

ROYAL ESTATE
Sandringham

The life and times of Queen Elizabeth II



Photo Credit: Julian Calder

Educational Resource

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Queen Elizabeth II

Princess Elizabeth Alexandra Mary was born by caesarean section on 21 April 1926 at 17, Bruton Street, London and later christened at the private chapel at Buckingham Palace.

She was the first child of “Bertie”, Duke of York, who was to become King George VI.

Childhood

Princess Elizabeth, or “Lilibet” as she was always known by her family and close friends, was a pretty baby with big blue eyes and golden hair. She was christened on 29 May 1926. Her christening gown had been worn previously by her grandfather, King George V, and her uncle, Edward, Prince of Wales. It was made of the finest Honiton lace and, for Elizabeth, was tied with pink ribbons.

Later in 1926 her parents, the Duke and Duchess of York, (the Duchess reluctantly because of her baby) agreed to embark on a tour of the Commonwealth. They left early in 1927 and were separated from their young daughter for several months. Every four weeks or so the Princess sat for new portrait photographs which were telegraphed to the Duke and Duchess at their ports of call.

Princess Elizabeth’s parents returned to London in June 1927 bringing hundreds of gifts for her, many of which had been given to them to give to their baby. The York family then moved into 145 Piccadilly where they were to live for nine and a half years enjoying a happy family life. Princess Elizabeth idolised her father and as she grew up, she seemed to model herself on him.

Princess Elizabeth developed a strong attachment to animals, especially dogs, and at the age of seven she had her first corgi called Dookie. This set a pattern for her entire life since, as Princess and later as Queen, she was surrounded by dogs at every opportunity, many of which she bred, and corgis became one of her trademarks.

As a child, the Princess’s favourite games involved playing at horses and she began learning to ride at the age of five on a Shetland pony called Peggy, who was given to her by her grandfather, The King. Horses were always an important part of her life and time with them, riding them, deciding breeding strategies or racing them, was one of the Queen’s favourite ways to relax.





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Christmas at Sandringham

Christmas at Sandringham as a child was a magical time for the Princess. In the Ballroom of the House stood a magnificently decorated eighteen-foot Christmas tree freshly cut on the Sandringham Estate and next to it were tables piled high with exquisitely wrapped gifts labelled individually by the royal couple for their guests. King George V and Queen Mary joined the children in hanging the gifts from the branches of the tree.

On Christmas morning, the Royal Family walked across the lawn to the local Church of St Mary Magdalene (Sandringham Church) before returning to the House for a five-course Christmas lunch. Afternoon tea was served at four and then the family presented gifts to a long line of staff in the Ballroom. Three hours later, a six-course dinner was served to the adults! On New Year's Eve, there were games and drinks.

Princess Elizabeth's second Christmas was really extra-special as the King and Queen converted a railway coach into what was described as "a fairy land". Around the sides of the coach bunches of holly were intertwined with glittering silver foil. From the roof hung a huge Christmas cracker, the cushions were covered with printed chintz representing fairy stories and on the floor was a picture rug.

A Sister

A sister to Princess Elizabeth was born on 21 August 1930 and she was named Margaret Rose. Princess Elizabeth called her "Bud", for, as she explained, her sister was too young to be a rose yet. The sisters were educated at home in a sunny room filled with maps and books. They developed very different personalities. Princess Elizabeth was conscientious, serious and attentive to detail with a definite "Royal" air about her; Princess Margaret was precocious, boisterous and always in mischief.

Death of The King

Early in 1936, George V, known to his grandchildren as "Grandpapa England", took to his bed at Sandringham and their grandmother, Queen Mary, took the Princesses out for a walk in the snow and explained that their grandfather was very ill. Princess Elizabeth was taken in to say goodbye to him and looked very unhappy when she and her sister left for home. King George V died just before midnight on 20 January 1936.

Bertie's elder brother became King Edward VIII, but he reigned for only 325 days and the last months of 1936 were predominated by the abdication crisis. Immediately upon Edward VIII's abdication Elizabeth's parents, the Duke and Duchess of York, became the new King and Queen: George VI and Queen Elizabeth. Princess Elizabeth then became the "Heir Presumptive" to the British Throne and the family moved to Buckingham Palace. At that point she was not "Heir Apparent" as it was still possible that the King and Queen may have had a son, who at that time, would have taken precedence over Elizabeth.

