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*The Royal Wave:
Royal Interaction with the Public*

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The Royal Wave: Royal Interaction with the Public

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Abstract: In the modern mass media age, images of waving members of the royal family have become one of the most iconic and often reproduced pictures of royalty. This article presents the first detailed study of this aspect of the royal image. The waving of British royalty is particularly iconic and seems to have played a prominent role in the establishment of this gesture. This study traces the origins of their waving from its historical roots in the nineteenth century to its first appearance in modern times in 1922: in the post-war context, this was a time when royalty generally opened up to and interacted more with the people. By way of introduction, the article also looks at the “royal bow”—the earlier established form of greeting. The article furthermore describes the particular forms with which royal individuals have waved, up to the present day. This reveals some intriguing gender and status differences that were apparent in the earlier years, and the closer look at the practicalities invites us to think about the meaning and “function” of the royal wave, which may stimulate further research on how royal waving was perceived, and to what effect. Overall, the discussion of this popular royal gesture contributes to various strands of ongoing research on royalty’s interaction with the public.

Keywords: waving; bowing; public; balcony; royal wedding; coronation; recording



One day when I was three years old, my brother put me in front of the television and told me that I ought to see the royal wedding. That was on 29 July 1981, and the wedding was that of Charles, Prince of Wales, and Lady Diana Spencer. Being only a little boy, I was—like many children probably are—disappointed not to see the Queen wearing her crown. However, the memory of the event has stayed firmly with me ever since. During the royal cavalcade through the streets of London before and after the service, my brother encouraged me to wave to the royals—which I did: in the evening I could proudly report to my father that I had waved at the princess and she had waved back at me! Yes, I was convinced that the royal bride had waved at me directly.

Personal as this anecdote may be, it illustrates a significant point: royalty’s waving, their use of this almost universal greeting gesture, is—withstanding occasional great distances in both time and space—one of their most intimate interactions with the public at large. It can leave an impression so strong as to be ingrained in the memory even of a three-year old. At the same time, on a different level, Queen Elizabeth II’s personal style of slow and dignified

waving has become the iconic epitome of the royal wave. It captures the essence of modern monarchies more than any other gesture.

In modern public appearances by royalty, or indeed by any public figure, waving has become an integral part of the interaction between those observed and the mass of observers. Royalty, like celebrities and politicians, all over the world are being waved at and wave back.

This gesture has become a fixture of public interaction. Yet, the general history of waving—not only for royalty and celebrities but also for “normal” people—still lacks a full socio-cultural, anthropological study. This particular gesture seems generally to have been much neglected, overseen, or, indeed, understood as not worth mentioning and has been taken for granted. For centuries, there have been numerous books on good manners and etiquette, so-called “conduct books.”¹ It is striking, however, that these books—while giving advice and instructions on correct comportment, the right way to walk, and other details down to how to perform a handshake—do not mention waving.

Inspired by the initial anecdote, the following discussion will focus on the history of the royal wave—and, with the British monarchy being the pre-eminent ceremonial monarchy, on the British royal wave in particular. Recently, Edward Owens has, somewhat in passing, alluded to the beginning of the royal wave and has dated it to the time of the 1934 wedding of Prince George, Duke of Kent, and Princess Marina of Greece.² However, as will be seen, royal waving as such occurred at least a hundred years earlier, and its modern version is documented for another, earlier royal wedding—that of Princess Mary and Henry Lascelles in 1922. Its use then can be much linked to the public image and increased public interaction of the monarchy following the Great War. The appearance, if not introduction, and development of this now so prominent royal gesture is here given a more detailed discussion, greatly helped by the availability of countless images and much historic film footage on the internet.³

The Royal Bow

In relation to Princess Marina waving to the people in 1934, Owens summarised how “newspapers noted that this innovative gesture contrasted with the bowing traditionally used by the royal family to signal their appreciation of the crowd’s cheers,” and he refers to an article entitled “Why Princess Waves” that appeared in the *Daily Sketch* a week before the wedding.⁴ As will be seen in detail below, the same observation about waving royalty had in

¹ For an introduction and overview, see: Tabitha Kenlon, *Conduct Books and the History of the Ideal Woman* (London: Anthem Press, 2020); and Jacques Carré, ed., *The Crisis of Courtesy: Studies in the Conduct-Book in Britain, 1600–1900* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994).

² Edward Owens, *The Family Firm: Monarchy, Mass Media and the British Public, 1932–53* (London: University of London Press, 2019), 56–57.

³ Much of the footage used in this article is from the online archive of British Pathé. These clips are available at <https://www.britishpathe.com>, and can be found via the respective IDs given in the following footnotes.

⁴ Owens, *The Family Firm*, 56; and “Why Princess Waves,” *Daily Sketch*, 26 November 1934, 12.

fact been made already twelve years earlier, in another paper.⁵ However, the main point remains: in the Victorian era and up to about the 1930s, royalty mainly acknowledged the salutations of the crowds mainly not with waving but with a graceful “bow”—as the gesture was invariably called. Given that this bow has not been shown in more detail, it will be useful to support this observation with at least some examples from grand royal occasions, and particularly weddings—arguably the most joyful of all royal occasions and which are the source for much of the iconic imagery of British royalty.

At the 1863 wedding of the Prince of Wales and Princess Alexandra of Denmark, it was reported that, during the couple’s carriage drive through Windsor before the wedding, the bridegroom “kept his hat elevated for a considerable time without placing it on his head”—while his bride “bowed repeatedly in acknowledgment of the hearty salutations offered to her.”⁶ Even more pronounced, the prince’s sister Princess Victoria in her carriage “partially rose from her seat several times in acknowledgment of the public acclamations.” Similarly, at the 1879 wedding of Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught, to Princess Margaret of Prussia, a report noted that Queen Victoria in her coach “frequently bowed in acknowledgment of the hurricane of loyal shouts which saluted her,” specifying that she “bowed right and left, the brilliant assemblage returning the salutation with much reverence.”⁷ Three years later, at the wedding of Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany, and Princess Helen of Waldeck-Pyrmont in 1882, one correspondent recorded that the members of the royal family in the first procession to the chapel were “bowing their acknowledgments on either hand to the cordial greetings of the spectators,” while Queen Victoria in her carriage “bowed with a pleased expression to her loyal subjects” and the bride “smiled and bowed pleasantly in response” to the crowd’s cheering.⁸ Notwithstanding that men had the option of lifting their hats, as the Prince of Wales had done in 1863, bowing as an acknowledgement was not restricted to women. For the same wedding it was reported that, on the way back from the chapel to the castle in their carriage, “The Princess smilingly responded, and bowed her thanks for the reception she received. Prince Leopold, who sat on the left of his bride, also bowed repeatedly.”⁹

In 1885, the *Times* report of the wedding of Princess Beatrice to Prince Henry of Battenberg referred to the “greetings of the crowd” to which the princess “graciously bowed her acknowledgments.”¹⁰ A few years later, at the wedding of Queen Victoria’s grand-daughter Princess Louise (daughter of the Prince of Wales) in 1889, one correspondent referred to “the large glass panels” of the bride’s coach and explained that these were “allowing to the crowd a good opportunity of seeing the bride, who repeatedly bowed her acknowledgments of the loyal

⁵ “Who, When, & Where,” *The Bystander* 73, no. 953, 8 March 1922, 533.

⁶ “The Marriage Ceremony,” *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* 1060, 15 March 1863, 4.

⁷ “The Marriage of H.R.H. The Duke of Connaught, K.G., and H.R.H. Princess Louise Margaret of Prussia,” *The London Reader of Literature, Science, Art and General Information* 32, no. 830, 29 March 1879, 525.

⁸ “The Royal Marriage: Another Account,” *Scotsman*, 28 April 1882, 5.

⁹ “The Royal Wedding: The Ceremony at Windsor,” *Irish Times*, 28 April 1882, 5.

¹⁰ “The Royal Wedding,” *Times* 31507, 24 July 1885, 5.

cheers with which she was greeted.”¹¹ It was not just British royalty who acknowledged the crowds by bowing, as a report of the 1891 wedding of Princess Marie-Louise of Schleswig-Holstein (the daughter of Princess Helena and grand-daughter of Queen Victoria) to Prince Aribert of Anhalt makes clear: for the carriage procession to St George’s Chapel, the German Kaiser with his wife and the Prince and Princess of Wales all “bowed graciously in response to the plaudits of the people.”¹²

At the wedding of the Duke of York (the future George V and Queen Mary) in 1893, the *Scotsman* noted that Queen Victoria on the way to the Chapel Royal “bowed frequently” in her coach; and similarly that the bride “frequently bowed in response to the cheering of the assembled multitude” and on her arrival acknowledged the cheering crowds “by bowing and smiling.”¹³ Three years later, in 1896, at the wedding of Princess Maud of Wales and Prince Charles of Denmark—later Haakon VII of Norway—the *Times* reported that the “demonstration of genuine and heartfelt congratulation” by the crowd along the way to and from the Chapel “was acknowledged by the smiles and bows of the Prince and Princess.”¹⁴ The *Manchester Guardian* similarly noted that “as the bride and bridegroom passed they were cordially and respectfully greeted, and they in their turn bowed their acknowledgments.”¹⁵

In 1905, for the carriage procession through Windsor after the wedding of Princess Margaret of Connaught and Prince Gustaf Adolf of Sweden (later Gustaf VI Adolf), the *Times* reported that the bridegroom “smiled again and again in answer” to the crowds—seemingly not bowing—but highlighted that the “picture of the bowing Princess” was “exceeding pleasant in retrospect.”¹⁶ The last royal wedding before the Great War was that of Prince Arthur of Connaught and Princess Alexandra, Duchess of Fife at the Chapel Royal in London, in 1913. The *Manchester Guardian* noted an interesting detail. It observed that in the return procession after the ceremony, from one of the carriages “peered a jolly baby bridesmaid, a sunny, rose-wreathed head nodding vigorously at all these thousands of friend.”¹⁷ Thus even young children were seen to bow (or “nod”) to the crowds—rather than to wave with their hands. They may have either imitated the adults around them or were actively taught to bow.

