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THE MEANING OF THE JUBILEE

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I. The Meaning of the Coronation

In February 2002, there was a newspaper story about the 50th anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne. It recalled that in London in 1952, hearing of George VI's death, people got out of their cars and stood at attention as a mark of respect. If they'd done that in 2002, the paper suggested, most likely they'd find themselves carjacked. A slight exaggeration, perhaps. But no one old enough to remember 1952 will argue the point: this year's Jubilee – not, notice, the 50th anniversary of the Coronation – will occur in a Britain transformed beyond imagination.

A few days after the 1953 Coronation, two sociologists sat down in an office in the East End of London to write an academic essay about it. Michael Young had just left the world of Labour Party politics to write a PhD thesis and to found the Institute of Community Studies in Bethnal Green, where he would soon begin to work with Peter Willmott on a book that would become a sociological classic and make them famous, *Family and Kinship in East London*. Ed Shils was an academic visitor from the University of Chicago. Their essay *The Meaning of the Coronation*, published in the *Sociological Review* in December 1953, describes the mood in the East End that summer. Based in part on dropping in on street parties that were held all over the East End, they found that everyone was sharing a kind of quasi-religious experience, based on the mystical ceremony in the Abbey.

Their central thesis was that the Coronation was the ceremonial occasion for the affirmation of the moral values by which the society lives. It was an act of national communion. The Coronation is exactly this kind of ceremonial in which the society reaffirms the moral values which constitute it as a society and renews its devotion to those values by an act of communion (Shils and Young 1955:67).

"Not only the principals and the spectators inside the Abbey, but the people outside also, participated in the sacred rite", they say (ibid:71). They admit that some claimed – even then – that it was the product of commercial exploitation, or manipulation by the popular press, or hysteria, or just the product of a national obsession with processions, uniforms, parades and pageants, or even an excuse for a national binge. All these explanations, they argue, were partial: "They all overlook the element of communion with the sacred, in which the commitment to values is reaffirmed and fortified" (ibid:71).

They quoted in support the publication, the next morning, of a cartoon by David Low in *The Guardian*. It showed "a Blimp-like figure, 'the morning after', a paper crown awry on his head, the remains of the tinsel and crepe paper of a gay party littered about him, a television receiver in the corner and over it all a grim reminder that £100,000,000 had been spent on the spree" (ibid:71). It brought a storm of denunciation – because, Shils and Young argued, "Just as the Coronation Service in the Abbey was a religious ceremony in the conventional sense, so then the popular participation in the service throughout the country had many of the properties of the enactment of a religious ritual".

But they went on to suggest a deeper explanation:

The Coronation, much like Christmas, was a time for drawing closer the bonds of the family, for re-asserting its solidarity and for re-emphasizing the values of the family – generosity, loyalty, love – which are at the same time the fundamental values necessary for the well being of the larger society.

On this occasion one family was knit together with another in one great national family through identification with the monarchy. A general warmth and congeniality permeated relations even with strangers (Shils and Young 1955, 73).

Something like this, they suggested, had happened earlier – during the Blitz, the Fuel Crisis of 1947, the London smog of 1952, even during Test Matches – and to some extent the causes were the same: a vital common subject for people to talk about, but also ‘the common sentiment of the sacredness of communal life and institutions’ (ibid:74).

Why then, they asked, should all this have happened in the UK in 1953? They argued that there had been a profound national transformation:

Whereas a century ago republicanism had numerous proponents in England, it is now a narrow and eccentric sect. Over the past century, British society, despite distinctions of nationality and social status, has achieved a degree of moral unity equalled by no other large national state. The assimilation of the working class into the moral consensus of British society, though certainly far from complete, has gone further in Great Britain than anywhere else, and its transformation from one of the most unruly and violent into one of the most orderly and law-abiding is one of the great collective achievements of modern times. The Second World War greatly contributed to the strengthening of attachment to society (ibid:76).

“Where once to mention the family of the King, like Charles II or George IV, would have provoked laughter” they wrote, “it is now common form to talk about the Royal Family. The monarchy is idealised not so much for the virtue of the individual sovereign as for the virtue which he expresses in his family life” (ibid:78). Devotion to the Royal Family was the same as devotion to one’s own family, because the values were the same. “On sacred occasions”, they argued, “the whole society is felt to be one large family, and even the nations of the Commonwealth, represented at the Coronation by their prime ministers, Queens, and ambassadors, are conceived of as a ‘family of nations’” (ibid:78–79).

Shils and Young summed up their thesis:

A society is held together by its internal agreement about the sacredness of certain fundamental moral standards. In an inchoate, dimly perceived, and seldom explicit manner, the central authority of an orderly society, whether it be secular or ecclesiastical, is acknowledged to be the avenue of communication with the realm of the sacred values. Within its society, popular constitutional monarchy enjoys almost universal recognition in this capacity, and it is therefore enabled to heighten the moral and civic sensibility of the society and to permeate it with symbols of those values to which the sensitivity responds. Intermittent rituals bring the society or varying sectors of it repeatedly into contact with this vessel of the sacred values. The Coronation provided at one time and for practically the entire society such an intensive contact with the sacred that we believe we are justified in interpreting it as we have done in this essay, as a great act of national communion (ibid:80).

Viewed from the standpoint of 2002, the whole essay appears nothing less than bizarre. Was this the Michael Young of *Family and Kinship* and *The Symmetrical Family*, the architect of the Consumers’ Association and the Open University? Did he lend his name to the thoughts of a visiting American who had become temporarily mesmer-

ised by the medieval trappings of royalty? Or did the piece reveal another Michael Young, who appears only fleetingly in the sociological work? He was never keen on having his private life or thoughts dissected; he told Asa Briggs, his biographer, to concentrate strictly on the public part. But we know, from the autobiographical fragments collected for his memorial service, that he had a tremendous internal need to connect to a family, because – a product of his parents' tempestuous lives and his banishment to a dreadful prep school – he felt he had never really had one (Anon 2002, 1–2). He identified with the Elmhursts who had effectively adopted him, and then more widely with the East End extended families who he felt embodied the values he so deeply cherished. So perhaps the Coronation piece was some kind of emotional rehearsal for that identification. Who knows?

OR IS THE PAST TRULY ANOTHER COUNTRY, one that we recognise only with the utmost difficulty? Maybe, the Shils-Young thesis sounds so fantastic today because the sociological background is so completely transformed. It takes a major effort to go mentally back into that world between the Queen's accession in February 1952 and her Coronation in June 1953. This was not a good time for Britain or for Britons. In December 1952 the great London smog descended for four days, killing an estimated 4000 people, paralysing traffic and closing theatres because the audiences could not see the stage. At the end of January a huge surge flood in the North Sea inundated 65000 hectares in eastern England, flooding 24000 houses and killing 300 people. In May the Comet, Britain's pioneering venture in commercial jet travel, crashed outside New Delhi; the third such crash, it would not be the last, and in January 1954 the plane was grounded. Britain was going through the long slow trauma of disengagement from Empire. In Kenya, Mau Mau leader Jomo Kenyatta was jailed.

But there were triumphs too – some dimly perceived at the time. The Cambridge University EDSAC became the world's first computer to be sold to a commercial company: the unlikely recipient was the Lyons teashop chain, and it became LEO (Lyons Electronic Office). A few doors away from EDSAC, in the Cavendish Laboratory, James Watson and Francis Crick were writing a paper, published on April 2 1953 in *Nature* and titled "Molecular Structure of Nucleic Acids: A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid". "This structure", it said in Crick's tongue-in-cheek style, "has novel features which are of considerable biological interest". It ended with one of the greatest scientific understatements of all time: "It has not escaped our notice that the specific pairing we have postulated immediately suggests a possible copying mechanism for the genetic material". Crick had put it all much more colourfully when, a few days earlier, he had burst into the bar of his local Cambridge pub: "We've just discovered the secret of life!

