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MAJESTY



QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

HER MAJESTY'S WEDDING GIFTS

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INSIDE ROYALTY IN DANGER ● MARGARET'S COUTURIER ● DANISH PRINCESSES

ROYALTY IN DANGER



An artist's impression
of the assassination of
Archduke Franz Ferdinand
and his wife Sophie

MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

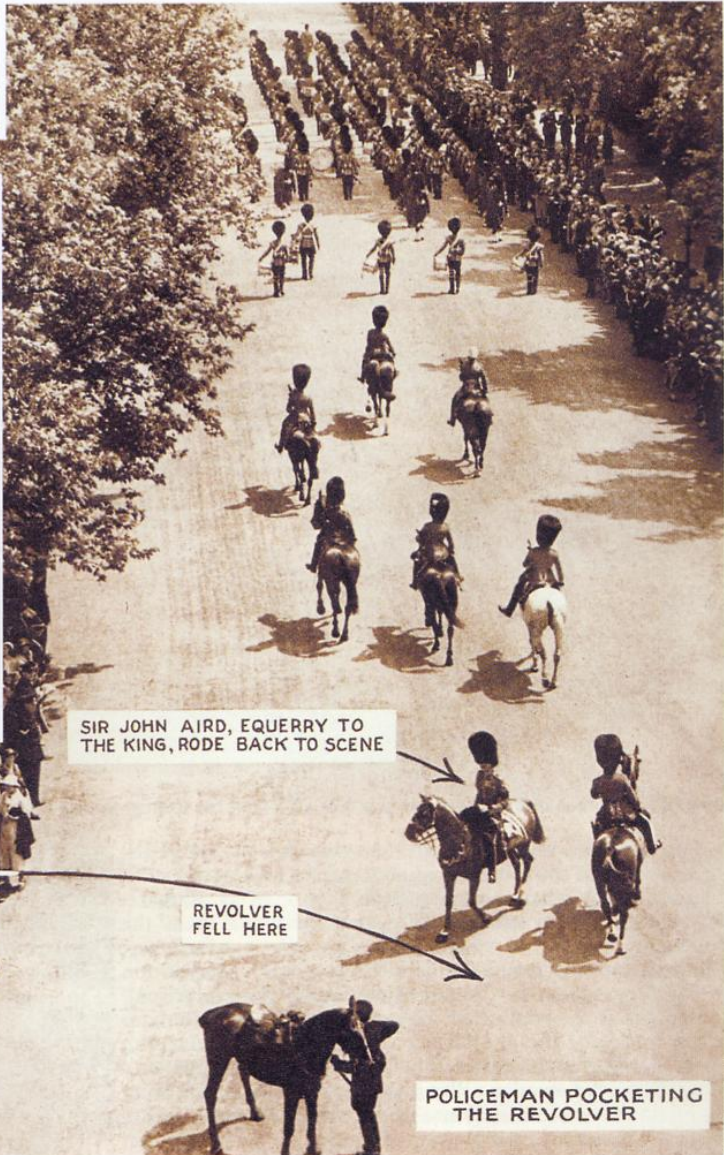
Concluding his two-part series, IAN LLOYD recounts a number of security breaches in earlier reigns



FROM TOP: King Edward VIII continues along Constitution Hill after the firearms incident

McMahon is taken away by police. He was sentenced to 12 months' hard labour for 'producing a revolver with intent to alarm the King'

A contemporary illustration of the scene from the Wellington Arch at Hyde Park Corner



PRIVATE COLLECTION

IN 1898, after an unsuccessful attempt on his life, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany was inundated with messages of goodwill from the crowned heads of Europe. 'These are the risks of our profession,' commiserated King Umberto I of Italy, speaking from personal experience after surviving a near-fatal stabbing the previous year.

In the 16-year period between 1898 and 1914 the kings of Italy, Greece, Portugal and Serbia were assassinated. In 1906 King Alfonso XIII of Spain narrowly missed being killed when a bomb was thrown at him and his new wife on their wedding day. The beautiful Empress Elisabeth of Austria was stabbed to death whilst holidaying in Geneva in 1898.

Finally, it was the murder of Elisabeth's nephew, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 that resulted in Austria declaring war on Serbia, a war that rapidly escalated into the greatest conflict the world had so far witnessed.

