
Extract from Chapter One...

Queen Elizabeth

The Queen Mother

The Official Biography

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QUEEN ELIZABETH

THE QUEEN MOTHER

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The birth of a ninth child is unlikely to attract as much attention as the first, and Elizabeth Bowes Lyon's birth was no exception. Her grandfather's diary does not even mention it, although he does record her father's delayed arrival at Glamis on 22 August, causing him to miss the start of the grouse season by ten days.[23] Nor has any correspondence about it come to light among the Strathmore papers. If the birth took place in London it was perhaps at the flat in Belgrave Mansions, Grosvenor Gardens, which Elizabeth's paternal grandparents rented, and where Lord and Lady Glamis lived when they were in London.* Or it could have been at Mrs Scott's home, Forbes House, where the couple's third daughter, Rose, was born in 1890.

In her account of Queen Elizabeth's early years, *My Darling Buffy* (1997), the writer Grania Forbes investigated the problem with diligence. She speculated that Elizabeth could have been born in a London hospital and then driven straight to Hertfordshire, or even that she was born en route between London and St Paul's Walden. Either is no doubt possible, but the hospital hypothesis is unconvincing, because women of Lady Glamis's station normally had their babies at home and also because it is likely that some record of a hospital birth would subsequently have emerged. Another possibility advanced by Forbes was that Elizabeth's father, an absent-minded man, actually made a mistake when he registered his daughter's birth, more than six weeks after the event.[24]

In his 2005 biography Hugo Vickers points out that Dorothy Laird – who received authorization and help from the Queen Mother for her 1966 biography – does not mention a place of birth.[25] Vickers suggests that she might have wished to draw a veil over the whole subject.[26] Perhaps she preferred not to discuss the matter both because she was uncertain of the truth and because she thought it of purely private interest. At least in her youth, details of births would have been considered too delicate an issue to be discussed even within the family.

The belief persists in some quarters, nevertheless, that her birth did indeed take place in Hertfordshire. Canon Dendle French, chaplain of Glamis Castle and formerly vicar at St Paul's Walden, has done what he can to resolve the mystery.

Canon French traced Miss Margaret Valentine, daughter of the

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* Belgrave Mansions is shown as their address on the invitation list for the Buckingham Palace garden party on 11 July 1900. (RA LC/CER/GP)

Rev. Henry Tristan Valentine, the vicar of St Paul's Walden who baptized the baby Elizabeth in September 1900. Miss Valentine was 'a very sprightly 91 year old, very lucid, and said she remembered very clearly August 4th 1900. "I was practising the piano at the Vicarage, and a maid came over from the Bury to say that Lady Glamis had given birth to a baby girl." I asked her if this had been at the Bury and she said that it was. She did not seem to have any doubt about this at all.' Moreover, among the letters Canon French received was one from a man who said that his father-in-law, Dr Bernard Thomas, a GP in Welwyn, always insisted that he was present at the birth. He was the family doctor, but it seems unlikely that a Hertfordshire doctor would be called to attend a birth in London.

Canon French also discovered that there had been a certain amount of gossip in the village, including the rumour that Lady Glamis had actually been en route from London when the contractions began and that the birth took place in or near Welwyn. One story passed down, but acknowledged as only hearsay, was that the baby started to arrive en route from London and that Lady Glamis was taken to Dr Thomas's home, Bridge House, Welwyn, where the infant was delivered. At the same time, one of Canon French's elderly parishioners told him that her aunt had been in charge of the laundry at the Bury and her work made her certain that the birth had taken place there. 'So there you are!' concluded the Canon. 'Conflicting stories – and perhaps we shall never know – but I have to say that London is the least likely place, given the evidence, and I still think it was in (or near) the Bury!'[27]

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WHEREVER HER birth took place, the new century into which Elizabeth Bowes Lyon was born seemed to many to be a dawn of optimism. Europeans could look back on at least 200 years of growth and most of them would have assumed that it was progress. European industrialization in the nineteenth century had brought the greatest expansion of wealth the world had ever seen. There was no reason to expect this to end.

