

# The Coronation of King George VI

King George V had been on the throne from the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1910 until his death on the 20<sup>th</sup> January 1936. His son Edward VIII immediately became King with his Coronation planned for the 12<sup>th</sup> May 1937.

While a Coronation did take place that day – it was not Edward who was crowned but his brother, George VI. Edward's determination to marry the twice divorced Wallis Simpson met with extreme hostility from Parliament and the Church. The result was that Edward was forced to relinquish the throne on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 1935, subsequently marrying Mrs Simpson. To younger readers this hostility and subsequent abdication may seem strange given that the current occupant of the throne and his Consort are both divorcees – how times change!

It was his younger brother, Albert Frederick Arthur George, who succeeded him, adopting the regal title George VI. The decision was taken that, as a date had been set for Edward's Coronation, it made sense to use the same date for George's crowning given that plans were already well underway.

Cities, towns and villages, throughout the realm were making plans to celebrate the occasion and Markinch was no different. Doubtless, similar preparations will soon be in full swing for the Coronation of Charles III on Saturday the 6<sup>th</sup> May – 86 years after that of his grandfather.

Saturday, the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1937, saw the *Fife Free Press* report that a committee had been formed to organise the

Town's Coronation Celebrations. The committee consisted of:-

- Provost A.M. Craik
- Bailies J. Jack and W. Colville
- Ex-Provost Guthrie
- Councillor Jas. A. Farmer
- Major J.L.A. Macdonald – British Legion
- Miss Smith – Girl Guides
- Richard Morrison – Boys' Brigade
- John McArthur – Boy Scouts
- T Johnstone – Highland Games
- John Wilson – Victoria Rangers F.C.
- J Hill – Schoolmaster
- Andrew Jack – School Management Committee
- J.C. Duthie (No other information)
- Major W.K.O. Shepherd – Town Clerk

The Town Clerk was to act as Secretary and Treasurer to the Committee. Mr Shepherd, a Leven solicitor, was a very busy man – he was also Chairman of the Largo Coronation Committee!

Tullis Russell's Prize Silver Band were engaged to attend the celebrations. A Fancy Dress Ball was arranged for the Town Hall during Coronation week with Bailie Jack, Councillor Farmer and officials of Victoria Rangers, to make the necessary arrangements.

A cinema show was to be organised in the Town Hall during April to raise funds. Andrew Shaw, the proprietor of the local cinema, had agreed to arrange this free of charge.

In its edition of the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1937, the *Dundee Courier* reported on a concert held by Markinch school pupils for the purpose of raising funds towards the installation of a cinema projector in the school. Infants, juniors, seniors and advanced division pupils, contributed to the

programme. The reason it is mentioned here is that, from the proceeds, £5 was to be given to the Coronation Committee.

It was Provost Craik who opened the event and once again the following names may be recognisable to some.

- Nancy Reid spoke the prologue and the epilogue.
- Jean Ballantyne conducted the infant choir.
- John Rodger as the Wee Cooper and Elizabeth Wallace as his wife were outstanding.
- Aitken Thomson and John Webster played the horse in the sketches.
- The following were mentioned as playing their parts in the sketches with "real skill":- Ian MacKie, John Thomson, John Barns, Sarah Boyle, Rossabelle Swan, Jean Bowden, Margaret Hutt, Margaret Porter, Eva Cowper, Ella Hutchison, Margaret Page, Betty Laurie, Grace Forrester, Nancy Stenhouse, Irene Grant, Robin Swan, Rosabel Swan, Cissie Paton, Ian McQuan and Betty McNeill.

The Headmaster, Mr Hill, called for the vote of thanks and intimated that the drawings amounted to £52.

The *Dundee Courier* was able to report on further fundraising in its columns on the 17<sup>th</sup> April 1937. Lodge Balgonie (764), Markinch, had held a whist drive and dance in the Town Hall. Bro. J.S. Clouston acted as card-master and prizes were presented by Provost A.M. Craik. Whist drives were a very popular entertainment at one time and the results for the evening were disclosed by the paper. For interest, and the possible recognition of a relative, the names reported in the newspaper is shown below:-

**Ladies** - 1. Miss Warden 2. Miss C. Braid 3. Mrs W. Scott

**Consolation** - 1. Miss Johnstone 2. Mrs Herd

**Lowest Score at Interval** – Mrs A. McInnes

**Hostess Prize** – Mrs C. Smith

**Gentlemen** - 1. Miss G. M. Erskine\* 2. Mrs Nicholson\* 3. Mr W Braid

**Consolation** – 1. Miss Kirkland\* 2. Mrs Syme\*

**Lowest Score at the Interval** – Miss Clunie\*

\* Indicates that these ladies were playing as gentlemen. The only assumption is that the teams were male/female and there were more females in attendance.

Music for the dance was provided by the Mc Innes' Band and the M.C for the evening was Bro. John Reid.

The *Dundee Courier* was back in action on the 6<sup>th</sup> May – this time to advise that a site for the celebratory bonfire had been chosen. The Committee had secured permission to use a field at Lawhead. There were details of further arrangements in that the old folk of the town and the Kirkforthar Feus area who numbered 164 were to be presented with a 4 shilling voucher (20p). In addition, children under school age were to receive Coronation mugs. That begs the question – does someone somewhere still have a Coronation mug? The article does not disclose if it was one specifically designed for Markinch or simply a general souvenir.

More details were given on the Fancy Dress Ball which would now be held on Tuesday the 11<sup>th</sup> May in the Town Hall. Again, it was confirmed that the arrangements were in the hands of Victoria Rangers F.C.

