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- » Carrying the weight of history on her shoulders
- » Following in her family's footsteps
- » Being a multi-tasking Queen and mother
- » Understanding the secrets of Elizabeth's success

Chapter 1

Queen Elizabeth II: A Global Icon

Great Britain is the only country in the world without a name on its postage stamps. This is not just because Britain invented adhesive postage stamps with a 'we were here first' attitude when it comes to mail; it's also because Brits reckon an image is all that's needed for others to recognize where UK mail has come from.

The image is not a map, nor a man-made feature, nor an animal. It is a portrait of the *Head of State*, meaning Britain's reigning monarch. For almost three-quarters of a century, longer than any other person to hold the office, Great Britain's stamps have been adorned by the profile of Queen Elizabeth II.



REMEMBER

Since the time of Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547 – see the nearby sidebar to find out what 'r.' means), England's monarchs have been called 'Your Majesty'. The title had previously been used only for God. The weight of history grows heavier if we give the Queen her full title: 'Elizabeth II, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of her other realms and territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith.' That's quite a mouthful!

REIGNS AND LIVES

Dates prefaced by an 'r.' are the years of a monarch's reign. Dates given without an 'r.' are the years of a person's life or an event. A single date preceded by a 'b.' is the year a person was born.



TIP

The inheritance is as daunting as the job title. As we get to grips with what makes Elizabeth tick, bear in mind that she sees herself as a sort of athlete in a relay race. The royal baton was handed to her by her father (see Chapters 5 and 6); her job is to hand it on intact to her heir. That, above all, is what drives her.



REMEMBER

Throughout this book, you'll encounter Elizabeth's extended family, heirs, and line of succession. Check out Figure 1-1 for a diagram explaining who's who in the modern Royal Family (and flick back to this page as you're reading through the book – I honestly don't expect you to memorize this sort of thing!).

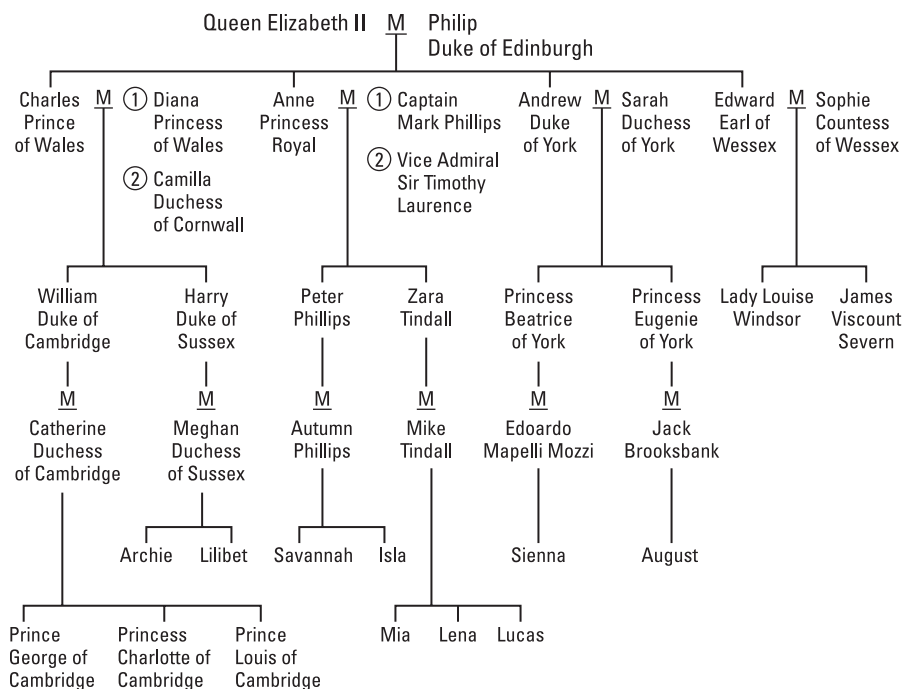


FIGURE 1-1: Queen Elizabeth II's family tree.

