
Undergraduate Honors Theses

Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects

5-2010

Looking the East End in the Face: The Impact of the British Monarchy on Civilian Morale in the Second World War

Amy Limoncelli
College of William and Mary

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorsthesis>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Limoncelli, Amy, "Looking the East End in the Face: The Impact of the British Monarchy on Civilian Morale in the Second World War" (2010). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. Paper 686.
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorsthesis/686>

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

**Looking the East End in the Face: The Impact of the British Monarchy on Civilian Morale
in the Second World War**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in History from
The College of William and Mary

by

Amy Elizabeth Limoncelli

Accepted for High Honors

Kathrin Levitan, Director

Bruce Campbell

Ronald Schechter

Williamsburg, VA
April 26, 2010

Introduction: The British Monarchy at War

Upon the outbreak of the Second World War on September 1, 1939, King George VI broadcast to the people of the British Empire. In his speech, he asked them “to stand calm and firm and united in this time of trial. The task will be hard. There may be dark days ahead, and war can no longer be confined to the battlefield.”¹ Yet, the King declared, Britain fought for a noble cause: ensuring peace, freedom, and the liberty of nations. He proclaimed, “If one and all we keep resolutely faithful to it, ready for whatever service or sacrifice it may demand, then, with God’s help, we shall prevail.”² His prediction of civilian dangers proved true, as the Battle of Britain brought devastating air raid attacks upon British cities and the needs of total war involved great sacrifices from the public. Indeed, the King had already realized the necessity for public unity and resolution in the face of great challenges. As symbolic heads of state, the King and Queen had a unique ability to affect the public mood. Recognizing the power of their position, the Royal Family dedicated their wartime lives to positively impacting public morale.

Traditionally, the British monarchy has served as a focus for national pride and patriotism, a role that has caused the Royal Family to receive significant media attention throughout the modern era.³ Because of the monarchy’s “singular nature, the public prominence and the constitutional centrality of the position,” the monarchy is both a focus of public attention and is often considered above political controversy.⁴ While the role may seem largely symbolic, the monarchy’s public influence can attain real results if used correctly. King George and Queen Elizabeth exemplified this power during the Second World War, using their status to positively

¹ Quoted in Sir John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI: His Life and Reign*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), 407.

² Quoted in *Ibid.*

³ Michal Foley, *The Politics of the British Constitution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 90.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

impact civilian morale at a time when it experienced grave threats. Promoting the idea of “equality of sacrifice,” they strove to demonstrate their commitment to the war effort and project an attitude of determination, hoping to foster similar sentiments among the public.

There were four main phases of the Second World War in Great Britain. The first, commonly referred to at the time as the “Phony War,” consisted of the eight months after the declaration of war in September 1939, in which there was relative inactivity. Great defense preparations were made, including the construction of public and private air raid shelters, formation of Air Raid Precaution, distribution of gas masks, implementation of blackouts, introduction of barrage balloons over London to discourage low-level attacks, requisitioning of London taxis for the Auxiliary Fire service, and creation of public and private evacuation schemes, but little actually happened in terms of attacks on the home front.⁵ By contrast, the second phase of the war saw several momentous events, beginning with the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk and the fall of France in June 1940, and continuing with the Battle of Britain in summer 1940. The third phase of the war lasted from September 1940-May 1941, during which London and several other cities faced heavy bombings. Throughout the second and third phases, the threat of German invasion remained possible. The last phase of the war began in mid-1941 as bombing became more intermittent and the threat of invasion diminished. From mid-1941 until the end of the war, victory seemed likely, yet significant challenges remained, including the introduction of the V1 and V2 rockets in 1944 with renewed

⁵ Angus Calder, *The People's War; Britain, 1939-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 55.

air raids on London.⁶ The war in Europe ended in May 1945, with victory in Japan following in August. During the war, approximately sixty thousand British civilians died in air raids.⁷

The threat that the war posed to morale was considerable. Several actors, including the government, the media, influential individuals, and the enemy, sought to impact morale and achieved highly different levels of success. Unique among these actors was the Royal Family. Supported by the tradition of the English Constitution and largely protected from sways in public opinion, the Royal Family built upon its traditional public duties, prominent media position, and preexisting concern for the common people to impact public morale. Within their public responsibilities, the King and Queen developed both formal and informal programs, finding that the public reacted positively to informal, personal interactions with the monarchs. Within their private lives, the King and Queen strove to set a positive example for the public. The King and Queen's dedication, their unique role in British society, and the supportive and personal nature of their program set the Royal Family apart from any other group attempting to impact morale.

Constitutional Monarchy in Britain

The British Constitution is founded on the basis of Parliamentary sovereignty, in which the statutes passed by Parliament are the supreme law of the United Kingdom. Yet Great Britain also has a constitutional monarchy, with a Sovereign who reigns under the hereditary principle. In *The English Constitution*, Walter Bagehot defined the three rights of the British constitutional monarch: the right to be consulted, the right to advise, and the right to warn.⁸ The Constitutional monarch has several "royal prerogatives," but these are largely delegated to the Prime Minister

⁶ Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 45.

⁷ William I. Hitchcock, *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945 to the Present*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 42.

⁸ Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 85.

and Parliament.⁹ In the modern era, the most important prerogative of the Sovereign has been the appointment of the Prime Minister. In the aftermath of a general election, the Sovereign appoints the leader of the party that received a majority in the House of Commons as Prime Minister. While the Sovereign naturally has his or her own political opinions, he or she is duty-bound to remain above political matters, supporting no particular political party.¹⁰

Under the doctrines of the British constitutional monarchy, the Sovereign and the Government maintain close relations. The Sovereign is constantly aware of current events and issues faced by the government and serves as an advisor and consultant to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. In this relationship, the Sovereign's Personal Secretary serves as his primary advisory and communications link with the Government. According to Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, the Sovereign's Private Secretary serves as a "vital link between the Crown and the Cabinet, between the Monarch and the machinery of government, and between the Sovereign and the Commonwealth."¹¹ The role emerged under the reign of George III and was officially recognized in the 1860s during the reign of Queen Victoria.¹² The Private Secretary, appointed by the Sovereign, informs the Sovereign of the topics and issues facing the Cabinet. His independence from politics is important, as it aims at instilling confidence in members of the minority party so that they may trust him if and when they take power. Therefore, like the Sovereign himself, the Private Secretary must be above politics.

⁹ Foley, 91.

¹⁰ While this is the ideal behavior for monarchs, it is not always the reality. Several times during the modern era "apolitical" monarchs have aligned themselves with a specific political party, often causing a public and media backlash. King George and Queen Elizabeth faced this themselves in 1938, when they appeared on the balcony of Buckingham Palace with Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in support of the Munich agreement. The Queen herself later acknowledged the unconstitutionality of this action. The Munich agreement had to be voted upon in the House of Commons, and both Labour and the Liberals voted against it. See William Shawcross, *The Queen Mother* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 443.

¹¹ Wheeler-Bennett, 817.

¹² *Ibid.*, 819.

In their public duties and in their private lives, members of the Royal Family coordinate their activities closely with the Government. The official duties of the Royal Family frequently involve consultations with the Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet. The Home Office often proposes or reviews official Royal patronages and participation in social or charitable groups. During the Second World War, the Royal Family also had to consult with the Foreign Office on matters of international relations, since as heads of state they communicated frequently with the other reigning monarchs of Europe and other leaders, including President Roosevelt of the United States. High levels of interaction between the Royal Family and the government existed throughout the war, in most aspects of the Royal Family's life but especially regarding their morale-boosting programs.

The Royal Family during the Second World War

The monarchs of Great Britain during the Second World War were King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. They ascended the throne in 1936 after the abdication of King George's elder brother, King Edward VIII. The "abdication crisis" leading to King George's ascension severely damaged public faith in the monarchy. Before becoming King, Edward VIII had been involved in a relationship with Wallis Simpson, a twice-divorced American woman who remained married to her third husband. Seeking to marry Mrs. Simpson, Edward VIII found that the Government, the Royal Family, and the general public disapproved of his choice. As Walter Bagehot explained decades before the crisis, "We have come to regard the Crown as the head of our morality. We have come to believe that it is natural to have a virtuous sovereign, and that domestic virtues are as likely to be found on thrones as they are eminent when there."¹³ In the eyes of many officials, for the British monarchy to suggest its approval of divorce and adultery

¹³ Bagehot, 50.

was unthinkable. The Prime Minister, Cabinet, and the remainder of the Royal Family therefore made it clear to Edward VIII that he must choose between the Crown and marriage to Mrs. Simpson. On December 12, 1936 he chose marriage, abdicating the throne and passing the crown to his younger brother.¹⁴

King George VI therefore ascended the throne at a time of great instability, when the very role of the monarchy was in question. Republican sentiment had been gathering since the conclusion of the First World War, which involved the overthrow of European monarchies in Germany, Austro-Hungary, and Russia. This weakening of monarchical tradition, combined with the post-war problems of demobilization, unemployment, industrial unrest, and other social changes had the potential to foster a similar revolutionary spirit in Great Britain.¹⁵ Shortly after Armistice Day, on November 14 1918, a General Election was announced in the House of Commons when the Labour Party withdrew from the wartime Coalition Government. The Secretary of the Transport Workers' Union, Bob Williams, announced that he hoped "to see the Red Flag flying over Buckingham Palace," but the Labour party ultimately decided against making republicanism one of its party platforms and such radicalism did not gain significant popular support.¹⁶ Yet the abdication crisis fostered a renewed interest in republicanism. James Maxton, a Member of Parliament and chairman of the Independent Labour Party, declared during the Abdication Debate in the House of Commons that "We are doing a wrong and a foolish thing if, as a House, we do not seize the opportunity with which circumstances have presented us of establishing in our land a completely democratic form of government which does away with old monarchical institutions and the hereditary principle."¹⁷ Maxton proposed an

¹⁴ Wheeler-Bennett, 288.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 160.

¹⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 299.

amendment to abolish the monarchy, soundly defeated in the Commons by 403 to 5.¹⁸ While the majority thus clearly favored the monarchy, the fact that the amendment was even able to stand for a vote signals the severity of dissatisfaction with the monarchy at that time.

Moreover, King George's own character was in question upon his ascension, as his elder brother had been debonair and charismatic, while he was reserved and hesitant.¹⁹ His brother had enjoyed great public acclaim as Prince of Wales, while George had avoided publicity. Yet despite his introversion, King George took his public role as a member of the Royal Family seriously. As an undergraduate student, he read Bagehot's *The English Constitution* and derived his opinion of kingship from it. While his father, King George V, was the only member of the Royal Family with political responsibilities under the constitution, the entire Royal Family engaged in a wide variety of public duties, supporting social associations, military regiments, the arts, charitable groups, and other organizations. As Prince Albert, the future King George VI began his "official career" as a member of the Royal Family in 1916 at the age of twenty-one. His first public function was the opening of a new rifle range in the Palace of Westminster for the use of members of both Houses of Parliament.²⁰

Upon becoming Duke of York in 1920, he increased his involvement in social public duties, forming an understanding of the nation through the support of social organizations. He became noted for his support of the Industrial Welfare society and the Duke of York Camps, patronages that would later assist his wartime public role. The Duke of York became President of the Industrial Welfare Society upon its foundation in May 1919. The role allowed him to visit industrial centers throughout the country, giving him an understanding of the nation's industrial life. The Industrial Welfare Society's objectives were "the formulation and development of the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 288.

²⁰ Ibid., 89.

many activities, industrial, educational and recreational, indicated in the word ‘welfare’ for the benefit of all those engaged in industry” and the Duke of York embraced this goal by promoting the interests of industrial workers.²¹ He visited mines, manufacturing plants, shipyards, and construction sites as well as offices and shops where women worked, and saw the unrest in the country. In a 1920 speech to the IWS he stated that “The saving and brightening of the worker’s life should be, and must eventually be, an industrial issue, and when the community realizes that the country is richest which nourishes the greatest number of happy people, a big step will have been taken towards the contentment and prosperity of the nation.”²² The experience he gained interacting with industrial workers, as well as his knowledge of the challenges they faced, would significantly help him in his wartime role.

The Duke also founded a series of “Duke of York Camps,” which gave working- and upper-class boys the opportunity to interact in annual summer camp sessions. The first Duke of York Camp was held in August 1921. One hundred public schools and one hundred industrial firms were each invited to send two boys between the ages of seventeen and nineteen to meet as guests of the Duke for a week of work and play, designed to have them intermingle in an environment of equality.²³ After the Camp proved a success, it continued and was an annual institution by the 1930s. The Duke maintained his interest in social issues upon becoming King, and made them an even greater priority upon the outbreak of war.²⁴

Like King George, Queen Elizabeth had an upbringing that prepared her for her wartime responsibilities. Queen Elizabeth was born Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon in 1900 to a noble Scottish family. Before her marriage to the Duke of York in 1923, she spent her time between

²¹ Ibid., 165.

²² Quoted in Ibid., 167.

²³ Ibid., 176.

²⁴ Ibid., 820.

her family homes of Glamis Castle in Glamis, Scotland, and St. Paul's Walden in Hertfordshire, England.²⁵ During the First World War, Glamis Castle served as a hospital for wounded service men. Elizabeth served as a nurse in Glamis throughout the war, developing a skill for personal sympathy which would serve her well as Queen during the Second World War.²⁶

The official rights and responsibilities of the British monarchy do not change during wartime. While the Sovereign is already the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, he or she does not take control of the forces in the field. His or her constitutional position remains the same and he or she receives neither more nor less power. However, the burdens of war bring additional responsibilities to all leaders, so when war broke out in Europe in 1939, the British Royal Family took on a new and significant role. This applied most notably to King George, who became highly active in his advisory role to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. Like his father George V during the First World War, King George VI felt that he ought not to impress his Ministers and Commanders with his own views, but adhere to the three basic rights of the monarch in advising, encouraging, and warning.²⁷ For most of the Second World War, King George's Private Secretary was Sir Alexander Hardinge, who had also served as Private Secretary to King Edward VIII and George V. He resigned due to illness in 1943 and was replaced by Sir Alan Lascelles, who continued to serve as George VI's Private Secretary until the King's death in 1952.²⁸ Hardinge and Lascelles played a prominent role in fostering communication between the monarchy and the government. The King also frequently asked

²⁵ Shawcross, 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁷ Wheeler-Bennett, 415.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 580.

Hardinge or Lascelles to investigate specific issues about which he desired more information, including morale, allowing him to form his own policy opinions.²⁹

King George adhered to his father's beliefs that the Crown must represent the best of the national character and that the Sovereign must "set an example to his people of devotion to duty and service to the State."³⁰ Even before the outbreak of war, the King and Queen prioritized the support of social and charitable groups. Upon their ascension, they realized the danger that the abdication put the monarchy in and set out to epitomize the type of virtuous royalty embodied by Bagehot and expected by the public.³¹ This activity only increased upon the outbreak of war. Their "service to the State" philosophy, combined with their concern for the welfare of the British public, led to the King and Queen's decision upon the outbreak of war to make it their duty to devote themselves to positively impacting morale.

The King and Queen were not the only members of the Royal Family to engage in wartime activities. The King's mother, Queen Mary, dutifully adhered to rationing, patronized wartime organizations, and promoted wartime contributions. His younger brothers, the Duke of Gloucester and the Duke of Kent, along with their wives, did the same. Both dukes also held military positions. The family strove to not only support, but lead, the public through the war.

Historiography and Sources

The historiography of the Second World War encompasses a diverse literature spanning from the immediate post-war years to the present day. Within this expansive body of research, certain works that focus on civilian life and morale are essential to a consideration of the monarchy's impact on morale. Earlier works examining wartime morale focused on an

²⁹ Ibid., 537.

³⁰ Ibid., 132.

³¹ Ibid., 300.

assessment of morale, while later works reexamined their theories, some expanding the debate into considerations of the factors that affected morale and others offering revisionist interpretations of the true nature of morale. The idea of social cohesion, which suggests that British society looked beyond social and class differences to unite against a common enemy, is central to discussions of wartime morale. Evident in wartime propaganda and echoed in early scholarly works, this theory suggests an “equality of sacrifice” spanning all classes and social divisions. Subsequent works challenged the legitimacy of this claim, arguing that it stemmed more from propaganda than reality.

Prominent early works focusing on the British home front during the Second World War include Richard Titmuss’s *Problems of Social Policy* (1950) and A.J.P. Taylor’s *English History 1914-1945* (1965). Their research promoted the theory of social cohesion and argued that the British people remained resilient and confident in ultimate victory throughout the war.³² These early works were somewhat limited in their scope, focusing primarily on the effects of air raids and evacuations on morale. Furthermore, both focused on the height of the blitz in 1940-1941 rather than considering the five years of the war holistically.

Angus Calder’s *The People’s War; Britain, 1939-1945* (1969), one of the most widely-accepted accounts of the British Home front, cast doubt upon the idea of a wholly resilient and united public.³³ Calder qualified the positive image of earlier research with evidence of looting, blackmarketeering, and class conflict. However, he concluded that these examples of weakness and low morale were exceptions, while overall civilian morale remained strong. The popular memory, according to Calder, had exaggerated the positive and undermined the negative, but overall the public did prove resilient. The primary source of this strength, argued Calder, was

³² Mackay, 4.

³³ Ibid.

the experience of shared suffering that united people of all classes and backgrounds. The “people’s war” was fought by all British citizens, he argued, who overcame their differences in order to achieve victory.³⁴ In *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War* (2002), Robert Mackay agreed with Calder that morale remained high, augmenting this argument with an analysis of the factors that affected morale. Mackay proposed that government propaganda, combined with an “invisible chain” of patriotic sentiment (a phrase coined by George Orwell during the war), strengthened civilians and kept morale high.³⁵ This theory supported Calder’s, as both scholars noted the unity of the British people across class levels and other social, economic, and regional differences.

Revisionist works have challenged the generally-accepted claims of high morale and social cohesion. Tom Harrisson’s *Living through the Blitz* (1976), and Clive Ponting’s *1940: Myth and Reality* (1990) both emphasized evidence of negative reactions to the war, arguing that defeatism was common. Harrisson, one of the founders of Mass-Observation, used its unpublished records to highlight the terror people expressed and provide examples of government failures to meet public needs after air raid attacks. Ponting targeted the year 1940, the focus of the earliest works on public morale, to argue that the popular belief of social unity and resilience during this time was solely a result of government propaganda propagating the idea. However, more recent research, including Mackay’s, suggested that their focus on these issues ignores the preponderance of positive responses to hardships, as well as the fact that Britain emerged victorious from the war.³⁶ In another revisionist work, *Which People’s War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (2003), Sonya O. Rose argued that national identity in Britain was not as unified as Calder contends in *The People’s War*. Since different groups such

³⁴ Angus Calder, *The People’s War; Britain, 1939-1945*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 18.

³⁵ Mackay, 263.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

as ethnic minorities, males on the home front, and young women faced unique challenges during the war, she argued, any analysis that consolidates the British people into one unified body oversimplifies the variety of experiences that different groups had.³⁷

Scholarly research focused on wartime morale in Britain typically has given little attention to the Royal Family. Robert Mackay, for example, merely noted George VI's power as a public speaker, referencing the King, Winston Churchill, and J.B. Priestly as the three most influential orators of the era.³⁸ Yet biographical works on members of the wartime Royal Family have highlighted their many wartime accomplishments. Sir John W. Wheeler-Bennett published his official biography of George VI, *King George VI: His Life and Reign* in 1965, in which he portrayed George VI as a leader with a strong sense of duty. Wheeler-Bennett focused on the King's relationship with the Churchill government as well as his individual wartime efforts, including his many public visits and speeches to promote morale. Selected by the Royal Family as the official biographer of King George, Wheeler-Bennett painted a distinctly positive portrait of the late King. Several unofficial biographies of King George also exist. Notable among these is Sarah Bradford's *The Reluctant King* (1989), which echoed Wheeler-Bennett's praise of George VI. It also, however, emphasized the King's initial timidity upon ascending to the throne and the personal struggles that made his public life difficult, including a speech impediment and a fear of heights.³⁹ While these works stressed the King's wartime contributions, David Cannadine offered an analysis of the relationship between Churchill and George VI that suggests

³⁷ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.

