

British Royal Family

A symbol of Britishness

Close relatives of the monarch of the United Kingdom are known by the appellation **The Royal Family**. Although there is no strict legal or formal definition of who is or is not a member of the Royal Family, and different lists will include different people, those carrying the style His or Her Majesty (HM) or His or Her Royal Highness (HRH) are generally considered members, which usually results in the application of the term to these persons:

- the monarch (the king or queen);
- the consort of the monarch (his or her spouse);
- the widowed consorts of previous monarchs (Queen Mother or Queen Dowager);
- the children of the monarch;
- the grandchildren of the monarch;
- the spouses and the widowed spouses of a monarch's son and male-line grandsons; and
- before 1917, great-grandchildren in the male line.

Many millions of people are related to the British Royal Family more distantly than this by virtue of a Royal Descent.

The current British Royal Family are members of the House of Windsor.

Royal Ceremonies & rituals

London is a royal city and has preserved its ceremonies and traditions over hundreds of years. Some are every day and some are every year. The most traditional ceremonies and most popular attractions are the **Trooping of the Colour** and the **Changing of the Guard**.

Searching the Houses of Parliament.

Before every State Opening of Parliament, the Yeomen of the Guard search the cellars beneath the Palace of Westminster by the light of old candle-lanterns. This precaution has been undertaken every year since 1605, when the "Gunpowder Conspirators" attempted to blow up parliament on the day of the State Opening.

The State Opening of Parliament.

Dating back to Medieval London, this ceremony marks the beginning of the new parliamentary year and features peers and bishops in traditional robes and a royal procession involving the **State Coach**. State openings usually take place in November, or soon after a General Election.

On the day of the Opening, the Queen travels from Buckingham Palace to the Houses of Parliament in the Stage Coach (a gold carriage). Once the Queen arrives at Parliament the union flag is lowered and replaced by the royal standard.

The Queen, wearing her crown and ceremonial robes then processes through the Royal Gallery to take her place on the throne in the House of Lords, from where she send her messenger (Black Rod) to summon the MPs. When he arrives at the House of Commons, the door is slammed in his face, symbolizing the right of the Commons to freedom from interference. He must then knock three times to gain entry and deliver his summons.

The Queen sits on a throne in the House of Lords and reads the "Queen's Speech".

It is tradition for the monarch to open parliament in person, and The Queen has performed the ceremony in every year of her reign except for 1959 and 1963, when she was pregnant with princes Andrew and Edward respectively.

No King or Queen has entered the House of Commons since 1642, when Charles I stormed in with his soldiers and tried to arrest five members of Parliament who were there.

Ceremony of the Keys.

One of London's most timeless ceremonies, dating back 700 years is the ceremony of the keys which takes place at the Tower of London. At 21:53 each night the Chief Yeoman Warder of the Tower, dressed in Tudor uniform, sets off to meet the Escort of the Key dressed in the well-known Beefeater uniform. Together they tour the various gates ceremonially locking them, on returning to the Bloody Tower archway they are challenged by a sentry.

"Who goes there?"

"The Keys." answers The Chief Warder

"Whose Keys?" the sentry demands.

"Queen Elizabeth's Keys."

"Pass Queen Elizabeth's Keys. All's well."

A trumpeter then sounds the Last Post before the keys are secured in the Queen's House.

Changing of the Guard.

Outside Buckingham Palace, you can see guardsmen dressed in their bright red uniforms and bearskin hats. the place of the "old guard". This is known as the Changing of the Guards ceremony and it dates back to 1660.

The monarch and the royal palaces have been guarded by the Household Troops since 1660.

Maundy Money.

Maundy Thursday is the day before Good Friday, at Easter. On that day the Queen gives Maundy money to a group of old people. This tradition is over 1,000 years old. At one time the king or queen washed the feet of poor, old people on Maundy Thursday, but that stopped in 1754.

Swan Upping.

On the River Thames there are hundred's of swans and a lot of these beautiful white birds belong, traditionally, to the king of queen. In July, the Queen's swan keeper sails up the

River Thames, from London Bridge to Henley. He looks at all the young swans and marks the royal ones.

