



Reproducing Royalty

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The union of the first son of the German house of Hanover and Saxe-Coburg with the second step grand-daughter of the house of Barbara Cartland seems to symbolically confirm Britain's style of monarchy as the extravagant Ruritanian soap opera packaged by the media and reinforced by travel agents and souvenir-sellers.

The day before Prince Charles' investiture as Prince of Wales 12 years ago, Jack de Manio and other BBC staff gathered to record obituary tributes — a sensible precaution in case Welsh Republicans succeeded in dynamiting the prince and blowing a gaping hole in the programme schedule. Now, following the appearance of a replica gun in the Mall at last month's Trooping the Colour, all the media will once more be taking precautions.

The royal wedding, so eagerly awaited for a decade by royalists and so relentlessly pursued by newshounds, is finally with us, but with an added dash of drama and danger.

For a seditious minority, however, the possibility of the royal family coming under renewed fire from replica pistols will not be the most horrific possibility in a day-long

bombardment of gushing tributes to royalty's ability to reproduce itself.

Just as the Caernarfon investiture was calculated and designed by the Palace to re-launch royalty for the 70s, so the latest ceremonial will be aimed to push Britain bowing and scraping toward the 21st century. On July 29, those with unshakeable devotion, iron nerves or no means of escape, will be watching, hearing and reading another triumph of the great bastion of continuity, stability and high moral values, or — putting in another way — greed, privilege, elitist power and militarist tradition.

But, even while the fancy dress uniforms are being pressed, the medals polished, and the Special Branch briefed for the great day, ominous changes are affecting the bridegroom's inheritance. The sun, having

set on the empire, is now blacking out Britain itself. There are more hospitals and factories available to be ceremonially closed than there are to be opened. And, even worse, there will soon be no battleships to be royally launched. 'We are a minor power', Prince Charles declared last year, maintaining his family's record of mixing bold statements of the obvious with the usual stream of inanities.

Travel agents and souvenir sellers

With Britain short on money and prestige, some rebellious thoughts have been turning towards the informal, cost-cutting monarchies of Scandinavia. But the union of the first son of the German house of Hanover and Saxe-Coburg with the second step granddaughter of the house of Barbara Cartland seems to symbolically confirm Britain's style of monarchy as the extravagant Ruritanian soap opera packaged by the media and reinforced by travel agents and souvenir sellers.

Grand royal celebrations have been occurring at an increasing rate. The prince's investiture was nine years after Princess Margaret's wedding; then, more quickly, came Princess Anne's wedding in 1973 to lighten the gloom of over a million unemployed, the Silver Jubilee in 1977, the Queen Mother's 80th birthday last year, and now this even greater celebration amid the gloom of 2Vi million unemployed.

Where the media build-up ends and the adulation of the subjects begins is hard to tell, but the devotion is less intense and unquestioning than, for instance, in the 50s. In the week of the Silver Jubilee, the Sex Pistols' 'God save the Queen (and her fascist regime)' topped the charts and not all the copies could have been bought by besotted royalists who thought they were buying the national anthem. Last year the now defunct *Now!* magazine published a poll showing 15% of Britons want a republic.

For this 15%, there are more years of torture ahead with the birth soon, if all goes according to plan, of a brood of royal heirs and the marriages of the Queen's younger sons. And, should the princes fail to oblige, the popular papers in hundreds of editions will be able to carry tales of their unmarried exploits. In between the processions and banquets the press periodically discovers that the royal family is only, or mainly, human; but then, perhaps in six years, there may be the most solemn moment of all, the Queen's abdication at 60, followed by the supreme royal occasion, the coronation itself.

But when the heralds shout 'the Queen has retired, long live the King' and Britain has a King Charles once again, the 15% of republicans may perk up at the thought of

certain difficulties experienced by the first two King Charles. King Charles III may not be immune from constitutional problems.

By appointment

This time it may not be roundheads who are to blame, but those well-meaning centrist politicians who are trying to realign British politics, leaving the sovereign as the final arbiter on the claims of would-be prime ministers from three strong parliamentary blocs.

