

HRH DUKE OF YORK VISITS ROWNTREES COCOA WORKS

Film ID: 2286 **Year:** 1920

With the recent success of the film *The King's Speech*, the Duke of York, later to become King George VI, has become a much more familiar figure. The second son of George V, Prince Albert – known as “Bertie” to his family and friends – has been praised for playing an important role in upholding morale during the Second World War. His biographer Wheeler-Bennett credits him with developing “a new concept of Royalty . . . closely identified with the people, genuinely interested in their affairs” (cited in Olechnowicz). In this early visit to York he could hardly have known what was to become of him.

We are now used to seeing the monarchy regularly on TV, but the filming of the monarchy is hardly new. Not long after Pathé started making newsreels in 1910 the Royal family became a favourite subject. At first the monarchy kept their distance from the British cinema newsreels, but as the First World War wore on, they increasingly became one of the main topics, with King George V featuring thirty six times in 1918. Soon Pathé were joined by Gaumont Graphic and Topical Budget. The Duke of York, or just plain Prince Albert before he received the Dukedom on June 4th 1920 (as well as Earl of Inverness and Baron Killarney), turned up regularly in the newsreels. Two curiosities of the film are: who is the other person accompanying the Duke, also in military attire? And, why are they both wearing black armbands?

It isn't known who made this film; it may be a newsreel company, although they usually had captions or intertitles explaining what is happening, and so it may have just been a local film company. This was the case, for example, with the visit of King George V and Queen Mary to Sheffield in May 1918, which was made by the Sheffield Photo Company, and his visit to Manchester in 1923 filmed by the Manchester Film Company.

One candidate for filming this visit is Debenham & Co., who made many films in this part of Yorkshire – they relocated from York to nearby Beverley just before the First World War – although they too put titles in their films. Another possibility is the US based Fox's newsreel which also filmed the Duke of York in York, visiting the Cathedral, in 1920. This may well have been on the same day. Or, it may simply have been made by Rowntrees themselves.

At any rate, the Royal family made the most of it, being filmed visiting factories, opening hospitals or doing other good deeds – or, very often, out hunting. Yet it was the Prince Albert's elder brother, the Prince of Wales, who was usually filmed. In fact in 1920 the newsreels accompanied him on his Empire Tour of the West Indies, the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand, piecing it all together into a documentary, *50,000 miles with the Prince of Wales*. The newsreels were always shown in cinemas along with the main film, right up to the 1960s.

The Duke of York was especially involved with The Industrial Welfare Society, becoming its President, which originated as The Boys' Welfare Association in 1918, only to change its name in 1919. This campaigned for better working conditions, such as lunch rooms and rest rooms. Between 1920 and 1935 Albert visited between 120 and 150 workplaces around the country. He also helped set up The Duke of York Boys' Camps – bringing together working class and public school boys – which he frequently visited. Much of this was filmed, although only a third of newsreels survive from this period. Also around this time there is a Gaumont Graphic newsreel of the Duke from 8th March 1920 attending a rugby match, on 23 June 1920 inspecting a rifle team, and on 23 August he is filmed taking his seat in the House of Lords. A search of the newsreel archives at ITN Source (References) reveals just how often he is filmed – see also the bfi Film & TV Database which also lists many of the Topical Budget films of the Duke.

According to Paul Ward, Albert was made “royal ambassador to the industrial working class.” This was a time of great industrial unrest (References). After the mass slaughter of the war, with Lloyd George promising “a fit land for heroes to live in,” with stronger union organisation, and with the example of the Russian Revolution, there was a very real fear of mass strikes. Increased militancy was evident especially in Clydeside and the South Wales Valleys, and was to culminate in the 1926 general Strike. The monarchy was supposed to be above the class conflict, hence the role that the Duke of York played throughout the 1920s and up to his coronation. It is no surprise therefore, to see the Duke of York here visiting the Rowntree factory in York, and the large numbers of onlooking children. Rowntrees, of course, have a reputation for good employee relations and for care of children – see [Joseph Rowntree Senior School in New Earswick](#) (1947) and [Rowntrees Sports Day](#) (c.1946).