The Queen's Telegram

This fairly new custom assures aspiring centenarians that they will receive a birthday telegram from the queen on their one-hundredth birthday. On his or her one hundredth birthday, a British person gets a telegram from the Queen.

The Birthday Honours list and the New Year Honours list:

Twice a year at Buckingham Palace, the Queen gives titles or 'honours', once in January and once in June.

Honours received include:

C.B.E. - Companion of the British Empire

O.B.E. - Order of the British Empire

M.B.E. - Member of the British Empire

These honours began in the nineteenth century, because then Britain had an empire.

Knighthood - a knight has "Sir" before his name. A new knight kneels in front of the Queen. She touches first his right shoulder, then his left shoulder with a sword. Then she says "Arise, Sir...and his first name, and the knight stands.

Peerage - a peer is a lord. Peers sit in the House of Lords, which is one part of the Houses of Parliament. The other part is the House of Commons.

Dame/Baroness - these are two of the highest honours for a woman.

Coronation & Royal ceremonies

The coronation of the new monarch follows the accession after an appropriate interval. The formal mourning of the sovereign at the time must be respectfully acknowledged before the heir can be newly anointed. The ceremony has remained the same for over a thousand years! For the past 900, the ceremony has taken place at Westminster Abbey, the site for many royal occasions. The service takes place in the presence of representatives of the Houses of Parliament, Church and State, and is conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who has performed this duty since 1066. Prime ministers, leading citizens from the Commonwealth, and representatives from other countries also attend.

The coronation is an occasion for grand pageantry and celebration for the United Kingdom, but it is a sacred and religious ceremony. The Sovereign takes the coronation oath; to rule according to law, to exercise justice with mercy - promises symbolised by the four swords in the coronation regalia (Crown Jewels) - and to maintain the Church of England.

The Sovereign is then seated in King Edward's chair, anointed, blessed and consecrated by the Archbishop. King Edward's chair was made in 1300, and used by every Sovereign since 1626. After receiving the orb and sceptres, the Archbishop places St. Edward's Crown on the Sovereign's head. After homage is paid by the Archbishop of Canterbury and senior peers, Holy Communion is celebrated.

The Queen will be succeeded by her son, Charles, The Prince of Wales, upon her death. He will be known as King Charles III (unless he chooses a different name), and his son William will be heir apparent.

Funerals

The large-scale public reactions that followed the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, on August 31, 1997, and that of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother on March 30, 2002, illustrate the longstanding tendency of prominent British royal deaths to stir an emotional response from millions who had never personally been acquainted with the deceased. Royal deaths have also evoked important forms of ritual and symbolic commemoration that are significant both in the context of the evolution of British civil religion and national identity, and in shaping and representing wider social and cultural responses to death. Despite occasional subversive undertones, the expression of such collective grief usually provided a potent legitimization of the institution of the monarchy and the existing social and political order.

Overall responsibility for the funerals of sovereigns rests with the Earl Marshal, an office of state held on a hereditary basis by the dukes of Norfolk, who are assisted by the heralds of the College of Arms. The funerals of other members of the royal family are organized by Lord Chamberlain's office, which is part of the permanent royal secretariat. Numerous other agencies are involved in more complex and large-scale rituals. These have included the Office of Works (for temporary additions to buildings), the church, the armed services, the police, and the railways.

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century royal funerals were usually held in London with interments in Westminster Abbey. George III, however, moved the royal burial place to St. George's Chapel in Windsor Castle, thus focusing ceremonially on what was then a relatively small country town, several hours journey from the capital in pre-railway days. Scope for public participation was therefore limited. Only following the death of Queen Victoria was there a decisive move back to a more public and large-scale ceremonial. Her funeral, which included a spectacular naval review and a military procession through central London, represented a return to a "theatre of death" on a scale not seen since the early seventeenth century. The trend was confirmed upon the death of her son Edward VII when a further ritual of a public lying-in-state in Westminster Hall was added and proved enormously popular.

Major royal funerals, especially those of sovereigns, were made up of a series of ceremonies extending over several days, public and private, religious and secular, and presenting different aspects of the deceased. For example, Edward VII's body initially lay privately in his bedroom at Buckingham Palace, before being moved ceremonially to the Throne Room, and then in a street procession to Westminster Hall. After the three days of the public lying-in-state, there was a further street procession to Paddington Station, a train journey to Windsor, a procession from the station to the Castle, and a culminating religious service in St. George's Chapel.

