

On Royalty by Jeremy Paxman
Viking 2006

You do not have to hear the author's voice speaking the words as you read Jeremy Paxman's last two books, (though it helps), but as I read this volume I found it impossible not to!

On Royalty is Paxman's analysis of the history and phenomenon of royalty, both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. It is a measured, honest, truthful and surprisingly positive examination of a system that the author admits should be long past its sell-by date.

Divided into 12 chapters, the introduction contains an amusing retelling of Paxman's experiences at a Sandringham house party and then sets the tone for what is to follow. He proceeds through all the various aspects of monarchy, the pitfalls into which so many have fallen, the inherent contradictions between being a human being deemed appointed by God to a role for which one may have no obvious qualification other than the identity of one's parents, and the perennial problem of Princes of Wales and fidelity.

But the constant thread throughout the book is the staying power of the British monarchy, its adaptability to changing circumstances and societal demands, and above all the astonishing skill and ability of Queen Elizabeth II during her long reign.

Paxman writes extraordinarily well, as one might expect, about an institution which it seems he admires and appreciates more than he feels he really should; and his conclusion, that by and large the British would do much worse with an elected head of state than we do with a hereditary monarchy seems sincerely held.

The trilogy that Jeremy Paxman has produced in recent years is an eloquent testimony not only to a journalist at the height of his powers but to an acute observer of the British scene.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh