

**Lord Lexden**

Conservative peer and historian

**Written with a most attractive astringency, Andrew Gimson's brilliant little book has been newly revised and updated to include the passing of Queen Elizabeth II and the succession of her son, Charles III**

## Gimson's Kings & Queens

### Brief Lives of the Monarchs since 1066

By **Andrew Gimson**  
 Publisher **Square Peg**

**A**ndrew Gimson, who is well-known to readers of *The House*, writes with a most attractive astringency. This quality is an immense asset in fashioning short accounts of notable lives. It leads to incisive judgements of personalities and careers, free from bias and sentimentality,

the greatest generosity.

His elegant astringency has been applied in a series of small books to our monarchs, to our prime ministers and to American presidents. *Gimson's Kings & Queens* was the first in the series. It was originally published in September 2015, the month in which Queen Elizabeth II overtook Queen Victoria's record of 63 years and 216 days to become our longest-serving monarch, more greatly loved than any of her predecessors.

A new, revised edition of this brilliant little book has just been issued. It covers the final stages of Elizabeth II's long and extraordinary life of service ("she invited Liz Truss, the

last of her 15 prime ministers, to form a government, and two days later she died") and the start of the reign of Charles III, a man who had waited longer than any of his predecessors to become King. Gimson writes: "He found it intolerable merely to go through the motions of being a dutiful heir, and felt moved to take a passionate interest in farming, the environment, architecture, the inner cities, medicine, music and things of the spirit. Here was an establishment figure who often found himself compelled to voice, with anguished sincerity, his opposition to the establishment view." The phrase "anguished sincerity" sums up perfectly his life as Prince of Wales, whose first marriage to a woman who shared none of his extensive interests was doomed from the start.

Many wondered whether such a figure would make a dutiful constitutional monarch, willing and able to set aside his own strong views of the issues of the day when he became King. They now have their answer. Charles III radiates kindness and goodwill in carrying out his largely ceremonial role.

That role matters enormously in providing an undisputed focus of national loyalty in a country which has become extraordinarily diverse in its composition in just a couple of generations.

After Charles III's accession, it swiftly became apparent, as Gimson notes, that "as King he possessed an authority which had eluded him during his long years as heir". It became equally evident that his subjects recognise that he cares "deeply about the welfare of his country and the world". In return, he has evoked tremendous sympathy as he undergoes cancer treatment.

The story of our monarchy, told so delightfully in this short book, is a story of constant adaptation to evolving circumstances. Those who were reluctant to adapt lost their crowns (and in one case a head as well).

Our two most recent monarchs have done more than simply move with the times. King Charles follows his mother in helping to interpret our ever-changing nation to itself in a way that a series of republican presidents could never have done. Therein lies the genius of constitutional monarchy. 🇬🇧



May 2023  
 Coronation  
 of King  
 Charles III

ality, which make his collections of miniature biographies both lively and beguiling.

Stern condemnation is not in Gimson's line, even when it is thoroughly deserved. His one detailed biography, devoted to Boris Johnson, treats that dangerous charlatan and law-breaker with