More mundanely, sweet rationing ended on 4 February 1953; the weekly ration had been equivalent to one modestly sized chocolate bar per week. But as Phyllis Willmott recalls in her diary of life in Bethnal Green in the 1950s, at the street parties throughout the country that June, the government had to issue extra rations (Willmott 2001, 9); sugar rationing came to an end only on 26 September. The BBC, who still held a television broadcasting monopoly, launched Panorama; but less than one in five households owned a television set. Surf washing powder, the first commercial detergent, was launched in 1952; its rival Daz in 1953. The Ford Prefect went on sale at £395 and found enthusiastic buyers: still only one in ten households owned a car, and it would be another five years before the first piece of motorway was opened.

The Coronation was on 2 June. That morning, the public heard that Hillary and Tensing had conquered Everest; predictably, the euphoric headlines read "The Crowning Glory". And this surely was the clue: Britain was a country slowly and cautiously emerging from years of grey austerity and real privation, and – rather like the Festival of Britain two years earlier, which had been somewhat a false dawn – it

signified the first signs of affluent celebration. Only six years later, at the 1959 election, Harold Macmillan could be memorably misquoted as telling the country “you’ve had never had it so good”.

That then was the background, the mental world, within which Shils and Young wrote. It is necessary to grasp this, because otherwise their article is impossible to grasp: it might have been written not 50, but 500, years ago. As all social historians recognise, in the decade that followed a revolution took place in British society and British values. It began in 1956, the year when John Osborn’s *Look Back in Anger* opened at the Royal Court and the anti-Suez demonstrations erupted in Whitehall. It continued through the years immortally encapsulated by Philip Larkin:

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
(Which was rather late for me)—
Between the end of the Chatterley ban
And the Beatles’ first LP.
(Annus Mirabilis, st. I, *High Windows* (1974)).

These were also the years of the *That was the Week that Was*, the satirical BBC programme that lampooned everything in sight and played a key role in turning British values upside down. All this happened ten years after the Coronation, and forty years ago: a seemingly immense divide, across which it is almost impossible to peer. If anything were being celebrated this summer, it would be the symbolic disintegration of the traditional family – Royal or otherwise.

WHAT THEN IS LEFT TO CELEBRATE? At the Institute, nearly half a century later and six months after Michael Young’s death at the age of 85, we decided to go into the streets of London again, to find out. Our local East End bailiwick is transformed: then solidly white working-class, now it’s a mosaic of races and cultures. So are entire areas of north and south London, where we also took to the streets. But, talking together about that essay, we guessed that we might come up with a funny result: that the ethnic and cultural minorities might just prove to identify most with the event – simply because, as in the wider Commonwealth from which they came, the Crown may still be a unifying symbol in a way that has ceased to be true for Britain. As will become evident, that hypothesis proved to be approximately half-true.

Preliminary indications were that the entire weekend might be no more or less than a traditional British festival. The *Financial Times* on sales at major supermarket chains, which suggested “Britons are preparing to celebrate Jubilee holiday weekend in traditional fashion – with an orgy of patriotism, drinking and sex”. The combination of the Jubilee and the opening of the World Cup had triggered a shopping frenzy: Sainsbury said its 10 top-selling seasonal items included Walkers coronation chicken flavour crisps (limited edition), Magnum ice cream bars, Jaffa Cakes, and a commemorative video called *Her Majesty the Queen: A Reign of 50 Years*. Sales of sausages were 30 per cent up; chicken satay, Chinese dim sum and various dips were 200 per cent ahead of the previous year. Tesco had sold 22,500 packs – or eight tonnes – of chicken tikka masala since the beginning of the week. Sainsbury were selling 1,000 pints of beer every minute, as well as 120,000 bottles of champagne and 1.9m bottles of wine in four days. Tesco had disposed of 1 million bottles of Kronenbourg in the last 24 hours and 4 million cans of Carlsberg since last weekend – and, small wonder, also reported a 400 per cent increase in sales of Alka-Seltzer and Resolve. Sainsbury reported that condom sales were 30 per cent ahead and was expecting a 50 per cent increase over the weekend. Clearly, as far as the public were concerned, this would be a very traditional British festival.

II. Out on the Streets: Searching for a National Festival

North by North West: Muted Merriment in Somers Town (Paul Barker)

Certainly that seemed the case in middle-class-intellectual North London, or in the solidly working-class estates that sat side by side: over the long weekend, in Camden, very few flags were to be seen on any houses, and those few on the council estates. England flags (for Sunday's World Cup match against Sweden) slightly outnumbered Union Jacks (for Jubilee); pubs seemed to be hedging their bets, with one big England flag and rows of Union Jack pennants. Some vans have both flags; one (and also one flat) managed to combine the England flag and Irish tricolour.

On the Jubilee bank holiday Monday, the landlady of the Totnes Castle pub, next to the Whittington estate in north London, was changing from the England flag to Union Jacks, now England's first game had resulted in a lacklustre draw. A baby sat in its buggy on the pavement, a Union Jack tucked into its buggy hood. In distance, a Union Jack dirigible was floating over central London. Off Camden Road, families with young children and picnics were piling into buses to go down to central London celebrations.

Everywhere, there was an uncanny Sunday-morning-like quietness, emphasising the fact that this is – even more than the Coronation and the Silver Jubilee – a media event: something that happens indoors. But at least the weather is okay.

Down in Somers Town, the party was taking place in the playground of St Mary & St Pancras C of E primary school: "a DfES designated Beacon School", the sign says. The playground railings were covered with Union Jack pennants, some showing the Queen then and now. All around were the strata of council and charity buildings for the local poor in this, traditionally one of London's most deprived areas. On the end wall of the school, a huge mural commemorates incidents from Somers Town history: Dr Darke's dust heaps (from *Our Mutual Friend*, now site of King's Cross station); figures from Luke Fildes's painting, *The Casual Ward*. On the Sidney estate behind the school, a man in a ground-floor flat has produced an elaborate outdoor display of England, Union Jack and Tottenham Hotspur flags and emblems.

Somers Town is one of the largest areas of Bangladeshi settlement in London (and thus in England), second only to Tower Hamlets. But there was very little sign of Bangladeshi on the street – or at the party, in spite of the efforts of Father Rob Wickham – priest at St Mary's, Eversholt Street, beside Euston station – and his wife, Helen. He is heating up sausages in T-shirt (which reveals dog-collar), shorts and sandals. He says: "The Church of England is the only organisation having street parties open to all. It's a question of bringing the community together." He gives out raffle prizes: first prize a large grey fluffy elephant. The raffle has brought in £170 for the church's Romanian children's fund, but he wants £200: "The buckets will be coming round."

I talked to a young woman, from Bristol originally, who came here five years ago and still has a West Country burr. She is here with her daughter and granddaughter. She is plump, smokes a cigarette. All three generations have gold ear-rings, even the baby in her buggy with her bottle of juice. "It's a five generation family," Clare says, but the great and great great grandmothers are in Bristol. To judge by the present three, everyone must have had babies very young. They all three line up for a photo.

She says: "It's not like it was in 1977. In Bristol our estate was all flags, about seven miles of it. The World Cup's affected her glory. I'm not a royalist, but I'm not a republican, either. I voted Labour. I came to support the church. I wouldn't want the royal family to go – there aren't a lot of royalty around. I applied for tickets to the palace pop concert. Who wouldn't want to see Sir Paul McCartney and that, but they were all sold out by the time I got through. The Queen needs to get more in track, but she's trying, I recognise that. She's got more sympathy since her mother

and sister died.”