This later example raises the question of what exactly royalty’s bowing in response to the cheering crowds looked like. According to the definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the verb “to bow” can mean “To incline the body or head (to a person) in salutation, acknowledgement of courtesy, polite assent, etc.”¹⁸ A report from 1922, describing Queen Alexandra bowing to the right and to the left, referred to “that wonderful swaying motion for

¹¹ “Foreign Gossip: September, 1889,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 119, no. 712 (October 1889): 337.

¹² “The Royal Marriage at Windsor: A Magnificent Ceremonial,” *Irish Times*, 7 July 1891, 5.

¹³ “The Royal Wedding,” *Scotsman*, 7 July 1893, 5.

¹⁴ “The Royal Wedding,” *Times* 34950, 23 July 1896, 5.

¹⁵ “Marriage of the Princess Maud of Wales,” *Manchester Guardian*, 23 July 1896, 5.

¹⁶ “The Royal Marriage,” *Times* 37735, 16 June 1905, 6.

¹⁷ “The Royal Wedding: Brilliant Scene at the Ceremony,” *Manchester Guardian*, 16 October 1913, 9.

¹⁸ “bow, v.1,” 7a, *Oxford English Dictionary*.

which she is famous.” The term “swaying motion” appears to indicate that her bowing was more than just a nod with the head, and rather a movement involving the entire upper body; and the explanation that she was “famous” for it implies not only that she had used this for some time but perhaps also that she did this in a more pronounced form than others. Yet, as can be seen in surviving footage, this form of “bowing” with a “swaying motion” of the upper body was also still used by George V and Queen Mary, and to some degree by George VI and Queen Elizabeth. In fact, some occurrences were seen much later. As late as 1960, at the wedding of Princess Margaret and Anthony Armstrong-Jones, the commentator of the sound broadcast described how, when the carriage procession was leaving Buckingham Palace for Westminster Abbey, the queen was “leaning forward, bowing, smiling to the crowd.”¹⁹

Royal Bowing as a Greeting

In the context of royalty bowing to the cheering public, it is important to note that bowing was in fact the “normal” gesture of greeting and/or acknowledgement for royalty, at least since Victorian times. In 1886, Queen Victoria recorded in her journal that she attended a garden party at Marlborough House, the London residence of the Prince and Princess of Wales, and detailed that she “went out into the garden with them, bowing right & left.”²⁰ For another garden party at Marlborough House, five years later, she recorded that “it was rather fatiguing, bowing, often shaking hands & speaking to so many people.”²¹ This kind of royal bowing in acknowledgement to greet guests was observed not only outside but also inside, in a more limited space. For instance, for the 1863 wedding of the Prince of Wales, one paper reported that, during the entrance processions into St George’s Chapel, Princess Mary of Cambridge was “bowing with natural stateliness” and that the “young princesses” were also “bowing in return to the lowly salutations of ladies and gentlemen right and left.”²² Again, such bowing as a greeting was seen also from Queen Victoria herself. For the wedding of Princess Louise to the Marquess of Lorne in 1871, Sarah Tytler recorded that when the queen entered the chapel “down goes every head, and bent is every back as she sails magnificently up the passage, bowing now to the right hand, now to the left.”²³ In 1882, at the wedding of Prince Leopold and Princess Helen of Waldeck-Pyrmont, Queen Victoria, entering the chapel and walking to her seat near the altar, “was received with great reverence, to which she bowed her gracious acknowledgments.”²⁴ Similarly, the bride after the ceremony “looked pleased and happy, and

¹⁹ Sound Recording of the 1960 Wedding of Princess Margaret and Anthony Armstrong-Jones, available at The British Library T10679, at 12:33 mins.

²⁰ *Queen Victoria’s Journals* (QVJ), 10 July 1886 (Princess Beatrice’s copy). All references to QVJ are accessible online at <http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org>.

²¹ *QVJ*, 9 July 1891 (Princess Beatrice’s copy).

²² “Marriage Ceremony,” *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 4.

²³ Sarah Tytler, *Life of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen*, ed. and with an introduction by Lord Ronald Gower, 3 vols (London, [1897?]), 3:11.

²⁴ “Royal Marriage: Another Account,” 5.

smiled and bowed right and left in response to the respectful salutations of the company.”²⁵ At the 1885 wedding of Princess Beatrice, Queen Victoria was seen “smiling and bowing graciously” as she “walked slowly down the chancel, hand in hand with the Prince of Wales.”²⁶

There are no photographs of these indoor ceremonies and it is generally difficult for this royal bowing to be captured in image. Nevertheless, one of the reports of the aforementioned 1891 wedding of Princess Marie-Louise and Prince Aribert in Windsor included an illustration that explicitly tried to show this mutual greeting by bowing: on his arrival at the altar, the bridegroom bows to the German Kaiser and his wife who were present at the wedding, and to the Prince and Princess of Wales, with all four bowing in return with their whole upper body (see Figure 1). Two years later, an eye-witness account of the 1893 wedding of the Duke of York noted that Queen Victoria on her arrival “graciously bowed once to the right and once to the left.”²⁷ As seen with the German Kaiser, bowing in acknowledgment was a gesture also shown by foreign royalty, and for the 1905 wedding, it was reported that Prince Gustaf Adolf of Sweden, the bridegroom, “bowed right and left as he advanced to the sanctuary.”²⁸

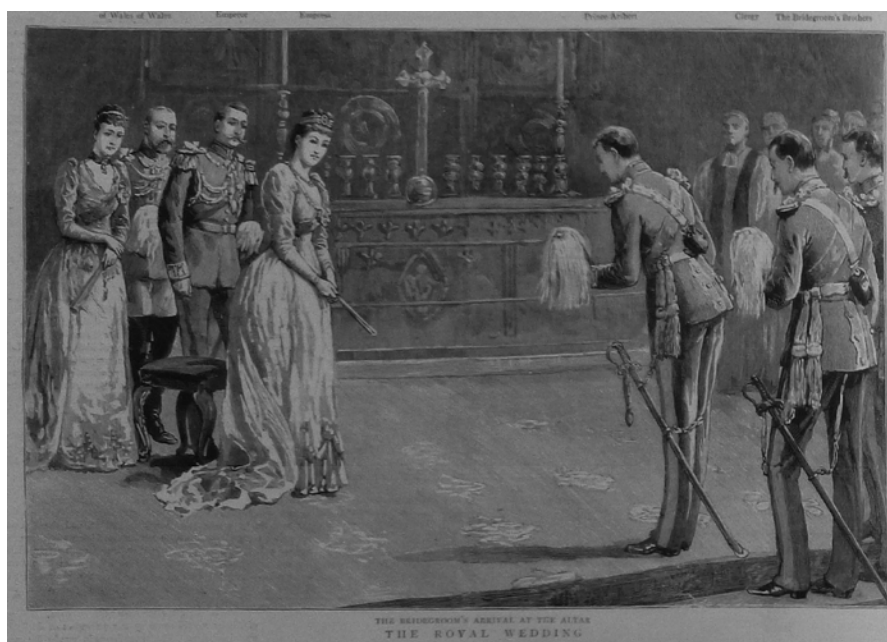


Figure 1: “The Bridegroom’s Arrival at the Altar.” From *The Graphic* 44, no. 1128, 11 July 1891, 48.
Author’s own copy.

²⁵ “The Marriage Ceremony,” *Illustrated London News: Royal Wedding Number*, 2 May 1882, 23.

²⁶ “The Marriage of Princess Beatrice,” *Illustrated London News* 2415, 1 August 1885, 106–107.

²⁷ Moulvie Rafiuddin Ahmad, “The Royal Marriage: From an Oriental point of View,” *The Strand Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly* 6 (July 1893): 451. This report was published by permission of the queen and (on p. 447) Ahmad explains that he had been present at the ceremony.

²⁸ “The Royal Wedding: Impressive Ceremonial / Splendid Reception of the Bridal Party,” *Scotsman*, 16 June 1905, 5.

Finally, for the 1913 wedding of Prince Arthur and Princess Alexandra, the *Scotsman* noted that Queen Mary and Alexandra were “walking side by side” and “bowed in acknowledgment of the respectful salutations of the company.”²⁹ Judging from the reporting and also the surviving pictorial evidence, this pronounced “bowing” as a gesture inside faded out in the 1920s and 1930s. In the wording of contemporary accounts, invited guests were no longer acknowledged with what would be described as a “bow” but at best with a nod of the head.

Overall, it is notable that, at least from later Victorian times up to the 1930s, bowing was royalty’s response to both: to their higher-ranking, invited guests—inside and outside—and also to the multitude of spectators from the general public thronging the streets. From a modern, twenty-first-century point of view—when bowing generally has become an unusual and archaic gesture—royalty bowing to those beneath them may appear to be a remarkable occurrence: the gesture of bowing is today usually associated with those of lower rank bowing to those of a higher rank. Even though royal bowing as an acknowledgement was regularly noted in a descriptive way, it seems never to have been commented on in a more discursive way. The inference is that bowing was overall a well-known established form of greeting, used so widely as not to require further explanation.

Royal Waving

Whereas in the later Victorian and Edwardian era, in the years up to the Great War, royalty’s customary way of acknowledging the cheering of the crowds was to bow, the crowds had expressed their cheering since at least the later eighteenth century by waving. Most of the earlier depictions of royal processions (especially the more official ones) are restricted to showing the participants but do not show the spectators; from the late eighteenth century onwards, however, the people is shown more and more. For instance, in a popular caricature print showing the procession of George III and the royal family to the thanksgiving service for the king’s recovery at St Paul’s Cathedral in April 1789, one can see numerous men waving their hats and at least some women waving with handkerchiefs.³⁰ This waving with hats and handkerchiefs appears to have been the usual way in which people waved at royalty.³¹ Waving in this way is documented in reports of royal events up to the 1930s at least.

In the context of royalty’s response to such cheering, there is an intriguing example from another monarchy. In his 1889 biography of the German Kaiser Wilhelm II, Hermann Jahnke recalled the 90th birthday of the Kaiser’s grandfather, Wilhelm I, in March 1887.

²⁹ “The Royal Wedding: Brilliant Scene at St James’s Palace,” *Scotsman*, 16 October 1913, 7.

