
OUR QUEEN
ROBERT HARDMAN

Contents

About the Book

History has known no monarch like her.

She has travelled farther than all her predecessors put together and lived longer than any of them. She has known more historic figures than anyone alive – from Churchill to Mandela, de Gaulle to Obama.

Now, the distinguished royal writer Robert Hardman has been granted rare and privileged access to the world of Queen Elizabeth II to produce this enthralling new portrait of one of the most popular public figures on Earth.

Only one other monarch – Victoria – has celebrated a diamond jubilee. As our Queen marks sixty years on the throne, Hardman travels with her around the country and the world. He meets her family, her closest advisers and her prime ministers past and present. He follows the devoted team around her, from her Lord Chamberlain to her footmen.

Not only has Elizabeth II reigned through Britain's transformation from an imperial power to a multicultural, multimedia nation, but she has steered the Monarchy through more reforms in the last 25 years than in the previous century. As Hardman discovers, she has quietly rewritten the entire royal job description – without us even noticing.

Staff who would once have lived an existence straight out of *Upstairs Downstairs* or *Downton Abbey* now have free

use of the Queen’s swimming pool, a round-the-clock counsellor and even her ponies. It’s a close-knit world. And Hardman finds out what happens to those who cross her – even if they happen to be monarchs themselves …

Our Queen sits at the head of an ancient institution which remains, simultaneously, popular, regal, inclusive and relevant in a twenty-first-century world. It is neither down to luck nor longevity. It is down to the shrewd judgement of a thoroughly modern monarch with no small assistance from the longest-serving consort in history.

Here is the inside story.

About the Author

Robert Hardman is one of Britain's best-known observers of the monarchy. He has covered royal life for more than twenty years, both as a Fleet Street royal correspondent and as the writer of several internationally acclaimed royal documentaries. He interviewed the Prince of Wales for his famous BBC One birthday film *Charles at 60*, and toured Windsor with Prince Philip for the much-loved BBC One series, *The Queen's Castle*. He is the writer of both the series and the book, *Monarchy: The Royal Family At Work*, which has been screened worldwide.

Hardman has reported on royalty from every continent and more than fifty nations. His dispatches have spanned every aspect of the royal story – from the Queen's 'annus horribilis' to the marriage of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. In addition to the British Royal Family, his royal interviewees have included the Emperor and Empress of Japan, the King and Queen of Norway and the Queen of Denmark.

After Cambridge University, Hardman joined the *Daily Telegraph*, for which he also covered politics and sport and edited the *Peterborough* column. Since 2001, he has written the *How I See It* column for the *Daily Mail*. Married with two children, he lives in London.

Also by Robert Hardman

MONARCHY: THE ROYAL FAMILY AT WORK (Ebury)

OUR QUEEN

Robert Hardman

Photographs by Ian Jones

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FOR MY WIFE, DIANA

Acknowledgements

In producing a comprehensive portrait of the most enduring international public figure of the last sixty years, it has been essential to have a good view. From the outset, I have enjoyed privileged access not only to events, royal engagements and some of the daily routines of Palace life but also to every level of every department of the Royal Household. For that, I am most grateful to Her Majesty The Queen.

I would particularly like to thank His Royal Highness The Duke of Cambridge for granting me his first author's interview and His Royal Highness The Duke of York for his thoughts and insights.

Despite this extraordinary opportunity, this is not an authorised publication. I have had an entirely free hand with my research. I have asked my own questions, made my own observations and drawn my own conclusions. But I am particularly indebted to Samantha Cohen, Assistant Private Secretary to The Queen, and Ailsa Anderson, her successor as Press Secretary, for their help and forbearance in response to my persistent requests for interviews and access during the last two years. This book would be much thinner without them, if indeed it had been written at all.

All the departments of the Royal Household and their staff have been generous with their time. My thanks go to the Earl Peel, Sir Christopher Geidt, Edward Young, Doug

King, Sir Alan Reid, Air Vice-Marshal Sir David Walker, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Ford and Jonathan Marsden and their respective teams at Buckingham Palace, along with Sir Michael Peat and his staff at Clarence House.

Those who work for the Sovereign are, understandably, wary of discussing their jobs and experiences with strangers bearing notebooks. Some of those to whom I have spoken had never previously given any sort of interview about their work. Some had been grilled by me before but were good enough to talk to me all over again. They are all named in these pages and I am very grateful to them all.

