William Tyler | Victoria Regina. 06-05-23

- Thank you very much indeed, Judy, and welcome back to you too. So everyone, this is the beginning of a new course on the Victorian Age. Each week will be a separate theme about the Victorian Age in Britain, but taken together, they will give you an overview of the 19th century, I hope. But, and they were also interconnect in various ways, but you can see one, hear one, miss one, and come back and you won't have lost much at all. Although of course, as you know, you can chase up the ones you've lost. So I thought, where do I begin? Of course, on the Victorian Age. And I thought what I would do is give a short introduction and that you can also find in a longer form on my blog under the title Victorian Age. And then I'm going to spend most of the time talking about Queen Victoria. And in doing so, we'll touch on a number of themes of the Victorian Age. And again, if you want to see a blog, I've done a separate blog on Queen Victoria. So one blog on the Victorian Age, one on Queen Victoria. And I've also done a first book list. There will be, as ever, new book lists issued on a weekly basis unless there are no new books that I'm referring to.

So then Victorian Britain. Charles Dickens, himself a Victorian, wrote in his novel, "The Tale of Two Cities," perhaps the greatest opening line in English literature. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." And although Dickens was writing about the French Revolution, that quotation, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," is equally applicable to Victorian Britain. Life had never been so good for Britain's expanding middle-classes. Simon Heffer, the historian, has called this "The ascent of the bourgeoisie." "The ascent of the bourgeoisie," the middle-class coming to power, predominant in the arts, in business, and in politics. The Age of the Aristocrat or the landed gentry is passing. In fact, there's a very interesting quotation I'm going to read from Simon Heffer's book, which is on my blog called "High Minds." "High Minds. The Victorians and the Birth of Modern Britain." Simon Heffer writes in his chapter on the ascent of the bourgeoisie, the middle-classes. He writes "In George Elliot's novel, 'Felix Holt,' the Rector, the Reverend Mr. Lingham, has a decidedly un-Christian view of the admittedly ghastly, attorney or solicitor, German. Whom he sums up as a fact handed glib-tongued fellow with a scented cambric handkerchief, one of your educated low breed fellows." In other words, an example of the bourgeoisie of Victorian Britain.

Simon Heifer adds to this the following, well, he finishes the quotation first of all, from Felix Holt, "One of your educated, low-class of fellows, A friendly, who got his Latin for nothing at Christ Hospitals, one of your middle-class upstarts who wants to run with gentlemen and think they'll do it with kid gloves and new furniture." Heffer says later on, "When German has buttonholed, the local squire Harold Transom in an inn, he's told by the barrener, Sir Maximus Da Berroot, in a voice of imperious storm," writes George Elliot, "Leave the room, Sir. This is a meeting of gentlemen." Well, the aristocracy and the landed gentry may have taken such an attitude to middle-class Victorian businessmen, middle-class Victorian politicians and middle-class Victorian artists. But the truth of the matter was, power was shifting. By the middle of the 19th century, power had almost entirely shifted from those old governing-classes to the new classes of the middle-class, to the monied middle-class.

And that's a very important point to understand about Victorian Britain because it explains how the monarchy of Queen Victorian and her husband, Prince Albert, was able to survive and grow because they were also looked down. Looked down upon by the British aristocracy of war. Albert was a German and Victoria was little better. And in the view of the aristocracy and the landed gentry, They were rather lower-class. Do you know they actually used fish knives and forks? "Horror!" Said the aristocracy and the landed gentry, "they're middle-class," but the fact that they gave the image of being a rich, middle-class family, enabled the monarchy to dig in deep in the 19th century. When at the beginning of the 19th century, it looked as though the monarchy might indeed be doomed and we will return to a republic of one sort or another. But it was the middle-classes that saved the monarchy then because the monarchy represented the middle-classes and the middle-classes were the ones with power.

Another Victorian, L.P. Hartley, the novelist, wrote to the beginning of his book, "The Go Between," "The Past is a foreign country. They do things differently there," another beautiful line. "The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there." And I was musing on that and thought, well, despite the fact that many of my generation, and I guess therefore of many of you listening to me, new Victorians in our childhood, whether you live in Canada or Australia, America, Israel or wherever, you knew Victorians. And today younger than people, than us, regard the Victorians as something out of the past, almost mediaeval, something that is not understandable. And yet we do have that link with a Victorian past. My grandparents, four grandparents were Victorian. Some of my school masters, when I was under 13, were also Victorians. A lot of my relations with Victorians, a lot of the people that I had contact with, adults, were also Victorians. And even to me, it seems a long time ago, but it's important that we understand, not just our generation, but all generations alive today, understand this Victorian period because it's that period which forms the basis of our society in 2023.

In another book on my blog listed by Gordon Kerr, "Short History of the Victorian Era," he writes a very short paragraph. "The Victorian era was one of extremes. Grinding poverty and extraordinary wealth, exploitation and generous charity and innovation and unyielding conservatism, perhaps that helps to explain the fascination of the period for the reader interested in discovering a past that greatly informs our present." And it was a contradictory age. Kerr is absolutely right. "Grinding poverty," "grinding poverty" for the poor. But for the rich middle-class, they'd never had it so good. All opportunities were open. Simple examples, holidays, not just in Britain but abroad. Something that was merely aspirational in the 18th century or the middle-classes. There was generous charity giving because this society was a very Christian society, a very religious society. Now when I talk about religion, we should also see there was great hypocrisy in the religion of the Victorian age, particularly in regards to sexual morality.

