

= Princess Victoria of Hesse and by Rhine =

Princess Victoria of Hesse and by Rhine , later Victoria Mountbatten , Marchioness of Milford Haven (Victoria Alberta Elisabeth Mathilde Marie ; 5 April 1863 ? 24 September 1950) was the eldest daughter of Louis IV , Grand Duke of Hesse and by Rhine (1837 ? 1892) , and his first wife Princess Alice of the United Kingdom (1843 ? 1878) , daughter of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert of Saxe @-@ Coburg and Gotha .

Her mother died while her brother and sisters were still young , which placed her in an early position of responsibility over her siblings . She married her father 's first cousin , Prince Louis of Battenberg , an officer in the United Kingdom 's Royal Navy , in a love match and lived most of her married life in various parts of Europe at her husband 's naval posts and visiting her many royal relations . She was perceived by her family as liberal in outlook , straightforward , practical and bright .

During World War I , she and her husband abandoned their German titles and adopted the British @-@ sounding surname of Mountbatten , which was simply a translation into English of the German " Battenberg " . Two of her sisters ? Elisabeth and Alix , who had married into the Russian imperial family ? were murdered by communist revolutionaries .

She was the maternal grandmother of Prince Philip , Duke of Edinburgh , the consort of Queen Elizabeth II .

= = Early life = =

Victoria was born on Easter Sunday at Windsor Castle in the presence of her maternal grandmother , Queen Victoria . She was christened in the Lutheran faith in the arms of the Queen on 27 April . Her early life was spent at Bessungen , a suburb of Darmstadt , until the family moved to the New Palace in Darmstadt when she was three years old . There , she shared a room with her younger sister , Elisabeth , until adulthood . She was privately educated to a high standard and was , throughout her life , an avid reader .

During the Prussian invasion of Hesse in June 1866 , Victoria and Elisabeth were sent to England to live with their grandmother until hostilities were ended by the absorption of Hesse @-@ Kassel and parts of Hesse @-@ Darmstadt into Prussia . During the Franco @-@ Prussian War of 1870 , military hospitals were set up in the palace grounds at Darmstadt , and she helped in the soup kitchens with her mother . She remembered the intense cold of the winter , and being burned on the arm by hot soup . In 1872 , Victoria 's eighteen @-@ month @-@ old brother , Friedrich , was diagnosed with haemophilia . The diagnosis came as a shock to the royal families of Europe ; it had been twenty years since Queen Victoria had given birth to her haemophiliac son , Prince Leopold , Duke of Albany , and it was the first indication that the bleeding disorder in the royal family was hereditary . The following year , Friedrich fell from a window onto stone steps and died . It was the first of many tragedies to beset the Hesse family .

In early November 1878 , Victoria contracted diphtheria . Elisabeth was swiftly moved out of their room and was the only member of the family to escape the disease . For days , Victoria 's mother , Princess Alice , nursed the sick , but she was unable to save her youngest daughter , Victoria 's sister Marie , who died in mid @-@ November . Just as the rest of the family seemed to have recovered , Princess Alice fell ill . She died on 14 December , the anniversary of the death of her father , Prince Albert . As the eldest child , Victoria partly assumed the role of mother to the younger children and of companion to her father . She later wrote , " My mother 's death was an irreparable loss ... My childhood ended with her death , for I became the eldest and most responsible . "

= = Marriage and family = =

At family gatherings , Victoria had often met Prince Louis of Battenberg , who was her first cousin once removed and a member of a morganatic branch of the Hessian royal family . Prince Louis had adopted British nationality and was serving as an officer in the Royal Navy . In the winter of 1882 , they met again at Darmstadt , and were engaged the following summer .

