

THE EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE I IN BATH, 1936–1940

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Haile Selassie I, King of Kings, Lion of Judah and ruler of Ethiopia spent his exile in Bath. The four years, 1936–1940, were a short episode in his long life (1892 to 1975), but they were eventful and significant. Royalty in exile, though not unusual between the World Wars, were usually reticent about their experience. The Emperor was no exception, and merely observed: 'Our life in Bath was very hard. We also encountered great financial difficulties. Some . . . had spread the rumour that we had taken a great deal of money with us when leaving the country . . . but it is a complete lie'.¹ His biographers have been equally discreet. Yet the Emperor, his family and his retinue aroused much interest in Bath where the refugees were familiar figures, and many people now in their 'sixties recall meeting and greeting them. Their reminiscences and a recent BBC Radio 4 programme led me to study the Emperor's years in Bath systematically. I take this opportunity of thanking them for their help and for providing many valuable details.²

The language barrier and the fading personal recollections of brief encounters over half a century ago are major constraints. But official documents, newspapers and the Bath Record Office supplied sufficient facts for this article.³ Their interpretation is a matter of opinion. I have attempted to summarise the salient events of the years in Bath. In particular I was interested to discover how Haile Selassie spent his time, whether the objectives he set himself were achieved and what impression he made on Bathonians. We do not, unfortunately, know how he felt about the many people he met in this country. This essay is not, therefore, a comprehensive account of his exile. The scope is

restricted and the aim has been to draw attention to the public life of an unusual 'guest' of this city.

At the outset it is necessary to summarise the course of events in Ethiopia. Mussolini, who wished to create an Italian empire in the Horn of Africa, provoked an incident near the ill-defined frontier separating Ethiopia from Italian Somaliland (December 1934). All attempts by the Emperor, the League of Nations and the Great Powers to achieve a compromise were brushed aside. In October 1935 the Italians invaded Ethiopia from Eritrea. They had better weapons and many aircraft, occasionally used poison gas and were helped by disaffected tribes in the north and east. The Emperor's troops were badly equipped and poorly led. The terrain, the great distances and the weather often delayed the Italians, but after a short campaign they occupied Addis Ababa in April 1936. The imperial household with many officials, some pets and tons of luggage took the train to Djibouti (then a French colony) where the party embarked on HMS Enterprise on 3-4 May 1936 bound for Palestine. The Emperor, the Crown Prince Asfa Wossen, Princess Tsahai and Prince Makonnen Duke of Harar and a few staff were conveyed thence via Gibraltar to England. They arrived in London on 3 June to a very friendly welcome and were put up in Sir Elie Kadoorie's house in Princes Gate (almost next door to the Ethiopian legation). They stayed there for about two months.

The cultural shock of the transition from a backward country to London must have been tremendous. We may also be sure that the Emperor felt deeply the rapid and unexpected change from autocratic sovereign to stateless refugee. The prospect was indeed dismal: the Italians were triumphant having just annexed Ethiopia and being about to declare their King as Emperor. The British and French governments were embarrassed by their failure to preserve Ethiopia even in a truncated form and to shore up the League of Nations. Though remote from Ethiopian affairs, the threat posed by Hitler and German rearmament was far more worrying. The Axis was showing its teeth. For the British moreover (unlike the French) there was also a moral issue: the League of Nations had a powerful appeal to many politicians and churchmen, to certain national dailies and to public opinion. The Covenant of the League and the sanctions imposed on Italy, though ineffective, could not be suddenly scrapped. To the

Foreign Office, the very presence of Haile Selassie in London was a reproach, but many people thought he was the victim of a dictator and had been abandoned by those claiming to uphold international order.

The Emperor considered his next moves. First, although he distrusted his subjects, because many had sided with the enemy, he could not abandon them or treat with the Italians for he would be deemed to have thereby surrendered all his legitimate rights to the throne. But how was he to regain it and restore his authority? He decided to appeal to the League, of which Ethiopia was a member. There was no practicable alternative and he was advised that this course would be supported by public opinion in Britain and the smaller European countries. In the second place he must, indeed it was expected of him, help his supporters still in Ethiopia, as well as those who had fled to the Sudan, Kenya and elsewhere. How this was to be done remained unclear, but he hoped God, or the League or his British friends would provide. There was also the imperial family whose welfare concerned him and to whose education he must attend. And last, though by no means least, there were the material resources needed to prosecute these matters. He tended to have a sovereign's disregard for money!

June was spent in London, meeting British and foreign well-wishers and consulting specialist advisers. It was noted that the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden (later Lord Avon) visited the Emperor and it also became known that the Swiss would accept him as a refugee only if he refrained from all political activity. He rejected the condition and thereby opted for exile in England. His general approach, after long reflection, emerged from his speech to the General Assembly of the League at Geneva on 30 June. He warned that collective security and the principles of the Covenant were at stake, and that Ethiopia's fate would also be the fate of European nations if Mussolini were not checked. The Emperor spoke in Amharic, undisturbed by the barracking of Italian journalists, who were ejected, and delivered his message without faltering. He was cheered. It was a fine and moving performance, but a useless endeavour for the opinion of the diplomats was that sanctions would soon be lifted and that recognition by Axis satellites of the Italian annexation would follow. Many delegates were dejected: the speech demonstrated the impotence of the

League and, as neither Britain nor France was giving a lead, the representatives of the smaller countries began to distance themselves from the Emperor. All agreed that he had been wronged, but could not be helped, let alone restored to his throne. *The Times* devoted a long leader to Haile Selassie's speech (2 July 1936) and asked: 'Is there another in history who has deserved more of fortune and has received less?'. This sentimental claptrap was not accompanied by criticism of the dictators, and was of no help to the Emperor who returned to London and to other urgent problems.

He now had to find a permanent home. His status in Britain was that of a 'visitor', officially incognito so that no official honours were accorded to him. But Eden, who was hostile to Mussolini and therefore friendly to Ethiopians, was able to grant the imperial family 'Freedom of Customs', a valuable concession when bringing goods and chattels into the country. The Home Office and the Colonial Office were asked to be friendly and helpful to the Ethiopian entourage. On the other hand it was made clear to Dr A.W. Martin, the Ethiopian envoy in London, that the Emperor should avoid 'public appearances' which 'might cause embarrassment' to H.M.G. and the Ethiopians. In their briefs and minutes the officials in the Egyptian-Ethiopian section of the Foreign Office were critical of the eminent exile, and one of them minuted ' . . . I feel sure that if we don't try to exercise some moderation, our guest will be both a nuisance and a danger'.⁴

There is no evidence that the Emperor was told to leave London, but Sir Elie wanted his house back, and after making enquiries, Haile Selassie and a small retinue, decided to spend August in Bath for rest and recuperation. Accordingly, he, the Crown Prince, Princess Tsahai, Prince Makonnen, Ras Kassa (the Emperor's chief commander and a trusted friend) and Dr Bayen (the doctor-secretary-interpreter) came by train on 5 August, and drove to the Spa Hotel. The hotel may have been recommended by Dr and Mrs Marsh whom the Ethiopians had known in Addis Ababa; it was spacious, had a large garden and was a little away from the centre of town. The unusual guests were very comfortably housed.

The Emperor sought privacy and after the initial novelty had worn off, he was left in peace. The weather was splendid that August and the party soon began the routine of sight-seeing. He



1 Welcome to Bath! The Emperor leaving the Royal Baths after his first treatment. Behind him are Princess Tsahai followed by the Crown Prince. (*Bath & Wilts Chronicle & Herald* 6 August 1936, Courtesy *Bath Evening Chronicle*)

was an indefatigable student of English life and work: he visited the bookbindery of Cedric Chivers, the new G.P.O. and its telephone exchange, Fortt's Bath Oliver works, and so on. The Mayor, James S. Carpenter LL.D., called at the hotel, and the next day, as etiquette prescribed, Haile Selassie paid a formal visit to the Guildhall. There was also a more relaxed side to the spa treatment: the Roman Baths were inspected and, on another occasion, a tent was hired at the Bath Horse Show, a great event in the city's social calendar, and the Ethiopian flag run up to show that His Majesty was attending. There were luncheon parties at the hotel, sociable and useful, because he came to know some Bathonians who later were very helpful to him.

The mixture of dignified affability and exotic charm went down very well in Bath. Besides, this social intercourse was lubricated by considerable expenditure on car hire, entertainment and miscellaneous purchases. In a small city of 70,000, the distinguished guest and his party were soon known by sight to many people. A reporter from the *Bath Chronicle* was at hand to take down the imperial message that Bath was the only place in the United Kingdom where the monarch had felt really well.⁵ The testimonial was appreciated, and it is very likely that the city may have suited his mood: it was elegant, but not fashionable as Monte Carlo or Cannes. Shabby in places, but dignified in a provincial way, cheaper than London, yet sufficiently near for consultations with supporters in the capital. There was, in fact, more to the visit than holidaying, making friends and influencing people. He needed a home and to plan his future as an exile. Princess Tsahai left before the end of the month to train as nurse at one of the London teaching hospitals. Her departure may have prompted her father to look for a house where the family, divided between England and Palestine, could be united and where the Empress would be comfortable.

The Emperor's preferences narrowed his choice: his residence had to be large, in a secluded location and with enough reception rooms to impress visitors. One might have thought a Georgian country mansion would fill the bill, but he preferred Bath. Fortt, Hatt & Billings directed his attention to Fairfield which stood empty in spacious grounds in Newbridge Hill. It had belonged to Mrs Campbell-White, a widow, who had died abroad earlier that year. It was a big place, quietly situated above the Kelston Road.



