



UNIVERSIDADE DA CORUÑA

Facultade de Filoloxía

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**The Enduring Nature of the British Monarchy from
1837 to 1952**

Andrea Roibás Díaz

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1. Summary

The British monarchy has suffered many changes over the years and in this work I focus my attention on those taking place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. History shows many difficulties that the institution had to overcome but also many successes.

The Hanover dynasty ruled Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the most characteristic monarch of this dynasty was Queen Victoria, who was sovereign for more than the half of the century. At this time monarchy still had a lot of power and the whole continent was related to the British monarchs via royal marriages. In spite of her young age, Queen Victoria earned the respect of people and politicians and her sixty-four-year reign was also characterized by the coordination of decisions with her husband, Prince Albert. She was head of state until 1901 and with her death came the end of the Hanover dynasty. She was succeeded by her eldest son Edward VII.

The twentieth century was characterized by the international conflicts that led to two world wars and British monarchs had to deal with the difficulties these periods brought to their country. Even if Edward VII died before World War I, he had to confront a difficult situation in Parliament, which finally led to more power for the Liberals; monarchy was starting to change in favour of the equality of power. His son, George V came to the throne when his father died in 1910. When war broke out he did what he could in order to maintain the faith of the country and, although Britain was one of the victorious countries, it suffered big changes after World War I, as much from the political as from the social point of view.

Nevertheless, a conflictive situation in the royal family was about to affect the country and even the future of the whole world. When George V died in 1936, his eldest son Edward VIII inherited the crown. But monarchy became unstable when he announced he wanted to marry a divorced woman which he could not do being not only head of state but also head of

the Church of England. This fact led him to choose between duty and love, and in December of the same year his father died Edward VIII abdicated in favour of his younger brother. This was three years before World War II erupted and even if the abdication crisis had not affected the monarchy, the pro-Nazis ideals of Edward VIII and his fraternization with Adolf Hitler would have changed the whole international situation.

George VI was an unexpected king with a significant speech problem. This was caused by the insecurities of his youth and it was a huge problem when he had to give speeches as the Duke of York and most of all as King of the United Kingdom. However, he overcame this difficulty with the assistance of Lionel Logue, a therapist who had unorthodox but useful methods. His reign started at the edge of a world conflict and he and his wife Queen Elizabeth had to do whatever they could to earn and then preserve the confidence of the country. War finished with the victory of the Allies in 1945 and George VI reigned for seven more years until he died because of a lung cancer. In the same year his eldest daughter ascended to the throne as Queen Elizabeth II and nowadays she has already celebrated her Golden and Diamond Jubilees.

The British monarchy is directly related to history and it is very important to be aware of the changes it caused because if other measures had been taken by this institution, the world might have been different. What is undoubtable is that the British monarchy has been very important and in the last two centuries it has suffered many events that led it to what it is today.

2. Introduction

This period was crucial for Monarchy in several ways. I will start my work with Queen Victoria, followed by Edward VII, George V, Edward VIII and George VI. All of

these sovereigns managed to preserve the British monarchy, despite the problems each one of them experienced during their reigns. In its role as an important institution, the British monarchy went through both successful and problematic periods in those times, and so influenced history in notable ways. I will try to analyse these situations and explain how the institution has overcome such difficulties and arrived where it is today.

In this work I will be focusing my research from the time Victoria reigned to the reign of the father of the present queen, George VI (1937-1952). Victoria earned the respect of the country in spite of ascending the throne as an eighteen-year-old girl who did not inspire much confidence. In spite of this difficult beginning she was Queen of England for sixty-four years, until her death in 1901. Even if she earned the love of the country, her reign was full of difficulties and she had to overcome several problematic situations, which I will present further in this work. At the other end of the period chosen for study, George VI had to make a great effort to overcome his personal difficulties after finding himself in a spot he never expected to be in and at a very conflictive time in history.

During the period in question, several decisions were taken which aimed to preserve the monarchy. One of the most significant changes was the one George V carried out, which was changing the last name from Saxe-Coburg Gotha into Windsor, leaving behind centuries of identification with the German Hanover dynasty. I will also talk about the political reasons for this change and how it affected history.

However, one of the most important facts in the twentieth century was the abdication of Edward VIII, who after the death of his father had the right and the duty to be King of the UK. At the time the event was a scandal, but nowadays we know that if he had not abdicated, it could have changed history more than people could have imagined at that moment.

With all of these ups and downs it is not surprising that British monarchy has been the object of attention of many writers and historians, who have written about its strength and its ability to overcome difficulties.

