



## The Real Elizabeth: An Intimate Portrait of Queen Elizabeth II

By Andrew Marr

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**A surprising and very personal biography of a woman who may be the world's last great queen, published to coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of her reign**

Elizabeth II, one of England's longest-reigning monarchs, is an enigma. In public, she confines herself to optimistic pieties and guarded smiles; in private, she is wry, funny, and an excellent mimic. Now, for the first time, one of Britain's leading journalists and historians gets behind the mask and tells us the fascinating story of the real Elizabeth.

Born shortly before the Depression, Elizabeth grew up during World War II and became queen because of the shocking abdication of her uncle and the early death of her father. Only twenty-five when she ascended to the throne, she has been at the apex of the British state for nearly six decades. She has entertained and known numerous world leaders, including every U.S. president since Harry Truman. Brought up to regard family values as sacred, she has seen all but one of her children divorce; her heir, Prince Charles, conduct an adulterous affair before Princess Diana's death; and a steady stream of family secrets poured into the open. Yet she has never failed to carry out her duties, and she has never said a word about any of the troubles she has endured.

Andrew Marr, who enjoys extraordinary access to senior figures at Buckingham Palace, has written a revealing and essential book about a woman who has managed to remain private to the point of mystery throughout her reign.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“An enjoyable book about the British monarchy as embodied by Queen Elizabeth II... Recommended for fans of today's British monarchy, who will come away further admiring the queen's mind for detail, her openness for enabling the royal household... to evolve, her nuanced relationship with 13 successive prime ministers, and her strong marriage.” *Library Journal*

“A comprehensive and lively history and analysis of the British monarchy as a political and social institution from the World War I to the present, more than half of which time has been taken up by Elizabeth's reign.” *Kirkus Reviews*

“British Royalty retains remarkable pulling power, but how much of this is due to the institution itself, and how much to the individuals involved? The answer is probably a mixture of both, but Andrew Marr's absorbing new book leaves no doubt about the pivotal role played by the Queen herself... He is particularly acute on the political aspects of constitutional monarchy, but he also writes perceptively about the individual members of the Royal Family.” *The Mail on Sunday*

“[*The Real Elizabeth* contains] a lot of information which will be new to any but the most dedicated student of the monarchy... [Marr writes] well and thoughtfully.” *Spectator*

“An overwhelmingly positive endorsement of the Queen's remarkable record... [*The Real Elizabeth*] offers plenty of reasons for repeating the old cry of ‘God save the Queen.’” *Daily Express*

#### About the Author

**Andrew Marr**, a bestselling author and award-winning journalist, hosts *The Andrew Marr Show* on BBC. His best-known book, *A History of Modern Britain*, was accompanied by a BBC television series that won one of British television's most prestigious prizes. He and his wife live in London with their three children.

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#### THE REAL ELIZABETH

#### Dynasty Is Destiny: How the British Monarchy Remade Itself

The Queen is only the fourth head of a fairly new dynasty. If you put brackets around her uncle Edward VIII, who lasted less than a year, she is only the third of the Windsors. Yet the British monarchy itself is one of the world's oldest: the Queen can trace tiny flecks of her bloodline back to bearded Anglo-Saxons and ancient Scottish warlords. More substantially, Hanoverian ancestry remains a strong influence. Both she and her eldest son have faces that recall monarchs of the eighteenth century, the solemn early Georges. But like other families, monarchies can reinvent themselves. Today's House of Windsor created itself less than a century ago, leaping away from the Hanoverians and their German connections in 1917.

The old British monarchy—of Victoria, the fecund Queen-Empress, and her son Edward, the louche and shrewd King-Emperor—had been at the center of a golden web of royalty stretching across Europe and

Russia. Monarchy was a family club, largely closed to outsiders. Britain's segment of the web had particularly close connections with German royal houses, connections that went back to the eighteenth century and the Hanoverians. Kaisers came to tea and joined parades dressed in British military uniform. They raced their yachts against those of their British cousins at Cowes. There might be mutual suspicion, but it was family rivalry rather than political.

The closeness was symbolized by the last visit King George V and Queen Mary made to Germany before the Great War. Arriving in Berlin in May 1913 for the wedding of the Kaiser's daughter to their cousin the Duke of Brunswick-Luneburg, they were greeted by Queen Mary's aunt the Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz—a very old English-born lady who remained in her north German estate until 1916. They went on to meet the Kaiser, Tsar Nicholas II, endless other dynastic cousins and what the family called simply “the royal mob.” The mob noted the presence of film cameras, or what they called “those horrid Kino-men,” but felt themselves a family, whose connections remained essential to the future of the “civilized” world.

George V was particularly fond of his Austro-Hungarian fellow Royals, and of numerous princely German relatives. Sir Frederick Ponsonby, the King's private secretary, noted of the visit, “whether any real good is done, I have my doubts. The feeling in the two countries is very strong” and George's biographer rightly said that, in the coming of the Great War, “King George V was no more than an anguished and impotent spectator.” Others at the time took the opposite view, or diplomatically pretended to: the British ambassador to Berlin Sir Edward Goschen said he thought the visit would prove “of lasting good.” Either way, Queen Mary had a lovely time in Berlin. By contrast, she dreaded a visit to Paris the following year, primarily because France was to her above all an alien republic and there were no friendly family faces to welcome her.

By 1917, however, deep into the bloodied mud of total war, this royal web seemed likelier to strangle the British monarchy than protect it. Germans had become loathed in Britain, their shops destroyed, their brass bands expelled, even their characteristic dogs put down. To be a monarch with German connections was uncomfortable. Rising radical and revolutionary feeling across Europe had made monarchs unpopular too. King George was already well aware of the danger to him of revolutionary socialist feeling. During 1911–12 Britain had faced mass strikes and great unrest. At times it seemed that London would be starved of food by militant dockers, while radical Liberals had struck at the aristocratic principle when the House of Lords blocked their “People's Budget.” In the streets, a more militant socialism was being taught, with the earliest Labour politicians often defining themselves as antimonarchists in a way few would today. Labour's much loved early leader Keir Hardie was a lifelong republican who was particularly hated by the Palace. Though an MP, he had been banned from the Windsor Castle garden-party list for criticizing Edward VII's visit to see his cousin Tsar Nicholas in 1908. Later, he described George V as “a street corner loafer ... destitute of ordinary ability.” The King responded by calling him simply “that beast.” For monarchs, even before the war came, these were unsettling times.

George, however, was lucky in his advisers, one above all. Lord Stamfordham's story began colorfully. As Arthur Bigge, the son of a Northumberland parson, he was an artillery officer who fought in the Zulu War of 1879. One of his friends was the son of France's deposed emperor Napoleon III, and when this young man was killed by a Zulu, Bigge was chosen to show his bereaved mother where it had happened, and to visit Queen Victoria to tell her the story. Queen Victoria liked Bigge so much that she immediately appointed him her assistant private secretary, and he spent the rest of his life working for the monarchy. When Edward VII became king, Bigge served his son, first as Duke of Cornwall, then as Prince of Wales, then as King George V, at which point Bigge became Lord Stamfordham. He had enormous influence on George, who once said he could hardly write a letter without Bigge's help.

At the start, though, Stamfordham did not get everything right. He and the King both had instinctively strong

conservative views, and during the constitutional crisis of 1910–11, Stamfordham advised George to face down the Liberal prime minister, Herbert Asquith. The Liberals were confronted by the Tory-dominated House of Lords, which was blocking the radical “People’s Budget.” Asquith had secured a promise from Edward VII to allow a deluge of Liberal peers to be created as a last-resort way of swamping the upper house. George V instinctively hated the idea, which seemed an assault on the notion of aristocracy. Had the newly crowned George V gone with his instincts and backed the peerage rather than the elected government, he would have forced an immediate general election that would have been in part about the right of the monarch to interfere in politics—the very thing his granddaughter has spent her reign carefully avoiding.

Looking back nearly a century, what we now imagine as golden-hazed “Edwardian” Britain was in fact a confrontational and seething nation, rife with revolutionary thinking and physical opposition. The Liberals, though more moderate than the rising Labour and socialist parties, were convinced that Stamfordham was their implacable enemy, sitting at the center of the imperial state. Feelings ran high. The then Liberal chancellor, later prime minister Lloyd George, disliked him so much that when Stamfordham came for meetings in Downing Street during the war, he made him wait outside on a hard wooden chair.

Yet Stamfordham learned from his mistakes. Later King George said he was the man who had taught him how to be a king. He did it by telling truth to power, and by listening. Stamfordham was a dry and difficult man but he prided himself on his honesty, and in particular telling his king the facts, however alarming they might seem. In the years before World War I, he worked hard to turn the sea dog and countryman into a politically aware national leader. By the outbreak of war, and then through its first hard years, George V had become a vivid and popular rallying point.

In the spring of 1917, the truths brought to the King by his adviser seemed very alarming indeed. The war was going badly. There were strikes and growing complaints that the King was closer to his German cousin, the hated Kaiser, than to his own people. This was entirely untrue, but George V did make crucial mistakes. He had opposed stripping the Kaiser and his family of their honorary commands of British regiments and their British chivalric honors, not to mention their banners hanging at St. George’s Chapel, Windsor. Royal solidarity and ancient hierarchy apparently counted, even in the throes of an industrial war. Early in the war, King George had been furious at the campaign against Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg, born German, but married to one of Queen Victoria’s granddaughters and now British First Sea Lord. Battenberg had to quit, to the despair of his son, then a naval cadet himself, who wrote to his mother about the latest rumor “that Papa has turned out to be a German spy.... I got rather a rotten time of it.” (That boy grew up to be Lord Louis Mountbatten, and one of the most influential figures in the Queen’s life.)

These instinctive flinches against the rampant anti-German feelings of wartime Britain had allowed the King’s critics to paint him as not wholly patriotic. Lloyd George, summoned to Buckingham Palace in January 1915, wondered aloud “what my little German friend has got to say to me.” London hostesses mocked the court’s Hanoverian character. Street-corner agitators warned about “the Germans” in the Palace. In fact, George was an exemplary wartime monarch, carrying out hundreds of troop visits and cutting down heavily on the expenses and living standards of the monarchy while the country suffered. He even gave up alcohol when Lloyd George asked him to, in order to set an example to drunkards (not an example, it has to be said, that Lloyd George himself followed). But the whispering went on and then grew louder. On March 31, 1917, there was a mass meeting at the Albert Hall chaired by one of Labour’s great heroes, George Lansbury, to celebrate the fall of Tsar Nicholas II, with much cat-calling against monarchy in general. At the time, the government’s wartime censors kept news of this out of the papers, but George was given eyewitness reports of what was said.

Stamfordham made...

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