

# MIDDLETONS UNDER ATTACK: GRANDMOTHER OF FUTURE KING ACCUSED

by **Claudia Joseph**

WHEN Joanne Callen found herself seated prominently amid the expectant hush of Westminster Abbey, she was understandably on edge – and more than a little excited.

Who wouldn't be? Cramping the medieval aisles from wall to wall, niche to niche, the pick of the British Establishment had gathered for the wedding of a generation.

Joanne is not a leading figure in society, nor is she enabled. Rather she is an unassuming recruitment consultant from a village near Watford. Yet, for all the grandeur of the occasion, she was in familiar company.

Her parents and grandparents were sitting just ahead of her, and just in front of them was her grandmother, Carole Middleton.

At the back of the Abbey, waiting patiently to make her entrance as the maid of honour arranged her train, was cousin Kate, the soon-to-be Duchess of Cambridge and Joanne's childhood friend and playmate.

Few will have heard of the Callens, but they and the Middletons are close family. Or, rather, they were.

Because now it seems that some in Joanne's family are deeply disappointed with their more illustrious cousins – and not only because the wedding was the last they ever saw of Kate.

In the eyes of Joanne, at least, Carole has become too grand to care

**'She has always been a social climber'**

about Joanne's family. Invitations to family occasions have gone unanswered, elderly relatives remain unvisited. Carole no longer bothers with her godchild.

The Callens have never even met Prince George.

Joanne's mother, Alison, is Carole Middleton's first cousin. So close were the pair that they grew up almost as sisters. And later their families shared Christmases and holidays. Yet in the three years since the wedding, Joanne says, the Middletons have steadily cut her side of the family adrift.

Carole's colourful brother Gary, her only sibling, might well sympathise. Because, according to Joanne, he too has now been so comprehensively 'dropped', that his sister refuses to be seen in his company.

In speaking out in this way, Joanne, 33, is going very much against the wishes of her own family, who would rather remain discreet.

But Joanne's account offers a quite extraordinary insight into Prince William's in-laws – and the strange pressures exerted by their new-found way of life.

'When I was a child Carole was really good to me,' she explains. 'She was a very good mother, a lovely godmother, and I liked her. But she has always been a social climber and now I feel she is snobbish.'

'She behaves as if we are not good enough for her now – so she does not need to respond to us or have any care. At the end of the day, I'm not sure what the word goddaughter means any more.'

Gary remains close to Joanne's parents. She says: 'Carole doesn't reply to invitations and doesn't turn up at any family events. She claims that she won't go anywhere where Gary is but I think she is just making excuses.'

'The real reason is that she is above us now.'

'We're not in her social circle. It's as if we are not good enough now

# 'Carole has shunned her own family... she is even grander than the Queen'



**CUT ADRIFT:** Recruitment consultant Joanne says Carole ignores her family

and she's embarrassed by us. She is now even grander than the Queen.'

The Middletons have been endlessly lauded as a dose of domestic normality for Prince William and the Windsors; but for Joanne, at least, the legacy of that Friday afternoon at the Abbey is a once-close family now painfully divided.

Carole, 59, is technically Joanne's first cousin once removed. It makes Joanne and Kate second cousins.

The Callens have never spoken a word of criticism about their famous relatives and Gary, who has done several interviews with this newspaper, has kept a determined silence about his on-off relationship with his older sister. But the family is clearly hurt.

The effect of being ignored, says Joanne, is devastating.

It obviously rankles that none of the Callens have seen their new relative George – despite many opportunities for an invitation.

The baby prince spent the first month of his life with Kate and William at Carole and husband Michael's new multi-million-pound mansion in Bucklebury (where Michael took the first photograph of the young family), and Carole cared for George when the Royals were on holiday in the Maldives in January.

Joanne continues: 'I was so excited when George was born. I watched Kate leaving the hospital looking lovely and have read about him in lots of newspapers and magazines. But none of the family has met him and we have barely seen Carole since the wedding.'

But it is the way Carole has behaved towards Joanne's grandparents, Ruth 81 and Ivor, 86, who live barely 30 miles away from her in the suburban town of Ruislip, Middlesex, that she seems to find particularly upsetting.

Joanne says Carole has twice promised to introduce the grandparents – Carole's aunt and uncle – to George but they still have not seen

him. In the run-up to last Christmas, Carole rang Ruth and offered to send a car to pick them up.

Ruth promptly went out to buy a present for George, but the car never came. 'Carole said a car would pick them up in the next couple of weeks to meet Prince George,' says Joanne. 'She said that she would call later and organise a time and a date. So my grandmother went out and bought George an outfit.'

'When I asked her later if she had met George, she made an excuse for them saying, "They must be very busy." But I felt terrible for her because she had gone out and bought a gift for him and was so excited about meeting him – not because he was Prince George but because he was family.'

'I still feel sad thinking of them sitting there waiting for the call with the present all wrapped up waiting for them.'

'Then Christmas came and it obviously wasn't going to happen. Our family is deeply saddened. There is no need to upset anybody. She should certainly have a good deal more respect for Ruth and Ivor.'

'If Dorothy Gold-

smith [Carole's mother] were alive she would be devastated by how Carole has treated Gary and my grandparents.'

Dorothy was the sister of Joanne's grandmother and so was Joanne's great aunt.

The second occasion was on June 26 this year, which was Dorothy's birthday.

Ruth, Ivor and Alison were having lunch after visiting the cemetery when Carole called and told them that if they waited for a few hours they could see Kate and George.

'Mum took grandma and grandfather to visit grandma's sister's grave in Pangbourne Cemetery, which is just up the hill from the church,' continues Joanne.

'They thought they might meet Carole for lunch but Carole could not make it and suggested they might like to wait for a few hours to see Kate and George. Mum told her,



**BIG DAY:** Carole arrives at the Royal Wedding in 2011