Apart from internal problems, there were also external ones. There were periods in which the monarchy was jeopardized by the threat of a republic. In this work I will try to analyse why the British monarchy still prospers and how this institution survived through a century full of social and political changes.

In order to search for information for all of these issues, I will consult different resources, such as history books or internet sources, which can include articles, books online or news from the periods.

3. Background information

The British monarchy has always been a very important institution of the United Kingdom and it has a very long history. Although this piece of work is focused on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there are several facts that condition this period and which are basic for an understanding of the British monarchy from a historical and social point of view.

The predecessor of Queen Victoria was her uncle William IV and he reigned from 1830 to 1837 a period which was dominated by the Reform crisis that changed the power of monarchy in a fundamental way. In 1832 the Reform Act was passed, leading to the prevalence in Parliament of the House of Commons. This reform brought several changes; one of the most important was to increase the role of public opinion in political decisions and this was because the franchise was extended to the middle classes. Among the reforms passed during his reign were the abolition of slavery in almost all the British Empire and the restriction of child labour.

Due to the death of William IV's legitimate children the crown passed to his niece Victoria. William IV died one month after Victoria had celebrated her eighteenth birthday, and because of that, regency was avoided.

4. The dynastic line in this period

4.1 Victoria, the last Hanover

The House of Hanover was characterized by the political stability of the period and by the longevity of its monarchs. The first king of the German dynasty was George I, and he came to power in difficult circumstances. He was not one of the first in the line of succession, but the fifty-second one. However, he was the nearest protestant relative according to the Act of Settlement, so he came to be the first King of the House of Hanover. George I did not even speak English when he became King and he had a peculiar way of being sovereign: he was mostly absent and he allowed his government to function autonomously under a Cabinet. George I was German and he was not familiarized with the English tradition, so it is important to say that he depended on his ministers when it came to his reign. During this period, the British Empire acquired most of its overseas possessions and the concept of constitutional monarchy was developed.

He was followed by his son George II, whose reign was threatened in 1745 by Charles Edward Stuart, but finally Stuart was defeated at the Battle of Culloden. The first Hanover actually born in England was George III, who became heir to the throne at the death of his father Frederick, Prince of Wales, and succeeding his grandfather George II. He was the first sovereign of the Hanoverians who used English as his first language.

The longest reigning monarch of the Hanoverians was Queen Victoria, who was also known as “the grandmother of Europe” for arranging marriages for her children and grandchildren throughout Europe, extending the House of Hanover all over the continent.

The following monarch, Edward VII and son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, belonged to the house of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha because this was the family name of his father.

4.1.1 Difficulties confronted by Queen Victoria

The first obstacle for Victoria to overcome was the lack of trust in her on the part of British people and British politicians. However, she was fortunate in having Lord Melbourne to guide her as queen, and that is why he was considered her mentor. She also counted on Baron Stockmar, who was the adviser of the queen in the first year of her reign. Despite the initial problem of trust and her youth, just 18, Queen Victoria was very capable of taking responsibility for the crown. The Duke of Wellington made a significant statement about one of the first appearances of Queen Victoria: “She filled the room” (Cannon & Griffiths 551)

It is ironical then, that the greatest problems were not associated with being queen, but with being a woman. When Queen Victoria married Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in 1840 and they started a family, this affected her duties so there was a shift in power and Albert managed to impose his own vision of monarchy. During the first months of marriage Albert did not participate in royal decision making, but this fact changed when Victoria became pregnant. The first change was to make him a member of the Privy Council in order to replace her voice when she could not be present. From then on, and bearing in mind that they had seven children in the first ten years, Albert gradually started making decisions until they were a coordinated royal couple with each one of them occupied with different responsibilities.

Since Albert was a child he had wanted to do great things but when he arrived in England, being German was a great disadvantage in trying to earn the respect of the country.

During the first year of marriage he was patient and he was probably waiting for Victoria to be unable to fulfil her duties in order to have the power he had always wanted.

Perhaps the most difficult period for Victoria during her reign was the death of Albert in 1861. For several years, the monarch felt unable to perform public duties, and even if she did manage to attend some of them, she was not the same as before the death of her husband; at least, not until her re-emergence in 1872, when she started to reappear in public events again.

During these years of mourning the desire for a republic in some sections of the country was worrying for monarchists, but the Prince of Wales came down with an illness at a very convenient time and this aroused the loyalty and the affection of the country. The royal family was concerned, but the problem of a republic did not persist: by 1880 none of the republican clubs existed anymore. Queen Victoria reigned until her death in 1901 and was the longest reigning of all monarchs so far.

