation to the public appeal of custom. Tom Harrisson has suggested that patriotic fervour created by royal ceremonial events was (and arguably still is) akin to that of an ancient society, with the monarch symbolically 'no less important [to the audience] than any primitive king to his tribe'.²³ Yet this does not acknowledge the basic novelty associated with such events. The period between 1870 and 1914 is widely acknowledged as a time when royal ritual became 'splendid, public and popular,' in correlation with the 'invention of tradition' thesis.²⁴ Additionally, the findings of Philip Ziegler concerning twentieth century royal celebrations suggest that many engaged with such events purely out of a desire for recreation.²⁵ Therefore, the staging of a royal celebration represented not just nationalistic ritual, but also broader cultural changes regarding leisure. As the first coronation for 64 years, the 1902 ceremony carried considerable novelty. It was also representative of the nation's past. Paul Readman has demonstrated that there was a 'strong antiquarian sensibility in the 1890s and 1900s' which was used to 'cope with and accommodate change'.²⁶ Coming at the start of a new century, in a climate of increasing democratization, it is tempting to see the coronation as a timely beacon of tradition against

²³ Tom Harrisson, *Britain Revisited* (London, 1961), 229.

²⁴ David Cannadine, 'The context, performance and meaning of ritual: the British monarchy and the "invention of tradition", c.1820-1977,' in Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, (Eds) *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1993) 101-164; 120.

²⁵ Philip Ziegler, *Crown and People* (London, 1978), 119.

²⁶ Readman, 160; 191.

the forces of modernity. The realities of the summer of 1902, however, made it a showcase of how rapidly Britain was changing.

Planning a coronation: The official response to the accession of Edward VII

The Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria prompted celebrations on an unprecedented scale throughout the country, simultaneously reinforcing municipal, national, and imperial sentiment and belonging. Beyond the official celebrations in London, the occasion was observed in a profoundly-recreational manner, providing solid precedent for future provincial celebrations, by catering to a growing public demand for entertainment.²⁷ The frequency of national celebrations and commemorations increased in the following years. When news came of the Relief of Mafeking (a turning point in the South African War) in May 1900, the nation broke out into jubilation, leading to general holidays being declared by local authorities to simultaneously observe the event. Civic leaders hastily organized municipal celebrations such as parades and thanksgiving services, utilizing precedents established for the Diamond Jubilee. A similar approach was taken in response to the death of Queen Victoria the following year. After initial confusion regarding how to mark the death of the longest reigning monarch in British history, there was a semi-suspension of public life. On the day of the funeral, most communities simultaneously staged memorial services, which as John Wolffe recognizes, symbolically evoked the familial bonds of nationhood and national grief, through the prism of civic culture.²⁸

²⁷ Roberts, 'Entertaining the community'.

²⁸ John Wolffe, 'Secular saints: church and civic commemoration in the United Kingdom, 1847-1910' *Hispania Sacra*, 42:86 (1990) 435-43.

The occasion was not universally revered, with many left-wing politicians and commentators lamenting the overly-militaristic and jingoistic tone of the commemorations.²⁹ However, this combination of both commemoration and reflection quickly became expected elements of municipal and state pageantry. Proclamation ceremonies for Edward VII were staged in every community, bringing yet more pageantry. Therefore, on the eve of the Edwardian age, Britain had benefited from several instances of officially-sanctioned and much-prized 'holiday' time, while being exposed to a variety of civic and state pageantry and ritual. There was eagerness not just to have time off work, but to engage in public celebrations, commemorations and communal events, ahead of what was to be an unprecedented year for the British holiday calendar.

After an initial 'dazed and hushed' mood in Whitehall and the royal palaces following Queen Victoria's death, a growing spirit of optimism and anticipation soon emerged.³⁰ This was tempered by the logistical problem of the first accession for 64 years, due both to the degree with which Britain had changed since Victoria's accession in 1837 and a lack of official awareness of exactly what was supposed to happen. As Sir Frederick Ponsonby, Private Secretary to both Victoria and Edward VII wrote, immediately following the Queen's death, 'we spent the evening looking up what had been done when George IV and William IV had died.'³¹ Confusion was widespread, with many local authorities relying on the assistance of the Association of Municipal Corporations to formulate a

²⁹ Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Aldershot, 1997), 178.

³⁰ Sir Frederick Ponsonby, *Recollections of Three Reigns* [originally published 1930] (London, 1981), 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

ceremonial response to the transition.³² Otherwise, little national guidance was forthcoming, apart from the issuing of a specific order of service for all churches and chapels in England and Wales to follow.³³

After a suitable period of mourning, the coronation planning committee was appointed on 26 June 1901 – exactly a year ahead of the intended ceremony.³⁴ The committee's efforts were assisted by the personable nature of King Edward. Viscount Esher recognized that the tone of royal business decidedly changed in the early months of the reign, as the king adopted an air of accessibility.³⁵ The central complexity lay with the mechanics of staging a national celebration and any associated national holidays. It was felt that the occasion should be observed with two public holidays, following the example of two-day celebrations of 1897.³⁶ Shortly after the one-year anniversary of the Queen's death, the Privy Council Office communicated (through various government departments) with provincial authorities, to assess public feeling about a potential double bank holiday on Thursday 26 and Friday 27 June, with a third optional holiday on Saturday 28 June.³⁷ This unexpectedly-democratic method suggested genuine concern regarding the effects of a prolonged holiday. More likely, it was a political move. As Sir Frederick Ponsonby, the king's Private Secretary later recognized, 'the Victorian tradition took some

³² Association of Municipal Corporations circular, January 1901, Teesside Archives, Middlesbrough, CB/M/C 5/9/8.

³³ Order of service (1901), Teesside Archives, Middlesbrough, U/ML (3) 8/19.

³⁴ Hinchliff, 'Coronation of Edward VII'.

³⁵ Viscount Esher, *Cloud-Capp'd Towers*, (London, 1927) 180.

³⁶ The National Archives: Public Record Office, Kew, *Privy Council Office, Coronation Proclamation of Bank Holidays*, PC/8/560.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

time to die and the new era was not ushered in within a few weeks of King Edward's accession to the throne, but gradually new methods were being introduced into the Royal Household and every department was being overhauled.³⁸ It was therefore characteristic of an innovative spirit of openness, linked to this 'brave new age.'