After a brief postponement because of the death of her maternal uncle , the Duke of Albany , Victoria married Prince Louis on 30 April 1884 at Darmstadt . Her father did not approve of the match ; in his view Prince Louis had little money and would deprive him of his daughter 's company , as the couple would naturally live abroad in Britain . However , Victoria was of an independent mind and took little notice of her father 's displeasure . Remarkably , Victoria 's father secretly married the same evening his untitled mistress , Alexandrine de Kolemene , the former wife of the Russian chargé d 'affaires in Darmstadt . His marriage to a divorced commoner shocked the assembled royalty of Europe and through diplomatic and family pressure Victoria 's father was forced to seek an annulment of his own marriage .

Over the next sixteen years , Victoria had four children :

They lived in a succession of houses at Chichester , Sussex , Walton @-@ on @-@ Thames , and Schloss Heiligenberg , Jugenheim . When Prince Louis was serving with the Mediterranean Fleet , she spent some winters in Malta . In 1887 , she contracted typhoid but , after being nursed through her illness by her husband , was sufficiently recovered by June to attend Queen Victoria 's Golden Jubilee celebrations in London . She was interested in science and drew a detailed geological map of Malta and also participated in archaeological digs both on the island and in Germany . In leather @-@ bound volumes she kept meticulous records of books she had read , which reveal a wide range of interests , including socialist philosophy .

She personally taught her own children and exposed them to new ideas and inventions . She gave lessons to her younger son , Louis , until he was ten years of age . He said of her in 1968 that she was " a walking encyclopedia . All through her life she stored up knowledge on all sorts of subjects , and she had the great gift of being able to make it all interesting when she taught it to me . She was completely methodical ; we had time @-@ tables for each subject , and I had to do preparation , and so forth . She taught me to enjoy working hard , and to be thorough . She was outspoken and open @-@ minded to a degree quite unusual in members of the Royal Family . And she was also entirely free from prejudice about politics or colour and things of that kind . "

In 1906 , she flew in a Zeppelin airship , and even more daringly later flew in a biplane even though it was " not made to carry passengers , and we perched securely attached on a little stool holding on to the flyer 's back . " Up until 1914 , Victoria regularly visited her relatives abroad in both Germany and Russia , including her two sisters who had married into the Russian imperial family : Elisabeth , who had married Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich , and Alix , who had married Emperor Nicholas II . Victoria was one of the Empress 's relatives who tried to persuade her away from the influence of Rasputin . On the outbreak of war between Germany and Britain in 1914 , Victoria and her daughter , Louise , were in Russia at Yekaterinburg . By train and steamer , they travelled to St Petersburg and from there through Tornio to Stockholm . They sailed from Bergen , Norway , on " the last ship " back to Britain .

= = Later life = =

Prince Louis was forced to resign from the navy at the start of the war when his German origins became an embarrassment , and the couple retired for the war years to Kent House on the Isle of Wight , which Victoria had been given by her aunt Princess Louise , Duchess of Argyll . Victoria blamed her husband 's forced resignation on the Government " who few greatly respect or trust " . She distrusted the First Lord of the Admiralty , Winston Churchill , because she thought him unreliable ? he had once borrowed a book and failed to return it . Continued public hostility to Germany led King George V of the United Kingdom to renounce his German titles , and at the same time on 14 July 1917 Prince Louis and Victoria renounced theirs , assuming an anglicised version of Battenberg ? Mountbatten ? as their surname . Four months later Louis was re @-@ ennobled by the King as Marquess of Milford Haven . During the war , Victoria 's two sisters , Alix and Elisabeth , were murdered in the Russian revolution , and her brother , Ernest Louis , Grand Duke of Hesse , was deposed . On her last visit to Russia in 1914 , Victoria had driven past the very house in Yekaterinburg where Alix would be murdered . In January 1921 , after a long and convoluted journey , Elisabeth 's body was interred in Jerusalem in Victoria 's presence . Alix 's body was never

recovered during Victoria 's lifetime .

