



The Queen's Platinum Jubilee: A Brief Parliamentary History of Her Reign

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On 6 February 2022, Queen Elizabeth II became the first British monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee, marking 70 years of service to the people of the United Kingdom, the Realms and the Commonwealth. Events and initiatives will take place throughout the year to celebrate this milestone, culminating in a four-day UK bank holiday weekend in early June.

The monarchy holds a prominent place in British political life. As noted in *Erskine May*, Parliament can be regarded as the sovereign, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Collectively they form the legislature, and as distinct parts of the constitution they exercise functions and enjoy privileges peculiar to each.

Originally published in 2016 as part of a [briefing examining the role of the sovereign as part of the constitution of Parliament](#), the following presents a brief updated overview of the Queen's participation in key parliamentary events since she ascended to the throne.

I. Queen Elizabeth II: the longest reigning monarch

On 9 September 2015, Queen Elizabeth II became the longest reigning sovereign in British history.¹ Born in 1926 and Queen at age 25 in 1952, Queen Elizabeth II is the 40th sovereign since William the Conqueror obtained the crown of England.

Only five other kings and queens in British history have reigned for 50 years or more: Edward III (50 years); Henry III (56 years); James VI of Scotland—James I of England—(58 years); George III (59 years); and Victoria (63 years). Queen Victoria became queen on 20 June 1837 at the age of 18 and reigned until her death on 22 January 1901 aged 81, with a reign of 63 years, 7 months and 3 days.²

To commemorate Queen Elizabeth II becoming the longest reigning monarch, members of both Houses gave tributes to the Queen in their respective chambers in 2015. Then Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords Baroness Stowell of Beeston said:

We join millions of people across the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and, indeed, the rest of the world who will mark this historic moment and thank her for the extraordinary service she has given to our country for more than six decades.

Throughout her reign, her commitment to public service has been beyond question. Her sense of public duty is as steadfast today as it was when she declared, aged just 21, that she would devote her whole life to the service of her people. She continues to demonstrate that commitment every single day. That is why I think she is so highly respected by all those she serves. All of us who seek to play a part in public life can have no better example than her.³

In the House of Commons, then Prime Minister David Cameron said:

Today, Her Majesty the Queen becomes the country's longest reigning monarch. It is of course typical of her selfless sense of service that she would have us treat this day just like any other. While I rarely advocate disobeying Her Majesty, least of all in her own Parliament, I do think that it is right that today we should stop and take a moment as a nation to mark this historic milestone and to thank Her Majesty for the extraordinary service that she has given to our country over more than six decades. [...] For all of us in this chamber who seek to play our part in public service, it is truly humbling to comprehend the scale of service that Her Majesty the Queen has given to this country.

The reign of Queen Elizabeth has been a golden thread running through three post-war generations. She has presided over more than two thirds of our history as a full democracy with everyone being able to vote. When I was born, Her Majesty had already been reigning for 14 years. When the Father of this House—our longest-serving member—was first elected to this chamber, Her Majesty had already been Queen for 18 years. [...] She opened up the royal

¹ Guinness World Records News, '[Queen's Diamond Jubilee: record-breaking facts about Elizabeth II](#)', 1 June 2012.

² The Royal Family, '[50 facts about the Queen's reign](#)', 25 January 2002; Meredith Veldman and Edgar Trevor Williams, '[Victoria: Queen of United Kingdom](#)', Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 4 February 2022; and The Royal Family, '[Queen Victoria \(r. 1837–1901\)](#)', accessed 18 February 2022.

³ [HL Hansard, 9 September 2015, col 1419](#).

collection and palaces, and she invented the royal walkabout, so that she could meet more people on her visits. People who meet the Queen often talk about it for the rest of their lives, and I am sure that I speak for all of my 11 predecessors when I say that going to see the Queen to form a Government and then meeting her once a week is one of the most enjoyable, inspiring and humbling honours of this office.⁴

2. The Queen's role in the state opening of Parliament

- Queen Elizabeth II has attended every state opening during her reign with only two exceptions: one in 1959, when pregnant with Prince Andrew; and the other in 1963 when pregnant with Prince Edward.⁵
- Queen Elizabeth II delivered her first speech at state opening on 4 November 1952.⁶
- State opening of Parliament took place twice in 1974. This was due to two elections taking place that year, following a hung Parliament after the first. Queen Elizabeth II therefore delivered a Queen's Speech to both Houses on two occasions in that year. The first state opening was on 12 March 1974 and the second took place on 29 October 1974.⁷
- The most recent state opening took place on 11 May 2021. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was held with fewer MPs and peers in attendance, a reduced royal procession into the Lords chamber and no diplomatic or non-parliamentary guests. It was also the first state opening to take place following the death of the Duke of Edinburgh on 9 April 2021.
- Traditionally, the Queen had been accompanied to the state opening ceremony by the Duke of Edinburgh. However, prior to his death in 2021, he had not participated in a state opening ceremony since 2016 after taking a step back from public appearances. Instead, the Queen has been accompanied by the Prince of Wales.
- Prior to 2016, the Queen was accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh in all but nine of the state opening ceremonies that she attended during her reign. Those where he was not present were: 1956, 1964, 1968, 1969, 1973, 1982, 1991, 1994 and 1996.⁸
- The Queen has walked alone twice at a state opening of Parliament ceremony. The first was in 1964, when the Queen walked alone for a usual state opening of Parliament ceremony. The second time was in March 1974, when the entire ceremony was scaled down.⁹

3. Royal assent of legislation

- Up until the end of the 2019–21 parliamentary session (the most recent for which full sessional returns are available), Queen Elizabeth II had given royal assent to 3,786 public bills.¹⁰

⁴ [HC Hansard, 9 September 2015, cols 387–8.](#)

⁵ UK Parliament website, '[State opening of Parliament](#)', accessed 17 February 2022.

