



# The Real Mrs Miniver: A Biography

*Ysenda Maxtone Graham*

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In 1937 the Court Page of the London Times began publishing a series of articles featuring a charming, upper-middle class English housewife named Mrs Miniver. The articles depicted an idyllically happy family with three children, a house in London, and a country cottage called Starlings.

Two years later, *Mrs Miniver* was published in book form. While some critics derided the book as sentimental, many readers embraced it as a symbol of an increasingly endangered English way of life, and it went on to become the #1 bestseller in America. The Hollywood film, released in 1942 with Greer Garson in the title role, won five Oscars, including Best Picture, and did so much to promote the American war effort in Europe that even Josef Goebbels recognized it as an exemplary piece of propaganda.

But who was the real Mrs Miniver? The articles were produced by Joyce Maxtone Graham, who wrote under the name Jan Struther and seemed to resemble her heroine: She was upper-middle class, and lived in a gracious, comfortable home with her husband and three children. After the war broke out, she served as an unofficial ambassador from Great Britain to the U.S.

In truth, however, Jan Struther was not at all like the conventional Mrs Miniver. It wasn't merely that she didn't like tea--to the amazement of everyone in America--but her real life was neither simple nor saintly. Her marriage was ending, and she was secretly in love with a Jewish refugee from Nazi Austria.

Written by Jan Struther's granddaughter Ysenda Maxtone Graham, *The Real Mrs Miniver* is a complex and fascinating biography. While the Hollywood version remains a powerful and inspirational movie, this book offers brilliant insights into the true impact of war upon real people's lives.

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