2 Fairfield, Newbridge Hill, the Emperor's residence 1936-40

A wall separated it from the elderly residents of Partis College to the east; beyond it to the north and west there were, in those days, fields and a couple of private houses, notably Pen, the home of Sir Guy Nugent. The total area was 2.2 acres and included a cottage, a garage or shed and a garden. Thus the Ethiopians would have their privacy in a respectable neighbourhood. The rateable value at £195 was high for that part of the city; the rates were 25 shillings in the £. The deal was closed promptly at a price later reported to be £3,500.⁶

By mid-September Haile Selassie had a new home and, though he could not move in at once because electricians, plumbers and painters took over, he asked the Empress and the rest of the family to join him from Palestine. A good deal of work had to be done before Fairfield was presentable, and it is interesting that central heating and additional plumbing were neglected while money was spent on showy decorations. They worked quickly in those days and at the beginning of October the Empress paid a

visit of inspection. The family moved in about 9 October. The published descriptions and personal souvenirs give a good picture of Fairfield and its inhabitants.⁷ After refurbishment the house had a large double drawing room with two fireplaces, a dining room with pantry, a morning room, a 'telephone room' or small office, a cloak room with W.C., and a conservatory. On the first floor were five 'principal' bedrooms and a spare room; the attic contained three servants' rooms. One bathroom is mentioned. In the basement were kitchen, scullery, bootroom, servants' hall, W.C., staff room, a strong room and a wine cellar. The cottage had been rebuilt to have six rooms; the garage could hold three cars and had a flat with bathroom above it.

These details are recorded to show that the residence could accommodate a good many people. But how many lived there and where? The exact numbers remain elusive and the Home Office Aliens Department failed to keep a check. My estimate is that there were altogether about 25 residents at Fairfield and the outhouses. The imperial couple had five surviving children at the time, but the Crown Prince lived in Liverpool or Palestine and Princess Tsahai was working in London. Her elder sister, Crown Princess Worq, had six children whose ages ranged from about ten to two. The Emperor liked the company of small children; he also had close to him his Foreign Minister in exile Herouy (whose younger son divided his time between Oxford and Bath), Ras Kassa, two or three Coptic monks and a doctor-secretary. There were several Ethiopian servants including a butler and a cook. Finally there were the resident English governess, her young assistant (who did not live in) and the gardener-chauffeur. It is clear that there were not enough rooms to house all these people decently and the servants lived in the basement in conditions which would not have been tolerated by the municipal authorities had they troubled to enquire. Another point, and one which soon became sufficiently urgent for Haile Selassie to take note, was that family and retainers had to be fed, clothed and kept warm. The daily cost of the household, even with the undemanding habits of those 'below stairs', was considerable.

The Ethiopians pestered the Foreign Office which, in turn, prodded the Italians to send the imperial regalia, clothes, works of art and some money from the British Legation in Addis Ababa where they had been 'temporarily' stored in April 1936: the cases

finally reached London in February 1937 by courtesy of Mussolini (whose authorisation was needed) and the P. & O. Steamship Co. (which carried them free of charge).⁸ Thus fine rugs, native artifacts and good cutlery graced the drawing and dining rooms which were elegantly and elaborately furnished. Upstairs, things were simpler, if not spartan. The residence was managed and the bills paid by Princess Worq and one of the English-speaking retainers. The Empress rarely appeared in public, did not speak English and led a circumscribed life in a climate that did not suit her. The relationships of the exiles with each other and with the British were governed by protocol. That did not appear so strange to Haile Selassie's visitors, because half a century ago formality among public personages was usual. Besides, these rituals maintained the impression the Emperor wished to give of monarchy temporarily without a throne. Thus protocol played a role at Fairfield, not merely when visitors came to garden parties or the rare dinners, but in the everyday life of the family.

Haile Selassie was then in his prime. Small but well proportioned, he had a long prominent nose, large deep-set eyes and a moustache merging into a short, well-trimmed beard which fringed the oval face.⁹ His features were not easily forgotten and his clothes emphasised his aristocratic features. He wore plain dark suits over which he put a knee-length cape, black in winter, white in summer. In public he was always dressed conventionally, only his headgear showed some variety – he had a bowler, a Homburg and even a cap!

Refugees do not have an easy life, and the Emperor had his share of problems. He kept them to himself. I doubt whether many Bathonians, even those who spoke Amharic or French, ever came close to him, for though he could speak and write English he preferred to use an interpreter on formal occasions – a practice common among foreign potentates even now. Thus, though closely observed, he gave little away. He was physically tough,¹⁰ made light of discomfort and was, in political terms, a survivor. To get to the top in Ethiopia and remain there entailed coping with intrigues and outsmarting rival contenders. He was wary, probably devious, totally convinced of the righteousness of his cause and in Bath he learnt the hard way about the fickleness of politicians, the incompetence of some lawyers, and also that money was not there for the asking. His autobiography, written

for Ethiopian consumption, is incoherent, couched in Biblical language and wholly one-sided; it does not create a good impression, let alone make out a plausible case. The civil servants who dealt with his appeals for justice, trivial requests, reproaches and obscurely worded allusions to cash-flow problems must have thought him a great bore, but equally they failed to understand his ways of thinking and background. In Bath, however, Haile Selassie created a lasting good impression, had a favourable press and his unfeigned affection for children (particularly his own, excepting only his eldest son who – following tradition – was not trusted) was noted and approved. His liking for dogs was, in the Bath of those days, counted as a good point. Above all, the Emperor though grave was always affable and polite to Bathonians. Thus people were prepared to overlook that he had been a less than perfect ruler and that notwithstanding his protestations, he had been unable to stop slavery, incompetence, corruption and dishonesty. By and large, however, he was a good refugee.