Despite their new duties The King and Queen did as much as they could to continue to give the two princesses as happy and carefree a childhood as was possible.





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Princess Elizabeth Falls in Love

In the summer of 1939, the King decided to retire the Royal Yacht “Victoria and Albert” which was no longer seaworthy, but firstly he insisted on making a nostalgic last voyage aboard her with his family to Dartmouth Naval College. It was here that Princess Elizabeth was to meet Prince Philip of Greece. She was thirteen years old.

Prince Philip was eighteen years old and with Viking colouring and natural good looks. Lord Mountbatten, the Prince’s uncle, noticed that Princess Elizabeth “stared at him (Philip) and for the rest of the day followed him everywhere”. As they left, Philip showed off by rowing dangerously near the Royal Yacht as it sailed away with the Royal Family on board. He clearly made a very strong impression on Princess Elizabeth.

Philip was actually of Danish rather than Greek descent. The Danes had been invited to hold the Greek throne in 1863 after Greece had achieved independence from Turkey. Philip was of the Danish royal house; named Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg. Through his mother he was also a great-great grandchild of Queen Victoria.

The Second World War

When war broke out in September 1939, the Princesses initially stayed up in Scotland and then, as usual, went to Sandringham for Christmas. In the New Year of 1940, the Princesses went straight from Sandringham to Royal Lodge at Windsor and then in the summer of that year they moved into the Castle itself and were to spend most of the war years there. The King and Queen refused to leave the United Kingdom and they moved between Buckingham Palace and seeing their daughters at Windsor despite the dangers to their safety. The Queen even learnt to fire a revolver.

During the war when Prince Philip was at sea and on active service, he and Princess Elizabeth wrote to each other and occasionally he visited Windsor whilst on leave. The Princess had a photograph of him on her bedside table.

Early in 1945, Princess Elizabeth enlisted in the ATS (Army Territorial Services). Although she did not sleep in one of the dormitory huts nor have her hair checked for nits, she did make a genuine attempt to be part of the war effort. She learnt to drive, including driving heavy trucks and was instructed in the maintenance of vehicles. The Princess ate in the Officers’ Mess each day where the diet sometimes consisted of horsemeat and soggy greens and pilchards in tomato sauce, although she did have a small jug of condensed milk which was a treat that nobody else enjoyed. Each evening she drove back to Windsor for work on Constitutional Law and Politics.

At the end of the summer of 1946, the King agreed to an informal engagement between Prince Philip and Princess Elizabeth. However, he wanted to make sure that his daughter was certain of her choice and so insisted that she took part in the royal tour to South Africa starting in February 1947. She did reluctantly, but she remained true to Philip and pined for ten weeks. The South African tour marked the first ever twenty-first birthday celebrations in one of the Dominions by an heir to the British Throne. Princess Elizabeth made her dedication-speech offering her whole life “whether it be long or short, to be devoted to the service of my people”.





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A Fairytale Wedding

On 28 February 1947, Prince Philip of Greece became a British subject, Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten, RN. The engagement was officially announced on 10 July 1947. Prince Philip was created His Royal Highness and, amongst other titles, was given the title of the Duke of Edinburgh.

The wedding took place on 20th November 1947 at Westminster Abbey. Princess Elizabeth's gold wedding ring was made from the same Welsh nugget from which her mother's ring had been made. After a luncheon for 150 at the Palace, where the couple appeared to cheers on the balcony, they honeymooned at Broadlands in Hampshire, the Mountbatten estate.

The newly-weds took a Royal train from Waterloo station to Hampshire. Staff were carrying seventeen pieces of luggage: fifteen were the Princess's and two were Prince Philip's! The dining car was elaborately set out for tea, and amongst the entourage was the Princess's favourite corgi: Susan. Susan died in 1959 and her grave can be found in the grounds of Sandringham.

