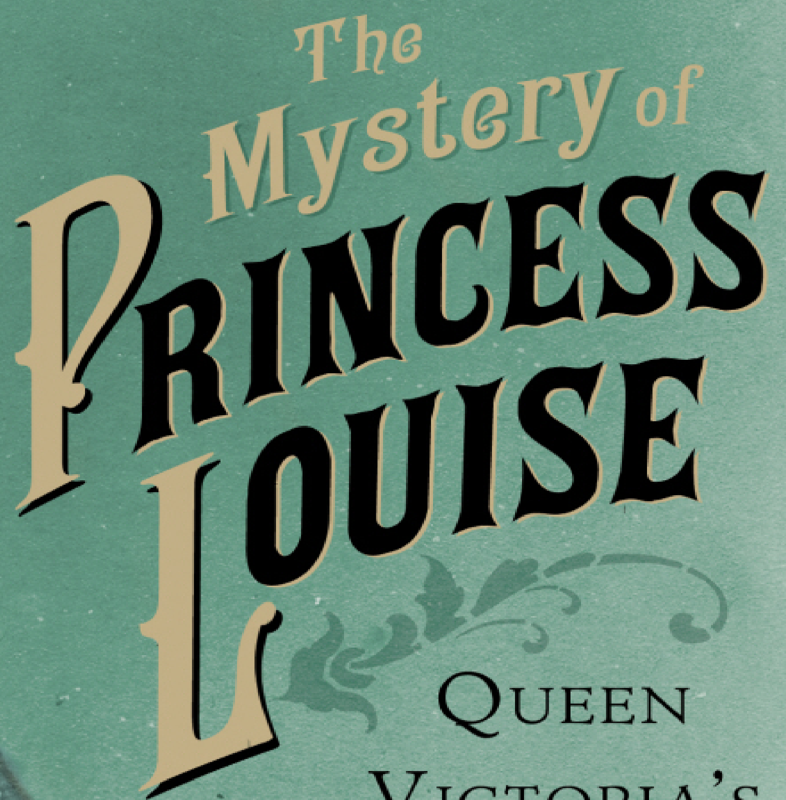

The Mystery of Princess Louise

Queen Victoria's Rebellious Daughter

Lucinda Hawksley

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About the Book

The secrets of Queen Victoria's sixth child, Princess Louise, may be destined to remain hidden forever. What was so dangerous about this artistic, tempestuous royal that her life has been documented more by rumour and gossip than hard facts? When Lucinda Hawksley started to investigate, often thwarted by inexplicable secrecy, she discovered a fascinating woman, modern before her time, whose story has been shielded for years from public view.

Louise was a sculptor and painter, friend to the Pre-Raphaelites and a keen member of the Aesthetic movement. The most feisty of the Victorian princesses, she kicked against her mother's controlling nature and remained fiercely loyal to her brothers – especially the sickly Leopold and the much-maligned Bertie. She sought out other unconventional women, including Josephine Butler and George Eliot, and campaigned for education and health reform and for the rights of women. She battled with her indomitable mother for permission to practice the 'masculine' art of sculpture and go to art college – and in doing so became the first British princess to attend a public school.

The rumours of Louise's colourful love life persist even today, with hints of love affairs dating as far back as her teenage years, and notable scandals included entanglements with her sculpting tutor Joseph Edgar Boehm and possibly even her sister Princess Beatrice's handsome husband, Liko. True to rebellious form, she refused all royal suitors and became the first member of the royal family to marry a commoner since the sixteenth century and moved with him to Canada when he was appointed Governor-General.

Spirited and lively, *The Mystery of Princess Louise* is richly packed with arguments, intrigues, scandals and secrets, and is a vivid portrait of a princess desperate to escape her inheritance.

About the Author

LUCINDA HAWKSLEY is a writer and lecturer on art history and nineteenth-century history. She has written biographies of the Pre-Raphaelite muse Lizzie Siddal, Charles Dickens, and Katey, one of Dickens' children. She is the great great great granddaughter of Charles and Catherine Dickens and is a patron of the Charles Dickens Museum in London.

