The Royal Family™

An Analysis of the Modernization of the British Royal Family
During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth II

B.A. Essay

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Abstract:

This essay discusses the British monarchy and how under the reign of Queen Elizabeth II it has developed and adapted to modern times. The British monarchy has been a very important part of British history and it has been around for hundreds of years, and even though the institution itself is old fashioned, the monarchy today is far from being so. Queen Elizabeth II has during her reign seen the rise of the media and a changed relationship between the Royal Family and the public. She has managed to adapt to those changes and still remain a stoic British symbol, not only for Britain itself, but also for the entire world. The essay also discusses how the protection of the royal image is important and how the Royal Family has worked to do just this. It looks closely at major events during Queen Elizabeth II’s reign, most notably the death of Diana, as this proved to be one of the most critical times for the British Royal Family. Further, it looks into how the Royal Family has given the public a look into their private lives, in particular in relation to their use of social media to control their image online. The spotlight is now on the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. The next generation is proving to be immensely popular and is taking advantage of that popularity. By examining how the next generation is combining old traditions with modern ways, the essay outlines how the monarchy is still going strong and how its abolishment is unlikely in the near future. As long as the British Royal Family protects its image and has a reason to be celebrated, it will thrive in modern society.
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Introduction

In modern society it is baffling that many countries in western civilization cling on to old ways and still have royal families and a monarch. Despite holding on to old-fashioned ideals these countries are considered to be modern. Monarchies are a big part of the narrative of the history of these countries and by upholding them, they manage to stay connected to their history. One of these countries is the United Kingdom, where the British Royal Family has been around for over a thousand years. The British Royal Family is, without a doubt, the most famous of the royal families in the world. Queen Elizabeth II is well known around the world, not only in the countries she is sovereign of, but everywhere else too. Her face is highly recognizable and she and her family are a monumental symbol of Britain. Her reign is a good example of how monarchies have been able to modernize to remain a part of modern society.

Queen Elizabeth II ascended to the crown in 1952 and today holds the title as the longest reigning British monarch. Many consider her to be old fashioned but in fact she has been a driving factor in modernizing the British Monarchy. In her years as queen she has made the Royal Family more approachable than ever, embracing the 21st century way of thinking, while still remaining private and stoic. The popularity of the British Royal Family has had its ups and downs, especially during the 20th century, and yet it has always held its place. The status of the British Royal Family today is very different from that of their ancestors; indeed, they seem to have acquired the status of celebrities, whose lives interest the public. It is true that the public seems more invested in their private lives than in their public lives these days. Films, gossip articles and pictures of the Royal Family that give information on their lives are always popular. Interest in the British royals is not exclusive to the United Kingdom, but it exists all over the world. The legislation and politics have been left to the politicians and the monarchy is left as a persisting symbol of British history and unity. The British Royal Family, with Queen Elizabeth II as the leading figure, has guaranteed its place in British culture by adapting the monarchy to modern times and 21st century ways of thinking, by realizing how to manage their image in the media and by focusing on the future.
The British Monarchy

The History of the Royal Family

“I have in sincerity pledged myself to your service, as so many of you are pledged to mine. Throughout all my life and with all my heart I shall strive to be worthy of your trust”. Queen Elizabeth pledged this in her speech on the eve of her coronation day on the 2nd of June 1953. She went on to say: “I have behind me not only the splendid traditions and the annals of more than a thousand years but the living strength and majesty of the Commonwealth and Empire; of societies old and new; of lands and races different in history and origins but all, by God's Will, united in spirit and in aim” (Queen Elizabeth, Coronation Day Speech). Queen Elizabeth comes from a long list of both English and British monarchs that goes back more than a thousand years. Many of those monarchs are world famous, from Henry VIII and his many marriages and his daughter, Elizabeth I, the prosperous queen, to Queen Victoria who reigned for 63 years. During her reign England reached its height as a world empire, fifth of the world’s population being subjects of Queen Victoria (Starkey, 470-471).

The British monarchy has undergone many changes during its time. The most pre-eminent one was when England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland joined together and became the United Kingdom in 1603 under King James VI of Scotland and I of England, joining up the Scottish and English monarchies (Starkey, 325). The monarchy has even been abolished, when King Charles I was beheaded in 1649, and restored in 1660 with King Charles II (Starkey, 346, 359). In 1707 Scotland and England were united under one parliament, which created Great Britain, and today the monarchy is known as the British Monarchy (Starkey, 411-412). The role of the monarch itself has undergone many changes, one of the biggest ones being in the 16th century when Henry VIII declared himself head of the Church of England and took up Protestantism (Starkey, 293). In the 17th century the monarchy endured many political changes and in the end became a constitutional monarchy (Starkey, 394-395). The realm of the British monarchy has grown and decreased over the centuries. It was at its biggest during Queen Victoria’s reign, and during her reign the kingdom was titled the British Empire. During the 18th and 19th century many British colonies were lost, the biggest loss involving the American Revolution and the American colonies becoming independent. The 20th century endured two world wars, during and after both of which Britain suffered hugely, and major social changes
took place. Through all of this the monarchy has adopted itself. In 1917, during World War I, King George V dramatically changed the family name. It changed from the House of Saxo-Coburg and Gotha, a German name, to the House of Windsor, a more traditional English name. This was done in order to weaken the relations that the Royal Family had to Germany. It was also in line with other families in Britain getting new names and German relatives being stripped of British titles (Starkey, 478). During the 20th century many European monarchies met their end but the British Monarchy has thrived despite all the social and political upheavals that took place.