³⁸ Mackay, 163.

³⁹ Sarah Bradford, *The Reluctant King*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 327.

that while Churchill remained respectful of the monarchy, the Prime Minister never publicly suggested that the King's involvement made any significant impact on wartime policy.⁴⁰

Many unofficial biographies of Queen Elizabeth were written during her lifetime. Many adopted a near-reverential tone towards the Queen and her accomplishments. Of these, Dorothy Laird's *Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother* (1966), written only two decades after the war, gave great attention to her wartime role. Anne Morrow's *Without Equal: H.M. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother* (2000), offered an equally glowing appraisal of the Queen's wartime work within its assessment of her life's achievements. Morrow highlighted the Queen's influence on British morale as one of her life's greatest contributions.⁴¹ *The Queen Mother*, her official biography, written by William Shawcross and published in 2009, provided a more realistic interpretation of the Queen's life. Although it painted a positive image of the Queen, it did not adopt the reverent tone of other works and was pragmatic in its analysis of her achievements. Of these, however, the author agreed that her wartime role, especially her many patronages, was notable.⁴²

Little post-war literature focused on the Royal Family during the war. The first work to do so was *The Royal Family in Wartime* (1945), a brief work commissioned by the Council of King George's Jubilee Trust that praised the Royal Family's wartime activities through light narrative and photography. This included images of the King and Queen visiting bombed cities, the armed forces in Britain and abroad, and other locations including hospitals and bomb shelters. The work, while an illuminating summary of the Royal Family's contributions, was commissioned by the monarchy and offered a biased commemoration of the Royal Family's wartime achievements rather than an analysis of its contributions. George VI ordered and orchestrated its publication

⁴⁰ David Cannadine, "Churchill and the British Monarchy," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, Vol. 11 (2001), pp. 249-272.

⁴¹ Anne Morrow, *Without Equal: H.M. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother*, (North Yorkshire: House of Strouse, 2000), ii.

⁴² Shawcross, 941.

immediately after the war's conclusion. The only scholarly book to focus solely on the Royal Family during the Second World War was Theo Aronson's *The Royal Family at War* (1993). Aronson argued that by actively supporting the public throughout the war, the Royal Family brought the Crown and the people closer together, improving the relationship between the monarchy and the public.⁴³ His research borrowed from biographical works on King George and Queen Elizabeth, but also incorporated interviews and a variety of other sources. His focus, however, was not on the relationship between the monarchy and morale but on the war's effects on the monarchy's popularity and prestige.

In studying the impact of the Royal Family on civilian morale, I have considered the insights of these historians in relation to my own primary research. The primary source documents I have consulted include papers from the United Kingdom Public Record Office, personal memoirs from Harold Nicholson, Alan Lascelles, Marion Crawford, and others, the diaries and letters of Royal Family members, newspaper articles from *The Times* and other publications, and records from the Mass-Observation archives. Quotations from diaries or letters of the members of the Royal Family come from the official biographies of King George and Queen Elizabeth.

Of these, the Mass-Observation archives were especially indispensable to my research, providing a unique source of first-hand accounts of the public's wartime experience and morale. Mass-Observation was a privately-run social reporting organization founded in 1936 by journalist Charles Madge, anthropologist Tom Harrisson, and film-maker Humphrey Jennings. It had a nationwide panel of fifteen hundred voluntary observers, one hundred and fifty diarists, and trained full-time reporters, who recorded a wide range of individual and group habits and opinions. Rather than conducting interviews, the Mass-Observation reporters observed and listened. In 1940, Home Intelligence hired Mass-Observation to monitor civilian morale as part

⁴³ Theo Aronson, *The Royal Family at War*, (London: John Murray Ltd., 1993), ix.

of the Ministry of Information, producing reports for the Government. Mass-Observation produced daily reports on morale from May to July 1940, weekly reports until October 1941, and monthly reports thereafter. It also produced special reports on specific air raid attacks and other matters affecting morale, including invasion fears, rationing, industrial fatigue and absenteeism. Upon taking the Government's commission, Mass-Observation began supplementing its observational methods with formal interviews and surveys, taking random samples of the population balanced according to age, sex, and economic class.⁴⁴ Mass-Observation placed great importance on people's state of mind, their interest in war news, and their optimism about victory and the future in general. While the archives serve as a valuable source of records on wartime morale, the records have some weaknesses. Reporters' interpretations of the comments and opinions they collected influence the conclusions drawn in Mass-Observation reports, and while Mass-Observation strove to take accurate samples from the population, this does not guarantee that all viewpoints were recorded.

In my research, I used a variety of sources provided by Mass-Observation, including polls, Home Intelligence Reports, and reports of individual comments, either in response to a reporter's questions or overheard by reporters. As a whole, Mass-Observation provided valuable insights on civilian morale, both from assessments in official reports and from an analysis of the individual comments recorded. Moreover, comments made on the Royal Family, typically concentrated at specific points in time, such as immediately following a bombing of Buckingham Palace or after a speech made by a member of the Royal Family, provided excellent evidence on the public's opinion of the monarchy's contributions to the war effort.

This research, combined with the government documents I collected at the Public Records Office and my studies of newspapers, memoirs, diaries, and letters, has led me to agree

⁴⁴ Mackay, 10-11.

with the modern qualifying interpretation of wartime morale. Considering the extreme degree of wartime casualties and destruction, the early claims that the public remained unwavering in its resolution seem unlikely. Furthermore, Mass-Observation provides examples of individuals who express significant anxiety, and while its polls suggest that negative responses were in the minority, they nevertheless existed. At the same time, extreme revisionists who argue that widespread despair characterized the population seem to ignore the preponderance of evidence suggesting high morale, including high participation in wartime service organizations and polls that illustrate public support for the cause of the war and determination to wage it. Therefore, from my research I have concluded that while it is important to acknowledge examples of negative morale, ultimately morale remained strong.

Upon this premise, I turned to a consideration of the factors that affected morale. Among the many influential factors suggested in the secondary literature, including government propaganda, the media, and societal considerations, the Royal Family receives little mention. Comparing this to the magnitude of their wartime activities as chronicled in the biographies of the King and Queen as well as in the memoirs suggested to me that an analysis of their specific contributions to morale placed within the context of the home front was missing from the historiography of the British experience during the Second World War.

I will therefore argue that the British Royal Family had a unique and significant impact on civilian morale during the Second World War. I will first outline the issues surrounding morale on the home front and will then analyze the various factors that impacted it, focusing in particular on the wartime Ministry of Information as well as the media. I will then turn to the specific impact of the Royal Family, through an analysis of both its public and private lives. In their public duties, members of the Royal Family not only increased the magnitude of their

traditional, formal public duties, which included patronage of social and charitable organization, reviews of armed forces regiments, and speeches, but augmented these with a new program of informal interactions with the public. Of these interactions, their tours of bombed areas of Britain and the informal compassion they displayed therein had the most significant and positive impact on morale, demonstrating to the public that the monarchs shared their suffering and actively supported them through the war. Mass-Observation evidence, first-hand accounts in memoirs, letters, and diaries, and media reports all suggest this conclusion. I will then turn to the private lives of the Royal Family members, arguing that they used their public spotlight to serve both as an example of proper wartime living and to send a message of unity and equality of sacrifice to the public. By depicting themselves as willing to sacrifice for the war, they both encouraged the public to do the same and illustrated that the nation as a whole was sacrificing for the common good. Within each of these sections, I will compare the specific roles of the King and Queen, arguing that each developed a unique symbolism in the public eye which reinforced ideals that strengthened public morale: the King as a symbol of British tradition and the Queen as a symbol of peaceful domesticity.

Central to these arguments is the media's influence in publicizing the Royal Family's public and private activities, so I will include an analysis of the roles played by the media, the government, and Palace staff in this respect. To connect their contributions more directly to the issue of morale, I will also analyze public reactions to the Royal Family's wartime role. Coming primarily from Mass-Observation, memoirs, diaries, and letters, these help illuminate the specific contributions that the Royal Family made to wartime morale. Combined, the sources suggest that the Royal Family had a definite and positive impact on wartime morale.

Official Responses to the Issue of Wartime Morale

As total war loomed on the horizon in 1939, officials in both the government and the monarchy recognized the need for strong morale and feared the impact that the hardships of war would have on the public. To address this issue, both the monarchy and the government adopted morale-boosting programs. However, the two efforts experienced dissimilar responses. The government's official propaganda campaign, focusing on anonymous sacrifices, experienced significant challenges and received negative reactions, as many pragmatic British citizens considered it overbearing and patronizing. In contrast, the Royal Family adopted a more personal method of boosting morale, which received comparatively better responses. This does not necessarily imply that one group achieved more success than the other, as morale, measured in actions rather than words, remained strong upon the war's conclusion. However, it signals important differences in the styles and perceived roles of the government and the monarchy.

An examination of the issues affecting wartime morale illustrates why officials made its control and monitoring a priority. Especially in areas threatened by air raid attacks, where civilian contributions were necessary for success, morale was both under great strain and essential to victory. While the Royal Family maintained close relations with Churchill and his government behind closed doors, the public perceived it to act largely independently. The Royal Family designed a program that initially appeared as an expanded version of its traditional public duties, but developed into more direct involvement with the people through informal interactions. Even in its formal aspects, such as broadcast speeches and patronage, the Royal Family's program took on a personal feel that contrasted sharply with the anonymity of the

Government's program. The Royal Family's efforts met with great public approval, in contrast to the negative reactions received by the government.

The British government and the Royal Family were not the only groups that attempted to affect home front morale: prominent individuals, the media, and the enemy also tried to impact the public mood for better or worse. Yet in terms of formal morale-boosting efforts, the newly-established Ministry of Information served as the primary official mechanism for controlling and monitoring civilian morale. To appreciate the success of the Royal Family's program, an understanding of Government efforts and the issues surrounding civilian morale is necessary.

Wartime Morale Assessed

The situation Britain faced during the Second World War placed considerable strains on morale, yet the public remained strong. It is therefore important to explain the challenges facing wartime morale in Britain. Within the Ministry of Information, the Home Intelligence Division had the task of monitoring civilian morale. To better understand the information they collected, Home Intelligence worked to create a definition of morale and the factors that affected it. In early 1940, Mass-Observation defined morale as "the amount of interest people take in the war, how worthwhile they feel it is. If people are left bewildered, or if their leaders do not interest them . . . then morale cannot be regarded as 'good' and may easily become 'bad.'"¹ A year later, Mass-Observation created a more complete definition:

By morale, we mean primarily not only determination to carry on, but also determination to carry on with the utmost energy, a determination based on a realization of the facts of life and with it a readiness for many minor and some major sacrifices, including, if necessary, the sacrifice of life itself. Good morale means hard and persistent work, means optimum production, maximum unity,

¹Quoted in Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002), 1.

reasonable awareness of the true situation, and absence of complacency and confidence which are not based on fact.²

In a January 1942 review of the previous year's Home Intelligence Weekly Reports, Steven Taylor, the head of Home Intelligence, concluded that morale was the "state of conduct and behavior of an individual or a group" and must be measured "not by what a person thinks or says, but by what he does and how he does it. This distinction is particularly important in dealing with the British public in whom admirable behavior is often coupled with a veritable wail of grumbles."³ Taylor considered "good war morale" to be "conduct and behavior indicating that they are prepared to go through with the war to final victory, whatever the cost to the individual or the group."⁴ In the same report, Taylor outlined the material and mental factors on which morale depended. The material factors that affected morale were food, warmth, work, opportunities for leisure and rest, a secure base, and safety and security for dependents; while the mental factors were belief that victory is possible, belief in the equality of sacrifices, belief in the efficiency and integrity of leadership, and belief that the war was necessary and its cause just.⁵ As will be seen, the Royal Family strove to address these issues through their public interactions.

During the war, it became clear from Home Intelligence reports that morale was at the greatest risk in areas facing air raid attacks, in contrast to areas dealing only with lesser challenges including rationing, black-outs, and the reception of evacuees.⁶ Therefore, air raid attacks on London and other provincial cities, designed by the Germans in part to damage morale, became the main focus of the Government's morale concerns. The first attack occurred in London on the night of September 7, 1940. The attack focused on dockland areas in London's

² Mackay, 2.

³ Stephen Taylor, "Appendix: Home Morale and Public Opinion – A Review of Some Conclusions Arising out of a Year of Home Intelligence Weekly Reports," Home Intelligence, January 1942.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mackay, 68.

densely populated East End, including Stepney, Whitechapel, Poplar, Shoreditch, West Ham and Bermondsey. On that night, four hundred and thirty civilians perished and sixteen hundred sustained injuries.⁷ London experienced heavy bombing for seventy-six consecutive nights after this (excluding November 2), with fleets of over two hundred German bombers attacking nightly. Focusing initially on the low-income East End, the attacks eventually spread to the wealthier West End and throughout the metropolis. In total, the attacks in London from September 1940 to May 1941 caused the deaths of approximately ten thousand people and injured thousands more. In November 1940, the Germans extended their attack to other cities including Coventry, Birmingham, Manchester, and the port cities of Southampton, Plymouth, Bristol, Clydeside, Merseyside, and Hull. After the last significant attack on London in May 1941, which destroyed the Chamber of the House of Commons and halted all but one of the main London railway stations, forty-three thousand people had been killed. Another series of attacks, known as the Baedeker raids, focused on areas not vital to the military or industry, but historic areas of beautiful architecture and great national pride, such as Bath, Canterbury, Exeter, York, and Norwich.⁸ These were designed explicitly to weaken morale. The final major air raid attacks, the V1 and V2 pilotless planes, occurred in Spring and Summer 1944 and caused the deaths of over eight thousand individuals and wounded twenty-two thousand.⁹

Initially, Mass-Observation reported displays of fear and hysteria, apathy, defeatism, rumors, blaming of authorities or scapegoats, and anti-war feeling, most prevalently among people subjected to bombing.¹⁰ From September 7 to November 13 1940, an average of one hundred and sixty bombers dropped an average of two hundred tons of explosives and 182

⁷ Angus Calder, *The People's War; Britain, 1939-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 158.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 562.

¹⁰ Mackay, 76.

canisters of incendiaries nightly on London.¹¹ The threat of German planes roaming the night skies caused great anxiety, yet after the initial shock, most people returned to their daily jobs from rest centers, nearby cities, and billets. By the end of November 1940, the population of central London had dropped by a quarter, but most workers remained at their jobs, and very few firms moved their headquarters from London.¹²

Yet Londoners' determination did not mean that morale was wholly secure. The Government's plan for civil defense had revolved around expectations of massive daylight assaults, but in reality, the attacks took place at night and lasted up to fourteen hours. This made public shelters inconvenient because they were not equipped for people to eat or sleep. Furthermore, because casualties were lighter than the Government expected and the ramshackle houses of the East End were so susceptible to bomb damage, more homeless individuals flooded the rest centers than expected.¹³ Harold Nicholson noted the discontent that this caused in the East End in early September 1940, where even the King and Queen were booed when they visited the area.¹⁴ As one of the first symbols of governmental authority to reach the East End, the King and Queen faced the brunt of frustration with these unsatisfactory preparations. The active role they took in encouraging better air raid precautions and in encouraging the public changed these reactions, as did the Germans' eventual bombing of other areas in London. According to Clement Davies, "if only the Germans had had the sense not to bomb west of London Bridge there might have been a revolution in this country. As it is, they have smashed about Bond Street and Park Lane and readjusted the balance."¹⁵ His comment reflected a fear of social upheaval shared by many officials in the early days of the Blitz, prompting officials to

¹¹ Calder, 168.

¹² *Ibid.*, 175.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁴ Harold Nicholson, *Diaries and Letters 1939-45*, (Collins, 1967), Diary, 9/17/1940, 114-115.

¹⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, Diary, 9/17/1940, 114-115.

stress the idea of “equality of sacrifice” among all social classes. Through propaganda and the media, officials promoted the idea of a “People’s War” in which wealthy and poor alike contributed towards a common goal.¹⁶

Enemy bombing that focused on low-income areas and left the wealthy relatively unscathed challenged this notion of equality, and therefore the Government viewed the East End with apprehension in the early days of September 1940. On September 15, a communist-led group of approximately one hundred East Enders rushed on the Savoy Hotel, which had equipped its underground banqueting hall as both a restaurant and bomb shelter. The crowd insisted on occupying the restaurant, but was thwarted when the siren sounded the all-clear shortly thereafter. The group retreated, and no similar incident reoccurred.¹⁷ As Davies noted, more even distribution of attacks helped to reduce tension, as did improved conditions in shelters and rest centers. Moreover, those who feared the air raids the most often simply fled. The individuals who remained in the blitzed areas were those who preferred to stay or felt that they had to do so, to work or to follow the call of duty. Many of these individuals became air raid wardens and Home Guard members, who learned to adapt to the dangers and set an example of courage that others were able to emulate.¹⁸

Although social tension had diminished, threats to morale remained. Compounding death, injury, and destruction of homes was the threat of invasion associated with the bombings and sleep deprivation caused by nighttime raids.¹⁹ Nicholson worried on September 19th, 1940 that “unless we can invent an antidote to night-bombing, London will suffer very severely and the spirit of our people may be broken,” as “[o]ne cannot expect the population of a great city to

¹⁶ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People’s War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 31.

¹⁷ Calder, 167.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁹ Mackay, 69.

sit up all night in shelters week after week without losing their spirit.”²⁰ Air-raid attacks required the dedication and energy of civilians including firemen, air raid wardens, policemen, nurses, doctors, and rescue workers.²¹ Their contributions were crucial to victory, a fact realized by the Government and the Royal Family. The Royal Family’s decision to live in London during the Blitz and keep the standard flying at Buckingham Palace became a symbol of its unity with these civilians, designed to encourage public fortitude and promote the idea of equality of sacrifice. Like the rest of London, the Royal Family could “take it.”

Rumors of German attacks also negatively impacted morale. On the second day of bombing in London in September 1940, a Mass-Observation reporter noted that “rumor mongers were busy” but overall “there appears a greater desire to wage the war more furiously.”²² Yet rumors continued to have a negative impact on morale throughout the war, causing anxiety and apprehension. In June 1944, shortly after the V1 rockets were introduced, a twenty-year-old man stated that he had heard that “the Germans say they’re going to smash up Central London this weekend . . . [Hitler] could do it, too. He could send over 2,000 at a time, and three or four hundred of them would get through; there wouldn’t be much of Central London left after that.”²³ Rumors even caused anxiety within the Royal Family. Marion Crawford, governess to Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, discussed the unease that the Royal Family felt upon hearing rumors of a new German weapon, which turned out to be the pilotless V1 rockets. When questioned by a Mass-Observation reporter about his reaction to the V1 attacks, a forty-year-old man responded “They say Britannia rules the waves, don’t they? Don’t look much like it. This

²⁰ Nicholson, Diary, 9/17/1940, 116.

²¹ Calder, 156.

²² Mass-Observation Archives (M-O A): Topic Collection (TC) 23/5/C Air Raids 1939-45: Observations Gathered September 1940.

²³ M-O A: TC 23/12/E Air Raids 1939-45: Air Raids on London, June 1944.

morning I was watching the poor little kids coming out of the shelters – looked more like Britons being slaves than anything I’ve seen yet.”²⁴

However, while such signs of fear and defeatism were present in Home Intelligence and Mass-Observation reports, they were in the minority. On the second day of bombing in London in September 1940, Mass-Observation reporters recorded queues outside public shelters, homeless people wandering around in a daze, and people crying as they heard of friends killed. Yet the same reporter concluded that morale was not low, citing an overheard comment that Hitler had “not done himself any good. He thinks he can break the morale of the British people – but he’ll never do that.”²⁵ By October 1940 Home Intelligence had switched from daily to weekly reports on morale, suggesting that the government was less concerned about its collapse.²⁶ People had risen to the challenge and many showed great resilience and willingness to sacrifice for the war effort. While the official propaganda image of a united British people battling undaunted through the crisis was an exaggeration, it was based in some truth.²⁷ Even at the height of tension in June 1940, a Mass-Observation survey of approximately 300 men and women in Fulham, London reported that seventy-three percent of individuals polled said they considered themselves to have “good morale,” 20.5 percent had “medium morale,” and only 1.5 percent said they had “bad morale.” Overall, the lower classes had slightly lower ratings. In the same report, Mass-Observation asked “What do you think is the most important thing we are fighting for?” 68.5 percent of individuals polled choose “freedom/liberty,” 12 percent chose “our lives and/or country,” five percent “to destroy the rule of force/Hitlerism/dictatorship,” and

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ M-O A: TC 23/5/C Air Raids on London: Observations Gathered September 1940.