Arranging all this has been a substantial logistical undertaking. My thanks go to Dr Ed Perkins, Colette Saunders, David Pogson, Meryl Keeling, Jen Stebbing, Zaki Cooper and Marnie Gaffney at Buckingham Palace; to Dame Anne Griffiths in the Duke of Edinburgh's Office; to Paddy Harverson and Patrick Harrison at Clarence House; to Miguel Head and Nick Loughran at St James's Palace; to Frances Dunkels and Emma Shaw at the Royal Collection; to Dr Lucy Worsley at Historic Royal Palaces; to Marcus O'Lone and Helen Walch at the Sandringham Estate.

I am also very grateful to so many former members of the Royal Household who have helped me in so many ways, in some cases over many years. They include the Earl of Airlie, Lord Fellowes, Lord Janvrin, Sir William Heseltine, Sir Malcom Ross, Sir Miles Hunt-Davis, Dr Mary Francis, Elizabeth Buchanan, Ron Allison, Charles Anson and Stuart Neil.

No study of any constitutional monarch would be complete without recourse to that monarch's Prime Ministers. I wish to thank David Cameron, Tony Blair and Sir John Major for their insights and their time. The Queen has been served by more than 150 Prime Ministers across all her realms during her reign. I have met several of them during my twenty years of reporting on royalty. But I would

like to thank, in particular, John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand, and Malcolm Fraser, former Prime Minister of Australia, for their time in relation to this book.

I am also indebted to the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, and his predecessors, Jack Straw, Sir Malcolm Rifkind and Lord Hurd for the accumulated wisdom of their many years in the royal orbit, whether in one of the Great Offices of State or other ministerial positions.

Among the Queen's many representatives, I am particularly grateful to Lord Shuttleworth, Chairman of the Association of Lord-Lieutenants, William Tucker, Lord-Lieutenant of Derbyshire and David Briggs, Lord-Lieutenant of Cheshire, along with their respective staff. Overseas, I am grateful to Eric Jenkinson, High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago, Dr Noël Guckian, Ambassador to Oman, Dominic Jermey, Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, Julian King, Ambassador to Ireland, and all their respective teams. The Queen's many roles have taken me in many directions. For their help in studying the Head of the Commonwealth, I thank His Excellency Mohamed Nasheed, President of the Maldives, Kamalesh Sharma, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, and Dr Danny Sriskandarajah, Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

My thanks go to Dr Rowan Willams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Nigel McCulloch, the Bishop of Manchester and Lord High Almoner, for talking to me about the Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

Men and women of every rank and age from across the Services have helped me to understand that crucial bond which they all share with the Head of the Armed Forces and the Royal Family. It is always a pleasure to talk to them.

There are many people who have helped this book to take shape in all sorts of ways. What they all have in common is that they have seen some merit in my

endeavours and have gone out of their way to help. I am grateful to them all. Some prefer to remain anonymous. Others include Alastair Bruce of Crionaich, Edward Llewellyn, Catherine Fall, Ciaran Ward, Arabella Warburton, Vanessa Burgess, Sir Sydney Chapman, Sir Michael Willcocks, Alexander Galloway, William Chapman, James North, Elizabeth Scudder, Sir Antony Jay, Edward Mirzoeff, Marie Papworth, Sir Simon Dawbarn, Wesley Kerr, Peter Wilkinson, Daniel Sleat, Harriet Hewitson, Sophie Douglas-Bate, Didy Grahame, Sir Michael and Lady Parker, Lesley Hamilton, John Phillips, Dr Stephen Spurr, Duncan Jeffery, Alan Duncan MP, Kate Hoey MP, Bob Honey, Robin Roberts, Don and Cathryn Kelshall, and James Dolan.

I have been extremely fortunate to draw on the advice, support and expertise of some our most eminent historians and biographers. Simon Sebag Montefiore, Andrew Roberts, William Shawcross and Kenneth Rose have all been kind and wise in equal measure. I am also grateful to Dr Amanda Foreman, Dr Jane Connors and Derek Ingram for their help. Wherever I have drawn on the scholarship of others, I hope that the credit is clear and unambiguous. And to my Fleet Street colleagues, to the photographic fraternity and the television crews, I say thank you for your camaraderie along the way.