Emperors in exile need an occupation, and Haile Selassie, unlike his older German colleague, the ex-Kaiser, kept busy. There was a routine of sorts at Fairfield, beginning at 6 a.m. with prayers, followed by breakfast and that, in turn, by dictation of his autobiography, dealing with affairs of state or attending to correspondence. His activities will presently engage our attention. Judging by the content of the P.R.O. files, the Emperor, like his officials-in-exile, spent much time on unnecessary detail and, as is the wont of refugees generally, on gossip and plots. Time and weather permitting, the ex-monarch used to go for a morning walk towards the city, accompanied by the dog and his children (or grandchildren) or some adult Ethiopian, the latter at a respectful distance. People greeted him and he responded with a smile or raised his hat. After lunch he often met visitors from London or abroad. He had a wide range of interests, but we may be sure that four topics dominated the conversations: first, current affairs and particularly news from Ethiopia; secondly, the fate of supporters in that country and the refugees in Kenya, Sudan and Palestine; thirdly, law suits; and fourthly, personal finances. These matters were kept distinct from the Emperor's private life, which apart from the obviously un-English household at Fairfield, remains unknown. The 'personal-story' element is therefore missing, but his persona – as presented to the public –

attracted much attention and invited speculation. This was partly due to Haile Selassie's unusual personality, but mainly to the complex interplay of diplomatic, legal and financial problems.

During 1936-40 the Emperor's position weakened, and it reflected the decline of the League and the strength of the Axis. He failed to understand the importance of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and of Italo-German intervention on behalf of Franco. By 1938 the Ethiopian case, however legitimate on paper, appeared trivial in Whitehall when the Austrian annexation (March) and the Czech crises ending with Munich (May-September) represented far greater issues for Britain. He had put his trust in Eden, but the Foreign Secretary resigned in February 1938 and Lord Halifax, who succeeded him, was not interested in the League and cared nothing for Ethiopia. For H.M.G. a settlement with Italy was desirable in order to safeguard the route to Suez and beyond. The Italians were also interested in a deal, provided Britain and France recognised the conquest of Ethiopia *de jure* and the King of Italy as Emperor. Eden was reluctant to comply, but Halifax was willing and the Anglo-Italian Agreement was tackled in earnest soon after his appointment. In all this Haile Selassie had no part, nor did he put his potential nuisance value to use. In 1937, even in 1938, the Italians were still worried about unrest in northern Ethiopia, but as their grip strengthened so they became less interested in a bargain with the ex-monarch which would have given him the status of a puppet-prince over some parts of the country and enough cash to sweeten the pill! The Italians held the better cards, they were in possession and as Haile Selassie's money ran out he was less able to stir up the tribesmen. H.M.G. declared it would not 'sacrifice Ethiopia', but was so eager to appease Mussolini (hoping he would restrain Hitler) that it signed the agreement with Italy on 16 April 1938. However, implementation was deferred until 2 November, and *de jure* recognition followed later that month.¹¹ It does not seem that Haile Selassie was kept informed of details. The Italians were aware of the Emperor's plight, and so were many Bathonians. The former were pleased, but the latter felt he had been let down by a pusillanimous Foreign Secretary. Hence the continuing popularity of the Emperor and of the Ethiopian cause in England and its special appeal in Bath.

Relief and support for the Ethiopians had begun during 1935,

and with Haile Selassie's arrival in England his well-wishers counted on the participation of the exiled monarch at lectures and fund-raising rallies. This was contrary to the promise he had given to the Foreign Office in 1936, but neither it nor the Ethiopians were bothered, for the undertaking had only been given to mollify Italian sensitivities. The Abyssinia Association was the principal pressure group. Its objectives were to maintain the Covenant of the League and to reinstate Haile Selassie. The people who formed its Council included many well-known public figures, politically mostly Liberal or Labour, which meant they carried little weight in Downing Street or Whitehall.¹² They failed to explain how their aims were to be achieved and as appeasement policies dominated the Cabinet's thinking they were, perforce, obliged gradually to abandon these objectives and concentrate increasingly on relief work. Some good was done in this area, especially by Sir Sydney and Lady Barton. (He had been H.M. Minister in Addis Ababa and retired in mid-1936 with a knighthood.) Barton chaired the Abyssinian Refugees Relief Fund which raised substantial sums for distribution in Africa. The Association managed the Emperor of Ethiopia's Fund which supported exiles in Palestine when Haile Selassie was no longer able to do so. There was also the group known as the Friends of Abyssinia run by Dr Martin from London, but he fell into disrepute and vexed the Emperor because he failed to account satisfactorily for large sums collected during 1936.¹³ It should also be noted that the Colonial Office made a large contribution and ultimately succoured 9,000 refugees in Kenya and Sudan; the Emperor, however, was not allowed to interfere with official relief.¹⁴

Haile Selassie did not canvass publicly for Ethiopian refugees and did not wish to be bracketed with the more militant among the supporters whose activities soon became counter-productive. But he attended (or sent a representative to) the functions of the West of England branch in Bath of the Abyssinia Association. For example, there was the public reception at Fortt's Restaurant in Milsom Street on 21 January 1937. The Mayor, Walter F. Long, came, contrary to the advice of the Home Office.¹⁵ The Emperor and the Empress were also there; Long referred to them in friendly terms and, to applause, declared that 'We may claim them now as citizens of Bath'. Some speakers demanded 'justice

for Ethiopia', others confined themselves to platitudes, and good fellowship prevailed all round.¹⁶ On 16 April, James Carpenter (who became Mayor again in 1939) spoke at a meeting of the Association. When the City's Establishment thus showed its support for the Ethiopians and the *Bath Chronicle* reproduced their speeches, others in town took their cue. Welfare and fund-raising activities in 1937 and 1938 were significant local events, which maintained public sympathy and showed the pride Bathonians took in their imperial exile.

