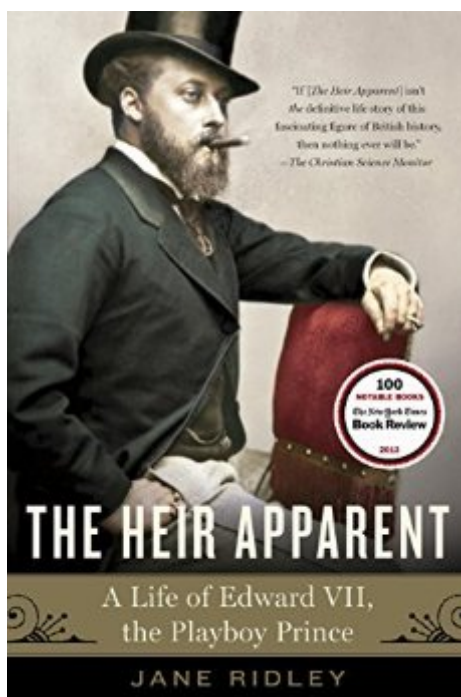


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# The Heir Apparent: A Life Of Edward VII, The Playboy Prince



## Synopsis

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW AND THE BOSTON GLOBE This richly entertaining biography chronicles the eventful life of Queen Victoria's firstborn son, the quintessential black sheep of Buckingham Palace, who matured into as wise and effective a monarch as Britain has ever seen. Granted unprecedented access to the royal archives, noted scholar Jane Ridley draws on numerous primary sources to paint a vivid portrait of the man and the age to which he gave his name. Born Prince Albert Edward, and known to familiars as Bertie, the future King Edward VII had a well-earned reputation for debauchery. A notorious gambler, glutton, and womanizer, he preferred the company of wastrels and courtesans to the dreary life of the Victorian court. His own mother considered him a lazy halfwit, temperamentally unfit to succeed her. When he ascended to the throne in 1901, at age fifty-nine, expectations were low. Yet by the time he died nine years later, he had proven himself a deft diplomat, hardworking head of state, and the architect of Britain's modern constitutional monarchy. Jane Ridley's colorful biography rescues the man once derided as Edward the Caresser from the clutches of his historical detractors. Excerpts from letters and diaries shed new light on Bertie's long power struggle with Queen Victoria, illuminating one of the most emotionally fraught mother-son relationships in history. Considerable attention is paid to King Edward's campaign of personal diplomacy abroad and his valiant efforts to reform the political system at home. Separating truth from legend, Ridley also explores Bertie's relationships with the women in his life. Their ranks comprised his wife, the stunning Danish princess Alexandra, along with some of the great beauties of the era: the actress Lillie Langtry, longtime royal mistress Alice Keppel (the great-grandmother of Camilla Parker Bowles), and Lady Randolph Churchill, mother of Winston. Edward VII waited nearly six decades for his chance to rule, then did so with considerable panache and aplomb. A magnificent life of an unexpectedly impressive king, *The Heir Apparent* documents the remarkable transformation of a man and a monarchy at the dawn of a new century. Praise for *The Heir Apparent* "The Heir Apparent" isn't the definitive life story of this fascinating figure of British history, then nothing ever will be. "The Christian Science Monitor" "The Heir Apparent is smart, it's fascinating, it's sometimes funny, it's well-documented and it reads like a novel, with Bertie so vivid he nearly leaps from the page, cigars and all." "Minneapolis Star Tribune" "I closed *The Heir Apparent* with admiration and a kind of wry exhilaration." "The Wall Street Journal" "Ridley is a serious scholar and historian, who keeps Bertie's flaws and virtues in a fine balance." "The Boston Globe" "Brilliantly entertaining . . . a landmark royal biography." "The Sunday Telegraph" "Superb." "The

New York Times Book Review From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It's difficult to imagine the time and effort that Jane Ridley devoted to her book *The Heir Apparent*, a long and painstakingly detailed biography of King Edward VII of England. The author has a career-long commitment to studying the history of Great Britain and its monarchs, and delving into archives that had been untouched for a century or more must have been extremely exciting. The author, I'm sure, found her work especially satisfying since discovery of new documentation was due, in good part, to her efforts to make the biography as accurate and complete as possible. When the portrait that emerged from her decade-long study of this massive collection of forgotten or previously ignored sources came to constitute a substantial revision of long-standing assumptions about the role and importance of Edward VII, I'm certain that Ridley was thrilled. She had created something genuinely new: a picture of early 20th Century England that differed significantly from other interpretations. The eldest son of long-reigning Queen Victoria, the youthful Edward VII, then known as the Prince of Wales and nicknamed Bertie, showed little promise as a prospective British monarch. Insofar as his future required disciplined intelligence and scholarly cultivation, the transition from the high-sounding but devoid-of-duties Prince of Wales to the demanding role of King

in a constitutional monarchy seemed a move that Bertie was sure to bungle. Ignorant and ineffectual monarchs are commonplace throughout European history, but the proud Victoria had hoped to produce something much better. Ironically, the length of Victoria's reign and her lack of confidence in Bertie both contributed to turning him into a womanizer, hard-luck gambler, world-class glutton, and general purpose do-nothing.

King Edward VII's reign lasted only 9 years, but it is usually remembered as a sort of Golden Age of British eminence, a time when two-fifths of the world was ruled from London and the seas were dominated by an all powerful Royal Navy. King Edward VII's popular image is well suited for that conception: a large, powerful, domineering man, self-confident and vain, a roue who moved from one mistress to another as well as a statesman who maintained the peace. Jane Ridley's new biography of the King validates many of these conceptions, but with the help of some new material calls others into question. It is easy to be appalled by the circumstances under which Edward VII spent his boyhood. He was raised under an exhausting and unimaginative regimen which did not suit him, and was continually reminded by his parents Queen Victoria and Prince Albert of how much depended on him and how disappointed they were that he did not live up to their expectations. He might have grown up a bitter and badly warped personality, but instead he became a kindly, if sometimes thoughtless individual who loved fun and games. His mother refused to allow him to play any role in government, meaning that he had to fill his days with amusements. He was married at a young age to the beautiful Princess Alexandra, and he indulged himself with a series of romantic affairs and a number of semi-official mistresses, including Lillie Langtry.

I have always been fascinated by the British Royal family, and you would be hard pressed to find a more colorful royal than King Edward VII. Jane Ridley gives us a very revealing look at the man who spent more time as Prince of Wales than any other prince in British history in *The Heir Apparent: A Life of Edward VII, the Playboy Prince*. She was granted unrestricted access to the papers of Edward VII in the Royal Archives, and thousands of them were never seen before by outside researchers. The profile shows King Edward, known as Bertie, in a new light. This is especially important because "after his death the politicians attempted to write him out of diplomatic history." Albert Edward (Bertie) was the second child and oldest son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. From the start, Bertie was a disappointment, lagging far behind his oldest sister, Vicky. It wasn't that Bertie was dumb. More likely, he was a lazy and unmotivated student. He was the type of child who responded to positive reinforcement and kindness--something not to be found with his

strict parents, who insisted on stricter tutors. The prince grew up to be a social, likeable, but hedonistic adult. With Bertie, it was a question of the chicken of the egg. Did Victoria's refusal to give him any active role in her government lead to his self-indulgent lifestyle? Or did Bertie's pleasure-seeking ways keep Victoria from trusting him with state matters? Bertie over-indulged in everything from women to food to gambling to smoking. Ridley claims that through her research, she realized that Bertie "grew up" and that "My affection grew for the man condemned to the lifetime of indulgence and political impotence while he waited for his mother to die.

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