

## Collecting the Coronations

A snapshot of the coronation themed items in the collections of Saffron Walden Museum

### **Elizabeth II's Coronation Dress**

One of the most fascinating items in the museum's collections related to coronations is a framed embroidery sample (pictured below left), which was used in the preparation of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation dress, which she wore when she ascended to the throne age 25 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1953.

The framed sample was a gift from Norman Hartnell, the designer of the dress, to Miss Grizelle Fowler. It was eventually bequeathed to the museum in 2016.



Elizabeth ordered the dress in October 1952 and it took 8 months of research, design and workmanship to create it. Hartnell put forward 8 different designs and Elizabeth chose her favourite. It then took at least 3 dressmakers, 6 embroiderers and the Royal School of Needlework to create the detailed embroidery.

The dress was made from satin. It had an embroidered design, featuring some of the national flowers and plants of Britain and the Commonwealth countries. These include the English Tudor rose, the Scottish thistle, the Welsh leek, the Irish shamrock, the Canadian maple leaf and the New Zealand silver fern.

Hartnell secretly added in an extra four-leaf shamrock on the left-hand side of her dress as a symbol of good luck. The design was completed in seed pearls, crystals, coloured silks and gold and silver thread.



### **Coronation Crown**

This straw plait crown (pictured left) was made in 1953 to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation by Thomas Thake the donor's grandfather. It was hung in Wimbish Church from the screen during the harvest festival after the Coronation. Thomas (Tom) Thake was a thatcher, builder and carpenter who lived and worked in the Wimbish area. The crown stayed with the Thake family for many years and at one time was hung up one of the family member's garages before its significance was rediscovered again.

## Coronation Fact Fans!

The coronation of Queen Elizabeth II was the first coronation to be shown on television. The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was reportedly initially against the idea, but Elizabeth refused his advice and insisted that the event be televised.

Sales of television sets soared in the weeks leading up to the coronation. Around 8000 guests from across the Commonwealth countries were invited to the ceremony in Westminster Abbey.

Before the ceremony, the guests passed through the streets of London in a procession, in front of about three million spectators. More than 20 million more were watching on television.

News that Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay had reached the summit of Mount Everest arrived in Britain on the day of the coronation and the media referred to this as “a coronation gift for the new Queen”.

## Street Parties & Celebrations



The museum's collection includes commemorative souvenir editions of magazines and newspapers, including the Cambridge Daily News, The Observer, The Sun (pictured below right), the Picture Post (pictured left), the Daily Graphic, Homes & Gardens Magazine and many more.

In typical British style, it rained on Elizabeth's coronation, but the spirits of spectators were not dampened. In London, there was a

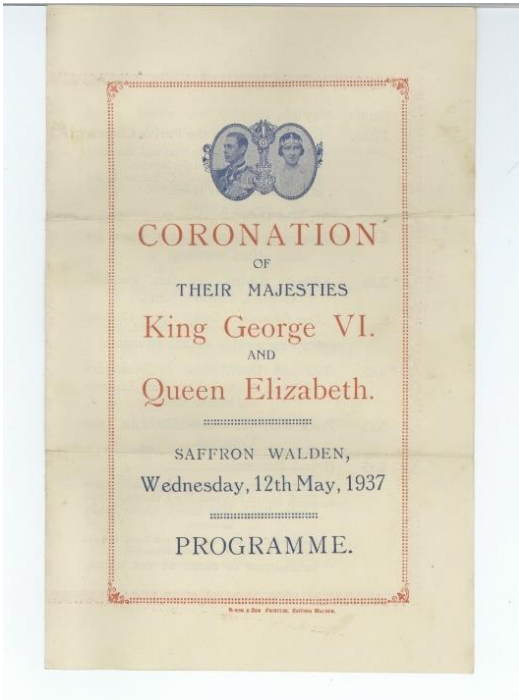
coronation lunch and fireworks on the Victoria Embankment. A 'Coronation Cup' football tournament was held in Glasgow.



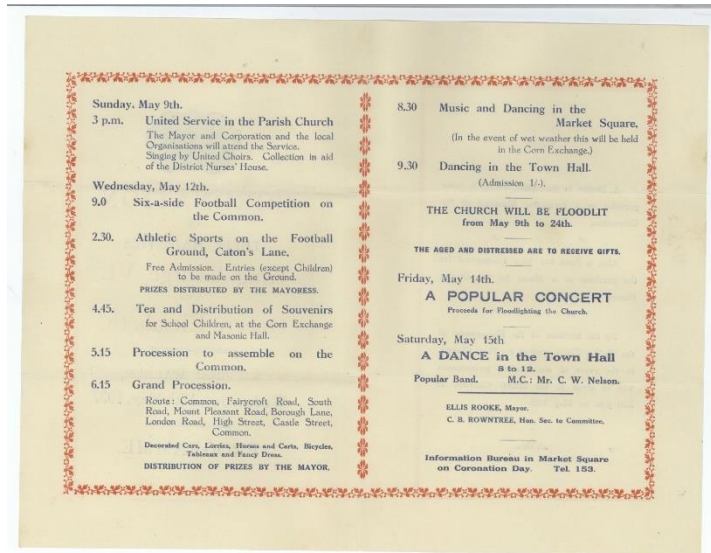
The souvenir programmes for Saffron Walden's own coronation festivities are of particular interest.