There were also more informal occasions in and around Bath which were only briefly reported. One such was the garden party given by Dr and Mrs Marsh at Englishcombe in July 1937 to which Haile Selassie came and which was honoured by the Mayor, Lady Barton and her future son-in-law, G.L. Steer of *The Times*. A sum of £40 was collected. Two years later the Marshes held another party, but the weather was unkind, the venue had to be moved to a hall in Twerton, and only £27 was raised. Times had changed – war was very close and the Ethiopian refugees were no longer newsworthy. The Emperor himself had not so much fallen in public esteem as he had fallen on hard times – his law suits and his finances were attracting attention.

It is easy to be wise after the event. But to assert that Haile Selassie was foolishly litigious may do him an injustice: his rights and claims mattered to him, but he probably was unaware of the pitfalls of the English judicial system, and he may have been badly advised. He certainly had some bad luck. The preparations for his lawsuits entailed translations and expert opinion, and were as time-consuming as they were expensive. Of the four cases known to me (there may have been others in which the Emperor was plaintiff or defendant), three had to do with money and one with libel. The first, in spring 1937, involved the London agents of the Bank of Ethiopia who refused to hand over money to the Emperor's representative. The dispute was settled out of court, but he failed to get the funds.¹⁷ In October of that year a court in Paris reserved judgement in a case involving the Emperor's half share in the Djibouti-Addis Ababa Railway Co., half-owned and managed by the French. Once again he was unable to realise an asset.¹⁸ The suit against the London *Evening Standard* was about a report in the issue of 26 May 1938: it repeated a libel over which Haile Selassie had sued and won about two years

earlier. It was settled out of court and the newspaper paid the then large sum of £6,000.¹⁹

But the costliest action was *Haile Selassie v Cable and Wireless Ltd (C & W)* which began on 4 January 1937, went twice to the court of Appeal and was dismissed (without recourse to the House of Lords) on 6 December 1938.²⁰ The facts were not in dispute: both parties agreed that £10,163 was owed to the Emperor for his share in the royalties of a radio-telegraph service between Addis Ababa and London up to 2 May 1936, when the station closed, but before the formal Italian annexation. The question was whether the monarch was '... still entitled to recover this debt.' He considered it was a private debt owed to him personally, but English legal opinion was divided and some held that it was what is now called a 'sovereign debt', not owed to an individual personally, but to the state as a sovereign entity. Britain had conceded *de facto* recognition of the annexation in December 1936, but the legal position depended on *de jure* recognition which had not been granted when writs were issued. There were many delays due to Foreign Office dilatoriness over the provision of documents and to the tactics of the Italians who claimed the money, but would not sue for it in an English court. At last, on 23 March 1938, Mr Justice Bennett declared 'I have no jurisdiction to decide', and stayed further proceedings. The Emperor appealed, won and had his costs paid by C & W (30 June); the case was returned to Bennett who, this time, gave judgement for the Emperor, but ordered a stay of execution (27 July). C & W thereupon appealed, but when the case came before the Appeal judges on 3 November circumstances had changed dramatically. The day before Chamberlain had told the Commons that H.M.G. would shortly recognise the King of Italy as *de jure* Emperor of Ethiopia. So the Lords of Appeal adjourned the case for four weeks and on 6 December the court noted that Britain no longer recognised Haile Selassie as *de jure* Emperor and, accordingly, his title to the debt had been 'displaced'. The money therefore belonged to the King-Emperor of Italy and his entitlement to it as head of state was backdated to *de facto* recognition in December 1936 – some three weeks before the action began. There would be no costs.

It was an extraordinary business and one may surely express surprise at the handling of the case in the High Court and at

Appeal. The delays and obfuscations of the judges were as reprehensible as the failure of the Emperor's lawyers to base their claim on the chronology of events. The role of the Foreign Office was hurtful to Haile Selassie without benefiting Britain in any way. The Italians got the money without suing, C & W merely had to settle their costs, and Haile Selassie, who could least afford them, was faced with heavy legal expenses.

When the Emperor arrived in England he had cash, plate and jewellery to the value of about £25,000, say £650,000 at to-day's purchasing power. There were also other assets, but as we have just seen, they could not be realised.²¹ His money just melted away in 1936, for apart from the rather grand style of living, there were business trips (in particular to Geneva) with his advisers, the purchase and redecoration of Fairfield and, until well into 1937, payments to refugees in England, Palestine and elsewhere. Even before 1936 was out there were problems which led to the sale of a silver service and of some jewels.²² Stories about Ethiopian debtors began to circulate in Bath and soon reached London where they aroused the curiosity of officials and MPs. Although English royalty had often been in debt in the past, a bankrupt Emperor in twentieth-century Britain was too awful to contemplate. But from about spring 1937 onwards some evidence pointed firmly in that direction. Though Foreign Office gossip was often inaccurate, a few members of the Abyssinia Association and some civil servants interpreted the Emperor's oblique phrases as signals that he needed help, and that quickly. How was this to be done discreetly, without hurting his pride, creating a precedent and upsetting the Italians? The months went by with talks in London and growing concern in Bath. The matter eventually reached the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy which considered, as Halifax put it, the Emperor's 'great financial straits', on 28 March 1938. A long discussion ensued, but the Cabinet was divided and no decision was reached. Chamberlain concluded by saying the Opposition would be sure to make political capital out of any help given to Haile Selassie and they would claim that H.M.G. was '... bribing the Negus to acquiesce in the Anglo-Italian agreement'.²³ Fifty years later the documents cannot hide the confusion and embarrassment of mean-spirited Ministers.

