



The BBC has turned the royal brothers' already fiery relationship with the press into a raging bonfire, writes **Kerry Parnell**

They have never been fans of the press, but thanks to an explosive new documentary in the UK, Prince William and Prince Harry's tumultuous relationship with the British media is back in the headlines this week.

The Princes And The Press debuted on the BBC on Monday, with journalist Amol Rajan taking a no holds-barred look at William and Harry's uneasy alliance with the British media and each other.

From tabloids exposing secrets, to palace leaks and a reported war of the royal houses, it unveiled a veritable Game Of Thrones.

So how do the two princes move on from here?

According to Rajan, William — once derided by the British press as Workshy Wills — is now taking a statesmanlike approach, employing a seasoned team of advisers and working with reporters he hasn't always looked kindly upon.

Harry, meanwhile, is more combative. He has long struggled to contain his dislike for the press pack — openly glowering at them when they follow him on official duties and even conducting his engagement announcement across a pond from photographers in Kensington Palace Gardens.

Meghan did not meet the royal press corps, as other brides did, and Harry famously told reporters accompanying him on his and Meghan's 2018 tour of Australia: "Thanks very much for coming, guys, not that you were invited."

Harry confirmed he and Meghan were dating with a fiery rebuke to the press in 2016.

"This is not a game," his statement said, attacking "the smear on the front page of a national newspaper; the racial undertones of comment pieces; and the outright sexism and racism of social media trolls and web article comments."

"It was a hot tongue of flame, that statement," BBC royal correspondent Jonny Dymond says in the documentary.

It also worked, for a while.



Prince William issued a joint statement with the Queen and Prince Charles hitting back at 'overblown and unfounded claims from unnamed sources' in the documentary; Prince Harry and wife Meghan (below) have taken their fight with the press to the courts.



Catherine Middleton gets the kind of in-your-face media attention that so riled the royal brothers, in 2007.

In 2017 Harry's approval ratings were higher than William's, for the first time, culminating in his and Meghan's joyous wedding in May 2018, despite the pair initially banning print media from inside St George's Chapel, eventually allowing one reporter in to cover the event.

According to royal correspondents, negative briefings about problems in the palace began just days after the wedding, but they resisted printing critical stories for about six months after the pair wed, despite what they describe as a torrent of leaks coming their way.

It was showbiz reporter Dan

Wootton who finally cracked in November 2018, with the now-notorious Tiaragate in The Sun, stating Meghan reportedly wanted to wear a different tiara to the one the Queen lent her, leading to Harry declaring: "What Meghan wants, Meghan gets."

After that, it was game over for Harry and Meghan with the British media and they began several court cases, from phone hacking to libel and invasion of privacy.

In the documentary, Meghan filled her lawyer Jenny Afia from Schillings to answer questions.

"Those stories were false," she said, regarding reports the Duchess of Sussex was too demanding to staff. Buckingham Palace is currently investigating allegations of bullying.

The problem is, UK Telegraph associate editor Camilla Tominey says, royals want to control the narrative and want to make sure nothing negative is printed.

"The princes would rather nothing negative ever appeared in the press about them and employ people to spin in their favour," she writes.

"It is the job of a journalist to see through that spin and report what is really going on in a fair, accurate and contemporaneous manner — whether the royal family like it or not."

She also blows up the myth the

palace directly briefs journalists with nasty stories about each other.

"Funnily enough, they don't call us up saying: 'You'll never believe what Meghan did today.'"

"I can honestly say that in my 16 years covering the royal family, I don't think I have ever been called by the Palace press office and actively briefed a story. That's not how it works."

But the palace does leak.

"Within each household there is still this competitiveness about getting publicity for their causes," Sky News royal correspondent Rhiannon Mills says. The Times royal correspondent Valentine Low says: "This is people leaking stories who maybe one removed from the central action ... two removed ... or possibly they are right in the centre of the action and are being very naughty."

The royal houses — Buckingham Palace for the Queen, Clarence House for Prince Charles, Kensington Palace for Prince William and now Archewell for Prince Harry — are separate silos that work independently of each other and not always harmoniously.

The rule is when one senior royal is conducting a tour or announcing an initiative, another royal does not "steal the front page" from them, but it doesn't stop each house trying to get better publicity than the others.

Buckingham Palace, Clarence House and Kensington Palace did work together though in response to the documentary, issuing a joint statement.

"A free, responsible and open press is of vital importance to a healthy democracy," it said.

"However, too often overblown and unfounded claims from unnamed sources are presented as facts and it is disappointing when anyone, including the BBC, gives them credibility."

It was subsequently reported William and Catherine have given the TV coverage of an upcoming Christmas carol service the Duchess is hosting in Westminster Abbey to ITV, rather than the BBC.

Prince Harry, meanwhile, has turned tackling misinformation into a mission — working with the Aspen Commission to create a 15-point action plan on fake news.

"For the better part of a year, we at the Aspen Commission have met regularly to debate, discuss and draft solutions to the mis- and disinformation crisis, which is a global humanitarian issue," he said.

"I hope to see the substantive and practical recommendations of our commission taken up by the tech industry, the media industry, by policymakers, and leaders. This affects not some of us, but all of us."