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THE KING'S SPEECH



BASED ON THE RECENTLY DISCOVERED
DIARIES OF LIONEL LOGUE



MARK LOGUE
AND PETER CONRADI

THE KING'S SPEECH

*How One Man Saved
the British Monarchy*

Mark Logue and Peter Conrad



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Mark Logue

Introduction

When I was growing up in the 1970s and 1980s we lived in Belgium, where my father, Antony, worked as a lawyer at the European headquarters of Procter & Gamble. Over the years we moved between various houses on the outskirts of Brussels, but there was one constant: regardless of where we were, a collection of photographs and mementos would be set up on a mantelpiece or windowsill.

Among them was a photograph of my father in his Scots Guards uniform; another of him and my mother, Elizabeth, on their wedding day in 1953, and a picture of my Australian-born paternal grandfather, Lionel, and his wife, Myrtle. Also, more intriguingly, there was a leather-framed portrait of King George VI, the father of the present Queen, signed and dated 12 May 1937, the day of his coronation; another picture of him and his wife, Elizabeth, better known to my generation as the Queen Mother, and their two daughters, the future Queen Elizabeth, then a girl of eleven, and her little sister, Margaret Rose; and a third of the royal couple, dated 1928, when they were still the Duke and Duchess of York, signed Elizabeth and Albert.

The significance of all these photographs must have been explained to me, but as a young boy I never paid too much attention. I understood the link with royalty was through Lionel, but he was ancient history to me; he had died in 1953, twelve years before I was born. The sum of my knowledge about my grandfather was that he had been the King's speech therapist – whatever that was – and I left it at that. I never asked any more questions and no more detailed information was volunteered. I was far more interested in the various medals and buttons laid out alongside the photographs. I used particularly to enjoy dressing up in my father's officer's belt and hat, and playing at soldiers with

the medals pinned proudly on my shirt.

But as I grew older, and had children of my own, I began to wonder about who my ancestors were and where they had come from. The growing general interest in genealogy further piqued my curiosity. Looking back through the family tree, I came across a great-grandmother from Melbourne who had fourteen children, only seven of whom survived beyond infancy. I also learnt that my great-great-grandfather left Ireland for Australia in 1850 aboard the SS *Boyne*.

As far as I was concerned, my grandfather was only one among many members of an extended family divided between Australia, Ireland and Britain. That remained the case even after the death of my father in 2001, when I was left the task of going through the personal papers he had kept in a tall grey filing cabinet. There, among the wills, deeds and other important documents, were hundreds of old letters and photographs collected by my grandfather – all neatly filed away in chronological order in a document wallet.

It was only in June 2009, when I was approached by Iain Canning, who was producing a film, *The King's Speech*, about Lionel, that I began to understand the significance of the role played by my grandfather: about how he had helped the then Duke of York, who reluctantly became King in December 1936 after the abdication of his elder brother, Edward VIII, in his lifelong battle against a chronic stammer that turned every public speech or radio broadcast into a terrifying ordeal. I began to appreciate that his life and work could be of interest to a far wider audience beyond my own family.

That April, Lionel had been the subject of the Afternoon Play on BBC Radio 4, again called *A King's Speech*, by Mark Burgess. This film was to be something far bigger, however – a major motion picture, with a big-name cast that included Helena Bonham Carter, Colin Firth, Geoffrey Rush, Michael Gambon and Derek Jacobi. It is directed by Tom Hooper, the man behind the acclaimed *The Damned United*, which showed a very different side of recent English history: the football manager Brian Clough's short and stormy tenure as manager of Leeds United in 1974.

Canning and Hooper, of course, wanted their film to be as historically accurate as possible, so I set out to try and discover as much as I could about my grandfather. The obvious starting point was my father's filing cabinet: examining Lionel's papers properly for the first time, I found vividly written diaries in which he had recorded his meetings with the King in extraordinary detail. There was copious correspondence, often warm and friendly, with George VI himself, and various other records – including a little appointment card, covered in my grandfather's spider-like handwriting, in which he described his first encounter with the future King in his small consulting room in Harley Street on 19 October 1926.

Taken together with other fragments of information I managed to gather online, and the few pages of references to Lionel included in most biographies of George VI, this allowed me to learn more about my grandfather's unique relationship with the King and also to correct some of the part-truths and overstretched memories that had become blurred across the generations.