4.1.2 One technique that changed the perception of Monarchy

During the reign of Queen Victoria, photography started to be more available and this technical means changed the view of Monarchy. Bearing in mind that until that moment all people knew about the monarchs was through portraits, painting or writing, photography was a very useful advantage for the institution. From then on, people could actually see how their sovereigns and their families lived. Nevertheless, it was not only something people could enjoy, but also something the institution could use to show and even manipulate the vision of monarchy. Nowadays photography is a technique that we are accustomed to and we may not be aware of how it can affect us, and make us see what we are supposed to see. A hundred years ago or so, monarchs started to be visible to their subjects, because the whole country

could actually see their everyday lives, families and activities. This meant that the distance between ruler and ruled had become shorter than ever.

In my opinion, the invention and improvement of photography brought two consequences. On the one hand, monarchists could follow the moves of the royal family at the head of the country. On the other hand, such an important institution with so many advisers and strategists could use photography to show whatever aspects they wanted to be seen.

4.2 Edward VII: A Prince in waiting

Edward VII was the eldest son of Victoria and Albert and he was heir to the crown for almost sixty years. He reigned from 1901, the year his mother died, to 1910, the year of his own death. He was the only British monarch from the house of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Queen Victoria had remained a Hanover, despite the fact she was married to Prince Albert Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.

Because of Edward's life-style, Queen Victoria did not allow him to participate much in state decisions. According to Cannon & Griffiths "she did not trust his discretion" (579). When he did start to participate in the decisions of state he was already over fifty years old. When Prince Albert died, Edward VII replaced Queen Victoria on some occasions, but he could not speak for her. Despite being an impossible child, when he grew up he became a handsome man. In adulthood he married Alexandra of Denmark, but had several mistresses and liked all the bad habits a man could have: horse racing, shooting, drinking and womanizing. However, the media were very controlled and censored at that time so people did not get to know more than monarchy and politicians wanted them to know. Nowadays it would be impossible for monarchy to hide that kind of habits.

When he finally inherited the crown, his reign restored the vigour of a monarchy that had been almost atrophied since his father died. Following the example of his mother, the first

thing he did as sovereign was a private declaration of independence. However, he found himself in an époque of social changes such as the rise of socialism, women's suffrage or the growth of the trade unions. But the biggest of these changes was the constitutional crisis, which started with the conservative majority of the Lords and led to the Liberal Budget of 1909. Nevertheless, Edward VII was not able to solve the situation and he did not live to see the resolution because he died in 1910.

Edward VII did not have the intention of ruling as his parents had done. In fact, they wanted him to reign as Albert I, but after the death of his mother he announced that his name as sovereign would be Edward VII. He travelled abroad frequently and for his relationships with European Royalty, he was known as the "Uncle of Europe"; he was literally related to all the royal families of Europe through his brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces. One of the travels that made him different to his predecessors was when he became the first British monarch to visit Russia, where he met with Nicholas II, who was not only the Tzar but also his nephew.

This trip to Russia should have been postponed because a conflict between the two countries caused by the attack of the Russian Navy, which confused the English with enemies ("On this day: Russia in a click") This fact almost led to a war between the two Britain and Russia, but an agreement was made and the government of Russia gave a compensation to the British soldiers that had survived. The trip which was supposed to do Edward VII in 1906 was postponed until 1908.

A field he acquired success in was the public sphere. He obtained for himself a lot of popularity after bringing the monarchy into the public eye. His lack of interest in knowledge was balanced out with his ceremony skills, and that was the reason he was so popular as a monarch.

After Edward VII died, the aristocratic world changed. The resolution of the constitutional crisis in 1910 in order to pass the Liberal budget caused a big change in the British Empire, which started to lose power because of the advantage of Liberals in Parliament. The world was changing and in consequence, so was monarchy.

4.3 George V: From Saxe-Coburg to Windsor.

He was the second son of Edward VII and he did not expect to be king because that position belonged to his elder brother Albert Victor. Even if he was supposed to be king, he was not prepared to be the head of a country because of his lack physical and mental skills. Edward VII and Princess Alexandra arranged a marriage for Albert Victor to Princess May of Teck, but he died a month after the engagement was announced, and so the crown passed to his younger brother George. The crown was not the only thing George took over from his brother: he also married his fiancée.