Family Life

In January 1948, the couple were living at Buckingham Palace while Prince Philip was working at the Admiralty. They moved into Kensington Palace at the end of the month and then by February, Princess Elizabeth was pregnant. In March, Prince Philip left the Admiralty and took an officer training course at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich.

On 14th November 1948 the Princess gave birth to a son to be named Charles Philip Arthur George. He was born at Buckingham Palace and weighed in at 7lb and 6oz.

Meanwhile, King George VI was suffering from ill health and he was diagnosed as having arteriosclerosis (obstruction to the arteries of his legs). He underwent massages and homeopathic remedies and had a successful operation in the spring of 1949.

Towards the end of that year, the Prince and Princess moved into Clarence House which had been refurbished for them to their taste and design and then in November, Prince Philip took up Naval duties in Malta as he had been lobbying the King to be allowed back to sea. Princess Elizabeth flew out to join him four days later and they spent an enjoyable few weeks together swimming and picnicking in secluded coves. She became pregnant with her second child. The Princess then gave birth to Princess Anne Elizabeth Alice Louise on 15 August 1950 at Clarence House.

The Princess was enjoying being a wife and mother before taking on the more onerous duties which she knew lay ahead for her as Queen.





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The Kings Illness

By late May 1951, the King was again unwell and went down with severe influenza. His left lung was infected and during tests his doctors saw a suspicious shadow. Princess Elizabeth deputised for him at the Trooping of the Colour in the June and it was clear that she might have to become Regent, so Prince Philip returned to her side from his naval duties.

The King's health became worse and it was confirmed that he had cancer. He was operated on to have a lung removed, but was unaware of the seriousness of the operation and he personally never knew he had cancer. Queen Elizabeth did know.

By Christmas 1951, the King seemed much improved although his broadcasted message was rather faltering; his voice being weak and he sounded exhausted. It was decided that Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip should begin the planned tour of Australasia without him and an initial stop in Kenya was included at the Princess's request. The King travelled to Heathrow Airport to wave his daughter and son-in-law off on their tour. He then returned to Sandringham.

On the morning of the 6th February 1952, the King died. He was found by his valet when he went into the Royal bedroom at Sandringham with the King's breakfast. Queen Elizabeth was informed and then Princess Margaret who was inconsolable. Prince Philip broke the news to his wife when it reached Kenya. By the time he spoke to her she was already the new Queen and the couple flew back to England straight away.

The Coronation

The Coronation took place on a very wet and soggy 2 June 1953. The Queen wore a heavy purple velvet and ermine robe over a coronation gown with a long train. The dress itself was made by Norman Hartnell and was smothered in jewels, lined with layers of taffeta and crinoline and stiffened with horsehair. It was decorated to reflect the nations of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth. Hartnell was concerned about the weight of the dress causing The Queen to stumble and so, without her knowledge, he sewed a tiny four-leaf clover of emerald spangles into it for luck. The Queen had practiced her role and walking with the heavy robes and train in the corridors of Buckingham Palace.

The Queen decided that she would rule using her first name "Elizabeth" and hence became "Elizabeth II". She also decided that the surname "Mountbatten-Windsor" would be used by her male descendants and their children other than those entitled to use the title 'Royal Highness' and 'Prince' or 'Princess'. However, she herself retained the name of "Windsor" alone as did her three children. This was her way of perpetuating her husband's family name. In later years even direct descendants of The Queen who have Prince/Princess or HRH titles and who need not adopt a surname have used the name "Mountbatten-Windsor".



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HMY Britannia

On 16 April 1953, The Queen launched Her Majesty's Yacht "Britannia". The yacht had been commissioned by her father, but he had not lived to see it built. The shipbuilders had received the order from the King for his new yacht only two days before he died. Prince Philip had played a major role in the design of the yacht and the family's accommodation within it. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh used the yacht for over 40 years as a private family home for holidays, away from prying eyes, but also to travel the World, holding receptions and investitures etc on board. She was the first Royal yacht which was built with complete ocean-going capacity.

