

= George VI =

George VI ( Albert Frederick Arthur George ; 14 December 1895 ? 6 February 1952 ) was King of the United Kingdom and the Dominions of the British Commonwealth from 11 December 1936 until his death . He was the last Emperor of India and the first Head of the Commonwealth .

Known as Albert until his accession , George VI was born in the reign of his great @-@ grandmother Queen Victoria , and was named after his great @-@ grandfather Albert , Prince Consort . As the second son of King George V , he was not expected to inherit the throne and spent his early life in the shadow of his elder brother , Edward . He attended naval college as a teenager , and served in the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force during the First World War . In 1920 , he was made Duke of York . He married Lady Elizabeth Bowes @-@ Lyon in 1923 and they had two daughters , Elizabeth and Margaret . In the mid @-@ 1920s , he had speech therapy for a stammer , which he never fully overcame .

George 's elder brother ascended the throne as Edward VIII upon the death of their father in 1936 . However , later that year Edward revealed his desire to marry the divorced American socialite Wallis Simpson . British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin advised Edward that for political and religious reasons he could not marry a divorced woman and remain king . Edward abdicated in order to marry , and George ascended the throne as the third monarch of the House of Windsor .

During George 's reign the break @-@ up of the British Empire and its transition into the Commonwealth of Nations accelerated . The parliament of the Irish Free State removed direct mention of the monarch from the country 's constitution on the day of his accession . The following year , a new Irish constitution changed the name of the state to Ireland and established the office of President . From 1939 , the Empire and Commonwealth ? except Ireland ? was at war with Nazi Germany . War with Italy and Japan followed in 1940 and 1941 , respectively . Though Britain and its allies were ultimately victorious in 1945 , the United States and the Soviet Union rose as pre @-@ eminent world powers and the British Empire declined . After the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947 , George remained king of both countries , but the title Emperor of India was abandoned in June 1948 . Ireland formally declared itself a republic and left the Commonwealth in 1949 , and India became a republic within the Commonwealth the following year . George adopted the new title of Head of the Commonwealth . He was beset by health problems in the later years of his reign . He was succeeded by his elder daughter , Elizabeth .

= = Early life = =

George VI was born at York Cottage , on the Sandringham Estate in Norfolk , during the reign of his great @-@ grandmother Queen Victoria . His father was Prince George , Duke of York ( later King George V ) , the second and eldest @-@ surviving son of the Prince and Princess of Wales ( later King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra ) . His mother was the Duchess of York ( later Queen Mary ) , the eldest child and only daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Teck .

His birthday ( 14 December 1895 ) was the 34th anniversary of the death of his great @-@ grandfather , Prince Albert , the Prince Consort . Uncertain of how the Prince Consort 's widow , Queen Victoria , would take the news of the birth , the Prince of Wales wrote to the Duke of York that the Queen had been " rather distressed " . Two days later , he wrote again : " I really think it would gratify her if you yourself proposed the name Albert to her " . Queen Victoria was mollified by the proposal to name the new baby Albert , and wrote to the Duchess of York : " I am all impatience to see the new one , born on such a sad day but rather more dear to me , especially as he will be called by that dear name which is a byword for all that is great and good " . Consequently , he was baptised " Albert Frederick Arthur George " at St. Mary Magdalene 's Church near Sandringham three months later . As a great @-@ grandson of Queen Victoria , he was known formally as His Highness Prince Albert of York from birth . Within the family , he was known informally as " Bertie " . His maternal grandmother , the Duchess of Teck , did not like the first name the baby had been given , and she wrote prophetically that she hoped the last name " may supplant the less favoured one " .

Albert was fourth in line to the throne at birth , after his grandfather , father and elder brother , Edward . In 1898 , Queen Victoria issued Letters Patent that granted the children of the eldest son of the Prince of Wales the style Royal Highness , and at the age of two , Albert became His Royal Highness Prince Albert of York .

