

## **Headteacher's Address to the school community on the passing of Queen Elizabeth II**

**9<sup>th</sup> September 2022**



The Queen is Dead. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II passed away peacefully at Balmoral Castle yesterday, the 8th of September, surrounded by her family. The end of an era and the beginning of a new one.

Although the Queen was 96 years old and had reduced mobility over the last few years, this has come as a shock to us all. We saw her appear with the Royal Family during the recent platinum jubilee celebrations in good spirits. Only on Tuesday, her Majesty calmly oversaw the transfer of power from Boris Johnson to the new Prime Minister, Liz Truss. Right to the end, she was agile of mind, discharged her duty and had an endearing smile for the camera. Even in her 90s, she used to spend several hours a day reading state papers and having the weekly audience with the Prime Minister. Her sense of duty unwavering.

We will never again see a reign of this length, 70 years, the longest ever serving British Monarch. Just as we talk about the Edwardian era, the Victorian era, the new Elizabethan area covers a vast sweep of British history. For most of us, she will have been the only monarch we have known. She appointed 15 Prime Ministers, and almost hard to believe that her first was Winston Churchill, someone we now learn about from history books, with Elizabeth's teenage years shaped by the horrors of the second world war. When she succeeded her father George VI in 1952, Britain and the world were a very different place. Food rationing would be in place until 1954. The news of the succession was delivered by telegraph and telegram, there was only one BBC TV channel in black and white, and the first jet airliner would be built at Hatfield and fly a few months later, bringing the news to the edges of the British Empire, where many colonies had yet to gain their independence.

And of course the Queen has a connection with Hitchin, with her mother Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon being born at St Paul's Walden Bury and her birth registered in Hitchin, with young Elizabeth spending much of her early life at St Paul's Walden.

So what does the Queen represent to you?

To me, she was the presence on TV every Christmas day as my grandparents made sure that dinner was interrupted to listen to the Queen's Speech. This was despite the fact that they lived in Ireland and the struggle for independence from Britain was within living memory. Somehow the Queen represented the best of Britain, the best

of us all, someone to be respected, whose opinion was always measured and true, with vast integrity and elevated above the humdrum and the divisive politics of the day.

She was always someone with remarkable calm, a reassuring presence, a constant that told us we will prevail, through the pandemic for instance, someone who can be trusted, who had seen it all and knew we would make it.

I met the Queen in 2012 as part of her Diamond Jubilee at Hatfield House, the childhood home of her ancestor Elizabeth the first. My main memory was how small she was but how she had a huge beaming smile, shaking hands with everyone she met and paying a real interest in who everyone was and displaying warmth and care.

So what did the Queen mean to you? And to others?

She was first and foremost a mother : to the new King and to Anne, Edward and Andrew. A grandmother to Harry and William and a great comfort to her grandsons when their mother Diana was tragically killed in a car accident. Some of her great grandchildren are now at school and Harry's youngest, Lillbet, is named after her childhood nickname with Prince George calling her Gan Gan as a toddler. She maybe reminds us of all of our grans or great grans - a safe place with unconditional love and support. She had to endure some tough times with her family sometimes linked with tragedy or controversy, but her own honesty and integrity was never in doubt.

She was also a monarch, descended from the great royal houses of Europe. A guarantor of stability in the UK, rising above political upheaval and many crises. A head of state of 32 different countries during her reign and leader of the Commonwealth. Although many of these countries have gained independence or become republics during her reign, it was something down to the reverence with which she was held that she was still the head of state of powerful countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Her defining characteristic was her sense of duty and service. Despite inheriting vast wealth, she was never ostentatious and always talked about her role as servant to the nation. And yet always ready to show her sense of humour, starring opposite James Bond in the 2012 Olympics skydiving sketch or taking tea with Paddington for her platinum jubilee

I want to read you her most recent major speech from her Platinum Jubilee. It feels like a summation of her reign and preparing us for the point we are at today:

*“Tomorrow, 6th February, marks the 70th anniversary of my Accession in 1952. It is a day that, even after 70 years, I still remember as much for the death of my father, King George VI, as for the start of my reign.*

*As we mark this anniversary, it gives me pleasure to renew to you the pledge I gave in 1947 that my life will always be devoted to your service.*

*As I look ahead with a sense of hope and optimism to the year of my Platinum Jubilee, I am reminded of how much we can be thankful for. These last seven decades have seen extraordinary progress socially, technologically and culturally that have benefitted us all; and I am confident that the future will offer similar opportunities to us and especially to the younger generations in the United Kingdom and throughout the Commonwealth.*

*I am fortunate to have had the steadfast and loving support of my family. I was blessed that in Prince Philip I had a partner willing to carry out the role of consort and unselfishly make the sacrifices that go with it. It is a role I saw my own mother perform during my father’s reign.*

*This anniversary also affords me a time to reflect on the goodwill shown to me by people of all nationalities, faiths and ages in this country and around the world over these years. I would like to express my thanks to you all for your support. I remain eternally grateful for, and humbled by, the loyalty and affection that you continue to give me. And when, in the fullness of time, my son Charles becomes King, I know you will give him and his wife Camilla the same support that you have given me; and it is my sincere wish that, when that time comes, Camilla will be known as Queen Consort as she continues her own loyal service.*

*And so as I look forward to continuing to serve you with all my heart, I hope this Jubilee will bring together families and friends, neighbours and communities – after some difficult times for so many of us – in order to enjoy the celebrations and to reflect on the positive developments in our day-to-day lives that have so happily coincided with my reign.”*

And perhaps this event has prompted emotions: sadness, grief, concern for the future. Perhaps we are thinking about those in our own family that we have loved and lost. Maybe she reminds us of our own gran!

As the author Julie Burchill said, “Tears are sometimes an inappropriate response to death. When a life has been lived completely honestly, completely successfully, or just completely, the correct response to death's perfect punctuation mark is a smile.”

We will observe the national plans for mourning and more information on this will be announced in the coming days.

Something that the monarchy represents that is so important is stability, continuity, succession. The Queen's first-born son has been waiting to become king for 73 years and now King Charles III takes the throne. Many things that we have become so accustomed to will change: our money, our stamps, our post boxes, our events such as Remembrance or Christmas, but they will all continue. Although the nation has lost an anchor, this means a new chapter of our history begins today. We should face this with confidence, a chance for renewal, a normal part of life's natural order.

Queen Elizabeth spent her life honouring the pledge of service that she made at 21. Let us thank her for her service. Let us all have the strength and integrity to keep such promises in our own lives.

God Save the King

Let us now observe a minute's silence, followed by the Last Post

*Fergal Moane*  
*9<sup>th</sup> September 2022*