



What is a Coronation?

Slide 1 – What is a Coronation?

A coronation is the formal investiture of a monarch of their regal powers. It is a grand, celebratory event in which the monarch is presented with royal ceremonial objects, such as the Crown Jewels, and it is where the crown is physically placed atop the monarch's head, in front of thousands of very important guests. While the objects used in each monarch's coronation may have changed from time to time, the way the coronation of monarchs in England (and later Britain) has taken place has remained nearly the same for almost 1,000 years. This year, we will bear witness to the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III – the first coronation of a monarch to take place in the United Kingdom since that of the late Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. There have been quite a few kings and queens of our island, so have they all had coronations?

Slide 2 – Coronations in the United Kingdom

Before the Acts of Union in 1707, there were two royal kingdoms in Great Britain – those of England and Scotland. Although the two kingdoms had been united under the rule of a single monarch since James I and VI, who took the throne of Scotland in 1567 and of England and Ireland in 1603, there had always been, there had always been separate formal English and Scottish coronations for the reigning monarch, with different ceremonies.

English monarchs have usually held their coronation at Westminster Abbey, in London, ever since the coronation of William the Conqueror whose ceremony was on Christmas Day in the year 1066. In Scotland, the coronation traditionally took place at Scone Palace, in Perthshire, for over a thousand years and it involved a special item called the Stone of Destiny. The last monarch to have a coronation in Scotland was Charles II in the year 1651. Ever since then, most coronations of monarchs have taken place at Westminster Abbey, but what have they been like?

Slide 3 – When do Coronations happen?

The monarch of the United Kingdom officially assumes their role immediately after the reigning monarch passes away. This is known as their Accession. The coronation is a grand ceremony intended to impress and be a joyous occasion. This is why coronations take place sometime after the previous monarch passes away – it allows time to mourn with respect but also it takes a great deal of planning and organisation to make such a grand event happen. The Coronation of King Charles III will happen this year, on Saturday 6 May, almost eight months after his Accession date.

Slide 4 – The Archbishop of Canterbury

Many hundreds of guests are invited to a coronation, including royalty, nobility, high-ranking politicians or celebrated experts in their field. To be invited to a coronation means you are a very important person – you would have to be on your best behaviour and wear your finest clothes! However, it is important to remember that even though the coronation is a large celebration, it is also an incredibly solemn and important religious ceremony.

Since 1066, most of the coronations have been conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, as the most senior cleric in the Church of England. The monarch is known as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The Archbishop and other members of the clergy are required to wear their ceremonial robes while conducting the ceremony. As the last coronation of a monarch to happen in the United Kingdom was in 1953 – of Queen Elizabeth II – this will be a very momentous occasion for the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. But what will actually happen?

Slide 5 – A Grand Ceremony

Whilst no two coronations are exactly alike, within the ceremony there are a certain set of events that have taken place for nearly a thousand years, which we can use to think about the King's coronation, too. The King will be presented as monarch to the people, and will swear an oath to uphold the laws of the realm and of the Church. It is at this point that he will sit on the Coronation Chair (which includes the Scottish Stone of Destiny), he will be anointed with holy oil and dressed, or invested, with the coronation regalia before finally being officially crowned! The procession will leave Westminster Abbey and, in recent times, it has been traditional for the Royal Family to appear on the balcony of Buckingham Palace so as to be seen by the crowds of public there to congratulate and cheer. The entire event is a must-see occasion and is made all the more important because it is one of the rare times where the most precious of the Crown Jewels are taken from their secure locations and used for this special purpose.

Slide 6 – The Crown Jewels

The Crown Jewels is actually a name for a large group of ceremonial treasures, more than 100 individual items that have been created and acquired over the centuries. The Honours of Scotland, the oldest Crown Jewels in Britain, are on display at Edinburgh Castle. The Crown Jewels of England are known as the Crown Jewels of the United Kingdom and are kept in the Tower of London. In the seventeenth century, the English Crown Jewels were seized by Oliver Cromwell's forces and were either sold or destroyed, but when Charles II was reinstated as the monarch, he had an almost entirely new set made for his coronation in 1661 and these have been used ever since. It is this set of items, the Crown Jewels of the United Kingdom,

that are used during the coronation of a British monarch today, and they feature what is known as the Coronation Regalia.