There's a programme for Saffron Walden Town Band's performance for Edward VII's Coronation Day in 1902.

Saffron Walden's programme for Queen Elizabeth's coronation, details gifts given to the local children and a busy events programme.

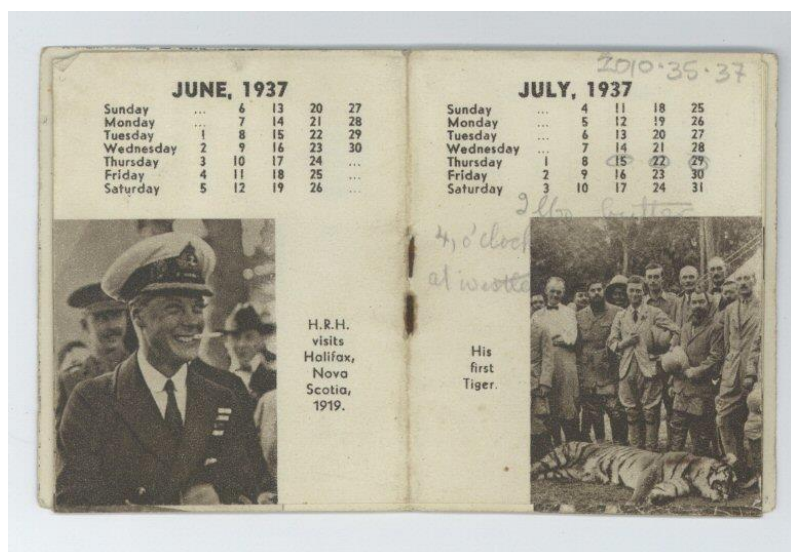


King George VI's coronation in 1937 involved sports events, a grand procession, a concert, as well as music and dancing in the Market Square (programme pictured left and below)



Edward VIII's coronation calendar is pictured below left and right. This calendar was distributed nationally in 1937 and showed his tours of Britain and the Commonwealth. To a modern audience it is very much of its time. The extract below for example shows the King smoking on a royal tour and big game hunting!

He abdicated and so didn't have an actual coronation in the end, although coronation souvenirs of this kind had been produced ahead of time and so are preserved in museum collections.



This beautiful poster (pictured right) was produced for Queen Victoria's Coronation Festival which was held in the town in June 1838.

The programme of "rustic sports," included a grinning match (gurning), wrestling and donkey racing.

This poster can regularly be viewed in the museum's local history gallery.

The Saffron Walden Weekly News detailed the street parties and festivities which were held.

The museum's collection also includes a menu, table plan, guest list, pudding recipe and national anthem song sheet for a coronation dinner held on the Common.



There also appears to have been a separate coronation charity meal for the "town's poor."

Edward VII's coronation in 1902 followed a similar pattern with "mayoral processions" and athletics and cycling races on the Common.

George V's Coronation in 1911 involved "games and fireworks, a cricket match, music by the town band and a procession." In the collection we have also have a children's song sheet from the coronation festivities which were held in the Marketplace.

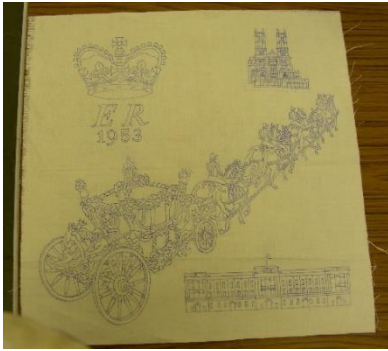
A water fountain was erected on the north side of the Common for Queen Victoria's coronation in 1837, whilst a bridge over the Slade was erected to commemorate Edward VII's coronation in 1902.

### The Coronation Throne

There are two Coronation throne models in the museum's collection. One is a ceramic miniature from the Hassall collection (a vast collection of miniatures of household objects, people and animals, originally an individual's collectibles) and a gilded cast metal version marked on the back with the maker's mark "J. Renvoise 10.3.1902.

### Souvenir Textiles

Commemorative handkerchiefs, tablecloths and bookmarks are commonly found in museum collections, but more unique commemorative textiles were also produced.



This transfer printed linen (pictured left) a design for an embroidery panel (which was never used) depicts the Coronation carriage at Buckingham Palace and Westminster Abbey.

We have a tray cloth embroidered by its donor in 1953 when she was 11 years old, for Queen Elizabeth's coronation, it features the official flowers of each country: the thistle, the shamrock, the rose and the daffodil.

There's a sample of red velvet, which was woven at Spitalfields in London to make peers' robes, which were then worn at Queen Victoria's Coronation in 1837.

There's also a piece of velvet brocade decorated with a Tudor rose and crown design, which hung from the Westminster Abbey chancel during the coronation of Edward VII in 1902.

This beautiful butterfly brooch in purple velvet (pictured right) was made by Reville, to mark the coronation of George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1937.



### Commemorative China



Commemorative beaker for the coronation of Edward VII and Alexandra in 1902 (pictured left).

Mug designed by Eric Ravillious for Wedgwood, also produced to celebrate Edward VII's Coronation, 1937 (pictured below).



## Coins and Medals



Commemorative coin and medal from Edward VII's coronation in 1902 (pictured left & right)



Coronation coin of George V and Queen Mary, 1911, converted into a medal, from Violet Dix's trunk (pictured left).