He often suffered from ill health and was described as " easily frightened and somewhat prone to tears " . His parents were generally removed from their children 's day @-@ to @-@ day upbringing , as was the norm in aristocratic families of that era . He had a stammer that lasted for many years , and was forced to write with his right hand although he was naturally left @-@ handed . He suffered from chronic stomach problems as well as knock knees , for which he was forced to wear painful corrective splints .

Queen Victoria died on 22 January 1901 , and the Prince of Wales succeeded her as King Edward VII . Prince Albert moved up to third in line to the throne , after his father and elder brother .

= = Military career and education = =

From 1909 , Albert attended the Royal Naval College , Osborne , as a naval cadet . In 1911 , he came bottom of the class in the final examination , but despite this he progressed to the Royal Naval College , Dartmouth . When his grandfather , Edward VII , died in 1910 , Albert 's father became King George V. Prince Edward was created Prince of Wales , and Albert was second in line to the throne .

Albert spent the first six months of 1913 on the training ship HMS Cumberland in the West Indies and on the east coast of Canada . He was rated as a midshipman aboard HMS Collingwood on 15 September 1913 , and spent three months in the Mediterranean . His fellow officers gave him the nickname " Mr. Johnson " . One year after his commission , he began service in the First World War . He was mentioned in despatches for his action as a turret officer aboard Collingwood in the Battle of Jutland ( 31 May ? 1 June 1916 ) , an indecisive engagement with the German navy that was the largest naval action of the war . He did not see further combat , largely because of ill health caused by a duodenal ulcer , for which he had an operation in November 1917 .

In February 1918 , he was appointed Officer in Charge of Boys at the Royal Naval Air Service 's training establishment at Cranwell . With the establishment of the Royal Air Force two months later and the reassignment of Cranwell from Admiralty to Air Ministry responsibility , Albert transferred from the Royal Navy to the Royal Air Force . He was appointed Officer Commanding Number 4 Squadron of the Boys ' Wing at Cranwell until August 1918 , before reporting to the RAF 's Cadet School at St Leonards @-@ on @-@ Sea where he completed a fortnight 's training and took command of a squadron on the Cadet Wing . He was the first member of the royal family to be certified as a fully qualified pilot .

Albert was greatly desirous of serving on the Continent while the war was still in progress and was very pleased to be posted to General Trenchard 's staff . On 23 October he flew across the Channel to Autigny . For the closing weeks of the war , he served on the staff of the RAF 's Independent Air Force at its headquarters in Nancy , France . Following the disbanding of the Independent Air Force in November 1918 , he remained on the Continent for two months as a staff officer with the Royal Air Force until posted back to Britain . He accompanied the Belgian monarch King Albert on his triumphal reentry into Brussels on 22 November . Prince Albert qualified as an RAF pilot on 31 July 1919 and gained a promotion to squadron leader on the following day .

In October 1919 , Albert went up to Trinity College , Cambridge , where he studied history , economics and civics for a year , with the historian R. V. Laurence as his " official mentor " . On 4 June 1920 , he was created Duke of York , Earl of Inverness and Baron Killarney . He began to take on more royal duties . He represented his father , and toured coal mines , factories , and railyards . Through such visits he acquired the nickname of the " Industrial Prince " . His stammer , and his embarrassment over it , together with his tendency to shyness , caused him to appear much less impressive than his older brother , Edward . However , he was physically active and enjoyed playing tennis . He played at Wimbledon in the Men 's Doubles with Louis Greig in 1926 , losing in the first round . He developed an interest in working conditions , and was President of the Industrial Welfare

Society . His series of annual summer camps for boys between 1921 and 1939 brought together boys from different social backgrounds .

