

QEIS Commemorates Queen Elizabeth II, 1926-2022

The Queen Elizabeth I Society sends our deepest condolences to the family and subjects of Queen Elizabeth II, the longest reigning monarch in English history. The Queen's peaceful death; the dignity of the funeral rituals, processions, and services; and the peaceful succession of Elizabeth's son Charles are a fitting conclusion to Elizabeth's 70 years of dedication to her people.

As with the deaths of Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth I, now the second and third longest reigning English rulers, most of Elizabeth's subjects have never lived under any other monarch, and, as with the earlier queens, the transition to "God Save the King" is likely to be a slow one. In addition to the political realities of dealing with a king whose politics and presence are quite different from his predecessor's, there are millions of banknotes, coins, and stamps; thousands of post boxes and warrants; and many other visible signs of royal rule that will need to change. As with earlier royal transitions, Britons are asking important questions about the need for a monarch, the role of royal pageantry, the expense of the king's household, the absence of inheritance taxes, the titles to be bestowed on children and grandchildren. We are fortunate that such questions can be asked and debated out loud, and without fear of arrest or execution.

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Both Queen Victoria and Elizabeth II produced heirs of the body to succeed to the throne, but Elizabeth I, the childless Virgin Queen, departed under more unsettled circumstances. She was succeeded by James VI of Scotland, who, like the current King Charles, was the father of an heir and a spare, but James's peaceful accession required some skilled political oversight by Robert Cecil and Elizabeth's Privy Council and was preceded by years of anxiety over whether or not Elizabeth's death would lead to civil war. That war did, eventually, break out under James's son Charles I, permanently altering the balance of power between the monarch and the people.

Elizabeth I died on March 24, 1603 after a short illness; a London lawyer, John Manningham, touchingly claimed "hir Majestie departed this lyfe, mildly like a lambe, easily like a ripe apple from the tree." Many of the rituals and practices we saw during Elizabeth II's mourning period and funeral were also followed for the first Queen Elizabeth: careful guarding of the lead-lined royal casket; a procession through London; a simple burial service; a months-long delay before the coronation ceremonies. While many subjects seemed genuinely to mourn Elizabeth I's death, once it was clear that James would take the throne peacefully, Roger Wilbraham asserted that the people rejoiced and that "few wished the gracious Quene alive again." But a comment from early modern chronicler John Stow was also true for Queen Victoria's subjects and will be true for Elizabeth II's: "the name of a King was then so strange as few could remember, or had seene a King before, except they were aged persons." We wish our friends in Britain and the Commonwealth countries a time of peace and prosperity as they begin life with their new monarch King Charles III, whose name, we hope, quickly becomes familiar.

The Queen Elizabeth I Society shared a post (also written by Catherine Loomis) celebrating the 70th anniversary of

Elizabeth II's reign. Since the Queen passed before that post was published, it is included here below the present post.

On Jubilees and Succession

The Queen Elizabeth I Society sends our heartiest congratulations to Queen Elizabeth II on the occasion of her platinum jubilee, a celebration of the 70th year of her reign.

The festivities begin the week of May 29th and will involve much in the way of pageantry and drama.

In a recent opinion piece in *The Guardian*, Ian Jack compared the physical difficulties the 96-year-old Queen Elizabeth II faces as she celebrates seven decades of ruling England to those Queen Victoria suffered during her diamond jubilee. Elizabeth has been riding on a motorized device during some recent public appearances; Victoria, also unable to walk without assistance, had herself moved about in a carriage during the public celebrations. Jack uses the aging bodies of each long-reigning monarch to warn his readers—republicans and monarchists alike—that the inevitable end will still come as a shock:

Victoria lay dying four years after her diamond jubilee, and in Lytton Strachey's words 'it appeared as if some monstrous reversal of the course of nature was about to take place. The vast majority of her subjects had never known a time when Queen Victoria had not been reigning over them.'

When the present Queen's turn comes, be prepared.

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Similar warnings, and a similar sense of a monstrous reversal, were found at the end of Queen Elizabeth I's 44-year reign. While both Victoria and Elizabeth II produced heirs of the body to succeed to the throne, Elizabeth I, the childless Virgin Queen, departed under more unsettled circumstances. She was succeeded by James VI of Scotland, who, like the current Prince Charles, was the father of an heir and a spare, but James's peaceful accession required some skilled political oversight by Robert Cecil and Elizabeth's Privy Council, and was preceded by years of anxiety over whether or not Elizabeth's death would lead to the outbreak of a civil war.

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Here's hoping Queen Elizabeth II enjoys many more years of good health, and that she has a jubilant June. And here's hoping our study of the reign of Elizabeth I gives us perspective on who and what will succeed.

– Catherine Loomis

Catherine Loomis is Professor of English at the University of New Orleans. She is current President of the Queen Elizabeth I Society