

History is now and England



by Ralph Berry

The Coronation was a glorious swirl of tradition, music, symbolic ceremonial acts, the players attired according to their role.

'History is now and England' said T.S. Eliot. Everyone, crowds and those in Westminster Abbey, realized that they had a part to play in the theatre of State, and did so to perfection. The meticulous organization, which had been prepared since well before the death of Queen Elizabeth II turned out a faultless performance. 'Vivat! Vivat Rex Carolus! Vivat! sang the choir.

The royals aside, the undoubted star was Penny Mordaunt. As Lord President of the Privy Council she carried the Sword of State during the ceremony. The 350-year old ceremonial blade weighs in at 3.5kg, so she had to do press-ups for a month. Mordaunt made her appearance in a beautiful, teal Safiyaa dress and impressed the nation as Boudicca. She is headed for the Lords.

Of the foreign coverage, *Le Monde* got it right in its praise of British soft power: 'The music was splendid, the liturgy meticulous, the costumes shimmering, the carriages a little ridiculous and the weather perfectly British—grey and wet.' Spain's *La Vanguardia* carried off the dunce's cap: 'The ceremony was anachronistic, with rituals over a century old.'

It takes a keen-eyed Spaniard to spot that. *The Washington Post*, after praising the spectacle of stunning scope, soon fell into its old ways: 'But King Charles's Coronation spectacle could come back to haunt him...such an overtly religious and grand production might ultimately stoke debate about royal wealth and the value of a hereditary monarchy.' This debate has been stoking for a while now, ever since the middle years of Queen Victoria, and all polls reveal that the people are well satisfied provided that they are not billed directly for the Coronation expenses. They know that Britain

makes a handsome profit out of visitors, royalties, and TV rights. The house of Windsor pays its way.

They had to deal with a couple of royal personnel problems. The errant Prince Harry turned up, all smiles, for a brief visit to England. His Abbey seat was immediately in front of the Princess Royal, whose large red hat completely obscured his face and view. He processed alone down the Nave, and was not on the prized balcony shot at Buckingham Palace. Taking the 3.45 B.A. flight to Los Angeles, he had come and gone for little more than 24 hours in England. Montecito beckoned.

The Duke of York is a true Hanoverian. I think of him as a younger son of George III. He no longer lives for pleasure but with his ex-wife, the loyal Fergie. After processing with his medals—the Duke as a helicopter pilot fought with distinction in the Falklands campaign—but not his uniform, he did not make the balcony shot. The King is a strict disciplinarian.

Which may lead us to future troubles. The King can be notably irritable, an unfortunate trait in a country teeming with skilled lip-readers. And he shows every sign of going the way of Queen Victoria, who believed that she, not the Prime Minister was running the country. The Queen adored Disraeli, a world-class smoothie, and could not abide Gladstone, who believed that the future was safe only in his hands. I have nothing to say on the latest scandal, today's news that the Prince of Wales (as he then was) 'had a 15-minute showdown over slavery' with Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister. He warned the Prince against interfering in politics. 'I'd be careful or you'll end up having to sell the Duchy of Cornwall to pay reparations for those who built it.' This one will run and run.