= = Marriage = =

In a time when royals were expected to marry fellow royals , it was unusual that Albert had a great deal of freedom in choosing a prospective wife . An infatuation with the already @-@ married Australian socialite Sheila , Lady Loughborough , came to an end in April 1920 when the King , with the promise of the dukedom of York , persuaded Albert to stop seeing her . That year , he met for the first time since childhood Lady Elizabeth Bowes @-@ Lyon , the youngest daughter of the Earl and Countess of Strathmore and Kinghorne . He became determined to marry her . She rejected his proposal twice , in 1921 and 1922 , reportedly because she was reluctant to make the sacrifices necessary to become a member of the royal family . In the words of Lady Elizabeth 's mother , Albert would be " made or marred " by his choice of wife . After a protracted courtship , Elizabeth agreed to marry him .

They were married on 26 April 1923 in Westminster Abbey . Albert 's marriage to someone not of royal birth was considered a modernising gesture . The newly formed British Broadcasting Company wished to record and broadcast the event on radio , but the Abbey Chapter vetoed the idea ( although the Dean , Herbert Edward Ryle , was in favour ) . Lady Elizabeth was styled " Her Royal Highness The Duchess of York " after their marriage .

From December 1924 to April 1925 , the Duke and Duchess toured Kenya , Uganda , and the Sudan , travelling via the Suez Canal and Aden . During the trip , they both went big game hunting .

Because of his stammer , Albert dreaded public speaking . After his closing speech at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley on 31 October 1925 , one which was an ordeal for both him and his listeners , he began to see Lionel Logue , an Australian @-@ born speech therapist . The Duke and Logue practised breathing exercises , and the Duchess rehearsed with him patiently . Subsequently , he was able to speak with less hesitation . With his delivery improved , the Duke opened the new Parliament House in Canberra , Australia , during a tour of the empire in 1927 . His journey by sea to Australia , New Zealand and Fiji took him via Jamaica , where Albert played doubles tennis partnered with a black man , which was unusual at the time and taken locally as a display of equality between races .

The Duke and Duchess of York had two children : Elizabeth ( called " Lilibet " by the family ) , and Margaret . The Duke and Duchess and their two daughters lived a relatively sheltered life at their London residence , 145 Piccadilly . They were a close and loving family . One of the few stirs arose when the Canadian Prime Minister , R. B. Bennett , considered the Duke for Governor General of Canada in 1931 ? a proposal that King George V rejected on the advice of the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs , J. H. Thomas .

= = Reluctant king = =

King George V had severe reservations about Prince Edward , saying , " I pray God that my eldest son will never marry and that nothing will come between Bertie and Lilibet and the throne . " On 20 January 1936 , George V died and Edward ascended the throne as King Edward VIII . In the Vigil of the Princes , Prince Albert and his three brothers took a shift standing guard over their father 's body as it lay in state , in a closed casket , in Westminster Hall .

As Edward was unmarried and had no children , Albert was the heir presumptive to the throne . Less than a year later , on 11 December 1936 , Edward abdicated in order to marry his mistress , Wallis Simpson , who was divorced from her first husband and divorcing her second . Edward had been advised by British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin that he could not remain king and marry a divorced woman with two living ex @-@ husbands . Edward chose abdication in preference to abandoning his marriage plans . Thus Albert became king , a position he was reluctant to accept . The day before the abdication , he went to London to see his mother , Queen Mary . He wrote in his diary , " When I told her what had happened , I broke down and sobbed like a child . "

On the day of the abdication , the Oireachtas , the parliament of the Irish Free State , removed all direct mention of the monarch from the Irish constitution . The next day , it passed the External Relations Act , which gave the monarch limited authority ( strictly on the advice of the government ) to appoint diplomatic representatives for Ireland and to be involved in the making of foreign treaties . The two acts made the Irish Free State a republic in essence without removing its links to the Commonwealth .

Courtier and journalist Dermot Morrah alleged that there was brief speculation as to the desirability of bypassing Albert ( and his children ) and his brother , Prince Henry , Duke of Gloucester , in favour of their younger brother Prince George , Duke of Kent . This seems to have been suggested on the grounds that Prince George was at that time the only brother with a son .

