



# Behind the tara

This year the Queen turned 80, and has seen the world celebrate with her. James Franklin asks how this anniversary has helped us better understand this woman about whom we know so little, and whose life of duty is not yet over.



Many, such as royal biographer William Shawcross, believe that it is this mystique that has allowed the Queen to remain such an admired figurehead for the somewhat less refined royal generations that have followed her. He described her as, 'not demonstrative. Her generation was perhaps the last to be brought up to believe that public displays of emotion were bad form.'

Her wit and sense of humour in private have been applauded by many over the years, which comes as a surprise to those used only to her rather dry

Christmas speeches. It is rare that the 'real' Queen emerges from her dignified royal persona, but from time to time she lets her guard down. At her Golden Jubilee in 2002 she was chatting with the crowd that had gathered when one young

**'It's all to do with the training: you can do a lot if you're properly trained.'**

*On the secret of her success*

woman's mobile phone rang. The Queen turned to her and said: 'You never know, it could be someone important.' At her birthday celebration held in July by the Lord Mayor of London,

the Queen deflected praise of her long and devoted service with a Groucho Marx quote: 'Anyone can get old. All you have to do is live long enough.'

#### Shy but not retiring

She certainly has earned the respect of her public, reaching 20 years beyond the average retirement age and showing no sign of stopping. Last year she attended 430 official engagements (more than one a day), including 48 on official overseas visits. All this, and she is 80 years old. Ever since she ascended to the throne she has seen her role as one of service to her country, and for that she is respected in a way that her children and grandchildren are not.

There is no doubt that the reputation of the British monarchy has undergone a rollercoaster ride over the last couple of decades, peaking with the marriage of Charles and Diana, and falling into disrepute with the breakdown of the same union. Since Diana's death, the attention has waned ever so slightly, and the Queen's Golden Jubilee, marked as it was by the death of the Queen mother, saw the beginning of what can only be described as a revival in the fortunes of the Royal Family.

Prince Andrew views the nation's affection for his mother as a result of her refusal to stray from

what she has always seen as her duty. 'It's slightly complicated for people to grasp the idea of a

**'The emotion that the Queen inspires is one of unbelligerent tenderness.'**

*English philosopher Roger Scruton*

head of state in human form, but I would put her appeal down to consistency. In their eyes, she's never let them down.'

The Queen's 80th celebrations

have cemented that revival. Her ability to inspire admiration and affection in all those she meets indicates a staying power that the passing fashions of the tabloid press cannot compete. The lady behind the royal mask has always intrigued her subjects and many more beyond these shores.

**'The problem is, the Queen is the kind of woman who could vote SDP.'**

*Margaret Thatcher, in conversation with broadcaster Brian Walden*

As she reaches her 80s it gets harder to hide her feelings and personality, and with every glimpse she gives, the British public are putting more of the pieces together – and they like what they see. ■

**A**fter 9/11 the Queen sent a consolatory message to the people of New York that was read out at the memorial service. It finished with the line, 'Grief is the price we pay for love.'

Bill Clinton, who attended the service, has since commented: 'It was a stunning sentence, so wise and so true. It somehow made people feel better, making us understand that we were grieving because we had that love.'

This sentiment that the Queen expressed so simply is one of the few glimpses we have had into the mind of a woman whose image is recognisable to a large part of the world's population, yet whose personality is hidden from all but her family and closest friends.

#### Reigning times

Elizabeth Alexandra Mary Windsor has ruled Great Britain since her father, George VI, died when she was 25. In all this time as the figurehead of a nation obsessed with its monarch, Elizabeth has

**'It's all right for you. I can't.'**

*In response to Bishop Michael Mann, Dean of Windsor, announcing his retirement*

remained an enigma. She never gives interviews and her statements are never quoted, except

for her annual Christmas speech. While she allows photos to be taken of her, the circumstances are controlled. She has managed to remain a private person while fulfilling the most public of roles. In fact, of all the world's public figures she is perhaps the most private.

Few are lucky enough to meet the Queen, and even fewer count her among their friends. Members of that select group, such as Nelson Mandela, smile at the mere mention of her, and all keep their conversations with her private. As Tony Blair once said of his meetings with the Queen: 'There are only two people in the world, frankly, to whom a prime minister can say what he likes about his cabinet colleagues. One's the wife, the other's the Queen.'



Queen Elizabeth II celebrates her 80th birthday at Mansion House, London, on 15 June 2006