The British Monarchy is alive and well today. Queen Elizabeth is queen of the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and twelve other countries that have become independent in the last century. She is also the head of the Commonwealth, an intergovernmental organisation of 53 countries. Balmer calculates that she is queen of about 100 million people, 1 billion if the Commonwealth is included in the count (2009, 642). The reason for the British Royal Family’s global popularity, as they are in a way a global royal family, celebrated around the world, is that British colonisation around the world has left a cultural heritage that connects countries with Britain, and even when those ties have been cut there is still an emotional pull towards the Royal Family (MacLaran). Modern globalisation has then helped with extending the interest to more countries, with the help of the Internet, to spread news of the Royal Family and its members. The members of the Royal Family keep the British Monarchy alive by doing work in support of the Queen and preserving the royal image.

Today, there is no uncertainty over who will inherit the throne and no lack of heirs. The Royal Family consists of Queen Elizabeth and her husband, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and their descendants. Next in line to the throne is their eldest son, Prince Charles of Wales, who is currently married to Duchess Camilla of Cornwall. Prince Charles has two sons from a previous marriage with Princess Diana of Wales, Prince William and Prince Harry of Wales. Prince William, the next heir in line, married Catherine Middleton in 2011 and they became the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. Together they have two children: Prince George and Princess Charlotte of Cambridge. Prince George became third in line to the British throne in 2013, marking an historic event of it being the first time in 119 years that the monarchy has had three generations of heirs living (Saul). The future of the monarchy is bright in regards to its members but the challenges those members face are very different from the ones faced by those who came before them.
Modern Monarchy

The very fact that the British Royal Family still exists and provokes interest among modern society is an interesting one. Their survival into today’s culture has been made possible because of their ability to adapt, but it is also due to constant public interest in them. In 1992 Professor Michael Billig published a book called *Talking of the Royal Family*, which is based on interviews he did with several families about the Royal Family and their attitude towards the royals. In the introduction to the first edition (1992), Billig talks about the lack of academic interest in the Royal Family at the time, although in a later version published in 1998, he mentions that academic interest changed after the death of Princess Diana. In the preface Billig interestingly points out the obsession for the Royal Family notable in the media and among the public. He also introduces a theory as to why the monarchy has survived:

> The survival of monarchy in late twentieth century Britain is a sociopsychological phenomenon of strange proportions. In a country supposedly imbued with the values of democracy—indeed, in the country which proclaims itself to be the home of democracy—this ancient institution of inherited status still persists. It does not survive as an embarrassing relic, shuffling along like an elderly relative, conscious of being in the way of the younger generation. Quite the contrary, it survives by being noticed, over and over again. (22)

Billig’s theory is that the British Monarchy’s survival is due to its constant ability to be noticed, to be in the news and interesting to the public. As long as the Royal Family has a reason to be celebrated it will thrive in modern British society. Billig goes on to point out that the monarchy and the Royal Family are a sign of British nationality and identity and that if it ever came to that, a president would feel too foreign for the British nation (13), not to mention that a president is a famous American position and in historic terms it is a matter of pride for England not to closely follow the American example. Billig’s theories are still applicable today but more recent critical discussions have looked into the same and come to similar conclusions. For instance, Balmer, Greyser and Urde argue that the reason for the survival of the Royal Family is that they are fixed in the hearts and minds of the people (904). This is because the Royal Family stands as a symbol of the nation. They stand for what it is to be British and have the role of uniting the nation’s citizens. When celebration or tragedy strikes the Royal Family, it unites the nation of Britain and their support increases (906). Recent events prove these theories; the death of Princess Diana in
August 1997 is a tragic event that united the nation while the royal wedding of Prince William and Duchess Catherine in 2011 is an example of an event celebrated by the nation as a whole. Both events put the Royal Family in the spotlight, both at home and around the world and therefore give them a reason to be noticed.

Billig gives an explanation as to why the public accepts this extremely wealthy family as their superior and does not seem to resent their wealth. He inspects newspapers like the Daily Mail, and the then News of the World, which make polls where the public are asked about their opinion on the royals, on how they are behaving, how they should behave and whether or not Britain should still have a monarch. The results are then made into front-page headlines, and advertised as the public opinion. In this way the media allows the public to feel that they are, in a way, superior to the royals, because the public opinion of them is so important that the behaviour of members of the Royal Family requires public approval (31-33). Members of the public are not afraid to voice their opinions, since there are countless blogs, articles and columns where people express their opinions of the Royal Family and their conduct, whether relevant or not. The public believe that they are in charge of the monarchy, and in recent years that has become true. The Royal Family has had to listen to what the public want and adapt their actions and traditions accordingly.

The Brand

The nature of the monarchy has been transformed during the last century. No longer is it believed that the monarch has been appointed by god and could therefore do nothing wrong. Modern standards are about the fact that the monarchy serves the people and that the people are in charge of the monarchy, and not vice versa. Balmer, Greyser and Urde allege that this is the same for major corporations and therefore the monarchy can be treated as a brand (903-904). Since the British Monarchy is now a constitutional monarchy it functions like a business in a democratic society, needing public support to thrive. However, unlike businesses of today, who usually sell products or service, the monarchy functions on a more emotional level (Balmer 2009, 649). The image behind its brand is the one of the steadfast, neutral monarch, the person that stands for British values. This is an image Queen Elizabeth has been true to her entire reign. The monarchy’s consumer is the general public but it is more difficult for the monarchy to read into the public needs and to assess its popularity. Any other company with a brand to protect
could look into its financial numbers and put on an advertising campaign to improve their image. The Royal Family could never advertise themselves, but they have subtle ways to control their image (Greyser et al, 905), some of which are later mentioned in this essay. The monarchy is supposed to be steadfast and neutral in an ever changing society, a symbol of British values and a symbol of a united nation.