³⁰ [Thomas Rowlandson, attrib.], *The Grand Procession to St. Paul’s* (London, 1789); London, Metropolitan Archives SC/GL/PR/RGP/p5430484.

³¹ For other examples, see: Robert Huish, *Memoirs of Her Late Majesty Caroline, Queen of Great Britain* (London, 1821), 2:654 (“continued waving of hats and handkerchiefs”); and for waving during the 1821 coronation procession: Bridget Cheery, “London’s Public Events and Ceremonies: An Overview through three Centuries,” *Architectural History* 56 (2013): 5 (Figure 3).

Wilhelm I and his family appeared on the balcony of his Berlin residence and were received by the jubilant crowds:

A roaring cheer, which drowns the brawling music, receives him – while he bowed as a greeting and raised his right hand to all sides, graciously thanking and waving as though blessing ... [at a second balcony appearance:] Renewed jubilation of the people, waving of hats and waving of handkerchiefs outside, to which the Kaiser responds with repeated bowing and waving. One cannot get enough of this picture.³²

Thus, Kaiser Wilhelm I still bowed as a greeting but he also distinctly waved with his hand to the people. For British royalty, waving to the people with the hand is not reported until much later. At the same time, however, Victorian royalty was not oblivious to waving as such and merely used a different approach, as some entries in Queen Victoria's journal illustrate. In 1856, when the troops returned from the Crimean War, she recorded how she stood with her family on the balcony of Buckingham Palace. As the troops approached, she "began waving my handkerchief, which was the signal for a great outburst of cheering from the crowd" and later on she observed how "Our girls & all the Princesses & Ladies waved their handkerchiefs, & our Boys, their caps, — most vehemently."³³ Nine days later Queen Victoria recorded how she and her family embarked on the ferry to the Isle of Wight, for Osborne House: they were "cheered heartily & touchingly" by the troops on two ships that they passed closely, and the queen recalled specifically "I waved my handkerchief."³⁴ In August 1874, she recorded leaving Cowes, on the Isle of Wight, and when another boat with her daughter Victoria and her son-in-law Prince Frederick of Prussia passed her, Princess Victoria "waved her handkerchief."³⁵

This use of royal waving was occasionally depicted to great effect. An illustration in Robert Wilson's *The Life and Times of Queen Victoria* in the late 1880s showed Queen Victoria and Prince Albert waving farewell to *HMS Duke of Wellington* departing for the Crimean War in 1854—the queen waving her handkerchief, the men waving with their hats (Figure 2).³⁶

³² Hermann Jahnke, *Kaiser Wilhelm II: ein Bild seines Lebens und seiner Zeit* (Berlin, 1889), 168: "Ein brausender Hochruf, der die rauschende Musik übertönt, empfängt ihn, während er sich grüßend verneigt und mit der Rechten nach allen Seiten hin huldvoll dankend und wie segnend winkt. ... Erneuter Jubel des Volkes, Hüteschwenken und Tücherwehen draußen, das der Kaiser mit wiederholtem Neigen und Winken erwidert. Man kann sich nicht satt sehen an diesem Bilde."

³³ *QVJ*, 9 July 1856 (Princess Beatrice's copy).

Robert Wilson, *The Life and Times of Queen Victoria* (London, 1887), 2:585.

³⁴ *QVJ*, 18 July 1856 (Princess Beatrice's copy).

³⁵ *QVJ*, 20 August 1874 (Princess Beatrice's copy).

³⁶ Robert Wilson, *The Life and Times of Queen Victoria* (London, 1887), 2:585.



Figure 2: Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and other members of the royal family waving farewell to HMS Duke of Wellington departing for the Crimean War in 1854. From Robert Wilson, *The Life and Times of Queen Victoria*, 4 vols. (London, 1887), 2:585. Author's own copy

In these examples, waving was addressed towards specific individuals (like Princess Victoria and her husband) or at a closely defined group (like the soldiers). Yet, there is also an example of waving as a mere greeting and acknowledgment of an indiscriminate, anonymous mass of people. In October 1832—that is, before she ascended the throne in 1837—the then Princess Victoria recorded a trip to Chester, where her mother opened the new Grosvenor Bridge.³⁷ She detailed that during the carriage drive through the streets “we could not have been received better, the hurrying, all the way & our ladies with us in the carriages waving their handkerchiefs.” The fact that she merely records this, without any further emphasis or explanation, may mean that—for her at least—waving at the people was nothing extraordinary. Nonetheless, her distinct wording indicates that it was only the ladies-in-waiting who waved “their handkerchiefs,” the implication being that she herself, and her mother, did not wave.

³⁷ *QVJ*, 17 October 1832 (Queen Victoria's handwriting).

Indeed, there do not appear to be any earlier instances of royalty waving before those cited above. In these examples, waving was heightened by the ladies and girls using a handkerchief, and boys and men their headgear. The gesture was thus better visible from a distance, and for a longer time when at least one party was on the move.

An important caesura in the history of royal waving came in 1922, at the wedding of Princess Mary and Henry Lascelles at Westminster Abbey. The reports at large were similar to those in the previous decades. The well-known society journalist Hannen Swaffer noted that Princess Mary “bowed her wedding greetings to scores of thousands of cheering people” on the way to Westminster Abbey and that during the return “she bowed her way again.”³⁸ After the wedding, when the newly-wed couple appeared on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, another account recorded that the bride again “bowed to the people with a pretty grace, and smiled her thanks for their vociferous greeting.”³⁹ Similarly, when the couple left the palace in their carriage for their honeymoon, Princess Mary was bowing to the cheering public.⁴⁰ Thus far, these reports match the earlier observations regarding bowing as the standard form of royal acknowledgment. However, under the meaningful sub-heading “An Innovation,” the reporter of *The Bystander* made an important observation worth quoting in full length:

I noticed one change in Royal etiquette in the wedding procession—Royal ladies waving their hands to the cheering populace. Princess Victoria waved her hand gaily all the way down Whitehall to the Abbey as Queen Alexandra, with that wonderful swaying motion for which she is famous, bowed right and left. On the return journey Princess Louise did the same, and in places where the outbursts of cheering were especially loud Princess Mary added a waving of her right hand to her incessant bowing. It was the first time I had ever seen any of the Princesses depart from the ordained bow, but it was very real and human, and the people liked it—just the note of a family ceremony in which the nation was taking part.⁴¹

The named Princesses Victoria and Louise were probably the sisters of George V. They are thus the first royals recorded to have waved at the crowds with their hands, and Princess Mary was the first royal bride to do so, in combination with the older habit of bowing. The correspondent clearly contrasted the princesses’ waving with Queen Alexandra’s bowing and it is intriguing that the correspondent referred to this earlier habit as “the ordained bow,” probably meaning that it was implied by the mentioned “Royal etiquette,” thus stressing how widely used and expected it was. The observation that the waving of the princesses was

³⁸ Hannen Swaffer, “The Historic Hour in the Abbey,” *The Graphic* 55, no. 2727, 4 March 1922, 254.

³⁹ “The Royal Wedding: A Nation’s Joy – The Empire at the Abbey,” *Times* 42968, 1 March 1922, 11.

⁴⁰ See: “Princess Mary Wedded to Viscount Lascelles at Westminster Abbey,” *Topical Budget* 549-1 (1922), BFI-Archive (available online via <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free> and at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CACqsxtQEbY>), at around 7:38 mins.

⁴¹ “Who, When, & Where,” *Bystander*, 533.

“very real and human, and the people liked it,” concluding that it was “just the note of a family ceremony in which the nation was taking part,” is particularly noteworthy.⁴² This corresponds with the larger historical context of this wedding: in the post-war years with their immense social changes, this royal waving emphasised the “family” character of the royal family and thus the overall imperial family united around the throne: at the time much was made of the fact that Princess Mary married not a foreign prince but a British subject, and a commoner to boot. For instance, the *Spectator* pointed out that it “would have been a great disappointment” if the princess had been “married to some foreign prince and taken away to another land,” concluding: “The more British our monarchy becomes, the better the nation will be pleased.”⁴³ In addition, following the wedding of the king’s niece Princess Patricia of Connaught in 1919, this was only the second royal wedding in modern times—and the first of a monarch’s daughter—to take place in Westminster Abbey, rather than in a palace chapel or even at Windsor. The change in location resulted in a long public processional route, giving more people of the “nation” the possibility of “taking part.”⁴⁴ This was further increased by their “waving” interaction with the royal protagonists.

Yet, royalty waving with the hand was not actually entirely new in 1922, for there had been at least one instance nine years earlier. In October 1913, Prince Arthur of Connaught married Princess Alexandra, Duchess of Fife (both cousin and niece of George V). After the wedding in the Chapel Royal at St James’s Palace, they rode in an open carriage and film footage of the procession shows the bridegroom giving military salutes while his new bride acknowledges the cheering masses with repeated bowing.⁴⁵ However, later on the couple appeared on the balcony of the Princess’s London home in Portman Square and this has been captured in a photograph: in this image, the bridegroom is distinctly waving with his right hand, not saluting (Figure 3).⁴⁶ This, then, appears to be the earliest pictorial evidence of a royal wave with the hand—yet it does not seem to have been commented on. As seen in the example of the German Kaiser, it was perhaps not too unusual for men to wave in public. This contrast may explain why the correspondent of *The Bystander* emphasised the waving of the younger princesses during the 1922 wedding procession and considered it as a ‘change in Royal etiquette.’

⁴² “Who, When, & Where,” *Bystander*, 533.

⁴³ “Thoughts on the Marriage of Princess Mary,” *Spectator* 128, no. 4888, 4 March 1922, 262. A more detailed discussion of the choice of royal consorts will have to be the subject of another study.

⁴⁴ For a more detailed study on the venues of royal weddings see the author’s *British Royal Weddings: The House of Windsor* (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

⁴⁵ “Prince Arthur of Connaught’s Wedding to Duchess of Fife (1914-1918),” *British Pathé Film-ID* 1938.30, at about 1:25 mins.

⁴⁶ “Prince Arthur of Connaught and Princess Alexandra of Connaught, Duchess of Fife at Portman Square,” 15 Oct 1913, *The Royal Collection*, RCIN 2303715.c. (accessible online at <https://www.rct.uk>).



