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Edward Windsor

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Edward Albert Christian George Andrew Patrick David Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, known as David to family and friends, was born on the night of 23 June 1894 at White Lodge, Richmond Park, London. Born into the most powerful and extended royal family in Europe, Edward was destined from birth to become King of Great Britain and the dominions, Emperor of India, and Head of State to the *British Empire*. He was every bit Queen Victoria's great-grandson, and she looked upon him as her long-term progeny to rule her empire into the latter half of the twentieth century.

Edward, Duke of Windsor, was an intelligent man, bilingual in English and German, who spoke French and Spanish with reasonable fluency. Throughout his life he kept a firm grasp on his finances and business investments. Edward was abreast of the complexities of European politics in the 1930s and understood the political choices he made. If Edward had not abdicated in 1936, he would have been Britain's *Head of State* and the head of sixteen other Commonwealth territories well into the 1970s.

Edward was born a Victorian at the end of the nineteenth century and experienced the end of the old world of empire and royal prerogative, to see it replaced by a new world of telephones, cinemas, ocean-going liners, motor cars and airplanes. From birth, Edward expected deference. His own conviction was that he was born to be King.

Great grandmother Victoria had been a prolific supplier of royalty and nearly all the European monarchies were related. Of Edward's uncles, Tsar Nicholas II was also his godfather, and Kaiser Wilhelm II his summer holiday host at *Bernsdorff Palace*. Edward's world was one in which an extended family encompassed the world's empires and holidayed in one another's homes. National boundaries only applied to their respective territories and the subjects they ruled. The great game of power-broking, they played between each other.

After the death of Queen Victoria, and then his grandfather, Edward VII, Edward's own father became British Sovereign as King George V in 1910. The following years, at the age of seventeen, Edward became Prince of Wales with an income of £100,000 a year from the *Duchy of Cornwall*. He spent the last happy holidays of his youth in 1913 visiting Germany, staying with 'Uncle Willy', the Kaiser, and his Queen. These visits inspired Edward's lifelong admiration of all things German. Edward's mother, Queen Mary, was a German princess, Mary of Teck.

When the *Great War* broke out in 1914, Edward was given a commission in the *Grenadier Guards*, and although prohibited from front-line action, he spent most of the next four years in France. What he saw in the *First World War* made Edward determined that peace should prevail between Germany and Britain.

By 1917, the *Bolsheviks* had taken power in Russia and the family of Tsar Nicholas II had been executed. Edward was to record that '...just before the *Bolsheviks* seized the Tsar, my father had personally planned to rescue him with a British cruiser, but in some way the plan was blocked.' George V passed his fear of *Bolshevism* and social revolution on to his son, Edward, catalyzing the prince's thoughts into an anti-*Bolshevik* sentiment that led to his embracing the right end of the political spectrum…a force that would prove increasingly dangerous by the late 1930s.

A few months after the *1918 Armistice*, a meeting of *Trade Unionists* at the Albert Hall made it known that their ultimate intent was to see the *Socialist Red Flag* flying over Buckingham Palace. Millions of men…with a huge preponderance of voting power…were being demobbed…expecting to return to 'a land fit for heroes'.

By the time of the *1926 General Strike*, class unrest had raised its head and royalty needed to be seen to be playing an important role. Edward and his younger brother Prince Albert…later to become George VI…played key roles in the campaign of selling the royal family and taking the public's attention away from the concepts of social upheaval.

In the late summer of 1929, Edward met Wallis Simpson, while attending a party at the home of Lady Thelma Furness. Both Wallis and her husband Ernest Simpson were friends of Thelma's. It was not long before Wallis was seen increasingly in Edward's company...sending shock waves rippling through the *Royal Court*.

It was an open secret in the higher echelons of the establishment at that time that another influence was entering Edward's life in the form of an all-consuming enthusiasm for the political ideology and force in Europe of fascism. Like most of Europe's royals, Edward had a horror of unpleasant influences coming from the east. He was convinced that Soviet Russia would attempt the ideological conquest of Europe. *Bolshevism* would infect the common man, bring down Britain's ordered social structure and sweep away the Windsor dynasty.

Edward was a fascist by nature and upbringing, but instead of reinforcing his belief in the virtues of democracy to present a united front against *Communism*, Edward saw fascism as the way ahead. His support quickly moved beyond an inclination to look favourably on Mussolini's Italy, to adoration of Hitler's Germany.

