

Chapter 25: National and International Events

The context of the end of the First World War and the build up to the Second have been explained earlier.¹ In May 1935, King George V celebrated his [silver jubilee](#) having ascended the throne in 1910. Grandad noted that he closed the shop for the day.



However, the king was not in good health. He suffered from chronic lung disease as a result of heavy smoking. In mid-January 1936, he became gravely unwell and, on the 20th, he [died](#). Grandad noted that "King George died at 11.55pm".² The next royal event noted by grandad was the [coronation](#) of King George VI on 12 May 1937. Grandad noted that he went to see the bonfires.³



¹ See [Chapter 12](#)

² Edith Searson noted the king's jubilee and his ill-health and subsequent death in her book(let) "I Remember" (p35).

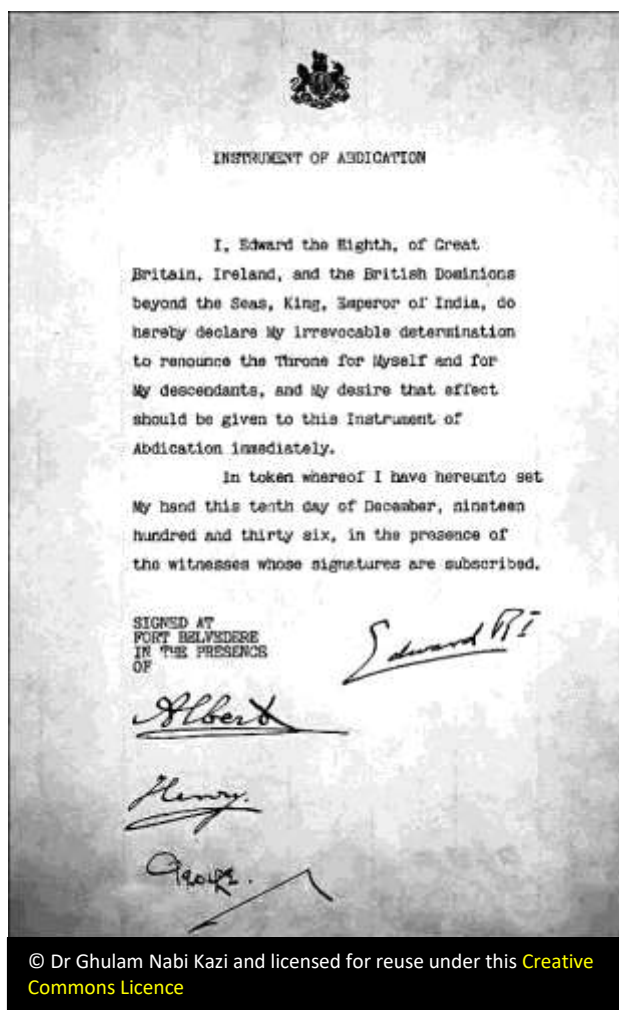
³ And that it rained nearly all day!



Mum would have been four at the time of this coronation. Among her possessions was a commemorative coronation mug. She noted that she received this in 1937 and used it a lot as a child.

It is interesting that grandad's diaries make no mention whatsoever of Edward VIII or the [abdication](#). Was it that grandad did not approve? Or perhaps he was not interested? I expect he probably did not approve but I would imagine he would have been interested. It therefore surprises me a little that he did not mention it at all.⁴

This period was characterised by a number of significant workers' strikes, culminating in the general strike of 1926. In April 1921, there was a [national miners' strike](#).⁵ This strike was triggered when the coal industry was returned into private ownership at the end of March 1921 and private landowners tried to impose wage reductions and increases in working hours. Miners who refused risked losing their jobs. The miners called on the railwaymen and transport workers to join them in a strike from 15 April 1921. However, they declined as they felt that the miners had not tried hard enough to negotiate. This day became known as "*Black Friday*". Although the miners continued their strike, they were finally forced to accept a pay cut and return to work. Grandad noted in his diary that there had been a national coal strike from the beginning of April 1921 until it was "*settled*" by the end of June. He also noted that, on 24 June 1921, they had their gas cut off because of the strike. Although the strike was over by the end of June, grandad noted that local miners at the Summit colliery only returned to work on 4 July.



