



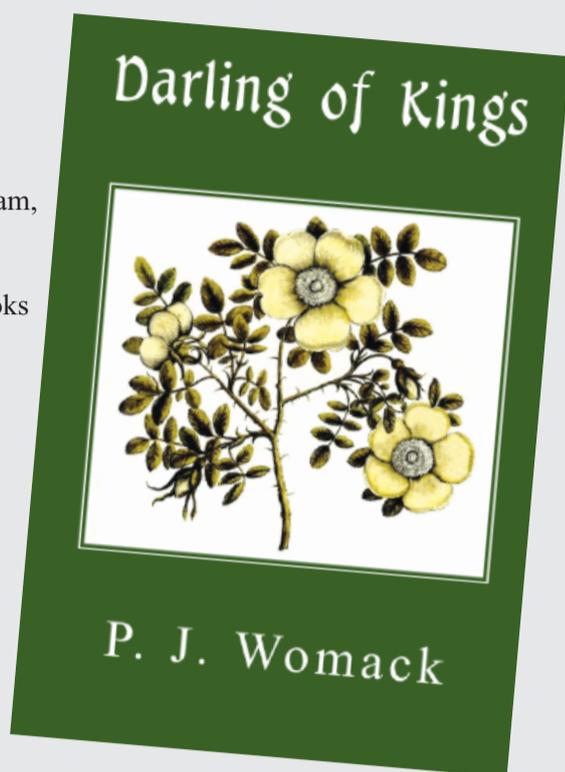
## the book

*Who rules the kingdom? The King.  
Who rules the King? The Duke.  
Who rules the Duke? The devil.*

Dear Reader,

We are delighted to present to you *Darling of Kings* by P. J. Womack. This book, published in the 400th anniversary year of the fateful first meeting of King James I and George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham, explores the complex relationships between the first two Stuart kings, their powerful favourite and the politics of the early 17th century.

From a minor gentry background and possessing little but good looks and charm, George Villiers is pushed forward at the decadent court of James I in the hope that he will catch the King's eye and topple the current favourite, Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset. The King is immediately captivated by the handsome young man and lavishes wealth and titles upon him and his family, culminating in his being created Duke of Buckingham. Building an intricate network of patronage and influence, Buckingham's power and domination of the King results in several attempts to depose him, as the Duke becomes the most hated man in England. Although initially the heir to the throne, Prince Charles, detests his father's favourite, he too is soon in thrall to the charismatic and all-powerful Buckingham; an obsessive and consuming devotion which will ultimately lead to confrontation with Parliament, war, and tragedy.



## reviews

*Darling of Kings* is a brilliant historical novel charting the meteoric rise and fall of one of the legendary characters of British history. I was intrigued and excited when I was offered the chance to read this novel about George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, and his relationships, first with King James I and then King Charles I. The Duke of Buckingham has been a source of creative inspiration for many a writer – he featured memorably in Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*, for example. After only reading a few paragraphs of *Darling of Kings*, I knew this book was going to be wonderful.

As the story progressed, I certainly was not disappointed. In *Darling of Kings*, Womack takes several historical figures who are either woefully neglected by mainstream historians and the public or only ever seen in a negative light and she takes us into their minds and their hearts. Indeed, my own perception of the Duke of Buckingham has been impacted so much from reading this novel, that I think I may have to re-evaluate how I view him. Womack brought such humanity to his character, that I can well understand why he was one of those rare figures who can command complete love and worship, or hate and envy.

The story is remarkably well-researched and full of adventure, romance, and politics while major historical events are skilfully woven in throughout. Womack's elegant turn-of-phrase, the way she vividly brings history to life, her amazing capacity to make historical figures into well-rounded, real, beings is nothing short of extraordinary. She writes in the exact style I admire: sophisticated, fluid, gorgeous prose that can hold its own alongside the classics of literature. This book took my breath away and I was left truly moved. Read it, love it, and embrace the history of the 17th century.

Andrea Elizabeth Zuvich,  
17th Century Historian and Historical Fiction Writer

## the author



P. J. Womack has had a life-long passion for history, particularly the Stuart period, and has spent several years researching the life of George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham. A qualified teacher, she lives with her son, her dog and hundreds of books in West Yorkshire.

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