But help came from another quarter, though the details are not

in the Foreign Office files or the local records. It would appear that through the intervention of the Abyssinia Association's Appeal Committee ' . . . a private benefactor had come forward and had guaranteed to provide the Emperor's financial requirements during the next five years and the Emperor has accepted this gift . . . '. Neither the amount nor the name of the donor were given. It would be interesting to discover who he was and his connection with H.M.G. and Ethiopia.²⁴ Whatever the scale of assistance, it is certain that economies were introduced at Fairfield and maintained in 1939–40, despite the discomfort which they entailed. Even that would not have sufficed if the City had not been forbearing over the rates and waived payment for electricity supplied by the municipal power station. This kindness was matched by the coal merchant and some of the tradesmen, and it is pleasant to record these acts of generosity to a foreign visitor in need.

The last year of peace and the phoney war were difficult for the Emperor and his family. Ras Kassa left for Palestine and the exiles lost a steadfast friend. Much more depressing was the death of Herouy at Fairfield on 19 September 1938 after a long illness. He had been Haile Selassie's closest confidant, a reformer, foreign minister since 1930, and unbribable.²⁵ He was buried at Lockswood Cemetery. The C & W litigation might have been handled differently if Herouy had been well enough to advise. The Empress returned from Palestine and was in better health, but the household was worried about money and in February 1939 stories about the impending sale of Fairfield surfaced again. It is significant too that the Ethiopians received less and less mention in the *Bath Chronicle*, a good indicator of the level of local interest. One of the rare occasions when Bathonians read about their visitor was in March 1940 when he took delivery of a new car – a Morris 10, a modest vehicle indeed for a monarch.²⁶

As war approached Haile Selassie sent a friendly message to the King, to which Halifax gave a dusty reply and very likely hurt his pride. The Foreign Office became even more anxious about his activities and Collier was not given permission to visit Ethiopians in Cairo and Jerusalem. Nevertheless the Emperor was busy planning and plotting, and even sent a trusted agent to spy out the land and report back. It was futile and amateurish, and the documents show that the British preferred their own methods

(Translation)



HAILE SELASSIE I
EMPEROR OF ETHIOPIA

To the Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, C.H., M.P.,
Prime Minister
Peace be unto you.

It was with great pleasure and renewed hope that I learned of your appointment as Prime Minister, not only because your gifts and energy will secure victory for the Allies, but also because you have always been a loyal supporter and advocate of the League of Nations.

At the outbreak of war against Germany, when it was thought that Italy might enter the war as the ally of Germany, I addressed a letter to His Britannic Majesty King George VI, offering the co-operation of myself and the Ethiopian people.

I now address His Britannic Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom through you to renew my offer of collaboration, and request that the attention of the Government may be directed to the enclosed Confidential Note.

An identical note is being forwarded to Monsieur Paul Reynaud, President of the Council of the French Government.

"Fairfield," BATH, 16th May, 1940.

(Signed) HAILE SELASSIE I, EMPEROR.

3 The Emperor's letter to Winston Churchill, 16 May 1940. (Courtesy Public Record Office, FO 371/24637)

and channels of communication.²⁷ When the Blitzkrieg exploded he thought his time had come and on 16 May he wrote to Churchill in Amharic and English, but the 'confidential note' which he mentioned is not at the P.R.O. – it was probably a programme of action drawn up in Bath. However there was no reply from Downing Street. On 8 June the Emperor was at St Paul's with the Bartons for the christening of Steer's son. On 10 June Italy entered the war and the next day the Abyssinia Association urged Halifax to let Haile Selassie go to Ethiopia.²⁸ About ten days later he was on his way and in great secrecy flew from England across France via Malta to Egypt and the Sudan. A tribal rising under the banner of the Lion of Judah seemed a good idea to the exiles and to Churchill, but the Sudan government would have none of it and once more the Emperor was frustrated. Only cash was available and suddenly he was in funds.²⁹ But security was so strict that the Empress did not hear from her husband until mid-July. His part in the Ethiopian campaign and his return to Addis Ababa in April 1941 are not part of this story. But the victory party at Fairfield on 15 May calls for mention.³⁰ It was a fine day and about 60 people attended the Empress' reception. The Mayor (Aubrey Bateman) came and so did Long, Carpenter, Dr Marsh, Ernest Smith and many others, accompanied by their wives. They had been helpful during the difficult years, and now they were being entertained in style, sipping champagne, admiring the flower arrangements and noting the Ethiopian flag. The Ethiopian women and children did the honours. A few months later the Empress and Princess Tsahai slipped away home. Princess Worq and her children followed in 1943 and the residence, except for the caretaker, stood empty for over ten years.