At Hutchinson, I owe a very great deal to my editor, Paul Sidey, for his unfailing enthusiasm and wisdom, and I also thank Paulette Hearn, Charlotte Bush, Emma Mitchell and Amelia Harvell. From the very start of this project, I have been indebted to my unflappable agent Charles Walker, at United Agents, and to his assistant Katy Jones. A considerable part of this book, of course, owes nothing to my words and everything to the superb photography of my old friend and former Fleet Street colleague Ian Jones. Bravo to him.

These pages have been written in many places and many countries. But I am particularly grateful to my mother-in-

law, Marion Cowley, my parents, Richard and Dinah Hardman, and Santa Sebag Montefiore for providing somewhere quiet to concentrate as the deadlines have loomed. No one, though, has been more supportive, despite all the lost weekends and truncated holidays, than my darling wife, Diana. This book is dedicated to her.

Introduction

'*It's amazing that she didn't crack*'

WHEN THE WORLD comes to look back on the early twenty-first century, two events in Britain – just weeks apart – will be lodged in the collective memory. One will be the 2012 London Olympics, a spectacular fortnight of international sporting endeavour. The other will be a celebration of a woman who has become so firmly established on the world stage that, in the words of one Commonwealth leader, she is no longer seen as merely British or, indeed, as merely human. She is the living incarnation of a set of values and a period of history. In Britain, she is Tower Bridge and a red double-decker bus on two legs, not to mention Big Ben, afternoon tea, village fêtes and sheep-flecked hills in the pouring rain. In the wider world, she is the newsreel figure who just has carried on going into digital high definition. More than one hundred nations – that's more than half the countries on earth – did not even exist in their present form when she was crowned. While her presence is taken entirely for granted at home, to millions of people around the planet she represents continuity on a scale bordering on the incomprehensible.

'She's incredible,' says Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, during a poignant and thoughtful first interview on someone he describes as 'my grandmother

first – and then she's the Queen'. No one, surely, is better placed to imagine what it must have been like to succeed to the throne, as the Queen did, at twenty-five. Sitting in his office in St James's Palace a few days before his own twenty-ninth birthday, the Prince ponders the enormity of her task: 'Back then, there was a very different attitude to women. Being a young lady at twenty-five – and stepping in to a job which many men thought they could probably do better – it must have been very daunting. And I think there was extra pressure for her to perform.' He remains in awe of the way she managed it: 'You see the pictures of her and she looks so incredibly natural in the role. She's calm, she's poised, she's elegant, she's graceful and she's all the things she needs to be at twenty-five. And you think how loads of twenty-five-year-olds – myself, my brother and lots of people included – didn't have anything like that. And we didn't have that extra pressure put on us at that age. It's amazing that she didn't crack. She just carried on and kept going. And that's the thing about her. You present a challenge in front of her and she'll climb it. And I think that to be doing that for sixty years – it's incredible.'

Only one other monarch has marked sixty years on the throne. Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, however, was a celebration of imperial might featuring a rare and somewhat valedictory appearance by a reclusive Britannia figure. The Queen Empress was too lame to make it up the steps into St Paul's Cathedral for her own service of thanksgiving. The clergy processed outside to her carriage instead. After sixty years of Queen Elizabeth II, the mood is entirely different. There is no triumphalism. Instead, the dominant emotion is one of pride in those quiet virtues of service, duty, stability. And the Monarch herself has no trouble with steps of any sort, whether they lead up to cathedrals or aircraft. In 2010, her list of engagements actually rose by almost 20 per cent. The schedule for 2011 – including the wedding of Prince William and Catherine

Middleton, the momentous inaugural state visit to the Republic of Ireland and the state visit by President Barack Obama of the United States all within days of each other – would prove busier still.

A jubilee, by definition, is a retrospective occasion. It is an invitation for everyone to view today's world through a sepia-tinted lens. 'If you compare life now, everything is incomparably better today than when the Queen came to the throne,' says former Prime Minister Sir John Major. 'I hope that will be a theme throughout the celebrations.'

But in looking backwards, we run the risk of ignoring the most remarkable aspect of this reign – namely the monarchy today. Historians and psychiatrists talk about 'Queen Victoria syndrome', a capacity to shield oneself away from reality and live in the past. Queen Elizabeth II syndrome is the exact opposite.

