



Family Britain, 1951-1957

By David Kynaston

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As in his highly acclaimed *Austerity Britain*, David Kynaston invokes an astonishing array of vivid, intimate and unselfconscious voices to drive his narrative of 1950s Britain. The keen-eyed Nella Last shops assiduously at Barrow Market as austerity and rationing gradually give way to relative abundance; housewife Judy Haines, relishing the detail of suburban life, brings up her children in Chingford; the self-absorbed civil servant Henry St John perfects the art of grumbling. These and many other voices give a rich, unsentimental picture of everyday life in the 1950s. Well-known figures are encountered on the way, such as Doris Lessing (joining and later leaving the Communist Party), John Arlott (sticking up on *Any Questions?* for the rights of homosexuals) and *Tiger's* Roy of the Rovers (making his goal-scoring debut for Melchester).

All this is part of a colourful, unfolding tapestry, in which the great national events - the Tories returning to power, the death of George VI, the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth, the Suez Crisis - jostle alongside everything that gave Britain in the 1950s its distinctive flavour: Butlin's holiday camps, Kenwood food mixers, *Hancock's Half-Hour*, Ekco television sets, Davy Crockett, skiffle and teddy boys. Deeply researched, David Kynaston's *Family Britain* offers an unrivalled take on a largely cohesive, ordered, still very hierarchical society gratefully starting to move away from the painful hardships of the 1940s towards domestic ease and affluence.

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Family Britain, 1951-1957 By David Kynaston Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Following U.K. bestseller *Austerity Britain 1945–1951*, this is the second title in historian Kynaston's series on postwar Britain. It was an eventful time. A BBC survey conducted after King George VI's death in 1952 found the lower classes were upset that news of his death disrupted their favorite radio programs. The media was saturated with news of Elizabeth II's coronation as well as Princess Margaret's affair with a divorced man. The new Tory Home Secretary gave prosecuting homosexuals the highest priority; the end of meat and butter rationing in 1954 after 14 years caused jubilation; there was a 1955 national rail strike; and Ruth Ellis swung from the gallows for murdering her cheating, abusive socialite lover. Kynaston makes excellent use of personal diaries from housewives, civil servants, and the famous, all struggling with personal lives as they voice opinions on issues of the day (priceless letters by novelist Kingsley Amis show him knocking Dylan Thomas to poet Philip Larkin). As Kynaston juggles a staggering number of sources, he gives us an audaciously intimate, rich, and atmospheric history that is so real, you can just about taste it. Photos. (Jan.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Picking up where the much-lauded *Austerity Britain, 1945–1951* (2008) left off, Kynaston's latest presents a panoramic view of a transformative period. The Conservatives were in power, the ration system was ending, unemployment was nil, and the masses were increasingly glued to the tele. Leading us on an immersive tour of headlines and correspondence, diaries and sociological studies, Kynaston narrates moments and motifs both great and small, among them the Festival of Britain, Council housing, the queen's coronation, pub culture, Kingsley Amis, smog, labor strikes, skiffle, the "colour bar," grammar schools, football, the Suez Crisis, young Mick Jagger, and the BBC. It is a sensitive portrayal, emphasizing the feelings and perceptions of those who were there, but Kynaston's is not an uncritical approach; as the author suggests, the decade's "instinctive retreat to familiar ways, familiar rituals, familiar relations" occurred "in the context of only very slowly lifting austerity and uncomfortably limited material resources." Robustly researched and engagingly written with a light wit, this selection will leave readers looking forward to future installments on the Macmillan years and beyond. --Brendan Driscoll

Review

"Kynaston has again written a masterpiece. More vividly and profoundly than any other historical work I've read, [*Family Britain*] captures the rhythms and texture of everyday life and the collective experience of a nation." ?Benjamin Schwarz, *Atlantic Monthly*

"Weaving together diaries, newspapers, polls, and other primary sources, Kynaston maps the fine grain of daily life." ?*New Yorker*

"Memories, myths, half-true recollection, fantasy: this is the difficult and exciting territory of social history. David Kynaston's massive projected history of postwar Britain from 1945 to 1979 is titled *Tales of a New Jerusalem*, echoing William Blake...Kynaston tells the story of people's lives during this time by compiling a range of contemporary voices from varied backgrounds and applying an historian's retrospective structure and gentle analysis. He gathers material from private and archived diaries and from novels and memoirs by professional writers, biographers, and others whose lives publishers deemed worth recording...Kynaston deals with the totality of social life in his book." ?Jenny Diski, *Harper's Magazine*

“I have decided to vent my spleen by embarking on a series of books that, I hope, will be of no interest whatsoever to the readership of this magazine. David Kynaston's superlative *Austerity Britain* is more than six hundred pages long and deals with just six years, 1945–51, in the life of my country. The second volume in the series, *Family Britain, 1951–57*, has already been published, so I plan to move on to that next; Kynaston is going to take us through to Margaret Thatcher's election in 1979, and I'm warning you now that I plan to read every single word, and write about them in great detail in this column.” ?*Nick Hornby, The Believer*

“With the previous volume, this is sure to be a staple in the British history genre. It will resonate most with serious Anglophiles and with a scholarly audience ... could serve as an excellent source in all academic library British history collections.” ?*Library Journal*

“As Kynaston juggles a staggering number of sources, he gives us an audaciously intimate, rich, and atmospheric history that is so real, you can just about taste it.” ?*Publishers Weekly (starred review)*

“Robustly researched and engagingly written with a light wit, this selection will leave readers looking forward to future installments on the Macmillan years and beyond.” ?*Booklist*

“Captures the stolid, charmingly evolving open spirit of the British people.” ?*Kirkus Reviews*

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