

‘The Prime Minister Has Made Himself King’ (an untold story)

Britain’s Prime Minister David Cameron became king of his country on May 8th 2015, hours after failing to win a parliamentary majority in the general election. He seized the throne in much the same way as a predecessor of his did in 1066 - Harold Godwinson, who was Earl of Wessex, and England’s chief minister.

IAN MACGILL reveals what happened when history recently repeated itself, and a servant of the crown again wore the crown.

King David and Queen Samantha



News of Prime Minister Cameron's coronation was first announced on BBC Radio 4. Here is a transcript of what was said.

John Humphrys. “Good morning. It’s six ‘o’clock on Friday, May the 8th. This is the *Today* programme, with Justin Webb and me, John Humphrys. In the last few moments there has been a sensational announcement from Buckingham Palace. Her Majesty the Queen died in the early hours, and soon afterwards the Prime Minister, David Cameron, was crowned king by the Archbishop of Canterbury during a private ceremony within Westminster Abbey. We’re going now to our political editor Nick Robinson, who is outside Buckingham Palace. Nick, an astonishing sequence of events. David Cameron was defeated in yesterday's general election, and now he ascends the throne on the death of Her Majesty. *Queen Elizabeth is dead! Long live King Dave!* Surely it can’t be true?”

Nick Robinson. “John, it’s true all right. His Majesty and Queen Samantha - both bedecked with coronation regalia - have just been driven past where I’m standing. You can probably hear the clattering of horses pulling their open-topped carriage - a state landau bearing the royal coat of arms - and hooves of a detachment of the Household Cavalry. *Splendid sight!* Red cloaks, glittering helmets, white plumes.”

John Humphrys. “*Amazing!* But as far as I’m aware, the Queen wasn’t ill.”

Nick Robinson. “Her Majesty was reported to be in good health yesterday evening when she hosted a dinner at Windsor Castle. But events of the past few hours are shrouded in mystery.”

John Humphrys. “This is... *surreal!* How on earth is it possible that the Prime Minister - a commoner like you and me - can be crowned king? Where’s Prince Charles? Prince William? Prince Harry? The Duke of Edinburgh? And what about leaders of the other political parties: Ed Miliband, Nick Clegg, Nigel Farage, Nicola Sturgeon? It all sounds as if a coup d’état has taken place.”

Nick Robinson. “Indeed, John. We’re witnessing the most bizarre transfer of royal sovereignty since that other infamous Friday of January 6th, 1066, when Earl Harold Godwinson was crowned king.”

John Humphrys. “He was a kind of prime minister, wasn’t he?”

Nick Robinson. “In all but name. A power-hungry lord who said the realm had been bequeathed to him the previous day, during - he claimed - a whispered conversation with King Edward The Confessor, who was on his deathbed.”

John Humphrys. “I know that The Confessor died childless, but I recall there was a legitimate heir to the throne on hand, as is the case today in the person of Prince Charles.”

Nick Robinson. “Yes. Prince Edgar should have been crowned - King Edward’s teenage great-nephew. The remarkable thing was how quickly and easily the royal House of Wessex was overthrown, as the House of Windsor now appears to have been. Edward died on January 5th, in the early hours - as our Queen has - and next day his funeral and Harold’s coronation were held with indecent haste. Nobody seemed to bat an eye.”

John Humphrys. “David Cameron’s crowning has taken place even quicker than the one in 1066. Let’s hope it isn’t a bad omen. Last time this happened, the outcome was tragic: King Harold killed at The Battle of Hastings later that year, and then our conquest by Duke William and his Normans. Nick, we’ll have to leave it there because I think - *yees!* - we have David Cameron on the line.”

King David. “Good morning, John.”

John Humphrys. “*Goodness!* I’m at a loss as to how to address you: Prime Minister? King Dave? Your Conservative Majesty?”

King David. (Chortles): “Oh, don’t let’s stand on ceremony. We’ve only been king for a couple of hours. Hasn’t quite sunk in. Actually, we will also be PM for the next five years.”

John Humphrys. (Coughs. Splutters). “*But you lost the general election!*”

King David. “There was an electoral hiccup, but during an audience with ourself this morning we agreed to form the next government. *Hello, John!* Are you still there? It’s not like you to be lost for words.”

John Humphrys. “Er, forgive me. Any moment I’m expecting to wake from what is an increasingly bizarre dream.”

King David. “It’s no dream, John.”

John Humphrys. “But in what circumstances did Her Majesty die? And where is Prince Charles, who we all assumed would be our next king? And what have leaders of the other political parties had to say?”

King David. “To answer your first question, the Queen passed away peacefully - in her sleep - just after three this morning, with ourself and Prince George at Her Majesty’s bedside.”

John Humphrys. “*Prince Georrrrge!* You were... you were holding Her Majesty’s baby great-grandson?”