Originally, it was proposed that the second holiday be restricted to London, though the Governor of the Bank of England highlighted the negative effect for business, if bills of exchange and promissory notes were issued on different days.³⁹ A double (or indeed triple) holiday *had* to be nationwide. However, the response of local authorities to the Privy Council's query was symptomatic of the degree to which a 'one size fits all' conflicted with local sensitivities and realities. In Edinburgh, for example, magistrates suggested that a single holiday would be sufficient, suggesting that a three-day holiday, with the addition of Sunday, would result in personal provisions running low.⁴⁰ Authorities took a similar view in Glasgow, while conceding that the public would probably demand a double holiday.⁴¹ The Lord Mayor of London supported this claim, claiming that local residents widely favoured two days of celebrations.⁴² Opinion in the rest of England appeared divided between one and two days. Quite reasonably, municipal authorities feared a prolonged holiday's effects on local trade and the broader functions of civil society. Yet, there was also clear recognition of high public demand for officially-sanctioned holiday

³⁸ Ponsonby, 40.

³⁹ The National Archives: Public Record Office, Kew, *Privy Council Office, Coronation Proclamation of Bank Holidays*, PC/8/560, Letter from the Governor of the Bank of England, 26 February 1902.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Edinburgh Town Clerk's Office to Scottish Office, 7 March 1902.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Glasgow City Chambers, 3 March 1902.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Lord Mayor's Office, 3 March 1902.

time. The flourishing leisure industry, bolstered by an established holiday calendar and growing demand for working-hour reform, created a nation of consumers who closely guarded their leisure time, were eager to avail themselves of the chance for recreation and were ready to defend their right to it.

This did not necessarily mean that workers could afford such holiday time. Since the 1871 Act, bank holiday pay had been dependent on the individual worker's terms of employment or the personal attitudes of employers.⁴³ The development of paid holidays was a slow process, championed by Liberal politician Sir John Lubbock and the Early Closing Association since the 1870s, but meeting with little success by 1900. Lubbock renewed his parliamentary efforts to secure better holiday time for workers in 1901-02, but was thwarted by governmental reluctance.⁴⁴ The issue was also not high on the agenda of trade unions. As Stephen Jones has acknowledged, holiday pay was a 'utopian' ideal compared with broader contemporary campaigns for workers' rights.⁴⁵ The ambiguity surrounding pay on irregular public holidays such as royal events was frequently seized upon by socialists to criticize the crown. Indeed, there were many examples of this in both 1901 and 1902.⁴⁶ Difficulty also came with the legality of public

⁴³ E.H. Phelps Brown, *The Growth of British Industrial Relations* (London, 1965), 77-78; Gary Cross, *Time and Money: The Making of Consumer Culture* (London, 1993), 80-82; Wilfred B. Whitaker, *Victorian and Edwardian Shop Workers* (Dawlish, 1973), 131; Barton, 107-132.

⁴⁴ Whitaker, Chapter 8. In 1911, the Trades Union Congress voted to support paid holidays, leading to Labour's George Lansbury presenting a private member's bill. However, it was not until the Holidays with Pay Act (1938) that pay became a legal right. See Sandra Dawson, 'Working-class consumers and the campaign for holidays with pay,' *Twentieth Century British History*, 18:3 (2007) 277-305.

⁴⁵ Stephen G. Jones, 'Trade union policy between the wars: the case of holidays with pay in Britain,' *International Review of Social History*, 31:1 (1986) 40-55.

⁴⁶ Kirk, 81-82.

holidays. The Law Officer's Department of the Royal Courts of Justice suggested an amendment to the wording of the Bank Holiday Act to create a mechanism for thanksgiving days and royal funerals.⁴⁷ An opposite viewpoint suggested that instead, Coronation Day should be proclaimed a day of thanksgiving, with peace celebrations after the Crimean War, the entry into London of Princess Alexandra and the funeral of the Duke of Wellington cited as precedent.⁴⁸ Little insight could be gained from referring to previous coronations; the 1838 crowning of Victoria was a poor guide, given the scale of social, cultural, economic and political change in the interim. In response, the Prime Minister, the Marquess of Salisbury, made clear his opposition to the creation of an act of parliament specifically for coronation holidays.⁴⁹ This would have set a precedent for future governments, with flexibility regarding moments of national celebration and commemoration preferable. While the issue was still being debated, Lubbock attacked the governmental silence on the matter, prompting the Prime Minister to ask for patience.⁵⁰

It is unclear what exactly was taking place behind closed doors in this period of indecision, apart from obvious concerns of public unrest if a hasty decision was made, which would later require retraction. Despite trade unionism being in a relatively weak position in 1902 compared with the end of the decade,⁵¹ any agitation would reflect badly on the monarchy and would weaken the perception of a 'new age' which the

⁴⁷ Ibid., Royal Courts of Justice, 11 March 1902.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Prime Minister's Office, 15 March 1902.

⁵⁰ *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 104, 10 March 1902, 840-1.

⁵¹ Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (London, 1992), 204.

Establishment seemed keen to promote. Finally, during a Privy Council meeting on 24 March 1902, the king signed a proclamation declaring both 26 and 27 June bank holidays, under the provision of the 1871 Act.⁵²

This period of indecision, rather than proving embarrassing for both the government and the palace, ultimately made both institutions appear more democratic. By opting for a double holiday, it was recognized that a coronation was not only a state event, but also an exercise in recreation and festivity. Despite having an ancient ceremony at its heart, the twentieth-century coronation was also an archetypal ‘invented tradition’ in the manner it ‘inculcate[d] certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implicate[d] continuity with the past.’⁵³ For the state, this was linked to ancient ritual and authority. For the public, frivolity associated with the revised observation of royal events was reminiscent of pre-industrial wakes and festivals. George A. Tresidder, in relation to eighteenth-century royal ritual, observed that civic coronation rituals ‘serve[d] the needs and express[ed] the ideals of urban life’, whilst promoting relations between the ‘patrician and plebeian classes’.⁵⁴ The same was essentially true of the coronation of Edward VII; Westminster had its ancient ceremony; the people would have their revelry.

Preparing for the coronation and the declaration of peace

⁵² *The Times*, 25 June 1902.

⁵³ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Inventing traditions’ in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (Eds.) *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1993) 1.

⁵⁴ George A. Tresidder, ‘Coronation Day celebrations in English towns, 1685-1821: elite hegemony and local relations on a ceremonial occasion’, *British Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies*, 15:1 (1992) 1-16.

