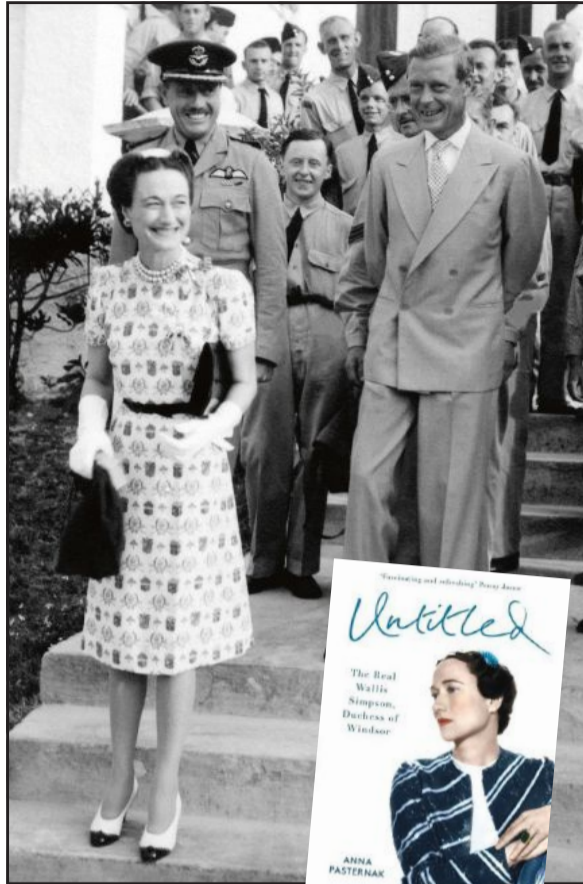


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Out on a limb: Hambleden author Anna Pasternak has written the first positive biography of Wallis Simpson, pictured above right in 1945 with Edward, Duke of Windsor, who had abdicated the throne to marry her. Inset, the book's cover

Orchestra is joining 'good vs evil' battle

EIGHT out of 10 children say they would like to learn how to play a musical instrument, according to research commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO).

An RPO spokesman said: "For children under 10 years old, an interest in classical music was based on having the opportunity to experience an orchestral performance. In light of this research, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra is proud to return to the Hexagon in Reading to serve up another action-packed interactive concert experience for all the family, providing the ideal introduction for children to the world of classical music."

Tomorrow (Saturday) at 11.30am, the orchestra will be performing "Noisy Kids: Heroes and Villains" — with valiant young audience members being called upon to join popular heroes from *Star Wars* and *Jurassic Park* in the eternal battle of good against evil.

The programme will include music from well-loved classics such as Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* and Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*. Plus there's a chance for young



Solo violinist: Jennifer Pike

and old to show off their superpowers as Tim Steiner brings everyone together to create a very special piece of music.

Then at 7.30pm at the same venue, the RPO presents "Jennifer Pike performs Mozart" conducted by Anu Tali.

Preceded by a pre-concert talk at 6.30pm in the Hexagon auditorium, the acclaimed violinist Jennifer Pike will play Mozart's exquisite and intimate *Third Violin Concerto*. The concert programme opens with Sibelius's *Karelia Suite* and concludes with Dvorak's *Symphony No. 8*.

For more information and to book tickets, call 0118 960 6060 or visit www.readingarts.com

Author says we all got Wallis Simpson wrong

IT was the biggest constitutional crisis since Henry VIII divorced Catherine of Aragon — except this time everyone was agreed on who the villain of the piece was.

On December 10, 1936, Edward VIII renounced what Winston Churchill called "the greatest throne in history" to marry the twice-divorced American socialite Wallis Simpson.

Wallis had been Edward's mistress since January 1934, but thanks to the deference of the media it took nearly three years for their relationship to become public knowledge.

George V had died in January 1936 and that summer Edward and Wallis holidayed together in the Mediterranean — a marked change of routine from the monarch's traditional stay at Balmoral.

By October it was rumoured in high society and abroad that Edward intended to marry Wallis as soon as she was free to do so.

The situation prompted the King's private secretary Alec Hardinge to write to him on November 13, warning that "the silence in the British press on the subject of Your Majesty's friendship with Mrs Simpson is not going to be maintained ... judging by the letters from British subjects living in foreign countries where the press has been outspoken, the effect will be calamitous."

So it proved, and Wallis's name has largely been mud ever since.

But now a journalist and author based in Hambleden has ventured to write what her publishers say is the first positive biography of Wallis Simpson — an intimate portrait of

By **MATTHEW WILSON**
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one of the most misunderstood women in the history of the British royal family.

Anna Pasternak's previous books include 1994's *Princess in Love*, about Princess Diana's relationship with Major James Hewitt.

Three years ago she delved into her own family background to write *Lara: The Untold Love Story That Inspired Doctor Zhivago*, about her great-uncle Boris Pasternak's mistress Olga Ivinskaya.

The book was critically acclaimed, and its success inadvertently gave rise to her latest volume, *Untitled: The Real Wallis Simpson, Duchess of Windsor*, which was published yesterday (Thursday).

"It definitely came out of doing *Lara*," says Anna. "Because when *Lara* was reviewed all the critics said I had rehabilitated Boris Pasternak's mistress and muse and that I was the first person to do so — and I realised then that I wanted to spend my career rehabilitating women whom history had treated badly."

"I was kind of waiting for the right woman to come along. And then the news broke that Meghan Markle was going out with Prince Harry and that suddenly made me think of Wallis Simpson."

"I thought, gosh, I couldn't find a woman who is more in need of rehabilitating than Wallis Simpson, so that gave me the idea."

Anna's book seeks to show that contrary to her public image, Wallis Simpson was a warm, loyal and intelligent woman who was adored

by her friends. Far from being the villain of the abdication, she was the victim.