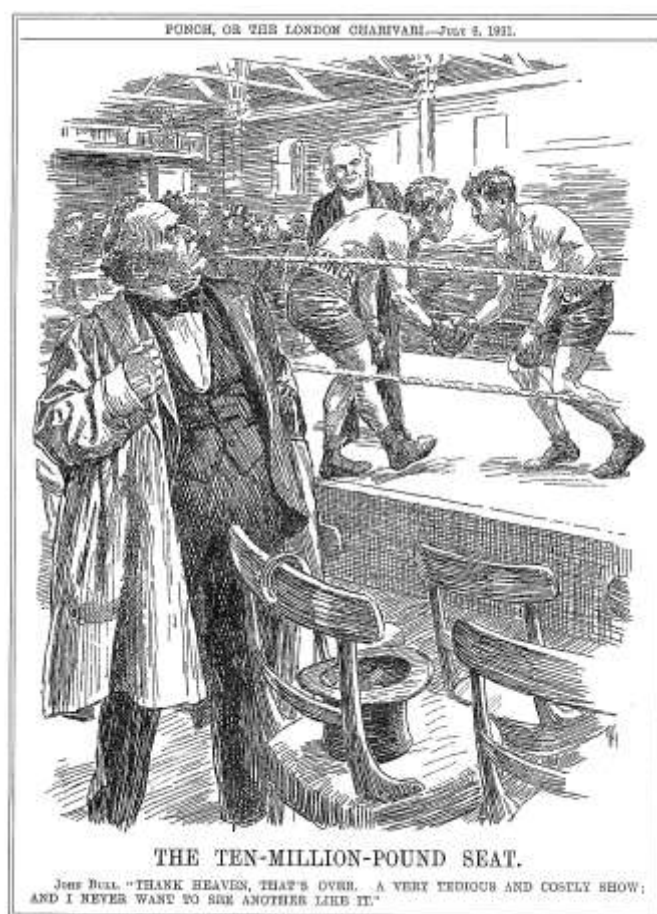
Top left – mum's coronation mug from 1937
Right – Edward VIII's letter of abdication

⁴ He did record other things in his diaries of which he did not approve.

⁵ Edith Searson recalled this strike in her book(let) "*I Remember*" (p32).



Punch cartoons related to the miners' strike in 1921



Tensions continued and, in June 1925, mine owners demanded further reductions in pay and increases in working hours. This time, other unions were supportive and this led to the Conservative government subsidising mine owners for nine months to avoid wage cuts for miners. During this time, preparations were made to mobilise volunteers if there was to be a general strike. The Samuel Commission was established and this recommended a reduction in miners' pay. The union rejected this and this led to a [General Strike](#) from 4 May 1926.⁶ Grandad noted that a general strike had been called and that it was "called off" on the 12th. He also noted that, on the 13th, local strikers had not returned to work and that many Kirkby miners only got their first wages after the strike in October. This seems to have been because, even after the end of the general strike, the [miners' strike continued](#). However, it ended in "total defeat" in November 1926 with the miners forced to accept longer hours and lower pay. I have a postcard sent from Harry in East Kirkby to Horace near Nuneaton on 8 June 1926. This notes, "Am having a quiet time here inside the strike area. About 80% of the population are on strike still, being miners".



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Left - North East workers demonstrating during the General Strike of 1926
Above – postcard sent from East Kirkby on 8 June 1926. It noted that most of the population were on strike even though the General Strike had ended. This was because they were miners.

There were a number of general elections during this period, although grandad did not note them all. Ahead of the general election in December 1923, grandad attended Liberal and Labour meetings at the Market Hall.⁷ In April 1929 ahead of the May general election, he attended two Liberal meetings and one Conservative meeting. He recorded the local result in 1929 as Seymore Cocks Labour about 23,000, Cove Liberal 9,000 and Pierrepont Conservative 8,000.⁸ On 27 October 1931, grandad noted that he "went to vote" for the general election but he did not record the results.

⁶ Edith Searson noted this in her book(let) "I Remember" (p33). She particularly noted the suffering and hardship endured by miners and their families.

⁷ Which later became the Festival Hall – see [Chapter 59](#). According to Edith Searson, in her book(let) "I Remember" (p36), prior to the second world war, there had been a market at the Market Hall every Friday evening.

