

MARCH 1734

It was the first marriage of a Princess Royal for over a hundred years and it had captured the public imagination as such events always do. Anne, daughter of George II, was the bride 'in whom each Grace and all the Virtues join', leaving her adoring brothers and sisters to wed a handsome prince whose very name stirred memories of greatness, William of Orange. The newspapers were happily exploring every detail: brocaded silk for the wedding-dress in the fashionable colours of blue and silver had been sent from France, the pillars of St. James's Chapel were being swathed in velvet and gold lace under the direction of William Kent, and Mr. Handel had composed a wedding anthem for his 'flower of princesses'. As the Hanoverians revived the two Stuart alliances, romance and nostalgia were in the air, inspiring even Cambridge dons to song:

His amorous suit he sighs in Anna's ear
And views his Goddess while he makes his pray'r.
His pray'r is heard, the mystick knot is wove,
Anna and William are but one in love.

Such is the mystique of a royal marriage that only a very few witnesses of the splendid ceremony saw a woman of twenty-five, badly marked by smallpox and 'with a great tendency to fat', being escorted to the altar by her two brothers, with whom she was barely on speaking terms, to join a political nonentity whose physical deformity made her mother weep.

The majority were right to ignore such details; on the personal level the union was supremely happy, and it was to bring the ambitious bride to a position of power in a foreign country never matched by an English princess.