The holiday calendar took its usual form until 31 May 1902, when the end of the South African War prompted the declaration of a national holiday to celebrate the victory.⁵⁵ Local newspapers were pivotal in encouraging patriotism from a distinctively civic perspective, through the personal experiences of local soldiers.⁵⁶ In the following weeks, homecoming parades were staged for the return of volunteers, prompting further municipal holidays. The official line from Whitehall regarding observance of peace was to make 1 June 1902 a 'day of thanksgiving', following precedent set after the Crimean War.⁵⁷ This avoided further complicating the holiday calendar, in addition to the contentious two-day coronation holiday. There was no apparent (recorded) opposition to these localized peace and homecoming holidays, with patriotism and thankfulness arguably silencing critics. The speed at which celebratory and homecoming events were arranged was assisted by preparations made for the imminent coronation, making use of existing resources, processional routes and official personnel.

Before long, press and public attention returned to the coronation and continued concerns regarding the two-day holiday. A *Times* report on Scottish preparations noted less public enthusiasm than was the case with the Victorian jubilees, questioning whether this was due to objections to Edward VII's title and its discontinuity with Scottish (rather than British) history. Trade Councils also continued to object to the two-day holiday due

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 3 June 1902. Also see Brad Beaven, *Visions of Empire, Patriotism, Popular Culture and the City, 1870-1939* (Manchester, 2012) 190-191.

⁵⁶ Beaven, 'The provincial press, civic ceremony and the citizen-soldier during the Boer War. 1899-1902: a study of local patriotism', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37:2 (2009) 207-228; Beaven, *Visions of Empire*, Chapter 3; Dion Georgiou, "'Only a local affair'? Imagining and enacting locality through London's Boer War carnivals', *Urban History*, (2017) [Forthcoming].

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 31 May 1902.

to the consequences for business.⁵⁸ The initial Privy Council's Office consultation gauged the opinions of such bodies, with any negative economic effect weighed against the benefits in terms of tourism and the purchase of souvenirs or provisions to mark the event. Yet, a national two-day holiday essentially remained an economic risk. While Scottish public opinion varied, the keenness of Londoners to engage in festivity was apparent on 23 June when King Edward and Queen Alexandra drove through the capital in an open carriage 'amid great enthusiasm.'⁵⁹ Following the dearth of public ceremony in the latter half of Victoria's reign, London was quickly re-familiarized with royal spectacle. One of Edward VII's early decisions was to revive the often-neglected State Opening of Parliament.⁶⁰ Edward also enjoyed considerable personal public popularity, with the more extravagant and even salacious parts of his private life overlooked.⁶¹ All of this added to the coronation's appeal. The revival of public ritual, a vibrant figurehead, the ongoing perception of a new era and the declaration of peace heralded the coronation as a symbolic 'rebirth' for the British Empire. Therefore, a sudden postponement of the ceremony was greeted with near universal upheaval.

The coronation postponed: consequences and responses

On the eve of the coronation, the king was diagnosed with acute appendicitis, requiring emergency surgery. With the monarch's life in jeopardy, postponement was inevitable,

⁵⁸ Ibid., 20 May 1902.

⁵⁹ Edgar Sanderson, *King Edward VII: His Life and Reign Vol V*, (London, 1910), 65.

⁶⁰ Cannadine, 'Context, performance and meaning', 136.

⁶¹ Donald Read, *Edwardian England*, (London, 1972), 68. Recent historiography had tended to misjudge Edward VII based on his personal life, resulting in less widespread analysis. See Michael Bentley, 'Power and Authority in the Late-Victorian and Edwardian Court,' in Olechnowicz, *Monarchy and the British Nation*, 163-187; 181. For further analysis of Edward's popularity, see Williams, 220.

with the very real possibility of deferral giving way to official mourning if the operation was unsuccessful. Postponement, however, was problematic for both local and national government. The official record of the decision-making process regarding the postponement is fragmentary. It seems that initially, even the king was in a state of denial, refusing to believe that surgery was necessary and 'dread[ing] the [public] disappointment and inconvenience' of a postponement.⁶² Clearly, the extent to which the ceremony had become recreational had been accepted. This too hinted at awareness of increasing public politicization, with fear of potential unrest. However, a rapid deterioration in Edward's condition forced the decision. In the House of Lords, the Prime Minister directly addressed the potential public disappointment, while reinforcing that the two coronation holidays were 'matters of Act of Parliament' and would stand.⁶³ This was echoed in the Commons by Arthur Balfour, (in the process of taking over the reins of government from his uncle), who confirmed they would go ahead due to the 'difficulties' of cancellation.⁶⁴

A statement from the palace expressed the king's wish that it be left to individual local authorities to decide whether to proceed with their individual event programmes, to partially postpone, or to cancel completely. This decision was intended to give the provinces operational freedom in reflection of local priorities and sensibilities, but the lack of clarity created confusion. In London, companies reluctantly began to refund ticket holders who had purchased seats on excursion trains or for coronation procession spectator stands. Thomas Cook Ltd. had to take similar steps to refund passengers who

⁶² Sidney Lee, *King Edward VII: A Biography*, (London, 1927), 103.

⁶³ *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 109, 24 June 1902, 1499-501.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, (Commons), 109, 24 June 1902, 1521.

booked on steamer cruises to witness the naval review in Portsmouth.⁶⁵ As author Hallie Killick recorded:

In a few hours, everything seems changed. Hurrying expectant crowds have given place to anxious groups, pouring over the latest bulletins. The flags that were fluttering so gaily this morning are being taken down; the hammering has ceased; stands are left unfinished and the red baize is being rolled up. There is an awful stillness over everything and the contrast is too sad for words... We were driving in an omnibus and I kept on wondering why everybody seemed so grave... and then a messenger-boy tore along on a bicycle, calling out “coronation postponed!”... Such dreadful rumours kept on arriving – one minute it was “the king is sinking” and worse still, “the king is dead and the news is being kept back”... Oh how awful the next few hours will be!⁶⁶

This apparent state of bewilderment and dismay was echoed by Dorset housewife and diarist Winifred Llewellyn,:

About the middle of the day the news came and almost directly the work of demolition commenced. Now London is in a state of undress. Half the work remains whilst half has disappeared again. One couldn't realize all it meant; the return of troops, royal visitors and disappointment of all concerned.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 26 June 1902.

⁶⁶ Hallie Killick, *The Story of the Coronation of Edward VII* [8th Ed.] (London, 1911) 3-4.

⁶⁷ Winifred Llewellyn, diary entry 'July 1902', <http://www.wynnesdiary.com>.