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This chapter looks more closely at the Queen's historic inheritance and the range of work involved in trying to maintain it. It concludes with a few suggestions as to why, showing stoic toughness and blessed with not a little luck, in most people's opinion by the time of her Platinum Jubilee (2022), she had made a fair fist of it.

Carrying the Weight of History

Queen Elizabeth's paternal grandmother, Queen Mary, sometime Empress of India, was an impressive figure. She demanded that Elizabeth curtsy whenever they met, and instructed her awestruck grandchild that kings and queens never smiled in public.

Though no academic, Queen Mary was a keen historian. Her specialization was genealogy, specifically the genealogy of her family. Born in 1867, she clearly remembered Queen Victoria (r. 1837–1901) and proudly recalled how King George III (r. 1760–1820) was her great-grandfather (find out more about these monarchs in Chapter 3). From this austere figure of her impressionable childhood years, Elizabeth was left in no doubt as to the weighty significance of her royal heritage.



Perhaps appropriately, in 1913, Britain's latest armour-plated battlecruiser was named after Queen Mary. It lasted less well than its namesake, exploding and sinking during the Battle of Jutland, 1916, in World War I.

You can read more about Queen Mary in Chapter 4.

Heading up a monarchy 1,500 years in the making

Elizabeth was born in 1926. Though Britain had been severely shaken by the bloodletting and vast expenditure of World War I (1914–1918), during the years of the Princess' childhood it was still a major world power. Its industry and commerce were formidable. The sprawling British empire – the largest the world had ever seen – remained more or less intact. If self-governing Dominions (see Chapter 10) were included, it stretched from New Zealand via India and large swathes of Africa to northern Canada.

That a country less than half the size of Texas should achieve so much was a source of national pride. This was reflected in the history taught to the young Elizabeth by family members and tutors (see Chapter 4 for more on her early life). She learned that, though there had been setbacks, British history was generally a

story of progress. And a number of worthy monarchs had sometimes been part of that progress.

Here are a few of the more important ones she may have been told about:

- » **Alfred the Great (r. 871–899):** The doughty King of Wessex (an Anglo-Saxon kingdom in southwest England) who resisted and then overcame an invasion by barbaric Vikings.
- » **William the Conqueror (r. 1066–1087):** The Duke of Normandy in northern France who seized the English throne, thereby paving the way for his country to become a major European power.
- » **Henry V (r. 1413–1422):** A warrior king whose victory over the French at the Battle of Agincourt (1415) inspired William Shakespeare's memorable patriotic verses.
- » **Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547):** A ruthless patriot who freed England from papal (Catholic) interference and put himself at the head of the Church of England.
- » **Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603):** A potential role model for Elizabeth II (though she denied it!) who demonstrated how a queen could reign as competently as any king.
- » **Charles II (r. 1660–1685):** A highly intelligent king with an innate political sense who guided the monarchy through a tricky post-republican era.
- » **Victoria (r. 1837–1901):** Elizabeth's great-great-grandmother whose reign laid the foundations of Britain's modern constitutional monarchy.

As well as these stand-out characters, the young Elizabeth would probably have found out about a whole host of others. A good many were pretty average. She can't have imagined enjoying a tea party with the ineffective Henry VI (r. 1422–1461) or the oddly named Harthacnut (r. 940–942). Nor with George I, who spoke scarcely any English. And poor Edward V (r. 1483) wasn't on the throne long enough to take tea with anyone. (Not that the Brits knew what tea was back then.)

Did the Princess thrill at the martial exploits of the warrior king Edward III (r. 1327–1377)? Was she fascinated by the idea that monarchs, like her doting but grumpy grandfather George V (r. 1910–1936), were placed on the throne by God, as propounded by James I of England (r. 1603–1625; aka King James VI of Scotland)? Maybe some of the tales she heard gave her nightmares. According to Shakespeare, the source of all the best stories of medieval skullduggery, Richard II (r. 1377–1399) was slain with an axe, John (r. 1199–1216) was poisoned by a monk, and Richard III (r. 1483–1485) had two little princes murdered in the Tower of London.