An Expanding Family

On 19 February 1960, The Queen gave birth to a second son, Prince Andrew Albert Christian Edward at Buckingham Palace. He was the first child to be born to a reigning monarch since Queen Victoria's last child, Princess Beatrice in 1857. He was christened on 8 April in the Music Room at the Palace.

The Queen's sister, Princess Margaret, became engaged to Antony Armstrong-Jones and the wedding took place at Westminster Abbey on 6 May 1960. The Duke of Edinburgh gave the bride away. Princess Anne was one of the bridesmaids.

In 1963, The Queen became pregnant for a fourth time. After Christmas at Sandringham with the family in high spirits, the new year began quietly. The Queen gave birth to another son on 10 March 1964 who was named Edward Antony Richard Louis. The Queen was tired and weak and she was ordered to have complete rest.

From 1964, Christmas was spent at Windsor for some years due to the growth in the number of members of the Royal Family and some major demolition work which was undertaken at Sandringham to streamline and modernise the service areas of the House. However, from the 1990s, the Royal Family once again returned to enjoying the traditional Christmas festivities at Sandringham.

Death of the Duke of Windsor

In 1972, The Queen learned that her Uncle David, the Duke of Windsor (formerly King Edward VIII) was seriously ill with cancer. She visited him in Paris while she was on a state visit to France. He passed away late in May and she arranged for the Duchess of Windsor (formerly Mrs Wallis Simpson) to come to Buckingham Palace and then onto Windsor where she joined the other members of the family for the Duke of Windsor's funeral and burial at Frogmore.





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The Silver Jubilee

In May of 1977, The Queen was present at the opening of Sandringham House to the public during the summer months, breaking all tradition in an effort to raise money to pay for expensive repairs.

1977 was also The Queen's Silver Jubilee year. She had been Queen for 25 years. She had very much settled into her role and was respected for her steadfastness and calm and cautious approach to difficult situations. To mark the occasion, Prince Philip gave her a painting of three of her favourite mares with their foals in a paddock at Wolferton near Sandringham House with the red roofs of estate cottages in the distance.

On 7 June, the Silver Jubilee celebrations took place. Over a million people (probably more than had attended the coronation) crammed the Mall and the other famous London streets as the gilded State Coach carried The Queen and Prince Philip from Buckingham Palace to a Service of Celebration at St. Paul's Cathedral. After the Service, The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh began a "walkabout", meeting the crowds and shaking hands. The Queen and the Duke were well known for this. They were greeted with cheers and well-wishes wherever they went which included a tour of the United Kingdom and a visit to Canada.

Troubled Years

On 27 August 1979, the Duke of Edinburgh's uncle, Lord Louis Mountbatten and three members of his family, were assassinated by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Mullaghmore, Ireland where the family were holidaying. Lord Louis had been a significant, if controversial, figure during the Second World War and he had been the last British Viceroy of India. His assassination shocked the nation and the Royal Family. He was given a State Funeral and The Queen led the tributes to him. She wrote of her "bitter anger" at his murder. Many years later, The Queen went out of her way on a visit to Ireland to meet the ex-leader of the IRA and to shake his hand in order to show forgiveness and peace.

On 13 June 1981, an attempt was made on The Queen's life while she was riding side-saddle on her horse Burmese to the Horse Guard's Parade for the Trooping the Colour. A 17 year old youth fired a pistol at her and was then seized by the police and The Queen, unhurt but shaken, continued. The bullets were found to be blanks.

In 1982 the Falklands War broke out and The Queen's son Prince Andrew served as a sub-lieutenant flying helicopters from the aircraft carrier "Invincible". Fortunately, by mid-June the war ended with the Argentinean's surrender.

On 9 July of that year, an intruder managed to get into The Queen's bedroom while she was asleep and, despite her pressing an alarm button and telephoning for security, nothing happened. The Queen was furious with the lack of security. A number of people in the Palace had noticed the man but had failed to do anything about it. The man claimed that his aim had been to highlight The Queen's lack of safety: this he achieved and security measures were stepped up.





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On 20th November 1992, fire broke out at Windsor Castle in The Queen's Private Chapel, causing considerable damage to several apartments. In order to raise money for the restoration, in 1993 The Queen allowed the State Rooms of Buckingham Palace to be opened for the first time to the public during the summer, a practice which has continued every year since. The Duke of Edinburgh led a very successful project to reinstate the Castle to its former glory.