The British monarchy also experienced its fair share of assassination attempts, although mercifully none succeeded. While the European attacks were often politically motivated and the assailants nearly always labelled 'anarchists', the men and women who attacked our Royal Family were almost all regarded as mentally ill and occasionally as complete lunatics.

'Queen Victoria survived assassination an incredible seven times'



Edward Oxford fires at Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in an attempt to take the monarch's life

This was certainly the case with the assailants of George III. In August 1786 the King was alighting from his carriage at St James's Palace when a woman, later identified as Margaret Nicholson, tried to stab him. 'The poor creature is mad!' the sovereign cried as his guards seized her. 'Do not hurt her! She has not hurt me.' Thanks to his personal intervention Nicholson was sent to a lunatic asylum rather than to prison.

George III was to display the same *sangfroid* 14 years later when James Hadfield, a former soldier, fired a shot at him inside Drury Lane Theatre. The bullet missed its target and instead struck a wooden pillar inside the royal box. The King stood up to show the audience he was fine, and eyewitnesses said he remained completely composed. The playwright Sheridan hastily composed a new verse to the National Anthem and it was sung at the end of the performance to wild acclaim.

In May 1810 George's son, the Duke of Cumberland, was almost killed by his valet as he slept in his apartments at St James's Palace. Joseph Sellis went berserk with the Duke's regimental sword, causing severe wounding to his hands, neck and head; only the thick royal nightcap saved him from being slashed to death. Another valet, Cornelius Neale, rushed to Cumberland's aid with a poker, but by then Sellis had run to his own room, where he killed himself by slitting his throat with a razor. Several motives were suggested, the most likely being that Sellis was jealous of Neale's popularity with their master.

Queen Victoria, Cumberland's niece, survived assassination an incredible seven times. The first attempt was in 1840 when 18-year-old Edward Oxford fired at her at point-blank range as she and Prince Albert drove out of Buckingham Palace into Constitution Hill. The other attempts on her life followed a similar pattern, all occurring when she was riding in a carriage near one of the royal homes.

All seven men were regarded as mentally unstable, and all the attempts apart from one involved guns – though not all carried real bullets.

Ironically it was the attempt on Victoria's life that didn't involve a firearm that caused her the most physical pain. In 1850 Robert Pate, the fifth potential assassin in ten years, hit the Queen in the face with a stick as she left the Piccadilly home of her dying uncle Adolphus, the Duke of Cambridge. She suffered a black eye, facial bruising and a headache, the deep brim of her bonnet almost certainly saving her from more serious injury.

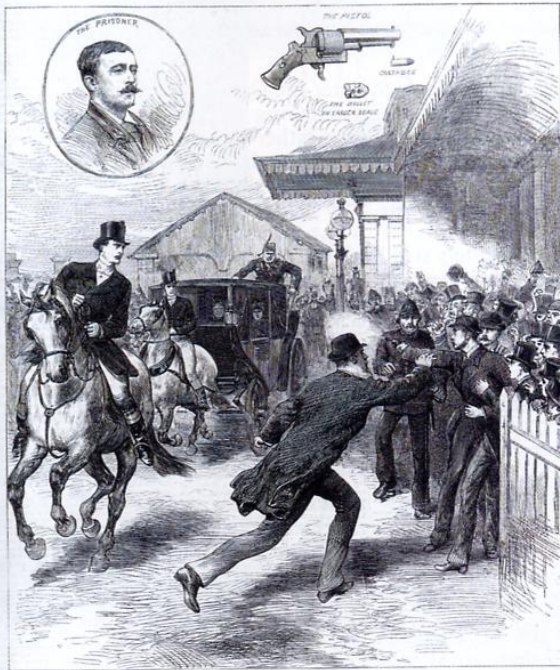
The final attack on the Queen's life occurred in March 1882 as she was leaving Windsor railway station by carriage. Roderick McLean fired a single shot at her from just a few yards away, but again Victoria remained remarkably composed, by now regarding such assassination attempts as an inevitable hazard of royal life. Each resulted in a renewed outpouring of public affection for her and after this final attack she noted, 'it is almost worth being shot at to see how much one is loved'.



