

Letter from Scotland

“A profoundly sad moment for the UK, the Commonwealth and the World”. Nicola Sturgeon’s first words on hearing the news from Balmoral that the Queen had died. “Her life was one of extraordinary dedication and service.”

And so the tributes rolled in, from the First Minister down. Douglas Ross, the Scottish Conservative leader, spoke of losing “a national treasure.” Anas Sarwar the Scottish Labour Party leader said; “The Queen brought our nation together at times of crisis.”



The Queen opening a new session of the Scottish Parliament.
PHOTO Andrew Cowan/The Scottish Parliament

Scotland found itself at the centre of the week's historic events. On Tuesday the Queen at Balmoral had said goodbye to her 14th Prime Minister and shook hands with her 15th. Both Boris Johnson and Liz Truss had flown up from London for the occasion, on a suitably stormy day. Very Shakespearian.

It was all part of a national drama that stretches back 700 years. Elizabeth Windsor could trace her family back to the ancient Stewart clan of Scotland, to the grandson of Robert the Bruce himself. The family has held royal office through wars of independence, civil wars, religious upheavals, agricultural and industrial revolutions, world wars and social changes too baffling to go into. Elizabeth herself reigned through some interesting times.

It's perhaps worth noting that she was "Elizabeth the First" of Scotland, since we were a wild and independent country during Queen Bess' glorious reign. When that Elizabeth died in

1603, there was a major turning point. James VI of Scotland joined the two kingdoms together and we've been united ever since.

United under the monarch, but different in so many ways. The Queen was always careful to remember this, wearing tartan in Scotland and being oh so tactful over referendums on devolution and independence. And it's clear she loved Balmoral, her moor and mountain estate on Deeside. It's altogether appropriate that she died there, the place where she found peace.

It's strange how historic events eclipse our day-to-day worries over things like the "cost of living crisis". We began on Thursday with the new Prime Minister announcing a huge package of support (at least £100 billion) for households and businesses facing hardship from the sudden and astronomical rise in energy bills. But by lunchtime that was all washed out of the news by a brief statement that the Queen was under medical surveillance. And by the evening, we were living in a different age, "Long Live King Charles III".

We are now left with the question, what will this new era be like? Will the monarchy change? Will Charles play a more active part in political debate than the Queen? Will he sell off some of the royal estate? (Not Balmoral of course!) Will the public still want a monarch? Or will we be more republican? Support for the monarchy in Scotland dropped to 45 per cent in one opinion poll at the time of the Queen's Jubilee in June.

People ask the SNP, would an independent Scotland still have the House of Windsor as its monarch? For the moment, the party says Yes. But that could change. The Queen in many respects has saved the British monarchy by her sheer devotion to the job, her political skill and her obvious sincerity and faith in the future.

In the pageantry of the next few days, and the media overkill, I hope I'll remember that the Queen was a person as well as a symbol. A person who did her best to lead a good life in the circumstances in which she found herself.

And that the monarchy is a symbol of us as "the people", just as a president would be, and therefore deserving of respect.



PHOTO Martin P McAdam