It is known that members of the British Royal Family refer to themselves as “the Firm” (“Crisis”), an indication that they see themselves as a business and that they are well aware of their position within modern society. Within “the Firm”, Queen Elizabeth is the corporate manager, head of the board (Balmer 2009, 662). As a company with an image to protect, the need for good media attention is important. Their status in British society gives them guaranteed media coverage at any major event, although not all publicity is good and sometimes the Royal Family goes out of its way to control the media coverage (Balmer et al, 904). There are entire offices whose job it is to take care of the royals’ public image and to advise the members of the Royal Family how to deal with the media and how to present themselves. In the BBC documentary series, Reinventing the Royals, Steve Hewlett reports on the way Prince Charles hired Matt Bolland, a famous public relations executive. Bolland was hired to help recover Charles’s image after the death of Princess Diana, and eventually introduce Camilla, then Camilla Parker Bowles, who would later become the second wife of the Prince of Wales (“Crisis”). The actions that the Palace took show how they manage their image like a brand and that they feel the need to keep up a good public image to keep the public happy. The individual has to succumb to the institutional brand, to protect the image of “the Firm”. The head of the Royal Family has done this throughout her reign and has also made sure that future generations are aware of the constant public eye.

Queen Elizabeth II

Queen Elizabeth II was born 21st of April 1926, the eldest daughter of the then Duke of York, Prince Albert and his wife Elizabeth. Princess Elizabeth was not raised to become the queen that she is today until she reached the age of 10, when in 1936 her uncle King Edward VIII abdicated the throne and her father became King George VI. Elizabeth then became the Princess of Wales and next in line to the throne. Her uncle’s abdication was due to his relationship with Wallis Simpson, a two-time divorcee. Wallis Simpson was not considered a person that could become a
queen and King Edward VIII could not accept the fact that he could not marry her (Pimlott, ch.1), an evident example of how the monarchy has complied with the public will. In 1937 Elizabeth witnessed the coronation of her father, which was then filmed and available to watch in cinemas around the country, a sign of a new technical age. Now everyone around the country had the opportunity to witness the coronation of their new King, not just the chosen elite but every British subject. Only two years later Elizabeth witnessed her father give a speech to the nation that the United Kingdom had declared war with Germany and that World War II had started (Pimlott, ch.2).

In 1942, at the age of 16, Elizabeth was appointed Colonel-in-Chief and did her first ever public royal engagement. Elizabeth served in the army during World War II as a mechanic, showing that royals do their part when there is a crisis, but still remaining safe (Pimlott, ch.4). In 1947 she married Philip, who was born a Prince of Greece and Denmark in 1921, but due to social changes during the 20th century had no real royal status. They got engaged when Elizabeth was eighteen years old and married when she was twenty-one. Their relationship was met with some contradiction at first, mostly due to Elizabeth’s young age at the time of the engagement (Pimlott, ch.6). Their royal wedding was a celebration to lift the spirits of the nation after the Second World War and they provided the kingdom with an heir in 1948 with the birth of Prince Charles. In the years that followed they had three more children; Princess Anne in 1950, Prince Andrew in 1960 and Prince Edward in 1964 (Pimlott). These members of the Royal Family, along with their children, are considered to be minor royals today, as they are no longer in immediate line to the throne.

Coronation and Early Years

From the very start Queen Elizabeth’s reign has been one of change to tradition. Her coronation was a major historical event, not just in Britain but also around the world. The event, on the 2nd of June 1953, was a live broadcast and was available to anyone who had a television set. The broadcast of the coronation was at first only the will of the BBC, as the Palace, the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill and the Senior Prelate of the Anglican Church were against it (Balmer 2009, 654). A coronation of a king or a queen had always been a quiet event, only witnessed by a lucky few (Pimlott, ch.3), King George VI being the first exception. The Palace and Churchill argued that airing the coronation live would be more stressful for the young queen
and any imperfections to the ceremony would be humiliating for the United Kingdom. The Church, on the other hand, was worried about the behaviour of the public that would be watching, and that people would not behave appropriately while watching such a ceremony (Balmer 2009, 655). The Queen’s own opinion was not made public as the Royal Family’s opinions are kept private at all times (Pimlott, ch.10). The BBC got their way in the end, assuring the media a right to broadcast the coronation live. The public now had the opportunity to witness the coronation in all its glory. This victory for the BBC illustrates the power the media was starting to have, power that continued to grow from this point onwards. This change to the coronation was a fitting start to the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

Interest among the public in Elizabeth’s life has been in place from the start of her reign. The broadcast of the coronation is believed to have been watched live by 20 million people and more around the world as the coronation was recorded and shown in cinemas where the queen was sovereign. What is interesting about this event in Britain is the fact that at the time there were only 2.5 million television sets available in the country. This suggests that people gathered in large groups to watch the coronation, clearly going out of their way for the experience. Seeing the new queen crowned was compared to a religious experience for her subjects. The broadcast allowed the Queen to truly be “crowned in the sight of the people” (Balmer 2009, 655). Those who were opposed to the broadcast were proven wrong as the coronation heightened the popularity of the monarchy and of the United Kingdom. The fact that the broadcast was available to everyone showed the coronation to be a sign of democracy rather than a symbol of aristocracy (Balmer 2009, 655). The Queen invited the public to be a part of this big
moment in her life, acknowledging them as an important aspect of her reign. The people felt this and accepted her as their head of state, therefore proving Billig’s theory that the monarchy needs to be noticed to survive (22). Although Queen Elizabeth’s personal opinion of the broadcast is not known, it is clear that her agreement to it is a sign of her willingness to modernize the monarchy. The BBC kept helping the Royal Family modernize as the Queen’s annual Christmas message started to be broadcast live in 1957, allowing the public a glimpse into her home. Queen Elizabeth has during her reign been very aware that the Royal Family needs to uphold a certain image, all the while allowing the public a limited access to their private lives by allowing parts of her life to be filmed.