⁶ [HL Hansard, 4 November 1952, cols 1–5.](#)

⁷ [HL Hansard, 12 March 1974, cols 7–12;](#) and [HL Hansard, 29 October 1974, cols 7–11.](#)

⁸ The Royal Family, '[Statement regarding the state opening of Parliament in May 2013](#)', 1 April 2013.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ House of Lords Library, [The Sovereign and Parliament](#), 4 March 2016; and House of Commons, '[Sessional returns](#)', accessed 17 February 2022.

- Queen Elizabeth II has never refused royal assent.
- Queen Elizabeth II has never given royal assent in person.

4. Parliamentary calendar

In 1974, during a tour of Australia and Indonesia, the Queen was called back to the UK when a general election in the UK was suddenly called.¹¹ In her absence, the Duke of Edinburgh continued the programme in Australia, and the Queen later rejoined the tour in Indonesia. The only other time that Queen Elizabeth II has interrupted an overseas visit was while in Kenya on 6 February 1952, on receipt of the news of her father's death and her succession to the throne.

5. Prime ministers during the Queen's reign

Since 1952, 14 prime ministers have served Queen Elizabeth II:

- Winston Churchill 1951–55
- Sir Anthony Eden 1955–57
- Harold Macmillan 1957–63
- Sir Alec Douglas-Home 1963–64
- Harold Wilson 1964–70 and 1974–76
- Edward Heath 1970–74
- James Callaghan 1976–79
- Margaret Thatcher 1979–90
- John Major 1990–97
- Tony Blair 1997–2007
- Gordon Brown 2007–10
- David Cameron 2010–16
- Theresa May 2016–19
- Boris Johnson 2019–present

6. Royal addresses by the Queen to both Houses of Parliament

Queen Elizabeth II has addressed both Houses in person in the Palace of Westminster on six occasions, other than at the state opening of Parliament. Table 1 below shows the date and location that each address took place, as well as the occasion it related to.

¹¹ The Royal Family, '[50 facts about the Queen's reign](#)', 25 January 2002.

Table 1: Address from Queen Elizabeth II to both Houses

Date	Occasion
20 March 2012	Diamond Jubilee address to Parliament
30 April 2002	Golden Jubilee address to Parliament
6 May 1995	50th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day
20 July 1988	Tercentenary of the Revolution of 1688–89 and the Bill of Rights
4 May 1977	Silver Jubilee address to Parliament
22 June 1965	700th anniversary of the Parliament of Simon de Montford

Source: House of Commons Library, [Addresses to Members of Both Houses of Parliament](#), 28 September 2021.

7. Sovereign visits: no address

There have been seven occasions when Queen Elizabeth II has undertaken a visit to Parliament without giving an address to both Houses, as detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Occasions Queen Elizabeth II has visited the Palace of Westminster without an address

Date	Occasion
6 December 2013	Viewing of the Diamond Jubilee window
5 June 2012	Diamond Jubilee lunch
22 September 2000	Opening of the 46th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
26 June 1995	Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter
25 September 1986	Opening of the 32nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
5 June 1959	Opening of the Atlantic Congress
12 September 1957	Opening of the 46th Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference

Sources: House of Lords Journal Office up to 2002; UK Parliament website, British monarchy website, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association 2002 onwards.

8. The Queen's first communications with Parliament

In 1944, soon after Princess Elizabeth's 18th birthday and during the absence of her father, King George VI, while he was on a tour of the Italian battlefields, the Princess was appointed a counsellor of state.¹² Counsellors of state are members of the royal family who temporarily undertake some of the sovereign's official duties in their absence.¹³ This was the first time that the Princess carried out some duties of the head of state.¹⁴ In August that year, Parliament presented an address to King George VI, to which the Princess—along with her mother Queen Elizabeth—replied on behalf of the throne.¹⁵

9. The first message from the Queen as recorded in *Hansard*

The first official communication that Queen Elizabeth II had with Parliament as sovereign was on the news of the death of her father and her accession to the throne. A message from the Queen was presented to the House of Commons by the then Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, and read out by the Speaker on 11 February 1952:

I know that the House of Commons mourns with me the untimely death of my dear Father. In spite of failing health he upheld to the end the ideal to which he pledged himself, of service to his Peoples and the preservation of Constitutional Government. He has set before me an example of selfless dedication which I am resolved, with God's help, faithfully to follow.

ELIZABETH R.¹⁶

¹² The Royal Family, '[Her Majesty the Queen](#)', accessed 18 February 2022.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ [HC Hansard, 2 August 1944, col 1355](#) and [HL Hansard, 3 August 1944, col 113](#).

¹⁶ [HC Hansard, 11 February 1952, col 957](#).

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