

Blair takes as an opportunity to reassure her and suggest that she is 'more respected now than ever' (1:30:09). The Queen seems somewhat appeased, but she warns Blair that one day 'quite suddenly and without warning' (1:30:28) he will be the subject of similarly hurtful and critical headlines.

Having cleared the air, the Queen suggests that they conduct their meeting while walking through the palace grounds. The film ends with the two leaders strolling companionably through the palace and its grounds, the Royal corgis cavorting around their feet.

CHARACTERS & RELATIONSHIPS

Queen Elizabeth II

Key quotes

'I don't think I shall ever understand what happened this summer.' (1:29:18)

'That's how I was brought up. That's all I've ever known.' (1:32:07)

'I doubt there is anyone who knows the British people more than I do ... nor who has a greater faith in their wisdom and judgement.' (53:16)

When Princess Diana is killed in a car crash, Queen Elizabeth II is seventy-one years old, and has been on the throne for forty-five years. During her reign she has taken some steps towards modernising the monarchy: dropping some formalities and voluntarily paying tax on her personal income. However, some British people still regard the monarchy as an anachronism, with Cherie Blair describing the Royal Family as living 'in a ludicrous cocoon of privilege' (48:37). The Queen's determination to remain in Balmoral after Diana's death is seen by many as proof that the monarchy has not kept up with the public's 'shift in values' (1:07:13), although by the end of the film audiences have more sympathy for the difficult position the Queen has found herself in.

Frears makes effective use of archival news footage to track the public perception of the Royal Family, particularly the Queen. The initial shock and grief gives way to confusion and anger as the British people question the lack of official response. When the Queen relents and inspects the tributes outside Buckingham Palace the public mood shifts again to one of understanding. Commentators covering the event suggest that 'Royal protocol' (1:16:07) might have been the problem, and now it has been 'swept aside' (1:16:11). This explanation of the Queen's behaviour allows the public to find it in their hearts to forgive her apparent coldness, as illustrated when a young girl gives a bouquet to the Queen and the onlookers begin to smile, nod and curtsey once they see her emotional response to the gift.

Over the course of the film Queen Elizabeth II is forced to find new ways to engage with her people. She begins to understand that an excessive focus on protocol and tradition can create impassable barriers between the monarchy and the people. Her initial fear that showing emotion might diminish 'what affection people once had for ... for this institution' (1:30:00) are proven to be unfounded, and in fact the British public respond positively to her show of humanity and greater warmth. Tony Blair is instrumental in guiding her to this new understanding of her public.

Tony Blair

Key quotes

'... his manifesto promises the most radical modernisation and shake-up of the constitution in three hundred years.' (Janvrin, 04:15)

'Will someone please save these people from themselves? Fine, I'll call Balmoral ... because as Prime Minister I've really got nothing better to do.' (44:30)

Tony Blair becomes the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom after a landslide election victory only three months before Diana dies. The Queen is initially wary of his informality and desire for modernisation, qualities that ultimately prove to be the key to minimising the harm Diana's death – and the Royal response – does to the monarchy. Blair is supported by his wife Cherie and his press secretary Alastair Campbell, although neither of them fully understand his softening attitude towards the Queen over time. The

Queen Mother dismisses him as 'that silly Mr Blair with his Cheshire cat grin' (1:08:31), and Prince Philip refers to him as a 'bloody fool' (54:07), but Prince Charles feels that he and Blair 'are both modern men of similar mind' (37:02). Ultimately Blair manages to win over the Queen, persuading her to accept his advice.

Blair is very good at reading and responding to the public mood. His skill in public relations allows him to manage the events of 'that week' (1:28:53) and guide the Queen through the changing moods of the British people. While the Royal Family are mostly shown in regal surroundings, whether that be within a palace or roaming the 'forty thousand acres' of Balmoral (1:01:02), Tony Blair is frequently shown in his cluttered and unfashionable home or his busy, untidy office. This emphasises Blair's humanity and explains his ability to 'speak to the people' (1:00:42). He is touted as a 'wonderful new Prime Minister ... a compassionate young man ... such a breath of fresh air' (48:01), and these qualities help him in his efforts to reconnect the Queen and her people.

Prince Charles

Key quotes

'I think what we need, what this country needs, is a more modern perspective ...' (28:10)

'... sometimes, in a situation like this, one has to be flexible.' (45:48)

Prince Charles, heir to the throne and ex-husband of Princess Diana, struggles with the death of his former wife. He is shown to be a compassionate and affectionate father, physically comforting his sons as he tells them of Diana's death (16:45). He makes it clear that he did not receive such affection as a child and subtly criticises the Queen's maternal skills by comparing her unfavourably to Diana, who 'was a wonderful mother' (38:51). A lack of affection between the Queen and Charles is evident throughout the film.

Charles is very aware of the public perception of the monarchy and goes to some lengths to present himself as a 'modern' man who is in touch with his subjects. His insistence that the flag at his own residence (Highgrove House) be flown at half-mast and his desire to work with the popular Tony Blair demonstrate his understanding that 'if the Queen continues to get it

wrong over Diana then the Royals will become public enemy number one' (37:46). While Charles can be seen as working to modernise and soften the monarchy, a cynical audience could also suggest that his main goal is to protect himself.