Edward greatly admired the Nazi's programmes to tackle mass employment and the economic miracle that had turned Germany's economy around after Hitler came to power. He stated publicly that Britain should extend the hand of friendship to Hitler's new regime…and referred to Britain and France as 'slip-shod democracies'.

While attending a party with Wallis in July of 1933, Edward found himself in conversation with Sir Bruce Lockhart discussing the most extraordinary political event of the year...the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the *Nazi Party*. Lockhart later recorded that, 'The Prince of Wales was quite pro-Hitler and said it was no business of ours to interfere in Germany's internal affairs…either re Jews or re anything else…and added that dictators were very popular these days and that we might want one in England before long.'

A few months later he expressed his sympathies for the *Nazis* by saying "Of course it is the only thing to do, we will have to come to it, as we are in great danger from the *Communists* here, too. I hope and believe we shall never fight a war again, but if we must, then it should be on the winning side, which will be the German and not the French."

King George V died on 20 January 1936 and Edward's star reached its zenith with his accession as King Edward VIII. But it quickly began to fall as he was regarded as disruptive to the smooth workings of the constitutional settlement of *The King in Parliament* that had been designed to replace Cromwell's commonwealth in 1659. As Edward increasingly meddled in politics, his dictatorial leanings and outright fascism became more pronounced. King Edward VIII was rapidly becoming a political and constitutional nightmare.

In 1931Baron William De Ropp, a Baltic Latvian who had served with the *British Royal Flying Corp* in the *First World War*, chased up an old acquaintance and fellow *Flying Corps* pilot, F. W. Winterbotham. By the early 1930s, Winterbotham had become head of the *Air Intelligence Section* of the *British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS)*.

De Ropp, who had lived in Berlin for several years, now contacted his old friend and told him that he was a reliable conduit into the German *Nazi Party*. After listening to de Ropp's information about the aims and methods of the *Nazi Movement*, Winterbotham realised his old friend's access to the *Nazi* hierarchy was an intelligence opportunity not to be missed. He thought he should hear all he could about this dynamic new force sweeping Germany.

As a result of this initiative, Winterbotham, with de Ropp's assistance, invited Hitler's close confidant and editor of the *Nazi* newspaper *Volkischer Beobachter*, Alfred Rosenberg, to London in the autumn of 1931. Rosenberg was introduced to prominent establishment figures, ostensibly promote Anglo-German friendship, meeting with Lord Hailsham, the *British Secretary of State for War*, and Lord Lloyd, a *Nazi* sympathizer.

The high point of Rosenberg's 1931 visit was meeting with Montague Norman, Governor of the *Bank of England*. Montague Norman made substantial loans to Hitler's regime in the early 1930s and did all he could to assist Hitler to gain and maintain political power, operating on financial plans emanating from Threadneedle Street.

After Hitler took power in1933, Rosenberg returned to Britain for a second visit, only this time he made a beeline for the palatial Ascot home of Sir Henry Deterding. It was reported in the press that: 'In light of the present European situation, this purely private talk between Hitler's foreign adviser and the dominant figure in European oil politics is of profound interest. It supports suggestions current in well-informed political circles that the big oil interests had been closely in touch with the *Nazi Party* in Germany.'

It was also claimed that Rosenberg had previously met Deterding during his previous visit. If Deterding and Rosenberg had met in 1931. As Deterding was one of the wealthiest men in the world, it can hardly be a coincidence that after Rosenberg's visit, Deterding loaned Hitler almost £55 million.

Winterbotham was to spend a great deal of time in Germany in the 1930s, frequently meeting both Hitler and Hess, and was later to write: 'The *Nazis*, who were themselves daily gaining experience in the battle for men's minds, saw at much closer quarters than ourselves the tyranny of *Communism*...in those early days the *Nazis* felt they had saved their country from *Communism*. Some of them even felt that we should help in this anti-Russian drive.'

In 1934 Winterbotham met Hitler in person, and during a frank discussion on foreign policy he was told by the German Führer that, 'there should be only three major powers in the world, the *British Empire*, the *Americans* and the *German Empire* of the future,' which, he explained, 'would include the rest of Europe and the lands to the east. England, with one or two exceptions, would continue her role in Africa and India, while Germany would take Russia and together we could decide the policy for China and the Far East.'