At a table of about eight elderly people, I talk to one, aged 77, here partly to hear his cousin open the party. He was born in Somers Town, but is now in Chiswick. His grandmother is on the mural, he says; she used to be a flower seller. “I used to work at the *Evening Standard*, on the publishing side. But I got out. I couldn’t stand the unions. They were always trying to run your life. I went away into the restaurant business in Chiswick. The trouble now is that enough people don’t understand the role of the royal family. For foreigners, though, it’s what Britain means. They don’t care about the politicians; they’re two a penny.”

I met the leader of the Silver Steel combo – only four of them from the full band of eight. They have done much Jubilee work, he says:

I must say I’m a royalist. I played for Princess Margaret when she came to Trinidad on her honeymoon. I was the youngest member of the steel band. We made an LP and gave it to her, and she said she would keep it for ever and ever. When I go back to Trinidad now, they say, ‘We know you were the youngest member of the band, but look at you now...’ And there they are with their pot bellies... I teach in Brent and Haringey and Barnet. You know the Metronomes, the big Notting Hill Carnival band? I’m their arranger and tuner. I played the solo for Sweet in the 1970s.

Unprompted, he looks out at all the Union Jacks and says: “It’s nice to think we’re living here now. But I think if you come to a country, you should live like the country. You try going to any other country and telling them how to live; you’d never get out alive. Here they try to stop you waving the country’s flag, even. I went to a school and I saw all these flags, but not the Union Jack. I said to the teacher, ‘Is this your idea?’ She said Yes. I thought it was terrible.”

An Asian girl – red dress with little circular mirrors sewn onto it – poses to be photographed next to a young white friend. The friend won’t tell me her name until I am surrounded by other friends (all white), telling me their names. She then tells me hers; “but don’t write it down.” She went to the nursery school here. The Asian girl is from another school. The nursery department has its sign in both English and Bangladeshi.

A young Bangladeshi woman has brought her young nephew across to see the party. He stands rather unsmiling with his Union Jack hat and red, white and blue balloons. She says: “He wanted to come in. We saw it going on, so we came over to look around. We’ve been celebrating the Jubilee, but indoors mostly. We were watching yesterday. It was very nice. We’ve been talking about the Queen. It’s like my Daddy says: as long as she’s here it’ll be all right. I hope she lives a long time.” She laughs.

The people at the party – about 250 eventually – are almost all White, though there are a few Bangladeshis, West Indians and Africans. At one end of the playground, some seven-year-olds start to play football: white and black boys. The Bangladeshi, West Indian and African parents and children mostly sit in a row along the ledge at one side of the playground, watching.

In the streets near-by, many young boys – white – hung around in little groups, not going to the party. An old man in a flat cap stares through the railings.

North by North East: Manor House to Hornsey, Holloway to Hoxton: A Random Walk in Search of the Jubilee (Nick Green)

A trip on the 341 bus down Green Lanes – a predominantly Turkish part of London – was uneventful. People were out shopping, as usual; all of the shops were open, as

usual; business, as usual. But the Jubilee? No sign at all. Each and every one of the side streets off Green Lanes between Manor House and Wood Green was pretty much deserted, in an almost perfect evocation of the typical comatose English suburban Sunday afternoon immortalised by comedian Tony Hancock in the 1960s. But it wasn't Sunday, it was Monday, and it wasn't a typical Monday, it was the Queen's Golden Jubilee weekend. Except that you wouldn't have known it. But for the odd English flag outside a pub, you could have been forgiven for not knowing that it was also the opening weekend of the World Cup Finals, and the day on which Turkey had suffered a two-one defeat at the hands of Brazil, in a match in which they were holding their own until they threw it away with a reckless tackle in the penalty area, allowing Brazil to score their winning goal from the spot.

At Turnpike Lane, children played basketball in the park, and a group of young pastiche punks sat benignly at a bus stop, disinterested perhaps in the anarchist origins of their predecessors, and garbed in gear free of any sort of political statements at all. The shop windows on the way to Wood Green looked, about the same as they ever do, although Benny Dee's clothes shop was holding a 'Jubilee Sale', and several shops nodded in the direction of the World Cup.

In Wood Green shopping centre, I searched gamely for evidence of a national celebration, and eventually struck pay dirt: a large video screen, right in the central stairwell, visible from the upper floor; showing a documentary about the Royal Family. I gave it the benefit of the doubt, but soon tired of watching it, and felt I had gone farther than anyone else on that score. In Woolworth's Queen is piped through the ceiling, but – despite an appearance to come that night at the Jubilee pop concert – not acknowledged as a head of state.

I decided to wander through the local streets, to see what I could find. I asked an old woman with a yellowing tombstone perched crookedly in a graveyard of blackened teeth if there were any Jubilee parties going on in the area. No, she replied, she didn't know of any Jubilee parties in the area, because there are no children any more. The houses used to be family houses, she said, but now they're being divided up and sold off to people. Everything was terribly quiet; no sign at all of any sort of Jubilee celebration. Why don't I try Finsbury Park? she suggested. I told her that Finsbury Park's event was a punk rock concert called Deconstruction 2002. Not very Jubilee at all, really.

A gentle rain had started to fall, and I wandered up to Hornsey to find the same sense of uneventfulness hanging in the air with the drizzle. I popped into a local newsagent to buy some gum:

"Do you know if there are any Jubilee parties going on around here?" I asked hopefully. "What?" came the blank reply from the girl behind the counter. "Jubilee parties, the celebrations for the Queen", I explained, aware now that I was being wildly optimistic. She shrugged and gave me my change. I decided to head down to Holloway. You really could be forgiven for not knowing about the Jubilee in Holloway. There was nothing, absolutely nothing. East, I thought, go East.

I had read that there was some sort of event in Hoxton, that centre of arty trendiness, so I thought I might take a look. But first, I jumped off the bus outside Moorfields Eye Hospital and, curious about the source of some loud music, strolled into a nearby street that led around the back. At last – a Jubilee party in the middle of a housing estate: "for tenants only" said a small sign. Saris and jeans mingled and the smell of cheap beefburgers wafted through the air, along with the pop music. I didn't go in, and headed back down the road to a nearby pub for a pint. Clearly all local, all of the patrons were in the same round, and watching the same horse race. I bought a pint and asked the landlord about the Jubilee. Was anyone doing anything in the area, I wondered. No, he replied, it's all in the West End. And there's no interest around here, he added, because of all the ethnics. It's not relevant. I finished my pint, and continued on my way. Next stop, home of all that is trendy: Hoxton.

And boy is it trendy. And it isn't really Hoxton, it's south of Hoxton Square. I had just come from Hoxton, and that's still pretty solidly working class as far I can tell. But trendy Hoxton is about as white middle class as you can get, and today at the Foundry a folk trio are playing while an assortment of Pearly Royalty, hovering nervously on the edges, looks on. A strange disjunction as gentrifiers meet gentrified. It's gone five now, and I figure that most street parties will be drifting into the bars and pubs. I walk back up to Hoxton Square. It feels safe, certainly not on the bleeding edge of urban regeneration: the bars here sell gnocchi, and prawns in garlic sauce; hardly traditional East End fare. And still no real signs of the Jubilee. World Cup aside, it could really be just another bank holiday. And I can't help feeling that for most people, it is.

East: Jubilee on Jubilee Street (Elaine Bauer)

A few days before the weekend, I went around the area of Jubilee Street in Stepney and approached the local people in the street, in shops and neighbours in the local estate housing complex to find out what the Jubilee meant to them. This is an area with a large population originally from the Indian subcontinent, especially Bangladeshi: their reaction was that the monarchy in general, and the Jubilee in particular, meant nothing to them. Some stated that they were looking forward to the weekend as an excuse for a long rest, or to take in the celebrations as something to do:

Means nothing other than a break. I think, Monday, Tuesday, wow! I can rest. I won't be joining the celebrations, I will be going away for the weekend. I remember '77, the silver Jubilee as a child in school with mugs, ice cream and candies. We had fun I guess, but as an adult, it means nothing. (Young professional Bangladeshi female)

It means I can have extra days to sleep. No celebrations for me. (Older Indian entrepreneur)

Some South Asians believed the whole Jubilee event was a "total waste of money" – especially of state funds. One Bangladeshi male became positively irate: "Total waste of taxpayers' money and time. And think of all the business that will be closing down and losing money on Monday and Tuesday!". While he had the stage, he took the opportunity to voice his opinion regarding the deference that the legal system shows to Royalty and politicians: "Why should it mean anything to me? They don't care about me or my problems".