But nevertheless, the Christianity was fundamental belief that you had to do well by others less fortunate than yourselves, and if you failed to understand that, and many modern historians I think do and talk about the giving of charity as a hypocrisy in Victorian England, Victorian Britain, but it isn't a hypocrisy. They believed that, that was what they had to do for

those less fortunate than themselves, and they didn't ignore the problems of grinding poverty of the Victorian with working class. There was legislation introduced, not least about housing, for example, which Prince Albert led to produce better housing conditions and sewage. All these sorts of questions were addressed, but I think probably the answer in the end has to be that we didn't have governments in the Victorian Age that necessarily had bought into the modern view that governments are there to collect money from those able to pay taxes in order to redistribute it for those who have less money. Now, that really is a development from the personal giving of individual Victorians, but it's a progressive thing and it isn't something that could happen overnight.

But what of Queen Victoria herself, to who gave her name to the age, the Victorian Age? She wasn't in life as important or as prominent as we see her in retrospect. If you were asked to produce a list of famous Victorians, unless you were scratching your head because you couldn't think of anything, you're very unlikely to put Queen Victoria down. Very few people ever heard her. This is before radio. Very few people actually saw her in the days before television or film. And after her husband's death, Prince Albert in 1861, she went into seclusion for about 20 years, two decades. This was not Queen Elizabeth II by any means. So once asked to ask the question, did Queen Victoria herself make any impact in any way? And I would say, you are welcome to disagree, but I would say that with very few exceptions, she made almost no impact. She remained a figurehead of an empire. An empire incidentally, which she never herself visited. She never went to India, of which Disraeli was to make her empress in the 1870s.

There was even strong Republican feeling at the beginning of her reign and strong Republican feeling during her years when she secluded herself after the death of Albert. In fact, Albert was her salvation. Albert was very different from Victoria. And had it not been for Albert then personally, I'm not sure that the monarchy would've survived. Victoria's two predecessors, her two uncles, George IV and William IV, were so horrendous that even an arch conservative like Duke of Wellington said, "If there were any more like these, it would turn even me into a Republican." And so if Victoria had married badly or had remained unmarried like Elizabeth I, then I think a republic would almost have been inevitable because the middle-classes, let alone the aristocracy like Wellington, would've seen that there was little point in going on. But Albert transformed it, and it was his transformation that allows the monarchy to exist still, rather, what shall I say, rather unexpectedly perhaps in the 21st century with the coronation of King Charles.

So maybe the greatest thing Victoria ever did, was to propose marriage to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg Gotha. She proposed marriage because it wasn't seemly that any man should be seen to propose marriage to the Queen of England. The Queen of England had proposed marriage to him. Now, unlike the Duke of Edinburgh, the late queen's husband who largely took a back step and did not interfere with the running of the sovereign's own job, Albert was quite different. He took over from Albert. Albert took over from Victoria it, after all, Victoria had nine children during the length of their marriage. She was often pregnant, which she didn't like, but she was pregnant, and so this gave him an easy entree into really becoming the

uncrowned king, which some Victorians called him, although his official title always remained Prince Consort. Incidentally, many people thought in 1952 that the Duke of Edinburgh will be given the title of Prince Consort, which he was never given by the queen. I don't know why, but I suspect, at the back of her mind, was she did not want Philip to turn into Albert. And so the title Prince Consort was never bestowed on the Duke of Edinburgh.

Finally, about Queen Victoria. For all the downside of her, of Victoria as queen, she came to represent the nation, the icon of the nation, particularly in the last 20 years of her life in the 1880s and 1890s. And then as a woman in her sixties and seventies, she projected an image of stability in a society that was in very rapid change, very similar to the society over which Elizabeth II ruled in the last decades of her reign. She provided a stability that was welcomed by the middle-classes and by the politicians of all, of the two major political parties. By then, the Conservative party and the Liberal party. She died in 1901, a mere 13 years, before the world that she grew up in, lived in all her life, was blown apart by the guns of the first World War. A war that gave humanity a glimpse of hell itself and a glimpse of what was to become more hellish as the 20th century proceeded. The 19th century was for Britains a good century. The 20th century has seen two world wars and decline, economically and politically.

Victoria herself came to the throne on the 20th of June, 1837, on the death of her uncle King William IV, the last of George III's sons to reign as King. Victoria was the granddaughter of George III and Elizabeth II was the great-great-granddaughter of Victoria. The continuity of monarchy in Britain is there for all to see. Victoria's own father was Edward Duke of Kent, a son of George III, but he was the next son in line after George IV and William IV, but he had died in 1820 and therefore his children would take the throne, and he had one child and that child was Victoria. Victoria was born in 1819 and was thus only a baby in arms when her father died the following year. She was just 18 years old when she became queen in 1837. Now, okay, I know today, young women of 18 could rule the world, but in 1837, young women of 18 were not far out of childhood. They also, however grand they were in the main, did not receive a good education or an equal education to boys of their class and Victoria was ill-educated. That's another plus for her marriage to Albert, who was well-educated.

In fact, had William IV died just a few months earlier, then at 17, Victoria could not have become queen. Well, she would've become queen, but there would've been a regency, and the regency is what her mother hoped for, and her mother hoped to keep that regency going after Victoria reach 18, along with her lover, the head of her household, Sir John Conroy. But mother and Conroy had their noses firmly put out of joint because William IV lived long enough to see Victoria celebrate her 18th birthday and ascend the throne. And the one good thing Victoria did, she slept in the same room as her mother up to then, was to ditch mother and the boyfriend. And she, well, she wanted... she needed, perhaps it's the best way of putting it, she needed someone to whom she could turn for advice and rely upon. And the one person she turned to advice for was the prime minister, the weak prime minister, Lord Melbourne. Now Lord Melbourne was an old fashioned regency rake, but he was the sort of advisor that Victoria needed to guide her into the political world into which she was now thrown. In fact, so close did they become that there were rumours that it was more than a

friendship and she was referred to in the popular press as Queen Melbourne, nothing like that happened at all.

