



THE COMPLETE SERIES

# Monarchy

*with David Starkey*

A VIEWER'S GUIDE

Athenä:

## THE POWERS BEHIND THE THRONE

### The “little people” with big political clout

Like any 21st-century celebrity or CEO, English monarchs had entourages—small armies of personal assistants who saw to every royal need. Even the earliest kings kept huntsmen, falconers, grooms for the horses, stewards, and servants for their private chambers. By the late Tudor period, however, as the realm expanded and the number of royal residences multiplied, the monarch’s personal staff grew to between 1,000 and 1,250 people. These household employees constituted the core of the royal court. And, although their duties might seem menial now, they wielded extraordinary power and exerted political influence far beyond their job descriptions.

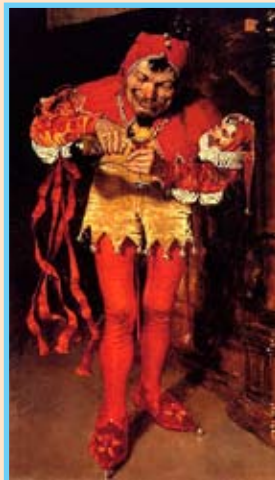
The organization of the royal household changed through the centuries, but generally it was divided along functional lines: staffers who attended kings and queens in their private and public chambers, kitchen workers and other housekeepers, and people in charge of transportation. Each of these areas had its own pecking order. In the chambers, for example, seamstresses, laundresses, musicians, and messengers did the grunt work. Above them came more skilled positions, such as jewelers, apothecaries, surgeons, clerks, music masters, and librarians. At the top of the hierarchy sat trusted nobles personally chosen by the monarch to perform the most intimate and important tasks. These peers were more than mere employees; they were friends and confidants who had direct contact with monarchs in their most private moments.



*The Chocolate Girl*, Jean-Étienne Liotard, 1744

The lord chamberlain took orders directly from the monarch; he managed all the ushers, pages, messengers, and other staff and arranged court entertainments. The groom of the stool originally emptied the king's chamber pot and attended to his personal hygiene; eventually, this position evolved into the groom of the *stole*, referring to the elaborate, fur-trimmed cloaks worn by kings and queens. By the 18th century, the groom of the stole carried a gold key giving access to every room in the royal residence, including the monarch's private chambers, gardens, and galleries.

The keeper of the robes dressed the monarchs and managed their clothing. For queens, this involved an elaborate array of undergarments, hoops, gowns, gloves, shoes, and handkerchiefs. Fanny Burney, the 18th-century novelist and playwright who served as Queen Charlotte's keeper of the robes during the reign of George III, left a detailed account of her duties. The queen



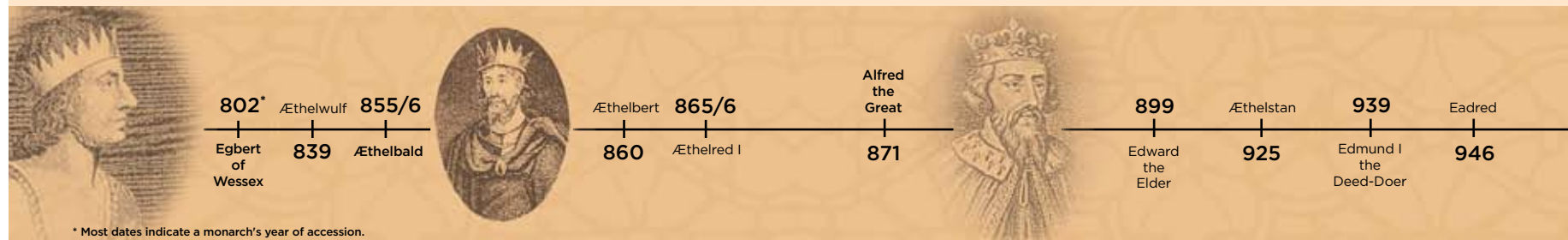
"Keying Up" - *The Court Jester*, William Merritt Chase, 1875

would ring a bell to summon Burney to the bedchamber, where a maid of honor would hand her an article of clothing. Burney would then put it on the queen. Formal dining involved a similar chain of custody. If the queen wanted a glass of water, a page poured it and passed it to a bedchamber woman, who in turn gave it to a lady-in-waiting, who finally handed it to the queen. And a lady-in-waiting always stood by with a napkin to cover the queen's mouth in case she had to spit.

For performing such services, nobles received room and board in the palace, plus modest annual salaries that varied according to the sovereign's circumstances. They might also supplement their salaries with gifts from the royal family or from patrons seeking to curry favor with the monarch. But the real payoff came in power. Sir Walter Raleigh once compared



"The Knights of Christ," detail from the *Ghent Altarpiece* by Jan van Eyck, 1432



\* Most dates indicate a monarch's year of accession.

ladies-in-waiting to witches, saying “they could do hurt, but they could do no good.” In fact, household personnel exerted considerable influence simply by controlling access to the monarch. Before the time of Queen Victoria, palace security was quite lax by modern standards; well-dressed persons could enter the public rooms with relative ease. However, obtaining an audience with the monarch proved far more difficult. Intercession from an attendant of the king or queen could open doors that would otherwise remain firmly closed to petitioners.