A young professional Bangladeshi woman, who also made it clear that the Jubilee meant nothing to her, went on to voice her anger at the officials at an East End hospital where the staff has been "making do" with "crummy old furniture" for a long time, yet, for some Jubilee event this weekend, NHS money was being used to produce all sorts of decorations including a new garden and fountain (which she suspected might be taken down after the weekend, for lack of funds to maintain it). "The Queen should be paying for that, not the impoverished NHS! Complete waste of time and money!"

Responses among the white East Enders were not so overwhelmingly negative. Views from the younger to mid-generation were mixed, while the older generation (65+) had mainly positive things to say about the monarchy and the Jubilee:

The Jubilee means nothing to me. I ain't got nothing against the Queen, don't get me wrong. But why should I celebrate someone else's Jubilee? (40ish white male shopkeeper)

A waste of money. The £80 million the Queen inherited from her mother

should be used to pay for all the celebrations, not the state money. (40ish working-class white male)

Oh yeah, it means a lot to me. I will be celebrating all right. The Silver Jubilee was great, and I hope this one will be just as good. (White middle-aged white woman)

In an extended interview, a 75 year-old white woman – who sees herself as a monarchist – gave this account of her views:

Oh well, the Jubilee means to me a wonderful achievement for a girl that I knew who's only two years older than me, and I always say she's the same age. And growing up, she was beautiful, she was lovely, and she was the story books that I never had. Yeah! She was something what we all had. We were poor, and she was our Queen. The princess, the little princesses. They were so beautiful. They are the oldest stories I know of now, because I still love fairy stories, cos I never had them books.

The Queen to me still represents the love we give her when I was 8, 9, 10, when she lost her grandfather, and then the best thing of all was when she got married to the handsome prince. Remember, to me, this is still a fairy story you know. And she was lovely. She was beautiful. And then she married her prince. Oh. And then she goes away on her honeymoon. It was still a lovely story. And then all of a sudden her dear daddy died, and that to me was a terrible thing. But then my Queen she comes back, she's gonna be Queen but she always had her mum behind her, and that is one of the loveliest parts of her (Queen mum's) reign. Because if she didn't have her mum behind her, I don't know what she'd have done, because she didn't have a good man in my opinion.

She remembered the Silver Jubilee:

I'd got a flat in South London (I come from East London), and I became a barmaid over there. And they were so great at the pub. And a man that used the pub he wrote a song which became a Jubilee song called "Golden Carriage". And I remember all the celebrations in the south side and the street parties and everything. But you ask me about that, but I remember the coronation of my Queen's father's father George V. We had a great big street party down our street. This was in Stepney at St. Georges in the East now called the Highway Tower Hamlets, changed names three times I think. That was in '37, so I was 10.

She had no problem with the Royal family's wealth:

The way I feel, she had money left to her from her parents and she invested it, and that's what's given her the riches she has today. We'd all like that opportunity to do that. She hadn't stolen from anybody. The royalty don't start with my Queen. I mean, she's not the law. She's not the one. Go back to Henry VIII who changed it all. Not my Queen. My Queen is tradition, tradition, tradition.

Talking about the Queen, what chance does she have to do anything? She could have her little private life that nobody know about and I think she's entitled to it. But as soon as anything comes out that's got to be public

knowledge, they blame her. She's just a figurehead. I mean, what about all them men that are in the palace telling her what she gotta do? They don't get put in the paper and say they're wrong. It's the Queen. And I don't think that's right.

She associated the royal family strongly with the spirit of World War Two that had brought Britain to victory:

During the war if we didn't have a royal family we would have been like flotsam on a beach. We had something. We had Churchill, and now that he's dead, people want to knock him down as a warmonger. They wouldn't be here telling you these tales if it weren't for Churchill and the royal family. It was something that was a part of us. That's all I've got to say, it's a part of us. I can't sort the world out, but I can sort my Queen out. She bleeds, she cries, and I love her. (75 year-old white woman)

During the celebrations on Monday, at the street party on Jubilee Street, the festivities were live with activities for children such as face-painting, and music and dancing for everyone. The older folks were dancing – Asians and whites alike, together. There were lots of flags around, and even a little dog was wearing his Union Jack. The media were out in great numbers, gorging on the events of the day. The mayor cut a very large cake in honour of the Jubilee and hand-fed bits of it into people's mouths. Everyone seemed to be having a great time. One white couple came from the Notting Hill area to join their East End white friends in their celebrations, because nothing was happening in their area. Both couples said that they remembered the Silver Jubilee, and were looking forward to celebrating this event, as the monarchy was important to them. But, as I milled through the crowd and asked people about the meaning of the event to them, the South Asian youths replied that it meant nothing more than the opportunity for a celebration.

Far East: Barking up the wrong tree in Dagenham or Perhaps not an own goal for Palace after all (Geoff Dench)

On the Friday before the Jubilee weekend, the sun was shining nicely. Or at least I thought it was shining, until I arrived and mingled into the area. Then, the general greyness of spirit and perpetually low-key atmosphere of the place soon calmed my expectations and brought me down to earth. Everything seemed to be pulling the place apart rather than together into a coherent and glowing community. The area is much too low in housing density for the amount of money people have. There is a lot of space, but not enough money to furnish it. Large gardens, back and front, to small houses, have little to show but (long) grass and rotting wooden fencing. And there is no sense of belonging to anything wider, or enjoyment of public goods, to overcome this dullness. In particular, there were very few positive signs of jubilation, apart from some scrawny flags stuck in gardens, windows and on the top of cars.

And here the first serious doubts arose: the only flags in private premises appeared to be those of St George. The Union Jacks were found only in shops in Heathway and the Mall off it, recalling familiar charges of commercialisation. Direct references to the Jubilee itself all seemed to focus around special offers in shops, or 'Golden Jubilee Sales', meaning that the shops in question intended to be open over the bank holiday. Ordinary people have different concerns, and when I casually asked people what they (and their families) are planning to do over the weekend there are generally some weak or even furtive smiles, followed by some reference to the fact that there is a lot of good football to watch so that they will have plenty to do.

When I button-hole a group of elderly women in the shopping parade the response is not much more enthusiastic – but telling all the same. One says very quickly that she likes the Queen and thinks that it is far better to have her than to have Tony Blair as a president. But she is getting a bit fed up with all the stuff about the Jubilee and hopes that it will soon all be over. Her friends agree but add that they would like to do what they can to support the Queen, as they know that she has had a bad year, with her mother and sister dying and that. So they were taking it a bit more seriously than they might have done. They weren't going to any parties, but one of them said that she might go to church on Sunday – but probably not unless someone went with her. At the time I did not regard this as a very positive response; though when I thought about it over the weekend I slightly revised my feeling.

Feeling rather flat, I dived into a shop and bought a current *Barking and Dagenham Recorder*, to see what public events were billed for the big weekend. I did not find what I was looking for; but what I did find was very illuminating. Firstly it turned out that there were no official events being staged, but there was some expectation of private street parties (which had been given a certain amount of borough support) and the Recorder used a couple of column inches to offer a prize (not specified) for the reader's pictures which best summed up the Jubilee spirit. (entries to arrive no later than Tuesday 4th).

