

# PRINCESS CECILIA VASA AND QUEEN ELIZABETH OF ENGLAND

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Gustav Vasa, the great hero of Sweden's successful fight for independence from Danish domination, was born into a noble family on the 12th of May 1496 and was elected king in June 1523. With a revolting peasantry to contend with, and an empty treasury, there was only one source of readily available wealth and that was the Church. However, the Church was somewhat reluctant to hand over its money to the new elected king, so Gustav called a Riksdag at Västerås in 1527 and by promising the nobles a share of the loot, Gustav was authorised to collect certain Church revenues. Revenues which enabled him to raise an army and crush the peasants.

By his action, Gustav Vasa had implicitly broken with Rome and, in a troubled world, he looked around for friends and allies. In England Henry VIII was marching to the same drum beat so, with the king of Sweden's first child, Erik, being the same age as Elizabeth, daughter of Henry, there was much talk of marriage between them.

Gustav Vasa married three times. His first wife was Katarina of Sachsen-Lauenburg who bore Erik and who died in 1535 at the early age of 22. Nasty rumour at the time suggested that Gustav disposed of his queen by hitting her on the head with a miner's hammer. The Swedes, with their morbid predilection for opening the tombs of their royal families opened Katarina's in the winter of 1945/6 and found a hole in her left temple. This was explained as due to the natural process of bone rotting in a damp atmosphere. The photographs show that the richly embroidered shroud did not apparently suffer from the same dampness.

The year after Katarina's death, Gustav married Margareta Eriksdotter or Leijonhufvud. Margareta was a noted beauty and bore her husband ten children, of whom eight survived their parents. There was Johan III, Magnus, Karl IX, Katarina, Cecilia, Anna, Sofia and

Elizabet. Margareta died in 1551 and Gustav married his sixteen year old niece by marriage, Katarina Gustafsdotter or Stenbock.

Gustav died on the twentieth of September 1560 and Erik continued the policy of looking for a dynastic alliance with England. His courtship of Elizabeth progressed like modern disarmament negotiations; slowly and sometimes unenthusiastically. By 1560, Elizabeth, now 27, continued to blow cold while Erik blew hot. In 1562 he considered sending over his sisters Cecilia and Elizabet to England so that Cecilia might marry an English milord.

Cecilia was a bit of a problem. She had always been a difficult child and finding a suitable suitor for her was not proving to be easy. With her mother's charm and her father's determination she was both beautiful and strong minded. Born in Stockholm on the sixth of November 1540 she had just turned nineteen when she became involved in what was known as the Vadstena scandal.

Following the wedding of her sister Katarina to greve Edward of Ostfriesland in 1559 the bridal party was moving through Sweden from royal castle to royal castle, to the great distress of the inhabitants surrounding the castles, who had to provide the supplies for the honeymoon couple and their retinue. In this retinue was the younger brother of the groom, pfalzgreve Georg Johan Vedentz and he became enamoured of the lovely Cecilia. His attentions were not unwelcome and one night in December at Vadstena the castle guard saw a rope ladder hanging from princess Cecilia's open window. The guard rushed up to Cecilia's chambers and, bursting in, found the pfalzgreve in a state of some undress. Erik ordered the arrest of Cecilia and Johan and sent a report to his father in Stockholm. The old king was furious. Not so much at what may, or may not, have been going on but that Erik had not handled the affair discreetly. The whole of Europe knew of the Vadstena affair and Vasa was not amused.

At first he wanted to execute the pair, but Eric pleaded for his sister and a medallion was struck, showing the innocent Susanna on one side and on the other, the presumably innocent Cecilia. But if Cecilia was innocent then what Johan was up to was attempted rape. Cecilia was spared. Johan's mother pleaded for her son's life and in this she was successful, but it appears that before Johan was released he was