The *Daily Mail* reported that the announcement ‘paralyzed all plans’ in every walk of life, leaving children ‘crestfallen’ and the Stock Exchange in turmoil.⁶⁸ The cancellation also caused considerable consternation in street markets, where retailers had expected to benefit from the excellent trade of goods for coronation celebrations, but were instead left with excess wastage.⁶⁹ The losses experienced by Lloyd’s insurance underwriters were estimated at 90 per cent of goods purchased in the coronation period.⁷⁰ By mid-July, it was reported that Westminster County Court was handling ‘scores of cases’ relating to coronation disputes.⁷¹

The postponement had a cumulative effect on British society. As Edward VII’s biographer Edgar Sanderson recorded in 1910, ‘the records of history fail to show any parallel to the enforced postponement of any state function of such a character from the dangerous illness of the central figure.’⁷² This explains the degree of confusion which abounded. Twentieth-century commercial realities also presented distinctly modern complications. Illustrated magazines, newspapers, special editions and souvenir booklets were produced in advance of the coronation, with most souvenirs and ephemera bearing the date – a significant problem for retailers.⁷³ Finally, the coronation was ‘marketed’ as

⁶⁸ *Daily Mail*, 25 June 1902.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 26 June 1902.

⁷⁰ *Evening Express*, 26 June 1902.

⁷¹ *Daily Mail*, 16 July 1902.

⁷² Sanderson, 65.

⁷³ Strong, 431; Cannadine, ‘Context, performance and meaning’, 137. Such items now have added novelty and worth. As Bronwen Edwards recognizes, surviving ephemera gives the event a ‘retrospective coherence’ absent from reality. See Bronwen Edwards, ‘Edward VII becomes king,’ in Morna O’Neill and Michael Hatt (Eds), *The Edwardian Sense: Art, Design and Performance in Britain, 1901-1910* (New Haven, 2010), 23-31.

part of the royal family's increasingly philanthropic associations. Therefore, a number of 'coronation charity campaigns' had been established.⁷⁴ While such campaigns proceeded as planned, the circumstances raised, at least temporarily, a question of legitimacy.

The most pressing concern related to planned celebrations and the need to counterbalance civic demand for entertainment with the sensitive situation. Public opinion was divided regarding the appropriateness of festivity. While some suggested that even the official coronation procession go ahead without the king, others felt that no level of celebration was appropriate until the monarch had recovered. In the words of one of Edward VII's more devoted subjects: 'how can we rejoice when we know the beloved and honoured centre of all hearts is lying in suffering and is ill in serious danger?'⁷⁵ Ambiguity created by deferring the decision to local government resulted in emergency meetings in parish, town and city halls throughout the country. In Cardiff, the Mayor initially decided to proceed with civic celebrations as planned, before later opting to postpone 'everything in the nature of festivity or rejoicing.'⁷⁶ This did not halt Cardiffian desire to observe a holiday, with crowds gathered on the Thursday evening described as being in 'thoroughly holiday mood.'⁷⁷

The change of direction in Cardiff was indicative of the 'public relations' dilemma facing every community. Officially, a tone of trepidation and concern was needed to convey basic respect for the monarch, making celebratory festivities inappropriate. The

⁷⁴ Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (London, 1995) 161-3.

⁷⁵ *The Times*, 27 June 1902.

⁷⁶ *Evening Express*, 25 June 1902.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 June 1902.

palace was fully aware of this predicament; by deferring to local authorities, the theme of openness and transparency, observable after the king's accession, was continued. Conversely, both the palace and Whitehall carefully avoided making a difficult and potentially unpopular decision. There was full awareness that the public mood leaned towards festivity, regardless of the circumstances; this much was reflected in the Privy Council Office's survey. Postponements would not reflect badly on the state, if decisions were made at provincial level. Certain urban centres, such as Birmingham and Manchester, proceeded in full, with constant press reminders that this was 'in accordance with the king's wishes'.⁷⁸ In other locations, the decision was more complex. A great number of 'foreign guests' and naval personnel had assembled in Portsmouth for the fleet review, subsequent to the coronation, creating a problem not just of public revelry, but a need to maintain public order.⁷⁹ Consequently, the Thursday alone was observed as a holiday, with other entertainments postponed apart from a friendly society demonstration.⁸⁰ Despite this, the city was noted as keeping 'holiday', with 'the gaily decorated streets being thronged until late at night.'⁸¹ In northern England, the problem centered on public demand for amusement. Middlesbrough Council only cancelled a civic procession and firework display,⁸² implying that the procession was most synonymous with entertainment, and was therefore inappropriate. Yet for centuries, the civic

⁷⁸ *Daily Mail*, 27 June 1902.

⁷⁹ *Evening News*, 25 June 1902.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 26 June 1902.

⁸¹ *Portsmouth Times*, 28 June 1902.

⁸² *North Eastern Daily Gazette*, 26 June 1902.

procession had symbolized order and hierarchy, much like the coronation ceremony. The cancellation suggested a temporary removal of order from society.

These postponements did not prevent the public from marking the occasion and extensively decorating the town – although Middlesbrough’s mayor was quick to state that this was an ‘expression of loyalty and not of rejoicing’.⁸³ The local press balanced the extent to which they represented the people’s genuine will to enjoy themselves, with expected decorum and sensitivity for the monarch’s condition. The *North Eastern Daily Gazette* suggested that the king’s illness had put proceedings ‘into very narrow and sober proportions’.⁸⁴ A similarly-inaccurate tone was struck by the *Northern Echo*, in relation to nearby Darlington, where it was stated that ‘everything... partaking of the character of rejoicing [was]... abandoned’.⁸⁵ In reality, very little had been revised. The mayor’s civic banquet was postponed and a service of thanksgiving became one of ‘intercession’. Otherwise, the programme went ahead with extensive public participation.⁸⁶

In communities where event programmes were carried out as planned, there is scant evidence of the public avoiding overt celebration. The tone struck by local authorities and newspapers was more representative of expected respectability than of reality. Yet in many towns and cities including Belfast, Leeds, Sunderland and Edinburgh, events were restricted to services of intercession and entertainments for children or for the aged.⁸⁷ This limited commemoration to expression of concern for the monarch and perceived

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 26 June 1902.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Northern Echo*, 25 June 1902.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 26-28 June 1902.

⁸⁷ *Daily Mail*, 27 June 1902.

'charitable' entertainments, in apparent effort to placate the public and avoid protest. In areas where postponement was more total, consternation was frequently vociferous. The decision of the Newtown Coronation Committee chairman to indefinitely postpone *all* celebrations, including a tea party for children, resulted in several antagonistic protests. As the *Evening Express* reported:

Upon emerging from the council chamber, the chairman was greeted by a large throng and freely hooted. He afterwards took refuge in an inn, the front and back entrances of which were surrounded by immense crowds, which gradually grew in proportions and for two hours awaited his exit. At a late hour, Mr P. Wilson Jones announced that he... had arranged for the tea to be given to the children and about midnight, the town crier proclaimed the news in the principal streets, the chairman not having then made his reappearance.⁸⁸

The late hour of this announcement suggests fear of further public unrest. Public entertainments connected with state celebrations were clearly prioritized in the minds of the public over sensitivities which were upmost in the minds of municipal officials and the press.