But secondly, it turned out that Barking is a bastion of republicanism. Half a page of this edition of the *Recorder* (Thursday May 30th) was given to a feature describing how "Town didn't care about new Queen". Apparently in 1953 Barking acquired national notoriety as the "Town that doesn't care", as it was the only London borough refusing to spend money on coronation celebrations. The rumpus started with a story in the Sunday People newspaper in January 1953 headlined 'Won't spend a penny on the Coronation,' featuring Barking mayor Cllr J R Sweetland who said spending on royal celebrations would mean "a reduction in living standards". The Labour-controlled council was refusing to allow its halls to be used for coronation parties. Staunch republican Alderman Julia Engwell was described as 'so disinterested' with the royal occasion. The newspaper said: "With every city, town and village throughout the country pushing ahead with coronation plans, one important London borough – Barking – has the unhappy distinction of refusing to take part". It had sparked off a storm of local protest, with a quartet of royalist councillors – all Conservatives – dubbed "the Faithful Four" by the Daily Express – leading the opposition. But their last-ditch efforts to have official coronation celebrations failed – by 23 votes to four. Street parties were allowed, and £100 was spent on "a small quantity of bunting" to decorate the Town Hall. Schoolchildren did receive a coronation memento, because Essex County Council was footing the bill. But Cllr Engwell – the woman dubbed "the Barking firebrand" – was adamant: "If I had my way we wouldn't spend a ha'penny on coronation celebrations. To go mad and spend money on a lot of flags for one day's celebrations is ridiculous. "If we have any money to spend, we want to spend it on important schemes of work, such as hospitals, increased pensions and health services.")

And this tradition continues. Part of the half-page feature in the *Recorder* deals with Billy Bragg, well-known song-writer and contemporary republican and "self-styled Bard of Barking", who is reported as making equivalent contemporary points by saying that "Instead of celebrating sanitised versions of the past, we should be celebrating the multicultural future of this country. We have to be very careful that we don't allow people's love of this country – and fears about Europe – to be hijacked by the far right as they have been in countries like Denmark, Austria and Holland."

All this raised questions about the Shils-Young hypothesis – and even about the Shils-Young fieldwork of half a century ago. If streets in the heart of the East End swayed from dawn to dusk (and later) to the rhythms of celebration at the

coronation, how can this outer rim of the East End have remained so aloof? In the early fifties there were already in Barking and beyond quite a few of the families displaced by war and redevelopment from Bethnal Green and its vicinity. The populations overlapped and were interconnected. Can their reactions have been so different then? Perhaps, I thought, this is something I can try to check with older Dagenhamites.

There are various possible explanations. Firstly of course there is the possibility that the level of celebration may not have been that great in Bethnal Green either. Secondly it could be something to do with all that space. When living in densely populated streets, and highly dependent on each other for neighbourly exchanges, people will have taken to street parties like ducks to water. But set down in this suburban wilderness, with vast gaps between houses and tracts of emptiness between streets, they might have preferred to stay indoors. Thirdly, more plausibly, it could be that those people with the closest personal ties to the old docklands, where the spirit of wartime resistance and solidarity with the monarch can best be understood, actually congregated for coronation celebrations in the old East End itself, among kin, rather than attempting to recreate the atmosphere in the suburbs. That, after all, is where most Mums, the Queens of their everyday life, would have been living. In which case we would probably expect locality to make a big difference to how feelings were expressed.

Alternatively, the very fact of displacement may have actually influenced feelings themselves, with the act of migration – even just a few stops down the line from Bow – transporting EastEnders into a new state of mind where they no longer felt so celebratory. Family and Kinship records the misgivings felt about leaving Bethnal Green. Our materials from the Bethnal Green restudy, soon to be published, have discovered how recent departees have often experienced movement as a rejection, almost forcible expulsion, from territory which their families had previously felt belonged to them until state housing policies showed them otherwise. The street parties in Bethnal Green at the coronation were in part the thanksgiving of survivors of war, and a grateful homage to the royal family as symbols of national interest and continuity who had shared that war with them – and had explicitly praised the East Enders themselves for their contribution and courage in the darkest hours. The parties were an act of mutual admiration. Simply by being in the East End, where the war was won, or at any rate felt to be, people were both enjoying the reward for their wartime sacrifices and reminding themselves of the central place they had recently enjoyed in the national struggle for survival which earned them that reward.

Little of this would have applied in Barking and Dagenham. On the contrary, for many people who had already moved out there was perhaps a sense of not receiving adequate consideration, and of no longer being needed. At best perhaps there would have been a feeling of moving on. So the temptation to identify with the old symbols of the nation would not have been very great. Maybe this is why Peter Willmott, Arch Republican, felt so drawn to that area. (And maybe some of the sentiments he felt towards Michael Young reflect the resentments of the spurned East-Enders he circulated among.) If this has any validity, then we should not be thinking of Essex as a continuation of the East End at all, in the way that we sometimes do. Maybe it never was like the heartland, and has had more to tell us about the future (and recent past) of Britain than we can find in Bethnal Green itself. Psephologists have been fascinated with Essex Man for some time now and we should move with them.

Which brings me back to the women I briefly spoke with, and their sororal solicitude for the Queen. The East Enders shared a heroic moment of history with the royal family – one in which both were, in a way, important contributors to the nation. This bound them in a very public way – and in the context of a class-divided society which had been rendered classless for the duration of war. By the coronation the East Enders were humble again, but could still remember when they were important. Modern Dagenhamites do not have anything public to share with the royals really.

But they do have their common concern for their families to unite them. And this is a very egalitarian feeling. The women wanted to do something (up to a point) to celebrate, as they felt sorry for the Queen and wanted to show solidarity with her. They identified with her in a very ordinary way – a quieter sort of mutual admiration. This might or may not lead to public expressions on the day: a lot would depend on the weather.

When it comes to leadership of the nation, and representation in that sense, then it seems that there is no real sense of the monarchy doing that any more. And there is plenty in the *Recorder* to demonstrate this too. For if you turn on a few more pages you come to the things that Essex People really do know a lot about, and to the figures who do represent the nation for them. We come to the football, which dominates the centre pages of this issue. (And I mean pages, not just a measly half-page.) And believe it or not Dagenham in this universe occupies the same sort of position in the British nation as the old East End does in relation to the second World War. It is the land of heroes. For Sir Alf Ramsey, who was manager of the only England team to win the World Cup, in 1966, turns out to have been born and bred in Dagenham, where he and his brothers played for the school team – and so on. So was Terry Venables, who was manager in 1996 when England reached the semi-finals of the European Cup. And any number of footballers (including Martin Peters of the 1966 squad) have grown up or lived there.

No wonder that the *Recorder* football section starts with the heading Ramsey delivered the world. This is the way that modern nations try to express their identities or control their destinies, and the way that leadership is recognised. The surrogate wars, fought out bitterly on foreign fields every few years, produce a new popular aristocracy with which ordinary people can identify very easily. And not only Dagenhamites. So when I watched the TV news on Sunday and saw the Bishop in Swansea in the middle of his Jubilee address before the Prince of Wales and sons announcing the latest score from Japan, my first thought was that the Palace had obviously scored an own goal in holding the Jubilee this year, 50 years after the accession, when it could have legitimately waited until next year, 50 years after the coronation. Because there is clearly no contest if people are going to have to choose between going to a street party and watching Brazil and Italy play their opening games – as people had to choose today. They did not give her a chance.

However my second thought was less critical. A World Cup may be an excellent place to bury a slightly wobbly Jubilee. I cannot see a realistic prospect of the nation decanting into the streets on Monday in massive displays of spontaneous monarchical fervour. (Not least, this is because neighbourliness is a much smaller part of our lives now that most people find their identity at work. People are going to be reluctant to face the embarrassment of spending hours in forced public socialisation with neighbours whom they hardly know. We get our sense of belonging now, if at all, through watching soaps. Privately. Local community is not vibrant.)