But it was an unwise decision because she was linking herself with one political party rather than standing above politics. She herself and later indeed, Albert, were leaning towards the Whigs, that is the more Radical party, than the Tory party. It was only when Disraeli became prime minister, then Gladstone became his opposite number in the Liberal party, the old Whigs, that Victoria found herself totally, totally under the spell of that spell binding Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli. He had her eating out of his hand. So her politics were not as firmly based as one might have thought during the lifetime of Albert. Disraeli, however, was able to capture her, really capture her full stop. And it was Disraeli who piled on, just absolutely piled on the flattery ending with her becoming Empress of India. And we will have a session on Disraeli and Gladstone, and we will talk about Victoria's relationship with the two later on in this 10 week or so course.

One other thing to say about her accession to the throne, she could not become Queen of Hanover because Hanover had the so-called Europeans Salic Law, S-A-L-I-C law, which prevented women inheriting the throne. So her remaining uncle, the Duke of Cumberland, left Britain for Hanover to become King of Hanover. And so that direct link between Britain and Germany, that it existed since George I, George of Hanover became George I of Britain, was finally broken at Victoria's accession in 1837. The previous two decades, into the 1810s, the 1820s and half of the 1830s had seen in Britain, political and industrial unrest, which had slowly forced the middle-classes to legislative changes. One of the reasons we had no revolution here is simply because the middle-classes had no interest in revolution. They wanted stability for all their enterprises. And so the way they dealt with political and industrial unrest from the working-class was to make concessions, the least concessions they cooked, but nevertheless concessions in order to maintain the status quo. Had there been no middle-class or a tiny middle-class, we would've had revolution. Had the middle-class, like Cromwell's middle-class, in the 1640s, rejected the monarchy and the structures of government, then we would've had revolution, but they didn't. The middle-classes were conservative with a small 'C' and they were concerned about themselves.

Let's take the broad view. How does it affect me, was how the middle class in the 1810s, 20s, and 30s looked at the political situation of unrest in the industrial heartland and indeed in agricultural rural Britain as well, of the unrest which could had led to revolution in other circumstances. Perhaps the greatest reform of all, although in itself did very little, but in it gave a message across the country, was the Great Reform Bill of 1832 passed by a Liberal government and importantly acquiescing by a conservative majority in the House of Lords, only because William IV threatened that if the Tories would not pass it in the House of Lords, he would create as many Whig or Liberal members of the House of Lords as it would take to change the majority. Two years later, in 1834, the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed in an attempt to regulate the support of the poor without money, the poor with mental illness, the poor with any sort of physical illness as well. The old system of parish welfare had broken down, and the Poor Law Amendment Act was the Victorian, well, I say Victorian, it was the act

was passed in 1834, but the implementation is Victorian of the Victorian Act, which sought to regularise the situation. It of course did, but it did so in ways which had not been anticipated, which was the horror of the Victorian workhouse, which Charles Dickens so ably demonstrates.

Lord John Russell, Liberal, and a very liberal home secretary, became home secretary when Lord Melbourne became Prime Minister. And Gordon Kerr writes in this way of Lord John Russell, he writes, "He introduced inspectors for prisons. And in a series of seven acts passed in 1837, the year Victoria came to the throne, the death penalty was removed as an option from all non-violent crimes, apart from treason, cruel sports such as bear baiting were banned, and no longer could one be punished by being put in the pillar." Kerr writes, "Things had changed radically in Britain, no longer was the government's responsibility simply raising revenue and keeping the nation safe. The Whigs (Liberals) the Whigs had now begun to intervene in the daily life of people in a way that no previous government had." And that's critical. It begins under Melbourne basically, and before him, Lord Grey. These Liberals, around the 1830s, begin to see the need for the government to intervene. The Great Reform Bill, Poor Law Amendment, all the prison reforms, they begin to see the need to do that in order to maintain stability in the country. And that is a feature of the entire Victorian Age of progress, mainly by the Whigs and or Liberal party, but seldom torn down when the Tory party or Conservative party came to power. And indeed, there were reforms under the Tories as well. Our flaw, it was Disraeli who introduced a far reaching reform act, which extended the votes for almost every man in the country.

So this is an age of progress and a progress led by the middle-classes bringing pressure, for example, as they had done over the slave trade, as they had done over the vote, as they had done over the corn law. The middle-classes bringing pressure. We will call them today, pressure groups, action groups on the government of the day to do reform. Not because they wanted to turn this country into a Radical enterprise, but because they wanted, desperately wanted, to preserve the stability and conservatism of the country. Lord Melbourne was forced to resign as prime minister over an issue, over an imperial issue, in Jamaica. The content to which isn't important. So Robert Pier was the Tory leader, but he failed to form a minority government. And this caused a lot of trouble because Victoria intervened. In those days, the ladies of the bed chamber, that is the personal entourage of the queen, were appointed by each incoming government. So when Sir Robert Peele attempted to form a Tory government, he would remove all the weak Liberal ladies of the bed chamber and replace them with Tory ones. and Victoria couldn't stand it. These were the friends that, or they had become friends, that had seen her through the first difficult years of her reign. And she caused so much trouble, that in fact, Pier was unable to form even a minority government. And after three days, Lord Melbourne came back into power, but that was not a good thing because Victoria had taken sides and there was an outcry in the country. If she was going to behave like this, we'd be better off with a republic.

But, on the 10th of February, 1840, she married the man of her dreams, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg Gotha. Their marriage was a marriage of love, very unusual in royal circles in the 19th century. They were the same age, they were 20. Yet it was a very Victorian marriage in which it

is absolutely certain that Albert as was the paterfamilias, the head of the family, as Philip, Duke of Edinburgh had been. But in truth, Albert was more than that, as I said before, he was the uncrowned king. He really took over a lot of Victoria's work. She was basically lazy, very much like all the Hanoverians before her, lazy. She was also not well-educated, as I said before. She wasn't very bright. She preferred, as a young woman, dancing than doing the papers, as the late queen would've put it. On the other hand, Albert did the papers. That is the papers delivered from the government daily with the meticulousness that the late queen shown to those documents.

And so when Lord Melbourne no longer was prime minister, finally, in 1841, by that time she had been married to Albert for just over a year. And Albert took on the role of the strong arm, if you like, the person she could lean on, the strong shoulder, everything that this very Victorian young woman wanted, a man, a man to lean upon. Now, all the ladies listening to me tonight, it's tonight here, in the morning wherever you are, all the ladies listening to me will be saying, well, that's disgraceful, but you mustn't judge the past by the morality of the present. It was not thought at all odd that Albert should do the job. The point I am making is that if Victoria left on her own, would've made such a mess of it that the anti-monarch feeling might well have grown. I think it would've grown. Albert prevented it. And Albert's great success would be, if I could bring Albert back to life today and say, "Is there any question you would like to ask me, Prince Albert?" And he would say, "Well, really, the question I've got to ask is, has the monarchy survived? After all my son, who became Edward VII, was a complete disaster. I'm sure he made a complete mess of it. Has it survived?" And the answer would be, "In all honesty, yes it has. And it has because of you, because of the way that you approached it."

So what is, can we say about Albert himself? He was hardworking, you might say stereotypically German. He was very serious man. He was very handsome, and he and Victoria fancied each other enormously. When she was younger, Victoria wasn't the blob that she later became. This huge sort of almost hysterical blob that could only go upstairs in a lift. But no, when she was younger, she was a quite attractive woman, but he was very handsome. She fell for him head over heels. He also was politically involved, but in a more modern way, in a sort of King Charles III way. The historian, one of my great favourite historians, David Cannadine, David Cannadine in his book called "Victorious Century", again it's on my blog, he wrote this, "Although the prince would also come to possess strong feelings for against the public men with whom he dealt." In other words, the politicians, largely. "The reasons were significantly different for Albert as befitted, the son of a ruling German prince, albeit a minor one, the role of a monarchy he envisaged and British public loved, was one of royal prerogative. He believed in the fundamentalism of monarchy rather than the role of the monarchy rather than the ornamental, he wanted a crown above party."

Now, I just said Victoria had aligned herself with the Whigs, Liberals, and so that was a bad stuff. He saw the crown as above politics, party politics, and that is how it remains. And that's how Charles sees it today. "He wanted a crown above party, not so it should be marginal and neutral, but as it could be," he writes, "disinterestedly involved in affairs of state. He was eager

to be actively engaged with ministers in their governing and their decision making. And he thought it entirely appropriate that he and the queen should conduct their own foreign policy by direct correspondence with their royal relatives, who occupied many of the thrones of Europe."

Now, clearly a modern monarchy in the 21st century doesn't do that, but Charles meets the Prime Minister on a weekly basis. He also, interestingly as it happened, had his first visit to Germany, where he addressed a German Reichstag in German, and his German links play out well in Germany. And it was really a coup for the British government that he was able to build bridges, post Brexit bridges, with the German political elite. So Albert wasn't entirely wrong. "Moreover says Canada, Albert's success in working with many of the leading public and political figures of the day over the Great Exhibition seemed a convincing vindication of his view." In other words, there was a role for monarchy, not a party political role, but a greater role. And he was edging his way to finding that, what that was, by the time of the Great Exhibition in 1851, but within a decade he's dead. But he had done so much that even though he and his eldest son Edward, later Edward VII, were very much at odds over Edward's morals.

Albert was an extraordinarily moral person, the epitome of the Victorian middle-class, if you like. But his son was, well, we call it the Edwardian Age when he becomes king. And the Edwardian Age is an age of Libertine excess, led before the age began by the then Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII. Albert was interested in 19th century progress, wherever he found it. Whether it be in providing housing, better quality than had been provided before. Whether it was in scientific progress, Albert was there at the forefront. He visited factories, factories! Victoria didn't. I mean, "Mere factories. Wha. No." Albert visited factories. Not only did he visit them, but he knew about them. He talked sensibly about them, very much like the present king does. He knew things and he researched things. He's every element of a 21st century king, but he's in the 19th century and he's Prince Consort. But he does achieve remarkable things, and perhaps the greatest legacy of all is the Great Exhibition of 1851. I'm using Cannadine with just a few quotations to sort of remind us of the Great Exhibition. The first thing that Cannadine tells us is that it was about progress. It was on the left of politics. It was a Liberal view of Britain. It was Britain showing itself to the world as a Liberal power. And the commissioners who sat under Albert's chairmanship all came from that.

I mean, today it would be highly criticised for the narrowness of the commissioners who sat on the board, but then it wasn't. Cannadine said "Most of these men," I'm afraid there were no women. "Most of these men were seriously interested in science and the arts. They were generally in favour of individualism, competition, and free trade. They preferred to emphasise what different social groups within the United Kingdom had in common, rather than their competing sectional interests. They understood Christianity in a broad and undogmatic manner that might further encourage a sense of natural solidarity across the British Isles. And they believed the international friendship and the brotherhood of mankind were economically possible and religiously essential.

As befitted the transitional nature of mid-century British economy, they understood industry to mean not just machine made artefacts that anything produced by honest toil and manual labour. And they hope that the exhibition, in displaying the highest quality goods produced by all the advanced nations of the world, would serve to alert British manufacturers to the shortcomings of many of their products and to the educational deficiencies of many of their workers." In other words, even by the 1850s, they're aware of the strides being made in both Germany and the United States, in both technical education and in industrial efficiency. You might say that we were in Britain by the Great Exhibition falling behind the race. On the other hand, as Cannadine says, "No other country in the world, in 1851, could have held such an exhibition as Britain and no city could have held such an exhibition but London." And the exhibition hall itself, this huge glass palace, the Crystal Palace, built by Paxton, a man who'd specialised in glass greenhouses before, and those of who visited the Duke of Devonshire estate at Chatsworth and seen his great greenhouse there, have seen where he learned how to use glass and to create this incredible crystal palace. Housing all this fantastic produce or products of industry and art, from across the world. It's estimated that 6 million, 6 million people visited it during the months that it was open in the summer of 1851. It was an enormous success and it was Albert's success. Without Albert pushing it, it might not have come about.