“Royal Family” 1969 Documentary

Allowing cameras into the private life of the Royal Family has not always been a success. In 1969 Queen Elizabeth commissioned a film in honour of Prince Charles’ investiture as the Prince of Wales. The film was directed by Richard Cawson and co-funded by the BBC and ITV (Bastin, 38). The documentary showed the Royal Family in ordinary situations and portrayed them as a normal family. One scene shows them enjoying breakfast together and interacting with each other informally. It was a historical first and lifted the veil of mystery off the monarchy and especially the Head of State (Bastin, 38). At the end of 1969 the Palace withdrew the documentary and it has never been shown in its entirety again. The film was criticised at the time of its premiere for being too revealing. It shattered the image that the public had of the Royal Family and showed them as being ordinary people and not the sophisticated royals they often appear to be (Thornton). Even so, the film was still shown throughout the year. Not only did it break tradition by allowing the public a glimpse into the private lives of the Royal Family but it also replaced the Queen’s annual Christmas message on Christmas Day the same year. This is the only time that the Queen has broken this tradition of addressing her subjects on Christmas Day during her reign, a tradition that her grandfather started back in 1932. This decision was not met with public approval and the Queen later wrote a response apologizing for the decision and assuring the public that the tradition would be upheld the following year (“A History of Christmas Broadcasts”). Although the film has never been shown again, it has not remained entirely unseen.
Clips from the 1969 documentary have been made available despite the resistance to it being shown again in its entirety. The National Portrait Gallery gained permission to show clips for a special exhibition on the Queen in 2011 for the upcoming Jubilee of 2012 (Singh). The Palace has never given a reason as to why the film has never been shown again but Singh reports that there are parts of the film that the Queen does not want to be seen and that she considers the documentary a failure. The rest of the film is now kept strictly private, apart from the clips that the National Gallery was allowed to show, which can now also be found online. Historians are not even allowed access to the film or the unedited footage that was not used in the film (Thornton). However, in 2016, in honour of the Queen’s 90th birthday, ITV gained permission to show clips in the documentary “Our Queen at 90.” That documentary also includes interviews with members about their relationship with the Queen, including Prince Harry, Prince Charles, Prince William and Duchess Catherine. Queen Elizabeth makes an appearance, although not in an interview; she is shown at the age of 89, riding horses and then grooming and feeding them. This is clear evidence that the Royal Family is easing up on their previous stance.

Allowing the public a close glimpse at members of the Royal Family changes the relationship between the British royals and the public. The 1969 documentary shattered the fantasy of the Royal Family by showing them in their everyday life, engaging in activities any other person in the United Kingdom was doing (Thornton). It affected their image at the time and hurt their brand. The fact that the film is now mostly kept secret is a fascinating fact, since in keeping it private the royals have been able to add to the mystery of their private lives. This relationship is constantly changing and the boundaries are being pushed. The 1969 film was an invitation for the media into the private life of the Royal Family. Thornton argues that this was the first step in the troubles that the Royal Family later encountered when the media started criticising the private lives of the royals, which it still does to this day. That criticism reached its height at the end of the 20th century.

1997: The Death of Princess Diana

In 1997, Queen Elizabeth faced one of the biggest challenges of her reign when, on 31st of August, Princess Diana was declared dead after a traffic accident in Paris. Princess Diana had been immensely popular following her marriage to Prince Charles. Their whole relationship kindled a lot of media attention throughout. Their wedding at first gained a lot of attention and
Diana was seen as the fairy tale princess many women looked up to. Charles and Diana had two boys and Diana was determined to allow her sons to have as normal a life as possible. But Charles and Diana’s marriage was not a happy one, and their relationship slowly started to crumble. In 1992 the couple separated and the media described their situation as “The War of the Waleses,” hinting that Diana’s subtle comments in interviews suggested that Charles had been unfaithful to her and that there was a huge conflict between Diana and the Crown. Charles and Diana finally got divorced in 1996. Following their divorce Diana was highly popular and the crown’s popularity diminished (“Crisis”). When Diana died, the British Royal Family reacted by retreating from the public eye. This was seen as a betrayal of the nation and caused outrage.