Hitler then declared, 'All we ask is that Britain should be content to look after her empire and not to interfere with Germany's plans of expansion.' This was pretty close to what was being whispering to Edward.

After being introduced into British society circles by Winterbotham in 1931, predominantly to those who had right-wing leanings, Rosenberg went on independently indulging in political intrigue and secret diplomacy on a highly organized scale.

Late in the evening of 23 January 1935, de Ropp paid a clandestine visit to one of the royal residences specifically to meet Prince George, the Duke of Kent, who knew that de Ropp was a German agent and a conduit into the *Nazi* hierarchy. The initiative came from the Duke of Kent, who plied de Ropp with questions. De Ropp was sure they were being asked on behalf of someone else. The Duke declared during the meeting that Britain was reconciled to Hitler's determination to rearm Germany and wished to know Hitler better...Hess, Göring and Goebbels also. In the

years ahead, Prince George, Duke of a Kent, would often act as an emissary for his elder brother Edward.

Hitler, meanwhile, was never a man content to have only one string to his bow, and a completely independent line of communication was opened to Edward. When Edward was thirteen he had his first meeting with his German cousin, Karl Eduard, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and the two youths had become firm friends.

The *House of Windsor* is the British royal house and that of sixteen other Commonwealth realms. It was founded by King George V by royal proclamation on 17 July 1917, when he changed the name of the *British Royal Family* from the *Saxe-Coburg and Gotha* (a branch of the House of Wettin) to *Windsor*.

While Edward's life had gone on to include service in the *Grenadier Guards* during the *First World War*, and post-war travels around the world to promote trade and integrity within the empire, Coburg had mirrored his cousin's career with service in the *Prussian Army*, followed with support for the *Nazi Party* in the 1920s and 30s. Coburg fully embraced Hitler's doctrines and became a devoted follower of his Führer and a senior officer in the *Schutzstaffel (SS)*. He also remained close to his British relatives, and whenever he was in London he stayed with his sister, Princess Alice, in her apartment at Kensington Palace.

When the news broke on 20 January 1936 that King George V had died, Coburg immediately travelled to Edward's home near Ascot to call on his cousin, the new King Edward VIII, who had returned home from his father's bedside at Sandringham a few hours before. Coburg was the first political influence on the scene, immediately taking Edward aside to offer his condolences and to engage his cousin in a private conversation 'with pipe at fireside.' Coburg later reported to his Führer that he had then accompanied Edward on his journey to Buckingham Palace.

In fact Coburg was Edward's sole companion on that journey to London, and the two men were virtually inseparable for the next few days, often engaging in private lengthy discussions about the future direction that Edward wished his reign as King to take. Coburg's confidential reports to Hitler on these conversations show that as *Head of State* of Great Britain and the British Empire, Edward was now in a position to realize his ambition of bringing Britain and Germany closer together.

When Edward was asked by Coburg whether Baldwin would approve of these closer ties and would sanction Edward's meeting with Hitler, suggesting that perhaps Baldwin should take the lead, Edward had replied, 'Who is King here. Baldwin or I? I myself wish to talk to Hitler, and will do so here or in Germany.'

Edward also made it very clear to Coburg that he had decided that his new role as King should not continue as the symbolic position that the *Monarchy* had become. He intended the position should be one of real power, taking the authority of government and policy-making decisions back from *Parliament* and devolving them upon himself.

Coburg assured Hitler that, 'King Edward is determined to concentrate the business of government on himself, although he admitted this was not too easy in England. The general political situation, though, especially the situation of England herself, will perhaps give him a chance. His sincere resolve is to bring Germany and England together.' Coburg cautioned that this 'would be made more difficult if it were made public too early.'

For this reason, he went on, 'I regard it as most important to respect the King's wish that the unofficial policy of Germany towards Britain should be firmly concentrated in one hand and at the same time be brought into relations of confidence with official policy.' Coburg concluded, "The King asked me to visit him frequently in order that confidential matters might be more speedily clarified in this way, and to fly to London at any time he wishes.'

Within two months of Edward's accession to the throne, Hitler would reap the rewards of his new-found ally by knowing that at long last the resolute defences of the West, the very foundations of the buttress that prevented German militarism and aggressive expansion, were being seriously undermined by a man whose pro-German inclinations would allow him to do exactly what he wanted.