The most extreme public reactions were recorded in Dunstable, Hemel Hempstead and Watford, where public anger resulted in rioting. Dunstable Council's decision to cancel the entirety of celebrations had not been easily reached, with councilmembers divided on the right way to proceed.⁸⁹ Afterwards, a well-attended open-air meeting was

⁸⁸ *Evening Express*, 26 June 1902.

⁸⁹ *Luton News*, 3 July 1902.

convened outside of the civic buildings, to urge the council to reconsider. However, the mayor appeared on the Town Hall balcony to address the public and reaffirmed the cancelation, further inflaming local tensions.⁹⁰ As the *Bedfordshire Chronicle* reported:

Booing and shouting and hooting became general and boisterous rowdyism was rampant. "What about the bonfire?" someone shouted and others became loud in their maledictions upon the unfortunate mayor... Some made for the mayor's house and, we should say, without any general intention of doing damage, but as a means of showing protest against the postponement of the festivities... The crowd was a noisy rabble and stones by the score were pelted at the windows... How far the rowdies would have gone in this policy of destruction if [a large bonfire had not been lit several streets away], it is not pleasant to think of.⁹¹

In the following hours, riotous behaviour spread throughout the town resulting in the conciliatory staging of entertainments for local children.⁹² In total, 29 new constables were sworn in to deal with the situation, although only four arrests were logged by Bedfordshire Constabulary.⁹³ This antagonism was primarily a result of the proposed cancellation of the children's entertainment, rather than the entire programme. However, once again, it

⁹⁰ *Bedfordshire Chronicle*, 27 June 1902.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² *Bedfordshire Advertiser*, 27 June 1902.

⁹³ Bedfordshire Archives, Bedford; Q5 (3/2), PSD 1/14, *Bedfordshire Constabulary Records*, 26 June 1902. The Dunstable Police Force consisted of only four constables, so was quickly overwhelmed. Dunstable experienced further problems of public order at the start of the First World War when riotous behaviour broke out due to price rises by local merchants. See Clive Emsley, *Hard Men: Violence in England Since 1750* (London, 2005), 95.

was indicative of the public willingness to speak out against perceived injustices and question the moral judgments of traditional authority figures.

The situation was more serious in Watford. By the admission of the Chief Constable in a subsequent report to the Urban District Council, his officers were 'overwhelmed', with additional support having to come from the Metropolitan Police.⁹⁴ Rioting and looting in Watford, specifically targeting businesses owned by members of the Coronation Committee, led to the Riot Act being read which merely aggravated the situation.⁹⁵ Subsequent criminal proceedings heard that rioters had greeted police with shouts of 'limb them off!' and 'let's do for them, boys!' as several swung their belts above their heads and attacked the constabulary.⁹⁶ In total, 54 people were charged over the incident, with trials continuing until October 1902.⁹⁷ Despite the unrest, the local authority stood firm and celebrations remained cancelled.

These extreme reactions, while in the minority, indicated a profound shift in public behaviour. Yet even in these towns, there was only minor violence, in-keeping with most public protests in the period.⁹⁸ Therefore, the extent of remonstrance is less significant than the fact that *any* form of protest over entertainment took place, especially given the circumstances. This reinforces the remoteness of the figure of the king, from the perspective of the public, in relation to the event. The coronation festival's holidays and associated entertainments, whilst conveying symbolism pertaining to monarchical

⁹⁴ Watford Town Hall; *Watford Urban District Council Minute Book*, 21 July 1902.

⁹⁵ *Bedfordshire Advertiser*, 4 July 1902.

⁹⁶ *Daily Mail*, 4 July 1902.

⁹⁷ *Daily Mail*, 15 October 1902.

⁹⁸ Emsley, 112.

authority, were more representative of a desire for – and perhaps more significantly - an expectation of recreation and holiday time than of patriotism and deference. The coronation had become a public event where even the removal of the central figure and postponement of the ceremonial event was inconsequential. In an age before the instant gratification of television and radio, the distance and inaccessibility of the monarchy and its associated rituals diluted the meaning of coronations and jubilees for provincial communities. The growth of public recreation associated with civic ritual accelerated this perception, meaning that cancellation or postponement of local celebrations was viewed, in some communities, as a direct attack on the public right to governmental-sanctioned holiday time. Differential decisions by various local authorities also created a climate of rivalry and unbalance. While one town may have seen full cancellation, a neighbouring community may have been in full celebration, prompting hostility and resentment.

Unrest was perhaps exacerbated by the temporality of the coronation relative to the death of Queen Victoria. While a lengthy interval between accession and coronation was typical,⁹⁹ there had been constant print media coverage, creating a climate of anticipation, leading to ultimate disappointment. Woods' view of 'sanitized rebellion' is also of relevance.¹⁰⁰ Such festivals gave local communities the opportunity to 'blow off steam' beyond the established boundaries of societal respectability and order, through the parameters of an official event. The denial of this opportunity conceivably prompted examples of civil disobedience. Somewhat prophetically, C.F.G. Masterman had written

⁹⁹ There had been 18 months between the death of George III and the coronation of George IV, 15 months between George IV and William IV and 12 months between William IV and Victoria.

¹⁰⁰ Woods, 'Performing power'.

in 1901, concerning the results of nineteenth century industrialization, that 'turbulent rioting over military successes [the Relief of Mafeking], hooliganism and a certain temper of fickle excitability ha[d] revealed to observers...that a new race, hitherto unreckoned and of incalculable action, [was] entering the sphere of practical importance.' He referred to this group as the 'city type... street-bred people of the twentieth century; the new generation knocking at our doors.'¹⁰¹ This suggests a growing concern with public attitudes and demands, which the postponement of coronation festivities, in some communities, had brought to prominence.

Masterman was correct; a degree of 'rowdyism' always came with national celebratory occasions and certain Mafeking Night celebrations had become unruly.¹⁰² It was accepted that Coronation Day would be associated with a degree of disorder. A popular music hall song of 1902, *On the Day King Edward Gets His Crown on*, hinted at expected misrule:

There's a good time coming soon for the family... Parading up and down The Strand, all of us you'll see... We'll all buy penny ticklers and won't we have a lark? All the policemen mother meets, she'll cuddle in the dark, father's going to smack 'em on their vaccination mark...with a brick we'll hit the landlord to make the baby laugh.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ C.F.G. Masterman, *The Heart of the Empire: Discussions of Problems of Modern City Life in England* (London, 1901), 7.