The more I have followed the monarchy professionally over two decades, the more I have seen it running counter to all conventional wisdom about family businesses and ancient institutions. This operation has emphatically not become more set in its ways as the management grows older. It has actually changed more in the last twenty-five years than in the previous one hundred and twenty-five. At times through necessity, at times through choice, it has adapted and repositioned itself again and again while the rest of us have barely noticed. 'The great challenge of this organisation is management of change,' says the Duke of York. 'And that's where the Queen has been so successful. This institution, under her leadership and guidance, has been able to change in a way and at a pace which reflects what is required by society.' The Queen herself is an extraordinary double act – the never changing, ever changing Monarch who happens to be the oldest in history, entering her jubilee year at the age of eighty-five. Yet no one thinks of her as a little old lady in a black dress harrumphing that she is not amused.

We see Queen Victoria in Highland seclusion and set in aspic. We see Queen Elizabeth II walking dogs or watching a dancing display somewhere in the South Seas. She is a ‘now’ person, not a ‘then’ person.

That is why this book is not a life story but, instead, a portrait of our Queen today. It is not a chronology but a study of a thoroughly modern monarch. There have been many excellent biographies of the Queen, notably those by Sarah Bradford, Robert Lacey, Elizabeth Longford and Ben Pimlott. In recent years, the picture has also been enhanced by superb biographies of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother by William Shawcross and Hugo Vickers. Equally, Jonathan Dimbleby has produced the definitive work on the Prince of Wales while Basil Boothroyd and Tim Heald have both captured the oceanic contribution of the Duke of Edinburgh to both royal and public life. The volume of work devoted to the tragically short life and times of Diana, Princess of Wales, is a library in itself.

Naturally, I have explored the past to put the present in context and have unearthed old files and fresh material from throughout the Queen’s six decades on the throne. But what follows is a contemporary inside view of one of the most respected public figures in the modern world. The Queen has never granted an interview and, I dare say, never will. At some point, many years from now and in another reign, an official biographer will be granted access to the diary she writes dutifully every night. Until then, her thoughts will remain, for the most part, off-limits.

But I have been granted special access to those who really know her and those who work – and have worked – with her. I have spoken to members of the Royal Family, prime ministers, private secretaries, prelates, pages, footmen and friends. I have been able to follow her around the world, around the country and around her own palace at close quarters. The jubilee may be an occasion for all of us to look back over the last sixty years but the star turn

will prefer to keep looking ahead. She accepts that her anniversary is a big deal for some. The Lord Chamberlain's Office has already declared an amnesty on tat. 'Normally, we don't allow people to stick the Queen's arms on things like mugs,' says Deputy Comptroller Jonathan Spencer. 'But for the jubilee, we are giving them a free-for-all and saying, "Go for it."' Even so, she will be mildly bemused and faintly embarrassed by all the fuss. History is important to her but the present is rather *more* important.

One day, in the midst of my research, I followed the Queen to a service in Westminster Abbey, the royal holy of holies – crowning place, marrying place, funeral place of sovereigns for almost a millennium. Several months later, billions would tune in to watch Prince William marry Catherine Middleton here inside Edward the Confessor's mighty foundation. At the end of this particular service, the Queen was taken to a side chapel to meet a team of experts beginning a £200,000 renovation of the most sacred royal relic of the lot, St Edward's Chair. It is also called the Coronation Chair although it is otherwise known, simply, as *The* Throne. It has sat in the Abbey for seven hundred years and has been used at every coronation since the fourteenth century. Scotland's sacred Stone of Scone slots in beneath it. The Queen was sitting on this battered oak seat, six feet tall and etched with centuries-old graffiti, when she was crowned Monarch herself. What was striking about this moment, though, was the Queen's reaction. She might have been viewing a moderately interesting new traffic control centre in the West Midlands. She listened politely to a short explanation about the restoration work. Then she admitted that, despite visiting the Abbey countless times throughout her reign, she had not actually seen the chair since 1953. It was nice to see it in one piece, she said, but time was pressing. And, with that, she was off. She then moved next door to the Abbey's education centre

where she spent twice as long watching children from a local primary school learning how to draw a Tudor rose.