On the morning of 7 March 1936, six weeks after the old king died, Hitler took his first tentative steps towards war when he broke the *Locarno Pact*, ordering his troops to cross the Rhine bridges to re-militarize the Rhineland controlled by France since 1920 and the West's guarantee that Germany would never again invade Belgium and France.

However, even as Hitler broke the treaties drawn up at the end of the *First World War*, he was still unsure of the strength of Germany's position and feared his actions might provoke France and Britain into a military countermove, precipitating a war for which he was not yet ready. In 1936, the might of Germany's war-machine was still very much a bluff, and Hitler knew that Germany stood little chance of re-militarizing the Rhineland if France and Britain decided to stop him.

As the troops of Germany's *Reichwehr* marched across the Rhine bridges at dawn on 7 March 1936, Hitler nervously awaited the result of his actions aboard his special train as he travelled south to Munich. The atmosphere was tense and the Führer troubled until the train stopped at a station. A message was handed aboard. Hitler read the message and sighed with relief exclaiming, 'At last! The King of England will not intervene. He is keeping his promise. It can all go well.' Hitler had received a ciphered telegram from his ambassador to London, Leopold von Hoesch.

An extraordinary account of the events that day were recorded by Fritz Hesse, the *German Press Attaché* at the embassy, who overheard the conversation between the British King and his ambassador. Edward had told von Hoesch, 'I sent for the Prime Minister, and gave him a piece of my mind. I told the old so-and-so that I would abdicate if he made war. There was a frightful scene, but you needn't worry, there won't be a war.'

And there wasn't, for although French pride and political sense determined that Hitler should not get away with breaking the treaty that had kept Europe safe since 1919, France was reluctant to act without British support. On 11 March, Pierre Flandin, *France's Foreign Minister*, flew to London and begged the British government to back France in military action to enforce the *Treaty of Locarno*. But his pleas fell on deaf ears. 'The Germans are only going into their own back garden,' Lord Lothian declared.

In the *House of Commons*, Anthony Eden told MPs that the occupation of the Rhineland by the *Reichwehr* had dealt a heavy blow to the principle of the sanctity of treaties. But 'fortunately, we have no reason to suppose that Germany's present actions threaten hostilities.' Hitler had known that France would not act without British support.

Later Hitler confided to Schmidt, his interpreter, that the 48-hours after he marched into the Rhineland, were the 'most nerve-racking of my life. If the French had attacked us, we would have withdrawn with our tails between our legs, for the military resources at our disposal were wholly inadequate for even a moderate resistance.'

Had France ordered her vastly superior forces into the Rhineland and forcibly ejected the *Reichwehr*, the resultant fiasco could well have caused the downfall of the German dictator. That he survived at all has been attributed to his iron nerves, which alone saved the situation. But it is clear from the evidence that the arch-schemer had lain his plans with Machiavellian precision, leaving very little to chance. He knew that Britain's reaction would be hamstrung by its pro-German King, who, if opposed would threatened to precipitate a constitutional crisis.

This was not the first time Edward had interfered in a British foreign policy decision and challenged and opposed Stanley Baldwin and the British Government.[1] Edward's defiance of his own government and determination to exert his own will on how Europe should develop, made it clear that he intended to cast himself in the mould of his grandfather Edward VII, who had personally intervened between his cousins, the Kaiser and the Tsar. However this was not old-world family diplomacy and meddling in minor policy with his relatives, it entailed openly siding with Europe's aggressive dictators against his own government on matters of fundamental importance. Britain's senior politicians believed that Edward's increasingly pro-fascist leanings demonstrated that he intended to take the lead on policy. They worried that a situation might develop where Edward would impose his will and when opposed, threaten a constitutional crisis each time he failed to have his own way. Edward's had expressed this intention to his cousin Coburg during the first hours of his reign. The principles of the *Führerprinz* would be a reality.

Anthony Eden remarked that if Edward insisted on intervening in foreign affairs, there were ways and means of making him abdicate. Although Edward had technically become British *Head of State* on his father's death in January 1936, his position was not completely secure for he would not fully become King until his Coronation on 12 May 1937. Once Edward was officially crowned at Westminster Abbey his position would be strengthened.

It was impossible to gauge what would happen if it proved necessary to remove Edward once his position had become fully legitimized. There were real fears of precipitating a second *English Civil War*. Spain's monarch Alfonso XIII had been deposed, and civil war was raging in Spain…and Britain had its own Franco, Sir Oswald Mosley, waiting in the wings. His support for Edward was well known. Action was needed soon.

