

Coronations

Joe Saunders

The coronation of King Charles III represents an important moment in history. In recent centuries, the coronation of British monarchs has taken place in London. However, before the Union between England and Scotland in 1707, there were separate coronations in the kingdoms of England and Scotland. In the medieval period, these coronations occurred at various sites. The significance of a coronation stretches far beyond the place of the event itself. Researching celebrations of historic coronations in our localities or links to our families can really bring them to life. These are also snapshots in time, points for us to focus on and discover that particular era. Local archives hold material relating to past coronations in your area but there are a wide range of other sources that can be used.

At the time of all previous coronations in recent history, printed words and images have been among the most important means of communication. This includes books, newspapers, magazines, posters, flyers, and other forms of short, throwaway print. They can also include letters, diaries, and school and church records. Many of these are familiar today though in many respects they have now been supplanted by digital versions. All manner of coronation-related information may be found in printed sources, ranging from first-hand accounts to advertisements of events, and souvenirs.



An outdoor dinner in Cambridge celebrating the coronation of Queen Victoria (1837).
 Lithograph by A.R. Greive after R.B. Harraden. Wellcome Trust. Public Domain.

One key printed source is the newspaper. Newspaper collections will have carried all manner of information, ranging from reports of planning meetings, to photographs of school groups dressed for the coronation. These might be found in a Local Studies Centre. Depending on the date, relevant newspapers might be available online through the [British Newspaper Archive](#) or [Find My Past](#). For those researching in Wales, [Welsh Newspapers](#) pre-1920 can be accessed freely online.

Following the invention of photography in the nineteenth-century, life has increasingly been recorded through visual means. This is especially so in the case of important events like coronations. The coming of the 'moving picture' or films in the early twentieth century expanded the visual recording of life. Famously, the first filmed coronation for television was that of Queen Elizabeth in 1953 as she endeavoured to embrace modern technologies. Recordings may also be available of local events linked to the coronation.

Some photographs may have been reproduced in print media, such as in a newspapers and magazines. Many photographs may be stored in public collections such as in public libraries,

local authority archives and local studies collections. Photographs are often not digitised and a visit in person may be required. .

In many places it was decided to mark the event of a coronation (and jubilees) with works deemed a contribution to the public good. This often meant making permanent changes to the physical environment in the name of celebrating the coronation. These things could be decorative such as monuments of various kinds, but also things useful to the community. Such markers include street furniture such as gates or more substantial fixtures of the environment like playing fields and gardens. In many places these markers still survive. The internet is likely to prove fruitful here, although older print sources may well be worth examining. There may be records relating to the establishment of such public works which can be located through your local archive.



A poster in Countisbury church shows the details of the local coronation festivities in 1911, when King George V was crowned. © Copyright Graham Horn ([CC BY-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/))

In more recent times coronations and other significant royal events (such as weddings and jubilees) have been marked in Britain by commemorative keepsakes and souvenirs. These have often taken the form of otherwise everyday objects such as coins, mugs, and plates, marked out for their special significance. There may even be programmes from events such as a local concert or food wrappers. You may have objects like this in your household, owned by members of your extended family or within the wider community. It may be these are in public places such as schools or museums. Even without the actual artefacts, the internet has multiple images of such souvenirs.

It is possible that you can get some first-hand accounts of previous coronations, although this is likely to be from 1953 (and possibly 1937). With these, you can understand the perspectives of people who were there through fresh and vivid insights. Some of these may be recorded in old print sources, such as newspapers. Others may have recorded their experiences in writing, such as in diaries. These may be kept in personal collections, such as within a family or by a neighbour, or in local museums or archives. In some cases, these recollections may themselves have been published within a local history book, or as an edition by themselves.

References and Resources:

Read more about researching coronations in local history on the British Association for Local History webpage for [The British Coronation Project 2023](#)

[A history of coronations | Westminster Abbey](#)

[Coronations Past and Present | Tower of London | Historic Royal Palaces](#)

Ian Lloyd, *The Throne: 1,000 Years of British Coronations* (2023)

[British Newspaper Archive](#)

[Find My Past](#)

[Welsh Newspapers](#)