King David. “*John, of course not!* We are referring to Prince George Osborne, our Chancellor of the Exchequer. In fact, he wasn’t officially ennobled until about half an hour ago, but that’s incidental. We received the royal summons at midnight, and rushed to Her Majesty’s bedchamber in Windsor Castle. The Queen’s last words were spoken in a faint voice, but clearly heard by everyone in the room.”

John Humphrys. “Everyone in the room being you, and George Osborne, the Right Honourable Member for Tatton.”

King David. “Precisely, John. Prince George and yours truly were the only witnesses to what Her Majesty said.”

John Humphrys. “Sounds like a replay of January 1066, when Earl Harold blagged his way to the throne.”

King David. “John, the word blagged is hardly appropriate. Harold was England’s chief minister, and his accession to the throne is the ancient legal precedent on which Her Majesty acted this morning. Anyway, where were we?”

John Humphrys. “You were recalling the Queen’s last words.”

King David. “*Ah, yes!* Her Majesty said: ‘Mr Cameron, we bequeath to you our realm, and the hearts and souls of our beloved people. We command that you be immediately crowned, in the certain belief that you will defeat the coming invasions.’”

John Humphrys. “*Invaasions!* From where?”

King David. “Normandy. Scotland. Argentina. Syria. Ukraine. *You name it!* In 1066 Earl Harold of Wessex was made king because he was the strong leader England needed. *Everyone knows that!*”

John Humphrys. (Suppressing a sob). “The Queen’s passing must have been an incredibly moving occasion. What did you do next?”

King David. “Prince George slithered under the bed, and...”

John Humphrys. “*Beneath the bed!* What for?”

King David. “To retrieve the crown, the orb, that silver-wand thingy, the robes, rings, and what-have-you. They were kept in a big cardboard box.”

John Humphrys. “But what of Prince Charles? Where is he? What’s his demeanour?”

King David. “He’s resting.”

John Humphrys. “*Resting!* That’s the last thing I imagine him to be doing. He must be the most agitated man in the kingdom - a kingdom you say his mother bequeathed to you.”

King David. “John, as you can imagine, what’s happened has come as a great shock to His Royal Highness. But he will be making a statement.”

John Humphrys. “When, exactly? When will he make a statement?”

King David. “Immediately he gets out.”

John Humphrys. “*Gets out!* Of where?”

King David. “Hospital, John. As we just said, all of this has been a blow to Prince Charles. But we feel certain he will be happy to talk with you. When he wakes up.”

John Humphreys. “Prince Charles is asleep?”

King David. “Yes.”

John Humphrys. “When do you expect him to awaken?”

King David. “*Oh, anytime!* Well, in the next couple of years. Doctors we consulted thought it best that he undergo a medically induced coma. It allows the brain to shut down. His Royal Highness will regain consciousness feeling totally refreshed. John, we will have plenty of opportunities to chat during our reign, but we feel this is a time for remembrance, when we need to look back on the amazing life of Her Majesty the Queen, who has...”

John Humphrys. “Excuse me, but have you spoken with leaders of the other parties? How have they reacted?”

King David. “We will meet with them in London later today.”

John Humphrys. “Whereabouts in London?”

King David. “The Tower of London.”

John Humphrys. “Excuse me again, but - *good Lord!* - Her Majesty is on the other line.”

King David. “*Splendid! Queen Samantha!* How are you, my royal darling?”

Queen Elizabeth. “Hello, we wish to speak with Ron Bumphrys.”

John Humphrys. “Ma’am, this is both a delight and a shock. But, are you... calling from The Other Side?”

Queen Elizabeth. “*Yes, unfortunately!* When we awoke, after they put the pillow over our head, we rolled over and became trapped near the bedside table. We are ringing you on our *Pineapple* phone. Please contact Prince William, and ask him to come to Windsor in his gyro-copter.”

John Humphrys. “Your Majesty, stay still. You’ll soon be rescued. Let me turn again to David Cameron. What have you to say? *Hello! Hello!* Mr Cameron... (no reply). Your Majesty, what has happened is terrible. The prime minister tried to smother you.”

Queen Elizabeth. “He’s not the first to try. The Labour lot are just as bad. Do you remember that fellow with the shifty eyes, and a grey quiff? You know - puffed a pipe. Droning voice.”

John Humphrys. “Your Majesty, Tony Benn was never PM.”

Queen Elizabeth. "Not him. The one from Huddersfield - *Harold Wilson!* You'll recall that he resigned in mysterious circumstances during 1976. The reason was that he had wanted to crown himself *King Harold!* Just like that upstart earl back in 1066. We do hope Prime Minister Farage behaves himself when he enters Number 10 today. *Ah, well! God bless you Mister Bumphrys! You and all your listeners!*"

John Humphrys. "*And God bless you, Your Majesty! Long may you reign over us!*"
(Drum-roll. National Anthem).