²⁶ Mackay, 77.

²⁷ Ibid., 87.

3.5 percent “to save humanity/democracy/civilization.”²⁸ The Royal Family, along with the Ministry of Information, used themes of freedom, liberty, democracy, and nationalism throughout its morale-boosting efforts, hoping to capitalize upon the public mindset.

While Mass-Observation reporters acknowledged a sense of “nervousness” in London in September 1940, they also noted that intensifications in air-raids had not led to panic.²⁹ Rather, reporters noted that individuals strove to continue living normal lives despite air-raid warnings and attacks. In London air raid shelters, reporters noted that while people discussed their anxieties over air raids and fears that they would have to live in shelters every night, they also discussed other issues, including their neighbors, land-lords, gardens, and pastimes.³⁰ A twenty year-old male student reported that after an air raid warning in Battersea in August 1940, “scarcely anyone” was “visibly perturbed. Two or three people ran up the road for shelter while the sirens were sounding, but when these stopped there were still quite a number walking up and down in the usual way.” The “general attitude . . . was that there was no point in actually going to shelter until firing was heard.”³¹ In general, reporters noted that there was “Mental opposition to any dislocation of normal habits, routine, or whatever one is engaged upon. Much, in fact, proceeding normally.”³² Similarly, in an October 1940 letter a London resident wrote that air raids were “[a]ll in the day’s work, and really an interesting experience.” Relaying a patriotic tale of the Blitz, she wrote that “[t]he Infants’ Hosp. in Vincent Sq. was hit two nights ago, but luckily all the children had been evacuated. It smashed all the glass of a little draper’s nearby, so they promptly filled the empty space with Union Jacks, and when I commiserated with them only

²⁸ M-O A: TC 43/1/C Public Opinion and Morale, 1939-42: Miscellaneous-Morale, 1940-42.

²⁹ M-O A: TC 23/6/H Air Raids 1938-45: Air Raid Morale, 1940-41.

³⁰ M-O A: TC 23/5/A Air Raids 1938-45: Observations gathered June-July 1940.

³¹ M-O A: TC 23/5/B Air Raids 1938-45: Observations gathered August 1940.

³² Ibid.

said how lucky they were that it was only their windows. That is the spirit everywhere.”³³ In response to the V1 rockets, a fifty-five year old woman remarked that “I think people are taking it rather wonderfully. Of course there’s a lot of grumbling, but I think that’s a very necessary safety-valve. You can see by the masses of people on the tubes and buses that it’s not really getting them down. I was in a crowded tube train yesterday evening – it was simply packed to the doors, and whenever the train gave a lurch people all rolled against each other and shouted with laughter. I thought at the time, I don’t think there’s much wrong with us if we can still take things as cheerfully as this.”³⁴ This determination to continue on with their daily lives and refusal to let air raid attacks visibly affect them was characteristic of the wartime London public.

One observer commented that in her Maida Vale neighborhood in the West End of London, the air raid attacks had affected morale very little. She recognized that there were, however, “a great many cases in which the blitz has made people frightened, defeatist, and hopeless,” but that this was more prevalent in the congested East End areas because of the “appallingly inefficient arrangements for sheltering, feeding, and evacuating the homeless” in September 1940.³⁵ Yet she also believed that even in the East End, “for each person who has cracked up under the strain of the blitz, there is probably another who has thrilled to find in himself a courage he did not believe himself to possess, now that it has come to the point.”³⁶

Beyond their ability to carry on with daily life, much of the British public was also able to adopt a positive outlook on the waging of the war itself. Harold Nicholson’s reflections, benefiting from the additional insight of Foreign Office information, reflect this optimism. As bombing began in September 1940, he remarked that “few people really believe that this ordeal

³³ M-O A: TC 23/7/C Air Raids 1938-45: Quality of Life during Air Raids, October 1940.

³⁴ M-O A: TC 23/12/E Air Raids 1938-45: Air Raids on London, June 1944.

³⁵ M-O A: TC 23/5/C Air Raids 1938-45: Observations gathered September 1940.

³⁶ Ibid.

can be continued for ever. They hope that ‘something may turn up.’ And, by God, so it may. I think we shall win through owing to unswerving pride.”³⁷ By July 1940, he wrote that “Hitler seems to be funkng the great attack upon England. All our reports from abroad . . . show that he is not now quite so sure. I do not see how he can abandon this great project. If we can stick it, we really shall have won the war. What a fight it is! What a chance for us!”³⁸ Even though “The German bombings of some of our parts are already pretty bad,” Nicholson wrote that “our morale is perfect . . . I really and truly believe that Hitler is at the end of his success.”³⁹

Indeed, the official pessimism about civilian morale before the outbreak of war proved largely unfounded. While some opposition existed among pacifists, communists, the Independent Labor Party and in some nationalist areas in Wales and Scotland, most groups supported the fight against Hitler for a number of reasons. Typically divergent groups united in the common cause, finding rationales aligned with their political and social outlooks. Conservatives fought to preserve British power, Liberals fought on behalf of threatened liberty, and socialists fought to preserve the gains of trade unions.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the real and immediate threat of air raids decreased the potential discord between typically conflicting groups.⁴¹ Wartime surveys suggested that while the British population was highly diverse, overall the public shared “an extraordinary degree of unanimous and single-minded commitment to unqualified resistance to Hitler.”⁴²

In a review of Home Intelligence Weekly reports from 1941, Stephen Taylor summarized “some generalizations and conclusions” about the British public. According to Taylor, the

³⁷ Nicholson, *Diary*, 9/19/1940, 116.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, HN to VS-W, 7/10/1940, 4 King’s Bench Walk, 100.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, HN to V.S-W, 11 July 1940, Ministry of Information, 101.

⁴⁰ Calder, 58.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴² Jose Harris, “War and Social History: Britain and the Home Front during the Second World War,” *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (March 1992), 27.

British public: “shows a very high degree of common-sense,” is “pragmatic,” has “a basic stability of temperament, with a slightly gloomy tinge,” and “has a great capacity for righteous indignation when things go wrong.”⁴³ He concluded, “There is, at present, no evidence to suggest that it is possible to defeat the people of Britain by any means other than extermination.”⁴⁴ Yet while these generalizations imply a public prepared for the demands of total war, the government nevertheless made morale-boosting a priority of home front policy.

Official Efforts to Improve Morale

Considering the recent strains of the First World War, the economic recession of the 1930s, and the divergent loyalties of different elements within British society, the British government was highly concerned over the public’s reaction to the outbreak of war in 1939. Many officials pessimistically predicted widespread panic and despair. This may not have been unfounded, as Mass-Observation reporters noted that several individuals expressed anxiety over the prospect of war, with some even considering “killing their families if war broke out.” One woman stated that “I’d sooner see kids dead than see them bombed like they are in some places,” thinking of recent conflicts in Spain and Abyssinia.⁴⁵ Fearing such reactions, the government devised civil defense measures to increase civilian safety as well as a system of propaganda aimed at boosting morale. Defense measures had varying success, but public participation was significant. By July 1, 1940, more than half of British males age twenty to twenty-five, and over one-fifth of the entire male population between sixteen and forty, had joined the services. On the

⁴³ Taylor, “Appendix.”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Charles Madge and Tom Harrison, *Britain by Mass Observation*, (London: Penguin Special, 1939), 49-50.

home front, one hundred and fifty thousand civilians had joined the Local Defense Volunteers.⁴⁶ The development of a propaganda system, however, proved more challenging.

The Government's efforts to boost morale centered in the Ministry of Information, formed shortly before the outbreak of war. Stephen King-Hall, one of the Ministry's founders, opined that home propaganda "must rank at least equal in status to all measures of offence and defense," believing that high civilian morale was crucial to victory.⁴⁷ In the Ministry leaders' opinions, if citizens believed that they were on the winning side of the war, they would be more willing to bear hardships and make sacrifices to contribute to victory. Ministry leaders therefore believed that the Government must give its clear assurance to the public that success was guaranteed. If a sense of futility developed instead, the resulting apathy or dissent could cause undersupply and contribute to military failure.⁴⁸ Upon this foundation, the Ministry of Information adopted a three-fold policy to sustain public morale. This involved the management of film, radio, and newspapers to replace the free availability of news with controlled media sources; public messages to reassure the public of the certainty of victory and express official concern for the public's needs; and the stimulation of patriotic commitment to the war effort.⁴⁹ This policy led to the implementation of three main activities: the censoring and management of mass media, the production of propaganda, and the monitoring of civilian morale.

While the Ministry of Information saw mass media as the best way to influence the public, Britain's early wartime leaders underestimated the ability of radio and film to influence the public. At the war's onset, Prime Minister Chamberlain even considered closing down the

⁴⁶ Calder, 119-120.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Mackay, 38.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

BBC altogether, viewing it as a “waste of resources.”⁵⁰ However, he granted the Ministry of Information supervision of the BBC and cinema industry. The Ministry used three methods to censor the mass media channels of film, radio, and print: the suppression of news and viewpoints considered detrimental to morale, the creation or release of news thought to boost morale, and the encouragement of certain writers to report certain events by giving them special privileges.⁵¹ This allowed the Ministry to promote its own viewpoints and prevent the publication of any news that could damage public morale, including statistics on air raid destruction and casualties.

Government-sponsored propaganda, distributed through pamphlets, leaflets, press advertisements, posters, and postcards, emphasized the strength of Britain’s armed forces, leaders, popular resolve, and allies; as well as the corresponding weakness of the Axis powers.⁵² The focus of propaganda varied, but generally appealed to British patriotism and addressed specific public concerns. For example, after the fall of France in June 1940, a series of press advertisements and radio broadcasts stressed the idea that Britain was not alone, but was supported by the four Dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa with contributions of troops and equipment. “There has been nothing like it in the world before. It is a Commonwealth, a family of free nations linked together by loyalty to one King,” proclaimed pamphlets.⁵³ Designed to reassure the public that Britain would not fall as the last bastion of democracy before the Axis powers, this series was one of only a few official propaganda sources that referenced the monarchy as a reminder of Britain’s strength and morality.

At first, the Ministry of Information hoped to transfer the authority of royalty to its propaganda messages, but over time its focus switched to “discourses of the people’s war, tied in

⁵⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵¹ Calder, 502.

⁵² Mackay, 150.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 151.

with discourses of citizenship,” focusing on anonymous contributions to the war effort.⁵⁴ The Ministry of Information designed its first propaganda posters in April 1939, several months before the outbreak of war. At the time, many officials feared the worst about public reactions to the war and hoped that the reassuring presence of the monarchy would provide support. They planned the first posters to include a message “from the King to his people.” These designs, in bold red with white lettering, featured a crown at the top of the poster and the slogans “Freedom is in Peril/Defend it with all your Might,” “Keep Calm and Carry on,” and “Your Courage, Your Cheerfulness, Your Resolution will Bring Us Victory.”⁵⁵

However, the posters debuted during the Phoney War, a time of relative inactivity when many people, although prepared to fight, had no opportunity to do so. This caused many to react negatively to the posters, dismissing them as vague, patronizing, and unnecessary. The media, while censored in the content it could report, remained free to give comment or opinion on the war, and *The Times* illustrated the public’s dissatisfaction with the Ministry of Information’s early propaganda posters. A September 23, 1939 editorial asked:

On whose responsibility are these egregious and unnecessary exhortations issued? The ‘slogans’ of the national service campaign were, in all conscience, dreary and ineffectual enough, but the insipid and patronizing invocations to which the passer-by is now being treated have a power of exasperation which is all their own . . . [T]he implication that the public morale needs this kind of support, or if it did, that this is the kind of support it would need, is calculated to provoke a response that is neither academic nor pious. Its sole contribution to the offensive spirit is to stimulate at once the question why money is being spent in this way . . . British morale is in excellent shape. Any tonic that it might require has been supplied by Hitler, and more may be expected from the same obliging source. Every citizen of this country knows quite well why it is at war, and is fully prepared for his or her part.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Rebecca Lewis, “The Planning, Design and Reception of British Home Front Propaganda Posters of the Second World War” (PhD diss., University of Southampton, 2004), 108.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

⁵⁶ “Poster Patriotism,” *The Times*, September 23 1939, 7.

The media and the public resented the patronizing tone and seeming uselessness of early propaganda messages.

Moreover, a Mass-Observation survey revealed that the wording of the third slogan implied that the common people were working for someone else, the “your” being the civilian and the “us” the Government, an idea in contradiction with the theoretical equality of the “People’s War.”⁵⁷ Therefore, in subsequent propaganda series, the Ministry of Information chose to focus on “shared and anonymous suffering and heroism,” rather than referencing prominent figures such as Churchill or the Royal Family.⁵⁸ The new focus on the public was meant to suggest that civilians were fighting for the common good, rather than for some impersonal authority. Thus, the Ministry of Information turned away from incorporating symbols of authority in its publications. Only the King and Queen themselves could put a face to the monarchy, and the personal nature of their programs did just that, achieving what the Ministry of Information had failed to do. However, this does not imply that the Royal Family operated entirely independently from the Ministry of Information. While the Royal Family administered its own morale-boosting program, the King and Queen occasionally worked with the Ministry of Information to contribute official messages of support and encouragement for publication in Ministry of Information publications.⁵⁹ Certainly they collaborated with government divisions, especially the Cabinet and the Home Office, in their efforts to boost morale, maintaining a high level of government involvement.

The “common-sense,” “gloomy tinge” and “righteous indignation” of the British public meant that while they reacted well to the challenges of the Blitz, they also expressed significant dissatisfaction with the government’s efforts to manage their morale. Mass-Observation reports

⁵⁷ Lewis, 106.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 108.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 105.

reflect this frustration, noting widespread criticism of official communiqués about air-raids for minimizing the amount of destruction: for example, using phrases such as “slight material damage” to describe a raid’s impact.⁶⁰ A Mass-Observation reporter wrote that “Many people have seen with their own eyes evidence that falsifies these bulletins” and this angered them.⁶¹ While the Ministry of Information withheld details in part to protect morale and in part to prevent the news from reaching the enemy, the public expressed great annoyance. Phrases such as “Why should we be treated like children?” reflect this dissatisfaction.⁶² Mass-Observation warned that this reaction was increasing and would continue to do so as the raids affected more people, warning Home Intelligence that “the prestige of the Ministry of Home Security and BBC Bulletins is likely to be especially affected” if the practice remained.⁶³ Individuals also objected to the Government’s withholding of air raid casualty lists, again kept confidential both to protect morale and to deny the information to the enemy. A Mass-Observation reporter recorded that in Croydon Town Hall requests for casualty lists from a recent air raid, which made a direct hit on a large factory, were denied. A porter explained that “if they put a list up so many people would see names that they knew and collapse on the spot that there would be a lot of confusion.”⁶⁴ However, this explanation did not satisfy the individuals there. One person stated “Do you expect the government to do anything they say they will? . . . Now they won’t put that up ‘cos it’s much too high. That’s why. They say there were hundreds in the factory.”⁶⁵ The same reporter heard several individuals express the opinion that the Government was afraid to give out casualty figures because the figures were “much too high.”⁶⁶ In general, people resisted being

⁶⁰ M-O A: TC 23/6/H Air Raids 1938-45: Air raid morale, 1940 – 41.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ M-O A: TC 23/5/B Air Raids 1938-45: Observations gathered August 1940.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

told what to think and how to behave. Most audiences knew when they were being targeted and resented this. Mass-Observation noted complaints such as “you got too much propaganda stuck down your throat” and “they’re overdoing the propaganda – it’s not necessary.”⁶⁷

While official propaganda received largely negative reactions, this does not necessarily imply that it was ineffective. As Mass-Observation noted, the British public was prone to be “gloomy” and express “righteous indignation,” attributes that potentially explain this response.⁶⁸ Yet, as the public was highly pragmatic it is likely that many realized the value of propaganda messages however they resented them. Home Intelligence noted that morale was measured best in actions rather than in words, and the support that civilians gave to the war effort illustrate their desire for victory and undermine their negative responses to propaganda campaigns.

While the Ministry of Information was the government’s official solution to the issue of civilian morale, its formal programs were not the only factors affecting morale. The media also had a significant impact on morale, but research suggests that media channels largely worked in tandem with the government. Supporting the idea of social cohesion, Arthur Marwick argued that since senior government personnel and media elites typically came from the same privileged social background, they had the same attitudes towards the proper role of the wartime media and cooperated in their outlook.⁶⁹ The BBC affirmed in 1939 that the “maintenance of public morale” would be the focus of its wartime programming, regardless of government influence.⁷⁰ Yet the government did influence it. The Ministry of Information scrutinized all newspaper photographs and had the power to close down offending newspapers.⁷¹ Moreover, at the height

⁶⁷ Mackay, 182.

⁶⁸ Taylor, “Appendix.”

⁶⁹ Arthur Marwick, “Print, Pictures, and Sound: The Second World War and the British Experience,” *Daedalus* 111(1982): 141.

⁷⁰ Marwick, 149.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

of the war the government sponsored approximately twenty percent of newspaper advertising, largely in the form of Ministry of Information propaganda.⁷² Newspapers' popularity made them an excellent morale-boosting channel. By the late 1930s, approximately three quarters of the 35 million British adults read at least one of the eight national daily newspapers, and many read more than one.⁷³ Radio broadcasts also received large and expanding audiences, with approximately 8.8 million radio licenses issued in 1938 and 9.9 million in 1945.⁷⁴ The BBC broadcast its morale-boosting messages, including those recorded by the King or Queen, to foreign nations and to British civilians and soldiers. The media, whether of its own volition or driven by the government, was a potent source for affecting morale.

Many prominent British individuals also made appeals to patriotic sentiment, which the press often echoed, in order to boost morale.⁷⁵ Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of Winston Churchill, who carefully crafted rousing speeches designed to impact morale. A gifted orator, Churchill made calls for patriotic action a foundation of his many wartime speeches, and achieved great success. Angus Calder called Churchill the "King of the home front" because of the widespread approval and public acclaim which his speeches received, and Geoffrey Dawson remarked in *The Times* in September 1941 that "So far as any man in the world can be regarded as indispensable, Mr. Churchill has earned that much abused title."⁷⁶ As Prime Minister, Churchill served as the head of the British government, yet public reactions to his individual efforts to boost morale are notably more positive than those to the general Ministry of Information campaign. His moving speeches and robust personality made him appealing to the vast majority of the public. Like the Royal Family, Churchill benefited from the public's ability

⁷² Ibid., 149.

⁷³ Ibid., 136.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 149.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 161.

⁷⁶ Calder, 89, "Looking Ahead," *The Times* September 8 1941, 5.

to identify with a specific leader rather than an impersonal and anonymous government campaign. Opinion polls reported that between July 1940 and May 1945, at least seventy-eight percent of individuals polled at any time approved of Churchill's Prime Ministership.⁷⁷

While this study explores the role of the Royal Family in boosting morale, it is important to acknowledge that Churchill remained the primary voice of wartime public encouragement. Like the monarchs, Churchill was viewed as a symbol of Britain's wartime spirit and courage. However, while his outgoing manner and actual decision-making authority may have overshadowed the comparatively reserved and powerless King, the political nature of his leadership placed him in a different and more unstable position than the monarchy. The King, by law separate from party politics, was immune to the rise and fall of political fortunes that made Churchill's position impermanent. Indeed, while the public voted Churchill out of power in 1945, the King remained in favor throughout his reign. Upon his death in 1953, the public expressed great outpourings of affection for the late monarch. A sixty-year-old man explained the nation's great sadness at King George's death in terms of national symbolism and the King's great sacrifices: "Because George VI is us. He is us and we are him. He is the British people, all that is best in us and we all know it."⁷⁸ While the monarch's death may have prompted a wave of nostalgia and affectionate feeling, the sentiment reflects the permanence and symbolism achievable only by the unique institution of monarchy.

