

Elizabethans

By Andrew Marr

Andrew Marr was born in Glasgow 1959 is a journalist and broadcaster. So, he is now in his mid-60s. He was educated at private schools and then read English at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, graduating with a first class honours degree.

Marr joined *The Scotsman* as a trainee reporter in 1981. In 1984 he moved to London and subsequently edited *The Independent* newspaper from 1996 to 1998.

He was political editor of BBC News from 2000 to 2005. He began hosting a political programme on Sunday mornings in September 2005.

He started making history documentaries in 2007 with *Andrew Marr's History of Modern Britain*, and followed this with *The Making of Modern Britain*, and his *History of the World*, a series examining the history of human civilisation.

He suffered a widely reported stroke in January 2013 but returned to his Sunday morning show later in September of that year.

In 2020 he published the "New Elizabethans" which was followed by the BBC mini-series.

He left the BBC in December 2021.

In 2021, he joined the New Statesman as its chief political commentator.

He has always had left-wing leanings. He married Jack Ashley's daughter.

Review

Apparently, the Times best seller list is the oldest and most influential book sales chart in the UK. The lists are published behind a paywall so I was not able to check that this book was a best seller. Reviews are not overwhelming, more descriptive than glowing.

Personally, I started the book with great enthusiasm, after all this is our era. And at the start I found it illuminating. It is extensively researched and expanded on people and issues that I only half remembered e.g. Diana Dors, Grunwick, Dom Mintoff. The style of writing was easy, at times I found metaphors very readable. P405. And politically I found that I fell in with his interpretation. I particularly appreciated his comments about secondary education

He is forthright in his description of people, of attitudes and behaviours. He downplays British exceptionalism and is honest about our role in the world. But on the upside he is keen to celebrate individual achievements.

He reminded us of the extent of social changes through the period well, e.g. the acceptance of homosexuality. I had forgotten how much had changed. I was surprised how often immigration and race came into his account but I couldn't disagree.

But as it progressed I became a little irritated at elements of his style. There are 63 shortish chapters. I found his way of finishing one chapter with a sometimes clumsy link to the next irritating. I wondered if his style is too much a carryover of his TV work. As far as I can see the book came before the TV series but the short chapters, the cliff-hanger endings, the links, the need for simplistic, even glib summarising, seemed more suited to the immediacy of TV rather than literature.

I may have agreed with his political interpretation, but his moralising was patronising, intrusive. Having adopted a more wary view of the presentation I then became more critical and wondered why it was arbitrarily divided into Elizabethans at home, in the world at work. The book was not a comprehensive picture of the era but rather a scattergun snapshot with some but, for me, not

enough analysis. And inevitably a short history doesn't align with my memories. Our music tastes differ and where is the discussion of the expansion of university education, the redbrick universities.

It was similar to one of our earlier books, interestingly also by a New Statesman writer, "Who are we now? ", rich on anecdotes but not enough pulling together of all the threads. But I was probably asking too much. Maybe decades of hindsight are needed.

Overall I thought it was worth my time. I liked his style and came to respect him more as a commentator but I will not seek out more of his books.

Reading suggestions

Science
Nature
Narrative

Jan
Carol
Kate
Talie
Philip
Simon
Rob
David
Peter

Cars
Coffee
Review
Drink/nibbles
Choose

Fire
Coffee
Drinks
Reviews