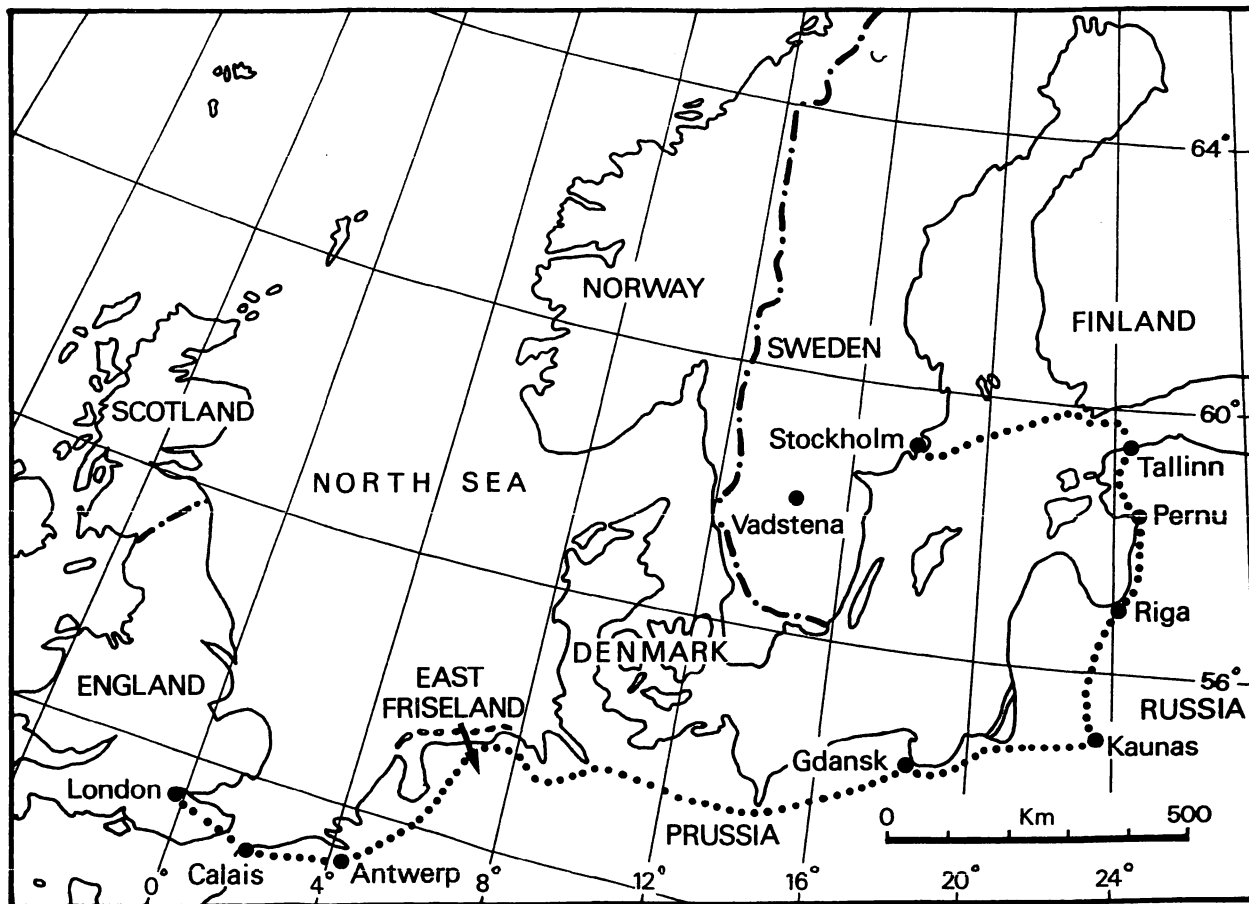
subjected to some nasty surgery carried out by the state executioner without the benefit of any anaesthetic. He retired to Holland and it was noted that he took no further interest in the opposite sex.

Finding a husband for Cecilia was now rather difficult. Prospective suitors were naturally frightened that if they became too amorous they might find themselves awaiting outpatient surgery in Stockholm. Minor nobles in the remoter reaches of Poland were canvassed and in 1561 Cecilia's name was associated with that of Jan of Tecsyn, but this fell through and in 1562 Erik wrote to Elizabeth suggesting that Cecilia might find a husband in England. England was far away and an English milord might not have heard of the Vadstena scandal.