The Royal Family and Patriotism

With an underlying interest in the welfare of the British public developed from his earlier experiences and sense of constitutional duty, upon the outbreak of war King George became

⁷⁷ Calder, 97.

⁷⁸ M-O A: TC 14/1/L Famous Persons Survey 1938-52: King George VI-his speech, death and funeral.

highly concerned over the strain that the public was under. He and Queen Elizabeth therefore made it their wartime duty to positively impact morale, using their unique role as symbolic heads of state to influence the public mood. Working closely with the government, they developed an understanding of the issues behind morale and the actions that they needed to adopt.

The Royal Family's morale-boosting program was carefully coordinated both within the Palace and in conjunction with the government. Within the Palace, the Private Secretary and Assistant Private Secretary were responsible for planning events, drafting or assisting the King or Queen with speeches, and coordinating with the Government. Alan Lascelles, the Assistant Private Secretary until 1943 and the Private Secretary thereafter, worked closely with the Cabinet and the media, both filtering outside suggestions for monarchical activities and promoting his own morale-boosting ideas. In May 1943 Lascelles wrote to the editor of *The Times* suggesting that publishing the exchange of telegrams between King George and Churchill upon the victory in North Africa would be a "good peg from which to hang a leading article on the general relationship of the Sovereign to his Ministers, especially in wartime," promoting the idea of a unified and confident government to boost morale.⁷⁹

In general, the Palace and the Government worked together without much tension, with the Royal Family willing to follow recommendations made by Mass Observation and Home Intelligence. In February 1941, after months of continuous bombing, C.M. Macinnes reported that "After each Blitz here is a corresponding fall in public confidence and with each recurring attack that fall will unquestionably reach lower depths . . . What the people want is some evidence that the sufferings which they bear are being justified by the effect of the war on the enemy and also an assurance that the authorities are genuinely anxious to care for them and

⁷⁹ Sir Alan Lascelles, *King's Counsellor, Abdication and War: The Diaries of Sir Alan Lascelles*, ed. Duff Hart-Davis (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), 130.

safeguard their interests however great the cost or the trouble involved may be.”⁸⁰ This theory was a platform of the King and Queen’s morale-boosting efforts. Mass-Observation also encouraged the monarchs to set specific positive examples. In one report Mass-Observation recommended “publicity for leaders taking shelter instead of ignoring warnings” in response to the common and dangerous practice of people choosing not to take cover in favor of watching the “dog fights” in the sky.⁸¹ The Royal Family made a point of publicizing its Buckingham Palace air-raid shelter in newspapers and newsreels.

But while the Palace and the Government often agreed on the proper role for the monarchs, this was not always the case. For example, Lascelles strongly disapproved of the Foreign Office and Ministry of Information’s requests in 1942 “for the Queen to pander to American journalists by giving interviews, answering questionnaires, etc.”⁸² According to Lascelles, the *Ladies Home Journal* had wanted the Queen to answer a “long and elaborate questionnaire about the position of women all over the world, involving every sort of political, racial and religious issue,” which he found highly inappropriate and turned down.⁸³ In response, the Foreign Office suggested that an imaginary conversation between the Queen and Mrs. Roosevelt be published in *Ladies Home Journal*, but Lascelles denied this as well, both because most of its sentiments “the Queen has already expressed, and expressed better, in her own broadcasts,” and because he viewed it as “such a palpable *fake*.”⁸⁴ As such, he worried that the British public would “dislike their Queen being involved in such an obvious bit of machine-made propaganda” and its publication would “do more harm than good.”⁸⁵

⁸⁰ M-O A: TC 23/6/H Air Raids 1938-45: Air raid morale, 1940 – 41.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Lascelles, 81.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Lascelles believed that the Royal Family's morale-boosting program must reflect its unique position in British society, focusing on tradition rather than trends of the day. According to Lascelles, the Foreign Office and Ministry of Information "don't seem able to realize that, as long as there is a Monarchy in this country, it must conform to *British* standards, and cannot sacrifice them in order to 'promote good relations' (which is often only a euphemism for 'curry favor') with other nations who have quite other standards."⁸⁶ To maintain the tradition and respect of the Royal Family, "there are certain things which the nation expects them to do, and certain things which it expects them *not* to do."⁸⁷ Lascelles considered blatant press publicity of the American variety to be irreconcilable with the Royal Family's status. Rather, the Royal Family would show its support for the war effort through its traditional channels of patronage and formal public activities. Innovation, in the form of informal interactions with the public, would come from within the Palace, not outside it.

Considering the dissatisfaction with official attempts to control morale, the differences between the Royal Family's morale-boosting efforts and the Ministry of Information's program are significant. Like Churchill, the Royal Family benefited from the personal connection that the public made between individual leaders and the war effort, rather than the cold impersonality of the Ministry of Information. Yet their position was even stronger than Churchill's. While the Royal Family remained in close contact with the Government in terms of the war at home and overseas, its association with the Ministry of Information and the government's official propaganda program was slight. It therefore remained largely unaffected by public dissatisfaction with the government, representing Britain's tradition and spirit rather than the current administration. Wheeler-Bennett attributed this to the Sovereign's unique role as a

⁸⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 82.

“supra-party” Head of State existing above the political power struggles of Parliament and the War Cabinet.⁸⁸ Moreover, an August 1941 Mass-Observation report on “Patriotism,” found that “people prefer what patriotism they have to remain unspoken,” and therefore “Patriotism if it is to be appealed to at all, should be appealed to indirectly.”⁸⁹ The Royal Family epitomized this indirect appeal to patriotism. Their symbolic status as head of the nation meant that most people associated them with the nation already; their wartime activities merely enforced this.

Wheeler-Bennett argued that King George supported Churchill with “all the great weight of the strength and tradition of constitutional monarchy.”⁹⁰ While the British constitution calls for the Sovereign to fulfill a political role, the tradition of the monarchy ensures that it takes on a significant social role as well. Bagehot explained the effect of a Royal Family as “bring[ing] down the pride of sovereignty to the level of petty life . . . A Royal Family sweetens politics by the seasonable addition of nice and pretty events.”⁹¹ By creating a personal, caring face for their morale-boosting program, the Royal Family capitalized on this effect. Wheeler-Bennett acknowledged this as well, stating that the “simplicity and virtue” of the King’s public activities was “a vital contribution to victory, an example of personal self-sacrifice and unsparing devotion to duty which evoked on every hand a spirit of emulation.”⁹² The specifics of that contribution, in both the Royal Family’s public and private lives, will be discussed in the following chapters.

⁸⁸ Wheeler-Bennett, 415.

⁸⁹ M-O A: TC 25/13/C Political Attitudes and Behavior, 1938-56: “Patriotism,” August 1941.

⁹⁰ Wheeler-Bennett, 448.

⁹¹ Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 41.

⁹² Wheeler-Bennett, 449.

The Public Role of the British Monarchy

Before the outbreak of war, the King and Queen had already undertaken significant public involvement, as the Royal Family traditionally performed many public duties and held a number of symbolic roles in public organizations. Upon the outbreak of war, the King and Queen's public role became even more influential, as they had the power to use their position to positively impact morale. The monarchs embraced this endeavor immediately, increasing the magnitude of their public involvement in planned activities, including the patronage of wartime service organizations, official inspections of the armed forces and volunteer service groups, speeches meant to bolster morale, and donations in support of wartime causes. These formal occasions reflected the symbolic leadership of the monarchy. However, the Royal Family also developed a new way of interacting with the public. This consisted of the informal and relatively unplanned visits that the King and Queen made to bombed neighborhoods, air raid shelters, homeless feeding centers, and other venues, where the monarchs engaged with the public on a personal and individual level. Responses suggest that this interaction had the greatest impact on public morale, as it caused the public to identify the monarchs not as formal figureheads, but devoted leaders who shared in their suffering.

These interactions fitted with the King's "new concept of kingship" in which the monarch had first-hand knowledge of the people. "There must be no more high-hat business," King George stated, "the sort of thing that my father and those of his day regarded as essential as the correct attitude – the feeling that certain things could not be done."¹ The needs of the people, the King believed, outweighed monarchical tradition and formality – especially in wartime. The

¹ Quoted in Sir John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI: His Life and Reign*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 393.

King and Queen chose everything from their words to their clothing with the intent of balancing informal compassion with the stateliness that the public expected of the monarchy, while reflecting a spirit of determination and courage that they hoped to spread among the public. They realized that people saw them as a symbol of national resistance, and they played this part consciously and skillfully. To this end, the King and Queen each undertook a definite role: the King emphasized his symbolic leadership of the nation and Empire while the Queen focused on displays of domesticity through informal yet elegant kindness. While each monarch participated in both official and spontaneous interactions, the King came to dominate the former, the Queen the latter.

Official Activities

Great Britain officially entered the Second World War at 11:00 am on Sunday, September 3, 1939. Nearly immediately the King and Queen began a routine of inspections, visits, and public interactions that would continue throughout the war. Official visits to wartime institutions and service groups were prominent among their formal activities. Directly after the war's outbreak, the King and Queen viewed the new defense measures in London, including Air Raid Precaution (ARP) posts, barrage balloons, and casualty centers, and visited the London docks to tour cargo ships and watch merchant ships being painted battleship gray. They also met with officials at the London headquarters of each of the Dominions: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, which all separately declared war on Germany in the early days of September 1939.² The King and Queen continued their inspections of defense measures, factories, and other such facilities throughout the war. As Supreme Commander of the military, King George spent much of his time inspecting Army and Royal Air Force (RAF) bases throughout Britain. The King and

² Dorothy Laird, *Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother*, (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1966), 207-208.

Queen often made inspections together, but they had distinct roles, with the Queen focusing her attention on female members of the armed forces. At Royal Air Force stations, the Queen met with Women's Auxiliary Air Force members, who serviced aircraft or worked in air traffic control, RAF offices, and RAF hospitals.³ These official inspections took the King and Queen beyond London to locations throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. In Edinburgh the Queen toured ARP centers, hospitals, and the Red Cross Society, while in the industrial city of Glasgow the King and Queen inspected wartime factories and spoke with the factory workers there.⁴ When traveling, the King and Queen used the Royal train as their headquarters. The train was made of bullet-proof steel and had a private telephone system so the monarchs could remain constantly informed of developments in London.⁵

Through patronage and donations the King and Queen encouraged the growth of wartime service organizations. In 1942 the King became Colonel-in-Chief of the Home Guard, a volunteer group of men unfit for military duty, usually due to age, which patrolled Britain's cities, towns, and coasts as a secondary defense measure against German invasion. The King inspected Home Guard units in training and on parade as part of his duties as Colonel-in-Chief, and his support for the organization helped it gain additional membership and media publicity.⁶ Queen Elizabeth became Commandant-in-Chief of the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the largest of the women's uniformed services. In this role she publicized the ATS and encouraged new membership.⁷ She also served as Patron to the Women's Land Army, a civilian group that took on agricultural jobs left by men called to military service. The Royal Family also

³ Laird, 220.

⁴ "The Queen in Edinburgh," *The Times*, February 26 1940, 9., *The King and Queen with their People*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1942), 4.

⁵ Sarah Bradford, *The Reluctant King*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 326.

⁶ "The King and the Home Guard," *The Times*, July 13 1942, 2.

⁷ "The Queen with the ATS," *The Times*, October 18 1943, 2.

patronized smaller wartime organizations such as the Queen Elizabeth Home for “Blitzed” Babes and Toddlers, one of nearly four hundred residential nurseries established by the Ministry of Health, to which twelve thousand children under the age of five were evacuated.⁸ The Queen gave her name to many small-scale service organizations, such as the Queen Elizabeth Club for Officers in Trafalgar Square, which provided food and shelter to off-duty officers.⁹ The King donated four ambulances and eight mobile canteens to the city of London, all with the inscription “Presented by His Majesty the King to the London County Council for the Civil Defense of London, October, 1940” and the royal cipher. Greatly impressed by the work of ambulances and mobile canteens in the bombed areas, King George made the donation out of his private income. The Council distributed the vehicles to the boroughs of London that needed them the most.¹⁰ This gift, like many other contributions of the Royal Family, was publicized in newspapers, alerting a wider audience to the King’s support of the war effort.

In late 1940, the King sought a way to recognize police officers, fire brigades, Civil Defense, ARP services, demolition squads, and other volunteers for their courage during the Blitz, but the War Office announced it would not award them with military decorations because these groups were not “working in the face of the enemy.”¹¹ In response, King George established a decoration for “civilian gallantry” equal to the Victoria Cross, the highest decoration for service in action. He created the George Cross for “conspicuous gallantry” in either the armed forces or civilian services, and the George Medal for devotion to duty in the Civil Defense Services and other civilian organizations.¹² The King designed the George Cross himself, with the Royal

⁸ “Work of Heritage Schools,” *The Times*, October 8 1942, 2.

⁹ “The Queen’s Visit to YMCA Club for Officers,” *The Times*, July 30 1941, 7.

¹⁰ “The King’s Gift to London,” *The Times*, October 11 1940, 2.

¹¹ Bradford, 326.

¹² Bradford, 325.

cipher, an image of St. George and the Dragon, and the inscription “For Gallantry.”¹³ He announced the creation of the George Cross in a September 23, 1940 broadcast to thank civilians for their contributions, especially the ARP services, factory workers, and railway workers. In a letter to Queen Mary, the King explained that he had “had it in mind for some time, as I felt sure that a special medal would be needed to award civilians for work in air raids, & the cross for bravery & outstanding deeds in this sphere.”¹⁴ King George placed a high importance on such recognition. Of the 92,000 decorations given during the war, including military decorations as well as the George Cross and George Medal, the King presented 37,000 in person.¹⁵ The ceremony of official decorations reinforced the King’s symbolic status and association with British traditions.

Behind the scenes, government officials and the King and Queen’s private secretaries coordinated the logistics and politics of these official activities and sponsorships. For example, it took significant negotiation for the Queen to become President of the Women’s Voluntary Service (WVS). The WVS, founded by the Dowager Marchioness of Reading upon a request from the Home Office, was a volunteer organization to incorporate women into the ARP services. One of several women’s voluntary groups, the WVS had a membership of 500,000 by 1939 and 843,000 by February 1941.¹⁶ The WVS performed a variety of wartime roles, distributing food and clothing through a national system of stores and depots, compiling censuses of neighborhood residents for use by air raid wardens, collecting aluminum for airplane construction, and performing other service roles as necessary.¹⁷ Sir John Anderson, the Home

¹³ “George Cross and Medal,” *The Times*, November 22 1940, 4.

¹⁴ Wheeler-Bennett, 471.

¹⁵ “Mr. Churchill’s Tribute to Monarch and Man,” *The Daily Telegraph*, May 15 1945.

¹⁶ “Women’s Help in Evacuation,” *The Times*, November 14 1939; “Growing Work of W.V.S.,” *The Times*, February 19, 1941.

¹⁷ Angus Calder, *The People’s War; Britain, 1939-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 194.

Secretary, considered carefully Lady Reading's request for the Queen's patronage, as he was concerned over Labour Party accusations that the organization favored and campaigned for the Conservative party. He told Lady Reading that the Queen would only be able to take the position "if it could be claimed that the movement was 'non-party' and 'all party.'"¹⁸ Lady Reading lobbied intensively, arguing that the Queen had just become Commander in Chief of the Women's Naval Military and Air Forces, but was even more involved in the WVS as she had visited their headquarters "at her own wish" and had consulted Lady Reading on evacuation issues.¹⁹ It took over six months of letters and discussions until Anderson permitted Lady Reading to invite the Queen.

Events such as parades and large gatherings of military or service organizations also involved significant planning and negotiation. After the Queen agreed to attend a gathering of female members of the Civil Defense Services and the Fire Guard for the National Fire Service Parade in 1944, the Secretary of State and several officials from the Home Office carefully orchestrated the event with representatives from the Civil Defense Services and the London County Council. The committee met frequently in the months before the parade to determine schedules, expenses, speeches, and other logistics. The Home Office wanted the Civil Defense Service volunteers to have a wide geographical representation, so as not to exclude or offend any region. While the Home Office also expressed concerns over coordination, housing, and other practical difficulties of managing such a diverse group, the parade committee ultimately approved wide representation.²⁰ The Home Office stressed that for security reasons there could be no reference in the press to the Queen's presence at the event.²¹ On December 6th, 1944, five hundred

¹⁸ The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA): Public Records Office (PRO) HO 186/102.

¹⁹ TNA: PRO HO 186/102.

²⁰ TNA: PRO HO 186/2307.

²¹ Ibid.

representatives from England, Wales, and Scotland gathered in London. The Queen made a speech praising their steadfastness and said that the war “could not be won without their help,” citing specific dangerous activities such as extinguishing incendiary bombs and driving vehicles during air raids.²² She compared them to soldiers, sailors, and airmen for giving up their peacetime work in the name of duty.²³ The Home Office provided copies of the Queen’s speech to local Civil Defense Service posts and depots around the country, while the WVS circulated the speech to its members. Associations between civilians’ and soldiers’ sacrifices figured prominently in the Royal Family’s wartime rhetoric, as the surge of new volunteer organizations caused many individuals to assume wartime duties and the Royal Family wished to encourage participation. Portraying involvement as selfless and noble, the King and Queen encouraged membership in volunteer organizations.

The Royal Family also spread their message of courage and resilience throughout the nation and Empire through public speeches and radio broadcasts. King George made the overwhelming majority of these speeches. His broadcast to the Empire on September 1, 1939 set the tone for a long series to come. In it, the King stressed his belief in the strength of the British people and in their ultimate victory, beginning by establishing a personal connection with the public: “In this grave hour, perhaps the most fateful in our history, I send to every household of my peoples, both at home and overseas, this message, spoken with the same depth of feeling for each one of you as if I were able to cross your threshold and speak to you myself.”²⁴ He stressed the merits of the Empire’s cause, fighting against a force that threatened “all hopes of settled peace and of the security of justice and liberty among nations.”²⁵ Having established the cause’s

²² TNA: PRO HO 186/2451.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, 407.

²⁵ Quoted in Ibid., 407.

morality, the King asked the people of the Empire to “stand calm and firm and united in this time of trial.” In a conclusion that became characteristic of his wartime speeches, the King appealed to the people’s faith, declaring “with God’s help, we shall prevail.”²⁶

Themes of morality, determination, Empire, leadership, unity, and faith remained prominent in the King’s speeches, as he believed these subjects would positively impact morale. His focus was appropriate, according to a January 1942 Mass-Observation report which, after analyzing a year of Home Intelligence reports, concluded that the main mental factors affecting morale were “belief that victory is possible, belief in equality of sacrifices, belief in the efficiency and integrity of leadership, and belief that the war is a necessity and our cause just.”²⁷ On Empire Day in 1940, the King made a speech declaring a Day of National Prayer in which he encouraged both faith and action, because “confidence alone is not enough. It must be armed with courage and resolution, with endurance and self-sacrifice.”²⁸ He warned that “our enemies” sought “the overthrow, complete and final, of this Empire and of everything for which it stands, and after that the conquest of the world,” but recognized that the Empire was ready to fight, as “the great uprising of the peoples throughout the Empire shows without doubt which will prevail.”²⁹ The King frequently made reference to morale in his speeches. As London was being fiercely bombed during the Blitz, the King proclaimed that “[i]t is not the walls that make the city, but the people who live within them. The walls of London may be battered, but the spirit of the Londoner stands resolute and undismayed.”³⁰ He reiterated his belief in ultimate victory and called on the people to “put our trust, as I do, in God, and in the unconquerable spirit of the

²⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 407.