The tragic death of The Prince of Wales's ex-wife, Diana, Princess of Wales, in a car accident in Paris on 31 August 1997 caused widespread mourning. The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh stayed with their grandsons, Diana's beloved boys, in Balmoral where had been holidaying. Later that week they all travelled together to London and The Queen broadcast to the nation on the eve of the Princess's funeral, paying tribute to Diana's life and work.

In December 1997, HMY Britannia was decommissioned after 44 years of service. It was a great sadness to The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. She had been a wonderful resource for them and had travelled over one million nautical miles and carried the Royal family to over seven hundred official engagements at home and abroad. She was also used as a base for some successful commercial programmes, demonstrating British skills and achievements. The British Treasury estimated that over £3 Billion was made for the Exchequer as a result of commercial days on Britannia between 1991 and 1995. Britannia was retired to Leith near Edinburgh where she remains a successful tourist attraction.

2002 was a year of personal sadness for The Queen. Her sister, Princess Margaret, died on 9 February at the age of 71, following a stroke. Only weeks later, on 30 March at Royal Lodge, Windsor, Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother, also died. She was 101. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh led the mourners at her funeral at Westminster Abbey before a private committal at St. George's Chapel, Windsor. She was laid to rest alongside her husband, King George VI. Princess Margaret's ashes were interred alongside her parents.

The Golden Jubilee

The Golden Jubilee of 2002 marked the 50th anniversary of The Queen's Accession in 1952. The Queen became one of only a handful of British monarchs to reach such a milestone; the last had been Queen Victoria. By now The Queen was respected worldwide for her undisputed dedication to her work.

Jubilee celebrations included visits to Jamaica, New Zealand, Australia and Canada; a tour throughout the UK, visiting 70 cities and towns; and a national weekend of celebrations, including two enormous concerts held in the gardens of Buckingham Palace.

Diamond Wedding Anniversary

On 20th November 2007, The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh celebrated 60 years of marriage. They travelled to Malta which is where they lived as a young married couple from 1949-51 while The Duke was stationed there as a serving Royal Naval officer.





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The Diamond Jubilee

In 2012, Queen Elizabeth celebrated 60 years as the British Monarch. The Queen, accompanied by The Duke of Edinburgh, marked the Diamond Jubilee with a series of regional visits and engagements throughout the United Kingdom. A host of special events were organised to celebrate this momentous occasion including a pageant along the River Thames, a concert at Buckingham Palace, the lighting of a network of beacons across the country and a Service of Thanksgiving at St. Paul's Cathedral. Many people across the country, including school children, participated in street parties to celebrate The Queen and the Diamond Jubilee.

Longest Reigning Monarch

On 20 December 2007, The Queen reached a new milestone when she became the oldest Monarch of the United Kingdom, overtaking her great-great grandmother, Queen Victoria. On 9 September 2015, The Queen once again overtook Queen Victoria's record when she also became the longest reigning Monarch.

In the Summer of 2020, The Queen was saddened, but understanding, of the Prince of Wales's younger son, Prince Harry's decision to stand back from Royal duties and to move with his family to the USA.

The Duke of Edinburgh

On 2 August 2017, aged 96, the Duke of Edinburgh announced that he would retire from public duties. He had completed 22,219 solo engagements and made 5,493 speeches since 1952. He planned to spend his retirement at Sandringham. He handed over the management of the Sandringham, Balmoral and Windsor Great Park estates to his son, the Prince of Wales.

In November 2017, The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh marked 70 years of marriage.

In 2020 the Coronavirus Pandemic hit the United Kingdom. The Queen and the Duke formed a 'bubble' with a few members of staff at Windsor Castle and they remained there together, only venturing out and mixing as the law of the day allowed. The Pandemic was devastating, but it did mean that The Queen and the Duke spent much of 2020 and the beginning of the year 2021 together.