The Bath connection was not yet at an end. In October 1954 the Emperor accompanied by Makonnen and a large retinue came on a state visit to England. When official business was over he returned to Bath, ostensibly to receive the Freedom of the City – a rare honour indeed, ' . . . in recognition of his services to the Allied Cause and his close association with the City'.³¹ Whether the honour was merited is debatable, but Haile Selassie, for one, was pleased. He arrived on 18 October and spent two nights at Fairfield, tidied up and repainted for the occasion. There was an unbroken round of ceremonies, official functions and a grand

reception at Fairfield. But he found time to visit Ernest Smith at his works and greet others who had helped him. And then, on 20 October, the motorcade was off to Oxford where he received an honorary degree from the Chancellor, Lord Halifax. What, one wonders, were their thoughts on this occasion?

Haile Selassie never returned. He had paid all debts and by his actions showed that he had not forgotten Bath: in 1958 he gave Fairfield to the city. The building was converted into an old people's home and an estate of sheltered housing built in the garden; it was named Empress Menen Gardens. He also presented a cricket pavilion to St Christopher's School in memory of Makonnen's sporting deeds in the 1930s.³² Fairfield, which now belongs to the County of Avon, still has a plaque to recall its distinguished owner; St Christopher's has given way to King Edward's School and the pavilion was destroyed by vandals in 1987.

Deaths in the family, Ethiopian politics, uprisings and – not least – the creation of the Organization of African Unity preoccupied the Emperor in the last twenty years of his life. The experiences of the Bath exile receded, but some were not forgotten. Education, specifically English Public School education, continued to interest him and he sought to transplant some of its principles and practices to Ethiopia. (But the new habitat was inhospitable and the experiment failed.) In the second place he was determined not to become a debtor again: after 1941 the skimping and scraping of the Bath years never recurred and the economic gulf between court and people, observed before 1936, remained wide after the restoration. And finally, the humiliations, real or imagined, at the hands of the Foreign Office were not forgotten. In the 1950s he turned away, gradually, but irrevocably from Britain to the United States.

Notes

- 1 Haile Sellassie, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress 1892–1937* (Oxford, 1976), translator's preface, p. xiv. The autobiography was translated and annotated by Edward Ullendorff. (The second volume takes the story from 1936–37 to the liberation of Ethiopia. So far as I know it has not been translated from the Amharic into English.) Ullendorff follows the Emperor's

- practice of spelling his name with a double l, but throughout this article I have followed the Anglo-American practice and used a single l.
- 2 I interviewed about a dozen local people who met the Emperor in 1936–40 or later in Ethiopia or in 1954 during the state visit. The BBC programme *The Emperor in Bath*, produced by Andrew Vivian in spring 1986, was repeated on 15 June 1987.
 - 3 There are many files (or 'pieces') at the Public Record Office (P.R.O.) in the series FO 371 dealing with Haile Selassie. The references that follow below give the series, the five digit file number and, when available, the document letter, J, and its number. Back issues of the *Bath and Wiltshire Chronicle & Herald* (shortened here to *Bath Chronicle*) are kept in the Bath Reference Library. The Bath Record Office hold the minutes of Council Meetings, the rate books and city directories.
 - 4 FO 371/20197, notes and minutes June–July 1936.
 - 5 *Bath Chronicle* 3 Sept 1936. There are many references to the imperial party during August.
 - 6 Rate books and *Bath Chronicle* 12 Sept 1936 and 1 Nov 1937. The price quoted in the issue of 1 Nov (p. 5) cannot be confirmed from other sources, but seems to be about right. Large houses with three reception rooms, five or six bedrooms, garden and garage were advertised by Fortt, Hatt & Billings, T. Powell & Co. and others in July–August 1936 for £1,600 to £3,000 depending on location and condition. Powell & Co. were prepared to offer up to £4,000 for an even larger property (9 bedrooms, 10 acres of garden) between Bath and Bristol. Houses of that sort nowadays change hands for more than £400,000.
 - 7 Fortt, Hatt & Billings advertised the sale of Fairfield in the *Bath Chronicle* for about a week, beginning on 7 Oct 1937. Then the notice was withdrawn. There was no explanation; the Emperor probably changed his mind. Some of my informants, in particular Mrs Haskins (née Blackmore), remembered the house very well.
 - 8 FO 371/20198 (J 8138) and FO 371/20920 (minutes dated 10, 11 and 18 Jan 1937 and 12 Feb 1937, J 645).
 - 9 The Fine Art Society not long ago exhibited a bronze head of the Emperor sculpted by Sava Botzaris in 1938.
 - 10 At Christmas 1937 he was injured by a taxi in London, but was soon back at work in Bath. *Bath Chronicle* 17 Jan 1938; L. Mosley, *Haile Selassie* (London, 1964), p. 245.
 - 11 The implementation of the Agreement depended on the withdrawal of the Italian 'volunteers' from Spain. This condition was waived by H.M.G. in November 1938: A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914–1945* (Oxford, 1976 ed.), pp. 423–4, and for details FO 371/20198, 20922, 20929, 22010 and 22012.
 - 12 The three Presidents of the Association were Sir Norman Angell, Sir Hesketh Bell and Sir George Paish. The Vice-Presidents were Eleanor Rathbone MP, Philip (later Lord) Noel-Baker MP, S. Vyvyan Adams MP, Lady Layton and the Dean of Winchester. During and after the war some of them became very well-known for reasons unconnected with Ethiopia.
 - 13 A.W. Martin was found by a British missionary on the battlefield of