Also by Lucinda Hawksley

Essential Pre-Raphaelites
Charles Dickens' Favourite Daughter: The Life, Loves and Art of Katey Dickens Perugini
Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel
50 British Artists You Should Know
Charles Dickens
March, Women, March: Voices of the Women's Movement from the First Feminist to Votes for Women

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For Merle and Mei, with love

Queen Victoria's Rebellious Daughter

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HAWKSLEY

Chatto & Windus
LONDON

Introduction: How it all began

The name of Sir William Blake Richmond is little remembered today, but in the late nineteenth century he was connected to almost everyone in the fashionable art world. As a painter who numbered amongst his friends William Morris, Robert Louis Stevenson and William Holman Hunt, Richmond moved with ease in the varied worlds that made up London Society. One day, as he was busy painting in his studio, he was annoyed to be disturbed by a servant announcing an unexpected visitor. Richmond yelled angrily, ‘Tell her to bugger off,’ unaware his visitor was close enough to hear. ‘Not till I’ve seen you’ was the mild and amused response from Princess Louise.[fn1]

I first discovered Princess Louise when researching my biographies of the Pre-Raphaelite model Lizzie Siddal and the artist Kate Perugini. This mysterious princess kept appearing in unlikely circumstances: visiting Dante Rossetti when he was ill (and deemed ‘mad’); remaining friends with the difficult James Abbott McNeill Whistler, despite his financial and social embarrassments; arriving to see John Everett Millais on his deathbed, or taking tea with Arthur Sullivan, who called her ‘*my* Princess Louise’ in a letter to his mother. I wondered who this art-loving, aesthetically minded princess was. The more vague appearances she made in my research notes, the more I wanted to find out about her. When I discovered she was not only a friend to artists, but a sculptor in an age when few women broke into such a masculine field, I determined to discover more about her life.

Princess Louise was born in 1848 and lived until 1939; her life encompassed almost a century of extraordinary – and often terrifying – achievements, conflicts and societal change. At the time of Louise's birth, British women and girls were, legally, the property of either their father or their husband. (Queen Victoria might have been the most powerful woman in the world – but she was fervently against the majority other women who fought to be given the most basic human rights.) By the time of Louise's death, British women had gained the vote and were striving to achieve a world in which men and women could truly be equal. Louise had played an important part in the educating of these powerful new women. She was, as the daughter of a monarch, famous and celebrated in her lifetime, but, like so many women of her era, she has been all but forgotten since.

When I started my research, I mentioned it to a couple of fellow authors – who advised me against it. Both of them had attempted to look into Princess Louise's life themselves. One warned me, 'you will come up against a brick wall at every turn'. That intrigued me. They were quite right, of course.

After discovering the bare bones of Louise's life and beginning to read existing books about her, I applied to the Royal Archives. Many months later I received a response telling me I was welcome to visit the archives and detailing what times they were open and what I would need to bring with me. It all seemed very positive, until I reached the bottom of the letter. Almost as an afterthought was the comment 'We regret that Princess Louise's files are closed.' I could visit the archive buildings, but would not be allowed to view the files I needed to see.

I tried her husband's family's collection in Inveraray, Scotland, where my several applications (phone and email) were kindly but firmly rebuffed. On my initial approach I discovered that their archives were in the process of being

rehoused and it would be over a year before they could be accessed again. More than a year later, I was told they were still inaccessible; and the same some months afterwards. My last two enquiries simply went unanswered. When I visited Inveraray as a tourist, in the summer of 2012, I was told by a curator inside the castle that the archives had not been rehoused. The curator also mentioned that it was ‘almost impossible’ for researchers to get into the archives; even people working at the castle itself were denied access.

I discovered that it was not only information about Princess Louise that had been hidden away, but information about a vast number of people who had played a role in her life, including royal servants and her art tutors. A great many items about these people that one would expect to be in other collections have been absorbed into the Royal Collection. Archivists at the National Gallery, Royal Academy and the V&A, as well as overseas collections in Malta, Bermuda and Canada, were bemused to discover that primary sources I requested had been ‘removed’ to Windsor. Over the decades, there has been some very careful sanitising of Princess Louise’s reputation and a whitewashing of her life, her achievements and her personality.

Initially, this book was intended to be a complete artistic biography, but as it became apparent that this was not possible, I began to realise that one of the most intriguing aspects had become the journey to try and find her. My working title became ‘The Mystery of Princess Louise’. There were so many rumours – some seemingly outlandish – that initially I had dismissed many of them as mere gossip, but the extraordinary secrecy that surrounds her life, and the many obstacles placed in the way of researching her, made me wonder if they were true. I have not been able to substantiate, nor could I disprove, the rumours that have been passed on to me from various

people's oral family history as well as tittle-tattle of the era, but perhaps there really is no smoke without fire. I have drawn my own conclusions and shall leave you to decide for yourselves.

