

For today's 'On this day' email, we go back almost 85 years, to May 12 1937. May 12 1937 was the date King George VI was crowned King. So why should we bother taking up an 'On this day' email talking about that? Well, this coronation was unusual because it was never meant to happen. On 20 January 1936, KING GEORGE V - the grandson of the great QUEEN VICTORIA (who we will definitely talk about some time) - died. The traditional cry went up 'The King is dead, long live the King!'



The king they were wishing long life to was KING EDWARD VIII, the eldest son of King George V and the heir to the throne when King George V died. The man who would become King George VI was Edward VIII's brother, Albert. (When someone becomes King or Queen, they don't need to keep the name they were born with. So it's not a sure thing that when the current Queen dies, that her eldest son will become King Charles III. It may be he will go for a different name entirely. What name do you think he will go for, if he does?) So King Edward VIII automatically became King after King George V died - but Edward VIII still had to be crowned King, in a big coronation ceremony which leaders from all over the world would attend. And that took some time to organise. And while people started organising the coronation, other people started to wonder whether it would be possible for Edward VIII to carry on being King of England. You see, Edward VIII had fallen in love with an American woman called WALLIS SIMPSON. There's nothing wrong with that, that's wonderful - but people had a problem with the fact that Wallis Simpson had divorced her first husband, and was still married to her second husband while she was going out with Edward VIII. She told Edward VIII that she would divorce her second husband, and Edward VIII said, 'That's great - then we can get married.' But when Edward VIII told the Prime Minister, STANLEY BALDWIN, about his plans, Baldwin said, 'I don't think you can get married in church to someone who has been divorced twice, and I don't think the British people will accept you being married in any way, shape or form to someone like Wallis Simpson.' So Edward VIII was faced with a choice - stop being King, or stop your relationship with Wallis Simpson. And he chose the first - on 10 December 1936, he ABDICATED as King, so that he could stay with Wallis Simpson. And Edward VIII's brother Albert was next in line to the throne - and that's how Albert ended up being crowned as King George VI on May 12 1937.



What came to be known as the ABDICATION CRISIS had a number of effects. The first was that it put on the throne the monarch who would end up helping to lead Britain through WORLD WAR II. If Edward VIII had stayed King, it's not clear he would have done as good a job as George VI of leading the nation through such a terrible time. In fact, it's not clear Edward VIII would have approved of Britain fighting so hard to defeat Germany as it seems he quite liked ADOLF HITLER. So if Edward VIII had stayed King, he might well have appointed LORD HALIFAX rather than WINSTON CHURCHILL to be Prime Minister

when NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN resigned as Prime Minister - and that might have resulted in Britain losing World War II, and coming under German rule.

The second effect of the Abdication Crisis was that Edward VIII's brother Albert was thrown into a hugely stressful and important role when he had thought all his life that he would have a quiet life as the younger brother of the King (a bit like Prince Andrew with Prince Charles at the moment). King George VI died in 1952, and his wife - the mother of our current Queen, and who was therefore known as the QUEEN MOTHER - thought that his life had been shortened because of the stress of being King. As a result, the Queen Mother always hated Wallis Simpson (who died in 1986), and blamed her for bringing about the crisis that made her husband King and, in her view, shortened his life.

The third effect of the abdication crisis was that when King George VI died, his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, became QUEEN ELIZABETH II - and she is still our Queen to this day. Had Edward VIII not abdicated, he would have stayed King until 1972, which is when he died. It's highly unlikely he would have had any children, and so Elizabeth would still have become Queen, because she would be next in line to the throne as the eldest daughter of King Edward VIII's younger brother (who would probably have been dead by 1972). But she would have become Queen in 1972, not 1952. So she would have had 20 years where she could enjoy herself and not worry about being Queen, and would have become Queen at the age of 46 rather than 26. How different would her life have been then?

One thing that King George VI had to learn to do when he became King was how to give a speech. He suffered from a bad stammer that stopped him speaking very well in public. This became very important during World War II when King George VI had to give speeches over the radio to help encourage the nation through the terrible suffering of wartime. A film was made about the speech lessons that King George VI had to help him overcome his stammer - it's called THE KING'S SPEECH, and you could watch it with no problems. It's very good - it won four Oscars, including for Best Picture and Best Leading Actor. This is a clip towards the end, showing King George VI making his speech to the nation after war had been declared on Germany:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPLIw64rLJc>

A very powerful scene – see if you can spot in it the young Princess Elizabeth (now our Queen), Winston Churchill, and the former Edward VIII and his wife Wallis Simpson.