It soon became clear, however, that the archive was incomplete. Missing were a number of letters and diary entries from the 1920s and 1930s, snippets of which had been quoted in John Wheeler Bennett's authorized biography of George VI, published in 1958. Also nowhere to be found were the scrapbooks of newspaper cuttings that, as I knew from my cousins, Lionel had collected for much of his adult life.

Perhaps the most disappointing absence, though, was that of a letter, written by the King in December 1944, which had particularly captured my imagination. Its existence was revealed in a passage in Lionel's diary in which he described a conversation between the two men after the monarch had delivered his annual Christmas message to the nation for the first time without my grandfather at his side.

'My job is over, Sir,' Lionel told him.

'Not at all,' the King replied. 'It is the preliminary work that counts, and that is where you are indispensable.' Then, according to Lionel's account, 'he thanked me, and two days later wrote me a very beautiful letter, which I hope will be treasured by my descendants'.

Had I had the letter I would have treasured it, but it was nowhere to be found amid the mass of correspondence, newspaper cuttings and diary entries. This missing letter inspired me to leave no stone unturned, to exhaust every line of enquiry in what became a quest to piece together as many details as I could of my grandfather's life. I pestered relatives, returning to speak to them time and again. I wrote to Buckingham Palace, to the Royal Archives at Windsor Castle and to the authors and publishers of books about George VI, in the hope that the letter may have been among material they had borrowed from my father or his two elder brothers, and had failed to return. But there was no trace of it.

Towards the end of 2009 I was invited on to the set of *The King's Speech* during filming in Portland Place, in London. During a break I met Geoffrey Rush, who plays my grandfather, and Ben Wimsett, who portrays my father aged ten. After getting over the initial strangeness of seeing someone as a child I'd only ever known as a man, I became fascinated by a scene in which Rush's character hovers over my father and his elder brother, Valentine, played by Dominic Applewhite, while they are made to recite Shakespeare. It reminded me of a similar real-life scene when I was a boy and my father obliged me to do the same.

My father had a passion – and a gift – for poetry and verse, often repeating verbatim entire passages that he remembered since childhood. He used to revel in his ability to rattle off reams of Hilaire Belloc as a party piece to guests. But it was from my elder sister, Sarah, that he derived the most satisfaction: indeed, she was often moved to tears by his recitals.

At the time, I don't remember being much impressed by my father's talent. Looking back on the scene as an adult, however, I can appreciate both his perseverance and the acute frustration he must have felt at my reluctance to share the love of poetry that his father had instilled in him.

Filming ended in January 2010, and this also marked the beginning of a more personal voyage of discovery for me. Canning and Hooper did not set out to make a documentary but rather a biopic, which,

although true to the spirit of my grandfather, concentrates on a narrow period of time: from the first meeting between my grandfather and the future King in 1926 until the outbreak of war in 1939.

Inspired by the film, I wanted to tell the complete story of my grandfather's life, from his childhood in Adelaide, South Australia, in the 1880s right the way through to his death. Thus I started extensive and detailed research into his character and what he had done during his life. It was in many ways a frustrating process because, despite Lionel's professional status, very little was known about the methods he employed with the King. Although he wrote a few articles for the press about the treatment of stammering and other speech impediments, he never set out his methods in a formal way and had no student or apprentice with whom to share the secrets of his work. Nor – probably because of the discretion with which he always treated his relationship with the King – did he write up his most famous case.

Then, in July 2010, with the publishers pressing for the manuscript, my perseverance finally paid off. On hearing of my quest for material, my cousin, Alex Marshall, contacted me to say that she had found some boxes of documents relating to my grandfather. She didn't think they would be of much use but, even so, I invited myself up to her home in Rutland to take a look. I was greeted with several volumes arranged on a table in her dining room: there were two Bankers Boxes full of correspondence between the King and Lionel dating from 1926 to 1952 and two more boxes filled with manuscripts and press cuttings, which Lionel had carefully glued into two big scrapbooks, one green and the other blue.