Figure 3: Prince Arthur of Connaught and Princess Alexandra of Connaught, Duchess of Fife at Portman Square, 15 Oct 1913, The Royal Collection, RCIN 2303715.c. Royal Collection Trust /
© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2021

Notwithstanding this early 1913 example, after its more prominent quasi-introduction in 1922, the new gesture of royal greeting in form of waving did not immediately become widely adopted by royalty. In the very next year, at the wedding of Prince Albert, Duke of York, to Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (later George VI and Queen Elizabeth), there are no records or pictures of royalty waving. Nevertheless, their daughter Princess Elizabeth (born in 1926 and reigned since 1952 as Elizabeth II) was from very early on reported to have waved to the crowds. There are many reports about the little princess waving and it will be worth considering a few of these in order to appreciate how popular a fact to relate this seems to

have been, especially in the more provincial papers. Of course, she was a little girl and would most probably not have been quite aware of what she was doing; yet, it is obvious that none of the adults—her mother, grandmother, or governess—stopped her from waving.

In late June 1927, when she was a mere fourteen months old, her parents the Duke and Duchess of York returned home from an Empire tour and then appeared together with her on the balcony to greet the welcoming crowds. The *Western Gazette* reported that when the little princess “waved her tiny hand the crowd forgot the rain, the hours of waiting, and cheered themselves hoarse.”⁴⁷ Notably, this was taken up by her parents in what is one of the earliest references to them waving, in addition to the traditional bowing: “The roar of applause was renewed when the Duke and Duchess, bowing and smiling, came forward and waved to the crowd.” Their waving “to the delighted people” lasted “for several minutes.” In the next year, about two weeks before the princess’s second birthday, the *Dundee Courier* reported a “Windsor Incident” and detailed:

Little Princess Elizabeth delighted a large crowd of holiday-makers which assembled at Windsor Castle yesterday to see the guard-changing ceremony. / When the Princess was wheeled along the south terrace to the entrance gateway there was a sudden rush of the women spectators. The Princess smiled, and as she was taken away she waved her hand again and again. The people waved back.⁴⁸

Not long after that, the same paper reported a similar incident, noting:

Princess Elizabeth waved to the populace so vigorously while driving at Windsor the other day that her handkerchief escaped, and had to be retrieved by a footman. If she is like most babies she will undoubtedly try to have this performance repeated.⁴⁹

Obviously, some adult must have given her the handkerchief in the first place, perhaps even encouraging her to wave with it. A year later, in 1929, another paper judged it worth a headline that her grandfather, George V, greeted the little princess in this way: “The King Waves to Princess.” Again, the princess also waved:

Half-way through the ceremony the Princess’s attendant wheeled her little charge to a point underneath the window, and the King waved to his grand-daughter. / At the close of the proceedings the Princess waved to the delighted onlookers.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ “Duke of York’s Return,” *The Western Gazette* 9908, 1 July 1927, 16.

⁴⁸ “Hand-waving Baby Princess,” *Dundee Courier* 23353, 10 April 1928, 7.

⁴⁹ “Men and Women of To-day,” *Dundee Courier* 23373, 3 May 1928, 12.

⁵⁰ “The King Waves to Princess,” *Derby Daily Telegraph* 88, no. 14881, 21 May 1929, 9.

On her fourth birthday in 1930, the princess appeared with other children on the terrace of Windsor Castle and she “waved to the crowd below, who returned the salutation by waving handkerchiefs,” or, as another report put it, she “waved her hand to them joyously, the crowd cheering and vigorously waving their handkerchiefs.”⁵¹

Princess Elizabeth was joined in waving by her sister, Princess Margaret Rose, who had been born in 1930. In 1932, when the king and queen were boarding the train at King’s Cross Station to go to Sandringham for Christmas, they were accompanied by their two granddaughters. A report detailed that when “the two little princesses” reached the platform with the royal train “there were murmurs of pleasure from women standing closely packed behind a barrier, many of whom waved their handkerchiefs.”⁵² In response to this, Princess Elizabeth, “walked along the platform smiling at everyone.” Yet another report furthermore noted that, as the train left the station, “the two Princesses waved to the station officials on the platform. Caps in hands, they smilingly returned the compliment.”⁵³

Although the sensation in these reports was probably heightened by the fact that the popular little princesses were involved, the sheer fact that the reports refer so distinctly to waving at and by the princess seems to indicate that this was a popular and noteworthy gesture. After all, as Owens observed, in 1934 when Princess Marina waved to the public, that was still “not something commonly associated with British royalty,” and at least one article—the aforementioned “Why Princess Waves” in the *Daily Sketch*—then contrasted it with the traditional bowing.⁵⁴ Indeed, Princess Marina waved often, and much, in the run-up to her wedding to Prince George. When she first arrived in London in mid-September and joined her future husband at York House (the residence of the Prince of Wales), the couple appeared at an open window and one paper reported in detail:

A great cheer went up, and hundreds of handkerchiefs were waved to greet them ... Of the two, Princess Marina was much more at ease, and catching some of the enthusiasm of the crowd, she was soon waving both hands to them as frantically almost as they were waving to her. Prince George, still blushing, smiled and waved also. For two or three minutes he and the Princess remained at the window, and then, with one final wave, withdrew, and the crowd began to melt away.⁵⁵

⁵¹ “Princess Is Four To-day,” *Dundee Courier* 23986, 21 April 1930, 6; and “Princess Elizabeth,” *The Western Gazette* 10055, 25 April 1930, 13 (which places the scene in the quadrangle of the Castle, approaching the George IV statue).

⁵² “A Royal Smile,” *Hull Daily Mail* 14721, 22 December 1932, 10.

⁵³ “Princesses Wave to Railwaymen,” *Gloucester Citizen* 57, no. 204, 22 December 1932, 1.

⁵⁴ Owens, *The Family Firm*, 56.

⁵⁵ “Britain’s Welcome to Princess Marina,” *Dundee Courier* 25362, 17 September 1934, 7.

Then, before the couple went to the station to catch the train to Balmoral, to meet the king and queen, “they appeared at the window again to wave their thanks.”⁵⁶ Only a few days before the wedding, the *Daily Telegraph* headed an article with the telling headline “Waving a Greeting Gesture Which Won All Hearts.” It reported how the prince and princess were waving from the balcony of Buckingham Palace, in celebration of the princess’s return to London for the wedding: “Two figures, dimly silhouetted against the cosy orange glow of Buckingham Palace interior, waved their greetings from the balcony in the murky dusk to 8,000 cheering Londoners.”⁵⁷ On the same occasion, the *Daily Mirror*, for instance, also referred especially to the “Waving Princess” and reported that the Duke “stood aside for a moment, leaving Princess Marina to acknowledge the cheers alone by waving to the crowd,” before the couple withdrew with “a final wave.”⁵⁸ On the wedding day itself, as Owens points out, the newly-weds “became the first royals to wave from Buckingham Palace’s balcony following their wedding” (see Figure 4).⁵⁹



Figure 4: Prince George, Duke of Kent, and Princess Marina with the royal family on the balcony of Buckingham Palace after their wedding, 29 November 1934. From *Daily Sketch*, no. 7988, 30 November 1934, 27.

Author's own copy

⁵⁶ “Britain’s Welcome to Princess Marina,” 7.

⁵⁷ “Waving a Greeting Gesture Which Won All Hearts,” *The Daily Telegraph* 24805, 22 November 1934, 16. The wedding was on 29 November.

⁵⁸ *Daily Mirror*, 22 November 1934, front page reproduced in Owens, *The Family Firm*, 59.

⁵⁹ Owens, *The Family Firm*, 57 (emphasis added by the author). This was also captured on film in the Pathé report of the wedding: “Wedding of Duke of Kent and Princess Marina of Greece in London” (1934), *British Pathé Film-ID VLVA8UMXILMX38TOXM07PWMKTFRWU*, at about 6:10 mins.

Notwithstanding Prince Arthur's waving from the balcony of his wife's home in Portman Square after their wedding in October 1913 (see Figure 3), the Kents in 1934 appear indeed to have been the first couple to wave from Buckingham Palace. In the context of the significant changes in society since the Great War, with regard to the monarchy, also considering the fall from power of several important dynasties, there seems generally to have emerged a slightly more relaxed, less formal way of interaction between royalty and the public. In the new, arguably more democratic age after the war, time-honoured, traditional gestures such as bowing may have seemed more and more old-fashioned and archaic. Owens explicitly credited Princess Marina with the introduction of waving "to suit the more emotionally expressive 1930s."⁶⁰ However, apart from the fact that royal waving had already been seen much earlier, the reason why Princess Marina in particular was such an avid waver could also have another explanation. It appears that waving to the people had been part of her upbringing as a royal princess in Greece. In his 1969 biography of the princess, James Wentworth Day included an informative anecdote:

When the three children [Princess Marina and her two sisters] went out for a drive in an open Victoria or landau ... the warm-hearted Greek crowds went mad with joy and cheerful devotion. They adored their man-in-the-street King. They worshipped his three little grandchildren. So the children, naturally, were taught to bow right and left to the cheering crowds and to wave back to them. Princess Marina occasionally became a little bored. Being a Great Lady, when you were really quite a little one, had its drawbacks. So she made Mary [her favourite doll] deputize for her. "It hurts my neck to bow, and Mary will do the bowing now," she announced. So Mary was held up in one tiny hand whilst the other hand inclined Mary's neck and waved Mary's hand to the crowds. It was the supreme winner.⁶¹

Intriguingly, this description mentions that the royal children were taught both to bow and "to wave back to" the people, which would contrast with royal upbringing in Britain at the time, which seems to have favoured bowing only—as seen in the case of the nodding "jolly baby bridesmaid" at the 1913 wedding, mentioned above.⁶² This may have contributed to Princess Marina being reported to be "much more at ease" than her fiancé Prince George, when she waved to the people on her first arrival in Britain.⁶³ Yet, while she was reported to have waved and so prominently depicted waving in photos, during the carriage procession

⁶⁰ Owens, *The Family Firm*, 57.

⁶¹ [James] Wentworth Day, *H.R.H. Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent: The First Authentic Life Story* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1969), 18.