Victoria 's husband died in London in September 1921 . After meeting her at the Naval and Military Club in Piccadilly , he complained of feeling unwell and Victoria persuaded him to rest in a room they had booked in the club annexe . She called a doctor , who prescribed some medication and Victoria went out to fill the prescription at a nearby pharmacist 's . When she came back , Louis was dead . On her widowhood , Victoria moved into a grace @-@ and @-@ favour residence at Kensington Palace and , in the words of her biographer , " became a central matriarchal figure in the lives of Europe 's surviving royalty " . In 1930 , her eldest daughter , Alice , suffered a nervous breakdown and was diagnosed as schizophrenic . In the following decade Victoria was largely responsible for her grandson Philip 's education and upbringing during his parents ' separation and his mother 's institutionalisation . Prince Philip recalled , " I liked my grandmother very much and she was always helpful . She was very good with children ... she took the practical approach to them . She treated them in the right way ? the right combination of the rational and the emotional . "

In 1937 , Victoria 's brother , Ernest Louis , died and soon afterwards her widowed sister @-@ in @-@ law , nephew , granddaughter and two of her great @-@ grandchildren all died in an air crash at Ostend . Victoria 's granddaughter , Princess Cecilie of Greece and Denmark , had married Victoria 's nephew (Ernest Louis 's son) , George Donatus of Hesse . They and their two young sons , Louis and Alexander , were all killed . Cecilie was pregnant at the time and the stillborn child was found among the wreckage . Cecilie 's youngest child , Johanna , who was not on the plane , was adopted by her uncle Prince Louis of Hesse and by Rhine but the little girl only survived her parents and older brothers by eighteen months , dying in 1939 of meningitis .

Further tragedy soon followed when Victoria 's son , George , died of bone cancer the following year . Her granddaughter , Lady Pamela Hicks , remembered her grandmother 's tears . In World War II Victoria was bombed out of Kensington Palace , and spent some time at Windsor Castle with King George VI . Her surviving son , Louis , and two of her grandsons served in the Royal Navy , while her German relations fought with the opposing forces . She spent most of her time reading and worrying about her children ; her daughter , Alice , remained in occupied Greece and was unable to communicate with her mother for four years at the height of the war . After the Allied victory , her son , Louis , was offered the post of Viceroy of India , but she was deeply opposed to his accepting , knowing that the position would be dangerous and difficult . He accepted anyway .

She fell ill with bronchitis (she had smoked since the age of sixteen) at her son Louis 's home at Broadlands , Hampshire , in the summer of 1950 . Saying " it is better to die at home " , Victoria moved back to Kensington Palace , where she died . She was buried four days later in the grounds of St. Mildred 's Church , Whippingham on the Isle of Wight .

= = Legacy = =

With the help of her lady @-@ in @-@ waiting , Baroness Sophie Buxhoeveden , Victoria wrote an unpublished memoir , held in the Mountbatten archive at the University of Southampton , which remains an interesting source for royal historians . A selection of Queen Victoria 's letters to Victoria have been published with a commentary by Richard Hough and an introduction by Victoria 's granddaughter , Patricia Mountbatten .

Victoria 's son remembered her fondly : " My mother was very quick on the uptake , very talkative , very aggressive and argumentative . With her marvellous brain she sharpened people 's wits . " Her granddaughter thought her " formidable , but never intimidating ... a supremely honest woman , full of commonsense and modesty . " Victoria wrote her own typically forthright epitaph at the end of her life in letters to and conversation with her son : " What will live in history is the good work done by the individual & that has nothing to do with rank or title ... I never thought I would be known only as your mother . You 're so well known now and no one knows about me , and I don 't want them to . "

= = Titles and styles = =

5 April 1863 ? 30 April 1884 : Her Grand Ducal Highness Princess Victoria of Hesse and by Rhine

30 April 1884 ? 14 July 1917 : Her Grand Ducal Highness Princess Louis of Battenberg

14 July ? 7 November 1917 : Lady Mountbatten

7 November 1917 ? 11 September 1921 : The Most Honourable The Marchioness of Milford Haven

11 September 1921 ? 24 September 1950 : The Most Honourable The Dowager Marchioness of Milford Haven

= = Ancestry = =