= = Early reign = =

Albert assumed the regnal name " George VI " to emphasise continuity with his father and restore confidence in the monarchy . The beginning of George VI 's reign was taken up by questions surrounding his predecessor and brother , whose titles , style and position were uncertain . He had been introduced as " His Royal Highness Prince Edward " for the abdication broadcast , but George VI felt that by abdicating and renouncing the succession Edward had lost the right to bear royal titles , including " Royal Highness " . In settling the issue , George 's first act as king was to confer upon his brother the title and style " His Royal Highness The Duke of Windsor " , but the Letters Patent creating the dukedom prevented any wife or children from bearing royal styles . George VI was also forced to buy from Edward the royal residences of Balmoral Castle and Sandringham House , as these were private properties and did not pass to George VI automatically . Three days after his accession , on his 41st birthday , he invested his wife , the new queen consort , with the Order of the Garter .

George VI 's coronation took place on 12 May 1937 , the date previously intended for Edward 's coronation . In a break with tradition , Queen Mary attended the ceremony in a show of support for her son . There was no Durbar held in Delhi for George VI , as had occurred for his father , as the cost would have been a burden to the government of India . Rising Indian nationalism made the welcome that the royal couple would have received likely to be muted at best , and a prolonged absence from Britain would have been undesirable in the tense period before the Second World War . Two overseas tours were undertaken , to France and to North America , both of which promised greater strategic advantages in the event of war .

The growing likelihood of war in Europe dominated the early reign of George VI . The King was constitutionally bound to support Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain 's appeasement of Hitler . However , when the King and Queen greeted Chamberlain on his return from negotiating the Munich Agreement in 1938 , they invited him to appear on the balcony of Buckingham Palace with them . This public association of the monarchy with a politician was exceptional , as balcony appearances were traditionally restricted to the royal family . While broadly popular among the general public , Chamberlain 's policy towards Hitler was the subject of some opposition in the House of Commons , which led historian John Grigg to describe the King 's behaviour in associating himself so prominently with a politician as " the most unconstitutional act by a British sovereign in the present century " .

In May and June 1939 , the King and Queen toured Canada and the United States . From Ottawa , the royal couple were accompanied throughout by Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King , to present themselves in North America as King and Queen of Canada . George was the first reigning monarch of Canada to visit North America , although he had been to Canada previously as Prince Albert and as Duke of York . Both Governor General of Canada Lord Tweedsmuir and Mackenzie King hoped that the King 's presence in Canada would demonstrate the principles of the Statute of Westminster 1931 , which gave full sovereignty to the British Dominions . On 19 May , George VI personally accepted and approved the Letter of Credence of the new U.S. Ambassador to Canada , Daniel Calhoun Roper ; gave Royal Assent to nine parliamentary bills ; and ratified two international treaties with the Great Seal of Canada . The official royal tour historian , Gustave

Lanctot , wrote " the Statute of Westminster had assumed full reality " and George gave a speech emphasising " the free and equal association of the nations of the Commonwealth " .

The trip was intended to soften the strong isolationist tendencies among the North American public with regard to the developing tensions in Europe . Although the aim of the tour was mainly political , to shore up Atlantic support for the United Kingdom in any future war , the King and Queen were enthusiastically received by the public . The fear that George would be compared unfavourably to his predecessor , Edward VIII , was dispelled . They visited the 1939 New York World 's Fair and stayed with President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House and at his private estate at Hyde Park , New York . A strong bond of friendship was forged between the King and Queen and the President during the tour , which had major significance in the relations between the United States and the United Kingdom through the ensuing war years .