Today we are used to members of the royal family pushing things. For example, Prince William and Kate pushing things about mental health, or the Queen Camilla pushing things like child literacy, we're used to that. But when Albert did it with the Great Exhibition, it was unique. No one had done it before. That's why I say he is important in the history of this country. It was also hoped that the Great Exhibition would create a sense of empire in the ordinary British visitors to it. So one of the interesting things about the British Empire in the 19th century, in its heyday, was that many ordinary Britains had no contact, unless they were soldiers, with the empire at all. And I will say more about that when we came to talk about the empire.

Well, all has it aside, Thomas Cook, the travel agents, were the first to use railways to bring people from the provinces in Britain to London to the Great Exhibition. You got your ticket through Thomas Cook and you travelled by train and in itself is quite incredible feat and a very modern feat. As I said, Albert died in 1861 age, just 42 and Prime Minister William Gladstone said "He left a great crisis of royalty." Victoria went into seclusion for 20 odd years, and Edward Prince of Wales was leading such a dissolute life that until Prince Harry's arrival in the High Court tomorrow, it is the first time any royal has been in court since Edward Prince of Wales was dragged to court as a witness in a divorce action. I'm looking at the clock because I don't want to not do the important bits of the talk.

Queen Victoria had nine children. It began in November, 1841 with a girl, and it ended with a girl in late 1850s. The first girl was Victoria, named Victoria after Mum, who married the son of the German Kaiser and became the mother of Kaiser Wilhelm II, the Kaiser of the First World War. The last daughter was Beatrice. Beatrice married Prince Henry of Battenberg, but much against Victoria's own judgement . Victoria came to loathe pregnancy, partly because it put her out of action and gave Albert more power, and partly because she didn't, she was fearful of

the physical nature of giving childbirth, of which she had every reason to be fearful because King George IV only legitimate child, Princess Charlotte, had died in childbirth. It's the only reason Victoria came to the throne. Had Charlotte survived childbirth, then Victoria would never have come to this throne.

And so that must have been going through this young woman's mind in her twenties when she gave birth over a period of time to nine children. She regarded... she's odd, really. She would, she rather liked sex, one has to say, because when she was told after the birth of her last child, Beatrice, by the doctor that she could have no more children, her replies a rather strange one for Victorian woman to give, "You mean doctor, no more fun in bed?" And he had to sort of explain carefully that it did not mean "no more fun in bed." But she was, I don't know, I think she thought of Beatrice as, this sort of perfect virgin, but on the other hand, Beatrice was a slave to her mother, and mother didn't want to let her go. So in the end, when Victoria did concede that Beatrice could marry Prince Henry of Battenberg, she made it a condition that the newlyweds should always live with her. And Henry of Battenberg agreed to do so, because again, his marriage to Princess Beatrice was a love match. And so he stomached having to live with his mother-in-law. I'm not able to make mother-in-law jokes in these days or wokeism. In the past I would've made some sort of comment, but I won't, I will restrain myself.

I said that she was interested in sex. There's a very interesting story, true story from Osborne House, the house that Albert had built. It's a frightful house, it looks like a railway station, and they had separate rooms. Nothing odd about that. The aristocracy in 19th century Britain had separate rooms and into the 20th century. And so Victoria came out of her bedroom and knocked on Albert's door and went to open it and it was locked. And she said, "Open the door Albert," in German, they spoke German to each other. And he replied, "No, I won't. I'm exhausted." He was exhausted because she had insisted on marital relations for so many days in a row. He said, "I can't." And she said, "I am your queen, I order you Albert, open the door." And apparently so it was recorded by the servants who'd heard all of this, he said something quite unspeakable in German and did not open the door.

When Albert died, she became very close to a servant on the Balmoral estate in Scotland. Balmoral, again, a house paid for, built and built for Albert. So belongs to the king as as personal housing. John Brown, some of you may have seen the film about John Brown. She relied upon John Brown in extraordinary, he treated her as normal, that is to say treated her as a woman. And although he was very unlike Albert, he was working-class, he was blunt, he was to all intents and purposes an alcoholic. And of course he wasn't well-educated. Now whether their relationship was more than one of support from him to the queen, we simply don't know. Historians would like to believe, as filmmakers would like to believe, that they were at it, as they say, "like rabbits." We have no proof of that. Although when she died and she had items of John Brown, including a lock of his hair buried with her, and she had all sorts of things buried with her from as Albert as well. Edward VII, now King, got rid of all references to John Brown that he could get his hands on. Maybe they were lovers, maybe they weren't. We don't know. And it really isn't important in the story of Victorian Britain or the Victorian Age. If she

found solace in John Brown, well, good for her. If she didn't, well, good for her as well. It's not something that need bother us.

She never got over Albert's death. She kept the room in which he died like a shrine, a memorial to him. And in the excellent biography by Lucy Worsley, "Queen Victoria," again on my blog, Lucy Worsley writes in this way, she says this, "Since Albert's death," sorry. Sorry, I'm reading from the wrong page. Here's the right page, "The maintenance of the scene of a death." In other words, the room in which the deceased died, "was a German tradition. Although Victoria wrote that the blue room where Albert had died was not to be a death room. She wrote it in German. But instead she wrote in English, a living beautiful monument, on the table in the antique room, reported one visitor, there were laid out his gloves and his white wide awake hat, as on the day when he had last used them. A painting from 1864 shows that the blue room was kept full of fresh flowers. In the evenings, if the door was open, people passing in the passage could glimpse a ghostly gleam of the white marble bust of Albert's head, placed just about at standing height upon a column. As many as 40 years later, a visitor to the room could see quote, all his things, uniforms, walking sticks, that bed he died in, the palms laid on his coffin and casts of his hand and foot. The blue room became a kind of long-running work of performance art, dedicated to Albert's memory. And Victoria had his favourite artistic advisor, decorate it's ceiling with angels."