A year before his accession, the future Edward VII faces danger whilst on a stationary train in Brussels

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

No. 2256.—VOL. LXXXI. SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 1882. WITH TWO SUPPLEMENTS! 18 PENCE.



PICTURES: MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

The Illustrated London News's front-page account of the 1882 shooting incident in Windsor

Two of Queen Victoria's children were themselves almost killed in separate attacks. In 1868 her second son Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, then aged 23, was shot at while attending a fundraising fête in Sydney during his visit to Australia. 'Good God! I am shot; my back is broken!' the Prince cried, as he collapsed to the ground. Fortunately his diagnosis was as way off the mark as the bullet had been and though hit in the ribs he went on to make a full recovery.

Henry James O'Farrell, his assailant, was described as a 'deranged Fenian' dedicated to the overthrow of British rule in Ireland. He was nearly lynched there and then by hysterical onlookers but survived another five weeks before being hanged on 21 April.

The Prince of Wales, Alfred's elder brother, escaped an anarchist's bullet in April 1900 as the royal train was preparing to leave Brussels station. A 15-year-old Belgian anarchist, Jean-Baptiste Sipido, jumped on to the footboard of the carriage and fired several shots through an open window. A bullet hit the seat between Edward and his wife Alexandra, and, as Dulcie M. Ashdown reveals in her book *Royal Murders*, a second was later discovered in the bun of hair of the Princess's lady-in-waiting, Charlotte Knollys.

Sipido was apparently protesting about Britain's involvement in the Boer War; remarkably he managed to escape from the chaotic scene and was never caught. ➤



The Duchess of Kent leaves her Belgrave Square home for an official engagement in May 1938

It would be another three decades before the next significant attack against a senior member of the Royal Family. In 1936, the present Queen's uncle, Edward VIII, was returning to Buckingham Palace on horseback having presented colours to three battalions of Guards in Hyde Park. As he turned into Constitution Hill a man in the crowd pulled a gun, and in the struggle with police the weapon was hurled at the feet of the King's horse. Believing it to be a bomb the monarch braced himself for an explosion: when none came, he rode on without flinching. The gunman was later identified as George McMahon, an Irish journalist with a grudge against the home secretary.

Less than three years after this attack Edward's sister-in-law, the popular Duchess of Kent, was shot at in June 1939. At the time she was being driven from her home in Belgravia for a night out with friends. The former Princess Marina of Greece remained unaware that she had almost been assassinated and was only told of her narrow escape on her return. Ledwidge Vincent Lawlor, a young Australian man recently arrived in Britain, had fired wildly at the royal car from the pavement. The Duchess, and presumably her chauffeur, mistakenly thought the car had backfired and simply drove off. Lawlor was apprehended, returned to Australia and imprisoned. The royal couple were due to go to Australia later in the year, where the Duke of Kent was to assume the role of Governor-General, a plan that had to be abandoned when Britain declared war on Germany that September.

The Duke was killed in a military flying accident three years later, while his brother King George VI and his wife

Queen Elizabeth, later the Queen Mother, were fortunate to survive the direct bombing of Buckingham Palace. Apart from this, there was a rather bizarre incident early on in the war when the Queen was dressing for dinner at Windsor Castle. Biographies reveal that as she entered the room a man sprang out from behind a curtain and flung himself at her, seizing her by the legs. 'For a moment my heart stood absolutely still,' she allegedly recalled later. Realising he was mentally unstable she resisted the urge to scream and instead said, 'Tell me about it.'

As he began his story, Queen Elizabeth moved across the room and pressed a bell to summon help. Her instincts were right: the man, an employee of a firm working at the castle, had deserted from the Army after his family had been wiped out in air raids. In later life she played the story down when, aged 90, she recounted it to biographer Theo Aronson.

'Putting on my best nanny voice,' she said, 'I told him he had no business being there and that he was to go away immediately. And he did.' Asked by Aronson what had driven the man to such extreme behaviour, Queen Elizabeth replied airily, 'Oh, he just wanted to speak to me. People always wanted to speak to me about something or other.'

Whatever the truth about the incident at Windsor, one incontrovertible fact is that Britain's kings and queens and their royal relations show remarkable self-control in life-threatening situations. From George III calming the crowd outside St James's Palace to Elizabeth II facing an intruder in her bedroom, each has coped courageously when faced with such unimaginable situations. ■