

The Queen



When Australia was discovered by Captain James Cook in 1770, George III was King. It was under his granddaughter Queen Victoria just 131 years later, that the Australian colonies federated into one sovereign and independent nation. Today Elizabeth II, the great-great granddaughter of Victoria is our present Queen.

Due to the difficulties and time taken in travelling from one side of the world to the other, it was impossible for earlier monarchs to visit Australia, although Queen Victoria did send her son Prince Alfred, the (then) Duke of Edinburgh, to Australia in 1867. Unfortunately Prince

Alfred was shot by an Irish rebel at Collaroy in Sydney but despite this upset, the two sons of Alfred's brother, the then Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, visited in 1881. One of these sons, the Duke of Cornwall, together with his wife, represented his grandmother Queen Victoria at the opening of the first Parliament in 1901. The Duke and Duchess were later to become King George V and Queen Mary.

The next royal visit was in 1920 by their son, Edward, Prince of Wales, later to become the uncrowned king Edward VIII.

In 1927 Prince Edward's brother Prince Albert Duke of York visited Australia together with his wife to open the (now old) Parliament House in Canberra. On Edward's abdication Albert became King as George VI and his wife, Queen Elizabeth now known as the late Queen Mother.

1934 saw a visit by their brother the Duke of Gloucester who returned after the war as Governor-General serving from 1946-7. The next royal visit was by Queen Elizabeth II with her husband the Duke of Edinburgh, in 1954. This was the first ever visit by a reigning monarch and since that time there have been numerous visits by Her Majesty and other members of the royal family.

The Queen's father became king on the abdication of her uncle King Edward VIII in 1936. Attitudes were different at that time and people were against his proposed marriage to a divorced woman. The Prime Minister of Australia was amongst those consulted and he was the first to respond with a vehement objection to the marriage.

No one ever thought at the time that Princess Elizabeth would ever become Queen. She was born on the 21st of April 1926 and named Elizabeth, not after Queen Elizabeth I, but after her mother. But when her father became King, Princess Elizabeth, only 9 years old, was trained for her future role as Queen.

Ever since the commencement of the second world war, Princess Elizabeth was determined to play her part and not sit idly by in spite of the onerous responsibilities which had been added to her educational studies. Reaching her 18th birthday, she joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service, training in driving and vehicle maintenance.

The Princess could easily have avoided joining up by simply claiming that by the time she was of age the end of the war would have been in sight. However, the calibre of the person who was to become our Queen can be found in the comment she made many years later namely that it was the only time in her life when she had been able seriously to test her own capabilities against others of her own age.

In 1947, Princess Elizabeth, in a broadcast to celebrate her 21st birthday whilst on a tour of South Africa, established the principles upon which she would reign with this extraordinary and inspiring vow:

"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 Commonwealth to which we all belong. But I shall not have strength to carry out this resolution unless you join in it with me, as I now invite you to do; I know that your support will be unfailingly given. God bless all of you who are willing to share it."

In July of that year, the Princess became engaged to her third cousin Prince Philip of Greece. They married on the 20th November 1947.

On the 6th February 1952, King George VI died and his daughter became Queen. Under the system of constitutional monarchy there is no break between reigns. This means that immediately one monarch dies, his or her heir becomes monarch. There is a phrase which describes this: 'The King is dead. God save the King'.

Queen Elizabeth was crowned on the 2nd June 1953. At her Coronation, Her Majesty swore an oath to govern the peoples of Australia and her other realms "according to their respective laws and customs". She had also said in a radio broadcast at the time: "I want to show that the Crown is not merely an abstract symbol of our unity but a personal and living bond between you and me."

She is unique in that she, more than any other king or queen who has gone before her, has selflessly dedicated her life to her people without regard for her own benefit or personal comfort. Indeed at no time has she ever not acted as we would expect or even lost her temper in public despite the many aggravations there must have been for her to do so.