So once a decision has been taken, or an assumption made, that this is how the Jubilee will be celebrated, the main practical problem is to find a way of minimising the disaster. And in these terms there are public relations benefits from holding it at the same time as the World Cup, and in particular while England are still involved. That way, there is at least a public mood that is compatible with the spirit of Jubilee. The national pride is there, and its symbols, and the general camaraderie. A different focus in detail of course, with focal points in pubs and on television for the football, rather than in streets or churches for the Jubilee. But there is enough ambiguity around to make it impossible to say for certain that people do not really care any more. (My own feeling is that people do care, but not in the way that they used to and certainly not in a way that leads to mass shared public merrymaking. This is a lesson that needs to be learned for the future. We live in a largely depersonalised, not face-to-face society now.) So the World Cup may actually be helping to rustle

up enough public belief in the monarchical idea to hold the republicans at bay for a little longer.

In the event, Jubilee Day in Dagenham proved to be every bit as damp a squib as forecast. That was not a matter of the weather, which was a little doubtful in the morning, though generally good throughout the afternoon. But the level of jollification was pitifully small. In the middle of Cadiz Road, a place name redolent with historical allusion, three or four old ladies sat under a panoply of bunting at a plastic table with a handful of toddlers, sipping orange juice. The party in Fitzstephen Street was more fun, with several large inflatables on which children could bounce themselves into a stupor. And a good number of able-bodied adults present too, mainly sitting at tables drinking. But there was no sense (as given by Shils and Young) of spontaneity or real enjoyment; more of a sense of gritting teeth and getting through the day. The feeling of artificiality made my skin burn at ten paces. If this was life, there were even fewer signs of it elsewhere in the borough, despite my scouring. And given the general atmosphere of suffering in near-silence, stiff-upper-lip old-style-British fashion, I did not have the stomach to grill the people I did find about their feelings on the event. Some things it is better not to talk about. I am sure a war correspondent could get away with it, or even a soap-star accustomed to glossing over realities. But in terms of finding out what people really felt about what was going on, I just did not feel that it was the appropriate time to intrude. There are times when observation overrules conversation: times when people are role-playing to the extent that they seemed to be doing on Jubilee Monday. But perhaps that is just Dagenham.

South: Multi-cultural Jubilee: Street Parties in Southwark (Belinda Brown)

In Southwark street parties were usually organised by a long-established member of the community who had good memories of the Silver Jubilee or even the Coronation which provided an inspiration. Maybe this is the reason why in the back streets of Peckham there were fewer Jubilee parties organised; many people living there had lived in the area, or even the country, only a short time and had no street party tradition.

Often the Jubilee reminded people of the Silver Jubilee when they had fun as children, bringing them up against the passage of time:

One thing the Jubilee does mean to me is not anything to do with the Queen or monarchy or politics at all but I remember being also in south east London 25 years ago for the other Jubilee the Silver Jubilee and there was also a street party for that one as well and I'm not entirely sure if it doesn't make me feel a whole lot older I'm here for the next one but it's a good positive thing to happen (Black female)

Often the Queen seemed entirely incidental to the event, though those of a more philosophical bent figured that without a Queen there wouldn't be a party and since the party was a good thing, so the Queen must be; you couldn't have such a party for a president, they argued. It also meant two days off work (if you were from Dulwich village, often none or one if you were from Bermondsey). The party was seen as such a good thing that one woman suggested that maybe we could have a day or two (or three) off work every year to celebrate having a Queen. The party seemed to be very much the entire point. It meant that for the first time, ever, all the kids played out together in the street and people sat and chatted to their neighbours beyond the usual 'hello'. With Karaoke, raffles, games and lots of food and wine, not only did the party give them (in their own words) a feeling of being a community; it was also really good fun.

Politically I don't agree with it but were here aren't we we've got a Queen I don't know how much of this is for the Queen or for the street, its just an excuse to have a party.???

it means different things to different people but here its just an excuse for people to get together and enjoy themselves have a beer relax and let their hair down. It s just a break from work I suppose. ???

It's an opportunity for the street to engage in a social event which they wouldn't otherwise do. It's like a catalyst for getting to know people a bit more than you already do and socialising in the street. ???

What does the Jubilee mean to me? I think its just a celebration of the community really. ???

Many felt that the celebrations helped to create a community that had almost gone. But there were others who thought the community was really strong:

I moved into the square quite recently and ever since I moved in they've been talking about memories of 1977. And I'm probably anti monarchist but I'm joining in with this because the community is really unique actually. I think so. 'Cos I moved down from Nottingham and everyone sort of said Oh London you know its really unfriendly its got no community. So I started living here and its the strongest community I've ever been in. I think its something to do with the architecture 'cos you've got these 12 flats around the courtyard everyone knows everyone, everyone's really close. (Young white male)

For many the Jubilee was an occasion which brought together people of many different backgrounds – though in Bermondsey there was one where many black people lived on the estate but weren't coming to the party. At one party there was some complaining about not everybody being invited, but it was still culturally a very mixed party. The most mixed party was one set up by a Catholic Church, but everyone in the area was invited and seemed to come – although someone said that the Asians and Jews hadn't come.

When you see people who are from other faiths other cultures who support events like this then people realise they're just ordinary friends and neighbours and they are part of it and they are part of the community and they're not like a separate entity they are not a separate group that work only for themselves. They are evident here and that's important. Whatever colour your face is it doesn't matter does it so all of those things are important (White British male)

The actual celebration I think is a good way to get the public together regardless of race, creed, background, that kind of thing. I think it's really good. Today we saw a good cross section of people down at Peckham square. Black people, white people, Asian people, all kinds of people and I think if a Jubilee is going to do that it's well worth it. (Black British male)

It was almost impossible to make generalisations about attitudes towards the monarchy or the Jubilee celebrations in terms of class, age or ethnicity. Perhaps the Jubilee meant somewhat more to older people than younger people, but even here there was no firm or fast rule. When the older people talked about the Jubilee they

talked about the royal family and what an excellent job the Queen had done and how you couldn't fault her. But the clearest expression of this sentiment came from a younger man, probably about 40. And there were many children of all backgrounds who had obviously absorbed a lot of enthusiasm for the Queen from somewhere, perhaps television.

I'm not exactly a Royalist but I do feel she's been on the throne fifty years and I feel that well yeah everybody should celebrate it cos she's still our Queen no matter what. I feel that's what brings the nation together at least for once. The Jubilee is part of history. Look back five years from now, you can say I was at a street party. Its good to be part of history (laughs) (Young black woman)

You see the golden Jubilee I would like to taste the food where the Queen is. I think it will be very nice. I think that the Queen deserves her golden Jubilee and she's worked very hard for it over the last fifty years (Black child, one of a group)

It's just a nice day out, looking seeing the kids enjoying themselves. Everyone enjoy themselves. Togetherness. Just hoping it doesn't rain. Just a nice day out. I haven't got a problem with the Queen she's alright (West Indian origin)

I don't believe in all that goes on these days but I think if we didn't have a monarchy I don't know what this country would have really. Everything else is taking over from everyone else but the Queen goes on. The Australians and the New Zealanders don't seem to want to any more but I don't see why we shouldn't (Older white person)

I've got a great respect for the Queen. She took a vow when she was very young 23 or something to basically serve the country and I think she's done that as well as she ever could for the next 50 years and as a personal achievement its quite something to do I do think that. I think that with the Queen mother dying this year and Princess Margaret dying this year its part of the fabric of life in the UK (White man, 40-ish)

It's the humanity and contact which is fairly important I think. You know how fast moving, and everyone's obsessed with their personal lives and in that sense. You know like southern European people are really obsessed with the family. It's a climatic thing as well. It's nice to see that that get together. We need more of that. We don't get the chance often (From Brick Lane area, male, Asian origin)

Some Africans feel very pro-monarchy, partly because they can identify with the system:

Yesterday I was talking on the phone to Ghana and they are aware of what's going on here today. So it means a lot. But unfortunately the British don't seem to realise that they have something unique. That they should hold on to. Yeah they should hold on to. If I had a chance to speak to the nation the British I would say hold on to it. It's very wonderful, never abandon it hold on to it. Because in times of crisis that's the only thing that holds the whole country together. (Black male)

Perhaps because they do attach a lot of importance to Monarchy, some Africans might think it ought to mean more than it does:

What I understand Jubilee to mean is a year when atonement is done. When I look through the celebrations that's going on I don't see any of the real sense of Jubilee as in the giving back of things people's freedom, people's liberties a lot of people are on asylum I don't see any amnesty being proclaimed. I think it should mean a bit more. There should be more significance during the Jubilee year I received this or I got this thing back or there was this release. All the concentration is on drinking spending partying, and none of the real Jubilee sense to me. (Black female)

We found some real patriotism:

I think it's a way of celebrating our history, it's fantastic, it makes you proud to be British, English I think it just it brings back the community and if you think back to the Silver Jubilee you tell your children what it was like at the Silver Jubilee and here you are at the Golden Jubilee and I don't know if they'll have the same memory of it. And it makes the children more patriotic because I think at school things get missed on the history cause I think England's got a great history and I think in a way celebrating the Queen's fifty years is a wonderful thing to do and I think it's nice for the kids to be involved in that. (White woman)

It's part of England and what England's all about its about our Queen country and everything about us and about our royalty no other countries got it in the world were blessed with that you know it means so much to me the Jubilee it about England and our royalty. I think if we didn't have the Royal family we wouldn't be half the country we are today. I'm just so proud of my Queen and country. (White man, 30-ish)

The Jubilee means a lot to me because her majesty the Queen has reigned tremendously over fifty years and it's no joke. And also she's a very strong lady. I say nobody is perfect and the misbehaviour of some of her family Charles covered everything. People don't mind the kids because of the Goodness of the Queen. (West African – probably Nigerian)

The Jubilee means that for fifty years the Queen's reigned strongly and powerful and such and people love her so much. Whenever I go home (to the Philippines) I don't sing with the national anthem, but when it's God Save the Queen, I stand up and do like this (putting her arm over her chest in a kind of salute). I'm from Philippines our contribution to this country is mainly the nurses. (Filipino woman)

A lot of things. A good celebration for our Queen. Respected dear lady that she is we love her very much. (Black British male)

The Jubilee means to me makes me proud to be British. You see the Queen after 50 years still reigning strong and okay I'm a black guy from the Caribbean with my family here and we are all celebrating 50 years of the Queen's Jubilee were not racist we've integrated into society well and we love Britain. (Black British)

If you look along the street there are so many different cultures in one street and I think that's the thing about embracing culture. And also the thing about the Queen's commonwealth. I'm second generation, my parents were first generation they came over from the West Indies and

they were asked to like work and it was very hard for them. But I think most of us have found our feet here we know where we are coming from and we know our culture because living in Britain doesn't mean that you have to get rid of your culture. (Black British woman)

I know everyone thinks it's a drink up. But its not, it's her day and it's our day as well because she is our Queen and she brings a lot of money into this country (said with emphasis). I wouldn't say I'm a Royalist but I like what they do. They work hard. I wouldn't like their job for anything in the world. All their money or whatever. I wouldn't like it. Because they work damn hard. How many weeks out of a year do they get off? They don't do they not really. (White British woman from Bermondsey)

Yes we went to a street party when we were kids but we didn't really know what we were doing and we didn't really know what we were celebrating, we didn't really feel part of it. It was like a British thing and we didn't feel we were included. But now we feel more included. We were excluded 25 years ago. Our parents were first generation here and we were sort of put together by the street rather than my parents being involved in the setting up and the kids went along to parties but probably because my parents didn't want us to miss out. But there is something about coordinating something like this. I think it's good when everyone was involved. And everyone was sort of involved in organising this. (Black British 30-ish).

But for some the Jubilee really wasn't important; they just went along for the sake of their children:

Doesn't mean a thing. Doesn't mean a thing. I remember that cause I was a little kid and it was a big event but when you grow up it don't mean a thing. A lot of my age group are disillusioned with the royals the muck ups they've made to put it politely. The scroungers, the hangers on it doesn't mean a thing and if it wasn't for my little boy I wouldn't be here now. I've only fetched him to play with the other kids to have a good time and if it weren't for my four year old I'd be lying in the garden and that's my truthful assumption. (White male 30-ish, Bermondsey).

And there were those for whom the whole affair does didn't really figure in their conceptual universe. This included young white or young Jamaican men just over here for a short time. There were also people who simply didn't know what the Jubilee was – for example a group of young white Bermondsey boys.

What does the Jubilee mean to you?
This Jubilee?
Yes this Jubilee
Honestly?
Honestly,
It don't mean nothing. (Rastafarian)

I think they're so ridiculous. It's almost like being angry at a dead dog for not moving it's almost not worth it. They're quite funny. It's like with the queers and stuff, when you get guys saying 'I don't mind what they do as long as they don't do nothing with me. And I'm like that with the Queen really. I don't mind what she does as long as she doesn't go anywhere near me. (Young white man)
The Queen of England. The Queen of England. I don't know what to say

about the Queen. I don't deal with the Queen and I don't deal with the pope. Understand. Jah we look forward to Jah. We are married to the creator. We look to the higher power. Some people bow to the Queen and bow to the pope but we don't. ????

I'm really terribly passive about the whole thing. I don't really care. I'd like to care one way or another, but I really don't to be honest. I don't think many people do. I think that's almost like a symptom of perhaps my generation, and people a bit younger than me like post Thatcher. We don't really care. We're not really that interested, and were not really proactive and it's a shame. (Young white woman)

I was almost rabidly anti monarchist because I thought it's the most ridiculous institution in the world but now maybe because of got older and softer I'm not so much of a firebrand. Just more complacent. If you'd've talked to me when I was sixteen I would've wanted like a socialist state and I would've wanted to smash the monarchy behead them and things. But now I suppose it's 'Oh Blair I don't much like him, but I'm not going to do much about it anyway..' I mean we've got IKEA haven't we. (Young white man)

Jubilee. The first thing that comes to my mind is a railway station a Tube station. (laughs) the Jubilee line that's all I know about Jubilee to Canada Water and I'm wondering why the Queen don't take the Jubilee line. (Young black male)

But even those for whom it wasn't important went along:

It doesn't mean anything to me now cause I'm Irish. But its just a day it's like I look at it it's like Paddy's day for the Irish, its like Paddy's day for the English. (Irish female)

There were also quite a few who resented the monarchy. This was either because they felt very strongly about the inequality which she represented.

How much do the Royals do for us fifty assignments a month being driven about in their nice cars having their nice foods that ain't work. Some of us are doing real work being paid just a minimum wage that to me is just a disgrace. And there's too many of them and too many hangers on if they were to cut down the Royal family and just have a Queen or something (Young white male)

I remember when Princess Ann was in Camberwell about four years ago and they completely renovated a housing estate just for that... so it's very false.

I think in some ways it's a money spinner. I think in some ways its a massive debt on the country. If you look at the Queen Mother's death she's supposed to be the most common of the Royal family. But the woman never combed her hair or ironed her own clothes in her life. Never cooked a meal in her life. Ran up something like 7 million pounds in debt. Now I'm a common person and I can't say that I've done that. (Black female)

You get the Queen wearing these dresses that cost thousands. One of those dresses could build a place for those people what she spends on them and that's what I thinks wrong. You don't see any money going in

those areas and that's what I think's wrong. You just have to go up Leicester square and see those people begging and nothings being done for them. (Irish female)

And there were also Guardian reader type republicans.

