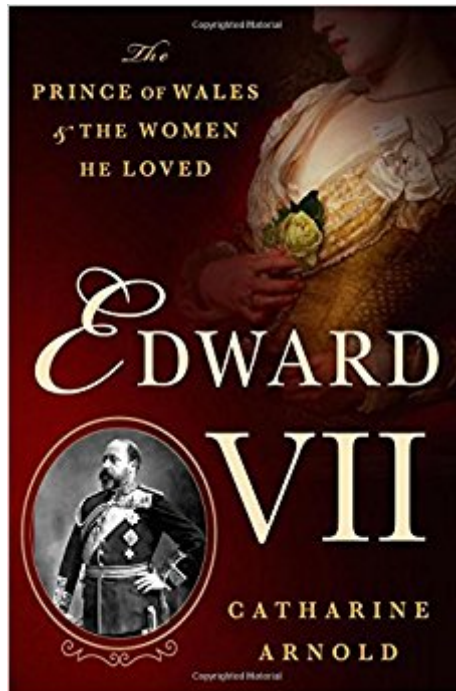




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Edward VII: The Prince Of Wales And The Women He Loved



Synopsis

Victorian England: We know what that was supposed to mean – all priggish prudery and "we-are-not-amused" harrumphing. Except now we know it wasn't all that . . . [Catharine Arnold's] new biography focuses – deliciously – on the women who shared the scandalously plentiful sex life of Queen Victoria's eldest son, the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII. – USA Today Edward Prince of Wales, better known as – Bertie, – was the eldest son of Queen Victoria. Charming and dissolute, he was a larger-than-life personality with king-size appetites. A lifelong womanizer, Bertie conducted his countless liaisons against the glittering backdrop of London society, Europe, and the stately homes of England in the second half of the 19th century. Bertie's lovers were beautiful, spirited, society women who embraced a wide field of occupations. There was Lillie Langtry, the simple Jersey girl who would become an actress and producer; – Daisy – Brooke, Countess of Warwick, the extravagant socialite who embraced socialism and stood for Parliament as a Labour party candidate; bisexual French actress Sarah Bernhardt, celebrated for her decadent appeal and opium habit; and by total contrast the starched Agnes Keyser, who founded a hospital for army officers. One of Bertie's most intriguing liaisons was with American heiress Jennie Churchill, unhappy wife of Sir Randolph Churchill and mother of Sir Winston. While the scandals resulting from his affairs – from suicides to divorces – were a blight on the royal family, Bertie would become a surprisingly modern monarch. His major accomplishment was transforming the British monarchy into the modern institution that we know today and ensuring its survival in a period when every other European dynasty collapsed in the wake of WWI.

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Customer Reviews

• Victorian England: We know what that was supposed to mean • all priggish prudery and "we-are-not-amused" harrumphing. Except now we know it wasn't all that . . . [Catharine Arnold's] new biography focuses • deliciously • on the women who shared the scandalously plentiful sex life of Queen Victoria's eldest son, the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII. • USA Today • Hugely entertaining . . . [Arnold] is a delightful travelling companion through the centuries of the city of sin. • Jeanette Winterson on *The Sexual History of London*, *The Times* (UK) • Often titillating, sometimes shocking, frequently entertaining . . . The book is a lively affirmation of sexual desire in all its varieties. • The Observer (UK) on *The Sexual History of London* • To pack 2000 years of vice into less than 400 pages is a challenge, but Arnold achieves it admirably. • The Independent (UK) on *The Sexual History of London* • There's plenty to get stuck into here. Arnold arranges her formidable research lucidly. • Evening Standard (UK) on *The Sexual History of London* • Richly detailed . . . an engaging survey of sex and the city. • The Sunday Times (UK) on *The Sexual History of London*

CATHARINE ARNOLD read English at Girton College, Cambridge and holds a further degree in psychology. A journalist, academic, and popular historian, her previous books include *The Sexual History of London*, *Necropolis*, and *Bedlam*.