George became king of England when his father died in 1910 but officially in 1911, the year of his coronation. Even if he was the opposite to his father when it came to ceremonies because he was not a public person, he had been one of the few that respect and love his predecessor. We can see this in the words George V pronounced when his father died: “I have lost my best friend and the best of fathers. I never had a word with him in his life. I am heartbroken and overwhelmed with grief”. (Starkey 475) In spite of these differences of character with Edward VII, George V solved the situation his father had left unsolved. Trying to avoid a Civil War with Ireland, he called a meeting in Buckingham Palace with all the parts in order to come to terms.

However, the most serious political situation George V had to face was World War I. He made over 450 visits to the troops and over 300 to hospitals (“George V (r. 1910-1936)”). As head of the country he should brought confidence not only to the soldiers but also to Britain

and its people, who were living a difficult time and should had a leader to overcome it. Although Britain was one of the victorious countries in 1918, the post-war situation was delicate because a lot of changes were being made, such as the vote to all men after twenty-one years and to women over thirty who had some characteristics as been householders. Britain made a big change during the war; the only thing that linked the post-war situation with the old Britain was the success of the Conservative Party.

The post-war situation of the country was also the beginning of the emancipation of Ireland, which took advantage of the distraction suffered from the World War I and the lack of control in the overseas empire. This led to Irish Independence which was signed at the end of 1921 and approved on January 1922.

Other political measures were necessary and the most important of all was the change of the family name. The royal family had German roots because of the marriage of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. He was German and his surname had passed to the British monarchs, and many of them even had a German accent. During World War I the dislike of Germans was understandable and George V decided to change the surname of the family in order not to be the target of people's hate. After giving it a lot of thought because of the importance this change implied, the British royal family changed from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor. It is also important to say that for two hundred years, Hanoverians had been married only to German families. George V also changed this rule, permitting them from then on to also marry British royalty.

George V reigned for nineteen years after this historical change. As a monarch he saw the introduction of the Irish Free State in 1922 or the Statute of Westminster in 1931. This Statute abolished reserved powers to the Crown in parliament and even if the monarchy was changing and losing political power, they managed to give it importance in other fields, such as the representation of the country. In 1932 George V was the first monarch to make a Christmas

Broadcast to the nation. This broadcast became a tradition and even nowadays we can see it every year.

After a reign full of changes, his death also brought an important phase for the institution, because of the abdication of his eldest son and the coronation of his second son as George VI.

4.4 Edward VIII: A reluctant king

When George V died, his successor was Edward VIII, his eldest son. His first royal duty had been at the age of sixteen, when a few weeks after his father had become king, he assumed the rank of Prince of Wales. Before he was proclaimed as king, he had already gained popularity among the people because of all the visits he had made as Prince (“Edward VIII (Jan-Dec 1936)”)

His reign went from January 1936 to December of the same year. The reason for this short reign was mainly the woman he fell in love with, Mrs. Wallis Simpson. The first thing Edward VIII did as king was more curious than important: he changed the time of the clocks at Sandringham, which had been put half an hour fast for his father because of his obsession with punctuality. Apart from this minor detail which is, however, an indicator of his relaxed approach to kingship, the new king spent the first months of his reign attending to royal documents. However, everything started to collapse when Mrs. Simpson, who was a married woman, became a divorced woman and the king started to show his intention of marrying her. This was a conflictive wish because the monarchy has always been related to the Church and as a result, the king, as head of the Church of England, could never be married to a twice-divorced woman.

4.4.1 Abdication Crisis

Because of the scandal this matter was causing to the institution, Baldwin advised Edward VIII to abdicate and he took the title of Duke of Windsor and retired to France, where he married Mrs. Wallis Simpson in 1937. The speech of the king in order to announce the abdication was broadcast on the eleventh of December 1936 and it was focused on his love for Mrs. Simpson and his best wishes to his brother and future King, George VI, as we can see in the following extract:

But you must believe me when I tell you that I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duties as King as I would wish to do without the help and support of the woman I love. (...) This decision has been made less difficult to me by the sure knowledge that my brother, with his long training in the public affairs of this country and with his fine qualities, will be able to take my place forthwith without interruption or injury to the life and progress of the empire. (The History Place par. 9, par.12)

However, this was not the only reason politicians wanted him to abdicate in favour of his brother. Edward VIII had been charmed by Hitler and he was fraternizing with Germany at a time they were an enemy to the whole world. In fact, when he abdicated, he was created Duke of Windsor and he was sent to the Bahamas with his wife in order to keep him away from Europe, where he could be a danger for the Allies in the war that was coming. In the appendix we can see a photograph in which Edward VIII and his wife Wallis Simpson are with Hitler.

