

IS THERE ROYAL INTRIGUE HIDING IN YOUR LOFT?

(811 words)

by Michael Pearcy

Do you have a box of diaries and papers gathering dust in your loft that were left to you when a distant relative died? Take the time to look through it. Mark Logue did just that and discovered details of one of the most intriguing royal stories for generations – how a penniless Australian ‘common colonial’ was invited to take a front seat at the coronation of King George VI.

Mark Logue is the grandson of Lionel Logue who was speech therapist to Britain’s war-time king. George VI suffered with a debilitating stutter that made it impossible for him to complete a public speech without embarrassing silences. Lionel’s Logue’s diaries, letters and scrapbooks that Mark rediscovered eventually became the book *The King’s Speech*.

Mark Logue co-wrote the book with Sunday Times author and journalist Peter Conradi. The two authors came to Windsor Parish church to answer questions about the book from an audience of four hundred.

The subject of the book is self-taught speech therapist Lionel Logue and the intriguing relationship that developed between this antipodian commoner and the King of England. Their lives entwined over twenty-six years and in the early stages of treatment the King visited Logue’s consulting room in Harley Street eighty-two times in fourteen months.

As Mark grew up in Brussels he had been aware of his grandfather’s royal connections and remembered seeing lavishly framed pictures of King George VI with personal inscriptions. But it was an enquiry from the producers of the film of the same name in 2009, that made Mark realise how significant that box of old papers in the loft could be.

“They were seeking anything that might help them in the art direction of the film. I said yes, I’ve got the whole archive. Then Iain Canning the producer got back to me saying ‘Oh my God, this is the Holy Grail,’” said Mark.

The movie was in production but everybody was excited to have this rich source of original material. It included all Logue’s case notes for the King and records of conversations between the two men. There were several important dialogue changes. The only man with reservations was the film’s writer.

Mark explained: “The writer David Seidler was worried his script was about to be proved wrong by the archive material. But through true serendipity and good luck, what came from his imagination wasn’t altogether wrong. By and large he got the portrayal of Lionel right.”

The film focuses on only a small part of the story and Mark realised that a fuller picture of his grandfather’s life and work could be of world-wide interest. Although Mark had a thorough understanding of the archive, he knew he needed the help of an experienced writer as co-author. “With Peter Conradi I couldn’t have found a better person,” he said.

The sixty-thousand word manuscript was written in just three months during the summer of 2010 and rushed into print to coincide with the release of the film.

Peter Conradi took up the story: “There was a huge gap in the original material particularly around the coronation in 1937 – very frustrating. But with a few weeks to go before the deadline, Mark’s cousin in Rutland, Alex Marshal, came up with all the missing stuff, saying, ‘this may not be of any use but...’ Crucially she had the King’s letters to Logue at this time. Too late for the film but all there in the book.”

There is no doubt that David Seidler, the author of the film’s screenplay, would have loved to use the Logue archive but he never had access to it in the early days. As a result some of the characterisation suffered.

Mark Logue explained: “Unfortunately, the Myrtle character (Lionel Logue’s wife) was the one thing that David Seidler got wrong. Myrtle wasn’t the

meek and humble person of the film who was homesick and sat quietly subordinate to her husband.

“In reality she was a very headstrong person and was probably the driving force behind their original decision to move to London in 1924. She loved England, loved her husband’s job and absolutely adored the accolade.”

Myrtle made a visit to Australia in 1938 where she became a much sought-after personality attending dinners, being photographed, interviewed and invited to various State functions. In England she was forbidden from exploiting the royal connection but as Mark Logue said: “...she was certainly going public about her husband’s job when she went to Australia.”

This was the year after Lionel and Myrtle had been guests at Westminster Abbey, seated in full court dress in the balcony above the royal box with one of the best views of the coronation.

Quite an achievement for an Australian born commoner, the son of a publican and a self-taught speech therapist who became indispensable to one of the highest-born men in what was then the British Empire.

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