Sometimes, members of the entourage exercised power more directly. For example, Henry VIII used his gentlemen of the privy chamber as direct envoys, both at home and abroad. Under his reign, the term “privy chamber” came to stand for the king himself, just as “the White House” stands for the president today. Monarchs appreciated these nobles for their opinions as well as their services, and they were rewarded accordingly. In a court, power emanated from the throne just like heat from a fire; those closest to the source enjoyed the greatest warmth.

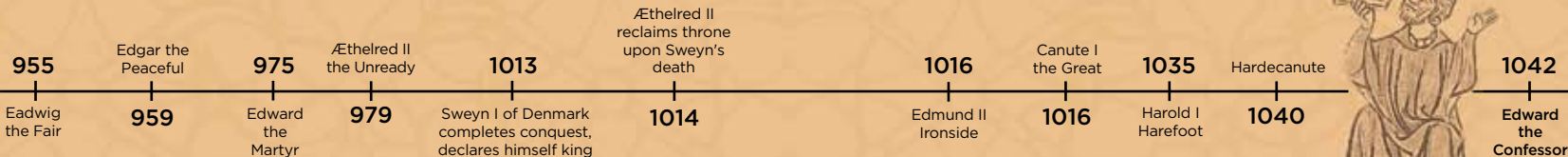
## IF WESTMINSTER'S WALLS COULD TALK

### Site of royal coronations for nearly a millennium

Ceremonially speaking, royal rule in England begins and ends at Westminster Abbey. Every monarch since William the Conqueror has been crowned in this ancient church, with two exceptions: Edward V, who was likely murdered as a youth, and Edward VIII, who abdicated before his coronation. The abbey also contains the tombs of more English kings and queens than any other place. Within Westminster’s walls, politics and spirituality intersect. Symbolically, the nation requests divine sanction for monarchs at the beginning of their reigns and in death at the end. It’s no wonder that the place has become such a potent symbol of the Crown.



Westminster Abbey



Edward the Confessor built the abbey on the site of an even more ancient church. Consecrated in 1065, it has undergone many reconstructions, revisions, and renovations since then. Most notably, Henry III rebuilt it in the Gothic style in the 13th century, Henry VII added the magnificent fan-vaulted chapel in the 16th century, and George II erected its two distinctive towers in the 18th century. Henry VIII evicted the resident monks in 1540 when he took over church properties. Today, Westminster operates as a “royal peculiar,” meaning its dean answers only to the reigning monarch, not a bishop.

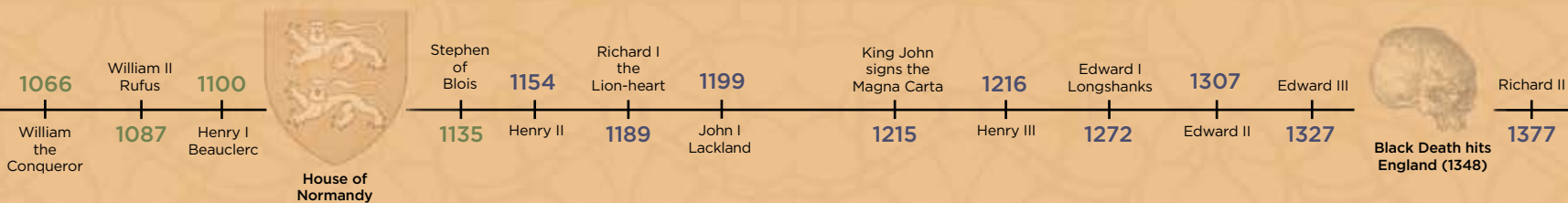
Like the building, coronation rites at Westminster Abbey developed over the centuries. Edward I commissioned the coronation chair to hold the Stone of Scone, the traditional seat for crowning Scottish kings, after he took it from Scotland in 1296. Since then, almost every English monarch



Stone of Scone in the Coronation Chair at Westminster Abbey, 1855

has been crowned upon it. In 1689, a second chair was made for the joint coronation of William III and Mary II. The ceremony, meanwhile, was conducted in Latin—the official language of the church—from the Middle Ages until James I’s 1603 coronation, which was entirely in English. (Elizabeth I employed a mix of English and Latin in 1559, reflecting the ongoing transition from Catholic to Protestant worship.) And while Frederic Handel’s arrangement of the coronation anthem “Zadok the Priest” has carried over from George II’s 1727 ceremony, the hymn’s lyrics have featured at every coronation since King Edgar’s in 973.