Ian Macgill is author of The Rhyme of King Harold, a novel explaining the events of 1066. You can see and hear the ghost of King Harold reading excerpts at www.rhymesofhistory.com

Here are 30 facts about the events of 1066, and King Harold (Did you know he once invaded England?)

- 1/. There were four kings of England in 1066: King Edward The Confessor, King Harold, King Edgar, and King William, who was Duke of Normandy. (Edgar was Edward's teenage great-nephew, who was declared king after Harold's death, though never crowned).
- 2/. Harold was born into the Saxon nobility around 1022, possibly in the Sussex coastal village of Bosham - one of six brothers and three sisters.
- 3/. Harold was England's chief minister for a dozen years before becoming king.
- 4/. Harold will have been about 44 at the time he was killed fighting at Hastings.
- 5/. Harold was not of royal blood, though his elder sister, Edith, was the queen of England's King Edward The Confessor.
- 6/. That marriage had been forced on Edward by Harold's father, Earl Godwin.
- 7/. By 1051, King Edward (then aged 48, having reigned for nine years) was so sick of Godwin's domination that he banished the earl and his family.
- 8/. Most of the Godwins fled to Flanders. Harold left for Ireland. Queen Edith was sent to a convent in England.

- 9/.** Within a year, Earl Godwin and his sons invaded England, sailing their war fleet up The River Thames.
- 10/.** King Edward backed down without a fight, and the Godwin family regained all it had lost. His Majesty agreed to Edith being re-installed at the palace in Westminster.
- 11/.** England was not a land of peace and harmony prior to the Norman invasion.
- 12/.** Early in October of 1065 - almost exactly a year before The Battle of Hastings - a great revolt began in York, the capital of Northumbria. It was the start of a two-week civil war.
- 13/.** The rebels wanted Harold's brother, Tostig, dismissed as Earl of Northumbria. They marched south, burning and killing as they went (Northampton was razed). By mid-October they were in Oxford.
- 14/.** King Edward agreed to the rebels' demands, and Tostig was sent into exile.
- 15/.** It seems that soon afterwards Edward suffered a series of strokes. He died, aged 63, on January 5th, in the early hours, after a reign of 23 years.
- 16/.** Edward was laid to rest in the great cathedral he had commissioned, - Westminster Abbey - though it was only half built.
- 17/.** *The Bayeux Tapestry* (actually an embroidery) shows four people at King Edward's deathbed. Queen Edith is apparently massaging the royal feet, and three men are standing close to the king. They are almost certainly Earl Harold, and the archbishops of Canterbury (Stigand), and York (Ealdred). All four of these people will have known that Harold intended seizing the throne, and will have given him the nod to commit what amounted to high treason.
- 18/.** Queen Edith (aged about 47) cannot have been well disposed towards King Edward, who had once sent her family into foreign exile, and confined her to a convent. She would fare better with her brother Harold on the throne, rather than young Prince Edgar.
- 19/.** The two archbishops were both in Harold's pocket. Archbishop Stigand was one of the most corrupt priests in the land (excommunicated several times by various popes). He had been made Archbishop of Canterbury by Harold's father.

20/. Archbishop Ealdred also owed his exalted position to the Godwin family. In 1061 Ealdred went to Rome (accompanied by Tostig), expecting to be confirmed as archbishop of York by Pope Nicholas. In fact, His Holiness ordered that Ealdred be denied any religious office. Only the intervention of Tostig saved the day, and made it possible for Ealdred to win the holy see of York.

21/. Harold obviously staged a coup in January of 1066. What's astonishing and mysterious is why he was allowed to get away with The Great Throne Robbery.

22/. Most historians believe Harold was 'elected' as king by a body of noblemen called The Witan. It is said Harold was crowned because an invasion from Normandy was expected, and he had the military experience necessary to meet the coming attack (he had fought skirmishes against the Welsh).

23/. But there was no threat of invasion until Harold's coronation. It was his high treason that brought about the Norman Conquest.

24/. Duke William was only able to win support from the Pope, and much of Europe, because England's throne had obviously been usurped. If there had been an orderly royal succession, William would have had no choice but to stay on his side of the Channel.

25/. The 'election' of Harold makes no sense, because England's Saxon rulers had for generations always come from the royal House of Wessex, and Harold was not of blue blood.

26/. There was no apparent reason for England's nobility wanting to overthrow their ancient royal household. And a suitable prince was ready and waiting.

27/. Prince Edgar will have only been about 15, but his youth was no disadvantage, because Edward the Confessor's father, King Ethelred, had been crowned aged ten.

28/. It is interesting to note that the fateful shenanigans of January 1066 took place on an island - Thorney Island - which was formed by a confluence of The River Tyburn (which now flows underground), and The River Thames.

29/. The Houses of Parliament are where the island used to be.

30/. Prince Edgar outlived the main players of 1066, dying in Scotland in 1126, aged about 75.