During her long reign, she has travelled more miles than all of her prime ministers put together. She has read more state documents and discussed more issues with Commonwealth and foreign heads of state and government than any elected official. Her average work-day is as long as that of any Prime Minister.

When at Buckingham Palace, she usually commences work on the red dispatch boxes containing parliamentary and diplomatic papers immediately following breakfast. The boxes follow her wherever she travels along with a contingent of secretaries who handle possibly the most voluminous amount of correspondence any person in the world receives. It is a most amazing thing that a letter to the Prime Minister can take

anything up to three months to be acknowledged, whereas a letter to the Queen will generally be replied to within a fortnight!

Added to this is a schedule of appointments which would daunt most people. Rarely a day will pass without some sort of official function, either in the palace itself or somewhere in the country.

The position of 'Head of the Commonwealth' is one which the Queen greatly cherishes, but which also brings its own massive work-load. Her Majesty sees her position as a peacemaker and in this regard has achieved great success.

Visits to foreign and Commonwealth countries also consume a tremendous amount of time and are extremely onerous, particularly when one considers that the Queen is in her eighties and the Duke in his nineties!

The Queen has reigned for over sixty years and is the fifth monarch in British history to have done so. Her Majesty is now the oldest monarch to ever sit on the throne. Both George III and his granddaughter Victoria were 82 when they died.

Over the years the immense popularity earned by the Queen has transposed into a virtual veneration of Her Majesty, not just by monarchists but also by republicans.

This is possibly because Her Majesty represents ideals in a way politicians can never do. These ideals represent stability, continuity, security and the national good. Hundreds of charities and associations are helped through royal patronage. Thousands of the Queen's subjects receive messages sent on the occasion of special birthdays and wedding anniversaries.

Each year in June, Australians have a holiday called 'The Queen's Birthday Holiday' which has often received strong and often crude criticism from republicans and media alike. However, this holiday is Australia's oldest public holiday, having been so proclaimed by Captain Arthur Phillip just five months following his landing, on the 4th June 1788, that date being the actual birthday of King George III. Whilst Her Majesty was born on the 21st April 1926, the Australian Government continues to celebrate the birthday in June as a matter of convenience. If they were to celebrate it in April it would be too close to Easter. Western Australia actually observes the Queen's Birthday in September or October because it celebrates its Foundation Day in late May or early June.

In the United Kingdom, the official Queen's Birthday is not an official holiday but is also set on a Saturday in June because the weather is warmer and more conducive for crowds to view the ceremony of Trooping the Colour.

The Queen's Birthday is also celebrated as a holiday in most Commonwealth countries which have her as their Sovereign. Even Fiji, although now a republic, has retained its Queen's Birthday Holiday. Canada celebrates its Queen's Birthday on the Monday on or before 24 May which was the birthday of Queen Victoria.

As Head of the Commonwealth, The Queen brings together 53 independent countries into one voluntary association. Her Majesty personally knows all of the Heads of State and Government.

As Sovereign, The Queen is the authority from which all official honours, decorations and medals emanate. The Queen is Sovereign of the Order of Australia together with all other Australian civic and military Orders.

When in Canada in 1987, The Queen described our monarchical system of government as follows: "*Parliamentary democracy has fostered tolerance and flexibility - a good balance between individual rights and collective responsibilities. And this is because the constitutional monarchy has always placed the emphasis on people in community - as it were, a national family with the Sovereign as its head.*"

Whenever asked about being replaced by a President, Her Majesty has always said that "*it is a matter for the Australian people to decide.*" That is our system and that is why it works so very well.

QUESTIONS

What is the date of the Queen's birth?

Who was she named after?

Did Princess Elizabeth avoid war service?

What did Princess Elizabeth declare she would do in a broadcast on her 21st birthday?

What date did Princess Elizabeth become Queen?

Why?

What does the Queen's average day consist of?

How long has the Queen reigned?

What is Australia's oldest public holiday?

When in Canada in 1987, what did the Queen say constitutional monarchy places emphasis on?

If the Queen was asked a question about the republic, what would she say?