

Queens and Queens Consort (part 2)

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George V was a stern and somewhat withdrawn man, preferring working on his stamp collection, rather than entertaining society. His spouse was a German princess, Mary of Teck. Hard as it is to believe, she became a leader of fashion with her billowing dresses and the ever present parasol. She had been betrothed to George V's elder brother, but he died before they were married.



Mary, never being one to let a chance pass, decided that one brother was as good as another (providing they were both kings!) married George V. They produced a family, but failed to give them a happy

childhood. King and Queen were both strict disciplinarians. This affected the family, particularly the Prince of Wales.

When war broke out in 1914 he was allowed to join the army and was sent to France. This must have felt like a release from prison. He indulged his freedom and became very much 'Jack the Lad'. The reputation he gained was somewhat unjust as he showed great concern for the interests of the people. After the war he visited the distressed areas of South Wales and was heard to remark 'Something must be done!' The Princess Royal was married to a Yorkshire Earl, old enough to be her father. It was said that the marriage was arranged to compensate the Earl for having paid the Prince of Wales' debts.

One son, John, was mentally retarded, and was left to the care of nursemaids. But in fairness to Queen Mary, it has to be said that she was very distressed when he died.

In 1935 George V died, and the Prince of Wales became Edward VIII. By now he had become infatuated with Wallis Simpson, an American divorcee. He intended to marry

her, but had not foreseen the reaction of both government and people. Never a strong character he abdicated. Wallis Simpson was thwarted. Undoubtedly she had planned to be Queen Consort. Edward paid for his weakness to his dying day. The avaricious woman that he had married gave him little happiness.

After his brother's abdication, the next brother, Bertie, became King. A position he had never wanted, he now almost feared it. He had been married some years earlier to Elizabeth, the daughter of Scottish aristocrats. She was known as 'Elizabeth of Glamis'. For Bertie, she was the love of his life. He had proposed to her twice, and she had refused him. The third time she yielded.



They married and lived in London. Elizabeth much enjoyed the social scene in London, and society was enraptured by this Scottish girl, now part of the royal family - the royal family which had always appeared rather stuffy and dull. Elizabeth changed all

this and threw herself with enthusiasm into all gay goings on.

Two daughters were born, and the little family was blissfully happy; but troubled times lay ahead.

At the end of the summer in 1939, the country was again at war. The King was going to need Elizabeth's support more than ever. He now had at times to address the nation. With his stammer, from which he had been afflicted since young, this was agonising. Elizabeth arranged for him to see an Australian speech therapist and this proved very helpful.



Many wealthy people sent their children to America. The Queen refused to do this. She said she would not leave Bertie and the children needed to be with her. She and the King frequently visited the East End.

Elizabeth wore all her finest clothes. When asked why she did this, she replied 'If they came to visit me they would wear their best clothes, why should I not do the same when I go to visit them?' The nation was at her feet!

When Princess Elizabeth was old enough she joined the ATS. She serviced her own truck and was given no special privileges. In time of war, royalty and people served together. During the war, she had met a handsome young man, Prince Philip of Greece. She was much attracted. In 1947 they were married. Philip was in the navy and for a while his ship was in Malta. Princess Elizabeth joined him there. Perhaps this was the most carefree time of the present Queen's life.

But again, sadness intervened. In 1952, the King, never strong, became ill. Elizabeth and Philip were on holiday in Kenya, staying at a remote game reserve. The news of her father's death was broken to her by Philip. They flew home, she was now Elizabeth II. The previous queen put aside her own grief and supported her daughter. Elizabeth II dedicated herself to the service of the nation. Many overseas tours were taken and when two children, Charles and Anne were born her mother took charge of them, and became affectionately known as the 'Queen Mum'.

Prince Charles was devoted to his grandmother. She was his rock in a changing world. He was now heir to the throne and must marry. His bride was Lady Diana, the daughter of the Earl of Spencer, of Althorp, in Northamptonshire. But it was

an ill starred marriage. Charles was not deeply in love. The previous Prince of Wales (Edward VIII) had not been happily married. It appeared that history was repeating itself. Worse was to follow. Diana had given birth to two sons, but now disillusioned with her marriage she threw caution to the winds and joined a set bent on pleasure and irresponsibility. The end came. Chased by the paparazzi she was killed by a car crash in Paris. The euphoria following her death was unprecedented - never before seen in England. She had been a fairytale princess; now the fairytale was over.

The royal family were in Scotland when the news broke. Prince Charles was stunned, the Queen remained tight-lipped and the little boys were heartbroken. All the Queen Mother's strength was now called on; she had to support them all. The press was furious that the family remained in Scotland. The ex-queen probably thought that they must be given time to grieve in private. They returned to London and tried to present a united front.

The Queen Mother lived to be very old and grew frailer, but she never failed to greet the crowds as they gathered at the gates of Clarence House for her birthdays. With her lovely hats and flowing gowns she was a magical figure to her admiring public. Never can a queen consort have been more admired, respected and loved.

I shall not write of our present queen, Elizabeth II. I have no authority to do so, and it would seem *lese-majesty*. Sufficient to say, that with her, too, duty and service were all.

We, of this island race, can indeed be proud of the queens and queen consorts of Britain.

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