As John Roberts pointed out in his magisterial *History of the World*, the flow of commodities had increased exponentially: oil, gas and electricity had joined coal, wood, wind and water as sources of energy. Railways, electric trams, steamships, motor cars, even bicycles, brought remarkable changes to communications – indeed it was the greatest

revolution in transport since animals had been tied to carts thousands of years before. Industrialization at the end of the nineteenth century was more than enough to keep pace with population growth. Those Europeans who considered such matters had reason to believe that their history since the Middle Ages showed a continual advance towards goals which were so evidently worth while that few of them were ever questioned. Since European civilization had spread across the globe, the entire world seemed set fair on a progressive course.

There were of course pessimists; some of them felt that civilization was drifting away from its moorings in religion and absolute morality, 'carried along by the tides of materialism and barbarity probably to complete disaster'.[28] Distribution of the newly created wealth was uneven and most Europeans were still poor. More and more of them lived in cities and towns, for the most part in wretched conditions which seemed to many to breed the inevitable conditions for revolution. Socialists stoked the rhetoric which sustained the notion of revolution – in Britain socialism was a moral creed rather than a materialistic one. It meant not Marxism but trade unionism and parliamentary methods. Yet in 1896 the Second International, an organization of socialist parties, had confirmed the supremacy of Marxism and the dogma of the class struggle.

This was frightening for the middle classes throughout the continent, but Marxist rhetoric tended to ignore the reality that, although the majority was still poor, the capitalist system had improved the lives of huge numbers of people in recent decades. It had also, in many places, advanced democracy. The suffrage was spreading inexorably, at least among males, and the discussion of women's rights had grown ever fiercer in the late nineteenth century. Henrik Ibsen had intended his play *A Doll's House* to be a plea for the individual, but it was taken as a call for the liberation of women. The development of advanced capitalist economies created massive opportunities for employment for women as typists, telephonists, shop assistants and factory workers. The accretion of such jobs changed domestic economics and family life for ever.

Another force was the ever faster march of technological progress. Together with piped water, clean sources of energy for both light and heat began to spread in the new century. These developments, and others such as electricity, preserved food, cookers, washing machines with mangles, helped to start the transformation of domestic life, at

least for the middle classes. Later, the gradual spread of knowledge about contraception began to enable women to think that they could try to control the demands of procreation in ways which had been unimaginable to their mothers and to all their ancestors before them.

As we look back over the horrors of the twentieth century it is easy to say that the pessimists won the argument. In fact neither optimists nor pessimists were wholly right.[29] Hindsight can be a disadvantage – sometimes today it is difficult to see how the optimists could have been so certain. But they included men and women of great intelligence and wisdom.

It is also true that, although the end of the nineteenth century really did have an ominously decadent *fin de siècle* feeling for some people, they were a minority, even among artists and intellectuals. Revolutionaries like to see history as a state in which, after long periods of nothing happening, cataclysm occurs. An alternative view is that progress (or any change) tends to be slow and is often almost unnoticed. Thus electric light is invented and is indeed revolutionary, but its adoption is gradual, spread over many decades. The changes, intellectual and technological, which were so much to affect the life of Elizabeth Bowes Lyon and all others born on the cusp of the century at first did little to disturb the traditional rhythms of her world.

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ON 22 JANUARY 1901, almost six months after Elizabeth's birth, Queen Victoria died at Osborne, her home in the Isle of Wight. It was a momentous event. Her funeral took place amid unprecedented pomp and ceremony and was attended by representatives of over forty nations. There are nineteen stout volumes in the Royal Archives containing the outpourings of the British press alone on the passing of the Queen Empress, who had reigned for nearly sixty-four years.

She was succeeded by her son, King Edward VII. Although it is tempting to see a new reign and a new century as marking a distinct change, these were but artificial breaks in a continuous process. The new monarch differed in style but not much in substance from the old; the monarchy itself remained firmly grounded in a society in which aristocratic families like the Strathmores could still be confident of the privileges, but also conscious of the responsibilities, which their place in the social order brought them.

King Edward VII's reign was to be short, less than ten years. He

was seen much more in public than his revered mother and he mixed more freely with his subjects. Enthusiastic for lavish spending and for pageantry, he resumed the tradition, only occasionally followed by Queen Victoria in her widowhood, of attending the state opening of Parliament in person.

