

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - May 2021

Royal Weddings - Catherine Sampson

Wargrave Local History Society welcomed back Catherine Sampson, a highly regarded local historian, for their May meeting. On this occasion, Catherine gave her presentation on Royal Weddings, using the internet Zoom system, with even more members joining in. She explained that she is an ardent royalist, even though although her talk included various accounts of scandal – the past being far more controversial than anything the media might suggest in more recent years!

People normally choose their bride or groom with care, marrying their soul mate or love partner. However, in time past it was rather different for royal families. The choice of a spouse could be on love, but factors such as pedigree, religious beliefs, political and social allegiances, temperament, looks or the ability to breed were more likely to be important. Health was rarely considered, so royal marriages could involve 1st and 2nd cousins from around Europe.



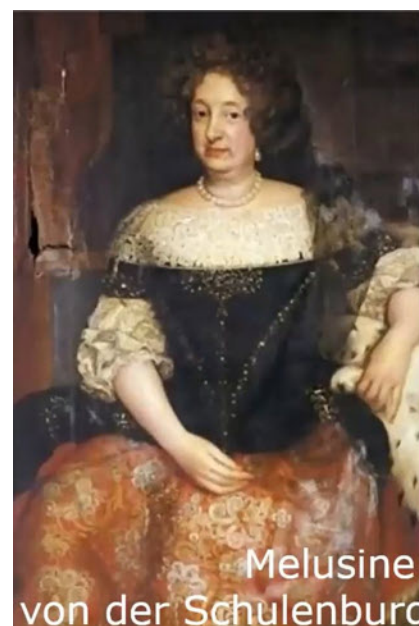
Sometimes a spouse would be involved in more than one royal marriage ceremony. An example of that was Prince Arthur who married Catherine of Aragon in 1503. Two legally binding ceremonies had taken place using proxies, but another wedding took place once Catherine had come to England. After Arthur died, she remained in England, and in due course married Henry VIII. In more recent times, Victoria Mary of Teck was originally engaged to Albert, Duke of Clarence, (eldest son of the Prince of Wales), but he died shortly before the wedding was due to take place. Queen Victoria persuaded her to stay in England for the year of mourning, and she then got engaged to Queen Victoria's 2nd son, Prince George (later George V).

*Victoria Mary of Teck
and Prince George.*



The choice of a suitable partner for a member of the royal family came to be governed by two Acts of Parliament. Under the Royal Settlement Act of 1701, anyone who was a Roman Catholic, or who married a Roman Catholic, was no longer allowed to inherit the throne. This was followed in 1772 by the Royal Marriage Act. George III was concerned that his brothers were making unsuitable marriage arrangements, and this Act required anyone in the line of succession to ask the ruling monarch for permission to marry. In more recent times, that has been amended, so that only the top five in line to the throne need seek the monarch's permission. Put together, these Acts determined who people in the royal family could marry – partners would be selected from abroad, so as not to give power to other families within Britain, and tended to come from northern Europe, as that was largely non-Catholic. Eight out of nine of the next generations had a partner from one of the German states, Germany not being a unified country then. (The only one not from one of the German states was Alexandra of Denmark, who married Edward VII – but her mother was German). The siblings of the heir to the throne often chose their marriage partner on a similar basis.

Royal mistresses also featured in some of the accounts. It was arranged that Prince George of Hanover – later to become George I – would marry Sophia Dorothea of Celle. George had a mistress, which was considered acceptable at the time for a male in the royal family, whilst Sophia had a Swedish count as her lover, and there were allegations of their having secret meetings. As a result, George divorced her, and in effect put her under house arrest in a castle for the rest of her life. George replaced the soldiers and servants there with people loyal to him, and she was never able to leave the castle grounds or see her children again. George then inherited the English crown, and brought his mistress Melusine von der Schulenburg with him to England. Although they were not married, she acted as if she were his wife.