For some of the original research, I am greatly indebted to Michael Gledhill QC. As a law student in the 1970s, he became intrigued by Princess Louise and began working on a biography. In order to research her life, he placed adverts in national and local newspapers and magazines. Because Princess Louise had lived until 1939, he received fascinating responses from people who had known her and, in some cases, worked for her. He very kindly allowed me to see the letters. I am also indebted to the Locock family, who have been extremely helpful and generous with their time as well as sharing with me their family memorabilia.

It is important for readers to be aware that although Queen Victoria wrote letters and diary entries almost every day, those that are now in the archives and available online are *not* her original work. The queen's journals and letters were heavily edited, following her death, by her youngest child, Princess Beatrice. The princess went through them and removed anything that she considered controversial, then copied out the journal entries and many of the letters and destroyed the originals. At times when the queen's journals record extremely unpleasant comments about her family, it is astonishing to realise that Beatrice considered these acceptable. It makes one wonder just how much more controversial must have been the passages that Beatrice removed.

Queen Victoria is often described as a mother to her people. British schoolchildren learn that she was a great monarch, stateswoman and Empress and we see all around the country a preponderance of statues and monuments to her. Most date from her golden and diamond jubilees, so were created at around the same time, in 1887 or 1897, and as such they give a slightly skewed version of history,

making one imagine not only that she was adored by everyone but also that she was adored all through her reign. This was not the case. When she became queen, soon after her eighteenth birthday, the public welcomed and idealised the young Victoria. When Albert, her prince consort, died in 1861, the young queen, bereaved so suddenly, was pitied and prayed for by her loyal subjects. People empathised with her pain and, in an age of high premature mortality, they could identify with her predicament.

As the years started to pass, however, and the queen remained in her 'widow's weeds' and continued to shun public engagements, she began to be resented by her subjects. By the time Princess Louise reached adulthood, her mother no longer had the love and respect of many of the people she ruled. Yes, she had lost her spouse to an untimely death, but so had many of her subjects, and, after all, the queen had nine healthy children. Even Prince Leopold, against the haemophiliac odds, was thriving. Those who, under her reign, still lived in terrible deprivation had become accustomed to watching their friends and family, especially young children, die. What was perceived as the self-indulgent behaviour of the 'Widow of Windsor' began to be seen as an insult to those others who suffered every day.

The queen's constant refusal to re-engage with her subjects and her ignoring of responsibilities jarred with her family too. Princess Louise, whose adolescence was blighted by the death of her father and by her mother's lack of interest in her children, as well as her constant criticism, found herself taking on many of the monarch's roles. In addition, Louise, in common with her sisters, had no choice but to work as her mother's companion, despite a heartfelt longing to leave the royal home and live as a professional sculptor. Unfortunately for the queen, Louise was the least compliant of her daughters and as the

princess grew into adulthood she became increasingly antagonistic to the maternal bullying that Queen Victoria had mastered so ably.

It became apparent that Princess Louise had an intriguing personality. She could be adorable, generous and charming, or she could be stingingly unkind. She went out of her way to help people she liked, but froze out those she did not. She found it hard to forgive mistakes and could be hypercritical – although the person she was often most harshly critical of was herself. Louise had a desperate need to be loved. When she loved, she was fiercely loyal and, like her mother, continued that love long after the object of it had died. Because she was often ignored or belittled by her mother and other family members this need to be noticed, and needed, became thoroughly ingrained in her. I became fascinated by how history has tried to tame and trivialise this astonishing woman; how often she has been dismissed with comments that she was ‘unhinged’ or ‘paranoid’: there has been a concerted effort to try and make people believe that nothing Princess Louise said or did could possibly have any credence. The opposite is true. Louise was a powerful voice for women of her generation. She was a princess who sought not to be ‘royal’, a Victorian woman who strove to break into a masculine world, and a fiery, intriguing, often confusing personality. She challenges many preconceptions that we, in the twenty-first century, have of women who lived under the long reign of Princess Louise’s formidable and – it has to be admitted – often extremely unpleasant mother.

As my research gained momentum, I found that much of the mystery surrounding Princess Louise was still to be uncovered. Why has she been locked away in the archives? What was it about her that is deemed too scandalous, or dangerous, to be revealed? Why should the life of a woman born in the first half of the nineteenth century be

considered unsafe to be explored in the twenty-first century?