You don't need to have that kind of monarchy in place to have a party do you? You can always find an excuse for a party. As an anti Royalist I don't think its a good idea really. (White male)

Others confessed to becoming disillusioned:

You never had all the scandals about family. Somehow everyone just looked up to the royal family. The less you know the more you think it's wonderful. And people looked up to the Royal family in those days it was just tradition something which you grew up with. Nobody ever doubted it. Nobody questioned that the Royal family was the Royal Family. (Black female)

I think the Jubilee what we had all those years ago was totally different... there was more council involvement I think that now it's become like they give you a bit of money do what you want to do. It wasn't like that before. It was more like prepared the council prepared it and you like came and had a good time. Now its like they don't really care what you do. (Black British woman)

People felt the Silver Jubilee had meant more:

In the Jubilee every person had a street party every estate got a function up and it was really good. I suppose there is quite a few people but it doesn't seem as big to me as it as for the silver Jubilee. (White couple – female).

It's the first street party I seen all day today. 25 years ago every street was shut. You know what I mean. The council will charge you five hundred quid for like holding up the street for the day, 25 years that wasn't thought of. There's no community spirit compared to 25 years ago. I don't think a lot of people are that interested any more. I think its cos the monarchies changed so much. I don't know if they are as popular as they used to be. People's attitudes, the generations changed. People don't seem to give a damn now. You know what I mean. Everyone is like sod you I'm alright with everything. You see someone in the street getting mugged people drive past they don't want to know they don't want to get involved. (White couple – male)

I've got nothing against the monarchy you know they are there but I don't think they really hold the same values as they did before you know. They are not special to the nation. They are not as significant as they were before. Whereas back in the fifties they were significant to the nation. But now they are just like a national treasure to the country really and they do bring in tourism. They bring in money and tourism. I was sad when the Queen mother died. I did have a liking for her. (Black British male)

People often did seem to make connections between the royal family and their own family

The Queen mother was the same age as my mother so I've been very keen

on Royalty all these years. I sent the Queen mother a birthday card. And the Queen I think's wonderful, I think she'll reign for another ten years. (White British woman)

Whereas for many people the Queen is quite peripheral, for others she is somehow directly connected. Again this is among people of different ages and different cultural backgrounds.

Well I think it's quite a historic moment. I'm not a strict royalist but I always watch the news always find out what she's doing. I'm interested in the princes and Charles. I think she's had quite a tough year and I think that I want to make sure that she gets some happiness out of this year as well. Particularly with Buckingham Palace going on fire yesterday. It's just been horrible. To see the people out in the street actually appreciating her, will actually give her some comfort. (Black British woman)

Football was seen somehow as adding to the whole event, and combined with the Jubilee it legitimated a display of patriotism.

I think it's just a positive side of the national character people can be patriotic and flag wave without it being associated with right wing hooliganism (Young white male).

III. Reflections on an Elizabethan Half Century: What's New? What's Different?

The immediate reaction is that British – more specifically London – society has gone through a social revolution. The trappings of monarchy may have survived, but much of the substance has gone. In particular, the profound – almost mystical – sense of national identification with the new Queen, that Shils and Young reported in 1953, had disappeared without trace. Simply, many people seemed to be bored with the event. Many, especially younger Londoners and ethnic Londoners, either hardly noticed it at all, or actively resented it as a waste of public money. Hence the curious lack of activity on many streets, and the muted character of the events that were to be seen.

But second thoughts and explanations suggest themselves – some contradictory, some perhaps compatible. One is that Shils and Young were guilty of creating a myth: this profound spiritual feeling never existed, or if it did they exaggerated it out of all proportion. Otherwise, it is very difficult to square with the fact that even then, some working-class areas of London actively resisted the very idea of celebrating the Coronation. Perhaps, then, it was a feeling very restricted to a small section of the traditional East End working class, defined both by place (the old terraced streets of Stepney and Bethnal Green, where Young and Willmott did their fieldwork and whose life they celebrated), and by time (the shared experience of bombing and privation in World War Two, which they felt the Royal Family had shared). Our interviews in Stepney and Dagenham very much suggest this. Even then, as East Enders moved out into the suburban housing estates and the new towns, they very quickly lost this sense of identification – and much else besides, as Willmott and Young bewailed. Yet older people we talked to in Southwark seemed to share the attitudes that they had identified for Bethnal Green – perhaps precisely because they had remained in the same kind of traditional area.

A second reflection, deepening this last one, is that there is quite a profound divide in attitudes – even in London, city of perpetual creative destruction. It might

be called old versus young, but attitudes did not simply divide on the basis of age. It might be called conservative with a small *c* versus radical with a small *r*. It was especially evident in South London, perhaps because there we find three groups – traditional white working class, older Afro-Caribbean, newer arrivals from Africa and even farther afield – who for different reasons still identify strongly with the idea of the monarchy and with the person of the Queen. They are proud to be British, either because they have British roots or because, coming as immigrants, they feel that they have assimilated into British life. And they respect the Queen as a person who does a difficult and arduous job well. They sense that an elected president would not as adequately perform the vital symbolic role of representing the nation. And they enjoy the sense of shared community that they found in their street parties. This sense did not seem at all evident in East London, where different ethnic minorities – predominantly from the Indian subcontinent – seemed to show at least a cynical indifference, verging on outright hostility, to the idea of monarchy and the fact of the Jubilee. There might be a research study, here, on the different attitudes of Hindus and Moslems. Yet, at a time when India and Pakistan were drifting towards war, it was significant that here on the streets of London there was no sense of tension between the communities.

Yet a third thought, not totally incompatible with these others, is that the nature of popular celebration and popular identification has changed. This Jubilee, like the Coronation, was a television event. Though television ownership was very far from universal in 1953 (even in London, which had enjoyed the world's first public television service in 1936), access to television through neighbours or pubs was widespread; significantly, the notorious Low cartoon had shown the hung over reveller in front of an screen, on which was seen a face and the banner REALITY. But the relationship of people to television was very different in 2002. The defining event of the Jubilee, by common consent, was the vast pop concert in the grounds of Buckingham Palace, which extended outwards via giant television screens on to the Mall and across Central London, where a crowd of one million people were assembled: one of the greatest massings of humanity, perhaps only exceeded by the Live Aid concert, in the history of cities. In some ways it recalled the night of the Millennium, though then the event was more diffused, less focussed on a single event.

On Jubilee night, what was new and perhaps significant was that the audience became part of the show: you appeared on television, becoming famous for rather more than fifteen minutes. Here on the Mall, not in the street parties, was where people identified with each other in a sense of being collectively British. This was a media event – so pervasively so, that it could be celebrated only in front of the camera or in front of the box.

In a sense, as Shils and Young argued, this meant that you identified as part of a family. But it was no longer the nuclear family that had half-way disappeared, or the extended family of the local street that had disappeared almost altogether; it was a national family, united electronically through technology. It was the same sense of identification as is found in football, and thus it was somehow appropriate that the Jubilee and the World Cup should have become so curiously conflated. (And, from that viewpoint, it meant that the English were celebrating a sort of cosy pre-1536 kind of family relationship, before those distant Welsh and Scottish and Irish relatives muscled in). Maybe, the English have this amorphous feeling of themselves as a family, identified by a common sense of belonging. As Orwell said in his essay *England your England*, written in 1941 but republished in that Coronation year:

Above all, it is your civilisation, it is you. However you may hate it or laugh at it, you will never be happy away from it for any length of time. The suet puddings and the red pillar-boxes have entered into your soul. Good or evil, it is yours, you belong to it, and this side of the grave you will never get away

from the marks that it has given you (Orwell 1953, 194).

The suet puddings may have been replaced by panacotta, and though the red pillar boxes remain most of the red phone boxes have disappeared. But, as Orwell commented, English society could profoundly change yet the underlying sense of belonging would always remain. It was just that it took television to make it at last fully real.

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