King Edward visited the watering places of Europe frequently, sometimes to the detriment of communications with his ministers. He was a genial extrovert who enjoyed meeting people and made them feel at ease. By his friendships he did a great deal to help secure the social acceptance of Jews. He sought, also, to achieve good relations with other countries, and his visit to France in 1904 created the atmosphere which helped to bring about the Entente Cordiale with Britain's hitherto hereditary enemy. In his personal life, he enjoyed the company of attractive and amusing women and acquired the reputation of a philanderer. But he treated his wife Queen Alexandra with affection and respect, and loved his children, three daughters, Princesses Louise, Victoria and Maud, and two sons, Prince Albert Victor ('Eddy') who died in 1892, and Prince George (later King George V) on whom he lavished affection after his elder brother's death.

The Edwardian years have been described as the Indian summer of the country-house way of life.[30] Despite the agricultural depression which set in after 1875 and which to a great extent broke the old reliance of the landed classes on land as a source of income, the mystique of ownership of a country property lived on. White tablecloths were still spread and the silver teapot still set out for tea on spacious lawns. Much had changed, however, and the families who weathered the changes best were those with resources beyond their broad acres – property in London, for example, or coalmining interests. Thanks to the arrival of the railways and then the motor car, travel to and between country properties was faster than ever before. Industrialization brought wealth and the newly rich wanted the highest status symbol of all – a stake in the land, but for purposes of recreation and display rather than income. Field sports, especially shooting, were the great pastime of the aristocracy of the age. According to the official history of Purdey's, the gun makers, the Edwardian years were some of the busiest and most profitable the firm has ever known. 'Individual cartridge orders of 10,000 per season are commonplace in the books of the time, and the cartridge-loading shop was busy far into the night. The orders for guns never slackened and profits boomed.'[31]

In the homes of great families, change was slow. Many country houses were still run on Victorian lines, so that family, guests, servants and children each had their separate areas. *Country Life* in 1911 commented approvingly of Crathorne Hall in Yorkshire: 'The whole of the nursery quarters are isolated, as they should be, and served by a separate corridor.'[32] That was not the case at St Paul's Walden Bury, a handsome Queen Anne house of rose-red brick, its walls covered with magnolia and honeysuckle, set in the green Hertfordshire countryside. The house was comfortable and slightly shabby; it had none of the imposing, slightly eerie romance of Glamis. It was large but not grand; the nursery wing was easily accessible from the rest of the house.[33]

Elizabeth's childhood was not formal or restrictive – indeed it was idyllic, all the more so after the birth in May 1902 of her brother David, the last of Cecilia and Claude's children. He and Elizabeth became so close and there was such a gap between them and their elder siblings that their mother called them her 'two Benjamins'. Within the family Elizabeth was known as Buffy.

After their mother, the most important presence in the children's lives was their nanny. Clara Cooper Knight, known as Alah, was the daughter of a tenant farmer on the Strathmores' Hertfordshire estate, and was taken on by Lady Strathmore when Elizabeth was only a month old. She later described Elizabeth as 'an exceptionally happy, easy baby: crawling early, running at thirteen months and speaking very young'.[34] Kind but firm, devoted and utterly dependable, Alah remained in charge of the nursery until Elizabeth was eleven and stayed with the family thereafter. She went to work for Elizabeth's elder sister May, and then took charge of Princess Elizabeth when she was born in 1926.

Elizabeth Bowes Lyon spent most of her childhood at St Paul's Walden Bury. Her brother David told Lady Cynthia Asquith that he and Elizabeth regarded Glamis as 'a holiday place, Streatlam as a visit, and St Paul's as "Home" '.[35] Cynthia Asquith commented: 'Its atmosphere of a happy English home recalls to one's memory so many of the familiar delights of childhood – charades, schoolroom-tea, home made toffee, Christmas Eve, hide-and-seek. Nowhere in this well-worn house, one feels, can there ever have been very strict rules as to the shutting of doors, the wiping of boots or the putting away of toys . . . least of all any edict that children must be seen, not heard.'[36]