[fn1] Richmond’s comment varies depending on the source. A more sanitised version claims he said ‘Tell her to go to the devil.’

Prologue: A celebrity comes to Liverpool

> To her views [Princess Louise] was wont to give very forceful expression. She was a most amusing raconteuse, an inveterate though never a malicious gossip, and her indiscretions of speech were delightful … Her friendship and constant concern for my future had … very important effects upon my life.
>
> Charles L. Warr, *The Glimmering Landscape*, 1960

In the mayoral offices of Liverpool in the autumn of 1878, excitement and tension were palpable. Within the next few weeks, the city would welcome one of the most popular celebrities in Britain and every detail of her visit had to be timed to the minute. At the city's docks, preparations were equally feverish. The employees of the Allan Line and the captain of the SS *Sarmatian* were fully aware of the import of their upcoming voyage. Liverpool was buzzing with the news that Queen Victoria's daughter was to visit the city – and she was the country's favourite of the queen's daughters, the one who had stood in so many times for her mother at official functions, her smiling, pretty face replacing the dour expression of the black-clad queen; she was the spirited daughter who had declared herself thoroughly British and refused to marry a foreigner, unlike her sisters. The journalists of Liverpool could not find enough superlatives to herald the arrival of the artist princess.

On 12 November 1878, the *Daily Post* explained to its readers everything that would happen during the princess's

brief stay. Carriages would be waiting at the station to take the royal party from the sleeper train straight to their hotel. After giving the travellers time to compose themselves, the mayor would greet them at Liverpool's imposing town hall, where there would be 1,000 invited guests. According to the *Post,* 'It is expected that the gathering will be a very brilliant one, as the good taste of the ladies will probably induce them to avoid dark colours, and display as many bright ones as the season will admit.' The paper published a map of the route for its readers, so that they could line the streets and wave to the princess and her handsome husband, the Marquess of Lorne. For several days, frenzied telegrams had been flying back and forth between London and Liverpool, in which every infinitesimal change to the princess's schedule was noted and explained.

At half past eleven on the night of Wednesday 13 November 1878, Princess Louise boarded a train at one of London's most impressive new landmarks, St Pancras station. With its magnificent hotel, designed by the architect Sir George Gilbert Scott, the station had caused a stir when it opened, two years previously, because of a truly innovative, and rather scandalous, addition: its Ladies' and Gentlemen's Smoking Room. This was the very first room in Europe in which ladies were permitted to smoke in public. It was the kind of place in which the bohemian princess (herself a smoker) would have felt entirely at home.

On the special train that rattled its way from London to Liverpool, the princess and her husband were accompanied by two of Louise's brothers, to whom she was extremely close: Arthur and Leopold. Their two Royal Pullman carriages were filled with every modern convenience and lavishly decorated with flowers, inside and out. Perhaps to avoid the crush of cheering crowds, the party had elected to leave late at night. This was not simply a royal visit to another city; it was the start of a brave and nerve-racking

new phase in the life of the princess and marquess. They were moving to Canada for several years, for the marquess to take on the role of Governor-General. It would be the first time that a member of the royal family had lived in Canada. Louise's diplomatic role would be every bit as important as her husband's.

In Liverpool, the railway station and its surrounding streets were on red alert for the arrival of the princess. Flags decorated the station and the papers later reported that 'Ranelagh Street was illuminated by electric light by an enterprising firm of shopkeepers.' In the middle of the night, the people of Liverpool had started to line the streets in the hope of glimpsing the princess. According to the *Liverpool Mercury*, 'the usual monotony' of a weekday in Liverpool would be pleasantly disrupted by the arrival of the royal party; businesses would be closed between 6a.m. and noon so that workers could have the chance to see the princess and her entourage.

The staff of the Royal Adelphi hotel had no sleep that cold November night. As one excited journalist wrote:

> The front of the noble building is literally covered with flags of all sizes and nations. The facade is surmounted by a magnificent Royal Standard, which is supported on one side by a Union Jack and on the other by a St George's ensign; while immediately above the principal entrance, and underneath the Royal Standard, an immense American flag[fn1] is displayed … A handsome porch, covered with scarlet cloth, has been erected at the principal doorway in Lime Street. This is surmounted by a shield representing the Argyll arms [the family crest of the Marquess of Lorne].

