

## Chapter 1

# Charting the Course of the Royal Romance

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Meeting at uni
  - ▶ Dealing with the press
  - ▶ Getting serious with each other
  - ▶ Saying 'I do'
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**T**hey've been practising for a long time,' was Prince Charles's laconic comment when Prince William and Catherine (Kate) Middleton announced their engagement to a delighted nation.

From meeting at university, sharing the same digs, supporting each other on entering the world of work and via a thankfully-temporary and amicable break-up, the relationship of Wills and Kate has been every inch a modern romance.

Now, at 11 a.m. on 29 April 2011, this on-off-on-again romance culminates in a national celebration; a wedding day to tell your grandchildren about.

But how did they (and the nation) get to this point? What ups and downs did the couple go through to arrive at a position where Kate said ‘I do’ to her dream prince?

In this chapter, I chart the relationship of William and Kate, the first great royal romance of the 21st century.

## *Living Life to the Full: University Days*

Prince William’s choice of the University of St Andrews in Scotland as a place to study was a major surprise. Not because St Andrews isn’t a great university – it’s one of the world’s oldest and most respected – but because recent royals preferred the very formal colleges of Oxford and Cambridge.

By choosing St Andrews, William was perhaps marking out that he’s slightly different from the older generation of royals and wants a more normal life.

Whatever his reasons, the choice was a wise one. He met the glamorous Kate Middleton, the eldest daughter of millionaire business couple Michael and Carole (I talk more about the Middleton family in Chapter 2).



Kate choosing to go to St Andrews seemed natural. After all, as a young child she was educated at a school with the same name: St Andrew’s in the leafy village of Pangbourne in Berkshire.

So when did Wills and Kate first meet? Was it in the student union bar or at a dinner party with friends? Or perhaps their eyes locked on the narrow historic streets of St Andrews?



The real answer is, in fact, more glam. The story goes that William attended a charity fashion show in 2001 in which young Kate was one of the models. He paid £200 for a front-row seat, which turned out to be the best investment of his life!

The young Prince was smitten by Kate's undoubted good looks and by hook or by crook he managed to secure the all important first date! However, it took some time because they didn't start dating until around 2003. By then though, they were living under the same roof sharing university accommodation.

As for how their romance developed at university, however, the details are patchy and pervaded by an air of mystery.

Good reasons exist for the mystery, including:

- ✓ **Press ban:** The British press agreed to leave Prince William in peace during his time at school and university. This ban on coverage may be seen as a direct response to the death of William's mother Diana, who had been the subject of highly-intrusive media speculation (read more about Charles and Diana's relationship in Chapter 3).
- ✓ **Good friends:** Wills and Kate chose their university friends wisely, avoiding any hangers-on who looked to spread tittle-tattle or make a quick buck out of their association with the young couple.



The public first became aware of a potential royal romance when the pair were photographed on a ski holiday to Prince Charles's favourite Alpine resort of Klosters in March 2004.



Kate studied History of Art at university while Prince William studied the same before switching to Geography; both got a very creditworthy 2:1 degree.

## ***Feeling the Pressure: Press Intrusion***

Turning 21 is a big day for anyone, but particularly for William because it was in effect the young Prince's coming out party for the world's media.

The press's long-standing agreement to leave the Prince and his private life alone came to an end and suddenly the gloves were off.

Fortunately, William handles himself exceptionally well and seems very level-headed. Therefore, any sections of the press that loved dishing the dirt weren't able to because, frankly, no dirt was available to dish.

This fact, however, didn't stop the press taking a very keen interest in William's private life and his blossoming relationship with Kate Middleton. In addition, Kate's family – and in particular her younger sister Pippa – became the focus of intense media scrutiny. Again though, the Middletons generally kept themselves to themselves, and the press found little to say (which may not, perhaps, have been the case with all families!).

Regardless, William and Catherine were now playing a whole new game with the gossip columnists and paparazzi in overdrive. Yet they kept their dignity, and Kate's unwillingness to give public interviews meant that, despite being very much in public view, the relationship remained fairly private.

What's more, experts at Buckingham Palace provided excellent media-handling advice and the couple have been supported by a network of loyal friends who keep their confidences.



Like many couples William and Kate have nicknames for one another. Apparently Wills calls Kate 'Babykins' while she refers to the future king as 'Big Willie' . . . about which, enough said!