The sovereigns I've mentioned are by no means a complete list and the details offered are scanty. Don't worry, we'll meet them again in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3. They are here simply to illustrate the enormous weight of history that bore down on Elizabeth's shoulders the moment she knew she was destined to wear the Crown. Whatever she thought of the long line of kings and queens who came before her, she was their heir and could never, ever forget it.

She owed it to them, and to history, not to mess things up.

Ruling the jig-saw kingdom

Non-Brits frequently refer to Elizabeth II as Queen of England. Though this is not wrong, it is incomplete. The reason why becomes apparent when scrolling down the list of countries that springs up automatically when completing an online form. After searching in vain for 'England' or even 'Britain', down among the 'U's one finds 'United Kingdom' between 'United Arab Emirates' and 'United States'. In the British Isles, Elizabeth is Queen of the United Kingdom, a jig-saw realm.



Even Brits get confused by this one! The 'British Isles' is a geographical name for a group of 6,000+ islands off northwest Europe. The two largest are Britain (made up of the countries of England, Scotland and Wales) and Ireland. The 'United Kingdom' is the European bit of Elizabeth II's realm. It comprises England, Scotland and Wales, plus the province of Northern Ireland.

Like many countries, the United Kingdom started small and expanded over time. Between the years 43 and 410, England and Wales (but not Scotland or Ireland) were part of the Roman Empire. After the Romans left, the British Isles split up into a number of tribal units.

By the sixth century AD, some tribal chiefs were calling themselves kings, and may even have taken the title *Bretwalda* ('Britain ruler'). The title didn't mean much because England, let alone all Britain, was nowhere near a single kingdom, but it certainly made them sound more impressive.

The United Kingdom's jig-saw came together in four steps of unity:

- » In the ninth century AD, the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex fought back against Viking invaders from Scandinavia. Bit by bit, they added Viking and Anglo-Saxon territories to their realm until, by the time of King Athelstan (r. 895–939), all England lay within a single kingdom. Athelstan is Elizabeth II's thirtieth great-granduncle.

- » The *Normans* (meaning ‘Northmen’ from Normandy in modern-day France) conquered England in 1066 and then Ireland in the late twelfth century. With two of its four constituent parts in place, the United Kingdom was now half-way there. The English and Irish parliaments were amalgamated in 1801.
- » Wales was conquered by Edward I (r. 1277–1307) in the thirteenth century. To placate the Welsh, who had – and still have – their own ancient language, King Edward ‘gave’ them his infant son to be ‘Prince of Wales’. The title has been given to the heir apparent ever since (see the nearby sidebar). It currently belongs to Prince Charles, Elizabeth’s eldest son. With the addition of Wales, the United Kingdom was three-quarters complete.
- » Scotland took a long time to pull together its scattered and mountainous territories into a single kingdom, and finished the process only with the acquisition of the Orkney and Shetland Isles in 1472. The 1503 marriage of James IV (supposedly a distant ancestor of mine, r. 1488–1513) to a sister of England’s Henry VIII, laid the foundations for the union of the two crowns. This came about when Scotland’s James VI succeeded Queen Elizabeth to become James I of England. Full political union of England and Scotland followed in 1707.

But, of course, this is no more than a snapshot of the complex history of the United Kingdom! (See Chapter 2 for more details on the backstory of the British monarchy.)



WARNING

Readers with Irish ancestry may already know that the union outlined above did not last. In 1921, Southern Ireland (also known as Eire or the Republic of Ireland) left the UK after years of tension and bloodshed. As a result, Elizabeth is Queen of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. During her reign, more Irish troubles and a Scottish independence movement further threatened the unity of her realm (see Chapters 15 and 21).

WHAT’S AN HEIR APPARENT?

The person in line to succeed a monarch on their death or abdication is their *heir*. The *heir apparent*, traditionally a first-born son, is someone whose right to succeed cannot be taken away by the birth of someone else. An *heir presumptive*, often a first-born female or a cousin of the monarch, is an heir whose right to succeed is lost on the birth of a more eligible child.