The public’s reaction to the death of Diana had a strong effect on how the Royal Family reacted to it. The death of Diana came as a shock to the world. Her death was sudden and the world grieved with the British nation over the death of their Princess. The reaction of the British public was unlike the stereotypical British attitude of keeping emotions to oneself or having a “stiff upper lip”. People were grieving in public places and gathered around Kensington Palace, Buckingham Palace and Westminster Abbey to lay down flowers in remembrance of their Princess and to pay their respects. The British Royal Family had been staying at Balmoral Castle, their residence in Scotland, and grieved in the more traditional British way, in private. The public was not happy with the Royal Family’s response, and felt anger towards their sovereign. They felt like the Queen had abandoned them and was ignoring their pain (Beinot and Brinson 146 – 147). Balmer argues that the public wanted to be consoled and that it wanted to console the Royal Family. He goes further to explain the dilemma the Queen faced, the conflict that lay in her duty towards her immediate family as set against her duty to the public (2009, 656). As Princess Diana had divorced Charles, she was no longer part of the royal household, but still held the royal title of Princess of Wales. Therefore no state funeral was planned for her. Despite these regulations from the Palace, the public demanded that Princess Diana should be shown the respect that they thought she deserved. The public and media also felt offended that the royal standard was not at half-mast after Princess Diana’s death. They did not care about royal protocol, as the royal standard had never been flown at half-mast, not even at the death of a monarch (Beinot and Brinson, 146-147). Finally, the Royal Family realised the need to acknowledge the public’s feelings and take action by returning to London.
Never before had Queen Elizabeth been so criticised by the British public and the British media and her response had to fit the severe situation. On September 5th 1997, the day before the funeral of Princess Diana, the Queen made a televised broadcast to the nation. This was the first time Queen Elizabeth made a speech with the intention of defending herself and her actions (Beinot and Brinson 153). The speech was also significant in that it was the first time during her reign that Queen Elizabeth addressed her subjects outside of the two annual speeches she does, her Christmas message and at the opening of Parliament (Beinot and Brinson, 147). In her speech in honour of Princess Diana, Queen Elizabeth assured the public that she was speaking from the heart and that she was not only speaking to them as their queen, but also as a grandmother, thus indicating that the matter was very personal to her and in a way defending her immediate reaction to the situation. She stated that the Royal Family was grieving with the public and used the plural “we” to indicate that she was including the feelings of the public. This signified that she felt at one with the nation and that she shared her grief with the public (Queen Elizabeth II, Speech Following the Death of Diana, Princess of Wales). The speech was a turning point and the attitude towards the Royal Family changed. People felt that the Queen had done what they wanted and that she had reacted according to their will (“Crisis”). The Queen’s speech was not the only untraditional thing that she did, as when she left for the funeral on September 6, the Union Jack was flown at half-mast and during the Funeral, the Royal Standard was flown at half-mast (Beinot and Brinson 150). Queen Elizabeth’s reaction to the public outrage was unique and showed her willingness to adapt to modern times; she realised that tradition sometimes has to be altered. Queen Elizabeth managed to take a situation where the image of the brand was in danger and turn it around.

The year 1997 proved to be a year where the Queen realised the need for a good media presence and that she truly was in the service of her people. Later that same year, on November 20th, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. They attended a lunch at Banqueting House in London, where the prime minister of the time, Tony Blair, also attended. The Queen gave a speech where she admitted to the power of the public and the media. In the speech she looked back on the changes she and Philip had witnessed during the last 50 years, the changes in society, technology and media. The speech addresses the importance of public support, both for the government and the monarchy. The government are voted in and can read the message of the public by the results of the elections. For the monarchy, on the other
hand, it is more difficult to read into what the people want: “For us, a Royal Family, however, the message is often harder to read, obscured as it can be by deference, rhetoric or the conflicting currents of public opinion. But read it we must” (Queen Elizabeth, Golden Wedding Speech, 20 November 1997). Balmer regards this speech as one of the most important of Queen Elizabeth’s reign (2009, 656) as she admits to the power of the people’s will. The speech also holds a clear message for the future; the public opinion needs to be held in high regard in order to protect the royal image.

The 21\textsuperscript{st} Century

Queen Elizabeth has indeed kept the message of pleasing her people close to heart since her reign entered the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. The beginning of the century saw the death of the Queen Mother and the golden jubilee, as well as Prince Charles’s second marriage. Public opinion of the Royal Family started to improve again after hard times during the last decade of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. However, the Royal Family started to see increased popularity in the first part of the 2010s, and to prove Billig’s point once again (22), it was because they had reasons to be noticed and celebrated. In 2011 Prince William married his long-term girlfriend, Catherine Middleton. The wedding was broadcasted live and was watched by millions around the world. The following year saw more reasons to celebrate. The year marked the 60\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Queen Elizabeth’s reign and saw London as host to the 2012 Olympics. Countless souvenirs and merchandise products were produced and sold that year to celebrate these two events, and the Queen’s face could be seen nearly everywhere, not to mention that souvenirs from the royal wedding were also still available (Maclaran and Otnes). The Diamond Jubilee was celebrated throughout the commonwealth and the United Kingdom. The British government also celebrated the Queen’s jubilee. Queen Elizabeth was invited to attend a cabinet meeting, being the first monarch to do so in 230 years ("Our Queen"). The jubilee’s main
celebrations in the capital were a royal pageant on the river Thames, a royal concert outside of Buckingham Palace and a thanksgiving service at St. Paul’s Cathedral on the 5th of June. After the service the Royal Family appeared on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, as is the tradition when it comes to royal celebrations. This time it included Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip and the first three heirs to the throne and their wives, a clear indication of where the future lies (“Our Queen”). These events all contributed to the welfare of the Royal Family, giving it a reason to be celebrated and noticed.

