

The place of Queens in history

The British monarchy got the idea of using female talent much sooner than many other institutions in our country. In the last 500 years we have been ruled by Queens for 202 years or 40% of the time. This includes the second Mary ruling jointly with husband William, as their tenure was based on her prime claim to the throne. Queens have not proved very different to their male counterparts in the way they have done the job. We have seen one woman try to usurp the throne in 1554, with various men also trying something similar. In the era of executive monarchs Queens like their male counterparts used executions to deal with rivals and threats. Queen Mary I earned herself the title of Bloody Mary for executing Protestant dissenters from her Catholicism, burning many at the stake including a former Archbishop of Canterbury and a Bishop of Gloucester.

Three women share three of the top four slots for longest reigns, showing their political skills as well as their good health. Of the men only George III had a reign of 60 years, in third place after Elizabeth II's 70 years so far and Victoria's 64 years, though his reign was troubled by mental illness and entailed a Regency for part of it. Elizabeth I managed to survive and flourish for 45 years on the throne despite many attempts to assassinate her. She also successfully confronted a major planned Spanish invasion to remove her from office by foreign force when Spain was the contemporary superpower seeking to unite Europe on Spanish terms. She faced enemies at home plotting with enemies abroad to kill her and change the government. No other King managed more than 40 years. Charles I was executed after fighting a civil war against Parliament. James II was removed from office in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Edward VIII abdicated over a dispute with Parliament about his marriage.

Elizabeth II's success in gradually modernising the monarchy whilst staying very popular for most of the time rests on one simple foundation. She has avoided expressing political views and has not tried to interfere with what her governments have been wishing to do. Her son needs to grasp the crucial importance of this before he in due course takes the throne. Pursuing contentious causes does not mix with neutral monarchy.

Today there is a small minority of republicans who want the institution abolished and who will not be celebrating the Platinum landmark. Most people from Mirror readers to Express fans, from Brexiteers to Remain supporters will celebrate the anniversary in some way or will look in on the national events of the four days on their televisions with a friendly eye. That is in itself the one tribute to the Queen that matters. 70 years on, in a world of Republics and with a global enthusiasm for greater equalities this monarchy is still relevant.

The Queen has carved out an important role as the UK's first diplomat. On the whole successive governments have used her wisely in that role, as she has been the uniting figure for the nation that foreign heads of government and of state can relate to whatever their politics. Some foreign leaders might

not have wanted a photo op with some of our Prime Ministers owing to big political divides, but all seem to want the photo with The Queen, a person known worldwide for her decades of meeting and greeting.

One of the advantages the UK has in the world of international diplomacy is the monarchy. Heads of State visiting here get something different from the five star hotel and luxury limo experience. They may dine in a castle, ride in an open carriage and meet a Queen they have no political issues with who is an internationally recognised global celebrity.