²⁷ Mass-Observation Archives (M-O A): Topic Collection (TC) 43/1/C Propaganda and Morale 1939-44: Miscellaneous-Morale, 1940-42.

²⁸ Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, 449.

²⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 449.

³⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 473.

British peoples.”³¹ In his 1940 Christmas Broadcast, King George spoke about his visits to the bombed cities of Britain, praising the public for their “new and splendid spirit of good fellowship springing up in adversity, a real desire to share burdens and resources alike.”³² The King’s concept of British “spirit,” with its focus on fellowship and perseverance, was linked with public morale. By propagating the idea that the British people had an inner strength to withstand enemy attacks, he hoped to encourage people to adopt resilient, optimistic attitudes.

The King used his public status, especially his rehearsed speeches, to depict himself as symbolic of the British spirit of resistance and determination, and as a leader united with the British people. In his speech to the joint Houses of Parliament after the end of the war in Europe, he said that “Danger could not deter my people from carrying out their daily tasks, that the life of our nation might go on. In field, factory, mine, office, workshop and on the lines of transport my people have toiled day and night in a productive effort to equip and maintain the armed forces.”³³ In such rhetoric, focusing on the contributions of “his people”, the King connected himself with the public’s sacrifices, reinforcing an image of wartime solidarity.

King George rehearsed his speeches extensively, as he suffered from a slight speech impediment. He often practiced his pronunciation and delivery with Lionel Logue, a speech therapist.³⁴ Harold Nicholson reflected that while the King had a “beautiful voice,” his stammer made it “almost intolerably painful to listen to him.” He described the experience “as if one read a fine piece of prose written on a typewriter the keys of which stick from time to time and mar the beauty of the whole.”³⁵ When the King made a radio broadcast speech upon the disbanding of the Home Guard in December 1944 after the danger of German invasion was remote, Mass-

³¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 473.

³² Quoted in *Ibid.*, 480.

³³ “The King on Victory and After,” *The Times*, May 18 1945, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 449.

³⁵ Harold Nicholson, *Diaries and Letters 1939-45*, (Collins, 1967), HN to NN, 5/17/1945, Sissinghurst, 462.

Observation polled the public's reactions. One fifty-five year old woman thought the speech was "very nice and very natural – nothing high-flown," and added that "he's speaking much better now – much stronger- you can't help but admire him."³⁶ The King strove to overcome the impediment, seeking to achieve a confident tone to match the morale-boosting rhetoric of his speeches.

Other members of the Royal Family also made broadcast speeches, but not to the great extent that King George did. Queen Elizabeth became the first Queen of England to broadcast to other countries, speaking in French to the women of France just before their country fell, and later broadcasting to the women of the United States.³⁷ The Queen made several radio broadcasts and newsreel speeches to the women of Britain, focusing on the duties and sacrifices of women in supporting the nation during times of war. She upheld her status as a symbol of domesticity in these speeches, appearing in newsreels as a maternal figure speaking from her Buckingham Palace sitting-room. Princess Elizabeth made her first broadcast to the nation's children in 1940, encouraging them to have courage, as she and Princess Margaret could relate to the trials of evacuation and separation from their parents. She included some of her own phrases in the speech and rehearsed the breathing and phrasing extensively.³⁸ According to Mass-Observation, most individuals thought the Princess's speech was "sweet" or "charming," although some commented that it was not her own, reflecting cynical views on the Royal Family.³⁹ One remarked, "A bit smug, for such a little girl, but then she didn't write it herself."⁴⁰ The Princesses spent most of the war out of the public eye, but as Princess Elizabeth, the heir to the throne, grew older, the King and Queen encouraged her to assume more public

³⁶ M-O A: TC 14/1/L Famous Persons Survey: King George VI – his speech, death and funeral.

³⁷ Laird, 219.

³⁸ Marion Crawford, *Little Princesses*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1950), 176-177.

³⁹ M-O A: TC 65/5/E London Survey: Week 12: 11-17.10.40.

⁴⁰ M-O A: TC 65/5/E London Survey: Week 12: 11-17.10.40.

responsibilities, in accordance with their belief that the monarch and people should have a close relationship.

George VI's Political Role

While the King worked extensively on the home front, as Supreme Commander of the armed forces he also hoped to influence the war overseas. He had no authority to direct the course of war, but he had the right to advise his ministers and did so throughout the war. At the outbreak of war he met with the Privy Council and visited the War Office, the Admiralty, the Air Ministry, and the Central War Room.⁴¹ As the war progressed, Winston Churchill kept in close contact with the King. At weekly lunches in Buckingham Palace, they extensively discussed Churchill's plans, and Churchill took the King's counsel seriously.⁴² The King wrote to Queen Mary that Churchill told him "more than most people imagine, of his future plans & ideas & only airs them when the time is ripe to his colleagues & the Chiefs of Staff."⁴³

The King played a significant political role in his relations with the United States, sharing details of the British experience to encourage the United States' entry into the war. King George and President Roosevelt established a friendship during the British monarch's visit to North America in summer 1939, and in the following years the two corresponded frequently. In September 1940, the King told Roosevelt of early successes in the Battle of Britain, writing that "the outstanding and consistent success of the Royal Air Force in the recent battles has created a great feeling of confidence. The country's defenses have now assumed a very formidable character; enemy bombings have so far interfered but little with production, and the morale of the people is superb," adding that the United States Service Representatives who recently

⁴¹ Wheeler-Bennett, 404.

⁴² Bradford, 352.

⁴³ Ibid., 339.

returned from Britain would give a reassuring report of conditions.⁴⁴ A few months later, King George wrote that “despite the constant & murderous bombing our people are full of courage & determination to win through,” hinting at frustration that the United States remained uninvolved in the war.⁴⁵ Once the United States did enter the war, King George often received high-ranking Americans at Buckingham Palace or Windsor. As before, Churchill briefed the King on developments with the United States and included him in working dinners at Downing Street.⁴⁶ Both Roosevelt and Churchill respected the office of sovereign as well as King George’s devotion to duty. Because they regarded the King highly, they included him in their wartime strategizing despite the constitutional limitations on his authority.⁴⁷

The King recognized the constitutional restrictions on his taking an active role as a combatant, but as Queen Elizabeth wrote to Queen Mary, “He feels so much not being more in the fighting-line” and he hoped to visit the troops overseas.⁴⁸ By 1943, the tide of the war had turned in the Allies’ favor and the War Office decided that the King could safely travel overseas. On June 11, he made his first journey out of England since December 1940, flying in Churchill’s York Bomber airplane to North Africa with Secretary of State for War Sir James Grigg, Secretary of State for Air Archibald Sinclair, and the King’s private secretary Alec Hardinge.⁴⁹ Churchill thought that the King’s presence would boost British and Imperial troop morale and promote Anglo-American cooperation in the field.⁵⁰ In North Africa, the King travelled 6,700 miles over two weeks, meeting with British Commanders, General Eisenhower, General Giraud, and General de Gaulle. He inspected British and American naval units in Algiers and visited the

⁴⁴ Wheeler-Bennett, 513.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 517.

⁴⁶ Bradford, 342.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 331-2.

⁴⁸ Wheeler-Bennett, 611.

⁴⁹ Bradford, 353.

⁵⁰ Wheeler-Bennett, 566.

United States Army at Oran. The people he met were impressed with his knowledge of local issues and the interest with which he conducted his inspections.⁵¹

From North Africa the King continued to Malta, part of the British Empire and a key strategic holding from which the Allies could attack the Axis sea-route to North Africa. Combined German and Italian air-fleets had attacked the island in a heavy assault, but British forces and local citizens successfully defended the island fortress. The King awarded the George Cross to the people of Malta in April 1942 but wanted to express his appreciation more directly.⁵² The War Office kept his visit secret for security reasons until the day of his arrival, yet once publicized, word spread quickly. When his ship entered the Grand Harbor at 8:15 on Sunday morning, the King observed that “Every bastion & every view point was lined with people who cheered as we entered.”⁵³ As the King toured the island, the people in each village welcomed him enthusiastically, so much so that the King wryly noted that “the profusion of flowers which they threw into the car was quite detrimental to my white uniform.”⁵⁴ In a letter to Queen Mary upon his return to London, the King expounded on the meaning the trip held for him, considering the suffering the people had experienced in order to preserve the Allied cause in the Mediterranean.⁵⁵ Their positive morale encouraged the King.

The War Office orchestrated King George’s overseas visits, creating code words for the King and his trips to ensure his security. For his trip to Italy in the summer of 1944, the King was referred to as “General Collingwood” in all official documents, and the code word “Trigger” was used to refer to his visit. The War Office considered his schedule, escort, security, transport,

⁵¹ Ibid., 569.

⁵² Ibid., 573.

⁵³ Quoted in Ibid., 577.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 578.

and communications, as well as which individuals would accompany him.⁵⁶ During and after his visits, the War Office and the Army headquarters in the overseas region exchanged communication on the results of the visit. In Italy, the King inspected battle sites, viewed actual fighting and artillery bombardment, met with units from Britain, the Empire, the United States, France, Poland, and Brazil, awarded Victoria Crosses to several soldiers, and knighted a general.⁵⁷ The King's political involvement in the war effort was a significant part of his support for the public, as his unique symbolic role allowed him to impact not the British public, but other wartime leaders and the armed services.

Informal Interactions

Official inspections of the armed forces, tours of wartime institutions, patronage of wartime organizations, creation of special civilian decoration, political meetings, travel abroad, and speeches represented a substantial amount of the King and Queen's time and took careful orchestration. Yet the monarchy's informal interactions with individuals in bombed areas, air raid shelters, and feeding centers received more notable reactions from the public and the media. The public expected the Royal Family to engage in inspections, patronage, donation, and speeches; only the magnitude and enthusiasm of their participation differed from their pre-war activities. In contrast, the very nature of the King and Queen's informal interactions with the public was remarkable. Their breakaway from formal monarchical roles featured prominently in the newspapers, magazines, newsreels, and other media. In the United States, *Time* magazine estimated that on average the King spent a third of his working days during the war on such tours, commenting that "never in British history has a monarch seen and talked to so many of his

⁵⁶ TNA: PRO WO 204/6857.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

subjects or so fully shared their life.”⁵⁸ *The King and Queen with their People*, published in the United States in 1942, displayed photographs of the King and Queen interacting with the public at feeding centers, air-raid shelters, and in bomb-damaged areas of London.⁵⁹ Such media reports had a clear pro-monarchy bias, portraying the King and Queen as selflessly devoted to the public. Yet independent sources corroborate reports of positive public reactions, especially when the King and Queen visited bombed neighborhoods.

Mass-Observation reporters recorded a routine in London during the height of the blitz. After an air-raid attack, the affected neighborhood would enter an “action” phase in which streets were evacuated and people attempted to repair what they could. Then the “sightseeing” or “Sunday evening walk” phase began, in which crowds gathered at the damaged sites.⁶⁰ Wanting to express their sympathy to the public, the King and Queen would promptly visit the bombed areas while the neighborhood experienced these first stages of shock. They traveled in a plain car, distinguished only with military plates, following a police motorcyclist and police car in an informal procession. There were rarely any advance instructions or planning for these visits, which often surprised air raid wardens and rescue workers.⁶¹ Upon their arrival, the King and Queen exited the car and the King, typically in Field-Marshal uniform, spoke with the air raid wardens while the Queen walked among the people, expressing her sympathy and listening to their stories.⁶² Crowds, a normal occurrence after any attack, swelled significantly upon the arrival of the King and Queen. One of the Queen’s ladies-in-waiting noted that “though [the Queen’s] heart was breaking, she could turn to a woman who had lost everything and find

⁵⁸ Bradford, 324.

⁵⁹ *The King and Queen with their People*, 3, 5, 7, 8-10.

⁶⁰ M-O A: TC 23/5/B Air Raids: Observations gathered August 1940.

⁶¹ The Council of King George’s Jubilee Trust, *The Royal Family In Wartime*, London: Odhams Press Limited, 1945, 52.

⁶² *The Royal Family in Wartime*, 52.

something kind and loving to say. Sometimes even Chief Constables wept, but she never broke down.”⁶³ The Queen believed it her duty to support the people during times of crisis. In October 1940 the Queen asked Lord Woolton about the morale of the people who had been bombed. He recalled that “when we were coming through a very slummy district a crowd gathered round the carriage and called out ‘good luck’ and ‘God bless you’ and ‘thank yms for coming to see us.’”⁶⁴ Although the neighborhood had just experienced a severe air raid attack, the people appeared energetic and excited to see the Queen. Lord Woolton, aware of the attack’s severity, said, “You asked me about morale. All these people have lost their homes.”⁶⁵ This fact made their displays of enthusiasm for the Queen particularly striking. Woolton noticed tears in the Queen’s eyes, and she simply responded, “I think they’re wonderful.”⁶⁶ The Queen made this sympathy apparent through displays of compassion that became her wartime hallmark.

During the Blitz the King and Queen also inspected London air raid shelters and feeding centers for homeless citizens, and as always they took the time to speak with the people they met and offer encouragement. In November 1940, they made their first visit to a “deep shelter” built beneath an Underground station. One of eight throughout London, it could hold between 8,000 and 9,000 people during a raid, but had only two hundred people in it during the royal visit. According to *The Times*, the people in the shelter were surprised at the King and Queen’s arrival, gave a great cheer, and sang the national anthem as they followed the monarchs around the long tunnel. When the King and Queen emerged from the far end of the shelter and made their way down the street towards their car, several hundred cheering passersby and storeowners accompanied them along the quarter-mile walk. Later that day, they visited the Battersea Park

⁶³ Quoted in Laird, 217.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Bradford, 325.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Ibid., 325.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Ibid., 325.

Road feeding center to speak to the 191 homeless air raid victims there, and they received a similar welcome.⁶⁷

The King and Queen also traveled to other cities that had been bombed, including Coventry, the site of one of the most infamous air raid attacks outside London. On November 14, 1940, German planes dropped 543 tons of bombs on the city, destroying the city center and its ancient Cathedral. The attack killed over five hundred people and injured over 420. King George arrived two days later by car, as bombs had destroyed rail lines to the city.⁶⁸ He recorded the extent of destruction in his diary, noting that “the cathedral, hotels, shops, everything was flat & had been gutted by fire. The people in the streets wondered where they were, nothing could be recognized.”⁶⁹ Despite this, however, he noted that the regional services performed their jobs well, many traveling from one hundred miles away to help. During his visit he spoke with people and wrote that “I think they liked my coming to see them in their adversity.”⁷⁰ He concluded that although “the shock to them was very great,” “the morale of the people is excellent & is getting better every day.”⁷¹ While the King’s diary reflects only his own opinion, public reactions suggest that his assessment was accurate. Many years later a survivor of the Coventry bombing reflected that “[w]e suddenly felt that if the King was there everything was all right and the rest of England was behind us. We no longer felt that we were alone, we realized that what had happened to us, bad though it was, was but part of what was happening to all England and that England realized this.”⁷² Government officials also noted the positive impact that the King had on the public in Coventry and elsewhere. Herbert Morrison, newly-appointed

⁶⁷ “Royal Visit to London Homeless,” *The Times*, November 15 1940, 7.

⁶⁸ Bradford, 326.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, 478.

⁷⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 478.

⁷¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁷² Quoted in *Ibid.*

Home Secretary in October 1940, accompanied King George in Coventry and gave a report on the visit at a subsequent meeting of the Cabinet Civil Defense Committee, praising the King's work.⁷³ In the weeks after the attack on Coventry, Southampton, Birmingham, and Bristol also experienced intense air raid attacks. King George visited each city and expressed the same sympathy and encouragement as he did in Coventry. He wrote, "I feel that this kind of visit does do good at such a moment & it is one of my main jobs in life to help others when I can be useful to them."⁷⁴

While both the King and Queen participated in these informal interactions, the Queen outshone the King with her outgoing and charismatic nature. Individuals near the Queen remarked at the skill with which she presented herself as an image of gentle, practical sympathy. As Harold Nicholson said, "the Queen has a truly miraculous faculty of making each individual feel that it is him whom she has greeted and to him that was devoted that lovely smile. She has a true genius for her job."⁷⁵ Both monarchs enjoyed high public regard, yet evidence suggests that the Queen had the greater impact on the public in direct contacts. As one individual commented, "for him we had admiration, for her adoration."⁷⁶ Harold Nicholson relayed the experience of Lord William Harlech, the North-Eastern Regional Commissioner for Civil Defense, who traveled with the Queen to visit Sheffield. Lord Harlech recalled that whenever the car stopped, "the Queen nips out into the snow and goes straight into the middle of the crowd and starts talking to them." The people called out "Hi! Your Majesty! Look here!" and the Queen spoke to several people individually. Nicholson noted that Harlech believed these visits did "incalculable

⁷³ Nicholson, HN to VS-W, 11/20/1940, Ministry of Information, 128.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, 479.

⁷⁵ Nicholson, HN to NN, 5/17/1945, Sissinghurst, 462.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, 467.

good” for public morale.⁷⁷ The Queen visited St. Paul’s Cathedral the day after a heavy blitz attack on London left the landmark surrounded by fire and rubble, to speak with the clergy and lay workers who spent every night in the Cathedral prepared to fight firebombs on its steep roof. After hearing the Queen’s encouraging words of praise, one of the staff remarked that “you feel you would go through hell for her.”⁷⁸ The Queen maintained a personal touch with all those she contacted, whether directly or indirectly. She sent a message to each foster parent who took in an evacuee during the war to express her appreciation to them, writing that through their selflessness and sympathy “you have earned the gratitude of those to whom you have shown hospitality, and by your readiness to serve you have helped the State in a work of great value.”⁷⁹

When Lord Woolton told the Queen that she represented “practical sympathy” to the public, she responded, “Do you really think the people think of me like that, because it is so much what I want them to think...It’s what I try to be.”⁸⁰ The Queen was a sophisticated aristocrat, but she projected a personality of approachability and kindness to appeal to the public. The Queen’s legitimate interest in the welfare of others, ability to make people feel comfortable, and deep sense of patriotic feeling helped her gain this reputation. Also important was her mastery of timing and gestures.⁸¹ Lord Woolton recalled that at a visit to a communal feeding centre, a small child in its mother’s arms grabbed at the Queen’s pearl necklace. A press photographer saw the endearing scene and rushed to take a picture, but the Queen had moved down the crowd. Lord Woolton, standing directly behind the Queen, murmured, “Your Majesty, you’ve broken a pressman’s heart.”⁸² Without recognizing that she had heard Lord Woolton, the

⁷⁷ Nicholson, HN to VS-W, 1/7/1941, Queen’s Hotel Leeds, 137.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Laird, 218.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Ibid., 209.

⁸⁰ Bradford, 330.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Quoted in Ibid., 328.

Queen moved back towards the child and allowed it to play with her pearls again so that the photographer could take the picture.⁸³ A bystander in the East End during a royal visit recalls a crowd of women crying out in sincerity, “Oh, ain’t she lovely; ain’t she just bloody lovely!”⁸⁴ Her delicate dress and warm smile made the Queen appear a symbol of calm domesticity in a crumbling world, and her enthusiasm for public exchanges promoted her popularity.

This informal and gracious image, developed largely during informal contacts with the public, also permeated the Queen’s formal role of patronage. On the fourth birthday of the Women’s Land Army in 1943, the Queen invited three hundred “land-girls” from England, Scotland, and Wales, to tea at Buckingham Palace. To create an atmosphere of surprise, the girls were told that they were going to London for a special occasion and only found out the morning of the event that they were attending a party at Buckingham Palace. The Queen and the two Princesses talked with the girls and showed great interest in their work.⁸⁵ The Queen also developed an organization called the Queen’s Messengers, which brought “food and kindness,” as well as information and encouragement, to air raid victims. Lord Woolton proposed this concept to the Queen hoping that the Queen’s Messengers would counter-balance the WVS, who had received negative responses in working-class areas because of their authoritarian style. While the Queen also served as President of the WVS, Woolton proposed that the Queen was a more suitable head for the Queen’s Messengers because “food and kindness indicate the things that Your Majesty means to the people of this country – practical sympathy.”⁸⁶

The King and Queen considered their public image in every aspect of their lives, from their daily activities, to their official patronage, their rhetoric, mannerisms, and even their dress.