In September 1936 Lord Wigram, George V's private secretary, and Alec Hardinge, Edward VIII's private secretary, secretly met Archbishop Cosmo Lang in Scotland and had a long talk 'up and down the problem of His Majesty.' Around this time Lang decided that Edward VIII would have to go. Lang viewed the monarchy as primarily a Christian institution, and felt it to be endangered by the king's behaviour. He viewed the monarchy as a focus of unity within Britain and the Empire, sorely needed at a time when *Fascism* and *Nazism* were disturbing Europe.

An opportunity for Lang to intervene came the following month when Lang and Baldwin were guests of Lord Salisbury at *Hatfield House*. Baldwin unburdened himself in a private conversation with Lang. In the following six weeks, Lang contrived a close friendship with Baldwin. The two men met in secrecy seven times, spoke on the tele-

[1] From October 1935 to January 1936, while still Prince of Wales, Edward's influence had not been particularly great, except for his meddling in Abyssinia by meeting with an old acquaintance, the right-wing French politician Pierre Laval, who together with the like-minded *British Foreign Secretary*, Sir Samuel Hoare, had devised the *Hoare-Laval Pact*...a plan whereby Mussolini would be allowed to keep his conquests in Africa. When Hoare took his plan before the *House of Commons*, Edward took the highly unusual step of demonstrating his support for Hoare by attending the discussion and sitting in the *Distinguished Strangers' Gallery*. Edward applauded Hoare repeatedly…in contrast to the boos and cat-calls Hoare received from his fellow *Members of Parliament*. The Pact, by which Mussolini would relinquish a large, useless tract of Italian Somaliland in exchange for a vast slice of Abyssinia's richest and most fertile cotton-growing region, was seen for what it was. Not only was the bill thrown out by the honourable members, but so was Sir Samuel Hoare who was shuffled off to the Admiralty.

phone, and exchanged letters. Lang, the intellectually abler of the two, galvanised Baldwin to take action.

Shortly afterwards a secret meeting took place between several government ministers, church leaders and senior civil-service mandarins at a secluded country house in Hampshire. They all met under the guise of a private shooting weekend, but what they really did was discuss their monarch and how he could best be manoeuvred off the throne.

It was no secret to these men that as Edward's ever closer links to the *Nazis* developed, combined with his sense of security in his new position, he was becoming more blatant about his *Nazi* leanings, and increasingly inclined to assert his political will. Weekend gusts were briefed that Wallis Simpson would be the tool to unseat the monarch.

Stanley Baldwin was a shrewd politician. He was a solid kindly man who avoided precipitate action. His inclination was to let things run their natural course before stepping in with a well-prepared end-game. By the late autumn of 1936 the Wallis Simpson 'affair', which had long been written and spoken about abroad, reached the British press.

In the first week of December 1936, with public anxiety rising rapidly, Sir Oswald Mosley called for a referendum on the marriage of King Edward VIII...complete with a public announcement that he and his Blackshirts were entirely on Edward's side. On 16 November 1936, Edward invited Prime Minister Baldwin to Buckingham Palace and expressed his desire to marry Wallis Simpson when she became free to re-marry. Baldwin informed him that his subjects would find the marriage unacceptable, because remarriage after divorce was opposed by the Church of England, and the people would not tolerate Wallis as queen. As king, Edward was the titular head of the Church of England, and the clergy expected him to support the Church's teachings.

Edward proposed an alternative solution of a *Morganatic Marriage*. He would remain king but Wallis would not become queen. She would enjoy some lesser title, and any children they might have would not inherit the throne. This too was rejected by the *British Cabinet* as well as by other *Dominion* governments, whose views had been sought pursuant to the *Statute of Westminster 1931*, which provided in part that 'any alteration in the law touching the Succession to the Throne or the Royal Style and Titles shall hereafter require the assent as well of the Parliaments of all the Dominions as of the Parliament of the United Kingdom'.

The Prime Ministers of Australia, Canada and South Africa made clear their opposition to the king marrying a divorcee; their Irish counterpart expressed indifference and detachment, while the Prime Minister of New Zealand, having never heard of Wallis Simpson before, vacillated in disbelief. Faced with this opposition, Edward at first responded that there were "not many people in Australia" and their opinion did not matter.