On 9 April 2021, His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh died at Windsor Castle. The Queen was with him. He was a few weeks off of his 100th Birthday. He had planned his own funeral which took place on 17 April at Windsor. However, because of the Pandemic not all of his wishes could be accommodated and, as the Pandemic was not over, The Queen sat alone in St George's Chapel at a slight distance from the other members of her family during the Service.





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Platinum Jubilee

On 6 February 2022, Queen Elizabeth II had been Queen for 70 years. She was increasingly frail and conducted only a few public engagements. However, she continued with the work of the Monarchy. She often held meetings remotely using technology to the full. She had used remote communications to carry out her duties during the Pandemic.

Her Platinum Jubilee celebrations took place in June. On 2 June she lit a beacon at Windsor Castle which led to a chain of beacons being lit across the country, including one at Sandringham. The weekend was a huge success, but the Queen was unable to attend the Service of Thanksgiving at St. Paul's Cathedral on the Sunday as she had experienced some discomfort following the Trooping of the Colour on the Saturday. However, the crowds in the Mall were clearly excited when the Royal Standard was raised over Buckingham Palace as the Royal family came onto the balcony to waive to the crowds on the Sunday evening. It meant that the Queen had arrived. The Queen had indeed arrived from Windsor and she appeared on the balcony with her Family waiving to the crowds for the last time.

Elizabeth

In late Summer 2022 the Queen travelled as was customary to her beloved Balmoral Castle for a holiday. She was still carrying out her constitutional duties.

On 8 September, bulletins were issued from the Castle about the Queen's failing health. Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II died that afternoon.

Her body was moved a few days later to Edinburgh for a Service of Thanksgiving and she lay in state there in St. Giles Cathedral for 24 hours before the Service. More than 33,000 people filed past her coffin. She was then flown to London and installed in Westminster Hall next to the Houses of Parliament where she lay in state for 4 days before her funeral on 19 September. More than 250,000 people filed past.

The funeral of The Queen which had been planned with meticulous detail was one of the largest, if not the largest, ceremonial event London had ever seen. After a Ceremonial Service in Westminster Abbey, The Queen was driven to Windsor for a private Committal.

Her Majesty was interred with the Duke of Edinburgh in the George VI Memorial Chapel in St George's Chapel alongside her parents.





Queen Elizabeth II

Elizabeth II

The British Monarch's role is a constitutional one as Head of the State and Head of the Nation. They play no active part in politics, but Acts of Parliament cannot be enacted without Royal Assent. They can listen to, advise and warn the Prime Minister and Government of the day. The Monarch's life is a busy one. They open (and can prorogue) Parliament, preside over the Privy Council, receive and entertain state visitors, give a weekly audience to the Prime Minister, take the Trooping the Colour ceremony, receive and entertain the diplomatic corps, accept ambassadors' credentials, confer honours, take on roles as presidents etc of countless organisations and charities, open hospitals etc, etc.

Queen Elizabeth II was also Head of the Commonwealth and Head of State to 14 other nations. The Queen was very proud of the Commonwealth and its achievements. Under her leadership the Commonwealth had grown to a commonwealth of 56 independent and equal countries. She was also Head of the Church of England.

The Queen was always a thorough, attentive and diligent Monarch. Her style of monarchy was much like that of her grandfather and father: dutiful and representative; honest and unpretentious; deeply religious and very dedicated.

She was praised for her calm, cautious approach and her steadfastness. When she died tributes came in from around the World.

She was the cornerstone of her family, which by the time of her death had grown to include 8 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren. As a family they had tragedies and difficult times as well as happy ones, but The Queen faced up to and coped with them all.

When she died, Elizabeth II was the oldest, the longest serving, the most photographed and filmed, the most written about, the most talked about Monarch the people of the United Kingdom have ever had. She had worked with 15 Prime Ministers, beginning with Sir Winston Churchill and countless Commonwealth Leaders. She had met 13 Presidents of the USA and received 112 State Visits from overseas Leaders. She and the Duke of Edinburgh had tirelessly travelled the World representing the United Kingdom and helping to ease difficult political situations.

She was much loved and was universally acknowledged to have been a very good Queen.

For further information about educational groups or resources at Sandringham please email education@sandringhamestate.co.uk