The princess and her party would enter the hotel by walking up steps covered with a 'rich crimson cloth'. Inside

were ‘festoons of flowers and evergreens’. Louise’s Aesthetic soul would have appreciated the Japanese banners which had been chosen to ‘impart additional variety and gaiety’. The staircase had also been given a makeover, with the addition of ‘a rich Brussels carpet’. A large crowd had gathered and journalists reported that the princess and her husband were given rousing cheers; although many also noted with amusement that the two sons of Queen Victoria seemed to pass almost unnoticed. The princess was the person the crowds wanted to see.

The hotel had been issued with strict instructions on the protocol, and a number of rooms on the first-floor landing were set aside for the princess and her entourage. When the special train arrived at Liverpool, the sun had not yet risen, but the hotel’s electric lights imparted, as one journalist wrote, to ‘the strange early morning scene a brilliancy which the Royal party must have found very magnificent and surprising’. All of these preparations were for a visit which would last approximately four hours.

When the royal train arrived, at six o’clock in the morning, it was met by an official party of ‘prominent local gentlemen’ including the mayor and the Commander of the District, General Willis. The proud mayor had travelled to London some weeks earlier for a private audience with the Marquess of Lorne, at which he had ascertained precisely how one should address the princess and whether she would be amenable to meeting local people. The answer was that Princess Louise would be very happy to undertake public duties. The royal party began its procession through the town, cheered on by crowds. Liverpool was proud of its maritime history, and the fact that the princess was beginning her new life from their docks was a moment to be cherished. The local hotels, restaurants and shops were equally pleased, their profits swelled by the journalists and other visitors flocking to the city.

The *Daily Post* claimed that a million people lined the streets of Liverpool that morning, cheering for their princess, and 'the weather was fine; frosty but kindly, and lit up with cheering sunlight'. The crowds of people waved flags as the princess, the two princes and the marquess were borne through the streets in magnificent carriages. By the time the royal party was ready to leave the hotel, for their 10.15a.m. meeting with the mayor, the numbers had swelled to include visitors from outside the city. Observers estimated that around a million people lined the royal route, desperate for a glimpse of the woman whose wedding had been such a popular event throughout the nation and whose loyalty to her people was legendary.

At this date, Princess Louise was more popular in Britain than her distant, stubborn mother (who, still mourning the death of her husband seventeen years earlier, made very few public appearances). The day after the princess's visit, the *Liverpool Mercury* reported: 'No event within recent years has caused so much excitement in Liverpool … although occupying but a few hours, [it] was characterised by an enthusiasm which could hardly have been more general or more significant.'

fn1 A Canadian flag might seem more fitting, but the newspapers report that it was American.

CHAPTER 1

Born in the year of revolution

> The poor Duchess of Gloster is again in one of her nervous states, and gave us a dreadful fright at [Princess Louise’s] Christening by quite forgetting where she was, and coming and kneeling at my feet in the midst of the service. Imagine our horror!
>
> Queen Victoria’s diary, 16 May 1848

By the time of her visit to Liverpool, Princess Louise was a determined young woman with a keen political mind and a career that she had fought to be allowed to have. She was renowned by the public for her good looks, her unusual artistic dress sense and her sense of humour. Most importantly, Louise was also known for her compassion and her many ‘good works’. The princess was a forceful personality, who could make herself adored, when she wanted to (and who could snub people royally if she did not like them). She was regularly described as ‘captivating’, ‘charming’ and ‘clever’. People felt able to approach her, members of the public wrote letters to her, or begged for her help with charitable or political causes. Fellow artists were comfortable enough to invite her to informal studio parties and men happily flirted with her, in a way they would not have dreamt of doing with any of her regal sisters. Even people who were not keen on the idea of a royal family found Louise acceptable. She spoke openly and

controversially about subjects that other people shrank from and she was not above criticising the monarch. On one memorable occasion, as she undertook, yet again, one of the queen's duties, Louise remarked loudly that her mother 'was not too unwell to open Parliament, simply too unwilling'. To understand why Louise should criticise her mother so openly, it is necessary to look both at Queen Victoria and at Princess Louise's childhood.