⁶² "The Royal Wedding: Brilliant Scene at the Ceremony," 9.

⁶³ "Britain's Welcome to Princess Marina," 7.

wedding after the wedding she could also be seen combining her waving with the more traditional bowing, as captured in a picture in one of the richly illustrated newspaper reports (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: Princess Marina in the carriage during the procession after her wedding. From *Daily Sketch*, no. 7988, 30 November 1934, 12. Author's own copy.

In any case, Princess Marina obviously soon influenced her husband-to-be: she and Prince George were quite often seen waving in pictures and were reported to have been waving. Moreover, at their wedding, they were joined in waving by the younger generation of the royal family. The bridesmaids included Princess Elizabeth, and one report noted about their arrival at Westminster Abbey that, when they “drove past the huge stands along the north side of the Abbey, there was tumultuous cheering”—to which the bridesmaids “waved back in acknowledgement.”⁶⁴ In some of the footage of the balcony appearance after the wedding, one can see the king’s granddaughter little Princess Margaret Rose waving her hand behind the balustrade of the balcony; the king himself then lifts her up on the top so that she can “wave to the crowd,” as the commentator explains, noting that “Rarely, if ever, has the camera portrayed so intimate a scene of British royalty.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ “To and from the Abbey,” *Nottingham Evening Post* 17598, 29 November 1934, 11.

⁶⁵ “Wedding of Duke of Kent and Princess Marina of Greece,” *British Pathe*, Film-ID

Although the 1934 wedding had so prominently brought waving to the forefront of royal ceremonies, royal waving remained somewhat of an exception and still took a while to become a regular feature of royalty's interaction with the public. George V himself was almost never captured on photo waving his hand to the public: at best the pictures show him giving a military salute or taking off his top hat, both of which would have been more "proper" than keeping his hat on and waving a hand. On 6 May 1935, during the state carriage procession as part of the king's Silver Jubilee celebrations, George V, in military uniform, showed his acknowledgements with military saluting, while Queen Mary, sitting next to him, acknowledged the cheering crowds with slight bowing forwards and sideways.⁶⁶ Yet, waving was again reported for their granddaughter and by now seems to have complemented her perceived image. At least one paper commented about the scene during the Jubilee procession: "Serene and self-possessed, as she usually is on big public occasions, Princess Elizabeth waved her tiny gloved hand to the crowd"⁶⁷ (Figures 11 and 12).

When George V and Queen Mary stepped out onto the balcony of Buckingham Palace to receive the ovation of the cheering masses, they first greeted and acknowledged them with short and small bowing, not waving.⁶⁸ Waving was left to the children and the king and queen benevolently watched their two granddaughters waving from the palace balcony.⁶⁹ However, George V was clearly not entirely adverse to waving in public, and to the public. There is a rare shot that shows George V together with his queen on the palace balcony, following the king's Jubilee broadcast to the Empire, in the evening of 6 May 1935: the queen is waving with her right hand and the king, now wearing a civilian suit and no hat, also gives a wave with his left hand.⁷⁰ This wave was also documented in some of the published reports, thus bringing the notion also to those who would not see the news in the cinemas. The correspondent of the *Aberdeen Journal* recorded that on this evening, after nine o'clock, the king and queen "both in full evening dress, appeared on the balcony and raised their hands in welcome to their subjects," further detailing that "For fully seven minutes their Majesties remained there bowing and waving."⁷¹ Indeed, the report pointed out that, while the crowds regaled the royal couple by singing loyal songs, the king "turned to the queen with a word or two and then each of them leant forward and waved to the crowd; and this was interpreted as "a heartfelt gesture from the King of thanks and gratitude to his people."

VLVA8UMXILMX38TOXM07PWMKTFRWU, at about 6:30 mins.

⁶⁶ See "Royal Silver Jubilee 1935," *British Pathé*, Film-ID 825.14, here around 2:03 mins.

⁶⁷ "Crowds Ninety Deep," *Aberdeen Journal* 25068, 7 May 1935, 7.

⁶⁸ "Royal Silver Jubilee 1935," *British Pathé*, Film-ID 825.14, here at about 6:20 mins.

⁶⁹ "King George V and Queen Mary," (6 May 1935), *Associated Press*, ID 3505060297 (available at <http://www.apimages.com>).

⁷⁰ "England King and Queen on Balcony," *Associated Press*, ID 3505061253 (available at <http://www.apimages.com>).

⁷¹ "Crowds Ninety Deep."

Later in the year, in November 1935, Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester, married Lady Alice Montagu-Douglas-Scott. After their wedding at the private chapel at Buckingham Palace, the couple were captured waving from the palace balcony.⁷² Both waved but, as at the wedding in 1934, there was a special focus on the bride and the mere fact she was waving was again worth a special mention in the headlines. For instance, the *Daily Sketch* had a photo of the balcony scene on its front page and the main headline had the prominent sub-title “How the Duchess Waved to the Crowd” (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: The newly-wed Duke and Duchess of Gloucester on the balcony of Buckingham Palace after their wedding. Front page of *Daily Sketch*, no. 8278, 7 November 1935. Author's own copy.

⁷² “The Royal Wedding” [1935], *British Pathé*, Film-ID 554.1, here at about 3:24 mins.

Notwithstanding the above examples, it was the era of George VI and Queen Elizabeth that arguably turned out to be the most decisive for the establishment and popularisation of the royal wave. Their coronation in May 1937 saw numerous royal waves, again prominently from the balcony of Buckingham Palace (see Figure 13).⁷³ Not long afterwards, when the royal family attended a service at St Paul's as part of the celebrations of Empire Day, it was reported that "The King, in morning dress, raised his top hat in response to the cheers of the crowd, and Queen [sic], who wore powder blue, smiled and waved her hand."⁷⁴

The reports pointed out especially that "Princess Elizabeth also waved to the people." Two years later, the royal family was captured on film on the balcony of Buckingham Palace—probably in June 1939, after the king and queen's return home from their tour of Canada and visit to the United States. In this scene, Queen Elizabeth is waving by slowly raising and lowering her right arm, while George VI is initially saluting and then gives grandly gestured waves; the two little princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret Rose, eventually join in the waving.⁷⁵

As already seen in the examples of Princess Elizabeth, waving was becoming part of day-to-day royal life and interaction with the public. In October 1937, the king and queen were on their way back to London from Balmoral. When they were at Perth station it was reported that up to then "nobody had been able to catch a glimpse of the Royal party" but that "on hearing the cheers the King and Queen came to the window of their special saloon compartment and waved to the crowd."⁷⁶ Even more privately, in 1939, during the family's stay in Scotland, the queen and the two princesses went on a visit to Glamis Castle, the queen's ancestral home. In its report of the scene, a local paper noted that "about fifty people gathered and witnessed the arrival and cheered and waved a greeting, which the Queen and the Princesses acknowledged by smiling and waving their hands."⁷⁷

The "Royal" Way of Waving

When considering the history of the royal wave, the exact practicalities of its execution are worth some further discussion. First of all, it is notable that—at least in the earlier decades—there had been a clear gender difference in waving. As could be seen, the older custom of bowing to people was practised equally by both men and women but waving to the general public was, as seen in the report of the 1922 wedding, first practised by princesses. In the early decades, there was a notable gender difference in whether, and also how, royalty waved. As already mentioned, judging from the reports and footage, it seems that George V hardly ever

⁷³ "Coronation Special 1937 - Reel 7," *British Pathé*, Film-ID 907.02.

⁷⁴ "King at Empire Day Service," *Evening Telegraph* 18874, 24 May 1937, 1; same in "Empire Day Service at St. Paul's," *Gloucester Citizen* 62, issue 20, 24 May 1937, 6, and in "The King and Empire Day," *Nottingham Evening* 18369, 24 May 1937, 9.

⁷⁵ See: *British Pathé*, Film-ID: 516.05, here around 0:20 mins.

⁷⁶ "Americans Say Queen Is 'swell'," *Evening Telegraph* 18995, 12 October 1937, 1.

⁷⁷ "Queen and Princesses at Glamis," *Aberdeen Journal* 26401, 12 August 1939, 1.

waved, and while his son Prince George could be seen waving prominently to the crowds in the events around his wedding in 1934, overall, women seem to have been waving somewhat more than men. The 1934 royal wedding also prominently displayed another pronounced gender difference in regard to royal waving. Many photos showed Princess Marina waving with a handkerchief at various occasions. In particular, when the newly-weds were waving from the balcony of Buckingham Palace after the wedding, she was seen waving with a white handkerchief (see Figure 3).⁷⁸ Indeed, even though both Prince George and his bride waved from the balcony, there was some focus on the princess in the reporting. The *Daily Sketch* dedicated a full page to this, and both the title and picture caption referred particularly to *her* waving: “The Bride Waves, the Crowd Cheers” (Figure 7).



Figure 7: “The Bride Waves, the Crowd Cheers.” From *Daily Sketch*, no. 7988, 30 November 1934, 25.
Author’s own copy.

⁷⁸ “The Royal Wedding,” *The Bystander*, 4 December 1934, supplement, front page. For her waving with a handkerchief on arriving in Britain, see: Owens, *The Family Firm*, 58.

The caption of the lower picture referred to “the great crowd that cheered as the bride waved her hand” and pointed out “Again and again they cheered; again and again she waved her hand.” This was obviously not precise insofar as the bride clearly waved with a handkerchief. Nonetheless, even allowing for what one might call journalistic poetry, this indicates that there was a notable interaction between the royal protagonists and the spectators: the more the princess waved, the more the people cheered.

As seen above, royal ladies waving with a handkerchief had a certain precedent, or precursor, going back to at least the early 1830s when the ladies-in-waiting of the then Princess Victoria waved with handkerchiefs. In earlier times, this arguably more feminine waving with a white handkerchief contrasted clearly with men’s waving their hat (see, for instance, Figure 2 above).

