

Feathers and Veils must be worn: 1937 Coronation Chic

If you were to go back in time to attend a swanky event in 1937, you'd probably top off your outfit with a nice hat: maybe a handsome homburg for the gents and a pretty pillbox for the ladies. When Bruce MP William Rae Tomlinson and wife Lucile (née Peers) received an invitation to King George VI's coronation, however, the dress code mandated that "feathers and veils must be worn" by the ladies. Yes, must.



Lucile Tomlinson A2020.050.023.001

Lucile had a spiffy collection of on-trend hats for various occasions, but these just wouldn't do – no matter how glamorous and stylish they were. According to customary "court dress" etiquette (rules about what one must wear when presented to British royalty) ladies were required to don veiled and plumed headdresses. But why?

Covering one's head, especially for women, has a long history signifying humility and respect in both secular and spiritual contexts. In short, veiling would be understood as a sign of deference to the king or queen. And the feathers? When these "court dress" protocols were established in the 1820s, ostrich plumes happened to be all-the-rage for high society ladies. So, they became part of the requisite attire and just hung around for the next 100+ years.

In a long sheer veil topped with ivory feathers and a glittering rhinestone headband, Lucile took this old-timey dress code and served up fashion on a platter. Paired with a sleeveless blouson evening gown and elbow-length gloves,

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Historically Speaking



she looked positively posh in this photograph by Frank Arthur Swaine. This photo was featured in the September

1937 issue of Mayfair Magazine.

Sources:

"Coronation of their majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth – Dress Regulations" document issued by the Earl Marshal's office, 1937, BCM&CC Archives A2020.058.003; "Royal Reflections" by Kathleen Bowker, 1397, in Mayfair Magazine, page 23, BCM&CC Archives A2020.058.023; "The Court Presentation" by Evangeline Holland, 2007, for Edwardian Promenade [website].

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