The garden outside was both lovely and mysterious, with barns

and other outhouses making irresistible places to play. Elizabeth loved being in the stable around the smell of horses and leather, bits of which the groom gave her to polish. 'Absolute bliss,' she recalled.[37] Beyond the garden lay woodland, intersected by long grassy avenues lined with beech hedges and connected by lateral rides. Statues stood at the end of vistas and a maze of walks criss-crossed the wood; there were ponds, a rock garden and a huge knobbled oak tree. Once within this wood it was hard not to believe that one was in a vast forest.[38]

The adult Elizabeth gave Cynthia Asquith a whimsical description of this magical childhood world. 'At the bottom of the garden, where the sun always seems to be shining, is THE WOOD – the haunt of fairies, with its anemones and ponds, and moss-grown statues, and the BIG OAK ... where the two ring-doves, Caroline-Curly-Love and Rhoda-Wrigley-Worm, contentedly coo in their wicker-work "Ideal Home".'[39]

The two children had a favourite hiding place which they called the Flea House. It was in the attic of the decrepit brewhouse – a 'blissful retreat', David said, in which they hid from grown-ups and escaped from their morning lessons. 'In it we kept a regular store of forbidden delicacies acquired by devious devices. This store consisted of apples, oranges, sugar, sweets, slabs of Chocolat Menier, matches and packets of Woodbines.'[40] Years later Queen Elizabeth recalled the fascination of the farm buildings for the two children: 'I loved wandering round the old Barns and Flea House, & remembering some of the old characters who seemed to live there. Will Wren's parlour and Charles May's shed were always full of fascinating & exciting objects when we were children, and the Brew House, with its dangerous deep well, and chaff cutting machine, were very special and rather frightening!'[41]

'We did all the usual country-life things together,' David told his sister's biographer. 'We were never separated if we could avoid it.'[42] Their interests were not identical: she loved horses, he did not; she loved parties, he did not. When visitors came she would explain, 'David is rather shy.'[43] Mrs Thompson, the housekeeper, wrote after Elizabeth had married and become duchess of York:

> They were the dearest little couple I have ever seen and the Duchess always took the lead. She would come tripping down the stairs and it would be 'Mrs Thompson, have you any of those

> nice creams left for us?' and she would herself open the cupboard and help herself to what she liked best ... I can see her now coming outside the window of the housekeeper's room with her tiny pony Bobs, and making him beg for sugar, and often she would come up by herself and pop her head up suddenly and make us all jump, at which she would have a good laugh. She had a very happy childhood, and always good health to enjoy it.[44]

If St Paul's Walden Bury was a delightful family home, Glamis Castle was a thrilling place to spend holidays. It is one of the most splendid buildings in Scotland. The oldest part of the Castle, the south-east wing, dates from the fifteenth century but it was not until the early seventeenth century, when the first and second earls of Kinghorne set about remodelling the Castle, that it acquired its impressive height, its turreted profile and some of its finest rooms. The soaring central staircase, with eighty-six wide stone steps winding round to the top of its tower, was built at this time. Its hollow newel may once have been intended to heat the house with warm air rising from a fire at its base; but since 1686 it has held the mighty weights of the Castle clock, the steady ticking of which, muffled by the thickness of the stone, has been described by one family member as 'the heartbeat of the castle'.[45]

The first Earl installed the imposing chimneypiece and overmantel in the great hall, now the Drawing Room; the second Earl was responsible for the handsome arched ceiling, dated 1621. After a period of neglect, towards the end of the seventeenth century the Castle acquired its present spectacular approach and façade thanks to the inspiration of Patrick, first Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne, who moved the entrance to the stair tower and the avenue leading up to it. He also installed the chapel next to the Great Hall, richly decorated with paintings by Jacob de Wet, which survives, after a mid-nineteenth-century restoration. Earl Patrick's much admired gardens and policies (parkland) were destroyed in the eighteenth century. However, the more open setting of the Castle today allows for dramatic effect, the turrets appearing to rise up as one makes one's way down the long, straight drive. (In 2008, the Prince of Wales opened the Queen Mother Memorial Gates at the end of the drive, thus allowing a view of the Castle from Glamis village for the first time.)