Weddings and life milestones are not the only way to be noticed. During the opening ceremony of the Olympics, Britain showed off their history and culture. The Royal Family was a great part of this, and surprised many with their participation in the ceremony, especially in the case of the Queen. Early in the ceremony a short film called “Happy and Glorious” was introduced; here, the actor Daniel Craig plays his well-known character James Bond on a visit to Buckingham Palace. Queen Elizabeth herself then makes an appearance and is seen greeting Bond and then accompanying him to a helicopter. The helicopter is then shown to fly over the Olympic Stadium, where the Queen and James Bond seem to jump from the helicopter in parachutes and land in the middle of the stadium. The Queen was then introduced to the ceremony and took her seat. The jump was met by a gasp by the audience at the stadium and then followed by everyone standing up when she took her seat (Olympics). Her introduction was a unique one for a monarch, and one that previous monarchs would never have dreamed of participating in. Her role in the short film showed a different image of the Queen and showed her embracing pop culture and stepping out of her role as an old fashioned monarch. This showed the Queen’s good humour along with her willingness to ensure a place for the Royal Family among younger generations.

Queen Elizabeth’s embracement of the entertainment industry is far from being the only step she has taken to modernise the monarchy that has affected the way she is seen in the 21st century. In 1992 she volunteered to start paying taxes, and has done so ever since (“Royal Finances”). In 1993 Buckingham Palace was opened to the public and since then guests can tour specific parts of the palace during the period of two months a year. The Royal Family does not get the funds raised with the opening of the palace; instead, the funds go to the Royal Collection (“Our Queen”). The etiquette of meeting the Queen has also been relaxed. The official website of the British Royal Family states that when meeting the Queen, it is not necessary to curtsy, as
many would think. Most people choose to do so, but polite courtesy is the only behaviour that is required (“Greeting the Queen”). Her role as queen has changed and these steps mean that she has been less criticised for being too conservative.

Some changes in recent years have been greater than others. In 2013 dramatic changes were finally made to the institution of the monarchy and the rules that limit its members with the Succession to the Crown Act of 2013. The Act defines a centuries’ old tradition of the throne going to the eldest son of the sovereign and states that the oldest heir of a monarch inherits the crown regardless of gender. The Succession Act also changed legislation to the rules of marriage qualification for heirs to the throne. No longer is a member of the Royal Family disqualified from succession if he or she marries a Roman Catholic, and only the first six heirs in line to the throne require permission from the Head of State to marry. However, the Act still requires heirs to the throne to be Anglican and to be members of the Church of England (Succession to the Crown Act 2013). These changes to the succession are in tune with modern society and allow the next generation to go on in a more modern way.

Social Media

21st century society is very different from the one that witnessed Queen Elizabeth ascend to the throne in 1952. The media grew in power during her reign and how the Royal Family appeared in media became more important. News of the Royal Family serves as a reminder to the public of their identity as British and often such news gets global attention; thus the world is reminded of the country and culture that once was a global empire. Most newspapers have a royal correspondent, a person whose job it is to report on news of the Royal Family. Some magazines even have a royal correspondent but do not bother having a foreign news correspondent, *HELLO! Magazine* for example. Radio, television and newspapers are no longer the dominating means of media communications; they have all had to succumb to the Internet. Royal correspondents follow the Royal Family closely and news organisations publish articles on the Royal Family both online and in their print issues. The Royal Family has not sat back and allowed the media to control the way they are seen online. In fact, in recent years, the Royal Family have established their presence online, especially through social media. The Royal Family has its own website with information on the Palace, members of the Royal Family and historical trivia relating to the history of the monarchy. They also have a Facebook page, Twitter
and Instagram accounts and a YouTube Channel. The public can now access news of the Royal Family more easily and more frequently than ever before.

The Royal Family now reports on themselves online. In April 2016 they updated their official website and the site is more linked with other social media accounts, especially Twitter. The Monarchy first joined Twitter in 2009 under the username British Monarchy (“Queen and British Royal Family on Twitter”), and have since changed it to simply, The Royal Family (The Royal Family, Twitter Account). The Queen herself has even tweeted a personal message on that account, an occasion that caught media interest (Sample). In 2010 Clarence House created their own Twitter account and tweeted news of the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall, as well as news of Prince William and Prince Harry, and of Duchess Catherine when she married Prince William in 2011. News of the birth of Prince George was released on Twitter in 2013, and his name was announced on Twitter at the same time as a press release was sent out. In 2015 Kensington Palace created their own account and tweets updates of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry (Kensington Palace). The first news of the birth of Princess Charlotte was released on that Twitter account in 2015. The Royal Family publishes pictures and tweets updates and news of their members on Twitter and in that way the family control their own media presence. By having three major twitter accounts for each generation of the major royals, each generation gets to control their own media outlet and their image.

The Next Generation: The Cambridges

The younger royals do their part in protecting the image of the Royal Family and maintaining the brand. Today’s media pays more attention to the individuals within the Royal Family than the actual institution (Balmer, Geyser and Urde 904), and the younger generation is more in the public eye than the older. Therefore they hold more power to preserve the image of a modern monarchy. After the success of the royal wedding in 2011, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and their two children, have been in the spotlight more than others. Prince William, as the oldest son of the Prince of Wales, is second in line to the crown and often considered to be the future of the monarchy. Prince William has grown up with the idea of how to modernise the monarchy and is fully aware of the importance of the media despite his apparent dislike of it (“Succession”). He and his family have been very successful in gaining popularity and charming
the public. By selling the media an image of a picture perfect family of four, they promote the idea of an ordinary family that allows the public to relate to them.