The Tory right wingers would not be the royal choice. In an argument with the Queen in 1979 over the Commonwealth Conference, Mrs Thatcher has already made it clear that there is only room for one real queen in Britain, Queen Maggie. But the other queen would not listen.

As for Labour, the leveller spirit is already spreading there. Even right winger Roy Hattersley has ducked out of the wedding. But the Social Democrats' David Owen will be at St Paul's. If political parties are ever able to have royal 'by appointment' warrants, the Social Democrats should be first in the queue. Their vague platitudes echo the sort of even-handed clichés with which Prince Charles himself lectures industry. 'Co-operation is the key to all this, and not confrontation. We are all in this together', he told the steelworkers' conference in 1979. A Social Democrat-style rhetoric also underlies E F Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* which is said to be a favourite book of the prince, one of the country's biggest landlords.

Still, it must be conceded that the politics of the current Prince of Wales are an advance on those of his predecessor who as the Duke of Windsor, remained pro-Nazi for several years after it had ceased to be fashionable. In a lesser mortal it would have been considered treason.

Prince Charles is not afraid to trawl troubled political waters himself, claiming the post of Australian Governor General. The spirit of Ned Kelly is asserting itself, however, and with the Labour Party still smarting from the political interference of Governor General Sir John Kerr, the prince is unlikely to get his matrimonial home down under.

Fears of unrest in the lower orders has also disrupted the happy couple's plans to honeymoon in the Caribbean.

In the days when the forces of the Crown around the world used to despatch people with noose or bullet at production line rates, there would have been a swift answer to such rebellion. Instead Prince Charles will have to take his anger out on flocks of game birds and any other creatures that cross his shotgun.

Hunting and shooting is now the only

'We are all in this together', Prince Charles told the Steelworkers' conference in 1979

chance for the Colonel-in-Chief of the Parachute Regiment to engage in the traditional royal pursuit, slaughter. But at least on a memorable day in Austria three years ago he was able to achieve the efficiency of a walking abattoir, slaying wild pigs, hares and pheasants to the dismay of his mother's RSPCA.

Another enjoyable shoot out took place this January, with a group at Sandringham including Prince Charles and Prince Philip peppering the car of a journalist — not considered in royal eyes a great deal different from a wild pig. On that occasion the forces of law and order failed to take the prompt action they displayed following the firing of blanks during the Trooping the Colour.

Double standards

The make-believe shooting in the Mall blew the dust off a formidable piece of legislation, the 1842 Treason Act (Part 2) which originally laid down seven years transportation for those who fire blanks to upset the royal nerves. No such protection exists for the rest of us, least of all against the disturbance created when a 21-gun salute is fired on the Queen's birthday. And should anyone actually consider firing a live cartridge at Prince Charles or the Queen, they could be sent to the gallows under treason legislation, a dubious protection unique to royalty.

British law and order — one law for the poor, another for the rich, and other laws specifically to protect the royal family — is at its most effective keeping the royal fortune from the prying eyes of the public and the prying hands of the Inland Revenue. A clause stealthily placed in the 1974 Companies' Act exempts the Crown from the compulsory disclosure of shareholdings. So the risks are reduced of the sovereign facing the sort of embarrassment that hit Princess Alexandra's husband Angus Ogilvie in the 'ugly face of capitalism' Lonrho scandal. He declared himself to be 'not against bribery in principle' — and the firm was not against it in practice.

Lady Diana is marrying into a family business worth £100 million (a 1975 estimate) in shareholdings and property; the same again for art treasures; half a million a year from the Duchy of Lancaster; the Civil List currently £3.5 million; plus another £4.6

million from the taxpayer for other expenses and some other expenses met by government departments; and Prince Charles' own Duchy of Cornwall brings him in £300,000 a year.

With such resources, royalty can afford to take a lofty attitude to the baser forms of commercial exploitation such as royal wedding T-shirts banned from displaying pictures of the happy couple. And under royal edict pubs have long since been told they must not call themselves the 'Prince Charles', though it will hardly matter when he ascends the throne; King's Heads up and down the country will provide suitable reminders of a King Charles.

