

# **On the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abdication of Edward VIII in order to marry American divorcée Wallis Simpson**

## **A proposal to reconsider the images of this couple later known as the Duke and Duchess of Windsor What is the truth?**

Because the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abdication of Edward VIII occurred December 2011, now is an ideal time for a reappraisal of this couple, a new look at the true circumstances surrounding this momentous and earth-shaking action which haunts the British monarchy to this day. It is also an appropriate occasion for a discussion of the continuous and publicly unknown cruelty, lies and persecution to which the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were subjected by the British royal family and their advisors throughout the remainder of their lives and beyond.

### **The context of the lives of Edward and Wallis**

1. Prince Edward was known as a playboy prince who enjoyed relationships with married women. There is some evidence that a youthful affair with a young woman of his own age resulted in a pregnancy which thereafter led him to choose this “safer” behavior.
2. Wallis never pursued him. He did all the pursuing. She was terrific company; people loved to be with her.
3. When he focused on her and began to woo her, they both considered they were involved in a “fling.” The reason it became more serious, especially for him, was because she was more natural with him, less deferential than British women, which made him feel like a human being and not like a symbol.
4. When it became obvious that he could not give her up (today we call this emotional dependency), it was too late. But he did not handle the situation to his best advantage: he chose abdication. If he had held out, his ministers would have had to accept his decision or resign. They could not force him off the throne.
5. The British monarch’s role as Defender of the Faith includes strict opposition to divorce which was the main reason for the abdication. (The only difference in status between the divorced Camilla Parker-Bowles, who is married to the present heir to the throne, and that of Wallis is that Wallis was American and seventy-five years have passed.)

### **The concentrated effort to destroy the reputations of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor**

1. The well-known visit to Germany, in 1937, by the Duke and Duchess on their honeymoon, was brief, late in their travels and during the period of appeasement by England, a year before the Munich Pact of 1938. Winston Churchill’s son, Randolph, was part of the entourage accompanying the Windsors on this portion of their trip and reported back to his father on the success of the tour. The elder Churchill wrote to the Duke and complimented him on this welcome result. When newsreels of the visit were shown in British theaters, the public cheered the former king and his new wife. There was no sense that the Duke and Duchess were expressing approval of the Nazi regime, rather that their visit might potentially help the cause of peace.
2. The powerful public relations machine around the monarchy created and perpetuated the reputation of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor as “Nazi sympathizers.” It was believed not to be enough to enhance and glorify the new king; it was thought necessary to demean and discredit the previous king as well.
3. With the help of *The King’s Speech*, we can see this as they did: here they had had a much beloved king who was handsome, charming and well-spoken and who had been highly visible as Prince of Wales for twenty-five years. (To put this in perspective, he was more popular in his day than Princess Diana was in hers; millions of young girls throughout the world kept his picture in their diary.) Now they had this new king who was afflicted with a speech impediment and unable to speak without stammering. The P.R. people were frantic. (Don’t forget, he wasn’t Colin Firth.)

### **The broader historical facts at the time of the abdication**

1. In the mid ‘30s there was great turmoil throughout Europe: thrones were toppling, fascism and communism were on the rise and the Russian czar and his entire family (close cousins of the British royals) had been murdered by the communists. There was no certainty that the British monarchy would survive and therefore the sympathy of all the British royals, nobility and aristocracy lay with the fascists who they believed would not murder them. This was not politics, it was survival and the attitude was universal. (Many members of the British upper classes visited Berlin during the 1936 Sumer Olympics and stayed with high level Nazis.) Churchill, who kept warning about Hitler, was considered a warmonger by the aristocracy. To purport that some aristocrats were actively antifascist is revisionist history, frequently depicted in film and television to distinguish between the good guys and the bad guys.

2. Edward and Wallis married in June, 1937. The Munich Non-Aggression Pact between Britain and Germany was concluded September 29/30, 1938. The royal family, led by George VI (of *The King's Speech*), openly supported this agreement even though the royals were supposed to stay removed from politics. The War began in September 1939 and there is no evidence that the Duke and Duchess were anything but loyal to the Allied War effort throughout the conflict. There were some rumors that the Nazis planned to kidnap the Duke so, in order to make him less accessible, he was made Governor of the Bahamas during the War. Churchill also arranged, with President Franklin Roosevelt, for the Duke to be under the protection of the U.S. Navy.

#### **Edward VIII made an arrangement with his brother, George VI, his successor, for his and Wallis' future**

1. As the eldest son, according to the British law of primogeniture, Edward inherited Balmoral and Sandringham. These two estates were not crown lands belonging to the monarch but rather had been privately purchased by George V, the father of Edward VIII and George VI. Edward VIII made a private arrangement with his brother, George VI, that the new king would pay rent for these two properties to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor throughout their lives. Today, this payment would be equivalent to an amount in dollars in the high six figures. This income is what the Duke and Duchess lived on for the first fifteen years of their married life.
2. When George VI died in 1952, the rent payments stopped. His widow, Queen Elizabeth, the sister-in-law of the Duke of Windsor, influenced her daughter, the young Queen Elizabeth II, to take this action. The Duke wrote letters and made phone calls incessantly to rectify this renegeing on the commitment of the deceased king but nothing was effective because no one would risk offending the "beloved Queen Mum." After this significant change in their resources, the Duke and Duchess developed the reputation of being freeloaders.

#### **How and where the former King planned to live after his marriage**

1. After a suitable interval, Edward planned to return to England and be of some assistance to his brother as his brother had been to him when he was king, i.e., attending an event when the new king was unable to and matters of that kind. He had no idea that his presence and the fact that he had left the royal position would be seen as a serious threat by the new monarch and his advisors. Because they were super sensitive about the fragility of the monarchy's capacity to withstand any further instability, they did not want Edward to come back to England. Although he would be welcome to visit, they told him that Wallis, as a divorced woman, would not be admitted to the palace. Edward would never risk having Wallis humiliated but, for many years, he continued to request a visit together with Wallis. This was never granted. Various excuses were made; at one point, he would have settled for 15 minutes for tea but his wish was always denied. (Now, the Queen's own daughter, Princess Anne, has been divorced and remarried and certainly not refused entrée to the palace.)

#### **The bequest to the Pasteur Institute, its importance and its significance**

1. Before the Duke's death, he and the Duchess discussed the disposition of their assets and agreed on a plan: he would leave everything to her and she would leave everything to the Pasteur Institute, a leading scientific research center for the study of infectious diseases, located in Paris. They chose this recipient as a way to express their gratitude to the people of France who had welcomed them, given them a home (their residence was an elegant house in the Bois de Boulogne which was lent to them by the government of Paris) and treated them with kindness and courtesy throughout the thirty-five years of their marriage. (Undoubtedly, sticking it to the British played a role in the generosity of the French but that does not change the reality of the benefit to the Duke and Duchess.)
2. The value of the bequest, essentially through the sale of the Duchess' jewels, was the second greatest the Pasteur had ever received, equivalent to \$90 million in today's dollars. It was also the largest from an American and the largest from a woman.
3. Two scientists at the Institute discovered HIV and this achievement led to the treatment that keeps so many infected with the virus alive for a normal life span. These two scientists, Dr. Françoise Barré-Sinoussi and Dr. Luc Montagnier, were awarded the 2008 Nobel Prize in Medicine for this discovery.
4. The Duchess' portrait is displayed in the reception area of one of the major buildings on the extensive Paris campus of the Pasteur Institute.
5. **Although it was not her destiny to become Queen of the British Empire, the worldwide benefits of the Duchess of Windsor's bequest, which will redound throughout many generations, have given her a far more noble legacy.**