¹⁰² Lawrence, 110.

¹⁰³ *On the Day King Edward gets His Crown on*, written and composed by Harry Pleon and Mark Lorne, (1902).

Aside from exaggeration for entertainment purposes, this indicates the degree to which Coronation Day 1902 was the 'people's day'; an opportunity to overcome perceived barriers of public respectability, decorum and conduct. Moreover, it spoke of societal expectations, explaining the extreme reactions of certain communities. As Paul Thompson recognized, Edwardian society was predominantly law-abiding, with 'collective resistance... usually seen as a means of adjustment rather than of a fundamental social change.'¹⁰⁴ Yet, Masterman's words of caution, together with evidence from certain communities seem to suggest that a new mood was stirring in those first few years of the twentieth century. It is in these terms that the unrest and civil disobedience should be seen. Along with the expectation that Coronation Day would be a moment of relative freedom, responses to the postponement from many quarters indicated a social repositioning. Masterman's observations were more representative of the scale of social change than he had ever realized.

Growing unrest: the coronation re-planned

The extent to which this was an occasion of public entertainment and festivity, irrespective of the circumstances, seems clear. However, the mood soon began to change; away from the popular celebrations, there was clear evidence of concern for the king's welfare. For several days after the surgery, 'anxious crowds... lingered almost until the early dawn outside the palace gates, reading and discussing the latest reports.'¹⁰⁵ Outside central London, newspapers were the primary vehicle through which people kept informed of the monarch's progress. Yet these reports also had to share column inches with extensive

¹⁰⁴ Thompson, 197.

¹⁰⁵ Sanderson, 66.

reports of celebrations which had taken place, alongside cautious and continuous reminders that the coronation was yet to happen, further supporting the view that for the public, the non-coronation celebrations had sufficed. Once it was clear that Edward was out of danger, the press began to speculate over the revised date. However, other ceremonial events soon took prominence.

Only a week after the postponement, London prepared for the return of Lord Kitchener from the former theatre of war in South Africa. An elaborate welcome was planned, including a procession through the principal streets of the capital, bringing metropolitan life to a virtual standstill. It was here that the first signs of 'event fatigue' became apparent. The Early Closing Association, prompted by a *Times* editorial, seized on the relative public popularity of the coronation double holiday to suggest a general holiday to welcome Kitchener home.¹⁰⁶ While some correspondents supported this idea, others claimed that London 'would be subjected to a three days' reign of confusion, congestion and dislocation.'¹⁰⁷ The implication was that the non-coronation had a paralyzing effect on the capital. These concerns were proven legitimate when the processional route revealed that considerable disruption to London life was unavoidable.¹⁰⁸

Ultimately, people extensively turned out to greet Kitchener, despite a subtle shift in public attitudes which would make future widespread participation in major celebrations

¹⁰⁶ *The Times*, 30 June 1902. This accompanied their campaign for reduced working hours for shop workers, ahead of the Shops Act of 1911.

¹⁰⁷ *The Times*, 2 July 1902.

¹⁰⁸ *Daily Mail*, 9 July 1902.

questionable.¹⁰⁹ Another large celebration came on 5 July, when the 'King's Dinner to the Poor,' organized by the Lord Mayor and other local Mayors entertained 500,000 poor residents of the capital in various locations, causing significant disruption.¹¹⁰ As the capital city, civic and state ritual had been part of London life for centuries. What was different in 1902 was frequency; resurgent royal ceremonial operated in close chronological proximity to sporadic civic celebrations for the coronation, peace celebrations and homecoming parades for troops and military leaders, creating a climate of resentment in Londoners. The capital had been hit hardest financially by the postponement, being in an indeterminate state for most of the following month. While some decorations, seating platforms and other constructs were immediately dismantled, many were retained in an uncertain wait for the eventual ceremony. This created a public nuisance, with demands that the government either remove the stands or clarify when, or indeed if they would be used. The government's official position was a somewhat vague hope that the stands would 'be used for the purpose for which they were erected', to give the king time to recover.¹¹¹

Finally, addressing the House of Commons on 23 July, new Prime Minister Arthur Balfour suggested 'that the balance of public opinion [w]as in the direction of turning the customary half-holiday of Saturday [9 August] into a Bank Holiday on the occasion of the coronation',¹¹² confirmed by royal proclamation three days later.¹¹³ It was made clear that

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 13 July 1902.

¹¹⁰ Sanderson, 71-2.

¹¹¹ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 110, 7 July 1902, 933.

¹¹² Ibid., 111, 23 July 1902, 1012.

¹¹³ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 July 1902.

the coronation would be less extravagant than originally planned due to reduced attendance of foreign and imperial guests and less participation from service personnel. *The Times* optimistically suggested that 'little procession and slightly curtailed service of Saturday [would] possess more significance than could have possibly been attached to the [original] service',¹¹⁴ recognizing that the day would pale in comparison to what had been planned. For many, the announcement of a revised date only exacerbated a growing feeling of event fatigue.

The scheduling of the coronation for a Saturday was a source of consternation for business owners, due to it being their busiest day. Birmingham City Council even sought the king's advice regarding the divided opinion of traders relating to opening for business.¹¹⁵ Reluctance to close was widespread, enhanced by the uncertainty caused in June and not eased by the Early Closing Association chastising traders who considered ignoring the bank holiday.¹¹⁶ The problem did not merely relate to profit margins; ancient civic rights were also challenged, particularly in market towns and cities such as Chester, where the right to Saturday trading was fiercely guarded.¹¹⁷ Similarly, in Darlington, traders cited ancient market byelaws to support their case. The Deputy Mayor appealed to the town's council to acknowledge the 'strong objection' to suspension of trade, given that Darlington had observed the June holidays and that Monday 11 August had also been declared a local holiday in lieu of the Saturday coronation.¹¹⁸ The disorganization of

¹¹⁴ *The Times*, 6 August 1902.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Daily Mail*, 30 July 1902.

¹¹⁷ *Chester Courant*, 6 August 1902.

¹¹⁸ *Northern Echo*, 4 August 1902.

June had been problematic enough, but the staging of the coronation on a Saturday to lessen the impact of a further holiday ultimately had more of a bearing on provincial life. Many local authorities, like Darlington, felt obligated to grant an additional holiday on Monday 11 August. Once again, every council was faced with a profound dilemma.