Considering the earlier custom of waving with hats and handkerchiefs, an additional innovation of the royal waving in 1922 had been not only that it occurred as waving to the masses at all but also that this “new” twentieth-century royal waving was exercised with just the hands. Beginning in 1922, ladies waving to the masses with a handkerchief became more and more of a rare sight and Princess Marina in 1934 was rather an exception. In November of the following year, the newlywed Duke and Duchess of Gloucester on the palace balcony both waved with their hands.⁷⁹ Again, the duchess seems to have waved notably more than her husband and later, when the couple left in the state landau for their honeymoon, there was again a clear gender difference in waving: the new duchess waved with her hand, while the duke waved with his top hat in his hand.⁸⁰ With men wearing hats more and more rarely, however, both men and women were increasingly seen waving with their hands—both gloved and bare. Waving with handkerchiefs and hats was more and more reserved for waving farewell. In this context, there is an interesting anecdote illustrating how Princess Elizabeth was always conscious of the appropriate comportment. In May 1939, Queen Mary recorded in her diary that she and the two little princesses went to Portsmouth to see off George VI and Queen Elizabeth when they left for their tour of Canada and the USA. She recorded that “we waved handkerchiefs. Margaret said ‘I have my handkerchief’ & Lilibet ansd. ‘To wave, not to cry’—which I thought charming.”⁸¹

George V’s immediate successors were reported and captured waving and there were still notable gender differences. At the first grand occasion of George VI’s reign, his coronation in May 1937, the newly crowned king apparently did not wave to his people during the main Buckingham Palace balcony appearance. Both his mother, the dowager Queen Mary, and his wife Queen Elizabeth, as well as the little princesses (Elizabeth and Margaret Rose)

⁷⁹ “The Royal Wedding” [1935], British Pathé, Film-ID 554.1, at about 3:24 mins.

⁸⁰ “The Royal Wedding” [1935], at about 3:50 mins.

⁸¹ Queen Mary’s diary, preserved in the Royal Archives, entry of 6 May 1939; quoted in James Pope-Hennessy, *Queen Mary: The Official Biography* (1959; London: Hodder, 2019), 594. I am very grateful to Ingrid Seward for pointing me to this anecdote in this source.

were captured bowing and waving, in photos and in film (see also Figure 12).⁸² The king himself, however, kept his hands under his royal robe, merely giving slight bows to the crowds. It was only during the couple's balcony appearance on one of the following evenings that the king, then in uniform without hat, waved his hand together with the queen.

A notable scene of royal waving occurred in the evening of 30 September 1938. When Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returned from the Munich Conference he and his wife were received by the king and queen. Numerous reports confirm that the crowds outside the Palace shouted for him; thus eventually the king and queen appeared with the Chamberlains on the balcony and the *Times* reported that "The little group stood there in the floodlight for four minutes, smiling and waving to the huge crowd which thundered its greeting."⁸³ There does not seem to be much photographic documentation of this waving, but the *Illustrated London News* included a full page of pictures of the balcony scene, one of which shows the queen and Mr Chamberlain waving.⁸⁴ The report in the *Scotsman* also confirmed that the four on the balcony "all waved their hands in acknowledgment" to the cheering crowds and also gave "a farewell wave" before going back into the palace.⁸⁵ The fact that the Chamberlains were invited on to the palace balcony at all was an honour rarely bestowed on anybody outside the royal family and there appears to have been only one other notable instance, about seven years later.

During the balcony appearances on VE Day and VJ Day in 1945, the royal family responded to the overall joyful and enthusiastic mood and all four members of the core royal family could be seen waving from the palace balcony. At some point during the former, on VE Day in May, they were joined on the balcony by Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Many modern writings seem to imply that Churchill on that occasion then also waved from the balcony, as Chamberlain had done in 1938. Indeed, the *Daily Telegraph* noted that the royal family appeared on the balcony three times during the afternoon, "after Mr Churchill's broadcast, and once again in the evening"; and it then furthermore detailed:

On their third appearance the Prince Minster joined the Royal party. He stood between the King and Queen, waved his cigar to the great assembly and gave the Victory sign. The cheers continued for at least five minutes.⁸⁶

⁸² "Coronation Special 1937 - Reel 7," British Pathé, Film-ID 907.02, at about 4:10 mins.

⁸³ "Ovation in London," *The Times*, no. 48114, 1 October 1938, 14.

⁸⁴ "On the Balcony on 'Peace Night': Their Majesties and Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlain," *Illustrated London News* 193, no. 5190, 8 October 1938, 624.

⁸⁵ "Premier Welcomed by Cheering Crowds," *Scotsman*, 1 October 1938, 13. Chamberlain "waving his hand and smiling" is also recorded in "Premier Appears on Palace Balcony," *Manchester Guardian*, 1 October 1938, 13.

⁸⁶ "Nation's Great Outburst of Joy on VE-Day," *The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, no. 28048, 9 May 1945, front page.

However, one has to wonder whether this was not a mere misassumption, generalisation, or confusion of reports. Numerous pictures confirm that Churchill waved and made his famous signature hand-gesture of the V-sign when he appeared to the cheering crowds on the balcony in Whitehall of the then HM Treasury building, now the Government Offices Great George Street building. In contrast, none of the known footage or photographs show Churchill waving (or bowing) when on the balcony of Buckingham Palace—notably not the picture on the front page of the *Telegraph*. Rather, the footage and pictures show Churchill standing in the middle of the royal family and while they wave, he is seen keeping his hands down and standing rather still (see Figure 8).⁸⁷ In contrast to Chamberlain in 1938, Churchill seems to have preferred not to wave, let alone to use make the V-sign, in the royal presence. Rather, it appears that he humbly left the acknowledgement of the jubilant crowds to the royal family.



Figure 8: Scene on the balcony of Buckingham Palace on VE Day, 8 May 1945. Frontpage of *The Daily Telegraph*, no. 28048, 9 May 1945. Alamy, PYH9WD.

⁸⁷ "V E Day in London," British Movietone 1945, BM45748 (available online via <http://www.aparchive.com>), between 4:15 and 6:30 mins.

In this context, incidentally, one may observe that, when royalty is present, there usually is generally very little waving from others next to them. Moreover—although it had been somewhat minor-ranking princesses who had waved from their carriages in 1922—during the balcony appearances of the royal family in the twentieth century at least, it has usually been the monarch and his or her spouse only who waved to the people, with the most common exceptions being a newly-wed couple after their wedding or little children.

A further differentiation in who waves became apparent again in the news report about the 1948 celebrations of George VI and Queen Elizabeth's Silver Wedding anniversary. During the carriage procession to and from St Paul's Cathedral for the thanksgiving service, the queen was both bowing and waving in the open state landau; the king, however, sitting next to her in full uniform, was shown neither bowing nor waving but at best giving a military salute.⁸⁸ Later, during the balcony appearance, the king did wave—but notably less than the queen. This clear gender difference, however, was to even out in the next generation. Ever since their wedding in 1947, the Queen and Prince Philip both waved avidly, and on that occasion their waving was reproduced in countless papers, magazines, and books (see Figure 9). Since then, no gender differences in who waves—or how much—have been perceivable.

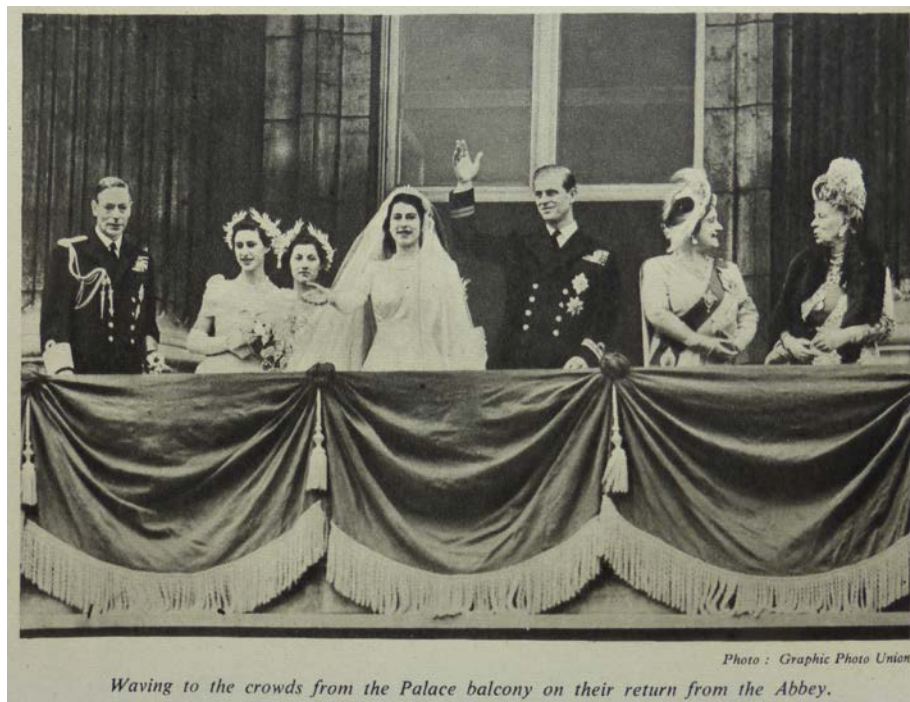


Figure 9: The newly-wed Princess Elizabeth and Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten, Duke of Edinburgh on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, after their wedding on 20 November 1947. From Betty Spencer Shew, *Royal Wedding* (London: MacDonald & Co., 1947), 114. Author's own copy.

⁸⁸ "The Silver Wedding," (1948), British Pathé, Film-ID 1428.08, at about 0:24 and 3:00 mins.

It does not seem documented what the early royal waves to the crowds in 1922 looked like—how exactly the gesture was performed. The earliest pictorial evidence of royal waving is probably that of Prince George and Princess Marina in the months leading up to their wedding in 1934. Various film recordings and photographs show that, unless the prince and princess used their hat and handkerchief, they both usually used a style of waving that shows the back of the hand turned outwards, with the hand going up and down in the height of their heads.