Through the ages the Castle has resounded with superstition,

legend and tales of ghosts and even monsters, and has received the visits of kings and queens of Scotland. James VI of Scotland visited often to see his friend the ninth Lord Glamis, who then accompanied his sovereign south on his accession to the throne of England (as James I) in 1603 and became one of his Privy Counsellors in 1606. It is possible that Shakespeare heard tales of the many historical connections between Glamis and the Scottish Crown at the English Court. Whatever inspired the playwright's imagination, the Castle continues to have a stirring association with the grim tragedy of *Macbeth*.[46] Before the installation of gas lighting in 1865, climbing the stairs to bed with a flickering candle could have unsettled the thoughts of even the most unimaginative soul. After spending a night at Glamis, Sir Walter Scott wrote, 'I must own that when I heard door after door shut, after my conductor had retired, I began to consider myself as too far from the living, and somewhat too near the dead.' Scott drew on the Castle and the circumstances of the family in two of his novels, *Waverley* and *The Antiquary*.[47] By the end of the Victorian period the Castle had become somewhat more domestic. In the last decade of the century the thirteenth Earl, Elizabeth's grandfather, embarked on building work to accommodate his growing number of grandchildren.[48] Plans for the new nursery wing show large south-facing rooms on the second floor. Electricity came to the Castle only in 1929.

One of Elizabeth's earliest memories was of her grandparents' golden wedding celebration at Glamis in 1903, when she sat on her grandfather's knee and watched the fireworks.[49] His diary records that the Strathmores invited 571 children from five schools in the neighbourhood to tea, sports and a conjuring show, followed by fireworks arranged by the house steward, Charles Collingwood. 'All went perfectly. They said there were 2000 people to see the fireworks. We saw them from my window with some of the children.'[50]

On 16 February 1904 Elizabeth's grandfather died and, at the age of forty-nine, her father became fourteenth earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne.* The diary of her elder sister May records that she and her mother sent their clothes off to be dyed black.[51] Years later Elizabeth recalled that in her childhood they always seemed to be in mourning for someone.[52]

* As daughters of an earl, Elizabeth and her sisters acquired the courtesy title of 'Lady'. Thus she was now Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon.

Home remained at St Paul's Walden Bury but now that her father had inherited Glamis as well – not to mention Streatlam and Gibside – her family's visits north became more prolonged. The winter, spring and summer until July were generally spent in Hertfordshire and London, where from late 1906 the Strathmores rented 20 St James's Square, a magnificent house designed by Robert Adam for Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn in the 1770s. In August they moved to Glamis, staying there until October or sometimes November before returning south. The autumn was also the period for visits to Streatlam. Decamping to Glamis was a major operation. It was not just the family but the household which moved to Scotland. As well as clothes they took silver, china and everything else that they might need for several weeks' holiday and entertainment north of the border. Everyone boarded the overnight train which took them to the little station at Glamis.

By the standards of the day, and of their acquaintances, the Strathmores did not run a grand household. The 1901 census return for St Paul's Walden Bury lists a housekeeper, a cook, a lady's maid, a dairy maid, a nursery maid, two housemaids, a kitchenmaid, two footmen, a page, a coachman and a groom (who doubled as a chauffeur when motor cars were acquired in about 1908). For many decades, the most cherished was Arthur Barson who served the family through several generations as footman, valet and butler. 'Nothing would go on without him – he keeps everything going,' the young Elizabeth informed a newcomer to the household.[53] She later told a relative that the family all liked Barson so much that they insisted he be included in the portrait of the family showing them gathered in the drawing room at Glamis, with Elizabeth and David in the foreground building houses of cards on the floor. It was painted in 1909 by a young Italian painter, Alessandro Catani-Chiti, and still hangs at St Paul's Walden Bury.[54]

Later Elizabeth recalled that Glamis, like St Paul's, was filled with local people working for the family. Outside there were gardeners, grooms and agricultural workers. Inside there were housemaids, kitchenmaids and laundry maids. 'It was really like a little village,' she remembered, and she thought it was a happy one. 'They were all our friends.'[55] For many years the family cook was Etta Maclean, known as Mrs Eeta. She had been trained by Lady Strathmore and travelled with the family. Her two sisters also worked for the Strathmores; one,