⁸³ Ibid., 328.

⁸⁴ Wheeler-Bennett, 467.

⁸⁵ “Land Girls at the Palace,” *The Times*, July 5 1943, 6.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Bradford, 330.

Throughout the war, the King always appeared in his uniform at public occasions to reinforce his symbolic role as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The Queen's dress choice was more complex. Norman Hartnell, the royal couturier, believed that "One of the essential elements of a majestic wardrobe is visibility" and therefore made sure that during public events the Queen stood out without looking too luxurious.⁸⁷ Since the Queen favored pastel colors before the war, Hartnell suggested she maintain this habit to convey an image of continuity and comfort, but mute the colors to dustier shades of pink, blue, and lilac. She never wore green or black, as Hartnell declared that "[b]lack does not appear in the rainbow of hope."⁸⁸ According to Hartnell, the Queen took care to look her best when visiting factories and bombed neighborhoods, as she did not believe that drab clothing would raise morale. Adhering to rationing, most of the Queen's wartime clothes were those of her 1939 tour of Canada and the United States. Her few new garments, in muted pastels, were practical and often incorporated elements from old dresses or fabric found in Palace storerooms.⁸⁹ This attention to detail, combined with the magnitude and variety of their public interactions, illustrated the King and Queen's desire to depict themselves as caring leaders and devotion to their cause. However, the impact of this endeavor on the public is the true measure of their success.

Media and Public Responses

After over five years of war, on May 7 1945 General Jodl signed the letter of unconditional surrender of the German Armies to the Western Allies and Russia on behalf of the German High Command. The official moment for the end of the war in Europe was set as 23:01

⁸⁷ Norman Hartnell, *Silver and Gold*, (London: Evans Brothers, 1955), 101.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Laird, 221.

Central European Time on May 8, or one minute after midnight on May 9th in Britain.⁹⁰ On VE Day, people celebrated throughout the nation; in London they gathered around the Mall, Trafalgar Square, and Buckingham Palace. The large crowds outside Buckingham Palace called for the Royal Family, who went out on the balcony to greet them eight times throughout the day and according to the King's diary enjoyed "a great reception."⁹¹ According to the *Daily Telegraph*, the police estimated that when the King, Queen, and the Princesses appeared on the balcony for the fifth time at 9:35pm, there were 100,000 people gathered outside the palace.⁹² It commented that "British family instinct inspired tens of thousands of men and women to go to the London home of their King and Queen on VE-Day yesterday to share with them the joy of peace in Europe."⁹³ According to the *Telegraph*, having shared sorrows and dangers, the public and monarchy now shared the joy of victory. Such media reports have a clear pro-monarchy bias, but Mass-Observation records describing the scene at Buckingham Palace on VE Day suggest that the public embraced this patriotic sentiment. At mid-day, one agent reported that more people arrived every minute to the already thick crowd and many shouted "We want the King," or sang "Land of Hope and Glory" and "He's a Jolly Good Fellow," "gently and tenderly." As the Royal Family prepared to step onto the balcony, the lights turned on in the room behind it and cheering commenced. The reporter described "deafening cheers" and comments such as "Doesn't the Queen look lovely?" He noted that the crowd dispersed "in a very orderly way, in long queues."⁹⁴ The crowds returned over the next few days and again the Royal Family acknowledged them from the balcony.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Wheeler-Bennett, 623.

⁹¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 625.

⁹² "Nation's VE Outburst of Joy: All-night Celebrations," *Daily Telegraph*.

⁹³ "Vast Crowds Hail the King at Palace," *Daily Telegraph*.

⁹⁴ M-O A: TC 49/1/C VE Day 8 May 1945 and VJ Day 15 August 1945: VE Day and the Day after, 8-9.5.45.

⁹⁵ Wheeler-Bennett, 626.

The King and Queen made State Drives through East and South London on May 9 and 10, greeted on both occasions by cheering crowds. On May 13, the Royal Family attended a National Service of Thanksgiving at St. Paul's Cathedral, and on May 16 they attended a similar ceremony in Edinburgh at St. Giles' Cathedral. On May 17, the King received addresses from both Houses of Parliament in the Great Hall of Westminster and gave a speech thanking them in reply. His delivery was nearly flawless, but for a falter when he alluded to the death of his youngest brother, the Duke of Kent, killed on duty in a Royal Air Force plane crash.⁹⁶ The attention given to the Royal Family on VE day signaled their symbolic association with the British cause and suggests that they had fostered loyalty among the people. However, general feelings of patriotism surged upon the conclusion of the war in Europe, leading many individuals to display allegiance to the Royal Family.

As with other public events, Palace staff carefully orchestrated the VE day celebrations months in advance. The staff strengthened the balcony facing the Mall, knowing that the Royal Family would make appearances there on VE Day and concerned that years of bombing had damaged its structural integrity. They also trained the horses that would draw the Royal carriage on celebratory State drives through London to become accustomed to loud noises by regularly broadcasting the BBC Forces Programme in the stables.⁹⁷ The King prepared and filmed his victory broadcast days in advance. In his diary he noted that the press had "worked everybody up" by announcing the end of the war before Churchill's official announcement at 3:00 pm on May 9th, and that the staff was busy placing loudspeakers and floodlighting lamps on the Palace

⁹⁶"King Thanks His Lords & Commons for Addresses," *The Daily Telegraph*, May 18 1945.

⁹⁷ Bradford, 366.

balcony.⁹⁸ Such planning was one element of an elaborate system of coordination in which the monarchy and Palace staff crafted the image the King and Queen presented to the public.

Support from the media helped to strengthen the monarchy's symbolic role, publicize their wartime activities, and promote their morale-boosting messages throughout the war. Newspapers frequently featured full-page spreads of the Royal Family on important occasions like the National Day of Thanksgiving or VE Day. The Court Circular, a regular column in *The Times*, reported the daily activities of the King and Queen and illustrated the magnitude of their wartime activity, recording each day's visits to everything from the London Auxiliary Ambulance Service to Royal Air Force bases. Furthermore, *The Times* often published speeches made by the King or Queen that reinforced their message of determination and courage. As the Ministry of Information monitored and influenced the media for purposes of propaganda and morale, wartime newspapers and newsreels consistently cast the monarchy in a positive light.⁹⁹ This pro-monarchy bias indicates that the media was a key channel of communication for the monarchy's morale-boosting message, and as such the validity of media assertions about public morale and the Royal Family's impact is questionable.

Media support for the monarchy, in both its actual and symbolic role, was especially apparent upon the conclusion of the war in Europe. Several articles illustrate the significant extent to which the media, censored by the Ministry of Information, depicted the King as symbolic of the British spirit. On May 15, 1945, *The Daily Telegraph* proclaimed that the King "is the symbol of the whole war effort of the British nations." Addressing his domestic role, it proclaimed that "time and again he had visiting [people's] bombed homes, inspiring and cheering them by his presence and kindness. He had shared their dangers too. He had lived in

⁹⁸ Quoted in Wheeler Bennett, 624.

⁹⁹ Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 145.

Buckingham Palace and had not escaped attack from the enemy.”¹⁰⁰ *The Daily Telegraph*’s article on the King’s speech to the joint Houses of Parliament on May 18, 1945, reported that the Lords and Commons “came together in homage to their Sovereign and in congratulation on his triumph in leading the nation to victory in Europe.” Continuing to focus on the symbolic leadership and grandeur of the monarchy, the article reported that “archbishops, bishops, lords temporal, MPs and distinguished representatives of the Dominions, India, and the Colonies joined voices in three lusty cheers for the Sovereign and his Consort,” creating an image of a strong and grand monarchy.¹⁰¹ The *Telegraph* stated that “it was the speech of a monarch proud of his people and grateful for their sacrifices. But it was also the speech of a man who had shared the pain and peril of war,” specifically referencing the death of the Duke of Kent.¹⁰² The *Times* reported that the public shared this appreciation for the symbolism of the monarchy, with headlines proclaiming “Pageantry and Loyalty” and “Cheers All The Way” in its report on the Royal Drive through London.¹⁰³

While the King and Queen deliberately controlled their public image, their sentiment seems to have been genuine. Publicity ensured that most of the Royal Family’s charitable acts were widely known, and indeed both the monarchy and the Ministry of Information encouraged the spread of such news in the media. However, the national press did not prominently cover some gestures. For example, when the King and Queen went to Windsor for the weekends, they would have tea on Sunday with the Princesses and the evacuated children living there, and one week surprised all the evacuees with bicycles.¹⁰⁴ Concerning the general characteristics of the

¹⁰⁰ “Mr Churchill’s Tribute to Monarch and Man,” *The Daily Telegraph*, May 15 1945.

¹⁰¹ “King Thanks his Lords & Commons for Addresses,” *The Daily Telegraph*, May 18 1945.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ “The Royal Drive,” *The Times*, May 14 1945, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Crawford, 204.

King and Queen, Lord Woolton was “greatly impressed by the simplicity of both of them.”¹⁰⁵ He commented that “they were so easy to talk to and to take round, and fell so readily into conversation with the people whom they were seeing, without any affectation or side,” concluding that “they were, in fact, very nice people doing a very human job.”¹⁰⁶ Yet while individuals near the King and Queen had more opportunities to assess the monarchs’ sincerity, their views are not representative of the public and likely favor the monarchy. The opinions of a more diverse group of British citizens are necessary to assess the overall impact of the King and Queen on morale.

Marion Crawford, governess to Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, reflected that the King and Queen led a “busy and wearying” life during the war, yet this intense activity seemed to have the desired effect.¹⁰⁷ The people reacted positively to the King and Queen’s public wartime activities, and evidence from the blitzed areas that they toured suggested that morale remained high considering the hardships the people had endured. When the King and Queen appeared often and without formality among the wreckage in East and South London, the crowds that gathered frequently displayed support for them. Upon one visit, a man cried out, “Thank God for a good King,” and the surrounding crowd cheered. The King responded with a ringing “Thank God for a good people,” eliciting another cheer.¹⁰⁸ On another visit, the King and Queen were presented with a large poster proclaiming “God Save the King.”¹⁰⁹ The public widely approved of these interactions and they featured prominently in the media. Two of the most popular songs of Spring 1941, as reported by *Time Magazine*, were “The King is Still in London,” and “The Day I Met His Majesty the King,” with lyrics such as “He just smiled at me

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Bradford, 325.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Crawford, 158.

¹⁰⁸ Wheeler-Bennett, 467.

¹⁰⁹ *The King and Queen With their People*, 8.

as if he'd known me all his life," and "we spoke just like two ordinary folk."¹¹⁰ Such evidence suggests that King and Queen succeeded in projecting an image of informality and compassion. Displays of informality promoted the idea of solidarity between the monarchy and the public, and therefore had high propaganda value.

While public responses to the monarchy were predominantly positive, they were not exclusively so. In the early days of September 1940, when the Blitz upon London had just begun, Harold Nicholson recorded that "Everybody [in the Ministry of Information] is worried about the feeling in the East End, where there is much bitterness." Moreover, he wrote that "it is said that even the King and Queen were booed the other day when they visited the destroyed areas."¹¹¹ However, he noted that in subsequent raids the Germans had bombed the wealthier West End of London and "readjusted the balance."¹¹² Subsequent reports of public appreciation for the monarchy diminish the impact of this early response, which the Mass-Observation reporters attributed to the initial shock of the Blitz.

In response to Morrison's praise of King George in Coventry at a Cabinet Civil Defense Committee meeting, Harold Nicholson marveled that Morrison spoke as if the King were a "phenomenon." Nicholson found the Home Secretary's "almost sobbing" praise excessive, commenting that Morrison "spoke about the King as Goebbels [Germany's Minister of Propaganda] might have spoken about Hitler."¹¹³ "Why should Morrison speak as if he were a phenomenon?" asked Nicholson.¹¹⁴ His apparent irritation with the large amount of positive attention given to the King, especially considering his analogy to Nazi Germany, is a rare response to King George's wartime activities, but even he agreed that "I admit that the King does

¹¹⁰ Bradford, 331.

¹¹¹ Nicholson, *Diary*, 9/17/1940, 114-115.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, HN to VS-W, 11/20/1940, Ministry of Information, 128.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

his job well.”¹¹⁵ The comment suggests that Nicholson may have believed that the King’s symbolic role had become too powerful, hence the comparison to Hitler. Nevertheless, this is the only negative comment about the Royal Family in all of Nicholson’s letters and diaries, and suggests annoyance at the King’s popularity rather than criticism of the King himself.

Mass-Observation records a more diverse set of reactions to the Royal Family’s contributions than the media or personal accounts, undermining the overwhelmingly positive responses documented in newspapers, newsreels, official publications, and memoirs of individuals associated with the monarchy. One forty-five year old woman reported in 1944 that she supported the idea of monarchy because she believed “some kind of symbolical figure-head that isn’t merely a politician is needed, and it’s much better that it should be on the hereditary principle, that it can never be the result of racketeering. I think from all we’ve seen happen, we might have something so very much worse.”¹¹⁶ Certainly the images of dictators in Germany and Italy contrasted sharply with the non-political British monarchy, despite Nicholson’s private allusion. A fifty-year old man commented on the wartime activities of the Royal Family with a blunt assessment of its accomplishments: “You’ve got to respect them – they do work hard. When you think of it, it must be an awful life...your life would never be your own. A human sacrifice, you might call it.”¹¹⁷ A fifty-five year old woman stated that “I quite believe in Royalty, I think they do a lot of good,” but a thirty-five year old man found the Royal Family “uninteresting”. Asked his opinion on the monarchy, he replied “I can’t imagine anybody

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ M-O A: TC 14/1/L Famous Persons Survey: King George VI – his speech, death and funeral.

¹¹⁷ M-O A: TC 14/1/L Famous Persons Survey: King George VI – his speech, death and funeral.

getting worked up about it either way.”¹¹⁸ A forty-year-old woman commented that “Well, in a way they aren’t much use, but in another way people would miss them if they weren’t there.”¹¹⁹

This suggests that certain individuals thought that the monarchy’s lack of real power left them inconsequential, reducing them to celebrity status. However, that status gained them popularity among most people, a role the Royal Family used to encourage the wartime causes it championed, including volunteering, air raid safety, and rationing. Ambivalence or mild disdain for the attention the Royal Family received is the worst of the Mass-Observation records; wholly negative reactions are absent. The majority of the public realized that the King and Queen held only a symbolic role, viewing them as celebrities rather than authorities. Therefore, most dissatisfaction during the war, especially concerning life on the home front, was addressed at Churchill’s government, especially the Ministry of Home Security and the Ministry of Information.¹²⁰ Since the public realized that the monarchy had little real power, they focused their criticism on the various Government ministries they blamed for their hardships, rather than the figurehead monarchy. While the public expressed dissatisfaction with certain privileges awarded to the monarchs concerning rationing and comparative protection from bomb damage, this criticism focused on the private lives of the monarchs rather than their official duties. Evidence suggests that the people found little fault with the public role of the monarchy.

As Harry Hopkins, a United States emissary to Great Britain, reflected after meeting the King and Queen, “If ever two people realized that Britain is fighting for its life it is these two.”¹²¹ According to Hopkins, the Queen believed that to achieve victory, “the one thing that counted

¹¹⁸ M-O A: TC 14/1/L Famous Persons Survey: King George VI – his speech, death and funeral.

¹¹⁹ M-O A: TC 14/1/L Famous Persons Survey: King George VI – his speech, death and funeral.

¹²⁰ M-O A: TC 23/6/H Air Raids 1938-45: Air Raid Morale, 1940-1941.

¹²¹ Quoted in Bradford, 344.

was the morale and determination of the great mass of the British people.”¹²² This belief, shared by the King, prompted the intense activity of the monarchs throughout the war. At its conclusion, official channels proclaimed the success of their endeavor. In a May 15 speech to the Joint Houses of Parliament, Winston Churchill said that “[s]incere affection, quite apart from constitutional respect, has come to King George VI, from all parts of his Empire and Commonwealth. He is well beloved because of his courage, of his simple way of living and of his tireless devotion to duties.”¹²³ Privately he told the King that “this war has drawn the Throne and the people more closely together than was ever before recorded, and Your Majesties are more beloved by all classes and conditions than any of the princes of the past.”¹²⁴ While the impact of their public endeavors on the diverse British population as a whole is difficult to ascertain, such testimonies, fortified by other personal reports and the media, illustrate that many individuals believed that the Royal Family not only devoted itself to positively impacting morale, but successfully accomplished this task.

¹²² Quoted in *Ibid.*, 344.

¹²³ “Mr. Churchill’s Tribute to Monarch and Man,” *The Daily Telegraph*, May 15 1945.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, 467.

The Private Life of the British Monarchy: A Display of Wartime Sacrifice

War not only affected the public activities of the Royal Family, but also altered its private life just as it changed that of families across the nation. Consistent with his desire to have a first-hand understanding of his people and his disdain for the “high-hat business” of his father’s reign, George VI insisted that the Royal Family adhere to the same regulations and rationing that the rest of the country followed.¹ Living in the public eye, the Royal Family worked to set a positive example for the rest of the nation, from rationing food to welcoming evacuees at Windsor Castle. In doing so, they hoped to encourage the public to behave similarly and to improve overall morale by fostering a sense of unity and promoting the idea of equality of sacrifice. This stemmed from the King and Queen’s earlier experiences interacting with the public and their realization that the public fascination with monarchy could be used to productive ends. Operating as an example to the nation, the King and Queen made sure to exhibit the positive and resilient attitude that they hoped to inspire within the public.

Upon the outbreak of war in September 1939, several immediate changes occurred in the private life of the Royal Family. One inevitable change was a significant reduction in the number of royal staff. Many members of the King and Queen’s Households and the staff had previously held positions in the military and rejoined their old regiments upon the outbreak of war. All of the King’s six Lords-in-Waiting and four Grooms-in-Waiting joined the service, as did the Queen’s private secretary.² Furthermore, the King and Queen decided to evacuate all unnecessary servants to the relative safety of Windsor Castle once the Blitz began. As previously noted, the King and Queen remained at Buckingham Palace throughout the duration

¹ Sir John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI: His Life and Reign*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), 393.

² Dorothy Laird, *Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother*, (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1966), 209.

of the war, although some government ministers argued that they should leave London for a more secure location. Their decision to remain was one of the first choices they made which esteemed them in the public eye.³ On the weekends the King and Queen would often visit Windsor Castle, where the Princesses stayed for the majority of the war, but messengers from London frequently briefed them on the latest developments.⁴ The King and Queen also kept abreast of the news through close contact with the Prime Minister. Throughout the war, Churchill joined the King and Queen for lunch at Buckingham Palace every Tuesday. If an air raid broke out during their meeting, they would simply bring their plates down to the basement shelter.⁵ While the King and Queen willingly adapted to the new conditions that wartime required of them, they were careful not to allow fear of the war to affect their daily routine. They recognized the difference between willingness to change and allowing fear to dictate their lives, and strove to set a positive example of the former while refusing to suggest the latter as a possibility.

Deciding to stay in London put the King and Queen in personal danger, but the Palace devised plans to ensure their safety. Protection of the King and Queen fell to the Coates Mission, a specially selected body of officers and men from the Brigade of Guards and the Household Cavalry. It was their duty to protect the King and Queen and escort them to safety in armored cars in the event of a surprise German parachute attack, which the government considered a viable threat.⁶ After the fall of France in June 1940, Britain stood alone among European nations fighting Germany and the personal danger to the Royal Family increased.

³ Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 255.

⁴ Marion Crawford, *Little Princesses*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1950), 186.

⁵ Anne Morrow, *Without Equal: H.M. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother*, (North Yorkshire: House of Strouse, 2000), 111.

⁶ Wheeler-Bennett, 464.

