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Review of *'Right Royal Bastards – The Fruits of Passion'* by Peter Beauclerk-Dewar and Roger Powell

This is a very useful work of history that also happens to be a great read. Everybody knows that English monarchs have produced bastard children, some in large numbers. Many have heard of more individuals who exist in a historical limbo, rumoured to have been royal by-blows but left unconfirmed as such, the favourites of the gossip-monger and the conspiracy theorist. What this book does is establish clearly, for the first time, how many confirmed royal bastards there have been since the fifteenth century, who they were and why they matter, and what can fairly be said of those who are rumoured to have this status.

The job is done so well that I doubt that, overall, it will need to be carried out again. The research is excellent, with constant quotation from original sources, and the style as lively as the subject matter, though with a neat precision. I was especially impressed by the boldness and directness with which rumours concerning members of the twentieth century royal family have been tackled (and scotched). It is heartening to see material which is traditionally the preserve of the yellow press and the airport paperback given a fair hearing and careful analysis.

Lessons seem to emerge. The first is, that, with a few outstanding exceptions, royal English bastards tend to be model citizens, a great deal less colourful and more well-behaved than both their parents. The other is that the reign of Queen Victoria really did make a huge difference in this as in other aspects of the monarchy. Despite huge temptations, and a tremendous range of personality in the modern royal family, a tradition of keeping fertile mistresses, which had gone on in virtually every generation for two hundred years, came to an abrupt end in 1837. The House of Windsor seems to exist in a happy void between the wilder romantic habits of both past and present worlds.