⁸ In [fact](#), Seymour Cocks polled 24,603 for Labour, Ernest George Cove 9,814 for the Liberals and Gervas Pierrepont 7,119 for the Unionists. Seymour Cocks was MP for Broxtowe from 1929 until his death in 1953. He features in a photograph for Kirkby carnival in 1952 (see [Chapter 52](#)). I don't know why he used his middle name rather than his first name, Frederick, particularly given the potential double meaning which was not lost on Gerald Lee, for example (see "Kirkby-in-Ashfield: Yesterday Remembered" (p66)).

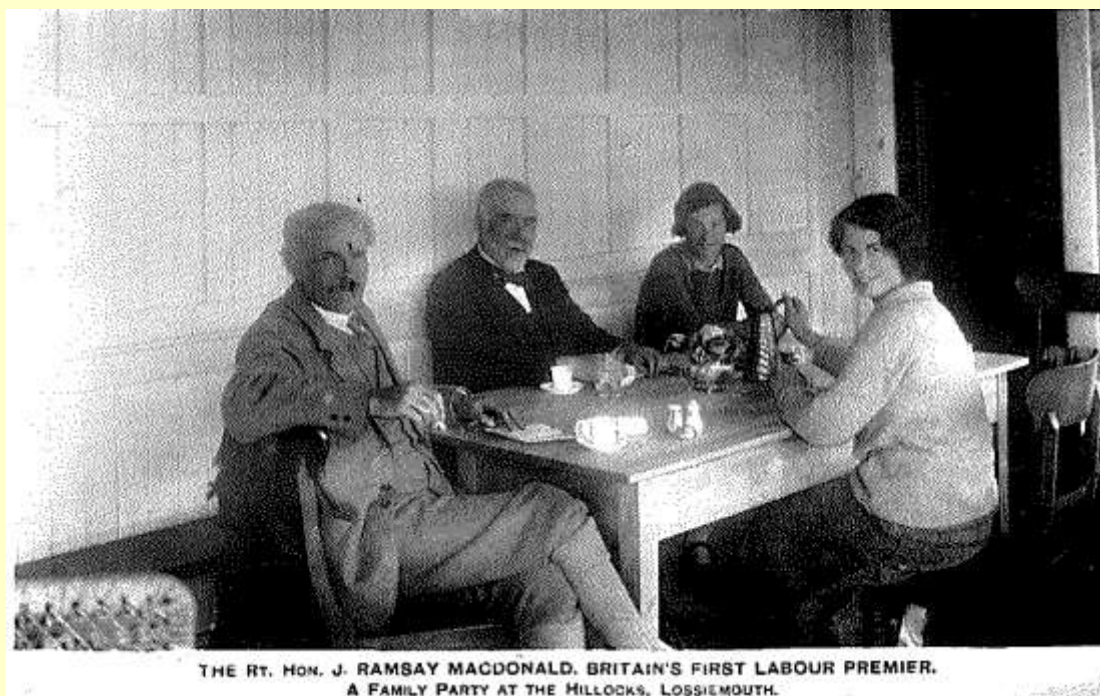
General elections between the wars

There were several general elections during this period – in 1922, 1923, 1924, 1929, 1931 and 1935. In all of them, in grandad's local constituency of [Broxtowe](#), the Labour candidate won over 50% of the vote. From 1918 to 1929, the MP was [George Spencer](#) and, from 1929, [Seymour Cocks](#).

The election in [1922](#) was the first after most of Ireland had left the UK. It produced an overall majority for the Conservatives, led by Bonar Law, with Labour second and a divided Liberal party third. In [1923](#), a further election was held after Bonar Law became unwell and was replaced by Stanley Baldwin. Baldwin wished to strengthen his leadership of the Conservative Party so an election was called. While the Conservatives were the largest party, they did not have an overall majority. So, the Labour Party, led by Ramsey MacDonald, formed a minority administration with tacit support from the Liberals.

This lasted only ten months and a further election was held in October [1924](#). This resulted in an overall majority for the Conservatives led by Stanley Baldwin with Labour losing 40 seats and the Liberals losing 118 of their 158 seats. The [1929](#) general election produced another hung parliament with Labour, led by Ramsey MacDonald, as the largest party for the first time in their history. The Liberals increased their seats to 59 and again held the balance of power.

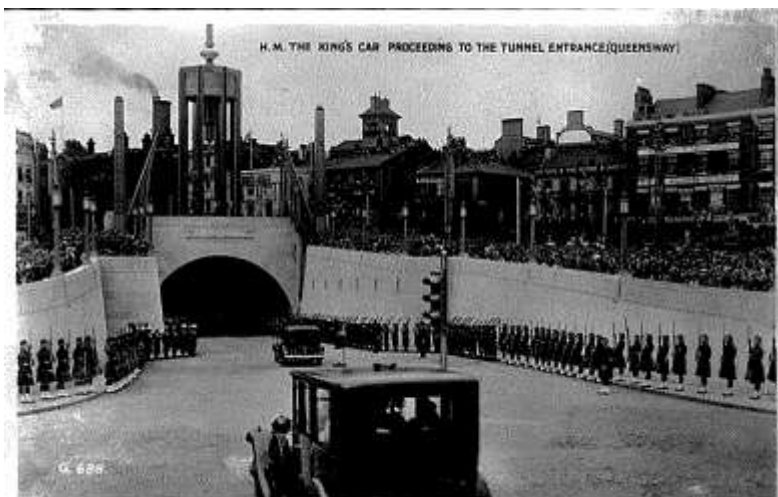
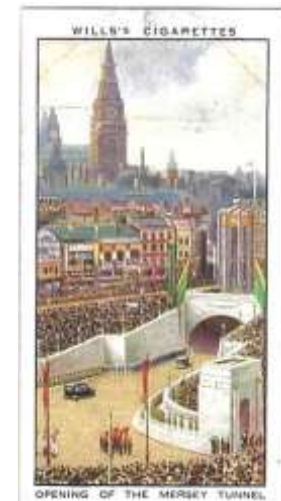
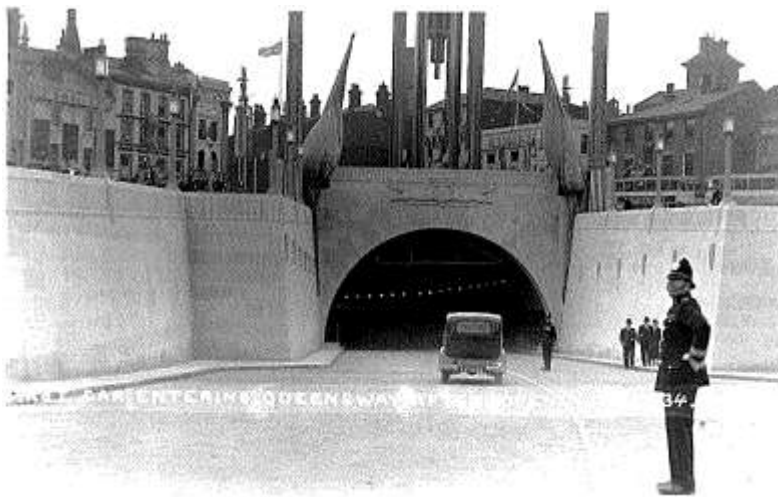
In [1931](#), after the [collapse of the Labour Government](#), the election saw a landslide victory for the National Government, led by Ramsey MacDonald, with the Conservatives within that winning 470 seats. It was disastrous for Labour who only won 52 seats, a net loss of 235. It was the last UK General Election not to take place on a Thursday. In [1935](#), the National Government retained an overall, but reduced, majority. The Labour party, under Clement Attlee, increased their seats by over 100. National Labour only won eight seats. Their leader Ramsey MacDonald lost his seat, as did the leader of the Liberals, Herbert Samuel. Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative Party leader, became Prime Minister again (having previously served from 1924 to 1929). He retired in 1937 aged 70 and was succeeded by Neville Chamberlain.



