

CHAPTER 1

The Queen: a life of duty



The 2012 Olympic opening ceremony is about to begin. Queen Elizabeth II walks through Buckingham Palace with James Bond. Outside a helicopter is waiting for them.

Minutes later, 80,000 people look up into the evening sky. They see a woman with a parachute jumping from a helicopter! Then James Bond jumps too ...

When the 2012 Olympics opened in London, this short film was part of the opening ceremony. Of course, the Queen didn't really arrive by parachute but she showed the world that the British queen enjoys a joke! The role of the monarch has clearly changed a lot since Elizabeth became queen at twenty-six years old.

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In 1952, Princess Elizabeth was in Kenya with her husband, Prince Philip. Princess Elizabeth's father, King George VI, was ill. In his place, Princess Elizabeth was visiting several countries in the Commonwealth*. But she had to stop and return quickly to London. King George died suddenly

* The Commonwealth is a special group of the world's countries. Read the Fact File on pages 18–19 to learn more.

and now Elizabeth was Queen of England. It was a very sad time for her but she had to start one of the most difficult jobs in the world.

The young Princess Elizabeth knew that her life was going to change greatly. For the rest of her life she had to put her country first and her family second. She had to do all the duties of the Head of State. And the first big ceremony was her Coronation.

It is the tradition for every new king or queen of Britain to have a coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey in London. They give promises to the people and take the British crown. It is a very important day for the whole country. In 1953 everyone in the UK and the Commonwealth planned special celebrations. There were parties in the streets and flags on nearly every house. Millions of people came to London to watch the Queen. Many arrived very early and slept in the streets so that they had a good place to watch the processions. And for the first time TV cameras filmed every moment so that millions more people could watch the ceremony in their homes.



They saw Princess Elizabeth ride to Westminster Abbey in a beautiful coach with twelve horses. They saw her go into the Abbey in a long, white dress. And they heard her promise to give the rest of her life to the people of England. It was a big day and a great responsibility for the young woman but she spoke strongly and clearly. For more than sixty years Queen Elizabeth has done exactly what she promised.

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In the past the kings and queens of England had a lot of power. Now the Queen can't make political changes. Her role is very symbolic. Some people today think that it is too expensive for the country to have a Royal Family. They say it is not necessary now. They think that the Royal Family live a rich and easy life but they don't pay for it.

Other people believe that the Queen does a very important job. Government changes the laws but the Queen has to sign them all. And there are lots of traditions she has to follow. For example she has to wear special clothes and her crown to open and close Parliament* every year. She has to meet the head of the British government, every week.

Every day Queen Elizabeth has lots of things to do. She has to visit schools, open new museums, go to important shows, meet important foreign visitors and visit a lot of different countries. She gives money and help to many charities too. And all the time she has to smile and be nice to people. It's not always easy!



For sixty years the Queen has done her job well. She has signed more than 3,500 laws. She has answered three and a half million letters! She has been on hundreds of visits to other countries and she has sent more than 175,000 cards to people who reach their hundredth birthday!

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* Important people in British politics meet at Parliament to discuss and make new laws.

During her time as queen the world has changed a lot. Queen Elizabeth has tried to change the way the people think of the Royal Family too. Elizabeth has brought the Royal Family closer to the people. She started this in 1970 in Australia when she did the first 'walkabout'. She walked close up to the people so they could see her and speak to her. Now everyone in the Royal Family does this when they can.

The Queen has done another important thing. She has allowed the people to see more of her own life. People know a lot about the lives of her children, Charles, Anne, Andrew and Edward. Before, people only heard the Queen on the radio when she gave her Christmas message once a year. Later, of course, she did this on television. But during her sixty years as queen there have been many TV films about the life of the Royal Family. In 1969 there was a famous TV show which showed the Royal Family's life at Buckingham Palace. People saw them eat breakfast and talk about everyday things. They saw them taking their dogs for walks. It surprised a lot of people!



The Queen and some of her family having breakfast

People today can also now go inside the Queen's London home – Buckingham Palace. Every summer about 300,000 people visit the palace and see the main rooms and gardens. But they can't see the Queen. She isn't at home! She spends a lot of time away from London

during the summer, though she always returns for her famous summer garden parties!

If you can't visit the Queen in London, you can always visit the Royal Family on your computer! In 1997 the British monarchy started its own website. In 2007 there was a British monarchy YouTube channel and a royal Twitter site and a royal Facebook page appeared in 2010!

THE QUEEN'S CORGIS



The Royal Family has always loved dogs but Queen Elizabeth's favourites are corgis. These are small, strong dogs from Wales. A long time ago people used them to work with animals. Corgis are small but they like fighting and sometimes they bite the visitors at the palace too!

People say that the Queen hid her favourite pet corgi, Susan, in the royal coach after her wedding in 1947!








What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.
bite **wedding**

GARDEN PARTIES

Every summer the Queen has three garden parties at Buckingham Palace. About 8,000 people come to each one! These parties happen from 4–6pm and people drink tea, eat cakes, walk round the gardens and sometimes meet the Queen.

The people who come are ordinary people with different jobs and lifestyles. The Queen invites them to say 'thank you' for things they have done to help people and the country.

If you meet the Queen, you need to know a lot of rules!

-  When you meet the Queen, call her 'Your Majesty' first, and after that call her 'Ma'am' – the same sound as 'I am'
-  If you are British, the women do a small curtsy, the men give a small bow. (You don't have to do this if the Queen is not your monarch.)
-  Do not put your hand out for a handshake but wait for the Queen to do this.
-  If the Queen stops eating everyone stops eating too!
-  And never turn your back on the Queen!



What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.
curtsy bow handshake

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After sixty years as Queen, Elizabeth II continues to work hard. In 2012, people all over the world saw her popularity with the British people during the three days of celebrations for her Diamond Jubilee.

Thousands of people came to London to watch the celebrations. Many people arrived early and slept in the streets to see her go past as they did on Coronation Day in 1953. Many more people had parties in the streets and watched it on television – and this time it was in colour! But unlike 1953 the weather was not kind during the celebration days. Rain fell on the procession of boats down the River Thames, but the Queen enjoyed every minute. At the end of a very busy day when smiling singers sang to her, she smiled back. Elizabeth II was happy. And after sixty successful years as the Queen of England, she was right to be.



Now watch Clips 2 and 3 and answer the questions on pages 16–17.