1

Her Achievement

‘*She’s really determined to finish everything she started*’

JUDGING BY THE internal memos, it’s surprising that the Queen was able to see her audience – or indeed breathe. This was to be her finest hour, a gathering of the mightiest in the land to salute the all-conquering heroine of the seven seas. Less than a year after her Coronation, the dizzyingly glamorous young Sovereign and her consort were to be welcomed home from what, to this day, remains the greatest royal tour of all time.

So there was to be no holding back on the vital ingredients as the Lord Mayor of London and his court started planning the grandest post-war feast the capital had seen. No less than £174 – more than 10 per cent of the entire food budget – was to be spent on tobacco. There were to be individual mixed boxes of cigars (two sizes) and cigarettes (both Turkish and Virginia) for each of the 401 Mansion House guests, plus red leather match cases and extra supplies of Punch cigars and Fribourg & Treyer cigarettes just in case anyone ran out. And why not? The Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, would expect nothing less.

The bill for musical entertainment, on the other hand, was not to stretch beyond £50 (only £11 more than the budget for ‘white gloves’). Fortunately, the Band of the Royal Artillery was happy to oblige for £47. The well-

nourished members of the food-tasting committee were eventually able to agree on a menu and the invitations were finally dispatched. And thus began an ill-concealed scramble for the hottest ticket since the Coronation itself.

On 2 June 1953, Westminster Abbey had staged the first global television spectacular in history as the Queen was crowned. Five months later, she departed on a journey which would take her all the way around the world. Her purpose was to greet and be greeted by the newly rebranded ‘Commonwealth’, even if most people still insisted on calling it ‘the Empire’. To celebrate her return in May 1954, the City of London would stage this official state luncheon. As plans for the royal homecoming were being drawn up in the capital, the tour had reached its zenith in Australia. That country had never seen a sovereign in the flesh before. The adoration and adulation were astonishing, even by the standards of Coronation-era Britain. On one Sydney evening, more than a quarter of a million people turned out just to watch the Queen return from the theatre. When the Lord Mayor of Sydney held a banquet, there were two thousand casualties on the streets at what became known as ‘sardine corners’. The entire rail network was shut down when thousands spilled on to the tracks to wave at the royal train.

According to Australia’s Dr Jane Connors, who has studied the social and cultural impact of the tour in depth, even the most remote parts of Australia experienced mayhem. The dairy town of Lismore saw the first traffic jam in its history. More than 30,000 people squeezed into the town of Casino (population: 8,000) to welcome the Queen, including the injured passengers from an overturned bus who refused to seek hospital treatment until the royal couple had left. Despite heavy flooding, remote communities tackled mudslides and swollen rivers to see their sovereign. Mr and Mrs Allingham of Southwick, both aged seventy-five, spent three days on horseback,

swimming across several creeks en route, to cheer the Queen in Townsville. A million people lined the road into Melbourne from Essendon Aerodrome. More than five hundred were hurt, one critically, when a stand collapsed in Cairns. The *Melbourne Age* found a group of Aboriginal children who had collected enough dingo scalps to pay for a two-thousand-mile round trip by bus.

The British press decided enough was enough. 'GO EASY,' demanded a *Daily Mirror* headline. 'YOU MAY HARM THE QUEEN'. But as the Queen headed for home via the Indian Ocean and Malta, where she joined the stylish new Royal Yacht *Britannia*, the excitement in Britain was reaching similar levels. Documents in the City archives show that the Lord Mayor was batting off requests thick and fast. One City councilman lobbied the organising committee to find a seat for the American preacher Billy Graham (he was informed that there was already a surfeit of 'Ecclesiastical representatives').

Churchill himself elected to join *Britannia* off the Isle of Wight on the eve of a triumphal journey up the Thames. When the Queen caught him nodding off during the after-dinner film, she urged him to go to bed. 'Now we have you home,' he replied, 'I shall sleep very well.' A day later, he was standing at the Queen's side as the Royal Yacht sailed beneath Tower Bridge, to the cheers of a city *en fête*. To this day, she likes to recall his running commentary on the approach as he proclaimed the Thames not as 'a muddy old river' but as 'the silver thread that runs through British history'.