Even if the monarchy was going through a crisis due to the abdication and the scandal that this situation was causing, the institution was not threatened by republican movements. In

fact, in 1936 Maxton presented a motion for a republic and the vote was lost by 403 to 5 votes (Cannon & Griffiths 606).

Edward VIII was king for eleven months and if he had continued his reign, history might not have been as we know it nowadays.

4.5 George VI: The younger brother with a problem who saved the crown.

George VI did not expect to be king and he did not appear to have the right kind of character to be a monarch. Before becoming king, he was known as the Duke of York and as “Bertie” in the royal family. At a very early age, he developed a stammer that may have been caused because of the lack of love and attention of his parents. He was also naturally left-handed but his tutors forced him to write with the right hand. These factors may have influenced his personality and made him a weak child. However, when he was still at the head of the country, his father George V had said: "I pray God that my eldest son will never marry and that nothing will come between Bertie and Lilibet [Queen Elizabeth II] and the throne." (“George VI biography”)

He did not expect to be king and with his speech problem it was even more difficult for him to be at the head of the British Empire. He chose to be named as George VI as a sign of continuity with his father and also in order to restore confidence in the monarchy after the scandal of his elder brother and the abdication.

4.5.1 A difficulty overcome.

The king’s stutter started when he was a little boy and he lived with it until his thirties when he had to become sovereign of the United Kingdom. He had tried many things before meeting Lionel Logue, a speech therapist who helped him to improve. In fact, one of the

things he was said to do in order to improve this difficulty was to smoke cigarettes, and ironically, he died of a lung cancer at the age of fifty six.

Nevertheless, George VI was frustrated for all the methods that had failed and according to Logue and Conradi, was his wife who convinced him about seen Mr. Logue because he was willing to fail again (64). The therapist identified the King's impediment for speech as a problem of breathing and he assured George VI that it could be cured. However, Mr. Logue had quite unorthodox methods in order to improve the King's speech; the first requirement he did was that they must be seeing each other at the therapist's house and not at the Duke's and in the session they must be equals. If not, the problem of the King could not be improved.

George VI attended to therapy for two years and his improvement was evident in each one of the speeches he should give as Prince and later as King. We must not forget how important the quality of oratory is for a monarch, because with each one of his speeches he should convince people and make them believe in him. And even if at the beginning he had not inspired too much confidence, mostly after the difficult situation monarchy had experienced in 1936 with the abdication, he managed to earn people's respect and made them forget about his speech problem.

In 1939 George VI had to give a lot of speeches in the tour he and his wife Queen Elizabeth did around a lot of countries. One of the most important live broadcasts that George VI had to make was in 1939 when they declared war on Germany and he had to tell the country. With the assistance of Lionel Logue he showed the progress he had made with so much effort and strength. After more than two years perfecting his oratory, the speech went well, in spite of the nervous and responsibility the king must felt at the moment. We can see in the appendix one photograph of the King giving one of his speeches.

Later, after the King had overcome this huge difficulty, he and Lionel Logue continued to share a bond because of all the situations they had experienced together.

4.5.2 A reign which started with a war

George VI is considered a great king because of his decisions and acts during a difficult period, but it is also very important to mention Queen Elizabeth. She rejected the proposal of the king when he was still the Duke of York because she did not want to be part of the royal family. But her reservations went away when George VI took the courage to make his second proposal and they married in 1923. She was an elegant woman who was willing to help people as much as she could and this was reflected in the difficult time Britain passed during the World War II, when she did all she could to bring confidence to people.

Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of the early years, was also a very important person for the sovereign because he advised him on the important decisions. In fact, he was one of the few permitted to be on the balcony of Buckingham Palace with the royal family. It is said that Edward VIII also advised the new king but his opinions were contrary to the ones of the politicians. (“George VI (1936-52 AD)”).

As a monarch, George VI did a lot of travelling, and in 1939 he was the first British monarch to visit the United States, meeting the current president at that time, Franklin Roosevelt. On the same tour, which had great political importance, he visited Canada where he said the following significant words: “Without freedom, there could be no enduring peace, and without peace no enduring freedom” (*The king who saved the crown, George VI and his royal destiny*)

In 1939, war was declared. Prime Minister Chamberlain had visited Germany in 1938 and he and the representatives of other countries had signed with Adolf Hitler the Munich agreement, in which part of Czechoslovakia was given to Germany in order to avoid the war.

Nevertheless, Britain was forced to declare war on German after the invasion of Poland by the Nazis in 1939, breaking the agreement they had signed a year earlier.