The next day was Coronation Day itself and the *Fife Free Press* on the 15<sup>th</sup> May, carried extensive reports on local celebrations. Even the briefest glance shows that Leslie in particular had pulled out all the stops with the celebrations starting on the Green at 9.15am.

In Markinch, the paper noted that "the day was blessed with favourable weather conditions". The parade was led by the Tullis Russell Silver Band and assembled on the Common and "the procession of schoolchildren was a brilliant spectacle". The route was via Landel Street, High Street and Balbirnie Street, to the John Dixon Park. The report indicated that "when the parade passed the Municipal Buildings, Provost A. M. Craik and Bailie James Jack stood on the balcony and took the salute".

At the park the four local Ministers conducted a service. The four men were the Revs. W.S. Anderson, E.M.M. Davison, J.L. Boag and S.M. Walker.

The Provost's wife then presented the prizes for the Fancy Dress Parade.

**Under 10s** - 1. Nancy Reid 2. Nancy Campbell 3. Jean Imrie

**10 and over** - 1. Isabella Todd 2. Thomas Hazelwood 3. Dorothy Langvie

**Adults** - 1. Christina Colville 2. Isabella McQueen

**Group Prizes** - 1. Betty Lawrie 2. Eva Cowper

**Special Group Prize** - 1. Nancy Nisbet 2. Betty Wyse 3. Harry Wyse

**Decorated Cycles** - 1. Lena West 2. Marjorie Haxton 3. George McQuan 4. George Johnstone 5. William Peebles 6. Sandy Johnstone 7. Alan Brand

**Best Fancy Dress and Decorated Cycle** - Lena West

**Special Prize** - Messrs J. Doig and James Birrell

**Decorated Vehicle Prize** – Mr Clements

The above was followed by an afternoon of school sports and then a five-a-side football tournament “for the youths of the town” which rounded the park activities off.

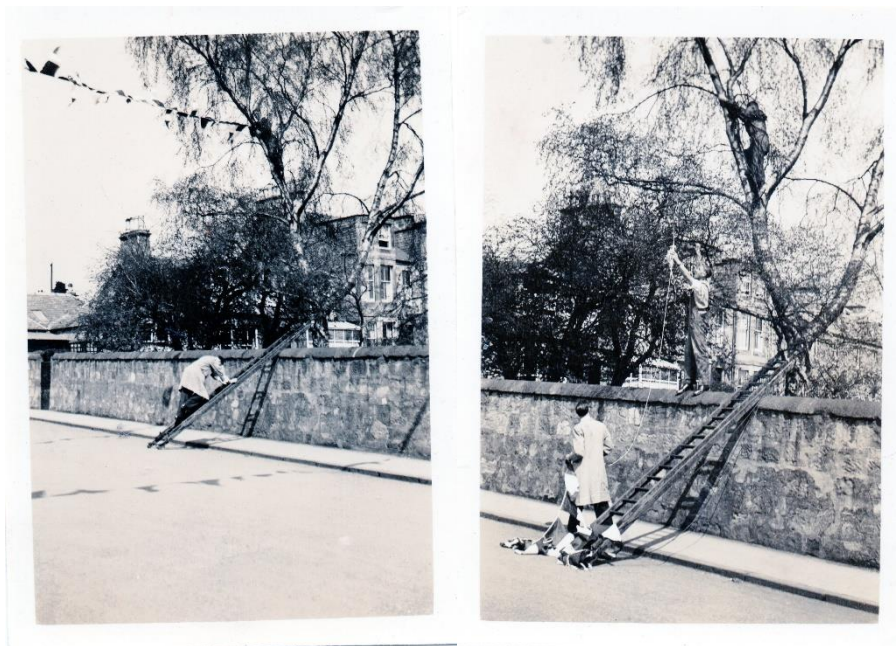
The celebratory bonfire was lit at exactly 10.00pm at Lawhead and a firework display was given from the tower of the Town Hall. The atmosphere was added to by St. Drostan's Church being floodlit.

“Those in charge of the arrangements supervised by the Provost and Magistrates are to be complimented on the efficient manner in which they were carried out”.

The Coronation left an indelible mark on Markinch in the name of some of the town's streets. There can be little doubt that *King Edward Street* had to have been named early in 1936, almost certainly before the furore broke out. As Edward was unmarried at the time, *Queens Crescent* must be a generic name. Certainly, *Wallis Simpson Crescent* was not an option. George Street was probably named after George V and guess work would lead to the notion that *Alexandra Crescent* was named after his mother. Markinch was certainly not alone with this issue. Even the briefest glance at the “Postcode Finder” shows upwards of 20 streets named after Edward – and that is only streets – no checks were made for potential roads, avenues, or crescents.

As an aside, in 1935, Markinch Guides and Brownies had planted a beech tree in John Dixon Park to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of George V. It stood for decades with a commemorative plaque by its side. In the early hours of a Sunday morning, in 2016, while most of the population were still asleep, the tree was felled. There had been no consultation but Fife Council assured the public that as the tree was diseased – there was no option.

It is always interesting to look at names from the past but here, thanks to a committee member, we can go one better. Bill Fiet, an enthusiastic collector, has an extensive collection of local postcards and photographs. Some of those relevant to the preparations and the day itself are included here. We do hope that they stir some memories and if friends or relatives are recognised – please let us know via the Facebook page.









1937 - CORONATION KING GEORGE VI & QUEEN ELIZABETH



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## Acknowledgements

Newspaper material – The individual newspapers are credited in the text but the information itself was obtained from Findmypast Newspaper Archive Ltd in partnership with the British Museum.

Bill Fiet – for allowing the use of the photographs which form part of his extensive collection.