Certainly, the Duke looks very purposeful and in good spirits. This may have something to do with the fact that he had recently first met, as adults, the 20 year old Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon at a dance in the Spring of 1920, and had apparently been smitten. They were, of course, to marry three years later. York Archives have photos of the two of them visiting York in July 1924 and June 1925. At any rate there is little sign in this short film of the Duke's difficulties with social situations.

As *The King's Speech* makes clear, these difficulties had much to do with the stammering (or stuttering) that he had from an early age, and which had embarrassed him in public speaking; such as the opening of the British Empire Exhibition in Wembley Stadium in October 1925, broadcast across the nation and the Empire, as portrayed in the film. The film gives some indication of what might have led to the stammering: namely, his father's harsh treatment of him as a boy, including forcing him to wear splints on his legs for his knock knees, day and night, and being forced to use his right hand to ‘correct’ his left-handedness.

It is said that he had special difficulty with a hard “k” sound, and this problem with particular sounds is what is portrayed in *The King’s Speech*. It is not known for sure why this kind of difficulty with particular sounds occurs, but as with many stutterers, it can be partially got around by avoiding words that begin with the difficult sounds, substituting for them, or by circumlocution. Hence, many of the 1% of the population who stammer manage to hide it: what are called ‘covert stutterers’. This is undoubtedly what the Duke of York eventually became, helped by speech trainer Lionel Logue. As Mark Irwin – former Board Chair of the International Stuttering Association – states in his review of the film, “People who are covert stutterers give enormous energy to speaking as they monitor ahead all words and sentence structures”. Irwin goes on to claim that today George VI would probably be diagnosed with Stuttered Speech Syndrome: the combination of stuttering and Social Anxiety Disorder, where one condition compounds the other.

It might be thought that the King was extremely fortunate to have found in Lionel Logue someone who was clearly ahead of his time. Nevertheless, as Mark Irwin goes on to state, there was no complete cure: “Logue’s therapy reduced the symptoms of George VI’s Stuttered Speech Syndrome which allowed him to manage his stuttering and communicate effectively”. He had engaged Logue in October 1926, just before the first sound newsreels by Fox’s Movietone the following year. Yet as Dominic Sandbrook points out in his review of the *The King’s Speech*, “from time to time, officials had to ask for newsreel footage to be withdrawn to avoid embarrassing the Royal Family”.

The daughter of the founder of The Stuttering Foundation has stated that it was King George VI who partly inspired her father, Malcolm Fraser, to set up his organisation more than six decades ago. Many have claimed that *The King’s Speech* has done more to highlight stuttering than decades of trying by campaigning organisations. So, whatever one’s personal views on the monarchy, or on the future King George VI in particular, he is to be thanked for inadvertently helping to highlight a condition that has usually been hidden and gone unrecognised. Anyone who is a stutterer will hardly envy someone who has to play such a public role, whatever other privileges they might have.

As for the Rowntree factory, the Cocoa Works on Haxby Road built in 1890, plans are underway to move production into a modern plant just to the north. There is also a campaign to make the area around the old factory a conservation site. But although the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Library and the Rowntree Theatre have been classified as Grade II listed buildings by English Heritage, at the time of writing (January 2011) they have yet to decide anything on the factory itself.

References

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Andrzej Olechnowicz (editor), *The Monarchy and the British Nation 1780 to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

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[ITN Source](#)

[bfi Film & TV Database](#)

[A Short History of British Cinema Newsreels, the Birth Of Television News and A Short History of ITN](#)

[A History of the British Newsreels](#)

[Dominic Sandbrook’s review of The King’s Speech](#)

[The King’s Speech on awesomestories](#)

[Review of The King’s Speech as it relates to stuttering](#)

[The Stuttering Foundation](#)

[The McGuire Programme](#)