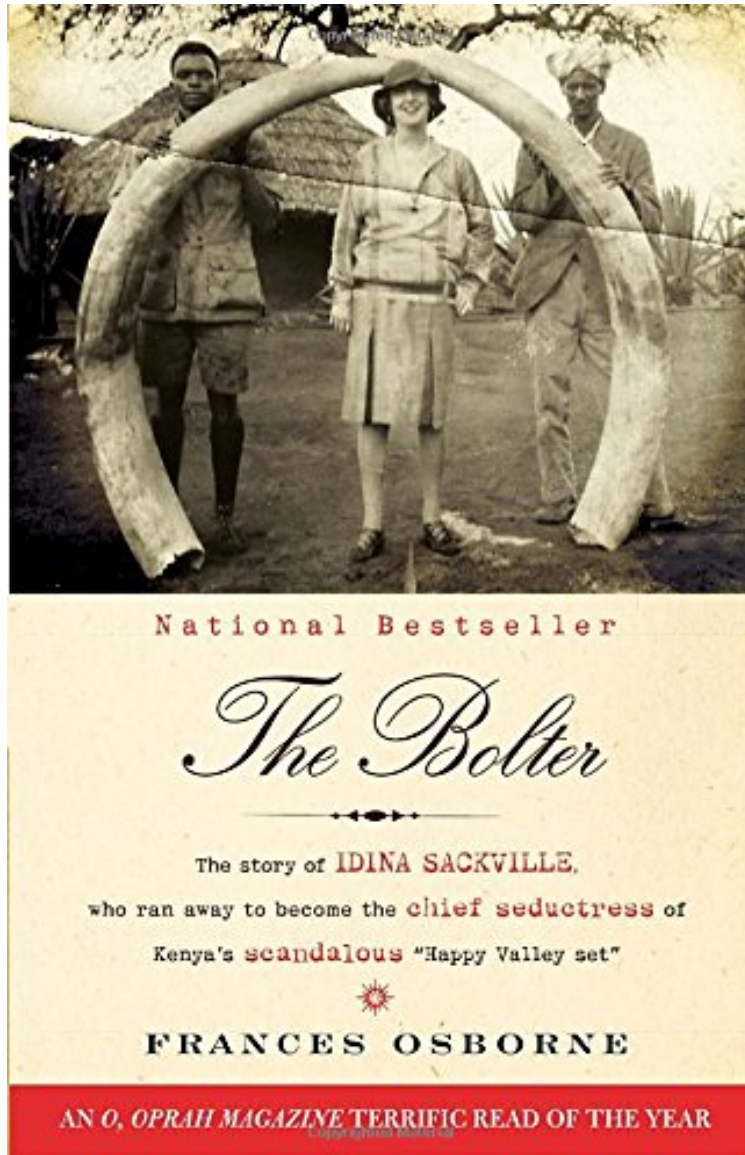


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## The Bolter: The Story of Idina Sackville, Who Ran Away to Become the Chief Seductress of Kenya's Scandalous "Happy Valley Set"

Frances Osborne

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Frances Osborne : The Bolter: The Story of Idina Sackville, Who Ran Away to Become the Chief Seductress of Kenya's Scandalous "Happy Valley Set" before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my

time, and all praised *The Bolter: The Story of Idina Sackville, Who Ran Away to Become the Chief Seductress of Kenya's Scandalous "Happy Valley Set"*:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Gripping! By F. S. L'hoir I thoroughly enjoyed this book, which held my interest from first to last. Well-written and thoroughly researched, it not only brings the story of the fascinating, and likely misunderstood, Idina to life, but it also gives us a glimpse into the lives of the British expatriates who were living in the British East Africa Protectorate--later the Crown Colony of Kenya before and during WWII. Mrs Osborne reveals fascinating historical details of which I was previously unaware. For instance, I had no idea that the British government offered up land in a sort of lottery to veterans of World War I (The doling out of other people's land is reminiscent of Marius (and other consuls) in ancient Rome paying off their veterans with land in North Africa). She also provides insight into the mores and double standards of aristocratic Great Britain during the early half of the 20th century, and the startling changes such norms underwent after the first world war. Osborne's descriptions of Kenya were especially effective in that they actually 'took me there' to the highlands where "explosions of pansies, roses, and petunias" coexisted with giant nettles that "trembled with an unseen animal's roar". I would recommend this absorbing book for anyone who is interested in early 20th-century history in general and British Colonialism and social history in particular.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Really interesting lady! By Julie This book is a true story about Idina Sackville, told by her great granddaughter. Idina was among a wealthy group of people, whose heyday started in the early 1900's. Nancy Mitford used Idina's life as the character "The Bolter" in her book "The Pursuit of Love". Idina was considered quite a rebel during her lifetime. She really didn't care about acting properly, or following a strict set of rules. She seemed to enjoy making her own rules in life. Whatever made her happy was usually the path she took, whether anyone else approved or not. She was married and divorced 5 times and had too many other partners to even count. She loved throwing wild parties where pretty much everyone else enjoyed the same lifestyle as she did. Oddly, you'd think she would have had a lot more enemies than she did, but most people who got to know her truly loved her. She was among a group who settled in Kenya in an area nicknamed Happy Valley. It did seem to be a magical place where everyone was happy for many years, but as time went on, the choices they all made began taking their toll. Other well known people mentioned in the book were Beryl Markham, Karen Blixen, and Denis Finch-Hatton.