= = Second World War = =

In September 1939 , Britain and the self @-@ governing Dominions , but not Ireland , declared war on Nazi Germany . George VI and his wife resolved to stay in London , despite German bombing raids . They officially stayed in Buckingham Palace throughout the war , although they usually spent nights at Windsor Castle . The first German raid on London , on 7 September 1940 , killed about one thousand civilians , mostly in the East End . On 13 September , the King and Queen narrowly avoided death when two German bombs exploded in a courtyard at Buckingham Palace while they were there . In defiance , the Queen famously declared : " I am glad we have been bombed . It makes me feel we can look the East End in the face " . The royal family were portrayed as sharing the same dangers and deprivations as the rest of the country . They were subject to rationing restrictions , and U.S. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt remarked on the rationed food served and the limited bathwater that was permitted during a stay at the unheated and boarded @-@ up Palace . In August 1942 , the King 's brother , Prince George , Duke of Kent , was killed on active service .

In 1940 , Winston Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister , though personally George would have preferred to appoint Lord Halifax . After the King 's initial dismay over Churchill 's appointment of Lord Beaverbrook to the Cabinet , he and Churchill developed " the closest personal relationship in modern British history between a monarch and a Prime Minister " . Every Tuesday for four and a half years from September 1940 , the two men met privately for lunch to discuss the war in secret and with frankness .

Throughout the war , the King and Queen provided morale @-@ boosting visits throughout the United Kingdom , visiting bomb sites , munitions factories , and troops . The King visited military forces abroad in France in December 1939 , North Africa and Malta in June 1943 , Normandy in June 1944 , southern Italy in July 1944 , and the Low Countries in October 1944 . Their high public profile and apparently indefatigable determination secured their place as symbols of national resistance . At a social function in 1944 , Chief of the Imperial General Staff Sir Alan Brooke , revealed that every time he met Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery he thought he was after his job . The King replied : " You should worry , when I meet him , I always think he 's after mine ! " .

In 1945 , crowds shouted " We want the King ! " in front of Buckingham Palace during the Victory in Europe Day celebrations . In an echo of Chamberlain 's appearance , the King invited Churchill to appear with the royal family on the balcony to public acclaim .

In January 1946 , George addressed the United Nations at their first assembly , which was held in London , and reaffirmed " our faith in the equal rights of men and women and of nations great and small " .

= = Empire to Commonwealth = =

George VI 's reign saw the acceleration of the dissolution of the British Empire . The Statute of Westminster 1931 had already acknowledged the evolution of the Dominions into separate sovereign states . The process of transformation from an empire to a voluntary association of independent states , known as the Commonwealth , gathered pace after the Second World War .

During the ministry of Clement Attlee , British India became the two independent dominions of India and Pakistan in 1947 . George relinquished the title of Emperor of India , and became King of India and King of Pakistan instead . In 1950 he ceased to be King of India when it became a republic within the Commonwealth of Nations , but he remained King of Pakistan until his death and India recognised his new title of Head of the Commonwealth . Other countries left the Commonwealth , such as Burma in January 1948 , Palestine ( divided between Israel and the Arab states ) in May 1948 and the Republic of Ireland in 1949 .

In 1947 , the King and his family toured Southern Africa . The Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa , Jan Smuts , was facing an election and hoped to make political capital out of the visit . George was appalled , however , when instructed by the South African government to shake hands only with whites , and referred to his South African bodyguards as " the Gestapo " . Despite the tour , Smuts lost the election the following year , and the new government instituted a strict policy of racial segregation .

= = Illness and death = =

The stress of the war had taken its toll on the King 's health , exacerbated by his heavy smoking and subsequent development of lung cancer among other ailments , including arteriosclerosis and thromboangiitis obliterans . A planned tour of Australia and New Zealand was postponed after the King suffered an arterial blockage in his right leg , which threatened the loss of the leg and was treated with a right lumbar sympathectomy in March 1949 . His elder daughter Elizabeth , the heir presumptive , took on more royal duties as her father 's health deteriorated . The delayed tour was re @-@ organised , with Elizabeth and her husband , the Duke of Edinburgh , taking the place of the King and Queen . The King was well enough to open the Festival of Britain in May 1951 , but on 23 September 1951 , his left lung was removed by Clement Price Thomas after a malignant tumour was found . In October 1951 , Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh went on a month @-@ long tour of Canada ; the trip had been delayed for a week due to the King 's illness . At the State Opening of Parliament in November , the King 's speech from the throne was read for him by the Lord Chancellor , Lord Simonds . His Christmas broadcast of 1951 was recorded in sections , and then edited together .

