

# Royal Parenting From Medieval Times to Modern Times

Thursday January 11 to March 14, 2024, 10 am to 12 noon

Zoom Series

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**Presenter: Dr. Carolyn Harris**

**Course Overview:** This lecture series will examine how British royal parents raised their children over the past one thousand years, from medieval times to modern times and how popular expectations of royal parents changed over time.

## **Thursday January 11: Royal Family Life in Historical Sources**

Learning about royal parenting and life behind palace doors over the past thousand years involves a wide range of sources from monastic chronicles and archeological excavations in the medieval period to letters, diaries, photographs, and films in the modern era. Since the invention of the printing press, there have been published childrearing manuals that expressed the concerns of their times, providing valuable information about how popular ideas of childhood and parenting changed over time and influenced popular perceptions of the royal family.

## **Thursday January 18: Early Medieval Royal Parenting: Saxons, Vikings and the Norman Conquest**

In the early medieval period, childhood was short. A boy could swear allegiance to the king and a girl could legally marry at the age of just twelve years old. Monastic chronicles and other clerical accounts from Anglo-Saxon England provide the first anecdotes about royal children, describing how Alfred the Great learned to read from his mother and went on a pilgrimage with his father. Later, the scheming of King Aethelred the Unready's mother was blamed for the start of his disastrous reign.

## **Thursday January 25: Later Medieval Royal Parenting: Raising an Heir, Raising a Rival**

After the Norman Conquest of 1066, raising an heir often meant raising a rival as royal fathers and sons, uncles and nephews, and cousins faced one another on the battlefield. William the Conqueror won the Battle of Hastings but then had to face another battle against his eldest son Robert. Henry II faced "the Revolt of the Eaglets" as his sons revolted against him, supported by their mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine. The Wars of the Roses saw royal cousins fight against each other and royal children were sometimes victims of the conflict, most famously, The Princes in the Tower.

## **Thursday February 1: The Tudors: The Search for an Heir**

The Tudors introduced new ceremonial customs for royal parents including ordinances describing how the rooms where royal children were born should be decorated and commissioning portraits of royal children from their infancy. Perhaps because there were few royal children in the Tudor dynasty, Tudor royal parents took a close interest in the upbringing of their children. Henry VIII and his sisters were raised by their mother, Elizabeth of York, and Henry VIII's first wife Catherine of Aragon personally corrected her daughter Mary's Latin exercises. New trends in Renaissance humanism resulted in elite women such as the future Queens Mary I, Elizabeth I and Lady Jane Grey receiving unprecedented classical educations.

## **Thursday February 8: The Stuarts: Royal Childrearing and Religion**

After Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were concerns in England and Scotland about Roman Catholic mothers influencing their children's religious upbringing in otherwise Protestant households. These concerns shaped royal parenting in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. After her abdication, Mary, Queen of Scots was not permitted to contact her Protestant son the future King James I. James I and his queen, Anna of Denmark struggled with one another for control of their children's upbringing and Charles I refused to follow the terms of his marriage contract, which entrusted the upbringing of royal children to his French Roman

Catholic queen, Henrietta Maria. Concerns about religion and royal parenting contributed to the outbreak of the English Civil Wars in 1642.

#### **Thursday February 15: The Hanoverians: Parenting and Politics**

The eighteenth-century enlightenment saw new ideas emerge about childrearing as philosophers encouraged elite parents to spend time outside with their children and cherish their youth. Children's literature and simpler clothing for children emerged at the same time. The Georgian monarchs of the House of Hanover were out of step with this trend toward celebrating childhood as they experienced conflict with their heirs. These royal family conflicts had political implications for the developing constitutional monarchy as the government gathered around the monarch and the official opposition gathered around the heir.

#### **Thursday February 22: Queen Victoria and Her Children**

In public, Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and their nine children presented an image of contented domesticity, in keeping with 19<sup>th</sup> century middle class ideals regarding family life. The royal family inspired new trends in family life including child centred Christmas celebrations with Christmas trees, and family vacations to the seaside. Behind palace doors, however, Queen Victoria had a complicated relationship with her children, especially her wayward eldest son, the future King Edward VII.

#### **Thursday February 29: European Royal Parenting in the First and Second World Wars**

Queen Victoria's descendants married into Europe's royal houses and employed British nannies to help raise their children. A generation of royal children grew up eating simple nursery food such as baked apples and rice pudding and wearing sailor suits and white dresses. For many of Queen Victoria's descendants and their relatives, these familiar routines were disrupted as 20<sup>th</sup> century royal parenting meant raising children amidst war and revolution.

#### **Thursday March 7: The House of Windsor in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

For the British monarchy, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of transition from British Empire to Commonwealth of equal nations, and royal parents undertook extensive overseas tours that separated them from their children for long periods of time. In these circumstances, grandparents and other extended family members were especially significant to the upbringing of royal children. At the same time, media scrutiny of royal domestic life increased and the public expected the royal family's domestic life to be relatable to their own experiences.

#### **Thursday March 14: The Modern Royal Family**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a new generation of royal children are growing up amidst a blend of royal tradition and modern innovations. The three children of William and Catherine, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge were christened in the same font as Queen Victoria's children in a replica of the traditional royal christening robe, but they also accompany their parents on Commonwealth tours and attend co-educational schools, setting new precedents for future royal children.

**Coordinator and Presenter:** Dr. Carolyn Harris is an instructor in history at the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies. She is the author of three books: *Magna Carta and Its Gifts to Canada* (Dundurn 2015), *Queenship and Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan 2015) and *Raising Royalty: 1000 Years of Royal Parenting* (Dundurn 2017) and contributes historical commentary to TV and radio. She is the co-editor of *English Consorts: Power, Influence Dynasty* (Palgrave Macmillan 2022), a four volume book series

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