Prince William and Catherine have since their wedding been a cause for celebration. On the 29th of April 2011, Prince William married Catherine Middleton, and they were granted the titles Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. The Metropolitan Police estimated that about one million showed up on the day to get a glimpse of the happy couple and 24.5 million watched the live broadcast on BBC and ITV (BBC News), excluding those who watched worldwide or on other British channels. The Queen made the wedding day a national bank holiday so the whole nation had an opportunity to celebrate. The couple got married in Westminster Abbey, and after the ceremony they rode in an open carriage through the city to Buckingham Palace, where they appeared on the royal balcony. In the weeks leading up to the wedding, plenty of souvenirs were made to mark the occasion and the palace commissioned many items to celebrate Prince William and Catherine’s union. The monarchy and the nation had an opportunity to celebrate, they had a new member of the Royal Family and as Prince William is the second heir to the throne, the newlyweds would one day become their king and queen.

William’s marriage to Catherine started a storyline that continues to combine old traditions with modern ideas. Their wedding seemed like a fairy tale wedding, the “commoner” marrying the prince. It reminded the public of the wedding between Prince Charles and Diana, a comparison that Prince William and Catherine do not avoid. The now married couple had been together for ten years in 2011 and got married to start their family life. They embraced the comparison to Charles and Diana, with an engagement photo very similar to the one Charles and Diana released in 1981, using the same photographer (see photo 3). Catherine also wears the same engagement ring Princess Diana wore. The comparison goes further. During Charles and Diana’s appearance at the royal balcony at Buckingham Palace after their wedding,
Charles asked his mother’s permission to kiss his bride, and the Queen granted the wish, much to the joy of the crowd. This had never been seen before, a public display of affection on the royal balcony (“Crisis”). Prince William kissed his new bride as well, not only once, but twice during their appearance (BBC), much to the delight of the crowd and the press, which got plenty of beautiful photos to boost their selling numbers. Even the simple gesture of two kisses, is their way of embracing a tradition that came before them while still making it their own.

The inclination to mix old traditions with new goes for the children of Prince William and Catherine too. In 2013 Duchess Catherine gave birth to a boy, Prince George, and in 2015 Princess Charlotte was born. Following the birth of Princess Charlotte, Kensington Palace released a picture of the little Prince and Princess taken by their mother. Two of the pictures bear a strong resemblance to older ones. One of them captures Prince George kissing the forehead of his little sister; a similar moment was captured between Prince Charles and Princess Anne in 1950. Another photo of Prince George simply holding his sister resembles one taken of Prince William holding his younger brother Prince Harry in 1984 (see photo 4). What makes the pictures in 2015 special is the fact that they are taken by Duchess Catherine, and not a professional photographer (Miranda). The pictures resemble ones that have previously been taken and follow tradition while still being new and gaining attention for being of the youngest members of the British Royal Family. The pictures show how old values can be upheld in the 21st century.

Royal photos have been a way to control the royal image and capture the interest of the public for a long time. Alexis Schwarzenbach demonstrates in his article how official royal photographs have been a way for the Royal Family to communicate with the public for years (256). The pictures give them an opportunity to control how they are viewed and to strengthen the emotional connection they have with the nation (265). Schwarzenbach explains how official
photos appear to be timeless; the royals are usually not photographed doing something specific. The reason for this is that, much like the members of the Royal Family, the pictures cannot have any precise meaning but will still be easily recognised (267). In the past, photos of royals used to portray stiff, royal poses but modern photos show royals to be more relaxed. During the 20th century these photos could be seen in homes and official places, as a reminder of the monarchy and the Royal Family. Today these photos are seen in newspapers and magazines and online. Even though there are pictures taken of members of the Royal Family at every engagement and occasion, official photos still gain a lot of attention and publicity. Their release is always something that is anticipated, so much so that in recent times the Palace has been known to give out an announcement before they release new pictures (Kensington Palace). This enhances the excitement around new photos and allows the media attention be ready for them.

Official portraits released by the Palace are more often of the Cambridges than other members of the Royal Family. They have released photos for nearly every major event in their life since their engagement, and also at moments that are not so spectacular. However, the Cambridges have managed to modernize even this old form of releasing photos. Their photos usually are less stiff than of those of older royals and photos are released for smaller occasions as well as big ones. In 2016 Kensington Palace published photos from their skiing holiday in the French Alps. The photos had no occasion behind it; the family were simply on holiday and commissioned photographer John Stilwell to take photos of the family (The British Monarchy - Facebook). Most likely this was done so that the family could get privacy while on their vacation. These photos show them as a normal family, dressed in skiing gear, enjoying the snow. Two of the photos capture Prince William and Catherine in a playful snow fight (see photo 5). The images picture them as cheerful and light-hearted, showing them as different in the way that they are not posing, unlike in the traditional royal images. Interestingly, the same is not done for the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, as they are next in line to the throne. The future of

Photo 5: The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are delighted to share new photographs of their family, enjoying a short skiing holiday with their children in the French Alps (The British Monarchy).
the monarchy is more in the hands of the Cambridges; “the Firm” is allowing the spotlight to fall on the new family to prepare them for the future. They listen to the wishes of the public and, in a way, give them what they want as Prince William and Catherine are considered to be the most popular members of the British Royal Family, and appeal to younger generations. The image of the Royal Family’s brand today is the young family.