Postcard showing Ramsey MacDonald at a family gathering

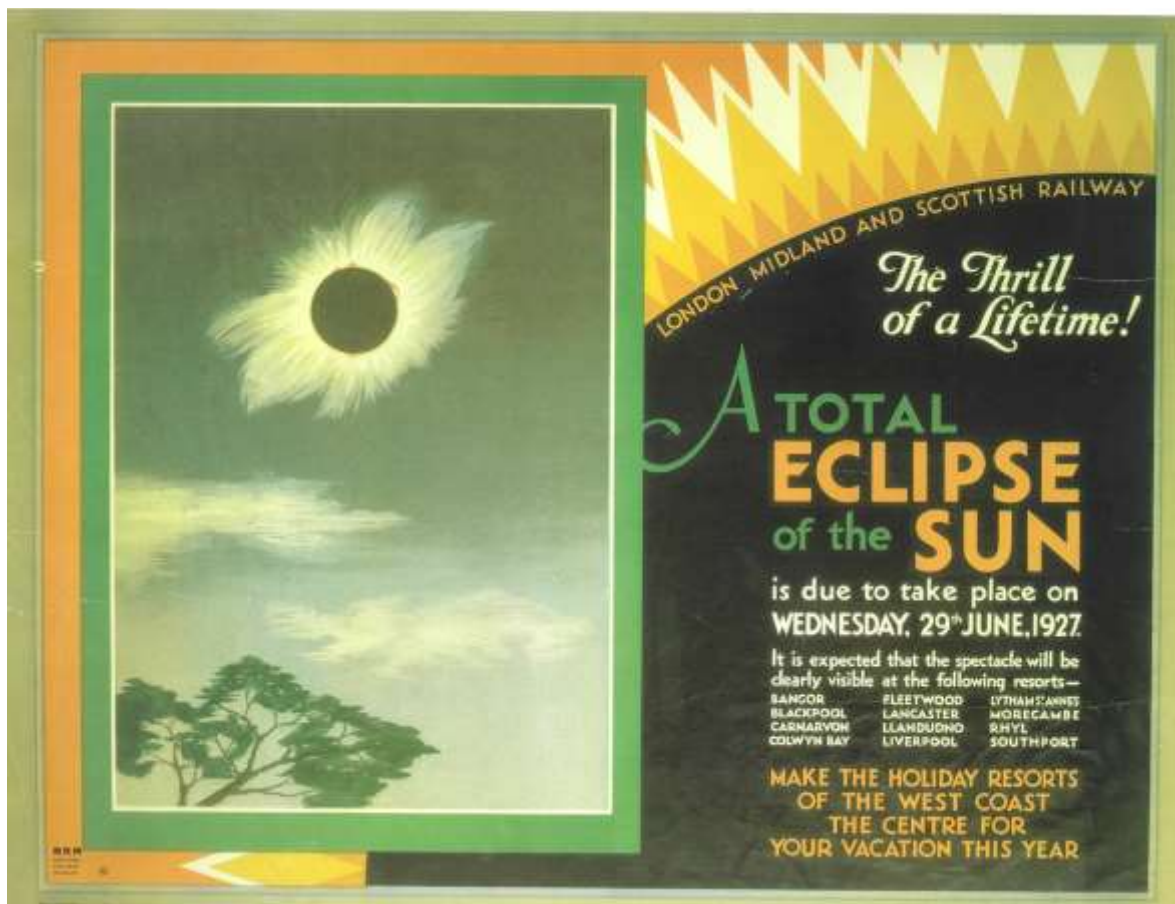
Grandad noted a number of other national and international events in his diaries between the wars. These included:

- In April 1931, a [census](#) was held in England, Scotland and Wales. A preliminary census report was produced in July 1931 and showed the population of England and Wales to be 39.9 million. Unfortunately, the census records for this year were destroyed in a fire at a store in Hayes in 1942.
- In July 1934, a new Mersey tunnel was opened. This is now known as the [Queensway tunnel](#).
- In May 1920, [severe flash flooding](#) occurred in Louth, Lincolnshire with 23 people killed. Grandad referred to this as a severe cloud burst.
- In June 1927, there was a [solar eclipse](#) which grandad got up at 6am to see.
- On New Year's Day in 1932, grandad noted hearing the national anthem. I am not sure of the significance of this but assume that he was referring to the playing of the national anthem at the close of programmes on the radio, a practice which continued on television until 1997.⁹



Postcards ([left](#)) and a cigarette card ([right](#)) commemorating the opening of the Queensway Tunnel

⁹ [Calls](#) to restore this by a Conservative MP have been rejected by the BBC on the grounds that this was played when its programmes closed at the end of the day and this no longer happens.



Top – postcard of the Louth disaster in 1920

Above – copy of advert for the solar eclipse in 1927. Grandad noted watching this in Kirkby