

ROYALTY

ANNE DE COURCY

A Steel
Marshmallow

ELIZABETH THE QUEEN MOTHER

★
By Hugo Vickers
(Hutchinson 618pp £20)

TO MOST PEOPLE alive today, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother was a diminutive figure in floating sweet-pea chiffon crowned by a face-framing hat, gloved hand waving from a Royal Ascot coach or accepting a birthday bouquet from some adoring member of the public.

What lay behind that sweet, impenetrable smile? Was it, as her biographer Hugo Vickers seems to suggest, emotions baser than the dedication to duty and discretion that had so marked her life?

Vickers is one who should know. Since he was an Eton schoolboy he has, he tells us, been fascinated by his subject. Indeed, the expectation in the literary world was always that the plum job of writing her official biography would fall to him. His knowledge of her life was unrivalled, and he had positioned himself nicely with an admirably restrained yet perfectly truthful life of Prince Philip's mother, Princess Andrew of Greece. But to the astonishment of all, not least that of Vickers himself, the surprise choice was William Shawcross.

Wisely, Vickers decided not to abandon the task for which he had so painstakingly made notes and for which he possessed an extraordinarily comprehensive archive. Still to come with Shawcross, though, will be the unrestricted trawling of the Royal Archives plus the final, inestimable personal touch – ten years' worth of taped interviews given by the Queen Mother to Sir Eric Anderson (Provost of Eton) and destined for her future biographer.

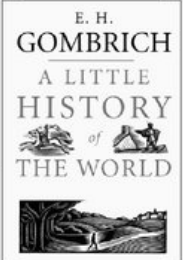
Born on 4 August 1900 into an ancient Scottish aristocratic family – her father was the 14th Earl of Strathmore – Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon was to become a national treasure. As a child in the ancient, menacing Strathmore castle of Glamis, she seems to have been as good as she was beguiling. And as a beautiful young woman with a melting, dark-fringed glance, she was irresistible to many of the men around her. By the time she was twenty-one she had garnered numerous suitors – no small feat in an era when, owing to the huge slaughter of the 1914–18 war, which had ended only three years earlier, girls greatly outnumbered men.

Easily leading in the race to capture her heart was the

A Little History
of the World

E.H. Gombrich

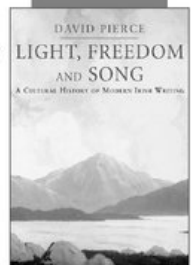
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David Pierce

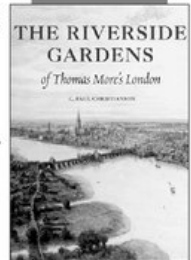
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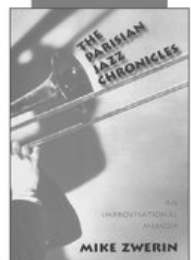


The Parisian Jazz
Chronicles

An Improvisational Memoir

Mike Zwerin

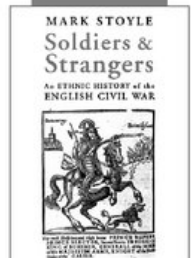
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