Despite the fact that she is one of the most famous monarchs of all time, Queen Victoria was not intended to become queen. It was almost an accident that this young princess, whose father had died before she could even recognise him, ever acceded to the throne. The first link in the chain that led Victoria to the monarchy was the death in 1817 of one of the country's most popular royals: the much-admired Princess Charlotte. She was Victoria's first cousin, and the only legitimate child of the Prince Regent (later King George IV). When the news of Charlotte's tragic death spread the country went into extended mourning. She had died giving birth to her first child, a son who was stillborn after a protracted and stressful labour. To compound the tragedy, soon after the deaths of the princess and baby prince, one of the royal doctors who had assisted with the birth, Dr Croft, committed suicide.

Instead of gaining a much-loved and happily married queen, the country was left with its continued succession of dissolute Hanoverian kings. Following the death of King George IV, the throne passed to his brother, who became King William IV. Most people were angrily aware of the new king's former relationship with the actress Mrs Jordan – and of their ten illegitimate children. Aware he might become king, William had hastily ended this 'illegal' relationship and married Princess Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen, but her two children failed to survive infancy. The country began to despair of its royal family, and the idea of a republican revolution was beginning to take hold.

The young Princess Victoria, who was the next in line to the throne, was perceived as a welcome and refreshing change after the excesses and debauchery of the sons of George III (one of whom, the Duke of Kent, was Victoria's father[fn1]). Initially, Victoria, who had lived her childhood and early adulthood so simply, stiflingly and in genteel impoverishment, was seen as almost a reincarnation of the lamented Princess Charlotte. When William IV became ill, people were deeply concerned that he might die before his young niece reached her eighteenth birthday, thus leaving the throne vulnerable. The ailing king managed to cling to life until Victoria was just eighteen. The accession of this teenaged girl to the role of monarch was believed to be the dawning of a new golden age, one often compared to the Elizabethan era.

Almost immediately after she was declared queen, Victoria became an icon of morality and 'goodness'. Poets and artists immortalised her on canvas and in print and the country rejoiced in their new monarch and the changes she seemed to promise. When she married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, her love-match wedding – to a husband she had chosen and proposed to – was the ideal of fairy tales. Yet although Albert tried vigorously to celebrate all things British, he was never quite forgiven by his wife's subjects for being a foreigner.

Princess Louise was the sixth child and the fourth daughter of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert – and her birth was both agonising and terrifying. The queen would regularly recall its horrors, and as a child the young princess was made to feel dreadfully guilty about how much her mother had suffered to bring her into the world. The new baby was born at 8a.m. on 18 March 1848 and given the names of Louise Caroline Alberta. Louise was the name of her father's mother as well as that of her mother's aunt. Caroline was after her father's recently deceased

step-grandmother – to whom Albert had been devoted. Her third name was after her father himself. On 14 April, the queen wrote in her journal: 'We have decided that our little girl's sponsors should be, Albert's Gt Uncle, Duke Gustoes of Mecklenburg Schwerin[,] Augusta Strelitz and the Dss of Meiningen.'[fn2]

During the pregnancy, Prince Albert had grown deeply concerned about his increasingly stressed wife, at what was a difficult time, politically. Royal families throughout Europe were being deposed, while in Britain, the working classes were agitating for higher pay, better working conditions and more legal rights. Following Princess Louise's birth, Prince Albert wrote a letter to his brother saying how relieved he was – despite the irritating fact of the baby being female: 'I have good news for you today. Victoria was safely delivered this morning and though it be a daughter, still my joy and gratitude are very great, as I was often full of misgivings because of the shocks which have crowded upon Victoria of late.'

The new princess – nicknamed 'la nouvelle' by her siblings – came into the world during a very turbulent time. The year 1848 would be remembered as one of revolution and rebellion. In Ireland, revolutionaries were calling for an end to British rule and chaos seemed to reign throughout Europe as revolutions bred one another. The royal family grew used to the sight of beleaguered foreign royals and aristocrats arriving in London. These refugees, often possessing only the clothes they were wearing, brought stories of dissension and violence. Even Buckingham Palace could not cope with the influx: the royal children's bedrooms had been taken over by desperate distant relations of the queen, and Victoria and Albert's children had to sleep in servants' bedrooms.

By the time of Louise's birth, the queen was heartily sick of pregnancy and childbearing. In addition, her devotion to

Albert allowed little room for her to love her children as they should have been loved. Many years later, the queen would reveal these feelings in a letter to her eldest daughter. When Vicky had been married for just a few weeks, she wrote to her mother of her longing to be alone with her husband and how tiresome she found it always having to carry out official duties. Her mother's reply explains a great deal about Queen Victoria's attitude to her children: 'You said in your long letter that the happiest time for you – was when you were alone with Fritz; you will now understand why I often grudged you children being always there, when I longed to be alone with dearest Papa! Those are always my happiest moments!'