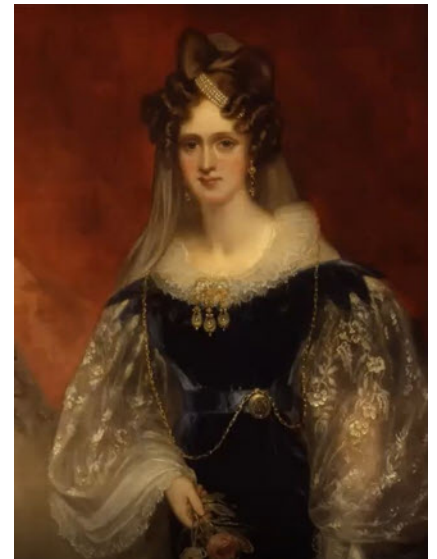


George IV was a spendthrift and collector (a large part of the Royal Collection having been bought by him). He was flamboyant, fastidious as the Prince of Wales, and later as Prince Regent, and looked forwards to acceding to the throne – and liked everyone to know that. He was not in a hurry to get married, but as a bachelor he was spending more than his income, but then worked out that if he had a wife, he would receive much more from the Royal Purse, so he married his mistress, Maria Fitzherbert, without telling his father – notwithstanding that she was a Roman Catholic. The marriage was therefore declared illegal, and George was single again. His father, George III, was keen on his niece, Caroline of Brunswick, becoming his daughter in law, and so sent Lord Malmesbury to prepare the paperwork needed. Malmesbury, however, doubted her suitability – she was somewhat indiscrete and a gossip – and at public events would lift her skirt to flash her garters at guests! When she came to England, and met George, she said he was not as handsome as in his portrait, whilst he went to his apartment and downed whisky, but recovered sufficiently to go through with the ceremony, and then spent the wedding night on the floor in a drunken stupor – although his father told him he had to consummate the marriage.



Caroline of Brunswick and the Prince Regent

Their daughter, Princess Charlotte (*below, left*) was the only one of George's children to be a legitimate heir to the throne, but she died in 1817, so in 1818, George III told 3 of his sons that they needed to marry, in order to ensure an heir to the throne. Prince Adolphus married Princess Augusta of Hesse-Kasse, whilst later in the year, Prince Edward married Victoria of Saxe Coburg, and then Prince William married Princess Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen. (*below, middle and right*)



Edward already had a long-term mistress, but had not told her he had got engaged, until she read it in a newspaper, whilst William also had had 10 illegitimate children by his long-term mistress. Although these marriages produced children, only Edward's daughter Victoria, survived into adulthood, and so she became the heir to the throne, as Queen Victoria.

Caroline then considered the most popular venues used for royal weddings. Westminster Abbey was first used for the marriage of Henry I to Matilda of Scotland in 1100. This was one of only 2 reigning monarchs to marry in the abbey, although at least one royal wedding in every generation from the 1200s onwards has taken place there. One of those was Edmund, Earl of Lancaster, who in 1269 married Aveline de Forz. She was aged just 11 at the time. (There are apparently examples of even younger royal brides dying in childbirth – Aveline was just 15 when she died). Later in the century, Margaret Plantagenet married John, Duke of Brabant. Born in 1275, she was betrothed when aged just 3, although the marriage did not take place until 1290. The other marriage of a reigning king at the abbey was for Richard II. He was young, good looking, and a very eligible marriage partner. Envoys were sent across Europe to find suitable matches, and Anne of Bohemia was mentioned. However, Richard thought she was too young, but a year later no other

suitable match could be found, so they were married in 1382 – Anne was 15 years old. The Privy Council were not happy about the marriage contract – not least because she had not a large dowry to bring with her.



John, Duke of Brabant



Anne of Bohemia

Catherine next looked at several 20th century royal weddings. Traditionally, the bridesmaid stood to the bride's right would be the next to marry, as several photographs showed. After the wedding of Prince Albert, Duke of York, in 1923 to Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, she was not seen carrying a bouquet in the photographs. Bertie had proposed to her 3 times, but eventually she accepted. As she processed down the aisle, one of the clergy fainted, and whilst he was attended to, she took the chance to lay her flowers on the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior (fairly new at the time). This became another royal wedding tradition, the bride's flowers being placed there even if the service was held elsewhere. As on one occasion the bride forgot her bouquet - these days two are prepared, with one kept at the church as a precaution!



St Paul's Cathedral has only been used twice for royal weddings. The old cathedral was used in 1503 when Prince Arthur married Catherine of Aragon, and the other was for Prince Charles and Diana. St George's Chapel at Windsor became popular in the 1700s and 1800s, and again more recently, whilst the Chapel Royal at St James' Palace has also been used for such events – notably for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. York Minster was also used for a royal wedding in 1328 – it was a real 'white wedding', and there was snow outside – and inside as there was not yet a roof on the building!

Catherine concluded with a selection of pictures of ‘scene stealing by attendants’ at royal weddings, with pages and bridesmaids looking the wrong way, sticking their tongue out, or sharing a joke!



One family wedding where a bridesmaid became the centre of attention was that of Patricia Mountbatten in October 1946, at Romsey Abbey. The royal princesses were bridesmaids, but as it was a cold day, they had arrived with coats which had to be looked after. The person assigned to look after Princess Elizabeth’s coat was Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten. This was captured by the newspaper photographers, and it was realised that they were already in a relationship, which then became more public, with the present queen and Philip marrying the following year.