Occasionally, a gaffe interrupts the pomp and circumstance, revealing a human being underneath the royal robes. After the traditional anointing—an English coronation rite that dates back at least to Ecgfrith, the son of King Offa of Mercia, in 787—Elizabeth I complained that the oil smelled bad. At Victoria’s coronation in 1838, the archbishop of Canterbury jammed the royal ring onto the wrong finger, bringing the proceedings to a halt (and hurting the queen) while he transferred it to the proper one. For pathetic public spectacles, though, nobody can match Queen Caroline, who tried to crash the coronation of her estranged husband, George IV, in 1821. She caused quite a scene when she struggled to push past the door guards. They finally turned her away in tears.



Seventeen English and British monarchs lie entombed in Westminster Abbey, from Edward the Confessor to George II. Other notables buried there include Geoffrey Chaucer, Isaac Newton, and Charles Darwin. But one of the most famous graves is anonymous: the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, dedicated in 1920. The idea caught on, and Britain's memorial became a model for similar ones around the world. Its inscription reads, "They buried him among the kings because he had done good toward God and toward his house." So Britain's nameless defender rests in Westminster Abbey, where so many of the realm's most prominent persons are interred.



Geoffrey Chaucer

## ROYAL TRIVIA

### The Oil of St. Thomas

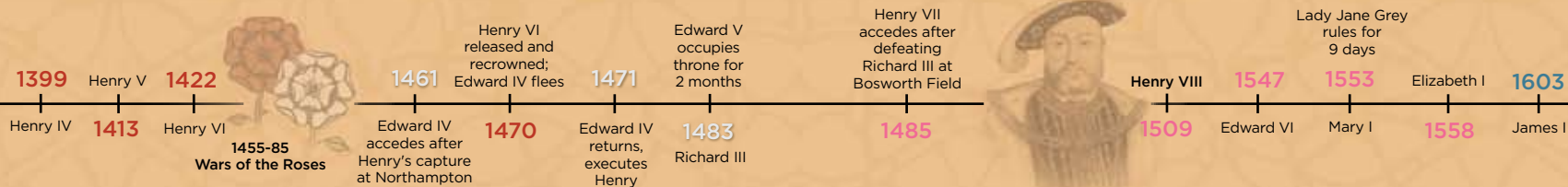
Legend has it that the Virgin Mary presented Thomas à Becket with a vial of oil with which to anoint English monarchs. When Richard II "rediscovered" the vial in the Tower of London more than two centuries after Becket's death, he tried to mount a second coronation for himself to use it. The archbishop of Canterbury refused. But Richard's successor, Henry IV (who needed all the help he could get to legitimize his kingship), was anointed with the supposedly mystical oil—as were his successors through Richard III.



"St. Thomas and the Men of Strood," detail from *St. Thomas Altarpiece* by Meister Francke, 1436

### The Royal Touch

According to a tradition dating back at least to Henry II, English monarchs could cure certain maladies—including epilepsy and scrofula (a.k.a. the "king's evil," a disfiguring form of tuberculosis infecting the lymph nodes)—simply by a laying on of hands. Belief in the "royal touch" persisted to the time of Queen Anne.







Tower of London

### Royal Prisoners

Besides the Two Princes (presumably murdered by Richard III’s henchmen), several reigning, deposed, or future monarchs spent time incarcerated in the Tower of London, including Henry VI (1465-70, 1471), Anne Boleyn (1536), Catherine Howard (1542), Lady Jane Grey (1553-54), and Elizabeth I (1554, during her sister’s reign).



*The Young Queen Victoria*, Franz Xaver Winterhalter, 1842

### Victoria’s Double Play

Queen Victoria is the only British monarch to sit twice in Edward I’s coronation chair—once when she was crowned in 1838 and again at her Golden Jubilee in 1887.

### Enter the Prince

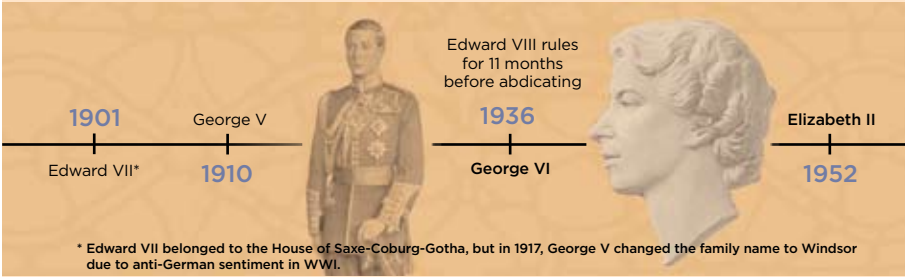
To formalize the English conquest of Wales, in 1301 Edward I began the practice of conferring the title “Prince of Wales” on the eldest surviving son and heir to the throne. Traditionally, the monarch’s second-eldest son is styled the Duke of York.



Imperial State Crown

### The Symbol of the Monarchy

Coronation ceremonies generally use St. Edward’s Crown. Dating from the 1661 coronation of Charles II, it’s composed of fragments from an earlier version, destroyed by parliamentary order in 1649. Since it weighs nearly five pounds, monarchs usually don the lighter Imperial State Crown for ceremonial occasions, such as the opening of Parliament.



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