To my delight, Alex also had the missing parts of the archive, together with three volumes of letters and a section of diary that my grandmother, Myrtle, kept when she and my grandfather embarked on a trip round the world in 1910, and also during the first few months of the Second World War. Written in a more personal style than Lionel's diary, this gave a far more revealing insight into the minutiae of their life together. The documents, running to hundreds of pages, were a fascinating treasure trove that I spent days going through and

deciphering; my only regret was that the letter that I had been so desperate to find was not among them.

It is all this material that forms the basis for this book, which Peter Conradi, an author and journalist with *The Sunday Times*, has helped me to put together. I hope that in reading it, you will come to share my fascination with my grandfather and his unique and very close relationship with King George VI.

Although I have endeavoured to research my grandfather's life exhaustively, there may be pieces of information about him that still remain undiscovered. If you are related to Lionel Logue, were a patient or colleague of his, or if you have any other information about him and his work, I would love to hear from you. I can be contacted on lionellogue@gmail.com

Mark Logue

London, August 2010

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CHAPTER ONE

God Save the King



The royal party on their way to the coronation of George VI

Albert Frederick Arthur George, King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions and the last Emperor of India, woke up with a start. It was just after 3 a.m. The bedroom in Buckingham Palace he had occupied since becoming monarch five months earlier was normally a haven of peace and quiet in the heart of London, but on this particular morning his slumbers had been rudely interrupted by the crackle of loudspeakers being tested outside on Constitution Hill. 'One of them might have been in our room,' he wrote in his diary.¹ And then, just when he thought he might finally be able to go back to sleep, the marching bands and troops started up.

It was 12 May 1937, and the forty-one-year-old King was about to face one of the greatest – and most nerve-racking – days of his life: his coronation. Traditionally, the ceremony is held eighteen months after the monarch comes to the throne, leaving time not just for all the preparations but also for a decent period of mourning for the previous king or queen. This coronation was different: the date had already been chosen to crown his elder brother, who had become king on the death of their father, George V, in January 1936. Edward VIII had lasted less than a year on the throne, however, after succumbing to the charms of Wallis Simpson, an American divorcée, and it was his younger brother, Albert, Duke of York, who reluctantly succeeded him when he abdicated that December. Albert took the name George VI – as both a tribute to his late father and a sign of continuity with his reign after the upheavals of the previous year that had plunged the British monarchy into one of the greatest crises in its history.

At about the same time, in the considerably less grand setting of Sydenham Hill, in the suburbs of south-east London, a handsome man

in his late fifties, with a shock of brown hair and bright blue eyes, was also stirring. He, too, had a big day ahead of him. The Australian-born son of a publican, his name was Lionel Logue and since his first meeting with the future monarch just over a decade earlier, he had occupied a curious but increasingly influential role at the heart of the royal family.

Just to be on the safe side, Logue (who was a reluctant driver) had had a chauffeur sleep overnight at his house. With his statuesque wife Myrtle, who was to accompany him on that momentous day, he began to prepare himself for the journey into town. Myrtle, who was wearing £5,000 worth of jewellery, looked radiant. A meeting with a hairdresser whom they'd agreed to pick up along the way would add the final touch. Logue, in full court costume, was rather conscious of his silk-stockinged legs and had to keep taking care not to trip over his sword.

As the hours ticked by and the streets of London began to fill with crowds of well-wishers, many of whom had slept out on camp beds, both men's sense of apprehension grew. The King had a 'sinking feeling inside' and could eat no breakfast. 'I knew that I was to spend a most trying day & to go through the most important ceremony in my life,' he wrote in his diary that evening. 'The hours of waiting before leaving for Westminster Abbey were the most nerve racking.'²

With origins dating back almost a millennium, the coronation of a British monarch in Westminster Abbey is a piece of national pageantry unmatched anywhere in the world. At the centre of the ceremony is the anointing: while the monarch is seated in the medieval King Edward's Chair, a canopy over his head, the Archbishop of Canterbury touches his hands, breast and head with consecrated oil. A cocktail of orange, roses, cinnamon, musk and ambergris, it is dispensed from a filigreed spoon filled from an eagle-shaped ampulla. By that act, the monarch is consecrated before God to the service of his peoples to whom he has sworn a grave oath. For a man as deeply religious as King George VI, it was difficult to overestimate the significance of this avowal of his dependence on the Almighty for the spirit, strength and power needed to do right by his subjects.