Nazi invasions in other European countries often involved holding the Royal Family hostage to instill fear and obedience among the public. To protect themselves, the King began to travel in a bullet-proof car, carry a steel helmet and a stun-gun, and the Queen learned to use a rifle and a revolver. They also decided to move Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret from Royal Lodge to Windsor Castle for additional security.⁷ Preparedness, not fear, characterized the Royal Family's response to heightened danger.

Air Raid Attacks

The greatest risk that the King and Queen faced as a result of their decision to remain in London was the threat of air raid attacks on Buckingham Palace. After the London Blitz began in September 1940, the palace received a basement air raid shelter with a steel-reinforced ceiling and a small window protected by steel shutters.⁸ The shelter proved necessary, as the Palace was bombed nine times throughout the war. The first Palace bombing occurred on September 9th, 1940, when the Luftwaffe shifted its attack from the low-income East End to the aristocratic West End. A single bomb fell on the north side of the Palace and lodged under the stone steps outside the Regency Room, directly underneath the King's study. The bomb did not explode until 1:25 the following morning. The Palace had been evacuated by this time and there were no casualties. The main structure remained intact, but the bomb destroyed the swimming pool and shattered several windows, including those in the royal apartments.⁹ The experience was merely a precursor to more lasting damage. On September 13, only a few days after the first explosion, a much graver attack occurred. The King and Queen were meeting with Alexander Hardinge, the King's private secretary, in a small sitting room overlooking the Palace quadrangle, since the

⁷ Laird, 213.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ William Shawcross, *The Queen Mother* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 522.

broken windows in the King's study rendered it useless. The King recalled that "all of a sudden we heard an aircraft making a zooming noise above us, saw 2 bombs falling past the opposite side of the Palace, & then heard 2 resounding crashes as the bombs fell in the quadrangle about 30 yards away."¹⁰ The bomb nearest the Palace had hit a fire hydrant, causing water to pour through the broken windows into the building. Six bombs were dropped in total. The aircraft flew down the Mall below cloud level, dropping two bombs in the Palace forecourt, two in the quadrangle, one in the Chapel, and one in the garden. After the attack, the King and Queen visited their staff in the basement to ensure their safety, and noted that everyone seemed calm. "We all wondered why we weren't dead," marveled the King in his diary, adding that "There is no doubt that it was a direct attack on the Palace."¹¹

Word spread quickly that the Palace had been bombed, but the Palace kept the extent of the King and Queen's direct danger a secret even from Churchill, lest it instill fear among the public.¹² However, the fact that their home had been bombed had a significant propaganda value. The attacks on the Palace did not cause fear, as the Germans had intended, but rather improved morale by increasing the sense of unity that the British, especially Londoners, felt with their monarchs. The idea of common suffering and the fact that the enemy had dared to attack the King and Queen increased feelings of loyalty to the monarchy and determination to withstand the trials of war.¹³ The incident, as well as subsequent bombings of the Palace, featured prominently in the media. Photographs of the King and Queen stepping over the rubble of their home helped the public to identify with their monarchs and promoted the idea of equality of sacrifice. By projecting an image of fortitude, the King and Queen hoped to encourage the same

¹⁰ Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, 324.

¹¹ Quoted in Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 468.

¹³ Ibid., 469.

sentiment in the public. Lord Louis Mountbatten wrote to the King that “if Goering could have realized the depths of feeling which his bombing of Buckingham Palace has aroused throughout the Empire & America, he would have been well advised to instruct his assassins to keep off,” summarizing the attack as a “major error in enemy psychological warfare.”¹⁴ King George recorded in his diary that he and the Queen had “found a new bond” with their people because the bombing of Buckingham Palace illustrated that “nobody is immune” from air raids.¹⁵ Queen Elizabeth expressed the same sentiment, remarking “I’m glad we’ve been bombed. It makes me feel I can look the East End in the face.”¹⁶ The concept of equality of sacrifice figured heavily in these reflections. The idea of equal exposure to air raid attacks helped reduce social tension and united the public against the common enemy.

Yet while the King and Queen publicly displayed fortitude, even they felt the strain resulting from the long years of continued air raid attacks. By 1944, rumors had spread throughout Britain of a new and horrific German weapon. In that spring, Germany confirmed these fears when they introduced the V1 pilotless plane in an initial attack over London that lasted over a fortnight, day and night, and resulted in severe casualties.¹⁷ Buckingham Palace was hit several times by the V1s, first when one fell in Constitution Hill causing a seventy-five-yard length of the boundary wall to collapse.¹⁸ A more serious attack occurred in June when the Guards’ Chapel in Wellington Barracks, opposite Buckingham Palace, was hit. Several people inside perished, including the sister of the Queen’s treasurer. The Royal Family was in Windsor Castle during the attack, but was distraught by the news. Like the rest of the nation, they were

¹⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 470.

¹⁷ Angus Calder, *The People’s War; Britain, 1939-1945*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 559.

¹⁸ Wheeler-Bennett, 610.

disturbed by the “strange new kind of pilotless aircraft.”¹⁹ “For the one and only time during the whole war,” remarked Crawford, “I saw the Queen really shaken. She seemed broken by the news. No one quite knew what this new weapon of frightfulness was, or what it could do. Appalling stories began to go round.”²⁰ The Royal Family shared the nation’s anxiety over the new style of air raid attacks, but did not allow this to interfere with the encouragement it gave the public through visits to bombed cities and neighborhoods. Yet, even they were not above the fears that the new wave of bombing caused. Lascelles commented on July 4, 1944, that on a day of constant air raid alerts the King and the Lord Chamberlain decided to move a small scheduled investiture to the basement of Buckingham Palace, near the air raid shelter. Churchill was visiting the Palace and witnessed the preparations for the investiture. He later telephoned Lascelles to say that “he thought it all wrong – a bad example, when the Government were urging people to go about their business as usual during working hours, no matter how many sirens sounded.”²¹ Lascelles passed this message on to the King, who held all future ceremonies above ground.²²

Rationing and Austerity

Aside from the daily dangers of air raid attacks, the Royal Family adjusted to the many other changes and hardships brought about by the war. One of the greatest adjustments to daily life was the rationing of certain goods. The Royal Family adhered to the same rationing imposed on the general public, including food, coal, and clothing, with one exception: the government permitted Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary a margin of flexibility in order to have new state

¹⁹ Crawford, 198.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Sir Alan Lascelles, *King’s Counsellor, Abdication and War: The Diaries of Sir Alan Lascelles*, ed. Duff Hart-Davis (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), 240.

²² Ibid.

occasion garments. The government rationed clothing on a “points rationing” system in which the consumer received a given amount of points that permitted him or her to choose within a range of goods, each with a different points price.²³ The two Queens received extra points to buy their state occasion clothes. However, the Princesses received the standard allowance and the entire family adhered to their coupon books and mended old clothes just as the public did.²⁴

Both Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary devoted themselves to setting a good example for supporting the war. Upon the outbreak of war, Queen Mary reluctantly left Marlborough House, her London residence, for the countryside estate of Badminton in Gloucestershire, home of her nephew the Duke of Beaufort. While there, the Queen kept the household busy contributing to the war effort by knitting or rolling bandages. She herself assisted in felling trees on the estate for crop cultivation. Marion Crawford reflected that “There was nobody in the whole of England who went in for austerity to such a degree as Queen Mary.”²⁵ Similarly, Queen Elizabeth donated spare furniture from Windsor Castle to individuals who had lost their homes.²⁶ *The Times* reported personal donations made by the Queen, including in September 1940 when she donated wardrobes, chairs, and beds from Windsor Castle to people in the East End. *The Times* remarked that several items had “been in use at the Castle since the early days of Queen Victoria’s reign” nearly a century earlier.²⁷ Such reports publicized the Queen’s donations both to encourage others to do the same and to demonstrate sacrifices made by the Royal Family.

Indeed, the Royal Family willingly contributed its extensive resources to the war effort, both illustrating its dedication to the public and hoping to foster this activity in others. Like women across England, Queen Elizabeth held social gatherings to make clothing for the troops.

²³ Calder, 240.

²⁴ Crawford, 160.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

²⁶ Sarah Bradford, *The Reluctant King*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 329.

²⁷ “Royal Furniture for East End Homes,” *The Times*, September 18 1940, 4.

Twice a week, she hosted sewing parties at the Palace in the Blue Drawing Room, although Mrs. Winnie Weddle, wife to a groom at the Palace, recalled that “[s]he always seemed to have the same piece of knitting.”²⁸ The King and Queen ordered the parkland and golf courses at Windsor, Balmoral, and Sandringham to be ploughed up for vegetable plots.²⁹ At Windsor Castle alone, over fifteen hundred acres of parkland were used to grow cereal crops and the Royal carriage horses were sent to plow the fields.³⁰ Royal staff prepared Buckingham Palace for the war, wrapping the Crown Jewels in newspaper and packaging them into leather hatboxes before sending them to Windsor Castle for the duration of the war.³¹ They stored other valuables, including portraits and porcelain, outside of the city.

The public could not see first-hand the living conditions in Buckingham Palace during the war, but heard about the changes made by the Royal Family through the media. King George introduced fuel economies at Buckingham Palace in Autumn 1941, forbidding the use of central heat or fires except on doctor’s orders. He also ordered that all baths be painted with a black or red line at the five-inch level to limit water use, and that only one light remain in each room.³² Accounts of royal adaptability and frugality extended to the United States thanks to Eleanor Roosevelt’s visit to London in October 1942. The King and Queen had remained in close correspondence with President and Mrs. Roosevelt since their visit to North America in 1939. When Mrs. Roosevelt announced her intention to visit Great Britain to witness the impact of the war, the King and Queen invited her to stay at Buckingham Palace. The Queen gave Mrs. Roosevelt her own rooms. Considered the most comfortable in the Palace, the rooms nevertheless had no glass in their windows because they had been shattered by bombs two years

²⁸ Quoted in Morrow, 113.

²⁹ Ibid., 111.

³⁰ Bradford, 329.

³¹ Crawford, 172.

³² Bradford, 329.

before. Instead, wood and isinglass inserts kept the considerable chill out. Mrs. Roosevelt was amazed by the conditions, remarking that “Buckingham Palace is an enormous place, and without heat. I do not see how they keep the dampness out. The rooms were cold except for the smaller sitting-room with an open fire. In every room there was a little electric heater.”³³ The King and Queen apologized that Mrs. Roosevelt could only have a small fire in her sitting-room and one in the waiting room. She stayed two nights and noted not only restrictions on heat, but also on water and food. Lord Woolton, the Minister of Food, informed the First Lady that the Palace meals, although still served on silver and gold plate, “might have been served in any home in England and . . . would have shocked the King’s grandfather.”³⁴ These hardships, however, instilled in Mrs. Roosevelt a belief in the Royal Family’s dedication to its people and the war effort. She noted that “the fact that both of them are doing an extraordinarily outstanding job for their people in the most trying times stands out when you are with them, and you admire their character and their devotion to duty.”³⁵

An article in *The Times* shortly after Mrs. Roosevelt’s departure from London reported that in a meeting with US journalists the First Lady spoke of “the completeness with which living had been changed for every one, from Buckingham Palace to Clydeside cottages.”³⁶ The statement reinforced the idea of equality of sacrifice between the social classes. Mrs. Roosevelt also reflected on the morale of the British people, noting that “It is extraordinary that people can remain cheerful through [the black-out] winter after winter and come put with the answer, ‘We have got to get on with the war.’”³⁷ She spread the message across the Atlantic that British

³³ Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, 550.

³⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 551.

³⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 552.

³⁶ “Mrs. Roosevelt on Her Tour,” *The Times*, November 19 1942, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

morale remained strong despite severe challenges, and encouraged Americans to follow their example.

Family Matters

Air raids, rationing, and black-outs were not the only wartime hardships that the Royal Family shared with the public. On Tuesday, August 25, 1942, the King received news that his youngest brother, George, Duke of Kent, was killed in a Royal Air Force plane crash. The incident shook the King's spirit. The Duke of Kent was flying through Scotland en route to Iceland to inspect RAF installations when his plane, flying at only seven hundred feet through rain, wind, and a dense fog, struck the top of a hill on the Duke of Portland's Langwell estate. The pilot, Flight-Lieutenant Frank Goyen, was an Australian with nearly one thousand hours in ocean patrols. There were nine men on board the plane, including engineers, radio operators, and gunners; all were experienced. While some suggested the flight had been sabotaged, the official verdict was determined as pilot error due to bad visibility.³⁸ The King was not informed until later that night. The death featured prominently in newspapers across the nation. Articles highlighted the Duke's devotion to Britain and the Royal Air Force, and reported the condolences expressed by the British government, the Dominions, and the United States.³⁹

Like families across England, the Royal Family also faced the difficult decision of how to protect their children from the dangers of war. However, unlike most parents, their decision could affect the actions of others. The Government encouraged parents to evacuate their children to the countryside, but many aristocratic families took an extra precaution by sending their children to North America instead. Several ministers advocated that Princesses Elizabeth

³⁸ Bradford, 345.

³⁹ "Duke of Kent Killed in Air Crash," *The Times*, August 26 1942, 4.

and Margaret should join this exodus and evacuate to Canada.⁴⁰ However, Queen Elizabeth unequivocally rejected the idea, proclaiming that “The children could not go without me, I could not possibly leave the King and the King would never go.”⁴¹ The King and Queen sought to protect their children while sending a message of confidence, and therefore sent the Princesses to Windsor rather than overseas. The decision also reinforced the idea of an equality of sacrifice: the Royal Family would not take advantage of the privileges available to wealthier Britons.

When war broke out in September 1939, Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret were staying in Balmoral, Scotland, where the Royal Family traditionally spent its summer holiday. The threat of war had delayed the start of their holiday, giving the Princesses their first experience of wartime changes. “Who *is* this Hitler, spoiling everything?” demanded Princess Margaret, age nine.⁴² Elizabeth, age thirteen, and Margaret remained aware of the war’s progression as their governess, Marion Crawford, read to them daily from newspapers, attempting at first to spare them the “horrible details” but soon realizing the futility of this endeavor.⁴³ They also learned news of the war from their nightly telephone conversations with their parents. Furthermore, like the rest of the British public, Elizabeth and Margaret were exposed to the opposing forces of government propaganda and anxious speculation, both of which influenced opinions and morale. They even occasionally listened to “Lord Haw Haw” on the radio, and like many across the nation expressed strong dislike for his treasonous messages.⁴⁴

Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret reflected their parents’ desire to assist in the war effort and willingness to make wartime accommodations and sacrifices. Throughout the war, the Princesses worked with local residents and evacuees in the various places where they stayed:

⁴⁰ Bradford, 321.

⁴¹ Quoted in Morrow, 109.

⁴² Quoted in Crawford, 137.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Balmoral Castle, Royal Lodge in Windsor Great Park, and for the majority of the war, Windsor Castle itself. In the early stages of the war when the Princesses were living at Balmoral, Crawford promptly organized “war work” for the household. She coordinated weekly sewing parties attended by the Princesses, the wives of local farmers, the wives of the crofters, and the wives of employees on the estate. In accordance with rationing regulations, each attendee brought her own sugar to contribute to the tea, sandwiches, and scones served at the meetings. The Princesses served the refreshments and “talked away happily to the various women, asking fondly after their departed sons and fathers,” according to Crawford.⁴⁵ Their direct involvement in the war became even clearer when children from the nearby city of Glasgow were evacuated to Balmoral. The King opened up Craigowan, a large house on the Balmoral estate, to evacuees and their mothers, and the Princesses frequently interacted with their new neighbors. Crawford described the urban children as frightened of the countryside, the forest, and the animals on the estate, reflecting the common issue of cultural and social differences causing tension between host families and urban evacuees throughout the country.⁴⁶

The Princesses’ involvement in the war increased as time wore on. They left Balmoral in December 1939 to spend Christmas with their parents at Sandringham, and after the holiday season moved to Royal Lodge on the Windsor estate, only twenty-five miles from London. While there, the Princesses joined the local Girl Guide Company along with several local children and evacuees from London. There were about thirty children from the East End living in Windsor, and Crawford reported that “We all became very good friends, and like most real Cockneys, these East End children were easy to get on with and made nothing at all of their

⁴⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

suddenly changed surroundings,” unlike the Glasgow children they had known in Balmoral.⁴⁷ Elizabeth and Margaret “took a great interest in them all,” according to Crawford, and became close friends with several. “The old cry of, ‘Wait for me, Lilibet,’ echoed round once more in all sorts of accents, Cockney predominating.”⁴⁸ In her memoirs, Crawford adopted a somewhat condescending tone towards the evacuees, suggesting that the tension between evacuees and host families characteristic across the country may not have escaped the Royal Family. While Crawford insisted that the two Princesses were happy to interact with the East End children and took on equal responsibilities while camping and working together, she also notes the Princesses’ occasional reluctance to participate. Princess Elizabeth especially protested against camping outside with the Girl Guides as she grew older.⁴⁹

On May 12, 1940, the Queen instructed Crawford and the Princesses to “go at once to Windsor Castle, anyway for the rest of the week” because as Britain’s European allies fell, she wanted the Princesses within the ancient fortress’s secure walls. Elizabeth, Margaret, and Crawford stayed there until the war ended in 1945.⁵⁰ Newspapers across the country reported only that the royal children had been evacuated to “a house in the country,” initially keeping the details of their location undisclosed for security.⁵¹ The Castle was considered a safe location for the Princesses, but nevertheless experienced several air raid attacks. Occasionally the household had to spend the night in the dungeons, which served as the Castle’s air raid shelter.⁵² Windsor Castle rests upon a chalk foundation, and its residents could feel vibrations resulting from the air raids on London, a constant reminder of the danger in the capital.⁵³ The Princesses had helmets

⁴⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 203.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 162.

⁵¹ Ibid., 163.

⁵² Ibid., 170.

⁵³ Ibid., 185.

and gas-masks to wear, and Princess Elizabeth was especially diligent about wearing her gas mask and cleaning the eyepiece each evening.⁵⁴

Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret continued working with evacuees through the Girl Guides throughout the war and were enthusiastic about their contributions to that organization. Every Christmas they performed a pantomime show with the evacuees at Windsor and gave the money they raised (over eight hundred pounds throughout the war) to the Queen's Wool Fund.⁵⁵ When metal was in high demand, they scoured the Windsor estate for pails, pots, and pans to donate, even excavating an old railing embedded in the ground. "We became absolute pests to everybody in Great Windsor Park," noted Crawford.⁵⁶ Upon completing their Girl Guide cooking badge, they gave the results of their labor to the ARP men standing lookout on the castle walls.⁵⁷ Princess Elizabeth and Margaret's enthusiasm for these activities often caught visiting British and American troops by surprise. The Princesses welcomed visiting troops by asking about their families and inviting them on tours of the Castle, gardens, or stables. Marion Crawford reflected that this easy-going attitude helped dispel the belief that the Royal Family was "some sort of superhuman creation, above the run of ordinary people."⁵⁸

Once Princess Elizabeth turned sixteen, she became eligible to participate in the women's services of the armed forces and expressed a desire to do so. While the King was initially reluctant to allow the future Queen to face the danger associated with any type of wartime work, he and his advisors decided that she could join the Auxiliary Territorial Service.⁵⁹ She worked at the ATS depot at Camberly near Windsor, serving as a subaltern. Her position was not merely

⁵⁴ Ibid., 183.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 194.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 155.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 205.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 196.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 212-213.

symbolic: she performed the same duties as all the other junior officers and learned how to maintain and repair army vehicles. Although she was allowed to spend her nights at Windsor Castle, she had to follow the routine of the depot and salute her seniors with the rest of the junior officers, despite her royal status.⁶⁰ Princess Elizabeth served as a subaltern until the war's conclusion, and always wore her uniform to public events, a fact typically noted in media reports.