As in June, the concerns of some communities went beyond trade. Portsmouth, with the king's support, observed an additional holiday on Saturday 16 August to coincide with the fleet review, a long-established post-coronation tradition.¹¹⁹ However, the city's delayed programme was carried out in full on Coronation Day, witnessed by thousands.¹²⁰ While there was no outward objection in Portsmouth, residents of Cardiff faced the prospect of observing the usual August Bank Holiday Monday, celebrations to mark the coming of age of local landowner the Marquess of Bute (taking place over two days) and a coronation holiday within just six days.¹²¹ This situation was made even more complex by the announcement of the South Wales Miners' Federation that some miners would work on Coronation Day, in accordance with their observation of 'Mabon's Day.'¹²² This was a monthly holiday which had been widely observed in South Walian mining communities between 1888 and 1898, but which was relatively rare by 1902.¹²³ Nevertheless, as Barton recognizes, Mabon's Day played a significant role in the escalating militancy of trade unionism in the area.¹²⁴ Therefore, the decision to observe

¹¹⁹ *Evening News*, 1 August 1902.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9 August, 1902.

¹²¹ *Evening Express*, 28 July 1902.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 31 July 1902.

¹²³ Andy Croll, 'Mabon's Day: The rise and fall of a Lib-Lab holiday in the South Wales Coalfield, 1888-1898,' *Labour History Review*, 72:1 (2007), 49-68.

¹²⁴ Barton, 112.

Mabon's Day in 1902 provocatively demonstrated the fraught atmosphere concerning the holiday calendar and the degree to which it exacerbated socio-economic unease. With national opinion divided, the king, when pressed, declined to comment, preferring decisions be based on 'local considerations and feeling.'¹²⁵ Essentially, the same approach was taken as had been adopted in June. However, while this might have been previously interpreted as democratic and progressive, the confusion caused should have warranted a more cautionary approach in August.

The tourist industry was the most vociferous in voicing their objections. Welsh holiday resorts reported a slump in trade over the whole season, caused by anticipation of the coronation and the wait for a revised date.¹²⁶ The *Daily Mail* predicted that visitor numbers to coastal resorts would be reduced by the holding of an August coronation.¹²⁷ One of the newspaper's correspondents suggested a solution:

It would, we think, be a great boon to the trading and the working classes... if the coronation could be brought off in the August Bank Holiday week. It is usually a broken trading week. Both manufacturers and men would the more heartily join in the joy of the coronation if it did not entail too great further pecuniary sacrifices'.¹²⁸

While manufacturers may have approved, this would have had an adverse impact on tourism in Britain, which relied on bank holiday trade. Access to holiday time had been a

¹²⁵ *Daily Mail*, 2 August 1902.

¹²⁶ *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 18 July 1902.

¹²⁷ *Daily Mail*, 9 July 1902.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11 July 1902.

widening notion for decades. As working and middle-class entertainments became more synonymous, holiday time emerged as a fundamental right.¹²⁹ Seebohm Rowntree observed in 1901 that the annual working-class seaside pilgrimage on the August Bank Holiday was widespread.¹³⁰ The day was a prized occasion, free from any prior Christian association, when the working man and woman (regardless of class) could engage in leisure. It is therefore unsurprising that there was no willingness to superimpose a state event on an occasion which, within a generation, had secured a firm identity as a day of recreation or relaxation. To do so could have provoked an increasingly-confident populace.

Concerns for the holiday market appear to have been premature, as an 'exodus' out of London was reported on the August Bank Holiday Monday. The coronation was cited as making the entire week 'an idle one', resulting in many choosing to go on holiday to avoid the coming commotion.¹³¹ On the morning of the ceremony, many left the capital, destined for Scotland, the south coast or the continent.¹³² Thus, the event fatigue felt by many Londoners eased the extent of event fatigue of their coastal compatriots. In a statement issued on the eve of the coronation, the king recognized, with a somewhat revisionist perspective, that 'the postponement of the ceremony, owing to my illness, caused, I fear, much inconvenience and trouble to all those who intended to celebrate it;

¹²⁹ J.M. Golby & A.W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England, 1750-1900* (Stroud 1999), 156, 198. Also see Thompson, 172.

¹³⁰ Reid, 'Playing and Praying', 756-7.

¹³¹ *The Observer*, 3 August 1902.

¹³² *Daily Mail*, 9 August 1902.

but their disappointment was borne by them with admirable patience and temper.¹³³ Clearly, the palace, supported by Whitehall, wished to draw a line under the difficulties which had arisen six weeks earlier. This was assisted by the decision to devolve responsibility to local authorities, which essentially absolved the state of responsibility.

When Coronation Day finally arrived, the national mood was mixed. In the words of the *Northern Echo*, relating to Darlington, there was 'nothing of an official character in the way of celebration'.¹³⁴ The town benefited from decorations and illuminations being re-hung and much was made of an ox-roasting, which was the central celebratory event on what was otherwise a mere general holiday. In Middlesbrough, there was nothing to mark the day, apart from an occasional string of bunting, highlighting the primacy of the June event.¹³⁵ The main attraction in Cardiff was a display of fireworks, however 'coronating' was noted as being 'very modest'.¹³⁶ To compensate for the reduced appeal of the day, some towns and cities tried to be more inventive. For example, in Coventry, the original programme was staged in full, including a revival of the town's Godiva pageant, while other major cities like Birmingham made much of illuminations and a civic procession to a thanksgiving service in Chester Cathedral.¹³⁷ What press descriptions of Coronation Day demonstrate is a universal and desperate attempt to aggrandize. Unlike the descriptions of revelry, gusto and mirth which newspapers used in relation to Queen Victoria's jubilees, and used nine years later for the coronation of George V, the *Observer*

¹³³ Sanderson, 77.

¹³⁴ *Northern Echo*, 11 August 1902.

¹³⁵ *North Eastern Daily Gazette*, 9 August 1902.

¹³⁶ *Evening Express*, 9 August 1902.

¹³⁷ *The Observer*, 10 August 1902.

described provincial celebrations as merely being observed with ‘great cordiality.’¹³⁸ The following day being Sunday, most church services took the form of thanksgiving for the king’s recovery, reflecting the extreme circumstances that had led to the whole incident, but also casting a somewhat sombre façade.¹³⁹ On the whole, the Coronation Day of King Edward VII was a rather contemplative, restrained occasion – far from what had been planned.