When war started, the two princesses sent a message to all the children of the country through a broadcast speech in which they expressed their sympathy for those children who had been evacuated from the largest towns and cities: “We send a message of true sympathy and at the same time we would like to thank the kind people who had welcomed you to their homes and countries. My sister is by my side and we are going to say goodnight to you”. (“The king who saved the crown, George VI and his royal destiny”) Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret were not evacuated to a safe place; they stayed with their parents in London, a fact which further endeared them to the public.

According to The king who saved the crown, George VI and his royal destiny when the King went to France in order to visit the troops who were going to war, one of the broadcasters said: “For almost every one of them the King has a handshake, no, the King has a handshake and a smile” (16:04) It is not a surprise then that George VI earned the respect of the people because of his caring attitude and his respect for people.

George’s wife, Queen Elizabeth was a great inspiration to women, who had to work while their husbands were fighting in the war. The Queen created a sewing circle in which she also participated with many other English women, making and renovating items in the wartime spirit of “make do and mend”. This had to do with the World War II slogan: to economize on raw materials, which were needed for the war effort. An example of this is represented in the “make do and mend” slogan and poster which we can see in the appendix. This fact could also be seeing after the war had finished, when people continued to economize materials until they were useless. It was a characteristic of that generation of people who were forced by a terrible situation to make the most of the few things they had.

In 1940 the country said goodbye to Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister and received Winston Churchill instead. His words inspired a lot of soldiers and his strength was contagious to all the country. This year was devastating for London because of the bombs that seemed unstoppable. London was on fire but the sovereigns of the country tried to bring confidence when they set out to visit the burned houses and the people in the city. In order to transmit the necessary strength to their country, the King and Queen wanted to stay at the palace instead of leaving for Canada, as the government wanted them to do. They refused to move even when their own palace was bombed. The solidarity of the crown with the country was reflected in the words of the Queen after the bombing: "I'm glad we've been bombed, now we can look the East End in the face." (Farndale par. 6) This made reference to the devastated eastern area of London. Unlike her husband, she was a sort of media star who connected with people through her words and made them feel confident.

During the war and in order to motivate the Allied countries, George VI instituted the George Cross and the George medal. The King said these words in order to present the awards:

In order that they should be worthily and promptly recognized, I have decided to create, at once, a new mark of honour for men and women in all walks of civilian life. I propose to give my name to this new distinction, which will consist of the George Cross, which will rank next to the Victoria Cross, and the George Medal for wider distribution. (History learning site par.3)

In 1942, Malta was awarded the George cross for its bravery as a country. In the words of the King: "To honour the brave people I award the George Cross to the Island Fortress of Malta to bear witness to a heroism and devotion that will long be famous in history". ("Event details")

But the misery of war did not only affect regular people. The younger brother of the king, Prince George, was a passenger of a flying boat which crashed near Dunbeath. When Prince George died in 1942 while he was away in the war, it was a tough moment for the royal family, who had lost one of their own. However, war did not stop for anyone and in 1943 good news travelled from North Africa, where General Montgomery had made a difference by the surrender of the Axis forces in that territory. George VI also visited British troops in this area.

The year following the conquest of North Africa, a great invasion in history took place in Normandy, when the Allies invaded the North of France on June 6th of 1944.

4.5.3 Victory and its results.

Six years of war finished in 1945 with the victory of the Allies. The day of the victory is known as VE Day (Victory in Europe day) and it was an occasion for the ringing of church bells, celebrations in the street and a lot of victory speeches. The royal family was joined on the balcony of Buckingham Palace by Mr. Churchill, considered the war leader. They had to go out and wave to the cheering crowds several times during the day. However, it is ironic that the same year England won the war, Churchill lost the elections and he was followed by Clement Attlee.

But victory also brought responsibilities and decisions to make. The monarchs and their daughters made a victory tour around Britain in order to bring confidence after a very difficult period for the country. When war finished and with it a lot of internal political conflicts, the former King, Edward VIII, now Duke of Windsor, came back from the Bahamas looking for a new home for himself and his wife. Even if he could not affect Britain anymore with his fraternization with the enemy, the Duke of Windsor did not find a home in the UK.

His title of governor of the Bahamas was held until 1945 and he lived abroad the rest of his life until his death in Paris in 1972.

However, Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of the king and queen, had turned eighteen in 1944 and her feelings were focused on Prince Philip who felt the same for her. The King asked her to wait until her twenty-first birthday to make the official engagement (*de*). Elizabeth and Philip (later Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip), were married in November 1947. We can see how such an important event was also affected by the consequences of the war. The ceremony was elegant and international with 2000 guests and 200 million who listened to the broadcast all around the world (“Elizabeth II’s wedding”). However, the country was still recovering from the war and the post-war austerity also affected this huge ceremony. The wedding dress that Elizabeth II wore that day was made with materials that had to be obtained from ration coupons, and some of them were even donated by the public. As always happens in difficult situations, people should be distracted from the terrible things war brought, and the ceremony of marriage was a useful distraction for the whole country. We can see a photograph of Elizabeth II wearing the dress in the appendix.

The reign of George VI was full of difficulties but also full of instances of overcoming difficulties. He did not expect to become sovereign but, ironically, he was a man that changed the British monarchy for the better at a time when the country had lost confidence and faith because of a destructive war and because of the abdication crisis. He managed to overcome personal and political difficulties and to revive the monarchy in extremely difficult times.

He was a smoker most of his life and this caused him a cancer that finally killed him in 1952 at the age of fifty-six years old, leaving his daughter Elizabeth as the new Queen of the country. Queen Elizabeth II is the current Queen and her reign has been the longest in the history of monarchy after the one of her great-great grandmother Queen Victoria.

Nevertheless, times are not the same and we cannot compare the monarchy of seventy years ago with the one of nowadays. The British monarchy is an institution that has been very important to the country. However, history might have been very different if George VI had not unexpectedly inherited a role for which certain qualities seemed to be essential. The coincidence in time of a crisis in the monarchy and an imminent war provided the motivation for strengthening the institution of monarchy.

George VI saved the monarchy and Britain as we know it. If Edward VIII had chosen the crown over love it is possible that the war would have been different because of his pro-German tendencies. And with Britain occupied by German troops, the Allies would have lost a big support for the victory of war, and obviously also the citizens would have suffered a fascist regime in their country because of all the liberties they would have lost. The fear about this issue was huge at the time of the abdication, and not only Britain had this concern but also American politicians. At that time the president was Roosevelt and he even sent the FBI to spy on the couple because of their pro-German sympathies and connections at the time. Every one of their movements was controlled, even their clothes (*Historian Andrew Roberts, King Edward VIII*).

For all of this, it was not only a choice between love and duty, it was much more than that and in the words of Roberts “to the public they could not be more glamorous, to the authorities they could not be more dangerous” (Historian Andrew Roberts, King Edward VIII). This is the reason why after Edward VIII had abdicated he and his wife were sent to the Bahamas in order to keep them away from the conflict and to avoid them helping the Germans with important information.

However, after such a difficult situation, with an unexpected king at the head of the country, the institution moved forward and George VI was an essential part of this period of internal conflict.

5. Internal and external forces shaping the monarchy and its actions.

Monarchy has always been a very important institution in England, almost untouchable in the past and very rooted in tradition nowadays. However, this does not mean it had not been threatened during history. The period from Queen Victoria to George VI has seen changes in the institution and its power, which have decreased over the years.

5.1 Internal problems

Internal forces were always affecting monarchy in one way or another, either because of the problems each sovereign caused or because of political decisions that shaped the institution and its bases. We could talk about the personalities of some monarchs such as Edward VII with his scandalous life or the personal difficulties that others had to confront, such as the eighteen-year-old Queen Victoria assuming the obligation of ruling a country. However, I would like to point out the problems that in some way changed the rules and, in consequence, history.

As we saw earlier in this work, the first decade of the twentieth century was characterized by a constitutional crisis that George V survived but he did not see the final resolution of the situation. It was all caused by the rejection of Lloyd George's "People's Budget" by the House of Lords. Lloyd George was a liberal politician who thought the common good depended on the worker class and not on the aristocratic one; and he was determined to change this fact. However, the upper class he was fighting against was the House of Lords, which had considerable power to make decisions in Parliament. When his proposal of the "People's Budget" was rejected, the First Minister of the Liberal Government H. H. Asquith, asked for the dissolution of Parliament claiming that the House of Lords had usurped power and this was unconstitutional. In 1910 the outcome of the elections was the

following: Liberals, 275 seats; Conservatives, 273 seats; Irish Nationalists, 82 seats; Labour, 40 seats (Bogdanor 113) The liberals had gained several seats but it would be with help from the Irish Nationalists and Labour MPs that they would achieve a majority of the seats in Parliament.

The only one who could solve the constitutional impasse was King George V by creating more peers in Parliament. However, the House of Lords accepted the passage of the 1911 Parliament Act, in which they had the majority but they could not veto every decision they disagreed with.