Cecilia was delighted at the thought of travelling to England and even her marriage on the eighteenth of June 1564 to the Markgreve Kristoffer of Baden-Rodemachern did not in any way diminish her enthusiasm to travel to the court of Queen Elizabeth. By this time Sweden and Denmark were at war and although the romance of Erik and Elizabeth was now dying, Erik wrote a cordial letter to Elizabeth explaining that as his sister was newly married the visit to England was now off. Erik miscalculated his sister's determination and, after a false start in September, Cecilia left Stockholm in November for England, carrying with her letters from Erik to Elizabeth, requesting English help in the war against Denmark.

Travel between Sweden and England was not easy at that time. Denmark controlled Norway which extended down almost as far as modern Göteborg, while the land on both sides of the narrow sea entrance into the Baltic was also Danish. The only way for a Swede to reach England without paying homage to the Dane was to travel across the northern Baltic and then by land down its eastern side, always taking care not to stray into Russian territory. This long, dangerous land route was what Cecilia had to take.

On the 12th November 1564 Princess Cecilia took leave of her siblings; all were in tears and her sister Sophia fainted with emotion. By the 13th Cecilia was at Vaxholm, a small island in the Stockholm archipelago and after many days in the open Baltic, surviving storms which destroyed one of their convoy, she landed on an isolated part of the Finnish coast on the 5th of December, but had to leave by the 9th as



PRINCESS CECILIA'S JOURNEY TO ENGLAND Nov 1564 to Sept 1565 .....

there was no food available for them to purchase. The storm was still raging and Cecilia demanded to be put ashore so that she could spend the night on land. The ship's boat managed to land her and a few companions on a small wooded island. She spent the night shivering under her servants' cloaks, whilst the unfortunate servants had to hop and run about all night to prevent themselves from freezing to death.

The next morning she regained the ship which eventually reached what is now Tallinn in Estonia where the party stayed over Christmas. Obtaining a passport for travel through Poland took some time and it was not until the 2nd of March 1565 that Cecilia left, seated in a horse drawn sledge. It was an extremely cold winter and a very late spring as the party passed through Paidiski and on to Pärnu. From Pärnu the party was in great peril, for despite the Polish passport the writ of Moscow also ran in these border lands and the fate of a Swede falling into Russian hands was not a happy one. Without food for themselves or forage for the horses they travelled overnight and well into the next day before they reached comparative safety at Salacgriva on the 7th of March. However, the party still felt threatened by the Russians and moved on the next day before resting for a few days. On the 11th Cecilia set off for Riga, but the town council refused to recognise the Polish passport and would not allow her into the city so the disappointed princess moved on, eventually reaching Meskuiciai. Here she became seriously ill and developed a high fever but she was determined to move on and on the 18th of March she struggled up from her sick bed and travelled to Siauliai in Latvia, where the people were alleged to be the most barbarous in the world. By the 30th of March she was at Kaunas where the horse drawn sledges were abandoned.

Cecilia stayed recuperating at Kaunas until the 18th of April but had trouble with a local duke who held her to ransom, but she sweet-talked her way to freedom and escaped to Prussia where she was received by the Duke of Prussia. She was amongst friends and the worst of her journey was now over. However, she was over five months pregnant and had many more miles to travel before she reached England. Lying in an unsprung wagon jolting over appalling roads she reached Gdansk. Here she again became very ill and had to remain resting for six weeks but even before she was fit she travelled continuously for thirty days until she arrived in East Friesland where she met her sister Katarina and her erstwhile lover, Johan.

After ten days with her sister and within eight weeks of her coming to term she set off at a furious pace and in six days entered Antwerp. After five days at Antwerp she hurried through Flanders to Calais. Here, bad weather forced her to wait but impatient of delay she embarked during the storm and was within sight of Dover when the wind shifted and the master had to run before it. Cecilia was distraught. Her indomitable spirit failed her and she collapsed bodily and mentally when the ship returned to Calais.

