



Rutland's Service of Celebration for the Coronation

An Address by the Lord-Lieutenant of Rutland

Sarah Furness

Yesterday we witnessed the Coronation of King Charles III in a moving and spectacular service at Westminster Abbey. Whilst the service had been adjusted for modern relevance, it remained essentially the same as it has been for a thousand years. We have all witnessed a moment in history.

The Coronation walked a fine line between spectacle, historical precedent, inclusion and frugality. His Majesty did not want the Coronation to be completely out of step at a time when there is a cost of living crisis. Although the pomp was reduced, the Coronation was a truly magnificent occasion with the ceremonial and circumstance for which we are renowned across the world. It is estimated that it will generate well over £1 billion by increasing tourism – many times its cost. So, the Coronation was not only a cheering spectacle and a moment in history, but also a welcome emotional and financial boost to our whole country.

The adjustments made to the historic formal investiture of our monarch are telling and reflect our King's values and concerns. His Majesty is very keen to promote both social and religious inclusion. He wishes to reward volunteers and those who serve the common good and to enhance social cohesion and community feeling. He wishes to be a King to all.

Invitees reflected His concerns. The invitation list to the Coronation Service, who should be included and who would not be, would have been difficult enough for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, the King's mother. At that event there were over 8,000 guests. Peers dazzled in coronets and ladies' tiaras sparkled; and a strict social hierarchy was very evident. The number attending King Charles's Coronation was reduced by 70% to just over 2,000. This time, most attendees were invited as individuals, without their spouses or partners. Indeed, as His Majesty's representative for Rutland, I was honoured to attend and represent Rutland just as all other Lord-Lieutenants attended and represented their counties. However, my husband Peter, like all the other spouses, had to watch it on television! Many peers who traditionally might have expected to go were not invited – including sadly our local Duke of Rutland.

This cutting back allowed room for His Majesty to invite representatives of charities and voluntary groups and show his appreciation for those whose voluntary work supports community well-being. 850 'community champions' were included from across the country. 450 were recipients of British Empire Medals. Many of these had received their honours for community work during the pandemic. I am delighted that from Rutland, Janet Thompson and Margaret Simpson were invited.

It is not just the Coronation invitation list that reflects King Charles's values. King Charles has suggested ways that the whole Coronation Bank Holiday weekend can do good for us all.

Today people celebrate together with the Big Lunch as a way of emphasising community. Across Rutland, like the rest of Britain, there will be street parties. I hope everyone here will be joining me to party. Please follow the procession into Cutts Close after this service, where Oakham Town Council have put on a musical Party in the Park.

Tomorrow is 'Big Help Out Day'. The idea of the 'Big Help Out' is to encourage people to get together help out those in need, and to think about volunteering. Here in Rutland we are having a 'Coronation Clear Out to Help Out' car boot and table top sale at the Rutland Showground. Thanks to the generosity of the Rutland Agricultural Society entrance money will go to 3 local charities – the Rutland Foodbank, Citizens Advice and For Rutland. There will be bargains for all and voluntary groups can showcase what they do. Again, there will be food stalls and entertainment so it will be an event that is widely accessible, does some good, showcases volunteers and enhances our sense of community. All the things that His Majesty is concerned to achieve.

In a modern democracy our monarch provides a national focus, stability, continuity and non-political moral leadership. Our Monarch is someone who can, through example, provide us all with a moral compass. Her Late Majesty's death brought home to many people the importance of a constant figure upon whom our national identity is concentrated and who remains steady, whilst around us so much changes. Our system of monarchy means that we always know who the next monarch will be. It has always been the case of 'the King is dead, Long live the King' or in our more recent sad experience 'the Queen is dead, long live the King'. The monarchy is about continuity and unlike much in our modern world it embraces certainty and stability.

Her Late Majesty, through Her patronages and example, gave national life a steer. Our King has had an exceptionally long apprenticeship as Prince of Wales. He too has provided our nation with steers and has shown foresight and courage in abundance. King Charles's choices for the Coronation reflect very long-term interests and dearly held concerns.

We know our new monarch well. He has proved his powers of leadership throughout his life as Prince of Wales.

It is incredible to look back to the seventies when a 21 year old Prince Charles started talking about the impact of plastic on the environment and on future generations. The Prince's environmental concerns grew. We now accept that they are well founded; but at the time not only were his views widely derided but so too was the then Prince, for expressing them. He was ridiculed – and often ignored. It is the mark of a real leader to remain steadfast, reasonable and to continue to articulate your arguments in the face of such derision.

Making the Highgrove estate organic and introducing a range of organic foods meant Prince Charles demonstrated the economic possibilities of producing food in environmentally friendly ways. Through his steadfastness and practical example His Majesty has over the years been largely responsible in shifting public opinion and debate. We are now concerned for the environment as individuals; and those concerns are reflected in corporate and civil life as well.

In the 1970s and 80s most people did not like what we now call 'brutalist' architecture – but no one was saying so effectively. His Majesty gave voice to and defended public opinion, against what He referred to as "godforsaken cities" littered with "huge, blank and impersonal" buildings that were 'imposed upon communities'. King Charles showed courage when He stood up to the architectural establishment that held sway at the time - and the architectural establishment were furious. His famous intervention in 1984 over a proposed extension to the National Gallery, saying that it looked like a 'monstrous carbuncle' on the face of a much loved and elegant friend', effectively gave voice to mass opinion.

It is interesting to note that His Majesty's arguments now appear uncontroversial. They have become accepted planks for local planning. The then Prince argued for the benefits of retaining and rehabilitating existing buildings. His concern for community was also evident forty years ago when He advocated the importance of community consultation and resident-led housing cooperatives. He argued against bulldozing areas and for restoring historic street patterns and reviving traditional housing types, such as terraces and courtyards. The Prince, as He then was, also argued for increased accessibility for disabled people – something not much considered at the time.

King Charles's sense that town and city planning should reflect human proportions, history and needs were exemplified in Poundbury, the town He helped to create. He showed by practical example that modern architecture need not be brutalist.

Our King's concerns for public good are long standing and have impacted the world in which we live. We are very thankful that modern town planning has moved away from concrete jungles and is much more focussed on residents' needs and opinions.

However, his Majesty's concerns are not only for the wider world, our environment (both natural and built), but extend to individuals who are vulnerable and who may have lost their way. Our King's imagination and compassion led him to form The Prince's Trust. It was founded by His Majesty in 1975 to give vulnerable young people a chance to turn their lives around. It

has been enormously successful and made real difference to individual lives. In 1975 many of these lives would have been dismissed as 'hopeless'. The Prince's vision, through the Prince's Trust, has given hope and a future to over a million such lives. It is quite a record.

As Prince of Wales King Charles has championed so much else - rural life, crafts and rural concerns, apprenticeships and much more. As Prince Charles he had over 420 charity patronages and took a very active interest in them. His hard work, courage in the face of criticism, and genuine concern for all, mark him out as a very great leader. He has shone light on issues which were of import, but which were not fashionable or being addressed.

We have much to be thankful to him for. We know that we have in King Charles a great king whose concern for us all is of very long standing.

God save the King.

Sarah Furness LL May 4th 2023.