Analyzing the ‘event fatigue’ of 1902

Simon Gunn, when considering urban ritual in this period, suggested that the ‘number of civic spectacles... satiated the appetite of observers’.¹⁴⁰ In addition to annual statutory holidays, many communities had an additional six-to-seven days off in 1902. For areas also witnessing specific local holidays, this figure was even higher. In total, some communities experienced two-to-three weeks of nationally or locally sanctioned holiday time, in addition to any contractual holidays. This was undoubtedly something to be prized for many, as British society slowly began to shake off the omnipresent shadow of the Victorian work ethic. Yet implementation of these public holidays also created significant problems and concerns.

As revealed by the initial uncertainty of both Whitehall and the palace regarding the declaration of coronation holidays, there was little clarity in public-holiday policy at the start of the twentieth century. While the Bank Holidays Act of 1871 and Extension Act of

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Lee, 109-10. London witnessed a further bank holiday on 25 October, for a thanksgiving service at St Paul’s Cathedral for the king’s recovery. *Manchester Guardian*, 21 October 1902.

¹⁴⁰ Simon Gunn, ‘Ritual and civic culture in the English industrial city, c.1835-1914,’ in Robert J. Morris & Richard H. Trainor, (Eds.) *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond Since 1750* (Aldershot, 2000) 226-241.

1875 enshrined in law the right to public holidays, they left considerable uncertainty concerning nonrecurring occasions. Additionally, the frequent decision of local authorities to declare their own general holidays resulted in disjointed approaches to sanctioned holiday time. Such declarations were often accompanied by clarification of whether municipal employees would be paid, but obviously did not guarantee pay for other local workers who may have found themselves unpaid if their employer chose to observe the holiday.¹⁴¹

The same was true of nonrecurring, additional, bank holidays. While the prospect of supplementary holidays had appeal, the financial reality of the number experienced in 1902 was potentially disastrous for non-salaried workers, dependent on wages for basic subsistence. Financial concerns therefore undoubtedly exacerbated event fatigue. In subsequent years, the frequency of municipally-declared general holidays declined. When civic processions or other ceremonial events took place, London, along with other towns and cities, mastered the art of event management to ensure that road closures were short-lived and disruption was minimal. Crucially, there was never again a calendar year which warranted so much additional holiday time.

Greater governmental guidance would have significantly assisted the shaping of policy relating to public holidays. Failure to legislate on this matter was not solely linked to readjustment at the start of a new reign, even one perceived as heralding a new age. Instead, public, civic and state responses to the holiday calendar of 1902 were indicative of broader changes taking place in British society. A coronation in the 'modern' setting

¹⁴¹ The staging of provincial 'holidays' and policy regarding pay is a topic in need of further historical study.

was an unknown and untested phenomenon, incomparable with the Victorian jubilees. This was particularly true when weighed against concerns voiced by Masterman, regarding the national moral condition. The cautionary approach of the government linked to the declaration of public holidays and delegation to local authorities was therefore unsurprising.

The anger generated in some localities linked to postponed or cancelled celebrations demonstrated how much the public prized opportunities for communal leisure. Outbursts of civil unrest were indicative of dissatisfaction with the disjointed and piecemeal way the incident was handled, rather than representing an unravelling of order. However, they do support Lawrence's view of the increased politicization of British society. The extent to which the public were willing to defend their democratic right to holiday time was symptomatic of an increasingly assertive working-class culture. Even in areas where holidays were honoured but celebrations curtailed, people tried to ensure that civic politicians adhered to their original promises. This certainly does not suggest that the circumstances of 1902 add credence to the 'crisis' debate. It can, however, be suggested that responses to the non-coronation were a precursor to unrest that was to build over the course of the decade.

The most illuminating fact was how the public perceived the king and whether event fatigue was more linked to a lack of interest in ceremony, rather than celebration. It is often argued that deference declined later in the century, following the Second World War.¹⁴² Instead, the evidence from 1902 suggests that a relaxing of deferential attitudes

¹⁴² McKibbin, 535.

was already underway, as the public openly challenged established authority figures and rejected calls for decorum. More broadly, change was evident in the degree to which most of the nation celebrated a coronation that was not taking place, while the head of state, the central figure for the whole event, was critically ill. As Patrick Joyce noted, deference is a social interaction and consequently there is a clear 'partnership' between the 'superior and inferior' elements of a deferential situation.¹⁴³ The coronation had a similar reciprocity; it was as representative of the broader nation as it was of the monarch.¹⁴⁴ While it is certainly true that the royal family acted as 'prompters of deference',¹⁴⁵ British society as a whole, representing the other end of the deferential partnership, was placed in a temporary position of power following postponement. Its engagement with the coronation as a symbolic event remained active; it was the monarch who temporarily adopted a submissive position, transferring power to local authorities. In turn, municipal politicians became legitimate targets to be questioned, rather than paternal figures in a position of superiority.

The decline of deference was also evident in the growing mood of event fatigue. There was a clear reduction in public interest in ceremonies to which the public were only passive witnesses, rather than active participants. This was made clear through the lack of enthusiasm which greeted the August coronation. King or no king, most people celebrated the non-coronation in June and a ceremony in London was, for many, no reason to repeat the occasion. In this manner, the monarchy and the coronation

¹⁴³ Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society & Politics*, (Bristol, 1980), 91; 124.

¹⁴⁴ Edward Shills & Michael Young, 'The Meaning of the Coronation,' *Sociological Review*, 1, (1953), 63-81.

¹⁴⁵ David Spring, 'Walter Bagehot and deference', *American Historical Review*, 81:3 (1976), 524-531.

ceremony had been democratized. This, at least, is in keeping with established debates linked to the monarchy. Most historians suggest that democratization of the monarchy was accelerated by the First World War, resulting in the royal family having a 'cultural centrality to British life possessed by hardly any other British political institution'.¹⁴⁶ Yet, much had already been done to ensure the ancient institution retained credibility, beginning with the 'civic publicness' of Victoria's reign¹⁴⁷ and continuing into the twentieth century with the 'welfare monarchy'.¹⁴⁸ The 1902 non-coronation was, as this article has shown, a key stage in the democratization process, as a direct result not of the actions of the monarch, but rather his inaction. The postponement of a ceremony involving ancient manifestations of power and hierarchy revealed the British people would defend their personal rights and reject what traditional authority figures viewed as the correct way to behave. The coronation of 1902, then, through governmental hesitation and the sudden illness of the king was more representative of the people at the start of a new century, than a monarchy stretching back a millennium.

(10,946 words, inclusive of notes)

¹⁴⁶ McKibbin, 7.

¹⁴⁷ John Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford, 2003), 13-67.

¹⁴⁸ Prochaska, 100-168.