The storm abated and once more the passage was attempted and although all the other passengers were sick, Cecilia sat up on deck on top of the hatches, singing in English, the psalms of David. Again the wind shifted as they approached Dover and again the master turned for Calais, but Cecilia implored him to anchor and ride out the storm. This he did, but the storm increased in intensity so that eventually he had to cut the anchor cable and run for Calais. Cecilia was devastated. Her child was due and determined though she had been that her child should be born in England, now, weary and devoid of any apparent emotion she waited passively for the storm to die away.

Eventually the storm died away and an exhausted Cecilia reached Dover where she was most graciously welcomed and, travelling in Queen Elizabeth's horse litter, she arrived at Canterbury. Here the Warden of the Cinque Ports met her and escorted her to Rochester and from thence to Gravesend where she was conveyed by barge to Bedford house in London, arriving there on the 11th September 1656.

Princess Cecilia spent a few days recovering from her gruelling journey but was able to receive Queen Elizabeth who came down from Windsor to see her on the 14th of the month. Next day, the 15th September, Princess Cecilia Vasa of Sweden gave birth to her first son.

The christening of the infant took place on 30th September in the royal chapel at Westminster amidst scenes of splendour but with little ceremony. The communion table was heavy with silver and gilt plate while the font was silver gilt and hung with tapestry. The baby was covered with a rich mantle, so heavily jewelled, that two gentlemen bearers were detailed to assist the lady-in-waiting, Birgitta Hansdotter Bååt, to hold the child. Queen Elizabeth, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Duke of Norfolk were the god-parents with the

Queen putting forward the names of Edward Fortunate for the infant. Later the same evening, the father entertained the gentlemen to supper.

Queen Elizabeth continued to lavish hospitality on Princess Cecilia. She granted an annual pension of 2,000 marks to the Marquis of Baden for so long as he allowed his wife to stay in England. The Spanish ambassador, an acute observer of the London scene, noted in November: "The Queen had the King of Sweden's sister brought to the palace and still pays her great attention". By Christmas, however, the lovely guest was starting to outstay her welcome.

Debtors were starting to gather outside Bedford house where Cecilia lodged. By this time Cecilia's husband had wisely left the country but foolishly returned to see his sick wife and was arrested for debt and flung into jail at Rochester. The Marquis claimed diplomatic immunity while his wife complained bitterly to the Queen. Elizabeth ordered Baden's release but simultaneously probably suggested that Cecilia and her entourage leave the country.

Meanwhile the local tradesmen had got wind of what was going on and during the month of April 1566 the bills flooded into the Baden/Vasa household. The grocer, the butcher, the candlestick maker all presented their accounts. Jewellers, lute-makers, costumiers and suppliers of butter also rushed round with their bills. Cecilia's servants were arrested for debt if they ventured out on to the streets and it was only by the unscrupulous claiming of diplomatic immunity that Cecilia and her household managed to leave England at the end of April. Not all of her entourage left, for one of Cecilia's ladies in waiting; Helena Snakenborg, found love and happiness in England.

Helena Snakenborg was a member of a noble family which came originally from Mecklenburg in Germany but which had emigrated to Sweden in the 14th and 15th centuries. Over the years the Snakenborg family gave good service to the Swedish crown and when Charles XII led his army to disaster at Poltava in 1709, no less than nine of his officers were from the Snakenborg family. Helena first married William Parr, Marquis of Northampton and brother of Henry VIII's sixth wife. On Parr's death Helena then married Sir Thomas Gorges, a distant relation of Sir Walter Raleigh.

As for Cecilia, she and her husband went home to Baden-Rodemachern where they continued their extravagant life style. The Marquis died in 1575 and a few years later, Cecilia and her children, including Edward with a Protestant archbishop for god-father, were received into the Catholic Church. Her latter years were spent in poverty. She dragged herself through Europe receiving sympathy and letters of recommendation to other princes – but little money. Cecilia lived until 1627 and died in Brussels where she is buried. She lived to see Gustav Adolf, the Lion of the North and the Champion of Protestantism, successfully carry the blue flag with the yellow cross over much of northern Europe, but there is no evidence that the daughter of the first Vasa king ever met her nephew, Adolf, the sixth Vasa. There is no evidence either that her mission to England in any way furthered an alliance between the two Protestant states of Sweden and England.