Being one of the precious few queens



REMEMBER

Britain has had dozens of queens, but Elizabeth II is only the eighth to reign in her own right. The others acquired their status through marriage. For example, Elizabeth II's mother, born Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, became Queen Elizabeth when her husband inherited the throne as George VI in 1936. You can read more about the Queen's mum (unsurprisingly known later in life as, 'The Queen Mum', in Chapter 11).



TIP

The first monarch of a particular name is not given a number until a second person of that name takes the throne. Therefore, the first Queen Elizabeth (mentioned earlier in this chapter) was not Queen Elizabeth I until 1952, when the second Elizabeth came into her royal inheritance. Note that Miss Bowes-Lyon morphed into plain 'Queen Elizabeth', not Queen Elizabeth II. She was the King's *consort* (partner). Britain gives numbers only to monarchs who have reigned and not to their partners.

There are, therefore, two categories of queen:

- » *Queens consort*, who are married partners of kings.
- » *Queens regnant*, who are monarchs ruling by birthright.

Let's look more closely at these two queenly types.

Queens consort

All of Britain's monarchs were expected to marry, whether or not they liked the idea. It was basically in the job description. Some, such as Edward II (r. 1307–1327), did not and drew down the wrath of conservatives for openly favouring male friends. Others made multiple marriages. The best-known example is Henry VIII, whose rhyming 'divorced-beheaded-died-divorced-beheaded-survived' summary of the fate of his six wives is one of the few bits of monarchical history popular with school kids.



TIP

Royal marriage had a triple purpose:

- » **Providing a legitimate heir.** This gave the monarch pride in their dynastic prowess (because the ruling family's position had been secured) and removed the grim prospect of a disputed succession. British history is strewn with conflict between rivals for the Crown. The prime example is the so-called Wars of the Roses (1461–1487), when descendants of Edward III – the Lancastrians (using the symbol of a red rose) and the Yorkists (using the symbol of a white rose) – fought each other almost to extinction.

It is unlikely that the House of Windsor (Windsor is the Queen's family name) would have resorted to armed struggle if Queen Elizabeth, her son Prince Charles, or grandson Prince William had failed to produce an heir. Nevertheless, all three clearly took pride in their ability to fulfil their royal heir-making role.

- » **Facilitating and cementing political alliances.** Royal marriages were usually political arrangements. A good example is the marriage of Henry VIII's sister Margaret to Scotland's King James VI. The union initially failed to stop the two nations from going to war with each other, but it did eventually lead to the union of the two crowns in 1603. (See Chapter 2 for more about the tricky history of these two nations.)
- » **Providing a church-sanctioned outlet for royal sexual desires.** This was the least successful aspect of royal marriages. Adherence to a single partner is not something for which British monarchs (and their families) are renowned. Until relatively recently, royal mistresses were a lively feature of the court. The ten-year, four-child relationship between mistress Arabella Churchill and the future James II (r. 1685–1688) was the launch pad for one of Britain's most famous non-royal families (both Winston and his illustrious military ancestor John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough).

Numerous queens consort made their understandable disappointment at their husband's philandering abundantly clear, usually to no effect. Others simply accepted it as par for the course and hoped their loyalty would be rewarded in heaven. Some, showing an altogether more modern outlook, determined to make the most of their consort role. For example:

- » **Eleanor of Aquitaine**, a duchess in her own right whose lands added substantially to the empire of Henry II (r. 1154–1189), refused to play second fiddle to her ambitious, notoriously unfaithful husband, and even encouraged her sons to rebel against him.
- » **Queen Margaret of Anjou**, rather than her feeble husband Henry VI (r. 1422–1461), was the fulcrum of royal power during his troubled reign.
- » **Queen Henrietta Maria**, consort of Charles I (r. 1625–1649), wielded political and even military power during England's Civil War (1642–1645).

Readers might be shocked by the treatment of many queens consort, especially as their taking a lover was treated very differently from their husband's. While George I made no secret of his two mistresses – known behind his back as 'The Maypole' and 'The Elephant' – he divorced his wife and locked her up in a castle for the last 30 years of her life because of her alleged affair with a German count.