Ahead of the great luncheon, the Queen travelled in state through the capital. At Temple Bar, the historic gateway to the City itself, there was a formal welcome from the Lord Mayor and his panoply of fur-hooded, velvet-robed, cocked-hatted, sword-bearing sheriffs, aldermen and remembrancers – almost everyone, in fact, bar Dick Whittington and his cat. Shortly afterwards, the Prime

Minister and his Cabinet, the leaders of the Church, the judiciary, the Forces, the Civil Service, the City and 'the Learned Institutions' were assembled in morning dress at the Mansion House to welcome the Queen plus her husband, mother, sister and cousins to lunch. A suitably colourful menu (by the austere standards of the day) had been prepared in honour of such an exotic tour. 'Avocado pear and shrimps' was to be followed by 'Scotch Salmon Hollandaise', 'Spring Chicken St George' and 'Strawberry Melba', accompanied by Australian wines and a 1945 Krug champagne (plus 'cold luncheon' for staff and 'beer and sandwiches in the Gaoler's Room' for the BBC).

Through the plumes of post-prandial smoke, the Lord Mayor, Sir Noël Bowater Bt MC, summed up the tour as follows: 'As an achievement of inspired conception and brilliant execution,' he told the Queen, 'it will ever remain a glittering jewel in the casket of a nation's memory.'[1]

The Queen's equally colourful response captures the energy and sense of purpose of those early years of the reign. 'Mount Cook soaring above the snows of the Southern Alps of New Zealand is but remotely related to the scorched rocks of Aden,' she declared. 'Yet, in these lands, their peoples hold strongly to certain common principles which all of them believe to be vital. In all of them, the idea of a parliamentary, democratic form of government is accepted and respected … part of the ultimate heritage of every one of my people.' Even in the midst of all this euphoria, though, she readily acknowledged that there was no point in maintaining a monarchy simply for the sake of it. 'The structure and framework of constitutional monarchy could easily stand as an archaic and meaningless survival,' she went on. 'But wherever we have been, we have received visible and audible proof that it is real and living in the hearts of the people.'

Tens of thousands were waiting outside the Mansion House, demanding her appearance on the balcony. The same crowds which had cheered her carriage all the way through London to the luncheon cheered her all the way back to the Palace. Were there no bounds to the heart-soaring brilliance of this new Elizabethan age? Who could possibly dispute Cecil Rhodes's axiom that to be English was to have 'won first prize in the lottery of life'? The whole world, it seemed, was in love with the twenty-eight-year-old Gloriana. As Churchill put it: 'Even Envy wore a friendly smile.'

Nearly sixty years later, the Queen is on her way back to London's ancient financial district. But today's crowd is no more than a hundred-strong. Most are just passers-by who have noticed a small cluster of television cameras. A celebrity must be imminent. But which one? All are delighted to discover that it's the Queen, yet a little surprised at the absence of fuss. But that is how the Queen likes it these days. And today she does *not* want to meet the great and the good. Just the good. As the capital's financial district continues to recover from the self-inflicted wounds of economic meltdown, the Queen is coming to salute those who do not move money around but simply keep the Square Mile going – the Tube staff, the police, the caterers and so on. She will not meet a banker all day. And there will be no cocked hats and swords at Temple Bar, either. Her car will just drive straight past.

She starts with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's Tower Station, the busiest in Britain. The small floating base below Waterloo Bridge has had three thousand 'call-outs' and saved 183 lives in the last eight years. Today, it is low in the water, weighed down with all the staff, the fundraisers and the top brass who have descended from elsewhere. No one wants to miss the R in RNLI.

A Palace press officer informs the media that the Queen will be wearing a Stewart Parvin red rusted tweed coat and a Rachel Trevor-Morgan hat. It's raining when she arrives. She has no umbrella but does not appear to mind. She meets the duty crew and watches video footage of a disturbed man jumping off Westminster Bridge three months earlier. She shudders as he lands in the water but the crew have him out again within seconds.

As she makes her way around, it is clear that what interests her most is not the mechanics of lifesaving but the voluntary dimension to the entire operation. She talks to Roger Cohen, fifty-four, who commutes from Sussex to do shifts here every few weeks. Gary Pittaway, forty-four, mans a lifeboat when he is not doing his day job with the Metropolitan Police. The Queen learns that one of her own officials, Major General Keith Cima, Governor of the Tower of London no less, is also a volunteer here. He may be a major general at the Tower but down here he is expected to make the tea like everyone else. He is not here today. It is later explained that he has ample opportunity to meet the Queen in his other life and is letting others take his place on this occasion.