Victoria, the Princess Royal, was nearly eight years old when the new baby was born. Vicky had been a true honeymoon baby, born on 21 November 1840, nine and a half months after her parents' marriage. By the time of Louise's birth, Vicky was a practised older sister and was accepted as the 'brains' of the family. Despite this, Vicky, in common with her sisters, was often made to feel a disappointment to her mother. Aware of how painful her mother's censure could be, Vicky grew protective of her younger siblings.

When Vicky was less than a year old, the queen had given birth to a son and heir. The future Edward VII, known as 'Bertie' to his family, was born on 9 November 1841. Almost from birth he was a disappointment to his parents, and his mother took every opportunity of letting him know how displeased she was with him. Bertie would become very close to Princess Louise, as the two often-neglected children bonded over their shared unhappiness. They would remain close throughout their lives.

The third of Victoria and Albert's children was Princess Alice (born on 25 April 1843); she was a caring sister and dutiful daughter, who strove not to upset her mother and who, during Louise's adolescence, often grew frustrated by

her younger sister’s wilfulness. Alice’s behaviour in childhood was not remarkable – as Vicky’s was by intelligence and Louise’s by artistic temperament – but she would grow up to become an indomitable woman, devoted to furthering gender equality and championing the need for more, and better trained, nurses. Alice was especially close to the always naughty Bertie, but in many ways she was her parents’ model daughter (until she grew up and became far too independent for her mother’s liking).

Prince Alfred was born on 6 August 1844 and known in the family as ‘Affie.’[fn3] Victoria and Albert made it obvious that they thought it a pity Bertie should be the heir to the throne, instead of the more promising Alfred. By the age of 12 Affie already knew what he wanted from life – he was going to be a sailor. He went on to have a distinguished career in the navy.

Princess Helena, known as ‘Lenchen’, was born on 25 May 1846. Her birth caused the queen to suffer ‘longer and more than the other times’, according to Prince Albert, and it was feared the baby would not survive. Helena was a tomboy, said not to cry when her brothers teased her, but to give as good as she got – famously punching one of her brothers back instead of bursting into tears. Helena was considered by her parents the least ‘pretty’ of the daughters and she grew up knowing her mother felt it would not be easy to find her a husband. Indeed, Helena spent much of her childhood feeling a failure because she was not pretty enough.

By the time of Louise’s birth, Victoria had an understandable horror of the pain of childbirth. She had few maternal impulses and famously detested the messiness and inability of young babies. She found their spasmodic movements – which she called ‘that terrible froglike action’ – physically repulsive. Louise’s birth was followed by those of two more sons, Arthur (born 1 May

1850) and Leopold (born 7 April 1853). Louise was always extremely close to her two younger brothers, who adored her. None of the other princesses compared, in Arthur and Leopold's opinion, to 'Loo', 'Loosy' or 'Looloo', as Louise was variously known.

Arthur was named after his godfather, the Duke of Wellington (whose birthday he shared).[fn4] Louise made one of her first 'public' appearances at Arthur's christening, dressed all in white, like her sisters, and distinguished in her mother's journal as being 'very pretty & not at all shy, – very smart with her white gloves & little white & silver shoes' (she was two years and three months old at the time). The young Arthur showed an early interest in the military: it was claimed that even as a tiny baby he reacted with excitement when he saw a uniform. He was destined for the army.

The birth of Leopold in 1853 was remarkable as the first time the queen was given chloroform to help alleviate the agonies. Chloroform was an experimental new wonder drug and the physician who administered it had been in terror for weeks beforehand in case anything should go wrong. The new baby was named after Queen Victoria's beloved uncle and advisor, King Leopold I of the Belgians. From birth, Prince Leopold was sickly. When he was five or six, he was diagnosed with haemophilia. Unable to join in the energetic games of his brothers, he was usually expected to stay with his sisters and keep safe. He also suffered from an illness that caused him to have fits, perhaps epilepsy, something that was little understood and seen as an embarrassment. Throughout many of Leopold's 'bleeding' illnesses, which left him weakened and miserable, Louise was his childhood nurse, learning ably how to take care of him. The queen and prince consort wanted their children to be practical and useful and all their daughters grew up to be practised nurses.