TIP

Was there a lesson in this for the young Queen Elizabeth II? Throughout history, the role of most queens had been to obey their husbands and produce heirs. Once the succession had been secured, many drifted into a life of respected irrelevance. That would not be Elizabeth's way. For inspiration, she needed to check out the seven female predecessors who had actually ruled – the queens regnant.

Queens regnant

The countries of Europe – as elsewhere – were traditionally unwilling to accept a female monarch. The French never did. This misogyny was endorsed by the male-dominated Roman Catholic Church. After the emergence of Protestantism in the sixteenth century, queens regnant became more common.

Here is a full list of Britain's queens regnant before Elizabeth II:

- » **Matilda (r. 1135–1153):** The history of Britain's queens regnant got off to a grim start. King Henry I (r. 1100–1134) made his barons swear to accept Matilda, his only surviving legitimate heir, as queen after his death. They reneged on their word immediately after Henry died. Matilda was never crowned and her reign was marked by incessant warfare.

This was one reason why Henry VIII was prepared to turn his kingdom upside down in order to get a male heir. (See Mary I and Elizabeth I, next on this list.)

- » **Mary I (r. 1553–1558):** Another uncomfortable chapter in the history of queens regnant. The first child of Henry VIII, the king who had broken with the Pope in order to get a male heir, Mary was determined to return her country to the Catholic fold. Her harsh religious repression, marriage to an unpopular and absentee Spanish husband, and military failure ensured 'Bloody Mary' had bad press.
- » **Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603):** Intelligent, politically adept, and served by able ministers, the 'Virgin Queen' (that's where the US state of Virginia got its name from) finally showed that a woman could be as effective a ruler as any man. Her decision not to marry meant that there was no man to challenge her authority.
- » **Mary, Queen of Scots (r. 1542–1567):** Elizabeth I's captivating but incompetent Scottish cousin reinforced male prejudice against rule by a woman. Her short, troubled reign ended in enforced abdication (see Chapter 5 for an explanation of abdication).
- » **Mary II (r. 1688–1694):** Mary was invited to replace James II, her deeply unpopular Catholic father. She accepted on condition that her Dutch husband be crowned alongside her as King William III (r. 1688–1702). Though she played little part in affairs of state, there was some resentment at his remaining king after her death.

- » **Anne (r. 1702–1714):** Anne, another of James II's daughters, was a useful example for the future Elizabeth II. Unlike her sister Mary, Anne made it quite clear that she, not her husband, was the crowned Head of State.
- » **Victoria (r. 1837–1901):** Victoria's long reign established a template for the modern constitutional monarchy. Here was a pattern and example for Elizabeth II to follow. But would a Victorian-style monarchy still be relevant in the twenty-first century?



REMEMBER

The story told briefly above is essentially a happy one. It tells how outstanding queens consort were able to make their mark in a man's world, and how that world gradually came to accept a female monarch as queen regnant. This resulted from developments in society. With the exception of Elizabeth I, queens did not shape their own positions but adapted to them. Aided by their advisors, each re-interpreted the role of queen regnant to suit their personality and the mood of the times. On ascending the throne, Elizabeth II would have to do the same.

Following in the Footsteps of Grandpa and Daddy

Elizabeth II's understanding of her role was taken from the behaviour and attitudes of four predecessors, who were her

- » great-great-grandmother Queen Victoria (r. 1837–1901)
- » uncle King Edward VIII (r. 1936–1937)
- » grandfather King George V (r. 1910–1936)
- » father King George VI (r. 1937–1952)

The example set by her outgoing, pleasure-seeking great-grandfather, Edward VII (r. 1901–1910), was so beyond her capabilities that he can be discounted. In a similar vein, the example set by her abdicating uncle taught her how *not* to do the job.



REMEMBER

Queen Victoria was a strong role model because she was a woman. If she could survive and give her name to the age in which she lived, so could Elizabeth. However, the two never met and Victoria's influence was largely passed on indirectly through Elizabeth's father and grandfather. The messages she received from each, and from their queens, were broadly similar.