She also had water delivered to his room for him to shave every day. And she had his evening dress laid out every evening. She was obsessed by his death. Victorians were always obsessed by death, but she was over obsessed by death. That she was in a clear clinically mental state after Albert's death, but no one recognised post-traumatic stress syndrome or whatever you want to call it, and no one recognised it. And only John Brown gradually pulled her out of it and later, and Disraeli pulled her out of it. Although unrecognised by the general British public and indeed by the majority of politicians, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 was to prove, in retrospect, the last grand phenomenon of the British Empire. As indeed may Charles III's coronation be the last grand occasion of royalty in Britain. But the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, in 1897, is a fascinating moment in time. David Cannadine writes this "At the Diamond Jubilee, the narrative of material progress, democratic advancement and imperial expansion was repeated with renewed further and conviction. The not in large parts of Ireland, where the great famine remained unforgiven and unforgotten. But 1897 was not all national complacency and imperial self-congratulation, the Great Depression had been a blow to the United Kingdom's industrial pride and self-esteem. The international imperial climate was becoming ever more tense and competitive. And questions were being asked as to whether Britain's imperial prowess and global preeminence could remain." And that is extremely important.

And Gordon Kerr writes of this crisis of economics, at the end of the 1890s, in this particular way, "The slump that followed the boom of the middle of the 19th century was known to the Victorians as The Great Depression. Although it has come to be known as the Long Depression, it affected, of course not just Britain, but the whole world. Although Europe and the United States felt it worst, it perhaps had the most impact in the United Kingdom, where it lasted from 1873 to 1896, Britain experienced the slowest economic growth since its industrial

revolution. And it put a dent in the view that Britain's prosperity was permanent." "That Britain's prosperity was permanent." The Victorians believe in ever advancing progress in science, in the arts, in morality even, but also in British power. And British industrial power had been hit badly by the Great Depression in the 1870s, 80s and 1890s. And by 1897, we were no longer in Britain, the great industrial power.

We had begun a slide, which was to continue right through to the present day. And one person recognised that. And it was a person who wrote a poem commissioned by "the Times of London" for the Diamond Jubilee, the poet was Rudyard Kipling. And he had great difficulty in writing this poem because he understood that the days of greatness were fading as the queen's life was fading in 1897. And he wrote a poem that few people really understood at the time because he was seen as a great poet of empire. And here he's the opposite.

And it's the great poem, "Recessional." "God of our fathers, known of old, Lord of our far-flung battle line, beneath whose awful hand we hold dominion over palm and pine. Lord God of hosts, be with us yet, Lest we forget-lest we forget!" He says that the Victorians had had hubris, they believe they could, that Britain could do anything. And he says, hang on, "Lord God of host, be with us yet, lest we forget-lest we forget. The tumult and the shouting dies. The captains and the kings depart, still stands thine ancient sacrifice, an humble and a contrite heart. Lord God of host, be with us yet, lest we forget-lest we forget. Far-called our navies melt away on dune and headland sinks the fire: Lo, all our pomp of yesterday, is one with Nineveh and Tyre! Judge of the nations, spare us yet, lest we forget-lest we forget." Now that is a critical piece of writing, saying that the decline has started. "Lo, all our pomp of yesterday, is one with Nineveh and Tyre!" And yet the Diamond Jubilee was a great occasion! “If, drunk with sight of power, we loose wild tongues that have not thee in awe, such boasting as the Gentiles use or lesser breeds without the law, Lord God of host, be with us yet, lest we forget-lest we forget. For heathen heart that puts her trust in reeking tube and iron shard, all valiant dust that builds on dust and, guarding, calls not thee to guard. For frantic boast and foolish word, thy mercy on thy people, Lord."

It's an extraordinary poem from the great writer of empire, who sees in 1897 that it's all over and he's to live long enough to see his son killed in action in the first World War because the queen died in 1901 and only 13 years later, her world crashes down in the horror of the first World War. And we no longer think of ourselves or should think of ourselves in any way as the country that we had been, say in the 1850s and 1860s. Within what, 29 years, after the end of the first World War, the Indian Empire is gone and following that, all the imperial possessions one by one. Our industrial power waned further than it had waned by 1897. The Victorian Age now stands in history as the high watermark of Britain, industrially, I think one might even say religiously. Industrially, religiously, arguably morally, militarily, and in most importantly of all, here in Britain. On a firm and sure basis, we believed in progress and progress came, we no longer believe blindly in progress. We no longer see or should see ourselves in any sense as superior to any nation in the world. Those days have gone, the Victorian Age has passed, and a century has gone without us finding our role in the world. As an American Secretary of State said, "Britain lost an empire and has failed to find a role."

Let me stop there and hope that you'll join me next Monday for a further instalment of the Victorian Age. I'm sure there's lots of people who want to say things.

Q&A and Comments

Oh, crikey, yes, there are. Let's see where I can get to.

"Would you say Jews at the time were considered middle-class at the order aristocracy disdained." Yes, but remember that some Jews enter the, well, some Jews, middle-class Jews, like middle-class Christians in Britain enter the aristocracy. Think Lord Rothschild for one example and the building of his extraordinary house at Waddesdon. So the middle-class is always wanted to become aristocracy. The, and although of course there's anti-Semitism, and it is a very, in comparison with other countries, it's a watered down anti-Semitism here in the Victorian Age. That who, that was Shelly.

