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The Queen

1926: Born on April 21 at 17 Bruton St, London W1 1936: Edward VIII abdicates 1937: Princess Elizabeth sees her father crowned King George VI

A very precious queen

Pictures: MARCUS ADAMS/Camera Press; SWNS; CAMERA PRESS; GETTY

FOR 60 YEARS she has reigned supreme as one of the world's most important women. Unwavering in her duty and stalwart in her service to the Crown, the Queen has earned respect around the world for her unfaltering conduct as Britain's head of state and constitutional monarch of 15 Commonwealth realms.

Revered as Britain's best diplomat and celebrated for her steadfast devotion to her subjects, she has earned her place in history as one of the most popular monarchs of modern times.

However, beyond the pomp and pageantry surrounding her, little is known about the Queen's journey as a woman to monarch. From her Coronation to the start of her Diamond Jubilee year tomorrow, how the Queen has ruled her realms has been widely analysed; yet as a woman she remains an enigma.

In a life bound by duty, she has been loyal daughter and sister, steadfast wife and loving mother and grandmother.

Since she has never given an interview (and is never likely to) the very little we do know about Her Majesty's private life has been gleaned from letters and the rare revelations of her nearest and dearest.

George VI's deep love and affection for his eldest daughter was laid bare in their extraordinary correspondence. In a letter he wrote to the then Princess Elizabeth upon her marriage to Prince Philip in 1947, the King spoke of his "pride" but also of how he felt he has lost something "very precious" when he walked her down the aisle at Westminster Abbey: "Your leaving us has left a great blank in our lives but do remember that your old home is still yours and do come back to it as much and as often as possible."

Ever the dutiful daughter, the Queen had respected her father's wishes that she and Philip postpone announcing their engagement for a year until she turned 21.

A somewhat over-protective father concerned that his young and inexperienced daughter may be rushing into things with a man five years her senior, George VI had earlier put the brakes on the princess's blossoming relationship with Prince Philip of Greece by writing to his uncle, Earl Mountbatten, expressing concern over the intensity of their relationship.

"I have been thinking the matter over since our talk and I have come to the conclusion that we are going too fast," he wrote, suggesting that if the couple were to marry, Philip would have to cease "being a Greek".

While the King adored Philip, he was simply reluctant to let go of



DUTY: (Clockwise) Princess Elizabeth with sister Princess Margaret in 1933; a family moment in 1951; with Prince Charles in 1948 and aged 19 during the war

The Queen's longest tour was from November 1953 until May 1954 when she visited the Caribbean, Australasia, Asia and Africa.

Elizabeth, so dependable and supportive of what he always referred to as "The Firm".

As Princess Margaret said of her father after his death: "He always thought of us as one, as opposed to four different people."

When the abdication plunged George VI into an unknown world of red boxes and affairs of state, his need to prepare Elizabeth for all that lay ahead took on a greater urgency.

He sent her to be tutored by Sir Henry Marten, vice-provost of Eton, who famously introduced each of her lessons with the word "gentlemen", as if addressing a room full of boys, when in fact the princess was the only person there.

According to the historian Kenneth Rose: "The King counselled Elizabeth and prepared her for her role. He didn't want her to show herself up. Marten had taught generations of boys at Eton and was rather old-fashioned in that he even referred to the Princess as if one of his schoolboys, but she took it on the chin. She wanted to learn and that appealed greatly to her father."

Elizabeth, described by Rose as "a remarkably intelligent woman with a very, very active, clever mind", shared

her father's intellect and his interest in history and constitutional affairs. Ever tuned into the wireless during the Second World War, the Queen even had her own maps upon which to mark the Allies' progress.

She also showed the characteristics of a Queen from a very early age and her father often likened her to Queen Victoria, the longest-serving monarch in British history. He observed to the writer Osbert Sitwell one night: "She showed so much character that it was impossible not to wonder whether history would repeat itself."

CHURCHILL wrote in his diary after staying at Balmoral as a guest of King George V and Queen Mary, in September 1928: "There is no one here at all, except the family, the household and Princess Elizabeth, aged two. The latter is a character. She has an air of authority and reflectiveness astonishing in an infant."

The princess's governor Marion "Crawfie" Crawford also noticed an unusual maturity in a then 10-year-old Elizabeth, upon hearing of her grandfather George V's death in

January 1936. She wrote in her controversial 1950 memoirs, *The Little Princesses*, arguably the most revealing book ever to be written about the Queen: "Lilibet in her sensitive fashion felt it all deeply. It was very touching to see how hard she tried to do what she felt was expected of her. I remember her pausing as she groomed one of her toy horses and looking up at me for a moment: 'Oh, Crawfie... ought we to play?'"

Sir Alan Lascelles, George VI's private secretary, would later tell his wife of the "remarkable development of P'cess E" on her foreign debut in South Africa when, at 21, she gave one of her most famous speeches, declaring her intention to live her life serving others: "There is a motto which has been borne by many of my ancestors, a noble motto: 'I serve'."

"I declare before you that my whole life shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great Imperial family to which we all belong."

He said: "For a child of her years she has got an astonishing solicitude

for other people's comfort; such unselfishness is not a normal characteristic of that family."

Even when her father died the Queen thought only of others, according to her cousin Margaret Rhodes, who revealed the contents of a letter she wrote shortly after his death in which she said: "It really was ghastly, the feeling that I was unable to help or comfort mummy or Margaret and that there was nothing one could do at all."

As Crawfie recounted, the Queen "took after" her father, adding: "She, too, was reserved. If you once gained her love and affection you had it for ever but she never gave it easily."

While her sister Margaret was a "plaything", Lilibet "always had the more dignity of the two", according to Crawfie. "Lilibet was the one with the temper but it was under control. Margaret was often naughty but she had a gay, bouncing way with her which was hard to deal with."

In many respects Elizabeth's and

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Review

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