

Queen celebrates sixty years of incredible change

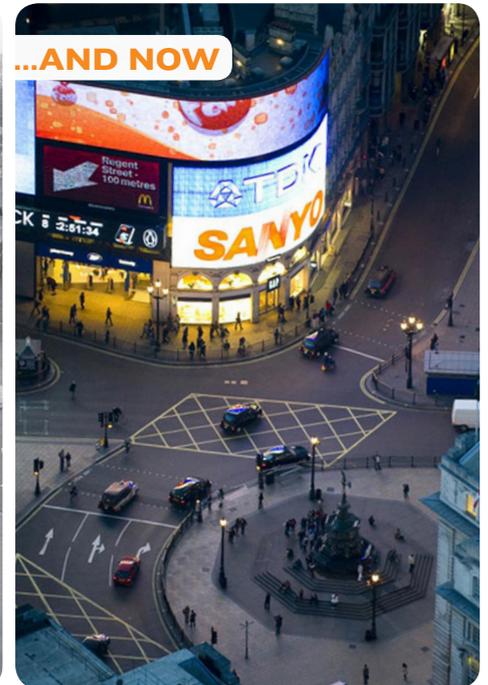
It is sixty years since Elizabeth II came to the throne. In that time, she has seen the nation change more radically than any King or Queen in British history. How will her reign be remembered?



CITIZENSHIP
HISTORY & POLITICS



Piccadilly Circus in London, in the 1950s, and today © Getty Images



This weekend, Britain will be buzzing with Jubilee celebrations, as people all over the country brave the crowds and the forecast of rain to celebrate sixty years since Queen Elizabeth II came to the throne.

Elizabeth has now ruled longer than any British monarch except Queen Victoria. Like Victoria, she has presided over an extraordinary period in her country's history – but while Victoria saw British power reach an unprecedented height, Elizabeth's reign has been a period of uncertainty and radical change.

In 1952, when Elizabeth came to the throne at the age of just 25, Britain was a failing empire, slowly recovering from the horrors of the Second World War. Winston Churchill was still Prime Minister. British soldiers were fighting in Korea. Supplies of meat and sweets were still being rationed.

The British Empire still covered millions of square miles, from South America to

Africa and the Far East, but it was shrinking rapidly. Bankrupted by war, the UK could no longer afford to maintain a presence in the colonies, which were, in any case, loudly demanding independence.

As the Empire retreated, people from all over the world came flooding in. The crowd that watched Elizabeth's coronation was almost entirely white Anglo-Saxon. Today, more than one in ten of her British subjects is foreign-born. The national dish in 1952 was fish and chips. Now it is chicken curry.

And while the country's power waned, its culture was gripped by a revolution. Young people born after the war rebelled against the rigid rules and expectations of their parents. Teenagers danced to rock and roll, the Beatles, then the Rolling Stones. Hippies shocked the older generation. Later came punks and skinheads, dancing ravers, spitting MCs.

Technology too has changed beyond recognition. Bulky 'wireless' sets have

been replaced by flatscreen 3D TVs. Aeroplanes can fly faster than sound. Americans have walked on the moon, while British scientists have unravelled the secrets of genes and DNA. Mobile phones and the internet have revolutionised the way Britons work and communicate. The young Queen in 1952 could never have imagined the way the world would look today.

GOOD OLD DAYS

So is Britain on its way up, or going to the dogs? On the one hand, British power has faded. The country is probably less unified than it once was; less patriotic; less polite. Many Britons see 1952 as belonging to the 'good old days.'

Others think things have only been getting better. The UK now has a diverse, lively culture and a hyper-connected, creative society. Overseas, the UK used to have colonies. Now it has friends and allies. Do Britain's best days lie ahead after all?

Q & A

Q Is there really any point looking back at the past?

A Yes! Apart from anything else, looking back at history can provide clues about the ways things will go in the future. It is possible to spot trends in the last sixty years (for example, social rules have relaxed; com-

munications technology has improved; wars have become rarer). It is then reasonable to expect those trends will continue into the future – a little way at least. Also, if things have been done wrong in the past, reading history helps prevent mistakes being made again.

Q Isn't there a famous quote about that?

A Indeed there is. The philosopher George

Santayana famously said: 'Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it.'

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

'Britain is a country in terminal decline.'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

▶ Queen celebrates sixty years of incredible change

WORD WATCH

Korea – Britain fought seven separate wars during the 1950s, of which the Korean War (supporting US troops against Communist China and North Korea) was the most serious. Around 14,000 British soldiers died.

Anglo-Saxon – Most British people are descended from Germanic

tribes – the Angles and the Saxons – who came to Britain between the Fifth and Seventh Centuries AD. Queen Elizabeth herself is also German, descended from the Royal house of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.

Faster than sound – Although military jets frequently break the sound barrier, the only commercial passenger plane to travel

faster than sound was Concorde – a Franco-British jet that stopped flying in 2003, following a deadly crash.

DNA – Deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA, is the material which holds the biological instructions for all complex life forms. Its unique double helix structure (a twisted spiral) was discovered by James Watson and Francis Crick in 1953.

YOU DECIDE

1. Which year is better: 1952 or 2012?
2. Do you think the Queen thinks her country has been getting worse or better?

ACTIVITIES

1. Write a short story looking back on the year 2012, from the year 2072 – sixty years in the future.
2. What do you think is the most important thing to have happened in the last sixty years? Make a short speech about your choice.

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 **NOTES**