- Magdala (1868), trained as a doctor in India and worked in Burma. He retired from the Colonial Service in the 1920s and became an adviser to the Emperor soon afterwards. He caused much embarrassment in England and was more foolish than dishonest. He returned to India in 1940: FO 371/20211 (J 4137) and 24637 (J 1851).
- 14 Lady Barton told an official at the Foreign Office that she had £30,000 for Ethiopian relief. The Colonial Office spent £50,000 on Ethiopian refugees in 1937 and estimated this would rise to about £60,000 in 1938: FO 371/20920 (J 166) and 22011 (J 2764).
 - 15 Long wrote to the Home Office for guidance on 30 December 1936. The official reply stated *inter alia*: ' . . . it is unnecessary and would be undesirable for any honours to be paid to him [the Emperor] by public personages . . . in their official capacity . . . '. If the meeting was ' . . . in any way connected with the . . . [Abyssinia] Association you would do better not to attend it.' FO 371/20920 (J 179).
 - 16 *Bath Chronicle* 22 Jan 1937. Long became a director of Wessex Associated News, the owners of the *Chronicle*, the following month.
 - 17 FO 371/20920 (J 2680), minute of a meeting on 7 June 1937 with C.S. Collier, an ex-governor of the Bank of Ethiopia. Collier held the Emperor's power-of-attorney in England. He told the Foreign Office very little on this occasion.
 - 18 *Bath Chronicle* 12 Aug and 27 Oct 1937. The details of the case and its outcome cannot be traced in Bath.
 - 19 FO 371/22011 (J 3386); in to-day's currency £6,000 would be worth about £160,000.
 - 20 All the relevant details are in the *Law Journal Reports (Chancery)*, Vol. 107 (1938), pp. 201–203, 380–84, 419–25, and Vol. 108 (1939), pp. 190–92. I am grateful to Moger & Sparrow for permission to consult L.J.R. on their premises.
 - 21 FO 371/20196, minute dated 7 May 1936 and 371/20198, meeting with Collier on 12 August 1936. The cash consisted of 200,000 Maria Theresa dollars and 500,000 French francs. There was also a trust, valued at £54,000 for the children, which could not be broken and a villa at Vevey (Switzerland). The cases forwarded from Addis Ababa in February 1937 contained (among other things) some gold and silver coins.
 - 22 *Bath Chronicle* 17 and 22 Dec 1936. The service consisted of about 500 pieces of modern Austrian design. The auction raised £2,527. Some of the silver was on display, presumably for sale, at Gilmer's of Bath the following spring. The jewellery was sold through Ernest Smith, who owned the city's leading leather goods shop, and who had won the Emperor's confidence in August 1936 (information from Mr W. Smith, 13 May 1987).
 - 23 FO 371/22010 (J 1266).
 - 24 FO 371/22010 (J 3386), memo by V. Cavendish-Bentinck dated 29 August 1938. The story is repeated in his brief, dated 9 January 1939, for the Chamberlain-Halifax visit to Mussolini. The only alteration is the addition that the donor demanded that the public appeal on behalf of the Emperor be abandoned; FO 371/23374 (J 138).
 - 25 *The Times* 20, 22 and 23 Sept 1938. Lt. Col. D. A. Sandford wrote a fine

- memorial to Blattengeta (in English: chief of the wise men) Herouy. The elder son was killed by the Italians in 1938.
- 26 *Bath Chronicle* 12 March 1940 (photo of car and Emperor). The references to Haile Selassie fell from 38 in 1938, to 12 in 1939, and to 3 up to June 1940.
 - 27 FO 371/24638 (J 482). C. Sandford, *The Lion of Judah hath Prevailed* (London, 1955), pp. 87–90.
 - 28 FO 371/24639 (J 1768).
 - 29 In a memo (in French) to Churchill, dated 6 July 1940, Haile Selassie wrote that he left London on 24 June and met Col. Sandford at Wadi Halfa on 28 June; FO 371/24635 (J 1768). In September 1940 the Foreign Office obtained Treasury agreement to pay the Emperor £2,000 a month backdated to 25 June. Soon afterwards the amount was raised; FO 371/24637 (J 1490) and 24639 (J 1965).
 - 30 *Bath Chronicle* 16 May 1941. Despite newsprint rationing the event was given large coverage.
 - 31 The freedom of the city was proposed on 5 October 1954 by the Mayor (Cllr Gallup) and endorsed by Alderman Long. The Resolution was accepted unanimously. Winston Churchill became a Freeman in 1950 and Yehudi Menuhin in 1966. They and the Emperor have been the only individuals (as distinct from military units) so honoured since 1945. Details of the visit and ceremonies are in the *Bath Chronicle* of 6 and 19 Oct 1954.
 - 32 *Bath Chronicle* (Weekly Edition) 10 May and 2 Aug 1958. Makonnen was killed in a car accident in 1957.