

History lesson for England on return to royals’ German birthplace

The state of Thuringia, home to the Windsors’ ancestors, is lecturing England about the past — although they have local backing to reach a dream final



The council in the central German state of Thuringia has poked fun at England with vans that bear messages pointing out the region’s royal sons and daughters, including Prince Albert, who married Queen Victoria in 1840

ALAMY, CHARLIE PARKER

Charlie Parker, Erfurt | Friday June 28 2024, 12.01am, The Times

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As England fights for glory in the European Championship, their German hosts have sent the squad a message: “Dear Three Lions, football is coming home — to the ancestors of your king.”

Plastered on the side of a van by local authorities, the words were driven through city streets near the team’s training camp and past the castle they are using for press conferences.

The campaign aims to alert Gareth Southgate’s men to the fact that throughout the tournament they have been living in the ancestral homeland of the British royal family.

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Thuringia boasts strong ties to the Windsors, who can trace their lineage directly to the noblemen and women of the land.

Most famously, Queen Victoria, the great-great-great-grandmother of the King, married her German cousin Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in 1840.

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During a visit to her husband’s homeland five years later, the couple danced and drank in the Thuringian festive hall of Gotha, with the Queen enjoying the trip so much that she wrote in her diary: “I feel so at home here.”

As a result of their union, the Queen’s descendants bore the name Saxe-Coburg-Gotha for generations, forming the foundations of the family’s strong ties to Germany.



Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg, who married Frederick, the Prince of Wales in 1736, was the mother of George III

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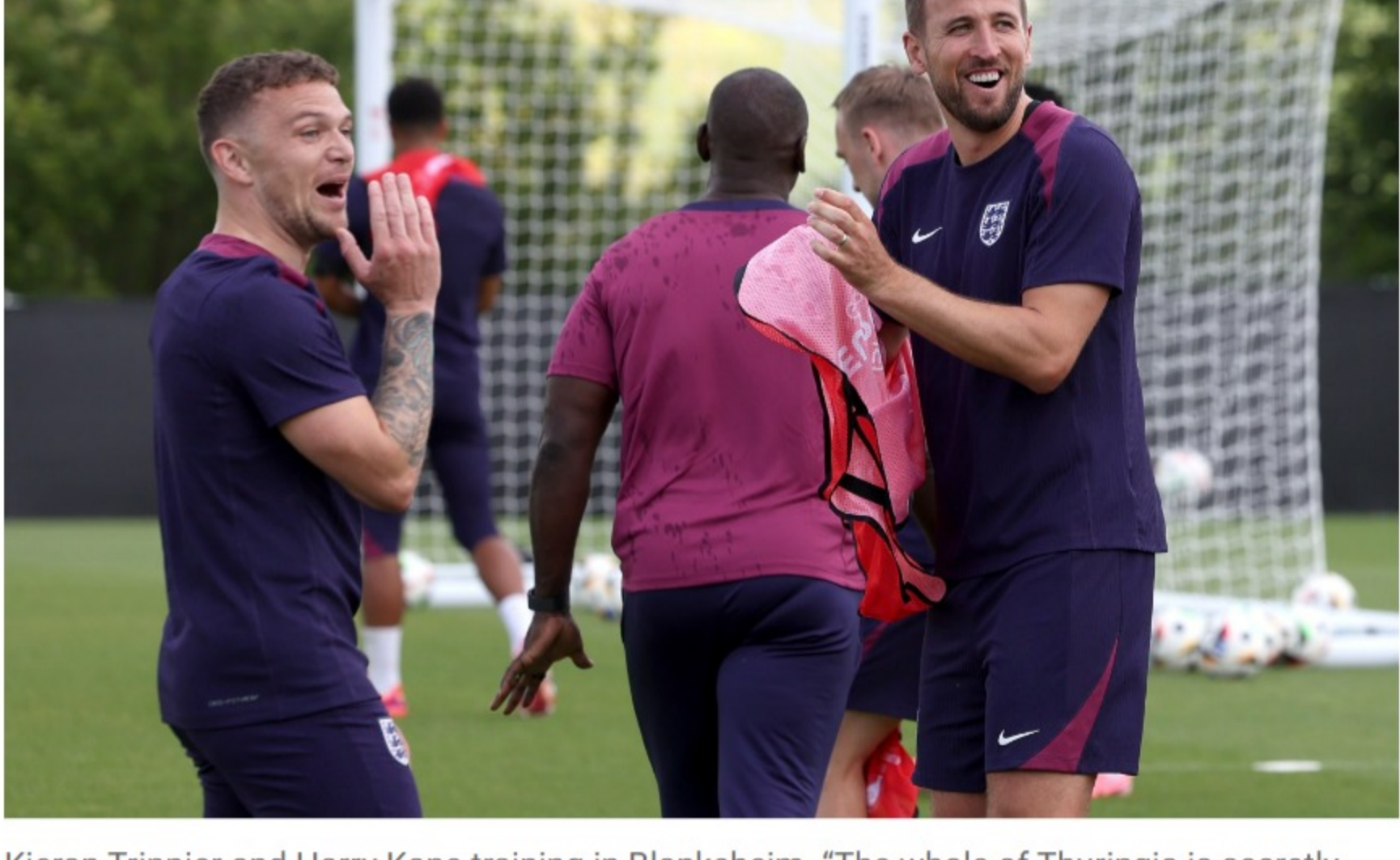
The dynasty was reconstituted into the House of Windsor by George V in 1917 after Britain became an enemy of Germany during the First World War. More than a century later, a new war is raging between the two nations’ football teams as they compete in Euro 2024.

The authorities in the capital city of Thuringia, Erfurt, have been capitalising on the area’s rich history to poke fun at the visiting England squad.

Wolfgang Tiefensee, the Thuringian minister of economic affairs, commissioned the campaign to remind the team of their heritage after it was announced that they would be based at a luxury resort in Blankenhain.

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He told The Times: “Thuringia is a proud host for the English national team. After all, we are the region where today’s English royal family has its roots.”



Kieran Trippier and Harry Kane training in Blankeheim. “The whole of Thuringia is secretly rooting for the English,” according to one politician

EDDIE KEOGH/GETTY IMAGES

These roots run far deeper than the time of Queen Victoria. The royal family’s links to Germany stretch back to the German Ernestine dynasty, which emerged in 1485 when the Saxon Wettins split into two branches, named after two brothers — Albert and Ernest.

The Albertines settled in and around Dresden, while the Ernestines became Prince Electors and took over territories in Thuringia. The “Saxe” in their family name was kept as a reminder of their Saxon ancestry.

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Augusta, the Princess of Wales, had been Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg before she married Frederick, the Prince of Wales in 1736. The couple’s son was George III.

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As well as driving vans through central Erfurt and around the castle in Blankenhain where players attend press conferences almost daily, the German authorities have launched other light-hearted attacks against the England footballers.

Tiefensee’s office has been broadcasting “five pieces of German football wisdom for the Three Lions”, which are quotes from former German football stars.

“The ball is round and the game lasts 90 minutes,” reads one from Sepp Herberger, the World Cup-winning coach in 1954.

“Offside is when the referee blows the whistle,” says another from Franz Beckenbauer, who was a World Cup-winning player in 1974 and won the trophy as a coach in 1990.

Tiefensee added: “The whole of Thuringia is secretly rooting for the English. Of course, our dream would be a Germany-England final on July 14 in Berlin.”

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