**Popularity**

Measuring the popularity of the monarchy can be difficult, and one way the media and academics use to measure their support is through opinion polls. Newspapers also issue their own opinion polls. *The Sunday Telegraph* issued an opinion poll in 2013; the poll was done online in July 2013, just a few days following the birth of Prince George. The poll showed that 60% believed that Britain was better off as a monarchy and 17% believed it would be better off as a republic (2). As for the future of the monarchy, 74% believed that Prince George would one day ascend to the throne (3). The poll showed that the Queen was the most popular member of the Royal Family among participants; 26% chose her as the royal that they liked the most, with Prince William following behind with 19% (11). These numbers came in when the Royal Family had had many major occasions to celebrate and these two members had been in the spotlight the most. This again demonstrates that when there are reasons for the Royal Family to be celebrated and noticed, they prosper.

Public interest in the younger generation of the British Royal Family and notably Prince William is clear in poll results. MORI has statistics from 1993 until the year 2013 and these can give an overview of how the family’s popularity has developed. One of the questions MORI asked is: “which three members of the Royal Family do you like the most?” (Ipsos MORI). In 2012 Prince William was at the top of the list with 62% of those asked choosing him, a massive increase from 2001 when 21% chose him in their top three (Ipsos MORI). No doubt this is due to William growing up into his royal role and being more in the spotlight with reasons to celebrate.

Vernon Bogdanor (qtd. in Davies) points out that public support of the monarchy, when tested with opinion polls, has remained “remarkably stable” throughout the years, despite the scandals and headlines saying otherwise. MORI numbers support his words, since when asked whether Britain should remain a monarchy or become a republic, 69% said monarchy in 1993, 75% in
1998, 80% in 2012 and 77% in 2013. Media coverage shows that the monarchy has had its ups and downs during the last few decades but popularity numbers show otherwise.

The popularity of the Royal Family has not only increased in Britain but in other places of the Commonwealth as well. Balmer states in an article published in 2009 that the monarchy’s popularity numbers in Australia had gone down and that the younger generations felt no need for such an institution, especially one that is so far away (671). Mansillo however shows how those numbers went up after the royal wedding of 2011 and that the popularity of Prince William and Catherine is the reason for this boost in the monarchy’s popularity (1-2) as support numbers were the highest they had been since 1988 six weeks after the royal wedding (16). He argues that younger generations see the monarchy as being presented in a positive way in recent years (2) and that is the reason for their popularity. “Monarchy has become more popular in a country that is better educated and less religious” states Mansillo (19), which shows that even though society is evolving and changing its values, the support and popularity of an institution that has its roots in medieval times are solid, and even on the rise. This proves that the monarchy has managed to adapt to modern times and meet the demands of modern society, securing its place not just in the United Kingdom but also in the Commonwealth and around the world.

Conclusion

During her reign Queen Elizabeth II has managed to bring the monarchy and the British Royal Family into the 21st century and thereby secured its position as part of British culture and history. Elizabeth II is highly recognizable around the world, and she and other members of the Royal Family have gained celebrity status. She has passed the torch on to the next generation, most evidently to Prince William, who in his own way is modernising the monarchy along with his wife Catherine. The ways in which Queen Elizabeth rules as a monarch have no doubt affected how the younger generation of royals represent themselves in the media and during public outings. Queen Elizabeth has taken many steps to modernize the monarchy during her time and has realised the importance of adapting to the times and listening to the public voice. The public has a massive part in sculpting the modern monarchy in Britain. The Royal Family has realised that they have an image to uphold and that each member needs to do their part in order to maintain it. They have had to deal with crises and have found out that the old traditional methods
are not always been the best ones, as well as realising that sometimes the media needs to be kept at a good distance in order to maintain the royal image.

The British Royal Family needs to hold on to old traditions while knowing when it is the correct time to change them. They stand as a living symbol of the British nation and as such need to be aware of the history that has come before them as well as the changed times we now live in. No longer is the monarchy the sole power of a nation, nor an institution that can do whatever it pleases; the tables have turned and the public is now in charge of the monarchy. As long as the public is satisfied with the Royal Family and the monarchy, the family and the institution will thrive. However, if this were ever to change the monarchy would be in trouble. Public support is what upholds the Royal Family in a modern democratic society.

Queen Elizabeth II’s actions and decisions strongly suggest that she is fully aware of the challenges that the monarchy faces. The Royal Family, by referring to themselves as “the Firm,” realise that managing a monarchy is similar to managing a business. They are in the business of protecting a brand, and keeping a good relationship with the public. Their public is not just found within the United Kingdom, but in countries around the world. These countries have different cultures but have a common sovereign that unites them. Queen Elizabeth has paved the way for the modern monarchy and has laid a strong foundation for future royals by embracing change. Through her efforts, along with the work of the younger royals, the monarchy has been able to secure its place in British culture. This medieval institution has survived many social changes and is still relevant in today’s society.
List of Images:


Works Cited:


Benoit, Wiliam L. and Brinson, Susan L. “Queen Elizabeth’s Image Repair Discourse: Insensitive Royal or Compassionate Queen?” *Public Relations Review 25 (2) (1999)*: 145 – 156. 4 February 2016.


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1 During the writing of this essay, the British Monarchy updated their official webpage and during that process this particular part of the webpage was unfortunately left out. The link within the citation is a permanent link address to the old version of the webpage with information on the history of Christmas Broadcasts.
Kensington Palace (kensingtonroyal). “This account represents The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry - follow for updates on their work and the #RoyalFoundation.” 14 January 2015, 10:01 AM. Tweet.
Kensington Palace (kensingtonroyal). “We'll be posting a very special photo of Prince George & his little sister Princess Charlotte late tonight. Can't wait to share it with you!” 6. June 2015, 11:00 AM. Tweet.

2 Due to this being a Kindle edition there are no page number for in text citations. Therefore the chapters are citated within the text.


