

The nation's journey 1952-2022

The Jubilee is a time to look back and to recognise our own personal journeys and how they are interwoven with the evolving life of the nation. Like most people I have never known another monarch. Queen Elizabeth has always been there. Her accent, way of doing the job and attitudes have evolved as the nation has changed. The nation expects complete political neutrality, visibility, but a little reserve and mystery.

I remember as a young child asking my parents to explain the rubble and overgrown weeds of a bomb site that still survived in my home city of Canterbury. We had a new shopping centre that had emerged from the rubble. I had never asked why the shopping centre was new. It never occurred to my child mind it could have been blown up by enemies. Beyond the city walls there was still a little lingering evidence of war that I had not understood. I remember the sense of shock I felt when my parents gave me a sanitised short simplified explanation of bombing. My naivety that adults were protective of children was dented by this new information as I saw it meant everyone had been bombed.

As the war receded in the rear view mirror prosperity spread more widely through the country as we picked the fruits of peace. The 1960s and 1980s for all their struggles were years of great progress in advancing a consumer revolution. The revelation of the Mini brought small cars to many more families. The mass production of affordable fridges, washing machines and driers greatly improved meal preparation and transformed washday. Cheaper package holidays allowed many more to go abroad for sun and sights. Central heating delivered new standards of winter comfort banishing the frozen windows and cold bedrooms. Tvs made their way into most homes and were adapted to coloured photography. Later the ubiquitous home computers and mobile phones morphed us into a digital age, providing us each with computing power that the state alone had developed and owned to help win the world war.

I remember as a young child having to visit an ageing old man. He lived in a Victorian terrace house which was little changed from how it must have been all those years before when first constructed. The house was still lit by gas lamps. The water for the tea slow boiled on a coal fired range. Just the one room was properly heated by the coal burner. The front room was forbidden territory only used for funerals or other unexplained and infrequent important functions. I was not allowed in it. We were entertained in the all purpose back dark living room. There was a large general purpose table and hard chairs to sit on. Like all adult chairs I had to mountaineer to get on one. As an only child in a world of adults I got used to living in rooms furnished for giants. There were heavy brocade cloths and house plants as decoration. I was delighted when we returned home to a more modern world. Much has got a lot better over the last seventy years.

When I talk to my young grandsons I think how the generations can stretch understandings of time. I can try to tell them what the world must have been like in the early twentieth century from relatives who told me and they may

in due course be able to look back from the early years of the twenty second century on how we live now. If a new generation will stand on the shoulders of an older generation it will see further and understand more.

The monarch provides such a living thread through our national story. Monarchs no longer make the laws, impose the taxes or spend the public money, but they are in regular contact with those who do. They are part of the public memory of things in history, part of the continuities of national life. The street parties taking place are very similar to those of long gone royal events in centuries past. The royal family itself has within it the tragedies, conflicts and disasters that befall others played out for all to see. It reminds us regularly of the strength of some family ties and the problems they can bring as the royal family has its share of divorces, family feuds, and inappropriate behaviours.