George V

George V was a dull, uninspiring man. At home he was a bullying tyrant who made the lives of his children a misery. In his role as monarch, he was strictly formal and deeply conservative, accepting change only when there was no alternative. His father, Edward VII, actually said that he thought that the British monarchy would end with his son. And yet, at a time when ancient monarchies all over Europe were toppling like ninepins, George survived. Why?

Four things kept him afloat:

- » **The country George led was successful in World War I.** Had Britain lost the war, its royal family would almost certainly have gone the way of those in Germany and Russia, becoming as extinct as the dinosaurs.
- » **George was presented as being in touch with the people.** This was thanks largely to the instincts of his indomitable wife, Queen Mary (see Chapter 4). During World War I, he inspected troops, visited hospitals, and announced that the Royal Family would share people's wartime deprivations by giving up alcohol.
- » **George and Mary offered themselves as the ideal, faithful, Christian married couple – a model for others to follow.** Society at large was always swimming with scandal, but not once did tongues wag about the private lives of this king and queen. Except, perhaps, when sharp-tongued subjects thanked God that they were not married to either.
- » **Perhaps most importantly, George was saved by his very ordinariness.** It's difficult to shoot at a target without colour or distinctive features.



REMEMBER

As a child, Elizabeth adored the man she once called 'Grandpa England', and he loved his little 'Lilibet'. She was only nine when he died, but by then she had absorbed from him an indelible image of what a monarch should be like.

George VI

Rather like his father, George VI is also credited by some as having saved the British monarchy. The threat this time was home grown. The decision of Edward VIII to prefer marriage with the American divorcee Wallis Simpson over the Crown brought the monarchy into serious disrepute. It fed republicanism and shook the foundations of the Empire that the monarch was supposed head of.

Fortunately, George lacked his brother's flair and imagination. The signal given to the fleet by Horatio Nelson before Britain's stunning naval victory at Trafalgar (1805) – 'England expects that every man will do his duty' – was engraved on

George's heart. He spoke with a stammer and was not very bright but, helped by his more outgoing wife and the loyalty of Winston Churchill, he played his part.

Such was the template Elizabeth inherited. Duty came first, above all other matters, even family. As she might have seen, however, successful monarchs rarely make successful parents. The Sword of State she would carry at her coronation was double-edged.

Wearing Many Different Hats

'Off with his head!' cries Queen Margaret in Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part III*. It is repeated by the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*, and thereafter (usually jokingly) by those wanting to get rid of someone who annoys them. It is a classic example of what we ordinary mortals imagine it is like to be a king or queen. Ask – and it is done. While you lie back and sip champagne.

Sure, modern monarchs do sip champagne. They don't have to worry about the price, either. But that's one of the perks of a mightily tough job. Tough not in the sense that they have to do a load of exhausting work like a gardener does, but because they rarely get a chance to properly relax. They're multi-taskers, on show 24/7.

Ruling in theory

Check out the UK's postage stamps, coins, bills, military lists, laws, law courts . . . there she is, Elizabeth II, Head of State. The monarch is the living embodiment of every country she heads. And the very second she passes away, her heir will become monarch in her place, because without a monarch all the countries she currently presides over would be headless.

Much of the job is strictly ceremonial: inspecting troops, signing bills into law, and so forth. Even this work can be trying. Not only does the Queen have to be on her best behaviour when performing the most mundane tasks – a stifled yawn would give the game away – but she may be called upon to do some strange things (see the sidebar, "Two birthdays and riding side-saddle" for example!).

Official business as Head of State gives the monarch considerable political influence at home and abroad. The UK's democratically elected Prime Minister discusses top-level politics with the Queen every week. She has to do her homework for the occasion, too, so she's not caught out.

TWO BIRTHDAYS AND RIDING SIDE-SADDLE

The monarch's birthday has long been celebrated with outdoor parades, parties and the like. Edward VII, a jolly fellow, decided that as the weather on his actual birthday (9 November) would probably be cold and wet, he should gift himself an official fair-weather birthday in June as well. The two-birthday tradition has persisted to this day.