Catherine (Catta), later became Elizabeth's lady's maid and stayed with her for many years after her marriage.[56]*

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THE FATHER of this great family was thin, rangy and unconventional. He had a thick moustache which greyed quite early in his life. He was not extrovert; indeed he was said to be 'a quiet, courteous, religious man, conscientious to a degree'.[57] He had a strong sense of duty which he imparted to his children; he was a dedicated landowner who was said to be generous to his tenants; he was a sportsman, a good if not first-class cricketer, and an excellent shot. But above all he loved forestry and was known for the eccentric delight he took in chopping up trees.

A family anecdote tells something of his character. One day when working with his trees, he was looking sufficiently unkempt and unrecognizable for a wandering tramp to stop and talk to him. They got on so well that the tramp stayed to help him with a bonfire. The Earl then told the tramp that he had heard that, if one went to the back door of the big house, one would be given some money, and advised him to try this the next day. Lord Strathmore then gave the butler a sovereign to pass on. Next day the tramp reappeared and told the Earl with jubilation that he had received a half-sovereign. History does not relate what happened to the butler, who was surely not the beloved Barson.[58]

If Claude was eccentric and loved by his family and retainers, Cecilia was simply much loved – by all her children, her servants and her friends. She dominated her family and household, running both with affection and care. One of her daughters recalled: 'Mother was a very wonderful woman, very talented, very go-ahead, and so upright. She had a terrific sympathy; the young used to pour their troubles out to her and ask her for advice, often when they would not go to their own parents.'[59] Her granddaughter Lady Mary Clayton spoke of her as 'the wisest person one could meet', and described her 'delicious' laugh.[60] Devoid of snobbery, Cecilia had a great capacity for friendship. She had a zest for living and was constantly developing new enthusiasms, but

* Catherine Maclean (c. 1890–1966), dresser to the Duchess of York and Queen Elizabeth 1923–52. Owing to ill health she did not work after 1941 and finally retired in 1952. In the 1950s and 1960s the three Maclean sisters ran the Dores Inn on Loch Ness, where Queen Elizabeth sometimes visited them.

she was casual to the point of apparent carelessness. When a visitor could no longer bear to watch water pouring down the wall of a room at St Paul's Walden Bury and pointed it out to her, she merely remarked, 'Oh dear, we must move that sofa.'[61]

She gave wonderful parties. Raymond Asquith, the eldest son of the future Prime Minister, described a ball at Glamis in September 1905: 'The place is an enormous 10th century dungeon. It was full of torches and wild men in kilts and pretty women pattering on the stone stairs with satin slippers . . . I was glad to find I had enough illusibility left to fancy myself in a distant century.'[62]

A lively and imaginative storyteller, Cecilia entertained her children with tales of life at Glamis in centuries gone by. Gradually, she inculcated in them a sense of history and romance, a love of tradition and a sense of duty. She was strict but not harsh; her children were brought up according to firm principles, but they recalled that these were never enforced unkindly. 'Work is the rent you pay for life' was one of her maxims; another was 'Life is for living and working at. If anything or anyone bores you, then the fault is in yourself.'[63] She was artistic and creative, and her embroidery, especially crewel-work, was outstanding in its design and execution. She also had a good ear for music and was an accomplished pianist. Another of her loves was gardening, and at Glamis between 1907 and 1910 she designed and created what is now called the Italian Garden. A major project, it involved felling about four acres of trees and levelling and draining the ground, all carried out by men from the estate.[64]

Christianity was fundamental to both Cecilia and Claude; they instilled a strong sense of religion in their children. The family said prayers daily at St Paul's Walden Bury and in the Glamis chapel. Lady Strathmore considered that women's hair should be covered for worship and provided white lace caps for guests. On Sundays she played the harmonium to accompany the hymns. She taught each of her children to kneel and pray beside their beds every night. Elizabeth continued to do this until the end of her life. The Strathmore children were brought up – like so many other British children from different backgrounds – with a love of nation as well as a love of God. Loyalty to King and Country were imbibed early on, along with decent behaviour. Their generation, like their parents', was proud of the spread of Christianity, law and technical progress throughout the British Empire.