Michael says, "In South Africa at school, boys were beaten by the teacher if he had not done his homework. I know that very well as I was only interested in history and sports."

Shelly says, "Would you say that the expanding empire helped to make the prosperity, the expanding middle-class?" Without a doubt, 110%. So the we depended, and that was, so in the Great Exhibition of 1851, we showed, that is Britain showed, manufactured goods. Countries like India, Canada, New Zealand showed raw goods that were brought into England, like Indian cotton, for example.

Q: Carol says, "Queen Victoria led a movement, create public parks so that poor people could get fresh air."
A: Well, she didn't actually lead the movement. Albert was quite constructing that movement. But another important part of it was local government because local government had been transformed as Queen Victoria comes to throne and the Victorian Age is the high watermark of local government in Britain.

Thank you Rita, as ever.

Michael, "Strictness was the rule in everything compared to today, a far better sister with definite rules and fair play." You use, sorry, Michael, you used the word strictness. I would use the word morality, both personal and public morality. Now, it doesn't mean to say that there weren't hypocrites in Victorian England, but the idea that all Victorians were hypocritical is wrong. I think why Victorian hypocrisy stands out is because most Victorians were distinctly moral in everything they did. It was the high, I keep using that phrase, but there isn't another, the high watermark of the civil service in Britain was the 19th century.

"The great reform bill was passed by Whig government." No, the Whig party becomes the Liberal party later, Howard, it was supported by Radicals. Now the Radicals become the Labour

party later. Howard says... Yes, I've been using the word Whig and Liberal, interchangeably. Simply to make the story easier, the great reform bill was passed by a Whig government. Later Whigs become Liberals. They were supported by some Radicals, but the Radicals later become Labour.

Q: "Why did William IV support the 1832 Reform Act?"
A: Because he realised that if he didn't, we were heading towards real trouble. There had been a reform bill riots on the street. My own city of Bristol had very serious riots. They had to call a military out.

Q: "Were Whigs middle-class and were the middle-class Whigs?"
A: The answer to both questions is, strangely no. Many aristocrats were Whigs, many middle-class were Tory. It doesn't divide, it doesn't divide neatly, in that way.

Q: Yana says "You repeatedly and rightly." Oh, that's a relief. "Refer to the Liberal middle-class drivers, did they themselves recognise this and refer to it as stability?"
A: Oh, Yana, you do ask difficult questions. I can't answer that question directly, but yes they, yes they did recognise it as stability. They saw an order in things and they sang in church on Sundays. The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, they believed in, hang on, I go back a bit.

Michael says, "Strictness, they believed in strictness of society, of society's classes. And although there was movement between classes, and it will be quite wrong to see our system as acaste, A-C-A-S-T-E acaste system". It isn't that, there were people who were working-class that became middle-class. For example, Thomas Crapper, unfortunate name, but his name gives rise to a slang word in English because Thomas Crapper actually invented the flush toilet, began as a working-class man and became middle-class for his invention.

They, no, Victoria Albert usually converse one another in German. The one family that conversed in English were the Russian family, Nicholas II and Alexandra often spoke in English.

"The recent TV series Victoria emphasises the role King Leopold on the royal marriages." Well, Leopold was involved, Sandy, was married to in fact Charlotte, the woman, the daughter of George IV who died and he was a fixer. That's true.

Rita "Movies, films, TV series about Victoria?" Oh, you've put the thing down, thank you.

Q & A: Judy says, "Do you think that the rise in the club party due to industrial revolution?" Yes. "When mass produced goods were more affordable". Yes. "Access water to a wider, sway the people?" All of that. Yes, yes, yes. "Near I believe principal also spurred on the development of the railways". I like the, The fact that your notice written railways is rainways. I don't think he was supportive of rain, even if it was British rain. But yes, he was supportive of railways and even Queen Victoria was supported railways. Queen, William IV's wife, Queen Adelaide was the first royal to have a railway carriage specially made for her. And if you visit

York, you in the National Rail Museum in York, in England, you can see Queen Adelaide's railway carriage. It looks more like a horse carriage with wheels to go on the track of the railway. Queen Victoria's offspring, the King of England, the Czar of Russia. No, the czar of Russia isn't her offspring. The czar of Russia is related through his mother. He is not directly. Well, yes he is, but not an offspring.

"Withheld Austria, Hungary royalty through their machinations ultimately destroyed Europe and cost Eliza millions of soldiers in World War I, which led to World War II. We would been a lot better off without royalty." That's not entirely true. The well, that is the say Sharon, I don't agree with that. The, it was a failure of politicians that led to World War I and it was a determination of the German Elite to go to war. So the fault lies firmly with Germany, not with Britain, not with Austria, Hungary and not even with Russia. The fault lies firmly in the German Court.

I'm not sure Myrna, what you meant to write. I'm not sure. I'm sorry, I'm sorry Myrna, I'm not sure what that means.

Rita, thank you. Mary, thank you. Thank you. Ross.

"You mentioned Albert was unique in the royal family is pushing things. How would you compare him to Charles II, who encouraged science, astronomy and architecture among other matters?" That is a very good point. Charles II is another of these extraordinary characters. Yes, he did. But, we were in a different age in the 17th century. In the 19th century, if you take a country like America as a republic and presidents, elected, who pushed things, Albert did that in Britain. So in the context of the 19th century, I believe he is unique. In the context of the modern monarchy, Charles II was ruling directly with royal prerogative. But you make a very good point. Nevertheless, I would just simply talk about the periods in a different way, the periods of history in a different way.

Michael, "I read someplace that Queen Victoria very upset when Prince Edward attended the wedding of his friend, one of the Rothschild's synagogue in St. Petersburg place. She thought, it's not appropriately for the heir go into a synagogue." That story, I don't know, but I don't doubt that you are right. And she would've found that odd. On the other hand, the royal family in Britain, that is saying Stewart's were not anti-Semitic. Queen Anne gave personal money out of it. Not government money, personal money to the building of Bevis Mark Synagogue in the centre of London, for example.