Therefore, the Queen's official birthday is now on the second Saturday in June. It is marked by the Queen's Birthday Parade (also known as 'Trooping the Colour') at which Her Majesty – and thousands of tourists – watches a parade of mounted and unmounted soldiers and musicians.

Initially, Elizabeth herself participated on horseback. This required that she learn to ride side-saddle, with both her legs placed to one side of the horse's back. A 'lady' should never sit astride a horse, especially in public. How vulgar and suggestive would that be!

The monarch also meets with foreign heads of state and governments. These get-togethers are essentially apolitical. Nevertheless, a formal meeting that goes well can have political repercussions by sweetening relations between the two countries. Occasionally, a monarch is known to have had a direct impact on affairs. The meeting between King George VI and President Roosevelt in June 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II in Europe, was one such encounter. It is said that as a result FDR undertook to assist the UK and its allies in the upcoming conflict with Nazi Germany.

Running the family firm

In the Windsor family, Elizabeth rules, ok? The Queen made this clear from the outset, when she insisted that her husband walk behind her on formal occasions. As top dog, she is personally responsible for the Royal Family, the large administrative machinery of the Palace, and all royal residences and estates. ('The Palace'? What's that? Check out the nearby sidebar on this very subject.)

Elizabeth has a large staff to help her, of course, and over some aspects of her brief (notably her wayward family) she has little control. Even so, in all matters royal the buck stops with Elizabeth. From security at Balmoral Castle to Prince Andrew's headline-grabbing antics, and the performance of her horses at the Epsom Derby races, she has to keep at least half an eye on everything. Multi-tasking at its most demanding.

WHAT IS 'THE PALACE'?

Literally, 'the Palace' refers to Buckingham Palace, the Queen's primary residence in London. It is her place of work, her office, while other royal residences like Windsor Castle and Balmoral Castle are more places of leisure. The term 'Palace' is also used for the Queen and her household team of advisors, secretaries, and so on. The usage is like 'The White House' in the US and 'Downing Street' in the UK, where the building is shorthand for the organisation it houses.

And Being a Mum, Too

It is tough for working women with children to strike the right balance between caring for their offspring and doing the job for which they are paid. As explained in Chapter 17, the Queen does not receive a salary.



WARNING

Even so, her position requires a great deal of work. Perhaps I should rephrase that: she demands a great deal of work *from herself*. The monarch does not actually *have* to do anything except exist and wear a crown. There's no list of duties or obligations set out in a written constitution. What they do is up to them. However, precedent from Victoria's reign made it pretty clear that if a monarch does nothing to justify their privileged position, that position soon begins to look mighty precarious. (This is explained further in Chapter 3.) So, to keep her crown, Elizabeth must do the monarchy job.

What about family matters? With few exceptions, Europe's royal families have been notoriously incompetent at child-rearing. The Windsors are no exception. In earlier times, queens handed over their babies to wetnurses rather than themselves breastfeeding. In recent years, infants were passed to nannies and nursemaids so their parents were free to get on with their duties.

As Elizabeth's parents left their nine-month-old baby behind when they went on a royal tour in 1927, so Elizabeth and her husband Philip left the infant Prince Charles and his sister Anne when they went on protracted tours. Duty came first. They knew no different. Overt demonstrations of affection – touching, kissing, cuddling – are to some extent learned behaviours. Having not learned them from her parents, Elizabeth the mother was unable to practice them herself.

Of all the tasks laid at Elizabeth's door, mothering was the one she was least prepared for. As we shall see in later chapters, it was also the one at which she has been least successful.

The Secrets of Elizabeth's Success



REMEMBER

A 2020 survey showed that 76 percent of Brits liked their Queen. A sizeable 58 percent thought she had done a very good job since ascending the throne; another 24 percent reckoned she'd done 'fairly well'. That's a whopping 82 percent very or reasonably happy with her performance. In contrast, Prince Charles, her heir, had a popularity rating of only 45 percent; almost a third (28 percent) of his future subjects disliked him.