It was a happy household and, according to contemporary accounts, Elizabeth was a vivacious child who, from an early age, loved the company of adults as well as children. Her grandmother found her 'quite a companion', even at the age of three, and enjoyed 'her coaxy little ways'.[65] Her mother once found the three-year-old pouring tea (which she had ordered herself) and talking to neighbours who had arrived early. On another occasion, according to Cynthia Asquith, she approached a distinguished visitor with the words 'Shall us sit and talk?' As Lady Cynthia commented, 'The sentence was a command rather than an invitation,' and the man was gently detached from the rest of the party and led away for a long conversation.[66]

Being ninth of ten children had its benefits: adults took a more indulgent view of one's behaviour. Elizabeth was mischievous as well as precocious, although her first biographer found no reports of 'sensational naughtiness' beyond the occasion when, aged about six, she used a pair of scissors to cut up her sheets. When she confided this to a visitor, she was asked, 'What will Mother say when you tell her?' 'Oh! Elizabeth,' she replied – and she was correct.[67]

Lord David Cecil, who was introduced to Elizabeth in London when they were both children, later wrote: 'I turned and looked and was aware of a small, charming rosy face around which twined and strayed rings and tendrils of silken hair, and a pair of dewy grey eyes . . . From that moment my small damp hand clutched at hers and I never left her side . . . Forgotten were all the pretenders to my heart. Here was the true heroine. She had come. I had seen and she had conquered.'[68] Another admirer, Lord Gorell,* whom she used as a child to call 'old boy', remembered later that she had said to him, when aged eight, that she was sure she had 'bothered' him when she was only six. On the contrary, he recalled: 'there are children, of course, who bother grown ups; but Lady Elizabeth was never one of them . . . She had, even then, that blend of kindliness and dignity that is the peculiar characteristic of her family. She was small for her age, responsive as a harp, wistful and appealing one moment, bright-eyed and eager the next, with a flashing smile of appreciative delight.'[69]

One of the many photographs of Elizabeth and David as children shows them at Glamis with their dancing master, Mr Neill of Forfar. It is almost like a painting by Rembrandt; the bearded old man, standing

* Ronald Gorell Barnes, third Baron Gorell (1884–1963), Liberal peer and author.

with his fiddle, watches as Elizabeth poses in a long Jacobean dress said to be of rose pink and silver, while David wears the multi-coloured jerkin, tights, cap and bells of a court jester. Mr Neill took his job as teacher seriously; though he used to skip around the room after his pupils as he played, he maintained a solemn mien so that David and Elizabeth knew that they must learn their steps. Only when the dance was complete and any audience present clapped them could they relax.[70] On one occasion they danced for the minister of Glamis, Dr John Stirton, who was later appointed chaplain to King George V at Balmoral. He recalled that when Cecilia Strathmore sat at the piano and played a few bars of a 'quaint old minuet', suddenly 'as if by a magician's touch, two little figures seemed to rise from the floor and dance, with admirable precision and grace, the stately measure so characteristic of the eighteenth century.' When the dancers bowed and curtsied, 'little choruses of praise were heard on every side, and Lady Elizabeth, on being asked the name of the character she had adopted, said with great *empressement*: "I call myself the Princess Elizabeth." '[71]

Among Elizabeth's abiding childhood memories were her trips to Italy with her mother, to stay with her grandmother Mrs Scott in her various villas in Florence, San Remo and Bordighera. These visits are not well documented, but the first was probably to San Remo in February 1907, when she was six years old. On 14 February, Claude wrote to his mother at the Strathmores' villa in Bordighera: 'Cecilia and my darling Elizabeth are starting from Charing X tomorrow morning and you will see her soon I hope.'[72] Eight days later Elizabeth wrote to her father, with some assistance, for the spelling is faultless: 'This is a most lovely place and there is an orange tree in the garden and lots of flowers I pick them before breakfast.'[73]

There were several more trips over the next few years and they made a deep impression on the young girl. Later she spoke to her first biographer of 'the thrill of night travel and restaurant-car meals, and at the end of the journey the glamour of being "abroad", the gabble and gesticulations of foreigners, and all the colour and beauty of this Italian home'. Mrs Scott's Villa Capponi in Florence had a wonderful garden, 'with magnificent cypresses standing out against the blue distant mountains behind Fiesole' and views over the city of Florence; the house itself was filled with beautiful furniture, pictures and flowers.[74] On another trip, this time to Bordighera, Elizabeth reported back to her father that she had been playing on the rocks on the sea shore.