## *Moving into the World of Work*

Many successful long-term couples say that the secret of their enduring romance is not being together 24 hours a day, every day, and to pursue their own interests and careers.

Royal watchers suspect that this is the secret to Wills and Kate's partnership. They share an interest in sport, the countryside, music and family, but they also have their own time and careers.



Kate worked in the past as retail buyer for clothing chain Jigsaw, but also found time to be supportive of Wills in his career.

William is a bit of high flyer . . . literally! He attended the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst after university and became a lieutenant in the Army. Later, he transferred to the RAF where he became a flight lieutenant and ultimately a search-and-rescue pilot.

In October 2010, William attended his first rescue call as a co-pilot and is going to continue in the role as a pilot until 2013, with a break for his honeymoon of course!



No doubt all you romantics remember the film *An Officer and a Gentleman* in which Richard Gere's character turns up at the factory in his white US Navy uniform and carries off Debra Winger? Well, Wills isn't adverse to a bit of work-based romance, too. On one occasion he surprised Kate and her family at home by landing his search-and-rescue helicopter on the family lawn and popping in for tea – how dashing!

## *Hitting the Buffers: The Break-Up*

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act I, Scene I), Shakespeare writes that 'The course of true love never did run smooth', and this statement certainly seems to relate to the romance of Wills and Kate.

The couple split officially in 2007. The pressures of intense media scrutiny were cited as a reason, but William also seems to have been not quite ready to settle down.



In 2005, William was reported as saying that he wouldn't marry until he was 28 or 30 years old! He proved to be right (he's 28)!

Kate was said to be devastated by the split from her prince, but again she kept a dignified silence, although her upset was reported to the press by some 'friends'.

But Kate didn't have to be upset for long, because reconciliation was soon on the cards. Within a few months she was attending royal family get-togethers and was again Prince William's girlfriend. Obviously the young Prince had seen the good sense to realise that he couldn't let her get away.

## *Moving into the Home Stretch: The Reconciliation*

Rumours that Wills and Kate were back together again started almost from the moment that news of their break-up hit the newsstands in April 2007.

But just a couple of months later Kate attended the Concert for Diana at Wembley Stadium with Prince William; then in August they went on holiday together to Desroches Island in the Seychelles.

By June 2008 Wills and Kate were most definitely an item again when she attended William's investiture into the Order of the Garter, along with her future in laws, the Windsors (flip to Chapter 2 for all about the royal family, past and present).

This time around the relationship displayed a new seriousness, as if the couple had looked at what life would be like apart and decided that it wasn't for them.



Some journalists unkindly nicknamed Kate 'Waity' Katy during the course of the royal romance, not as a cruel jibe at her figure – which is worthy of a top model – but because she had to wait a long time for William to pop the question.



When Kate Middleton attended William's passing out parade at Sandhurst, the royal rumour mill went into overdrive. Royal watchers and columnists speculated that an engagement was on the cards. One retail chain, Woolworths, even went as far as to start selling royal wedding memorabilia – this was a false alarm and Woolworths even went bust a couple of years later.



Kate has a strong friendship with William's younger brother Harry. After the announcement of their engagement, Harry was quoted in the German press as saying, 'I always wished for a sister and now I have one.'

## ***Popping the Question: The Engagement***

Anyone who's dropped to one knee and proposed knows that how you pop the question is crucial. Planning pays dividends if you're to elicit the answer 'yes'!

William chose one of his favourite spots – the Lewa game reserve in Kenya – to ask Kate for her hand. The words he spoke are private but you can picture the scene . . .



William underlined his love by presenting Kate with his mother's engagement ring, inset with a stunning 18-carat sapphire. She said yes and the engagement was announced on their return from holiday.

Now Britain is geared-up to celebrate a glamorous royal wedding on 29 April 2011 – a very modern couple tying the knot in the traditional setting of Westminster Abbey. I take you on a tour of this marvellous building in Chapter 4 and provide info on some other royal palaces in Chapter 12.



If you plan to attend the procession and other celebrations in person, discover how to navigate your way around London on the big day in Chapter 7.

For loads of other ways in which you can play a part in the celebrations, check out Part III of this book: Chapter 8 for arranging a street party, Chapter 9 for the all-important guide to your own royal feast and Chapter 10 for how to organise a royal pub quiz.