The Regalia features many items including robes, a spoon and a sword but perhaps the most famous are the Sceptre, the Orb, and two different crowns.

- The Sovereign's Sceptre is particularly special as it features the largest colourless cut diamond in the world – the Cullinan I.
- The Sovereign's Orb is a golden globe with a cross at its top. The cross symbolises that the monarch's power comes from God.
- St Edward's Crown is considered the most sacred of the crowns, only being used at the specific moment of crowning itself. It is adorned with various semi-precious stones and the solid gold frame weight around 2.2kg – that's almost two bags of sugar!
- The Imperial State Crown is worn by the monarch as they leave Westminster Abbey after their coronation. This crown is also used on other important state occasions such as the annual State Opening of Parliament. It is this crown that features some of the most famous gemstones in the Royal Collection such as the Black Prince's Ruby, the Stuart Sapphire and the Cullinan II Diamond.

Slide 7 – Coronation Portraits

It has always been recognised as important that the monarch's people can be a part of their Head of State's coronation but, unfortunately, most of us are not lucky enough to get an invite! Before the internet, television or even photography, people relied on paintings to capture moments in history and many monarchs have chosen to have a portrait painted showing their coronation. Some paintings are made depicting the act of the coronation taking place, but often this is a portrait depicting the monarch in coronation dress and with their regalia. Now, in the times of instant photography and global television, we do not rely on artwork to tell our stories as much, but it was Queen Elizabeth II who took that first step into making the coronation a truly accessible event for all.

Slide 8 – The First Televised Coronation

On Tuesday 2 June 1953, the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II took place. The previous coronation had been that of her father, King George VI in 1937. Much had changed in the years between these events and, with advancements in technology, Queen Elizabeth II decided it should be allowed for her coronation to be televised live by the BBC. This would be the first time television cameras had been allowed inside Westminster Abbey and it was to be the first major world event to be broadcast internationally. Not only was it to be the first international broadcast but, across Europe, residents of several countries were actually able to watch the event live! To make sure the people of Canada could see the event on the same day, members of the RAF flew BBC recordings across the Atlantic Ocean to be broadcast by the CBC. Recordings were also flown to the USA and Australia but with a slightly longer delay! Not everyone had access to a television at the time and so great 'watch parties' sprung

up around the country, and many people even rented a television just for the event. The worldwide audience for the 1953 Coronation was estimated to be 277 million.

Slide 9 – King Charles III

On Saturday 6 May 2023, the first coronation of a British monarch since the year 1953 will occur when King Charles III is crowned at Westminster Abbey. At the age of 74, he became the oldest British monarch to accede to the throne on 8 September 2022. For most of us, this is first change of a monarch any of us have experienced in our lives. Many changes occur when the crown is passed on – especially in the UK! The King's image will be added to our coins, our banknotes and a new royal cypher for the King must be designed and embossed on post boxes, flags, uniforms and so much more. Have you seen the King's royal cypher? Every monarch in history has had one to identify items from their kingdom and their reign.

Slide 10 – A Cause for Celebration!

Although Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation was televised, only the few could view it in colour, for most it was in black and white. So, with the advances in technology since 1953, with the internet, with mobile phones and streaming services, drone cameras, top-quality audio recording equipment and so much more, the Coronation of King Charles III is going to be unlike any before it in the history of the world. The world will be watching, in real time, as the new king is crowned. So, wherever you are, try to make note of this occasion in some way, to hold on to history and say you were there!

If you could design The King's coronation robe, what would it look like? How do you think an invitation to the Coronation would look? What about your very own royal cypher? Would it look anything like King Charles III's? Check out our Coronation 2023 resources and celebrate the Coronation in your own way!

