

The world reflects on a remarkable reign and looks to era of Charles

Regardless of whether one identifies as royalist or republican, it's virtually impossible to dispute the global significance of Queen Elizabeth II, who died last week aged 96. This special edition of the magazine focuses on a woman whose 70 years on the British throne - and as the head of 14 other states around the world - became synonymous with an era. Caroline Davies reflects on a queen whose longevity was such that few people can even remember a world without her.

Then, of course, there is the new king, Charles III. Having prepared for decades for this moment, what sort of monarch will he be, how will the world respond to him, and what does his ascent to the throne mean for the British royal family?

As Queen Elizabeth's coffin began its journey from Scotland to London, Guardian reporters spoke to crowds lining the route. From Australia, Ben Doherty and Lorena Allam consider the republican question and the scars of empire. Without its devoted figurehead, diplomatic editor Patrick Wintour and historian David Olusoga ask what the future holds for the Commonwealth more broadly. (We hope a Guardian Weekly live event on this subject, originally scheduled for this week, can be rearranged soon.)

The iconography of one of the world's most famous faces is explored by art critic Jonathan Jones. And, a special expanded Opinion section culminates in an extraordinary obituary by Stephen Bates on the life of the passing monarch, one of whose most interesting feats was to "remain largely unknown - and unknowable".

Perhaps the most poignant final note comes from the writer Frank Cottrell-Boyce, who co-scripted the Queen's much-loved afternoon tea sketch with Paddington Bear.

In his words: "The most emotional moment ... is when the bear says: 'Thank you, Ma'am. For everything.' People will ask: 'What everything?'" Well, make your own list. But I'm thankful for the way she used the peculiar power of her archaic role to allow us to glimpse, however fleetingly, that we share something good."



On the cover

A peculiar fixture of international design classics ranging from coins and stamps to Sex Pistols singles, the Queen's silhouette became one of the world's most instantly recognisable images over the course of her 70-year reign. What kind of a void will her death leave behind?

Illustration: Guardian Design



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