While these figures suggest that Elizabeth may not have secured the long-term future of Britain's quaint monarchical system, they make it clear that she's probably managed her inheritance as well as anyone could have done. A majority of Brits never want her to abdicate. They hope she'll go on wearing the Crown to the end.

Where does this public approval come from? Let's take a look at the secrets of Elizabeth's success.

She's been queen for a long time

In 2022, Elizabeth II is approaching her Platinum Jubilee (70 years as monarch). In the UK and around the world, she has been before the eyes and in the ears of the people she serves for nigh on seven decades. Familiarity has bred affection rather than contempt.

Like Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth I before her, Elizabeth II's longevity has allowed her to become part of the fabric of people's lives. The great majority have never known any other monarch. Just like familiar landmarks, such as London's Big Ben, she has always been there. Whatever people think of her, they find it hard to imagine a world without her.

The passage of time may have taken away Elizabeth's youthful good looks, but it has replaced them with something more precious. It has allowed her to appear indestructible and to re-invent herself as the global grandmother.

Everyone loves granny, don't they?

Her style has evolved and adapted

Elizabeth is well aware how important tradition is for the monarchy she heads. People instinctively like tradition. It provides a sense of stability and continuity in rapidly changing and often unsettling times. Trooping the Colour, the Changing of

the Guard at Buckingham Palace, the Queen's Christmas Broadcast (see Chapters 10 and 12) . . . these and similar events are like handrails, something to hold on to during a storm-tossed voyage.

Experience – sometimes bitter – has also taught Elizabeth that things cannot remain unchanged for ever. To survive, the monarchy must move with the times, or at least a few steps behind. The Queen is instinctively conservative by nature and has rarely initiated change. Instead, circumstances have forced her hand.

Elizabeth has, for example, attempted to narrow the gap between herself and her subjects by engaging in royal walkabouts (see Chapter 14) and moderating her cut-glass, upper-class accent (see Chapter 12). These small but significant adaptations have ensured that, in the eyes of many, the Queen has kept herself more or less in touch with the mood of her country.

She uses more carrot than stick

Walter Bagehot, the famous Victorian commentator on the British constitution (see Chapter 8), reckoned the monarchy had three remaining rights:

- » to be consulted
- » to encourage
- » to warn

We know that Elizabeth is consulted because she reads *state papers* (government papers) and has regular meetings with her prime ministers (see Chapter 8). What little we know about her encouragement and warning suggests that they are offered subtly.

Here's an example of this. In her 1983 Christmas message, the Queen suggested 'redressing the economic balance between nations' by a more generous sharing of technology between richer and poorer nations. The statement was both an encouragement for aid programmes and organizations like Oxfam, and an implied warning of what might happen if the gap between the haves and the have nots grew too wide.

The remark was certainly not strident. But it did give weight to a world view that was out of kilter with free market capitalism then in vogue in the US and UK. Its influence is hard to estimate, though advocates of larger aid budgets and charities such as Oxfam surely approved.

She's nothing if not discreet

Though she does not go as far as her grandmother and refuse to smile in public, Elizabeth is often accused of looking glum. Her expression is partly deliberate. We do not know whether she has read Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) – we don't know much about her reading and TV watching – but she is certainly aware of the thinking behind what Paine said about monarchy:

I compare it to something kept behind a curtain, about which there is a great deal of bustle and fuss, and a wonderful air of seeming solemnity; but when, by any accident, the curtain happens to be open — and the company see what it is, they burst into laughter.

With this in mind, Elizabeth knows how important it is to maintain at least some of that 'wonderful air of seeming solemnity'. Whatever happens, she is determined to maintain a degree of mystery about the institution she heads. If she lets in too much light, if too much is known about her thoughts and feelings, she becomes like everyone else. And if she's exactly like everyone else, then how can her privileged position be justified?

These then are her watchwords: duty and discretion. Though neither is particularly exciting, and certainly few modern celebrities would place them high on their list of priorities, over many years they have served Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II well enough.