But surely as a twice-married woman of the world, Wallis had found herself in that position as a result of her own free will?

"The thing about Wallis is she got in too deep too quickly," says Anna. "It never occurred to her that Edward wouldn't break off the affair and have to marry an eligible bride — and then she would stay married to Ernest Simpson. She was in a sense trapped by this man, by this besotted king. And I think that was incredibly difficult for her."

Could she not simply have left Edward in 1936, if she didn't like the way things were going?

"She did, she tried, she absolutely tried. Throughout my book I detail her many attempts to try and leave him. In the Easter of 1936, Edward took Wallis and Ernest to the Duchy of Cornwall to see the rhododendrons and he started giving her these incredibly lavish gifts and she realised that Ernest was put out by this — it was a very valuable bracelet he gave her. And she wrote him this letter after the holiday saying 'Look, we cannot trample on people's feelings like this. We must break up.'

"She absolutely tried to break it off by letter and in person, and I think it's difficult in the context of today to fully appreciate the nature of his obsessive narcissism and neediness. As Churchill said, she was his oxygen — and he wasn't going to let that go."

"The other thing that people don't realise today is that the story was under a media blackout, so the country at large knew nothing of

their relationship — although obviously their society friends knew — until 10 days before he abdicated.

"He by this point was so deranged with his exhaustion and obsession with her that he slept with a loaded pistol under his pillow and he threatened to kill himself. And she knew he was quite capable of that and she said to the royal courtiers, you know, we'd have a far bigger problem on our hands [if that happened]. She would be even more reviled if she was responsible for the death of this man."

"So people don't know the extent to which she tried to prevent it and tried to stop it — and she didn't know the extent to which his obsessional love was going to prevent her from leaving."

Whatever people think of Wallis now, with hindsight you could say she did the country a favour, given that her involvement with Edward indirectly led to the reign of our present Queen?

"Absolutely," says Anna. "It was Noël Coward who said there should be a statue of her [Wallis] on every village green in England. I completely agree that the Queen has been a superb monarch and we wouldn't have had that without Wallis. Although, saying that, both Edward and Wallis had fertility issues and it's very unlikely that even if he had stayed on the throne he would have produced an heir. So we could have seen a similar course of history but for a different set of reasons."

● *Untitled: The Real Wallis Simpson, Duchess of Windsor* is published by William Collins, priced £20. Anna Pasternak will be appearing at this year's Henley Literary Festival.

'Dynamic' organist plays for all tastes

A FORMER North West Organist of the Year will be tinkling the ivories of Henley town hall's state of the art theatre organ on Sunday (March 10).

Known as "Little Miss Dynamite" in honour of her dynamic performing style, Lancashire-born farmer's daughter Elizabeth Harrison has been playing theatre organs for more than 20 years.

A spokesman for concert organisers the Henley and District Theatre Organ Trust said: "Elizabeth is an award-winning performer with a delightful style and playing technique. She can adapt her skills to theatre organs both large and small, entertaining the audience with unique sounds and styles ranging from light classics to marches, with a varied concert programme designed to suit all tastes."



Popular: Elizabeth Harrison

Doors open at 2.30pm for a 3pm start. Entry is £8 with concessions £7 and proceeds from the concert will go to help the Thames Valley Air Ambulance. A raffle will be held and refreshments will be on sale.

For more information, call Susan Rusman on 0118 972 4988 or visit www.henleyorgantrust.org.uk

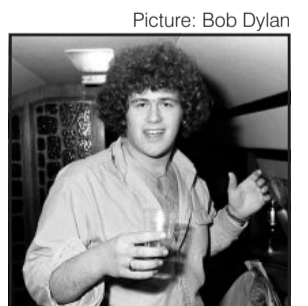
Rock photographer's show is on the move

VETERAN rock music photographer Danny Clifford's retrospective exhibition at the Old Fire Station Gallery has just finished its week-long run.

But with an archive of four million images to his name, anyone interested in seeing more of his work — and reading the stories accompanying them — has a chance to do so when his next show opens in London next Friday (March 15)

"Rock Stars Don't Smile" is transferring to the Heath Street Baptist Church in Hampstead, where it will be open daily until April 11.

Danny said: "It's a massive church right in the centre of Hampstead and the minister is a real music fan. We've got some really big stuff that's going to be



Picture: Bob Dylan
On tour: Danny Clifford on Bob Dylan's plane in 1978

displayed, but the minister said that if there's anything that's blasphemous it's fine because he'll just use it in his sermon on Sunday!"

Admission is free. To view images from Danny Clifford's portfolio, visit www.dannyclifford.com

For more information, visit www.heathstreet.org

Belfast four-piece are anticipating St Patrick's Day

WITH St Patrick's Day now just over a week away on Sunday, March 17, Nettlebed Folk Club has decided to celebrate early.

On Monday (March 11), they will welcome Belfast four-piece Craobh Rua to Nettlebed village club.

Folk club organiser Mike Sanderson said: "This amazing Irish band has given us so many great nights, playing songs and

tunes on Irish pipes, fiddle, whistles, banjo, guitar and mandolin."

The group, whose Gaelic name translates as "russet branch", includes founder Brian Connolly on banjo and mandolin and Jim Rainey on vocals.

Mixing rousing jigs, reels and polkas with tender ballads, the band's traditional take on Irish music has made them firm

favourites on the European festival and roots circuit.

With a distinctively rich acoustic-driven sound, they have released five albums to date, including their latest offering *If Ida Been Here Ida Been There*.

Doors open by 8pm and the concert starts at 8.15pm. Tickets are £15 in advance or £16 on the door. Call 01628 636620 or visit www.nettlebedfolkclub.co.uk



Rooted: Craobh Rua play Nettlebed Folk Club on Monday