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Blue Blooded Naughtiness By John D. Cofield In writing *The Bolter* Frances Osborne confronted and dealt with some fascinating albeit unsavory details from her family background. Her great grandmother was Lady Idina Sackville, known as The Bolter in London high society in the 1920s and 1930s due to her string of love affairs, flirtations, and five husbands. Osborne has done a fine job of tracing and telling the story of her ancestress in the context of her times. Lady Idina Sackville was born into an unconventional family. Her parents separated shortly after her birth, and Idina and her sister and brother lived a life of material plenty but emotional shortages. Idina married for the first time at 20, divorced for the first time at 25, and then embarked on a string of love affairs and marriages, none of which lasted for more than a few years. Despite having less money than most aristocrats, she managed to live in luxury in Britain and in Kenya and maintained a reputation for well dressed elegance and panache. Osborne does a good job explaining the ins and outs of her great-grandmother's life, using diaries and letters as well as newspaper accounts of her doings. She never really gives us a good sense of what the five husbands were like, with the possible exceptions of the first and third, except for the general observation that all of them were just as emotionally needy and rambunctious as Idina herself. There's also quite a bit of interesting information about Kenya in its days as a British colony, when it served as a rendezvous or hide out for aristocrats who wished to lead a more colorful life than was possible back home. Lady Idina and most of her husbands, friends, and lovers were intelligent people who ought to have led fuller, more praiseworthy lives. Their story is both interesting and cautionary.

A San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the Year An O, The Oprah Magazine #1 Terrific Read In an age of bolters women who broke the rules and fled their marriages Idina Sackville was the most celebrated of them all. Her relentless affairs, wild sex parties, and brazen flaunting of convention shocked high society and inspired countless writers and artists, from Nancy Mitford to Greta Garbo. But Idina's compelling charm masked the pain of betrayal and heartbreak. Now Frances Osborne explores the life of Idina, her enigmatic great-grandmother, using letters, diaries, and family legend, following her from Edwardian London to the hills of Kenya, where she reigned over the scandalous antics of the Happy Valley Set. Dazzlingly chic yet warmly intimate, *The Bolter* is a fascinating look at a woman whose energy still burns bright almost a century later.

From Publishers Weekly Starred. Osborne's lively narrative brings Lady Idina Sackville (an inspiration for Nancy Mitford's character the Bolter) boldly to life, with a black lapdog named Satan at her side and a cigarette in her hand. Osborne (*Lilla's Feast*) portrays a desperately lonely woman who shocked Edwardian high society with relentless affairs and drug-fueled orgies. Idina's story unfolds in an intimate tone thanks to the author, her great-granddaughter, who only accidentally discovered the kinship in her youth with the media serialization of James Fox's *White Mischief*.