On 31 January 1952 , despite advice from those close to him , the King went to London Airport to see off Princess Elizabeth , who was going on her tour of Australia via Kenya . On the morning of 6 February , George VI was found dead in bed at Sandringham House in Norfolk . He had died from a coronary thrombosis in his sleep at the age of 56 . His daughter Elizabeth flew back to Britain from Kenya as Queen Elizabeth II .

From 9 February for two days his coffin rested in St. Mary Magdalene Church , Sandringham , before lying in state at Westminster Hall from 11 February . His funeral took place at St. George 's Chapel , Windsor Castle , on the 15th . He was interred initially in the Royal Vault until he was transferred to the King George VI Memorial Chapel inside St. George 's on 26 March 1969 . In 2002 , fifty years after his death , the remains of his widow , Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother , and the ashes of his younger daughter Princess Margaret , who both died that year , were interred in the chapel alongside him .

= = Legacy = =

In the words of Labour Member of Parliament George Hardie , the abdication crisis of 1936 did " more for republicanism than fifty years of propaganda " . George VI wrote to his brother Edward that in the aftermath of the abdication he had reluctantly assumed " a rocking throne " , and tried " to make it steady again " . He became king at a point when public faith in the monarchy was at a low ebb . During his reign his people endured the hardships of war , and imperial power was eroded . However , as a dutiful family man and by showing personal courage , he succeeded in restoring the popularity of the monarchy .

The George Cross and the George Medal were founded at the King 's suggestion during the

Second World War to recognise acts of exceptional civilian bravery . He bestowed the George Cross on the entire " island fortress of Malta " in 1943 . He was posthumously awarded the Ordre de la Libération by the French government in 1960 , one of only two people ( the other being Churchill ) to be awarded the medal after 1946 .

There are a number of geographical features , roads , and institutions named after George VI . These include King George Hospital in London ; King George VI Reservoir in Surrey , United Kingdom ; King George VI Highway and King George Boulevard in Surrey , British Columbia ; Kingsway in Edmonton ; George VI Sound in Antarctica ; and the King George VI Chase , a horse race in the United Kingdom .

Colin Firth won an Academy Award for Best Actor for his performance as George VI in The King 's Speech , a 2010 film that won the Academy Award for Best Picture .

= = Titles , styles , honours and arms = =

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14 December 1895 ? 28 May 1898 : His Highness Prince Albert of York

28 May 1898 ? 22 January 1901 : His Royal Highness Prince Albert of York

22 January 1901 ? 9 November 1901 : His Royal Highness Prince Albert of Cornwall and York

9 November 1901 ? 6 May 1910 : His Royal Highness Prince Albert of Wales

6 May 1910 ? 4 June 1920 : His Royal Highness The Prince Albert

4 June 1920 ? 11 December 1936 : His Royal Highness The Duke of York

11 December 1936 ? 6 February 1952 : His Majesty The King

George held a number of titles throughout his life , as successively great @-@ grandson , grandson and son of the monarch . As sovereign , he was referred to most often as simply The King or His Majesty . In his position as sovereign , George automatically held the position of Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief .

= = = Arms = = =

As Duke of York , George bore the royal arms of the United Kingdom differenced with a label of three points argent , the centre point bearing an anchor azure ? a difference earlier awarded to his father George V when he was Duke of York , and then later awarded to his grandson , Prince Andrew , Duke of York . As king , he bore the royal arms undifferenced .

= = Issue = =

= = Ancestry = =