

BERTIL, PRINCESS LILIAN, DUCHESS OF HALLAND (1915-2013)

Name: Lilian Bertil
Date of birth: 1915
Date of death: 2013
Gender: Female
Area of activity: Royalty and Society
Author: Brynley Francis Roberts

Princess Lilian, wife of Prince Bertil of Sweden, was born Lillian May Davies, in her grandparents' home 3 Garden Street, Swansea on 30 August 1915, a month or two after her parents' marriage. Her father was William John Davies (1893-1956) and her mother was Gladys Mary (Curran) (c.1895-1942), daughter of William Curran, labourer at the fuel works, and his wife, Jane. W. J. Davies served in the Swansea battalion of the Welch regiment in World War I and he and his wife separated in the 1920s and divorced in 1939. Gladys was the eldest of the four children at Garden Street in 1911. Lillian's father remarried in 1941 and he and his wife had two daughters.

Lillian had a variety of jobs after leaving school aged 14, as a general servant, shop assistant and laundry worker, but then, when she was 16, she emigrated to London with two friends. She met Ivan Craig, an actor (stage and occasional film), and they were married in 1940. She had begun to create a career for herself as a moderately successful model, dancer and singer and during the World War II she worked in a factory making electrical equipment and in a hospital. She was one of the young sophisticated celebrity set in London (she dropped one 'l' from her name believing that Lillian was more professional) and in a party to celebrate her 28th birthday in her flat in Bayswater she met Prince Bertil of Sweden, at the time on the staff of the Swedish embassy. According to one account, he had already seen her at a gambling club where she was a hostess. (She was, indeed, strikingly similar to Marlene Dietrich in appearance). A relationship and a love affair quickly developed. When Ivan Craig returned from the war he wished to be free from his marriage to remarry and he and Lilian were divorced amicably.

King Gustaf VI Adolf was unwilling for his second son, who might become heir to the throne, to marry a commoner, and rather than precipitate a constitutional crisis Lilian and Bertil lived together from 1946 in their villa in Sainte-Maxime in the south of France. They did not play a public role but neither were they a retiring couple but enjoyed an exciting international life of racing cars and the social round with their photographs appearing regularly in the gossip magazines. They returned to Sweden in 1957 and lived together openly. Lilian was not wholeheartedly or warmly welcomed at court but the atmosphere gradually improved though it was not until 1972 that she appeared at an official function with Prince Bertil. King Carl XVI Gustaf, Bertil's nephew, who ascended the throne in 1973, had himself married a commoner and he gave his permission for the couple to marry after 30 years of living together. Lilian and Bertil were married in the church of the palace of Drotingholm, in the presence of the king and queen, 7 December 1976. They honeymooned in Kenya.

Over the years their faithful love story became better known and after her marriage Princes Lilian played a prominent and very acceptable role in the public life of Sweden. She won the hearts of ordinary folk, as a person full of humour and fun, with an unaffected air, though it was often said that she looked more regal than many members of the family. Bertil died 5 January 1997 but the Princess continued to represent the royal family on official occasions and to be the active sponsor of several institutions until her health failed. She died in Stockholm 10 March 2013 aged 97 and many members of Scandinavian royal families were present at her funeral 16 March. Though it was said that she always acknowledged her Swansea roots, she does not appear to have retained contact with her Welsh family nor her two half sisters.

The Princess published her memoirs *Mitt liv med prins Bertil* in Swedish in 2000.

The romantic love story of the prince and a girl from a terrace house in central Swansea caught the imagination of the press and there were many warm accounts in most newspapers. There are many photographs in these accounts and on the web, especially the photograph [Lilian Craig \(née Davis\), Princess Lilian of Sweden; Prince Bertil, Duke of Halland](#) by Anthony Buckley (1953) in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Author

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Sources

Personal research in the census records

The Economist, 16 Mawrth 2013

The Daily Telegraph, 10 Mawrth 2013

Daily Mail, 11 Mawrth 2013

The Daily Mirror, 12 Mawrth 2013

^{*}[Princess Lilian, Duchess of Halland](#), Wikipedia, viewed 5 November 2013

Further Reading

Royalty Obituaries: [HRH Princess Lilian of Sweden](#), *The Telegraph*, 10 March 2013

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