The full title of Catharine Arnold's book is *Edward VII. The Prince of Wales and the Women He Loved*. This rather clumsy title might be taken to suggest that Edward, like Prince Hal, tidied up his act once he ascended to the throne. This was most definitely not the case and Arnold's book begins with a superb picture of Edward's coronation in Westminster Abbey where a special pew nicknamed the "loose box" was set aside for some of his past and present paramours. Most biographers either love or hate their subjects and Arnold belongs firmly in the former camp excusing Edward's many affairs on the grounds that much of Bertie's misbehaving was the product of "boredom" because "Queen Victoria resolutely refused to abdicate" or that his engaging in multiple sexual liaisons was no different from those of most upper-class men of the time. She also quotes Anita Leslie approvingly when she wrote that, "After all, he merely wanted to go to bed with a lot of women and took advantage of unparalleled opportunities. Would many men act differently if put in his place?" Without wishing to sound puritanical these all seem rather poor excuses for some very poor behaviour. As has already been noted, Edward did not turn over a new

leaf once he ultimately become King and there are more useful ways in which a Prince of Wales can occupy his time in that position than indulging his carnal appetites. To say that Edward was merely doing as others did is no defence at all. Edward had an example to set, especially if he aspired to make the royal family seem a model family. Doubtless Leslie, and by extension Arnold, is correct in assuming that many men would be tempted to act as Edward did but I like to think that few men would follow his lead in going whoring in Paris during their wife's difficult first pregnancy. Arnold's bibliography not only omits *The Pursuit of Pleasure* by Keith Middlemas, which would have helped her flesh out her picture of a priapic Edwardian High Society but also has no reference to Celia and John Lee's *The Churchills: A Family Portrait*. This is a much more serious omission because whereas Arnold claims that Jennie Churchill "was too clever to leave any explicit clues" about an affair with Edward, the Lees' book provides evidence to suggest that the two were indeed lovers for two-years. According to Arnold "Notes from Bertie to Jennie are models of discretion" yet according to the Lees the way the Prince wrote to her, asking her to serve him tea in her "geisha dress" (a loose fitting kimono) would have been a totally inappropriate way to address any respectable woman, married, widowed or single. In short, Arnold's book is a very entertaining read, with racy prose befitting its subject matter and a wealth of wonderful anecdotes focusing on Edward's relationships with Lillie Langtry, Daisy Warwick, Alice Keppel and Jennie Churchill but even if one forgives the author for being too indulgent to her royal subject the fact that she doesn't appear to have researched her topic as thoroughly as she might means one can't, in good conscience, bestow five stars.

I was enjoying the robust sample provided by and intended to buy until I got to chapter 9 and read about the "Red House," which the author definitively states was built for Lillie Langtry by Edward VII when he was Prince of Wales. Interested to see the house for myself, a quick search online showed that this book's account of their connection with the house is sharply disputed (although the current owners of the property, now a hotel, are happy to promote it as such, and in fact, the language in the book is very similar to the advertisement on the hotel's website). Given that the book presents this account as fact, it calls into question the credibility of the research throughout. If we can not trust something so easily researched, how do we trust the less easily validated descriptions of relationships, conversations, and motivations? A book like this is worthwhile if it can be trusted to be reliable, otherwise a good fiction book on the era would do. If you're aren't feeling too picky about the facts, this is an entertaining read. If you are trying to learn a bit of history, this isn't a solid choice.

From the radio & newspaper promos, I was interested; but I probably had the wrong expectation. I was looking for something that was more biographically political -- a la William Manchester or Doris Kearns Goodwin -- regarding the Windsor's, and it wasn't there. The book reads like a school research paper -- or the society pages of THE TIMES -- which is fine if that's your interest. Some of the vignettes were interesting/educational; some were even a bit humorous; and some were just silly/inane. After reading, I felt I should revisit W. M. Thackeray's VANITY FAIR :) This book was the wrong pick for me...

I received a free Kindle copy of Edward VII: The Prince of Wales and the Women He Loved by Catharine Arnold courtesy of Net Galley and St. Martin's Press the publisher. It was with the understanding that I would post a review to Net Galley, Goodreads, , Barnes and Noble and my history book review blog. I also posted it to my Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Google Plus pages. I requested this book as I have read about some of England's Royalty, but never one on Edward VII. It is the first book by Catharine Arnold that I have read. This is a light and quick read. The author focuses on a few selected extended loves of Edward VII, also known as Bertie, so I feel the title can be a little misleading. That said, she does an excellent job of detailing the hypocrisy that existed in Victorian England among the royals and their sexual escapades when the rest of the country was expected to be virtuous, but was not. It would be very difficult to accomplish in today's world of social media everywhere at anytime. The time period covered primarily Bertie's time waiting to ascend the throne, which did not happen until late in life. No time was spent on what type of ruler he was once he became King for a short period of nine years, but that was not the subject of the book. He did have some gall as he has his "ladies" sit in a front pew during his coronation. I recommend this book for anyone looking for a light read about the life of one of England's more colorful royal characters.

This book was just okay. There were interesting parts. It gives an interesting view of England during the time of Edward VII. It will be of interest to those people who like this genre of books. I can recommend it to those who like historical books.

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