It's a warts-and-all tour. The Queen is even shown the changing rooms. She stands in the rain for a photograph but there's so little space that the photographer has to climb into a boat and move offshore in order to squeeze everyone inside the shot. 'Thanks very much,' she says almost jauntily and heads off to Aldgate Tube station. There she meets the staff who handle six million commuters a year. Some were on duty the July day a suicide bomber killed seven people here in 2005. They present her with a Tube sign for a non-existent station called 'Buckingham Palace'.

And so to lunch. It could scarcely be a more different affair from that sunny fiesta of quasi-imperial effusion in 1954. Back then, the Lord Mayor wore robes over his velvet

Court suit. Today's Lord Mayor, Nick Anstee, is in a lounge suit with only a small chain of office to denote his position. Some City grandees are said to be miffed that they have not been invited to a royal lunch attended by bus drivers and secretaries. There will be no Mansion House silverware or portraits, either. The lunch is on the thirty-ninth floor, the top tier of one of the City's most modern buildings, the glass-fronted 'Gherkin'. At the very top, there is a final flight of stairs up to pre-lunch drinks on the observation deck where a hundred guests are sipping champagne. It's one of the best views in London but no one is admiring the scenery. All eyes are on the stairwell. A hush descends as the top of that Rachel Trevor-Morgan hat rises into view.

A lunch of salmon terrine, loin of lamb and bread and butter pudding is being cooked by young chefs from the Hoxton Apprentice, a restaurant which turns the long-term unemployed into catering professionals. Until recently, many of these cooks had no skills and no prospects. Head chef Leon Seraphin, twenty-nine, had been homeless when Hoxton turned his world around. He ended up working at White's Club where he served both Prince William and David Cameron – 'nice chap, salads only' – before returning to Hoxton. He cannot wait to get home and tell his family that he has cooked for the Sovereign. Upstairs, Hoxton's founder, Gordon da Silva, chats to the Queen and is astonished when she mentions that two of his apprentices have worked at the Palace. He knew that – but didn't expect that she would.

At lunch, the Queen sits at a round table of ten who include two train drivers and an administrative assistant from Tower Bridge. In 1954, the Queen dined on a raised platform. Today she is on 'Table 3'. She has the head of London Underground on her right and the Lord Mayor on her left. He delivers a short speech at the end in which he thanks the Queen and praises the 'indispensable' work of the City's service workers. There is no smoking, no port

and no brandy. There is no band or entertainment, for that matter, and no one is wearing white gloves either. The Queen thanks the cooking team and leaves for her next engagement at Tower Bridge. In 1954, it raised its two one-thousand-ton arms to their full height as HMY *Britannia* sailed through with the Queen and Churchill on board. Today, staff have already been told not to open the bridge in her honour. She has seen it all before, thanks very much, and does not want to disrupt the traffic. As she leaves the Gherkin, she is greeted by the first decent crowd of the day. Word has spread among City workers that the Queen is having lunch in their midst. Several hundred are waiting to see her leave and, in the finest traditions of the City, they all get a bonus – because the Queen leaves twice. The Lord Mayor sees her safely into her State Bentley, the four-ton flagship of the royal fleet. And then nothing happens. The car will not start. There is an awkward pause that must seem a toe-curling eternity for the Lord Mayor and the Queen's chauffeur. And then she gets out of the car. With certain heads of state, there would be panic stations, much yelling into electronic cuffs, a public inquiry and high-level redundancies. But the Queen seems to be rather amused. 'So much for new technology,' she says in mock despair to the Lord Mayor and cheerfully climbs into the 'back-up', a police Range Rover. And off she goes in a convoy of two cars and one police outrider – the sort of modest motorcade which might be laid on for, say, a middle-ranking trade minister from the European Union.

What is she thinking as she hitches a ride in a borrowed car through the City? A stranger comparing the bugle-parping newsreel coverage of 1954's royal progress through the Square Mile with today's modest events would conclude that the monarchy had endured a catastrophic decline during the intervening decades. From global adulation to a conked-out car? What a comedown for a sovereign who could once precipitate the greatest

voluntary assembly of people ever seen in whichever country she chose to set foot.

There will, though, be no complaints from the Queen today. Nor will there by any grumbles from her family or her advisers. She has led her country for so long – far longer than any Western leader since her great-great-grandmother – that she knows that it is not a numbers game. She is well aware that loyalty and affection are not solely measured by the depth of a crowd or the viscosity of a formal welcome.