This revolution brought shifts of power but especially, it proved that the upper class was not untouchable after all and that the world was changing. The British monarchy realised that it was necessary to adapt to changing times. The only way it could resist as a viable institution was to see its power reduced in favour of parliament, occupying a representative role by reigning but not ruling.

5.1.1 Republicanism

One movement that always affected monarchy in one way or another was republicanism. When there is a monarchy, there is always a part of the population that demands a republic and for a head of state that does not inherit power, but earns it in an election. England had a republic in the middle of the 17th century at the end of the English Civil War and after the execution of Charles I. This period lasted from 1649 to 1661, the year Charles II was crowned king of England. Since that year until nowadays the country has been ruled by monarchs.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, during the reign of Queen Victoria, and in order to protect monarchy from republican feelings, the Treason Felony Act was signed in

1848. This is a law that protects the sovereign and the crown and parts of it are even still in force.

Republicanism has never been an actual threat to the monarchy because of the attention the country had in their lifestyle and because of the media, which were focalized on showing the best part of the royal family.

5.2 External problems

External problems were bigger than the internal changes suffered by the monarchy its own country. Only in the twentieth century there were two World Wars, and the United Kingdom was part of both of them. George V and George VI had to deal with a country subjected to the fear and chaos of war. This consisted not only in visiting troops or travelling around the country, but also the hardest thing a monarch had to do in these times of difficulty: to earn the respect of people and make them trust him with his words and acts. If World War I was a devastating one, World War II took by surprise a country that was still recovering from the first one.

External forces that in some way could affect British monarchy are difficult to determine because every conflict could have changed the course of events in history. The twentieth century in Europe was characterized by the power which fascism had in several countries, such as Spain first with Primo de Rivera and later with Franco, Italy with Mussolini or Germany with Hitler. This radical feeling of patriotism had its peak at the time between the two world wars and it unleashed the second war. This is important because Britain did not have a fascist regime but it had to deal with the consequences of this European phenomenon.

6. Conclusions

Despite all the situations we have seen in this work or maybe because of them, the British monarchy is one of the most powerful institutions in the world. In the past, even earlier than the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, monarchy had a lot more power than today. However, while the world was changing, monarchs tried to adapt the institution to the situations of the moment. Nowadays, Queen Elizabeth II has not the same power of decision as her predecessors had, but she enjoys respect and an important symbolic role in the country. The media follow all her activities and also those of other popular royals, such as her grandson Prince William and his family.

This attention from the media has been always notable and can be reflected in the jubilees that certain monarchs have celebrated in this period with popular participation. Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 represented the sixtieth year of her reign and was an international event: apart from the heads of the overseas colonies of Britain, fifty princes and princesses attended such a significant event ("Queen Victoria"). But even if Victoria's was the longest reign of all, she was not the only one who celebrated a jubilee. George V had his Silver Jubilee in 1935, and it was also a very popular celebration for the twenty-fifth year of his reign. Even two years ago, when monarchy had already changed and lost some of its power, the Diamond Jubilee of Elizabeth II was very popular and international. These events are characterized by street parties, concerts, garden parties, receptions and a lot of different celebrations. Whatever republican feeling there might be does not appear on the surface at these times of euphoria in the country.

Some of the sovereigns have been disappointments for Britain, some of them because of their personal lives or because of their way of ruling the country. However, it is impressive how the institution has managed to be loved by people. It can be understandable in periods of difficulty when the country needed to rely on something bigger than themselves to feel

secure, as, for example, the two World Wars. However, nowadays Britain is still a monarchist country with a lot of support from people.

The contrast with other countries is noteworthy. While other countries had chosen to be able to elect who they want to be at the head of the state, Britain has not that concern. Future monarchs are known since they are born and this may inspire a confidence that an unknown president is not able to do. However, one thing that we cannot deny is the effort and the strategies the monarchy has shown during the years. The institution has overcome a lot of delicate situations for the crown and it has managed to maintain the respect of people and their faith in monarchy.

Even if I am not a monarchist person it is impossible not to appreciate the situations that the monarchy had to go through during this period in particular. Although I think nowadays it is not necessary for a country to be represented in the way monarchy does, there have been situations when monarchs have been very useful and encouraging for people; up to the point of changing history for the better.

History is one of the most important things in order to understand the world a little more. However, we have to be critical because history is what has been written and not necessarily what actually happened. With this work I have tried to understand monarchy and the history that is beneath it and for this I have used several different kinds of sources in order to get enough knowledge about the issue.

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Appendix



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