In contrast to this, other members of the royal family, in the early years of royal waving, used a style of waving that looked rather different: with the stretched arm raised up rather high, relaxed at the wrist, the hand's turning motion appearing more like a stirring movement up in the air. Queen Mary herself occasionally used this type of waving: for instance, she gave a brief such wave from the Buckingham Palace balcony at the Jubilee celebrations in May 1935, as a short farewell gesture before going back into the palace, and then also at the wedding of her son Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester, later in the year.⁸⁹ The new Duchess of Gloucester used this style of waving right from the start: she was seen waving like this from the palace balcony after the wedding (see Figure 5) and also in the state landau on the way to the couple's honeymoon.⁹⁰ However, Queen Mary also had another distinct style of "waving" that is prominently recorded in the footage of the balcony scene at the 1937 coronation of her son and daughter-in-law, George VI and Queen Elizabeth: she held her hand in about hip-height and moved the whole lower arm with an outward-throwing or rolling movement (which looked a bit like feeding birds).⁹¹ Yet, George VI very distinctly cultivated the "stirring" style of waving, with his arm stretched out and his hand, from the wrist, circling high up in the air in a "stirring" motion.⁹² This was all the more striking, since his wife Queen Elizabeth usually displayed a notably different style of waving, with the hand stretched out, the back of the hand turned outward, the lower arm graciously going up and down in slow movements.

As detailed earlier, Elizabeth II has been waving from a very early age. She also seems to have established her own style of waving relatively early. Whereas some of the reports mentioned the little princess using a handkerchief to wave, she mostly waved just with her hands. As an eight-year-old, Princess Elizabeth was a bridesmaid at the 1934 wedding of Prince George and Princess Marina, and after the ceremony she waved from the balcony of Buckingham Palace together with the newly-weds: she then waved with the open palm of her hand towards the people (see Figure 3). She was seen "waving to the crowd" in the same way

⁸⁹ "Royal Silver Jubilee 1935," British Pathé, Film-ID: 825.14, at about 6:28 mins; and "The Royal Wedding," [1935], British Pathé, Film-ID: 554.1, at about 3:16 mins.

⁹⁰ "The Royal Wedding," [1935], British Pathé, Film-ID 554.10, at about 2:46 and 3:50 mins.

⁹¹ "Coronation Special 1937 - Reel 7," British Pathé, Film ID 907.02, at about 4:30 mins.

⁹² George VI's "stirring wave" is particularly clear in footage that probably shows the balcony appearance after the royal couple's return from their tour of Canada and visit to the United States in 1939. See: British Pathé, Film-ID: 516.05, at about 0:20 mins.

at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester in the next year (see Figure 10).⁹³



Figure 10: Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose on the balcony of Buckingham Palace after the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. From *Daily Sketch*, no. 8278, 7 November 1935, 3. Author's own copy.

However, it was apparently at about this time that she adapted a more stylised form of waving, which she has most often used ever since: with the back of the hand facing outward (and the palm towards herself), usually with the whole of the lower arm going slowly up and down, or with the hand very slowly turning in the wrist. A photograph of the balcony appearance after the King's Birthday Parade ("Trooping the Colour") in June 1935, celebrating the king's 70th birthday, beautifully captured how the little princess neatly mirrored the waving of her grand-mother, Queen Mary, with a focused expression on her face while her mother approvingly watched her from the side (Figure 11). As Laura Cahn put it, Princess Elizabeth can in this picture be seen "perfecting the wave for which she will one day become famous."⁹⁴

⁹³ "England Royal Wedding Prince Henry," Associated Press, Image ID: 3511060109 (available online at <http://www.apimages.com>).

⁹⁴ Lauren Cahn, "Trooping the Colour: 19 Vintage Photos of the Queen's Annual Parade," *Reader's Digest*, online ed, 13 April 2020, <https://www.rd.com/list/trooping-the-colour> (accessed 6 April 2021).



Figure 11: Scene on the balcony of Buckingham Palace after the Trooping the Colour parade, 3 June 1935; Queen Mary and Princess Elizabeth waving. ANL/Shutterstock, 1353198a.

With Queen Mary waving with her left hand and Princess Elizabeth with her right, this picture, incidentally, also highlights another detail (see also Figure 9): the royal wave is performed with either hand and is not restricted to any side—in contrast to shaking hands, which in Western society is ordained by custom to be done with the right hand. In this context, it is notable also that British royalty almost never seems to have waved with both hands simultaneously—with the above-cited report of Princess Marina “soon waving both hands” in 1934 being a very rare example.⁹⁵ This would probably look too informal, too much like animating the people to cheer more; if not even presumptuous, like an Olympic athlete wining a competition.

⁹⁵ “Britain’s Welcome to Princess Marina,” *Dundee Courier*, 7.



Figure 12: Scene on the balcony of Buckingham Palace after the coronation of George VI and Queen Elizabeth, 12 May 1937. Contemporary postcard from the “Excel Series” (1937). Author’s own copy.

By 1937, Princess Elizabeth had further established her distinct style, when she was captured waving from the palace balcony following her parents’ coronation, with her little sister mirroring her wave. This image was widely disseminated through reproduction in books and even a postcard (Figure 12). Indeed, one of the pictures of this scene shows the princesses’ mother critically observing their waving.⁹⁶ Both princesses wave with their lower arm raised up, the back of the hand (or the side, respectively) turned towards the people. Andy Scott suggested a practical reason for this peculiar variety of the royal wave, detailing that the queen, “someone who waves so much,” waves in this way “to save energy and prevent injury”—explaining that Queen Mary developed “repetitive strain injury” from waving and therefore adopted a smaller wave, the “gentler wave we see today.”⁹⁷ The point about this special form of the royal wave being more economical is perhaps a valid one. In addition, the special forms, or expressions of the “royal wave” seen in the earlier decades may also have had advantages in respect to practical considerations on a different level. In the evenings following their coronation, George VI and Queen Elizabeth stepped onto the floodlit balcony of Buckingham Palace. With the camera not zooming in very much, it is just possible to make out their royal

⁹⁶ See the picture reproduced in *The Life and Times of King George VI*, 63.

⁹⁷ Andy Scott, *One Kiss or Two?: The Art and Science of Saying Hello* (London: Duckworth Overlook, 2017), 25. Unfortunately, Scott does not provide a reference for this statement.

figures—but any closer details, such as small gestures (let alone facial expressions) would be very much hidden. However, George VI's peculiar wave of “stirring the air” high above his head, and also the queen's slow raising of her white-gloved arm, are clearly distinguishable.⁹⁸ Grand (if not slower) gestures are generally better to perceive from a distance and therefore more suitable.

It may be worth pointing out that, while the traditional bowing as a gesture of acknowledgement and greeting had served both inside and outside, waving has been confined to outside use. Whereas politicians regularly wave during indoor-events and popes and bishops use a blessing gesture when passing people inside, royalty have not used a hand-gesture in a similar way and, indoors, show their acknowledgment at best with a small inclination of the head. In this context, and considering the exact technicality of the royal wave, one may recall the aforementioned report that described the German Kaiser Wilhelm I “waving as though blessing.”⁹⁹ This description that the Kaiser's waving was as though he was “blessing” indicates a slow, measured movement of the hand, rather than a frantic joyful waving. A royal (or indeed imperial) wave is a serious gesture, conveying nothing less than royal attention, and the reference to “blessing” points to a deeper meaning and symbolism. Obviously, for different people a royal wave can mean different things: from the expression of probably personal royal attention to the bestowal of a royal blessing.

The Queen herself over the years has slightly changed her form of waving: while earlier on she usually waved with the lower arm slowly going up and down, the back of the hand towards the spectator, in her later years she is more and more using a gesture in which the lower arm, hand and fingers are stretched forward, with only the hand waving from the wrist in a gentle and slow turning-motion. The occurrence of such a special, typical exemplification of the “royal” wave as an unusual gesture not seen elsewhere has very much decreased over the last four or five decades. The waving especially of the younger adult members of the royal family has become more and more indistinguishable from that of any Hollywood star, international politician, or indeed any other people in everyday life, as is well documented in countless reports in print, television, and online media. Today, the younger adult members of the royal family generally, and sometimes also the more senior members, use a waving gesture that is indiscriminate from that of the cheering masses and does not stand out from people's everyday waving (see Figure 13). As a result, their gesture has no intrinsic recognition value, no characteristic that marks a royal category: it is no signature gesture. The same applies to other royalty beyond Britain; their style of waving is no different to that of the people at whom they wave. This might bring them closer to the people, glossing over the barrier between “them” and “us,” but it also takes away another bit of the mystique that surrounds the throne.

⁹⁸ “Coronation Special 1937 - Reel 7,” British Pathé, Film ID 907.02, at about 5:10 mins.

⁹⁹ Jahnke, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 168.



Figure 13: The newly-wed Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, on the balcony of Buckingham Palace after their wedding on 29 April 2011. Alamy, 2D04R0R.

The “Function” or Effect of the Royal Wave

From a purely practical point of view, waving is visually much more appealing than the previous habit of bowing. Not only can waving be seen more easily from a longer distance—thus being more detectable at grand outdoor events—but it also works more effectively in pictures: while it is very difficult to capture bowing meaningfully in a photograph or to show it in a drawing, a raised waving hand or arm is very easily captured and instantly recognisable as a salutational gesture. Even if the hand will turn out slightly blurred in the picture, this merely increases the notion of movement—whereas a body caught in bowing motion will usually look somewhat peculiar.

As initially mentioned, the gesture of waving in general has been rather neglected by researchers and the studies of Michael Argyle, now dating from over forty years ago, are still very pertinent. His work includes much research on body language and lists waving among those gestures that have a universal, trans-cultural meaning; while he assumes that these gestures are probably not actually “innate,” he interprets them to be “natural symbols” that are

the “most obvious way to express specific messages with the human body.”¹⁰⁰ From this point of view, the earlier custom of royal bowing as a response to the public’s cheering must appear like a somewhat artificial—or deliberately sophisticated—response. Royal waving, in turn, would appear as a “natural” gesture; or as the *Bystander* commentator put it in 1922, fully quoted above, bowing was perceived as “very real and human.”¹⁰¹

Owens observed that according to the press coverage about Princess Marina in 1934—for instance about her waving frantically on her arrival in England—it was her wave that “brought her closer to the public, who were able to connect with her through new informal codes of etiquette and deportment.”¹⁰² Thus, waving would have been perceived as somehow in touch with the common man. Such a perception, indeed the “danger” of too much perceived informality through waving, could have been the reason why George V seemingly very rarely waved in his role as king-emperor; and also why other senior members of the royal family eventually adopted a peculiarly distinct style of waving—clearly differing from the straightforward informality of the masses. Royal waving, in whatever form, is a serious ritual performance imbued with much meaning.