Edward informed Baldwin that he would abdicate if he could not marry Wallis Simpson. Baldwin then presented Edward with three choices: give up the idea of marriage; marry against his ministers' wishes; or abdicate. It was clear that Edward was not prepared to give up Wallis Simpson, and he knew that if he married against the advice of his ministers, he would cause the government to resign, prompting a constitutional crisis.

Edward tried one last throw of the dice. He went to Downing Street and announced his intention of putting his position to his subjects in a radio broadcast. Baldwin told Edward that such an appeal to the people over the head of the government would be unconstitutional...indeed it was tantamount to setting up a *King's Party*.

Edward VIII was left with the options of staying on the throne without Mrs Simpson, or abdicating and marrying her. Later Baldwin was to describe himself to Archbishop Lang as being 'like a dog in a sheep-dog trials who has to induce a single sheep into a narrow gate.'

Finally, on 10 December 1936 Edward VIII abdicated and was succeeded by his younger brother, King George VI. In his abdication broadcast to the nation and the *Empire*, he explained his decision to abdicate and famously said, "I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duties as king, as I would wish to do, without the help and support of the woman I love." He was being economical with the truth.

In central London five hundred of Mosley's *Blackshirts* gathered in front of Buckingham Palace, giving the fascist salute and chanting: 'We want Edward!' and 'One, two, three, four, five, we want Baldwin, dead or alive!' Other *Blackshirts* picketed the *House of Commons* waving placards that demanded, 'Sack Baldwin. Stand by the King!'

The following morning fascists gathered for a mass rally at Stepney in east London, and before an audience of three thousand, Sir Oswald Mosley demanded that the abdication should be put before the people. Windows were smashed and *Fascists* and *Socialists* fought openly in the streets.

At *Villa Lou Viei* on the French Riviera, Wallis Simpson listened to Edward's abdication speech with a few close friends. A maid who was present reported that a grim-faced Wallis had muttered, 'The fool, the stupid fool.' A close friend reported that after the broadcast Wallis flew into a tantrum, screaming with rage and smashing things.

Late on the night of 10th December 1936, Edward, now Duke of Windsor, was taken by car to Portsmouth where *HMS Fury* was waiting to take him across the Channel. Edward VIII had been king for 325 days and never crowned. On entering France he boarded the Orient Express and made his way to Baron Rothschild's *Schloss Enzesfeld* in Austria, where he would stay there for three months.

On the morning following Edward's abdication, MP Harold Nicholson had a chance meeting with Edward Windsor's private secretary, Alan Lascelles, and was taken aback by the man's anger. "Don't feel sorry for him," he said, "He will be quite happy wearing his silly little Tyrolese costumes. He never cared for England or the English. That was all eyewash. He hated this country."

The Duke of Windsor married Wallis Simpson, who had changed her name by deed poll to Wallis Warfield, in a private ceremony on 3 June 1937, at Château de Candé, near Tours, France. When the Church of England refused to sanction the union, the Reverend Robert Anderson Jardine, Vicar of St Paul's, Darlington, offered to perform the ceremony, and the Duke accepted. The new king, George VI, forbade members of the Royal Family from attending the wedding…to the lasting resentment of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor for Edward had particularly wanted his brothers the Dukes of Gloucester and Kent and his second cousin Louis Mountbatten to attend the ceremony.

The denial of the style Her Royal Highness to the Duchess of Windsor caused further conflict, as did the financial settlement - the Government declined to include the Duke or Duchess on the Civil List, and the Duke's allowance was paid personally by George VI. The Duke compromised his position with his brother by concealing the extent of his financial worth when they informally agreed on his allowance. Edward's wealth had accumulated from the revenues of the Duchy of Cornwall paid to him as Prince of Wales and ordinarily at the disposal of an incoming king.

George VI also paid Edward for Sandringham House and Balmoral Castle, which were Edward's personal property, inherited from his father, George V, and thus did not automatically pass to George VI on his accession. Relations between the Duke of Windsor and the rest of the Royal Family were strained for decades. Writing to his mother, Queen Mary in 1939,Edward said: "Your last letter destroyed the last vestige of feeling I had left for you and has made further normal correspondence between us impossible."

In October 1937, the Duke and Duchess visited Germany, against the advice of the British government, and met Adolf Hitler at his Obersalzberg retreat. The visit was much publicised by the German media. During the visit the Duke gave full Nazi salutes.

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