Osborne makes generous use of sources and private family photos to add immediacy and depth to the portrait of a woman most often remembered as an amoral five-time divorcee: the author shows her hidden kindnesses at her carefully preserved Kenyan cattle rancha refuge from the later destructive Kenyan massacres. Still, Osborne unflinchingly exposes Idina's flaws along with those of everyone else in the politely adulterous high society while ably couching them in the context of the tumultuous times in which Idina resolved to find happiness in all the wrong places. The text, most lyrical when describing the landscapes around Idina's African residences, proves that an adventurous spirit continues to run in this fascinating family. 66 photos, (June) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Engrossing and beautifully written. . . . [An] affecting story. San Francisco Chronicle Intoxicating. People If notorious relatives make for the best dinner-party anecdotes, then Frances Osborne should be able to dine out for decades. Enthralling. The Plain Dealer Idina Sackville. . . could have stepped out of an Evelyn Waugh satire about the bright young things who partied away their days in the 20s and 30s, and later crashed and burned. . . . Frances Osborne . . . conjure[s] a vanished world with novelistic detail and flair. The New York Times An engaging book, drawing a revealing portrait of a remarkable woman and adding humanity to her scandalous life. . . . Ms. Osborne has succeeded in her stated aim, to write a book that has in a way brought Idina back to life. And what a life it was. The Wall Street Journal Vibrant. . . . Osborne connects vast expanses of the dots that formed Idina's reality: the gender inequalities in Edwardian England, the economic imperatives of colonialism, the mores of upper-class adultery, the differences between Idina's aristocratic father . . . and her merely wealthy mother. Newsday Intelligent, moving, and packed with exquisite detail. Providence Journal [Idina Sackville's] life story, speckled with the names of the rich and famous, is a miniature history lesson, bringing into sharp focus both world wars, the Jazz Age, and the colonization of Kenya. . . . Sackville's passion lights up the page. Entertainment Weekly [A] rumbustious and harrowing biography that takes us from London to Newport to Kenya. . . . A feast for the Anglophile. The New York Times Book Brilliant and utterly divine. . . . A breath of fresh air from a vanished world. The Daily Beast The Bolter is a biographical treat. Good Housekeeping Fascinating. . . . Paint[s] an interesting picture of Edwardian England, its social mores and rigors giving way to the wildness of pre-depression Europe. Minneapolis Star Tribune An engaging, definitive final look back at those naughty people who, between the wars, took their bad behavior off to Kenya and whose upper-class delinquency became gilded with unjustified glamour. Financial Times A sympathetic but evenhanded portrait of a woman driven by needs and desires even she didn't understand. The Columbus Dispatch Truly interesting. Osborne paints an enthralling portrait of upper class English life just before, during and immediately after the Great War. Frivolous, rich, sexy [and] achingly fashionable. The Observer (London) Even today Lady Idina Sackville could get tongues wagging. . . . A lively portrait of the UK-born troublemaker, a woman who took countless lovers, raised hell in England and Africa, inspired novels by Nancy Mitford and carried around a dog she named Satan. . . . Through [Idina's] story, we not only get a sexy and difficult-to-put-down read, we also get a good look at the shadow side of this prim and proper era and the real women who defied convention to live in it. Jessa Crispin, Books We Like, NPR A racy romp underpinned by some impressive research. The Sunday Telegraph (London) Passionate and headstrong, Lady Idina was determined to be free even if the cost was scandal and ruin. Frances Osborne has brilliantly captured not only one woman's life but an entire lost society. Amanda Foreman, author of Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire Told very much like a novel, The Bolter introduces readers to a world where every rule is broken and creating a scene is the latest fashion accessory. The Daily Texan Not only is it a beautifully written, intriguing chronicle of a frenetic, privileged, and profoundly sad life, it catches a social group and the mad-cap lives they led so luxurious, so wasted. . . . Superb. Barbara Goldsmith, author of Obsessive Genius and Little Gloria. . . . Happy at Last Drawing on family letters, Osborne's portrait creates sympathy not for Idina's reckless behavior but for the emotional emptiness that provoked her far-flung, self-defeating yet undeniably glamorous search for love. More Fascinating. . . . Beautifully written. . . . Frances Osborne brings the decadence of Britain's dying aristocracy vividly to life in this story of scandal and heartbreak. Simon Sebag Montefiore, author of Young Stalin and Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar Sex, money, glamour, and scandal make Idina Sackville's story hard to put down. What brings that story to life is the courage of an incorrigibly stylish survivor. Searching for the woman behind the legend, Osborne [gives us] a heroine impossible to resist. Frances Kiernan, author of The Last Mrs. Astor and Seeing Mary Plain: A life of Mary McCarthy About the Author Frances Osborne was born in London and studied philosophy and modern languages at Oxford University. She is the author of Lillas Feast. Her articles have appeared in The Daily Telegraph, The Times, The Independent, the Daily Mail, and Vogue. She lives in London with her husband, a Member of Parliament, and their two children.