In fairness, it must be said that, despite the great royal wealth, the Queen does think the less well off, if only to encourage them to contribute to the many charities which have royal patrons. The royal family itself is not known for making contributions. Protocol helps by laying down that royal males should never be seen with their hands in their pockets. Prince Charles is particularly skilled in keeping his hand permanently behind his back.

Sexual standards

Royal double standards are worst of all when it comes to royal sex and marriage. An outburst of frankness by Lady Diana's sister Sarah put her out in the cold. At a time when she was the prince's frequent companion she told reporters: 'I wouldn't marry anyone I didn't love, whether it was the dustman or the King of England. If he asked me, I would turn him down.' That was too much for the royal ego. Court officials were trying to build up the prince's reputation for sexual prowess and he was said, before his engagement, to summon women to his Buckingham Palace flat by late night phone calls.

The women were not allowed to phone him up themselves and had to address him as Sir when they were together — a detail which seems so absurd as to undermine the whole story.

In contrast, Princess Margaret received a flood of criticism from both in and out of royal circles over her friendship with Roddy Llewellyn. Her marriage plans in the 1950s to the divorced Group Captain Peter Townsend were similarly condemned. The war hero finally departed in 1958 saying unromantically that he could not expect the princess to forfeit her royal income by marrying him against the wishes of the Queen and government.

If sex outside marriage can barely be tolerated for Princess Margaret, it is certainly out for any future queen. In the prolonged search for a suitable bride, one well-tipped

contender Davina Sheffield fell from favour when a former fiancée revealed that they had lived together. And, even more shocking for royal morals, was Fiona Watson, daughter of Lord Manton, who was revealed to have appeared as a *Penthouse* full-colour spread.

Far more alarming for some people would have been the prospect that the next queen might be Tricia Nixon, and the next king's father-in-law Richard Nixon. But this scheme of the President during the prince's 1970 tour of the US was happily a disaster.

Lady Diana also has solidly reactionary connections in the form of her stepmother Countess Spencer, a former Tory councillor. And, on the crucial question, her uncle Lord Fermoy has declared that she has a 'blameless past'. Debrett's, anxious to underline the quality and correctness of her breeding stock, even leapt in to announce that she was descended legitimately from King Charles II — a miracle as the king had no legitimate children.

Before handkerchiefs become too moist at the thought of the happy couple, it should be recalled that Prince Charles himself let it be known that good breeding stock was what the search for a bride was all about. Otherwise he would have been content to stay in his bachelor flat at the Palace.

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Another blot on the perfect royal love story was the 'royal love train', as the *Sunday Mirror* headline proclaimed over a report that the couple had met at night on the royal train. The ferocious denials from the Palace brought relations with the press to their sourest ever. Even months later the *Mirror* was waspishly saying: 'Lady Diana's looks are hard to analyse without appearing rude'.

But the whole royal soap opera would be nothing without the media, and we can be sure that sweetness and light in great quantities will be restored on the wedding day and for days before and after it.

A peaceful day

Under such a battering from the press it will not be immediately apparent to the consumers that the coverage, along with the public reaction, will be in a lower key than the first big televised royal wedding — Princess Margaret's 21 years ago. Even the

Guardian editorial hailed the event in verse 'for lo, the wished day is come at last.'

In today's more cynical Britain, the sugary flood of wedding stories will be diluted by great tales of royal courage by a family who, menaced by the sort of murderers who blew up Mountbatten, still brushed aside saturation security precautions.

Even so, the crowd watching the wedding procession will feel itself in turn being watched by a crowd of uniformed and plain clothed armed policemen. Paranoia will also be fed by the military presence, however ceremonial. After the blank cartridges incident at the Trooping the Colour, Lance-Corporal Alex Galloway said with loyal fervour of the alleged attacker: 'I thought about using my bayonet on him.' Fortunately he thought again.

Hopefully guardsmen riding in the wedding procession will restrain any similar impulse to deal with disturbances in the crowd by rushing in with sabres swinging.

Intending murderers would also be well-advised to restrain themselves and stay away in the public interest. On top of all the wedding froth, it would be the last straw for at least 15% of Britain if some bungling gunman succeeded in raising the happy couple to the status of living martyrs like President Reagan and the Pope. •

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