

Queen Elizabeth II: Britain's longest-reigning monarch at 63 years, 216 days (and counting)



Queen Elizabeth II smiles as she arrives at Tweedbank Station in Tweedbank, Scotland, on Sept. 9, the day she became the longest-reigning monarch in British history.

Queen Elizabeth II became the longest-reigning monarch in British history on Wednesday, spending 63 years and 216 days on the throne and surpassing the record set by her great-great-grandmother Queen Victoria. Tributes poured in for the 89-year-old who became queen in 1952 when she was just 25 years old. At the

time, Harry Truman was president and Josef Stalin ruled the now-nonexistent Soviet Union. Prime Minister David Cameron described her reign as a “golden thread” running through generations of British society as he acknowledged the historic milestone Wednesday during a speech in the House of Commons. “Her Majesty the Queen inspires us all with her incredible service, her dignified leadership and the extraordinary grace with which she carries out her duties,” he said, adding that it was “truly humbling” to take stock of how she had dedicated her life to the nation. Scotland’s First Minister Nicola Sturgeon also praised the queen’s “exemplary sense of public service” and offered her a “simple, but heartfelt, thank you.”

Elizabeth has been the monarch during the office of 12 British prime ministers — from Winston Churchill through to the current Conservative leader, Cameron — as well as 12 U.S. presidents. Palace officials said Victoria reigned for 23,226 days, 16 hours and 23 minutes and calculated the exact moment Elizabeth surpassed that record as 5:30 p.m. London time on Wednesday. Despite the significance of the occasion, the queen wanted the day to be “business as usual,” and no special fanfare has been planned. This is believed to be partly out of respect for Victoria and the memory of Elizabeth's father.

“She wanted to keep it low key today because in many ways, we are marking the death of her father,” said Robert Jobson, author of “The Future Royal Family” and royal editor of London’s Evening Standard newspaper. “She is quite a shy person and dedicated to what she does. But it’s a hugely significant moment. She is the symbolic figurehead of the nation, rather than just being head of state.”

The queen did appear in public briefly Wednesday, taking a 30-mile journey from Edinburgh to Tweedbank in Scotland to celebrate the newly opened Borders Scottish railway. Even if she wasn’t planning on making a fuss, throngs of excited crowds gathered to greet her, snap photographs and give her flowers. She looked relaxed and genuinely happy at the warm welcome with her husband, Prince Philip, by her side. The queen made note of the milestone she had reached but admitted, “It is not one to which I have ever aspired.” “Inevitably, a long life can pass by many milestones. My own is no exception,” she added before thanking people for their touching messages.

Princess Elizabeth became queen on Feb. 5, 1952, when her father, King George VI, died. She was in Kenya at the time, arriving in the country as a princess and landing back in Britain a queen. But several years earlier, she had already acknowledged that hers would not be an ordinary life, and she conveyed her dedication to the role she had been born into. During a broadcast to the Commonwealth to mark her 21st birthday, the princess pledged that her “whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service.” Cameron, who noted that the queen had been reigning for 14 years before he was even born, said in the House of Commons that it was one thing for a 21-year-old to make such a statement, but an entirely different thing for someone to stand by that pledge for more than six decades. He added that going to see her after an election to ask her permission to form a government and also attending their weekly private meetings were enjoyable, inspiring and humbling perks of the job. The palace released a new photo of the queen taken in July by Mary McCartney, the daughter of Paul McCartney. She is seen sitting at her desk in her private audience room with an official red box in front of her containing government papers.



The prime minister said the queen has answered 3.5 million pieces of correspondence during her reign. She also has made hundreds of overseas trips to more than 110 countries, including to post-apartheid South Africa. Buckingham Palace noted that she carried out the first state visits by a reigning monarch to China and Russia, and was the first to visit the Republic of Ireland.