In terms of interaction with the public it seems that, in a probably not unexpected reaction, the waving of royalty also increased the waving of the crowds. In 1911, during the carriage procession to the coronation of George V and Queen Mary at Westminster Abbey, there had still been relatively little waving in the crowd of people. The surviving footage shows that the participants riding in open carriages did not wave to the people, and the people lining the street did not wave to them. Only once the royal state coach approaches can one see that some men begin waving their hats and some women wave with handkerchiefs, with some isolated bare hands waving also.¹⁰³ However, in the pictures and footage of the following decades, especially after the 1922 royal wedding, one can see more and more people waving on such occasions. As seen above, increased cheering as a response to royalty’s waving had been noted by Queen Victoria as early as in 1856 and later on, in 1934, it was also prominently indicated in the press reports (as in Figure 6).¹⁰⁴

Once introduced and then adopted by the more senior members of the royal family, the gesture of waving to the public quickly became part and parcel of more or less all public royal appearances—so much so that today, for decades, it has barely been even mentioned in reports and is more or less taken for granted. All the same, it is notable that even in the earlier

¹⁰⁰ Michael Argyle, *Körpersprache & Kommunikation: Nonverbaler Ausdruck und soziale Interaktion*, 10th and rev. edn, trans. Karsten Petersen (Paderborn: Junfermann Verlag, 2013), 240. My own translation. See also 74–75. These points do not seem to be that clear in the English original; see Michael Argyle, *Bodily Communication* (1975; London: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁰¹ “Who, When, & Where,” *Bystander*, 533.

¹⁰² Owens, *The Family Firm*, 57.

¹⁰³ “Coronation of His Majesty King George V,” British Pathé, film ID:1800.01.

¹⁰⁴ *QVJ*, 9 July 1856 (Princess Beatrice’s copy); “The Bride Waves, the Crowd Cheers,” *Daily Sketch*, no. 7988, 30 November 1934, 25.

decades, when it was unusual, the fact that royalty began to wave was seemingly not pointed out or explained by more commentators—and not in any of the major and arguably more serious media reports. Both in 1922 and in 1934 it was noted and explained by reports in a tabloid: *The Bystander* and *The Daily Sketch*, respectively. The introduction of this gesture was probably not perceived as something to be detailed in the more “serious” publications. Alternatively, it is also possible that it was simply not widely perceived as anything remarkable. After 1918, and with the grand royal weddings at Westminster Abbey since 1919, the royal family was to some extent riding on a wave of popularity. In this context, their adoption of waving to the people may have seemed perfectly natural: only a few noted that it was a significant break with royal tradition—and even fewer thought it worth mentioning. Once the royal wave, as a greeting to the crowds, had been fully introduced, in 1934 as it were, it became so accepted, if not expected, that only few people realised and commented on how relatively “new” and unusual it was. It was probably around this time that waving was also seen in other European monarchies and became a universally used gesture. While royalty’s waving has since become the preferred pose in photographs, it is rarely even mentioned in descriptions—let alone commented upon.

In a short article in 2006, Claudia Schmölders discussed the meaning of waving by politicians, highlighting the contrast between their waving indoors and outdoors.¹⁰⁵ She observed that open air spectators often reply to waving and thus create “a short dialogue” and that the gesture can thus negate distance and status differences.¹⁰⁶ Owens suggested this function of royal gestures for 1934 and interpreted that “the more direct, informal modes of communication introduced by George and Marina worked to personalize the relationship between the House of Windsor and the public.”¹⁰⁷ As seen above, that much had already been indicated in the report of the 1922 wedding, when *The Bystander’s* commentator noted about the princesses waving that “the people liked it” and that it was “just the note of a family ceremony in which the nation was taking part.”¹⁰⁸

In the context of modern, far less reverential times, the particular way of royal waving seen in the past, and today at least by the Queen, stands out even more, or sticks out even more clearly. The modern notion of the “royal wave” invariably evokes images of the style most often used by Elizabeth II and is far removed from a gesture that could be perceived as informal, as in 1922 and 1934. Strictly speaking, the special expression of the “typical” royal wave in a slow gracious movement, as employed by senior royals since the 1930s and today still by the Queen in what Cahn has termed her “signature royal wave” is actually rather the

¹⁰⁵ Claudia Schmölders, “Winke von oben: Wer winkt am besten? Über Gesten der Nähe und Ferne,” *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch* 56, no. 1 (2006): 58–59.

¹⁰⁶ Schmölders, “Winke von oben,” 58.

¹⁰⁷ Owens, *The Family Firm*, 57.

¹⁰⁸ “Who, When, & Where,” *Bystander*, 533.

opposite of a communal gesture.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, by showing a gesture that is very recognisable, common and widely used, but in a version so markedly different from that used by other people, royalty curiously managed to be both: to be on par with the people and at the same time to stand quite apart, in a class of its own. The special expression of the royal wave embodies both monarchical dignity and direct interaction with the people.

In some way, the royal wave almost falls into the same category as the monarchy's "invented traditions," famously described by David Cannadine.¹¹⁰ Especially the queen's slow and dignified expression of the royal wave has become very much associated with the monarchy and is perceived as a traditional, time-honoured gesture. Her style of waving in itself has become a symbol of monarchical dignity and has become almost synonymous with "the" royal wave—it is the "royal wave *par excellence*." This stereotypical "royal wave" has its very own appeal and has become one of the most iconic images of British royalty, functioning almost as a trademark gesture. In relation to the public celebrations of the 2011 royal wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton, now the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Andreas Widholm and Karin Becker observed that some enthusiastic, cross-dressed celebrants employed "typical royal gestures"—for instance in that they "waved graciously to the people passing by."¹¹¹ Moreover, miniature figurines of the queen with one hand waving—powered by a solar cell—have become omnipresent in British souvenir shops up and down the country. Notably, the queen is one of only very few personalities whose waving is iconic enough to be shown in these figurines; together with the pope, interestingly.

Whether the princesses who first waved to the people in 1922 were aware of the wider dimensions of their doing so is, of course, an altogether different matter. However, it is notable that they were by no means young girls (or even children): Princess Victoria had been born in 1868 and Princess Louise in 1867—so they were both in their 50s—and Princess Mary, the bride, was 24. These princesses were mature adults who would have been very aware of what they were doing. Without wanting to credit any individual with a particular intent, the introduction of the royal wave to the British public between 1922 and 1934 can be read in the broader context of the monarchy's increased attempt to interact with—if not appeal to—the public after 1918. As Cannadine put it, "the monarchy appeared, particularly on grand, ceremonial occasions, as the embodiment of consensus, stability and community."¹¹² Especially the last aspect—of "community"—was enhanced by communal and interactive waving at each other. Owens has meaningfully suggested that the use of royal waving at the 1934 royal wedding constituted a contrast to gestures in dictatorships on the continent at the time and

¹⁰⁹ Cahn, "Trooping the Colour."

¹¹⁰ David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition,' c.1820-1977," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101–164.

¹¹¹ Andreas Widholm and Karin Becker, "Celebrating with the Celebrities: Television in Public Space during two Royal Weddings," *Celebrity Studies* 6, no. 1 (2015): 18–19.

¹¹² Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual," 140.

that Princess Marina's wave "may have similarly intensified the personal connections between members of the public and the royal family."¹¹³ The friendly gesture of waving clearly contrasted sharply with the more martial gestures in dictatorships—such as the stiffly stretched-out right arm for instance; and at the same time, with both the spectators and royalty waving at each other there was clearly more interaction than when royalty had just bowed to the people's acclaim. Surely, bowing had implied a degree of modesty: royalty literally bowed to the masses, submitted to them for a very short moment. Waving, however, seems to involve more action—the arm needs to be raised and the hand moved in some way. Altogether, waving constitutes much more of interaction. After all, while bowing inevitably implies that the head goes down, with waving it stays up—and spectators can at least think that they look royalty in the eye, or that they have personally been favoured with a royal glance. Whereas the Victorian reports had explained that royalty's bowing was "in acknowledgment" or "in response" to the people's greetings (see above), waving is more than a mere acknowledgement: it is a reciprocal gesture, one person greeting another, or others. Indeed, the common perception is probably that royalty plays the active part: that royalty waves at the people—not that the people wave at royalty and royalty merely responds by waving back. Yet, when royalty waves to the people, this is not just a mere greeting; rather, the royal wave has the function of expressing the royal attention bestowed on the populace as well as thanking them for their enthusiastic adulation.

The Modern Wave

With the change of waving style, especially in the younger members of the royal family, the idea to stand out from the masses in appearance and gestures seems no longer to be prevalent. In this way, while perhaps being arguably less stately and dignified, the younger royalty's way of waving recalls the description of "very real and human" from the 1922 wedding. Obviously, the expression of the "royal wave" is not codified in any way and keeps changing over time. At the time of first writing this, the so-called "lockdown" due to the coronavirus crisis has resulted in much public life and interaction being restricted to the internet. Apart from the queen herself, it is especially the younger members of the royal family who can be seen using this medium to interact with the public—and the modern royal wave is a clear part of this interaction: like countless other people using the same way of communication, the younger royals wave at the beginning and/or end of an online conversation in order to underline their appearance or leaving visually.

Waving is royalty's most straightforward way of communicating with a larger group of people, both highlighting a friendly nature and expressing interest. Even though the particularly distinguishable forms of the "royal wave" are now gradually disappearing, in its most recent incarnation—as a gesture akin to that used by the rest of humanity—the "royal

¹¹³ Owens, *The Family Firm*, 56.

wave” survives as a very popular expression of royal attention and remains the most direct form of interaction between royalty and the people. This achievement of a short “interaction” between royal personages and their spectators is possibly one of the main assets of the royal wave: being waved at creates a personal relationship, the idea that the person opposite does something, maybe even just for oneself personally, and this works even via modern media (as in the initial anecdote). The resulting emotional “bonding,” as it were, may arguably strengthen the acceptance and therefore the support of the monarchy as a whole. And so the royal family keeps waving and waving, on almost all public occasions—evermore building new relationships with the public through the “royal wave.”