Royal funerals—unlike coronations, jubilees, and weddings—need to be arranged in a timescale measured in days rather than months. Although some discreet advance planning can be made, the exact circumstances of a death are unforeseeable and, in particular, the unexpected death of a relatively young person, as in the case of Princess Diana, is likely to catch the authorities almost wholly unprepared.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the days of royal funerals were increasingly marked by parallel processions and church services in provincial towns and cities. By this means many people remote from London or Windsor were able to achieve a sense of participation in a national ritual. Solidarity in grief was expressed by the wearing of mourning clothes and emblems such as black armbands. In this period instructions for the general wearing of mourning for periods of several weeks drew general compliance, giving a somber atmosphere to the streets. From the mid-twentieth century onward, the advent of radio and, eventually, television intensified this sense of involvement while shifting it from the communal public religiosity of streets and places of worship to the individualistic and domestic environment of people's homes. Film and television have increased consciousness of royal funerals as mass spectacles, as manifested in the unprecedented size of the worldwide television audience that watched Princess Diana's funeral.

Since the death of Queen Victoria, ceremonial or state funeral processions have been carried out on the death of a British Monarch, a close member of the British Royal Family or, in some cases, a highly regarded statesman or woman. These are probably the most powerful and moving ceremonies of state which take place in Britain. State funerals are normally reserved for the death of the reigning Monarch or can be granted by the Monarch to others. The coffin is carried on a gun carriage, escorted in a long procession by members of all the armed forces and by members of the Royal Family, to Westminster Hall where the body lies in state, allowing ordinary people to pay their last respects by filing past the coffin.

The practice of allowing the body to lie-in-state goes a very long way back in history. The people who surrounded the body, be they soldiers or relatives of the deceased sovereign, were essentially representing the feelings of the people and ordinary people were therefore allowed to see the body lying-in-state in order to bond the people and the Nation together. The processional ceremony, however, is relatively recent in origin, beginning only with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and continuing with the funeral of Edward VII.

In the modern procession the gun carriage is formed from a detachment from The Kings Troop, Royal Horse Artillery. However, during a state funeral, the gun carriage would be drawn by members of the Royal Navy rather than artillery horses.

The Bearer Party carry the coffin towards the gun carriage before the procession begins and carefully place it on the prepared carriage.

The Garrison Sergeant Major first gives the order to the procession to reverse arms and then to slow march and the procession moves off to the beat of the muffled drums of the bands which play funereal music. The gun carriage is followed by members of the Royal Family, walking behind, along with other dignitaries and members of the Royal Household. During the procession, guns are fired from Hyde Park at one minute intervals. The funeral procession, which is usually more than half a mile long, continues on its way towards Westminster.

The funeral procession passes through the Horse Guards Arch, which was once the main gateway to Buckingham Palace, before turning right onto Whitehall and proceeds along Whitehall towards Westminster Hall. On arrival, the Bearer Party remove the coffin from the gun carriage and carry it into the ancient Hall where the catafalque awaits.

The coffin is borne to the centre of Westminster Hall and placed upon the catafalque where it will remain for the three days of the lying-in-state. A short receiving service takes place which is led by the Archbishop of Canterbury attended by dignitaries and members of the Royal Family.

As the final prayer ends, the first vigil begins. In a tribute evocative of Arthurian legend, four officers march down the steps of the Hall, past the heraldic beasts, across the stone floor and mount the catafalque, one at each corner of the coffin. The coffin is guarded in this way, during the lying-in-state, by officers from Household Division, The Queen's Bodyguard of the Yeomen of the Guard, Her Majesty's Bodyguard of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen at Arms and The Royal Company of Archers in turn and turn about.

They reverse their ceremonial weapons, resting their hands upon the hilts and bowing their heads. Each unit mounts guard for six hours at a time with the guard being changed at twenty minute intervals.

The body normally lies-in-state for three days in order to allow time for the ordinary people to file past and pay their last respects.