'There is a dear little donky here called Marguarita and we put it in a little carriage and I drive it is so quiet have got nothing more to say exept it is a lovly garden my best love to yourself good by from your very loving Elizabeth.'[75]

In November 1908 Elizabeth's eldest brother Patrick, Lord Glamis, married Lady Dorothy Osborne, daughter of the Duke of Leeds. 'Me and Dorothy's little brother are going to be bridesmaids,' she wrote.[76] It was to prove a problematic marriage for the family: none of them found Dorothy Glamis easy.[77] In early 1910, the birth of John, the eldest son of Patrick and Dorothy, made Elizabeth an aunt for the first time, at the age of nine. She proudly recorded the event in the first of her surviving diaries, which she began on the first day of 1910.

The diary is a red morocco leather book about the size of a large postcard, perhaps given to her as a Christmas present in 1909. Her handwriting is strong and even, in black ink. On the flyleaf she wrote: 'Written by Elizabeth Lyon, begun Jan 1 1910, at St Paul's Walden.'

> Jan 1 1910. I had my first nevew great excitement. Same day went to Lady Litten's Fancy dress party and had great fun. Jan 2 Sunday – did nothing went to church. Jan 3 lessons in the morning – in the afternoon I went to a party at King's Walden there was a Xmas tree. Jan 4 had lessons in the morning. At 7 in the evening May, Rosie, David and I went to Lady Verhner in fancy dress it was great fun, there were proggrams too and supper at half past nine. We went away at ten. It was from 7 to 12.[78]

The diary was kept well for January 1910 but, in the way of diaries, tailed off thereafter. It recounted her lessons, a 'not very nice' fancy-dress party, enjoying *Aladdin* in London, lessons, rain, more lessons, tobogganing and church, and on the 21st she went for a long walk and 'met people going to vote. David and I wore the right color. Vote for Hillier.'[79] Alfred Hillier was the Conservative candidate for Hitchin, and his victory gave Elizabeth some happy news to send to her French governess: 'Le conservatives a allee dedans ici n'est e pas ces gentil.'[80]

It was a time of political change. In 1906 the Conservatives had been swept away at Westminster by a landslide Liberal victory, and twenty-nine of the new Members represented the Labour Party. The January 1910 election was called after the unprecedented rejection by the House of Lords of a Finance Bill – Lloyd George's controversial 'People's Budget' of 1909. He had proposed to raise income tax and

other taxes. Land taxes, in particular, aroused the fury of the Conservative majority in the Lords.

The election resulted in a hung Parliament. The Liberals lost their large majority and were returned with a majority of just two. They now had to rely on the support of Labour and Irish MPs. King Edward VII was not pleased. He complained to his son that 'our great Empire' was now being ruled by Irish nationalists, 'aided and abetted by Messrs Asquith, L. George and W. Churchill'.[81] And indeed the new government was compelled to bring in an Irish Home Rule bill in return for Irish nationalist support for Lloyd George's budget. But the Conservative majority in the House of Lords rejected the proposals of the Liberal government to reduce the powers of the Lords and this brought about a constitutional crisis which eventually did lead to a reduction in those powers.

The crisis was unresolved when, on 6 May 1910, Edward VII died. His son, King George V, wrote in his diary, 'At 11.45 [p.m.], beloved Papa passed peacefully away & I have lost my best friend and the best of fathers.'[82] Lady Strathmore noted that all the shops were 'crammed' when she went out to buy mourning clothes. On 20 May, a beautiful day, she and her two elder daughters watched the funeral procession from Apsley House at Hyde Park Corner.[83] Nine European monarchs came to bury the King, including his nephew Kaiser William II of Germany; none could foresee that four years later their nations would all be engulfed in war.