Cherie Blair

Key quotes

'... remember, you're a man that's just been elected by the whole nation.' (05:13)

'Maybe this time people will finally have seen them for what they actually are ... a bunch of free-loading, emotionally retarded nutters.' (48:20)

Cherie Blair, Tony Blair's wife, is a lawyer and anti-monarchist. She has little patience for the protocols of the monarchy, rolling her eyes and pulling faces at Blair when they are being briefed on how to behave while in 'the presence' (05:49), and her curtsey 'could best be described as shallow' (04:31). She is somewhat bemused by Blair's growing sympathy for the Queen, particularly as his increasing respect for the monarchy seems to be at odds with his reputation as a moderniser. Cherie puts his support down to it being 'a mother thing' (49:17), suggesting that Blair admires the Queen as a woman of the same era as his deceased mother, and she later exclaims that 'at the end of the day all Labour prime ministers go gaga for the Queen' (1:22:58). Even during Diana's funeral Cherie remains unmoved while Blair applauds Charles Spencer's eulogy (1:26:51). Cherie supports her husband, but does not share his sympathies for the Royal Family.

Key point

It is important to note that, while Tony Blair develops respect for the Queen, he does not necessarily extend this to the monarchy as a whole. He tells Cherie that it is unimaginable that their country will become a republic in the Queen's lifetime (49:07), but does not rule it out as an option for the future. He is open to the idea of phasing out hereditary privilege (48:50), suggesting that his support is for the Queen as an individual rather than the institution she represents.

Robin Janvrin

Key quote

'I'm most grateful, Prime Minister.' (55:10)

Janvrin's conversations with the Queen are unfailingly proper, following strict protocols and never veering into emotional or overly personal territory. Audiences can see, however, through his body language and actions, that he is very protective of the Queen and sometimes wishes he could offer more genuine warmth and support. This is made clear when the Queen is returning to London in her private jet. Janvrin speaks to her about the public address he has written for her, then seems close to saying something personal (1:15:33). He finds himself hamstrung by convention and unable to speak freely, and is finally dismissed by the Queen's somewhat curt 'Was there anything else?' (1:15:30). He encounters a similar difficulty when he speaks to Blair about the Queen. Janvrin is torn between respecting her right to privacy and wanting to explain her apparent coldness; the conversation with Blair is constrained and awkward as a result (54:26).

Alastair Campbell

Key quotes

'You think the Royals are nutters. You should meet their flunkies!' (32:09)

'People's princess, mate. You owe me.' (32:26)

Alastair Campbell is Tony Blair's press secretary. His role is to keep an eye on the media reports, noting the mood of the public, as well as managing press releases, speeches and other communication from the Prime Minister's office. It is Campbell who comes up with the phrase 'the people's princess', capturing the public sentiment perfectly. He is critical of the monarchy and is very aware of the backlash against the Royal Family. Campbell relishes the fact that Blair's popularity keeps on rising, and he takes some of the credit for this.

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon)

Key quote

'You sit on the most powerful throne in Europe. Head of an unbroken line that goes back for more than a thousand years.' (The Queen Mother, 1:08:15)

Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon is Queen Elizabeth's mother, known as the Queen Mother. She is ninety-seven years old when Princess Diana dies, and in this film she embodies the institution of the monarchy. She is a stickler for conventions and tradition, referring difficult decisions about protocol to the Lord Chamberlain, and reminding the Queen of her duty 'to God as well as your people' (1:07:45). The Queen finds her mother's pragmatism useful, and she turns to 'Mummy' (1:06:22) for advice when she is troubled by the events surrounding Diana's death. Ultimately though, the Queen must make the decision on how to respond. While she appreciates her mother's support, she also recognises that the situation the monarchy finds itself in is so unusual that protocol is no longer the most effective guide for behaviour.

Prince Philip

Key quotes

'I was sure he'd give the other one up. Or at least make sure his wife toed the line. Isn't that what everyone does?' (42:24)

'Who does he think he's talking to? You're the sovereign. The head of state. You don't get dictated to.' (46:07)

Prince Philip is in a difficult position. He is protective of his wife and the monarchy, but he has little legal standing as the Queen's consort (the monarch's spouse). While Philip grew up in an era when the husband was considered the head of the household, his wife became the Queen of England and as such he is always outranked. He finds his own way to assert his authority, being quite vocal and abrasive in his defence of the monarchy and its traditions. In private he speaks quite coarsely and aggressively, perhaps in an attempt to establish some dominance within his household.

Diana, Princess of Wales

Key quotes

'Her weaknesses and transgressions only made the public love her more. Yet ours only make them hate us.' (Prince Charles, 39:16)

'They see me as a threat of some kind ... I don't go by a rulebook because I lead from the heart, not the head.' (Princess Diana, 41:50)

The death of Princess Diana drives the central narrative of *The Queen*, and as such she plays a pivotal role. She is the only character in the film not represented by an actor. Instead the real Princess is included through Frears' use of archival media footage. This gives Diana an eerie, ghost-like quality. Audiences never see her relaxed and comfortable at home, and they never see her private conversations in the way they witness those of the other characters. The effect is to both keep Diana at arm's length and also allow her to dominate the film. Her presence is constant and pervasive, mirroring her role in the UK during the 1980s and '90s.

Prince William and Prince Harry

Key quote

'They're much better off here. It's private. They're protected.' (Queen Elizabeth II, 38:54)

Prince William and Prince Harry are fifteen and twelve years old respectively when their mother, Princess Diana, is killed. Throughout the film they are always shown at a distance, through doorways or across a river, often from behind, and they do not have any dialogue. This reflects the Queen's desire to protect the boys from anything that might upset them, and from anything public. She arranges to have 'the radio taken out of the bedroom and the television taken out of the nursery' (17:47), and when the boys seem upset and angry Philip and the Queen assume it is because 'they saw the papers' (1:01:53). This demonstrates the Queen's distrust of the media, and goes some way towards explaining why she is so determined to keep the boys away from the furore surrounding Diana's death.