Separation of families due to military service, evacuation, and loss of life was a common theme throughout the war. The Royal Family experienced each of these in its turn, and more often than not the public learned of its experiences through the media. This enforced the idea of equality of sacrifice and helped the public associate the Royal Family with their own wartime challenges. However, the Royal Family was not equal in every sense of the word. Strategy in their morale-boosting program often dictated exceptions to the idea of equality of sacrifice. For example, when the Queen's "age-group" of women was called to register for compulsory wartime service, the King and Lascelles jointly decided that she should not register. Not only was it already clear that the Queen was doing her part for the war effort, but Lascelles feared that the public would realize that the Queen's registration was a formality, meaning she would never actually be called up to work on the land or in a munitions factory. He feared that people would view the registration of all upper-class women as a similar formality, fostering ideas of inequality that the Palace strove to prevent.⁶¹

Media and Public Responses

⁶⁰ Ibid., 214.

⁶¹ Lascelles, 39.

Individuals who came in contact with the King and Queen often reported feeling encouraged about the state of the war because of that interaction. One Lady-in-Waiting reported that “Not only did the Queen have all the courage in the world, she had the power to transfer it to you. When London was being heavily bombed and one had all sorts of problems to contend with at home, I used to arrive feeling more or less battered, at the Palace to go into waiting, and then I would have to take over all the current problems there. Altogether, life was rather a strain. Yet, once I had seen the Queen, I felt absolutely all right, and able to face anything.”⁶² Harold Nicholson expressed a similar sentiment, which he connected more directly to the King and Queen’s determination and optimism. The Queen informed him that she was taking daily instructions in firing a revolver. When he expressed his surprise, she responded “I shall not go down like the others,” a veiled reference to other European monarchs fallen before Hitler.⁶³ He was greatly impressed with the monarchs. “They did me all the good in the world,” he marveled, “resolute and sensible.”⁶⁴ Based on his meeting with the monarchs, he believed that “[w]e shall win. I know that. I have no doubts at all.”⁶⁵

Those who did not have direct personal contact with the King and Queen were aware of their determination and dedication to the public, not only through their public visits and widely-publicized speeches, but also through newsreels and other media reports that followed the private lives of members of the Royal Family, giving a glimpse into their daily lives and specific events that affected them. Reports on the Royal Family were among the most prominent subjects of wartime newsreels. They typically included reports on public events, filmed speeches designed

⁶² Quoted in Laird, 216.

⁶³ Harold Nicholson, *Diaries and Letters 1939-45*, (Collins, 1967), HN to V.S-W., 7/10/1940, 4 King’s Bench Walk, 100.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

for public audiences, or reports on the King and Queen's family and palace life.⁶⁶ Through this third category, the public saw for themselves images of the Royal Family's sacrifices, including Princess Elizabeth performing truck maintenance in the ATS and the Queen with her sewing circle of aristocrats and Palace servants. Furthermore, images of the Royal Family simply acting as a family: sitting around the fire, reading, walking at Windsor, or playing with the corgis, served as "propaganda cameos" to demonstrate that the British Monarchy, the symbolic head of the government, was a peaceful, domestic entity, in stark contrast to the threatening Axis leaders.⁶⁷

Newspaper stories about the Royal Family from 1939-1945 also followed its private life in great detail. *The Times* frequently published articles about royal outings and celebrations, including Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret's first visit to a West End theatre in 1942 and their participation in Windsor horse shows. It also ran annual articles celebrating the birthdays of the King, Queen, and other members of the Royal Family, which often included messages of congratulations from various world leaders and government officials. These articles nearly always included the wardrobe choices of the King, Queen and the Princesses, the size of the crowd in attendance, and the formal celebrations that took place.⁶⁸ *The Times* often featured full-page spreads of photographs from royal celebrations and parties, such as Princess Elizabeth's eighteenth birthday in April 1944. Members of the Royal Family also used newspapers to express their thanks for birthday wishes that they received from the people of Britain. These reports reinforced the symbolic leadership of the monarchy and kept the Royal Family in the public eye throughout the war, ensuring that the public was aware of its sacrifices and activities.

⁶⁶ Rosalind Brunt, "The Family Firm Restored: Newsreel Coverage of the British Monarchy 1936-45," in *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality, and British Cinema in the Second World War*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 147.

⁶⁷ Brunt, 149.

⁶⁸ "Royal Birthday Ceremony," *The Times*, April 22 1944, 2.

Notable among media accounts of the Royal Family was the great detail with which newspapers recorded the air raid attacks upon Buckingham Palace. An article in *The Times* reporting the first September 1940 attack had the headline “Heavy Bomb on the Palace,” and proclaimed that “the King and Queen thus share with thousands of their subjects the hard lot of having had their homes damaged by wanton bombing from the air,” enforcing the idea of common suffering.⁶⁹ The article added that “even as the King was touring East London on Monday morning [before the time-delayed explosion], comforting others who had lost their homes, he knew that his own home was in danger.”⁷⁰ The bomb finally exploded that night after the Palace had been evacuated. After the second attack on the Palace two days later, *The Times* issued messages from the War Cabinet that “we have now had a personal experience of German barbarity which only strengthens the resolution of all of us to fight through to final victory.”⁷¹ Reports on the second attack focused on the bombing of the Royal Chapel, a historic and symbolic building constructed during the reign of Queen Victoria. These articles played on British patriotism to muster support for the Royal Family and the nation as a whole.

The bombings of Buckingham Palace gained much attention, and government officials and newspaper reporters alike stressed that they increased feelings of solidarity between the monarchy and the public with the idea of equality of sacrifice. Yet Mass-Observation reports a wide variety of responses to the bombing among the public, suggesting that the bombings sometimes triggered morbid curiosity rather than support for the Royal Family. To be sure, the news met with excitement, as Mass-Observation reports from September 13 record that “before this news had appeared in any of the evening papers, it has spread the length and breadth” of

⁶⁹ “Heavy Bomb on the Palace,” *The Times*, September 12 1940, 4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ “Buckingham Palace Again Bombed,” *The Times*, September 14 1940, 4.

London, with people exclaiming it in the streets.⁷² In the direct aftermath of the bombing, few individuals expressed fear, but the dominant attitude was one of “acute interest and curiosity” rather than “dismay or anger.”⁷³ A Mass-Observation reporter recorded an overheard conversation between a young woman and some lorry drivers, in which the young woman laughed “excitedly” and exclaimed “They’ve bombed Buckingham Palace. Buckingham Palace is bombed!”⁷⁴ Others reported individuals expressing their eagerness to see the rubble themselves. Some reactions were even more negative. One individual commented to a Mass-Observation reporter on September 13, 1940 that it was better for the Germans to have bombed Buckingham Palace “[s]o they don’t bomb my home!”⁷⁵ Illustrating disdain for the Royal Family and the class tension that was prominent in the early days of the Blitz, he declared “[i]t’s all right for these people; they can go somewhere else. It’s us working people can’t go anywhere else.”⁷⁶ Comments like these illustrate the resentment felt by the working class which the Royal Family and the Ministry of Information alike attempted to combat by promoting the idea of equality of sacrifice.

Three days after the first bombing of Buckingham Palace, a Mass-Observation interviewer recorded the scene outside Buckingham Palace while the changing of the Guard ceremony was in progress. He noted that about one hundred people were watching, but once the ceremony had completed only about fifteen people lingered to look at the bomb damage. After four minutes, he noted that “no one was taking any interest in Buckingham Palace.”⁷⁷ From the front of the palace, no damage was visible but from the North side, all the windows were

⁷² Mass-Observation Archives (M-O A): Topic Collection (TC) 23/5/C Air Raids 1939-45: Observations Gathered September 1940.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ M-O A: TC 23/5/C Air Raids 1938-45: Observations gathered September 1940.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

broken.⁷⁸ Mass Observation suggested to Home Intelligence that this lack of interest suggested that the public was becoming acclimatized to the bombing. One Mass-Observation investigator was driving along Buckingham Palace Road when the bombs struck and recorded his realization that “to-day for the first time he has generally found himself acclimatized to the London air-raided situation” and “his morale has been better today than for many months passed.”⁷⁹ However, this ambivalence also suggests that some members of the public viewed the Royal Family as mere celebrities rather than true leaders, reflecting curiosity rather than fear that the Palace had been attacked.

In general, reports from Mass-Observation demonstrate that the public supported the monarchy, and although some individuals expressed disinterest no one expressed outright dislike for the Royal Family. One forty-five year old woman reported that she thought the Royal Family was “terribly conscientious” in its wartime endeavors.⁸⁰ Another woman reflected on the character of the Royal Family, commenting that “they’ve got no affectation at all – they’re all perfectly natural,” demonstrating appreciation for the King and Queen’s frequent and informal visits with the public.⁸¹ Other interviewees reflected more ambivalence about the Royal Family, recognizing that they lacked real power.

Royal Determination

In general reflections on their wartime experience, the King and Queen exhibited a robust optimism that mirrored their outward actions. The King recorded that “I feel that our tours of bombed areas in London are helping the people who have lost their relations & homes & we

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ M-O A: TC 14/1/L Famous Persons Survey 1938-52: King George VI-his speech, death and funeral.

⁸¹ M-O A: TC 65/5/E London Survey 1940: Week 12: 11-17.10.40.

have both found a new bond with them as Buckingham Palace has been bombed as well as their homes, & nobody is immune.”⁸² The Queen remained reserved about her own feelings and anxieties related to the war, but the words she did express suggest a firm determination to remain strong. One of the Queen’s ladies-in-waiting remarked that “the Queen was tremendously reserved, she carried on steadfastly with the daily things that had to be done, and she was always giving out help to people, but she seldom said anything about what she was thinking.”⁸³ She did, however, discuss her feelings about the war with a select group of people close to her. To Queen Mary on October 19, 1940 she wrote “I feel quite exhausted after seeing & hearing so much sadness, sorrow, heroism and magnificent spirit. The destruction is so awful, & the people so *wonderful* – they *deserve* a better world.”⁸⁴ She also spoke frequently about the war with Marion Crawford, although according to Crawford she never showed that she was worried.⁸⁵

King George expressed his confidence in the British people in his private correspondence with President Roosevelt. On June 26, 1940, he wrote to Roosevelt that “the British Empire has had to face a series of disasters for which it has been little to blame. But the spirit here is magnificent, and the people of these islands, strongly reinforced by the Dominion Contingents, are inspired by the thought that it is their own soil which they now have to defend against an invader. Their resolution and their confidence are supreme.”⁸⁶ Roosevelt later responded that he realized “how splendidly all of your good people are standing up under these terrific air attacks – but I have what we call a ‘hunch’ – not necessarily based on cold figures, that you have turned the corner and that the break of the luck will be more and more with you.”⁸⁷ In the same letter

⁸² Quoted in Bradford, 324.

⁸³ Quoted in Laird, 210.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Calder, 524.

⁸⁵ Crawford, 156.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, 511.

⁸⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 517.

Roosevelt revealed that positive reports of the King and Queen's wartime activities had reached the United States, writing that because of the King's dedication to his nation "you, personally, and the Queen have deepened the respect and affectionate regard in which you are held in this country by the great majority of Americans."⁸⁸

At the war's conclusion the King wrote that "We have spent a very busy fortnight since VE Day & feel rather jaded from it all. We have been overwhelmed by the kind things people have said over our part in the War. We have only tried to do our duty during these 5 ½ years. I have found it difficult to rejoice or relax as there is still so much hard work ahead to deal with."⁸⁹ The Royal Family had lived each moment of those five-and-a-half years in the public eye, so that people across Britain saw everything from the Royal Family's rationing of food, water, and heat, to their resilience in the face of bombing and destruction. Hoping to set a positive example and promote the idea of equality of sacrifice, the Royal Family used its private life to boost morale just as they did with their public duties.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Ibid.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Ibid., 627.

Conclusion

The Second World War found the Royal Family walking the rubble-strewn streets of the East End, conversing with homeless air raid victims, and acknowledging crowds from the balcony of Buckingham Palace. Not only are the magnitude and variety of its wartime activities remarkable, but the purpose which drove its actions remained paramount throughout. From the earliest days of fear and uncertainty in August 1939 to the final hours of triumph in May 1945, the Royal Family supported public morale through over five years of severe dangers and challenges, adopting activities specifically meant to bolster the public's spirit.

While it is clear that the Royal Family made a positive contribution to public morale, assessing the magnitude of its impact on the public is more difficult because they were one of many sources impacting morale. The British people certainly found encouragement from the Royal Family, but the media, the government, and notable individuals such as Winston Churchill also had influence. Moreover, it is important to credit the British people themselves for the strength of their morale. As Stephen Taylor noted in his 1941 Mass-Observation report to Home Intelligence, the British were a pragmatic, intelligent people who exhibited great determination to wage and win the war. They found strength within themselves and from each other.

Yet British society was one of great socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic diversity. British people's intelligence and pragmatism did not guarantee that they would be able to unite over their many differences. For unity to occur, as it surely did, a central symbol with which all people could identify was necessary. Of all the sources that impacted morale, few could claim this ability to unite the public into one body. Supported by the tradition of the British monarchy and its symbolic status as the moral head of the nation, the Royal Family had a unique apolitical

and universal leadership role that all other groups, including the government and the media, lacked.

While it is therefore safe to state that the Royal Family had a definite impact on morale, further research is necessary to ascertain the true wartime role of the Royal Family. For example, the extent to which the drive to boost morale came from within the Palace remains uncertain. While the biographies of the King and Queen emphasize their devotion to public duty and their determination to assist civilians during the war, these are naturally biased sources in favor of the King and Queen. Churchill's government may have influenced their activities more than the historical record suggests, as little evidence exists from within the Cabinet or Home Office on which group truly drove the Royal Family's actions. Records from the King and his private secretaries suggest that the King and Queen directed the monarchy's efforts, but comparing these accounts with those from the government may further illuminate the circumstances behind their wartime role.

Furthermore, it is possible that the Royal Family's motivations for boosting morale were not entirely selfless. The Abdication crisis had severely weakened popular opinions of the monarchy, and even before the war the King and Queen had determined to improve views of the monarchy through displays of support for the public. They may have used their wartime roles to further this self-seeking goal in addition to supporting morale. While accounts of the King and Queen's wartime activities emphasize their altruism, further research into their private letters, diaries, and conversations may illuminate more depth in their motivations. Whether or not improved public perceptions of the monarchy was a goal of the wartime Royal Family, this had been achieved by 1945 and carried the Royal Family into the second half of the twentieth century on a wave of popularity.

Indeed, improved perception of the Royal Family in the wake of the Second World War is perhaps the most obvious legacy of their wartime role. Expressions of great public loyalty towards the King were highly evident in the post-war years. After the war, Mass-Observation returned to its role as a private social research group, gauging the public's attitudes towards a variety of events, government policies, and aspects of life. Upon King George's death in 1952, Mass-Observation noted an outpouring of admiration for the wartime King. One reporter noted several comments in a London train station expressing the speakers' appreciation and respect for the King. A sixty-year-old man stated that "Everyone feels this as a personal loss. Not only us. The whole world feels it . . . George VI had a great influence over the whole world . . . They are coming to the funeral from all over the world. It's a great tribute to him and it's a great tribute to us," reflecting the close association established between the King and the public.¹ A sixty-five year old woman said that she felt "Dreadful. I feel it's a very great loss for the whole nation, because he was loved so much . . . I feel as though I'd lost someone of my own. He was a greatly loved man, wasn't he?"² The public associated both the King and the Queen with their wartime devotion, years and decades after the conclusion of the war.

The early twentieth century saw the collapse of several European dynasties, yet many scholars claim that the British monarchy emerged from the Second World War stronger than ever. While the late twentieth century saw renewed criticism of the monarchy when younger members of the Royal Family faced political and public backlash for exorbitant spending, it is notable that the Queen Mother was spared criticism. This suggests public support for the Queen Mother remnant from her wartime days. While republicanism does exist in Britain in the twenty-first century, it is in the minority of public opinion. According to modern opinion polls, most

¹ Mass-Observation Archives (M-O A): Topic Collection (TC) 14/1/L Famous Persons Survey 1938-52: King George VI-his speech, death and funeral.

² Ibid.

British citizens support the monarchy either in its present state or in a scaled-down format more similar to the austerity of the wartime monarchy, suggesting that the idea of equality of sacrifice remains appealing to the public to this day.³

Today, popular discourse declares that Hitler described the Queen as “the most dangerous woman in Europe” because of her “ability to focus national loyalty around herself and the King.”⁴ While it is unknown whether Hitler actually made this comment, or the context in which he did so, the fact that it has been so embraced by the media and the public memory in the years since the Second World War signal the high acclaim that the public has bestowed upon the wartime Royal Family. The reason for this commendation is best explained through the lens of morale. At a time in which the British public experienced great challenges, the Royal Family emerged as a rallying symbol of patriotism, support, and determination. With their public duties and private activities featuring prominently in the press, their adoption of informal interactions with the public, and their constant rhetoric of determination and patriotism, the Royal Family became a unifying force within British society that helped deliver the public from the many threats to morale posed by total war.

³ March 15, 2003 YouGov Poll: “Do you think that in the next few years, the monarchy should be abolished and Britain should become a republic; slim down dramatically; or carry on as it is?” Results: 19% “be abolished,” 51% “slim down,” 27% “carry on as it is,” 2% “don’t know.”

⁴ Rosalind Brunt, “The Family Firm Restored: Newsreel Coverage of the British Monarchy 1936-45,” in *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality, and British Cinema in the Second World War*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 149.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archival Sources

Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex Special Collections: *Topic Collections, 1937-60*:

Air Raids 1939-45

Famous Persons Survey

London Survey

Political Attitudes and Behavior 1938-56

Public Opinion and Morale, 1939-42

VE Day 8 May 1945 and VJ Day 15 August 1945.

The National Archives of the United Kingdom: Public Records Office:

Cabinet Office Papers

Home Office Papers

Prime Minister's Office Papers

Newspapers

The Daily Telegraph – 1945.

The Times – 1939-1945.

Printed Sources

Bagehot, Walter. *The English Constitution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

The Council of King George's Jubilee Trust. *The Royal Family In Wartime*. London: Odhams Press Limited, 1945.

Crawford, Marion. *Little Princesses*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1950.

Harrison, Tom and Charles Madge. *Britain by Mass Observation*. London: Penguin Special, 1939.

The King and Queen with their People. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1942.

Lascelles, Sir Alan. *King's Counsellor, Abdication and War: The Diaries of Sir Alan Lascelles*. Edited by Duff Hart-Davis. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006.

Nicolson, H., *Diaries and Letters 1939-45*. Collins, 1967.

Taylor, Stephen. "Appendix: Home Morale and Public Opinion – A Review of Some Conclusions Arising out of a Year of Home Intelligence Weekly Reports." *Home Intelligence*, January 1942.

Secondary Sources

Aronson, Theo. *The Royal Family at War*. London, John Murray Ltd., 1993.

Bradford, Sarah. *The Reluctant King*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.

- Brunt, Rosalind. "The Family Firm Restored: Newsreel Coverage of the British Monarchy 1936-45." In *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality, and British Cinema in the Second World War*. Edited by Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996, 140-151.
- Calder, Angus. *The People's War; Britain, 1939-1945*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1969.
- Foley, Michael. *The Politics of the British Constitution*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.
- Cannadine, David. "Churchill and the British Monarchy." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, Vol. 11 (2001), 249-272.
- Harris, Jose. "War and Social History: Britain and the Home Front during the Second World War." *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (March 1992): 17-35.
- Hartnell, Norman. *Silver and Gold*. London: Evans Brothers, 1955
- Hitchcock, William I. *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945 to the Present*. New York: Anchor Books, 2004.
- Laird, Dorothy. *Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother*. New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1966.
- Lewis, Rebecca. "The Planning, Design and Reception of British Home Front Propaganda Posters of the Second World War." PhD diss., University of Southampton, 2004.
- Mackay, Robert. *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Marwick, Arthur. "Print, Pictures, and Sound: The Second World War and the British Experience." *Daedalus* 111(1982): 135-155.
- Marwick, Arthur. *The Home Front: The British and the Second World War*. Wallop: Bas Printers Limited, 1976.
- Morrow, Anne. *Without Equal: H.M. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother*. North Yorkshire: House of Strouse, 2000.
- Rose, Sonya O. *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Shawcross, William. *The Queen Mother*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.
- Wheeler-Bennett, John W. *King George VI: His Life and Reign*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965.