Fifties Britain was another world. As the figurehead of a nation in desperate need of revitalisation and reassurance after an exhausting battle for survival, she could hardly fail in those early days. The true mark of her success is that, six decades later, she remains, by a considerable margin, the most popular figure in British public life.

It has not been a simple case of good fortune or of reacting to events as they unfold. There has been a game plan running through this entire reign. And it is one which continues to serve the Queen well according to the second in line to the throne (or, as he puts it, ‘the young bloke coming through’).

‘She’s so dedicated and really determined to finish everything she started,’ says Prince William. ‘She’ll want to hand over knowing she’s done everything she possibly could to help and that she’s got no regrets and no unfinished business; that she’s done everything she can for the country and that she’s not let anyone down – she minds an awful lot about that.’

Having inherited an Edwardian (some would say Victorian) institution in 1952, she has not merely kept it going. She has put it through the most vigorous reforms of modern times. She has managed to remain simultaneously regal, popular, inclusive and relevant in a twenty-first-century world. She sits at the head of a hereditary institution often associated with rigid tradition. Its critics

might even call it an anachronistic pantomime. Yet that same institution is busier and more dynamic than ever, with more going on around the Queen the older she becomes. It's not merely about developing a royal presence on Facebook or Twitter. Internal records show that, between 2005 and 2010, the amount of hospitality at Buckingham Palace actually rose by 50 per cent. Shortly after her eighty-fifth birthday in 2011, the Queen was presiding over three of the most exciting but demanding royal events of the twenty-first century within the space of a remarkable month – Prince William's wedding, that state visit to Ireland and only the second state visit to Britain by an American president.

'Ireland was fantastic,' recalls Prince William. 'We all wanted it to go smoothly because it was such a big deal.' Even on honeymoon in the Seychelles, the new Duke of Cambridge – and new Colonel of the Irish Guards – was tracking events in Dublin closely. 'I was keeping a careful watch on the internet, hearing the odd snippet and seeing the photographs. I know a lot of Irish people and so many of them were so excited about the visit that I knew it would go well.'

The wedding would turn out to be one of the most watched events in global television history, a cracking blend of state pageantry and family occasion which would produce an eternal collage of classic moments – from the balcony kiss to the Aston Martin departure to a jubilant off-duty verger filmed cartwheeling down the Abbey aisle.

It was widely interpreted as a 'shot in the arm' for the monarchy, an event which would somehow lead the institution towards the 'modern world'. In fact, the monarchy needed no such introduction. Behind the scenes, it had long since undergone a broader internal revolution, including a shift in management culture away from the gentleman amateur to unisex professionalism. The result is a Royal Household which has changed from top to bottom.

Not only are a third of senior staff now women but the chambermaid of yesteryear (now a ‘housekeeping assistant’) is sometimes a he, can also double up as a footman and is more likely than not to have a degree. One recent housekeeping assistant arrived with a 2:1 in physics from Prince William’s old university, St Andrews. Among the current crop of footmen is a graduate in aeronautical engineering from one of Britain’s top universities. ‘You probably have enough expertise in here to assemble a nuclear bomb,’ observes one member of the Household, surveying the staff serving at a Palace reception. Indeed, by any set of modern diversity criteria, the Royal Household can now compete easily with most of corporate Britain.

The Duke of York is quick to point out that this accelerated pace of royal change has been driven by external factors. ‘That’s a function of society, not necessarily a function of the Palace,’ says the Queen’s second son and fourth in line to the throne. ‘Fifty years ago it was not remotely possible or sensible to fly to the United States or the Middle East and come back in a day. And the great advantage was it took time for communication to happen, which allowed thinking time. Now, people communicate instantaneously.’ But having spent ten years as the Special Representative for UK Trade and Investment (a post he has now relinquished), he has observed plenty of change management in practice. And the Duke acknowledges that the monarchy is going to have to adapt even more rapidly in the future. ‘That need to restructure or to change is more frequent because of the change of pace of life.’

History has known no monarch like the Queen. She has travelled farther and met more foreign leaders than all her predecessors put together. If one works on the basis that she has met 150 new people every day of her adult life (a low estimate since she can do the same in one walkabout and three hundred people at a single reception), then the