

QUEEN ELIZABETH II



Queen Elizabeth II was born in 1926. She was not destined to be queen but her uncle, Edward VIII, abdicated so her father then ascended the throne as King George VI. When he died in 1952, she became queen. At 69 years, she is the longest reigning of any British monarch.

ELIZABETH'S FAMILY LIFE

Queen Elizabeth II was born to King George VI and his wife Elizabeth. She only had one sibling, a sister named Margaret who died in 2002. In 1947, she was married to Prince Philip and they had four children; Charles, who will succeed her, Anne, Andrew and Edward.

ELIZABETH AND WORLD WAR TWO

During the Second World War, politicians suggested that Elizabeth and Margaret should be evacuated to Canada. The king refused to be parted from them and felt it was necessary to remain in Britain. In 1940, when Elizabeth was 14, she made a radio broadcast to all evacuees:

"We are trying to do all we can to help our gallant sailors, soldiers, and airmen, and we are trying, too, to bear our own share of the danger and sadness of war. We know, every one of us, that in the end all will be well."

Later on, she begged her father to allow her to do military service as she saw it as her duty. She joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service, training to be a driver and mechanic. On VE Day, she and her sister sneaked out of Buckingham Palace and joined the huge crowds celebrating the end of the war.



The Queen repairing a truck



ELIZABETH AND POST-WAR BRITAIN

Britain was a gloomy, depressed place after World War II. People were suffering the costs of the war; the economy was in a poor state, rationing continued until 1954, there was widespread bomb damage and many people were physically and mentally scarred by what they had lived through.

Even though Britain was victorious, its power and influence in the world was declining rapidly and its Empire was coming to an end. However, during the 1950s, optimism began to grow. There was the Festival of Britain in 1951, celebrating national achievements in art and

science, an event similar to Victoria and Albert's Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace. In 1953, the coronation of Elizabeth, which was the first to be televised, was very popular with the public as it gave them a sense of a new beginning. The economy also began to improve and unemployment was low.



The Queen with other Commonwealth leaders

ELIZABETH AND THE COMMONWEALTH

In 1953, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip embarked on a tour of thirteen British colonies to promote the idea of the Commonwealth. Nearly all former colonies gained their independence from Britain and joined the Commonwealth. Elizabeth has made many tours of foreign countries during her reign, especially to former colonies.

ELIZABETH AND THE MONARCHY

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy meaning the monarch has their authority limited by laws passed in Parliament. It is very different from an absolute monarchy like as Queen Elizabeth I's who had the power to do almost anything she chose. Queen Victoria was a constitutional monarch but still retained enough power to go against the will of Parliament which is unthinkable today. Queen Elizabeth, as constitutional monarch, is the head of British state but the Prime Minister is the head of government which makes the laws. The Queen has an interest in politics, meeting the Prime Minister each week, but she can't make her own political demands. The monarch's role is mostly symbolic and ceremonial, carrying out duties such as entertaining visiting heads of state and opening Parliament.



ELIZABETH'S CHARACTER

At her coronation, the Queen said of herself,

"I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong."

She loves her country and sees herself as its representative. Throughout her reign she has put service to Great Britain and the Commonwealth before her own feelings and wishes and remains neutral about all things political. One newspaper called her "Elizabeth the Silent" for her refusal to make public statements that even hint at her political views.

The Queen is very popular with people around the world especially in Commonwealth countries and is a respected by world leaders and politicians for her diplomacy and stable reign.