"Was the slave trade a factor in his great-" No, no, no slave trade, no, not, not, not that at all.

Oh, Vivian says "She's just read Edith Walton's "A Son at the Front." Another of these remarkable books about the First World War.

"Is there an antidote for complacency and self-congratulation?" I'm not, I'm not sure. If you're getting at me, I apologise if you think I'm complacent and I'm certainly not self-congratulatory.

Every lecture I give, I always think I could have done that far better. We live on our nerves. If you're me, if it's a mention to the history, I've lost the plot.

Howard. "Did Victoria have little to do with prosperity in the Victorian Era?" She had no contact at all. Nothing.

Ralph, thanks for blah blah blah. Thank you.

I looked this up, the name Victoria amongst the top 20, 30 names for girl's even today. Yes, it's come back into fashion. A lot of Victorian names in Britain have come back into fashion. My youngest grandson is called Albert.

"And what did Albert die of?" Well, there's various suggestions. One is he had bowel disease, which is probably bowel cancer. One is he had TB. One is that he suffered from depression, particularly over his son Edward. And another is, that he was just worn out. The answer is we don't know. By the way, he thought he had a cold in the last week of his life and complained to Victoria. She to- Every gentleman listening, listen to this, she told him, "Stop fussing. There's nothing wrong with you." I say no more.

Susan says, "What or who was responsible for modernization, development of new ideas and infrastructure?" Not one person, not one organisation, it was individual men and individual women who, as in our age, make experiments, back ideas, fund good ideas, fund modernization of medicine or whatever it will be. So the answer is, there isn't one answer whatsoever. It is the nature of society itself.

Irene, hello Irene. "Perhaps when we lost the empire in 1948, we scared another high, implementing parts of the beverage report, in setting a standard public welfare that is just about last until today." Yeah, I think you've probably heard me before about public welfare, which began under the Liberal government of Asquith prior to the first World War. Was then taken up again by the Labour government in 1945 and has been chipped away at since and we are not, what the beverage report might have delivered for us, a Scandinavian democracy. We simply aren't that, and I'm not sure where we are now and I'm sure you don't know where we are either.

Tony. "How numerous were the middle and working-classes respectively?" Ah, that's tricky, because who do you include? I'll come back to that question because I will at some point, I'll make a note 'cause I'm going to talk about the census and I'll try and answer that question when we get there. The bulk of the people were working-class, whether rural or industrial. It still remains, a rural society outside of the cities, and I will try and find some figures for that.

James, "Did Victoria speak French?" Yes.

"Was German lingua franca among all royalty?" No, ours was German.

"Were the poets of empire important in developing morals of school boys?" Oh gosh, gosh. Kevin, I, whoa. That's dear, dear. You are too clever for me. "Were the poets of empire important in developing morals of school boys?" The books that boys, particularly boys were given to read in the Victorian Age were meant to be uplifting. That is true. And also the poetry they were given was meant to be uplifting. Uplifting morally, but also uplifting in the sense of duty. Duty is a very Victorian phrase, so I think the answer is yes.

Jeff, "Victoria was an accomplished artist as is Charles III, I saw an exhibition." Absolutely. Yeah. Victoria honed her talent. Show many months lying in an artistic tray seems to be there in the House of Hanover or as it is today, the House of Windsor.

“What accounts for the flying of Scottish science, maths and philosophy during this period, the same as in England?" There is no distinction between England and Scotland at this point. In fact, Scotland is normally referred to at this date as North Britain. And, it's again money and it's money in Glasgow that funds Scottish science and education. On the other hand, education in Scotland, it was and up to quite recently far superior than English education. So that has a role in the play.

Yes. Victoria's a carrier of haemophilia and spread it around Europe, leading to the Romanoffs." Absolutely right. Nanette, oh thank you Nanette.

“Oh, your honour. No, not me that is complacent, Victorian society and complacency.” In retrospect, you are 100% right. And they were jolted out of this complacency in August, 1914. They thought that Victorian, yes, they were complacent. Some of you've heard me say this before, but it's a Victorian phrase and it's worth repeating.

"God is of gentleman through and through and in all probability, an Englishman too, only in England." Could anyone say such a blasphemous thing?

Michael. "Typhoid fever is likely cause of Albert's death." Sorry, that was another suggestion put forward.

Linda. "Was it not thought to be typhoid in the water at Cambridge when he visited son?"

Zach, just to straight, no, you're right, but there is still disagreement over what actually killed him.

"Victoria's daughter, Princess Louise Long was a sculptress." Absolutely right and a rather good sculptress, actually.

I think I've, sorry, I can't sit back. I think I've answered well, I've attempted to answer the questions. I have not answered all of them fully. I have not answered all of them as well as I could. But, remember, if you ever see anyone on television answering questions, they've had a good look at them beforehand and know and have thought out their answer. I'm talking off the

cuff. So please forgive me if you didn't like the answer or didn't ask, but if you look at some of the books that I'm going to recommend during the course, you'll find that as we go through, there are a lot of books. If you want one book about the age as a whole, then perhaps a short history of the "Victorian Era" by Gordon Kerr is worth it. I got it for quite recently 'cause I'd lost my copy. I got it for three pounds on Amazon. So it must be readily available everywhere. It's on my blog.

If you are like Queen Victoria as a person and you want to know, read Lucy Worsley's book, "Queen Victoria," which is extremely good. And if you really want to get in deep into the sort of detailed history, read David Cannadine's "Victorious Century". I am a huge fan of David Cannadine. He is one of our greatest historians and what he doesn't know about the 19th century really isn't worth knowing.

So thank you all for listening. Look forward to seeing, I hope some of you next week, when we will continue our trek through Victorian Britain. Bye.