

HELLO!

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WILLIAM AND KATE THE LATEST ON A POSSIBLE ENGAGEMENT BEFORE CHRISTMAS



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THE QUESTION ENGAGING THE NATION **WILLIAM AND KATE** HOW EVENTS WOULD UNFOLD IF THE PRINCE MAKES A CHRISTMAS PROPOSAL

**'William could pick up the phone to his grandmother
the Queen at any time to seek her permission'**

It is the big royal question on everyone's lips – will Prince William announce his engagement to his long-term girlfriend Kate Middleton before Christmas? In recent days speculation has been at an all-time high that the lovebirds, both 28, will reveal their marital plans before 25 December. Their show of unity and togetherness at a friend's wedding last month coupled with Kate's parents attending a Balmoral shooting party have fuelled talk that it is all systems go.

According to one Sunday newspaper journalist, Robert Jobson – who broke the story of the Prince of Wales's betrothal to Camilla Parker Bowles – the engagement will happen before Christmas and the couple will wed next July. And HELLO! has been told by a royal source: "Preparations are moving forward quickly. Things that need to be put in place for an announcement are being worked on."

Royal observers say that an engagement would ease Kate's acceptance at Sandringham over the crucial holiday period where all senior royals gather. And bookmakers believe it will happen. They have cut the odds on an announcement this year from 7/1 to 4/5 – meaning they think it is more likely to happen than not. With punters placing significant bets at Ladbrokes in Windsor and Slough, the company fears that people "in the know" are trying to cash in. Spokesman David Williams tells HELLO!: "We are on red alert for Palace leaks and we've learnt to our cost that courtiers are happy to make money on a royal gamble. We believe that an engagement is imminent."

Clarence House insiders were last week playing down reports, telling HELLO!: "Only William and Kate know what their intentions are and nothing has been communicated to us," but their words will not quell speculation. Royal sources concede the engagement could happen very soon. One said: "William could pick up the phone to his grandmother the Queen at any time to seek her permission."

Here, royal writer Ian Lloyd explains how "operation engagement" would roll into action once Prince William makes his proposal, and what would be involved in the lead-up to the announcement hitting headlines worldwide.

By the time the world finally hears the news of William and Kate's official engagement, a well-oiled process of protocol will already be under way to ensure key members of the establishment are told before the rest of us.

Before any announcement is made, all the members of the royal family will be informed. Prime Minister David Cameron will also be told, followed by the leader of the opposition. If the Commons is sitting at the time of the announcement, members of the Cabinet are then advised a few hours before an official statement is made. A message of congratulations will be read out in the House of Commons at the next Prime Minister's Questions.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, who normally officiates at the weddings of senior royals, will receive notification from the Prince's office, as will all the heads of Commonwealth nations. What royal advisers don't want is a press leak, such as the tabloid

When William and Kate's engagement is announced, the eyes of the world will turn to the official photocall. Prince Charles and the then Lady Diana Spencer held theirs in the grounds of Buckingham Palace (below left), while Prince Edward and Sophie Rhys-Jones smiled for the cameras at St James's Palace (below right)





William is likely to choose brother Prince Harry and cousin Peter Phillips as his "supporters" (left). Kate's sister Pippa (above) is expected to be a bridesmaid, as are Princesses Eugenie and Beatrice (right)

scoops that spoiled the announcement of Prince Edward and Sophie Rhys-Jones's engagement in 1999 and that of Charles and Camilla six years later. In both cases the Palace was forced to rush out the official statement.

The announcement will be released by the Prince of Wales's office. Over the years the wording has become more relaxed. In 1981 it was "with the greatest pleasure" that the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh "announce the betrothal of their beloved son the Prince of Wales to the Lady Diana Spencer". Almost two decades later they were "delighted to announce the engagement of their youngest son, Prince Edward..." Now it will be

Prince Charles's turn to be delighted to announce Prince William's engagement to Miss Catherine Middleton, the elder daughter of Mr and Mrs Michael Middleton. Normally the statements end with "the Queen has gladly given her consent" or similar sentiments.

FORMAL APPROVAL

Just weeks after the announcement, the Queen will convene a meeting of the Privy Council, to give her formal approval to the marriage under the terms of the 1772 Royal Marriages Act, which requires the sovereign's consent for all descendants of King George II to marry. When Charles

became engaged to Diana, his mother had been informed three weeks earlier, and then the Prince asked Diana's father for permission to wed, a week before the announcement.

There are no firm rules regarding the timings, though both families will obviously be among the first to know, and William will almost certainly ask Michael Middleton, whom he already calls "Dad", for Kate's hand in marriage.

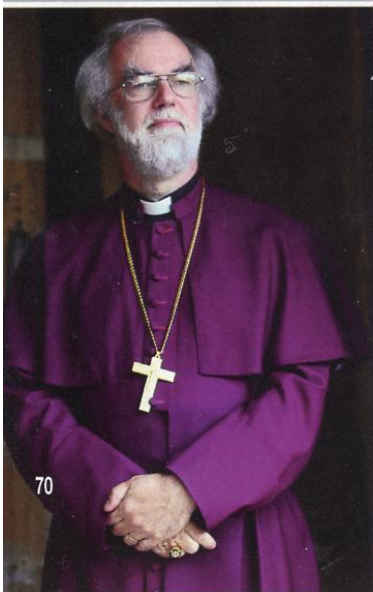
What has always remained tantalisingly private is the actual date royal couples decide to tie the knot. Charles asked Diana over dinner, three weeks before the official release. Edward's announcement was on

6 January, and he admitted he had proposed "over the Christmas holidays". The Queen was privately engaged in the autumn of 1946, though it was July of the following year before the world knew.

There will be more subterfuge when it comes to choosing an engagement ring, since involving even trusted jewellers would risk a news leak. Diana chose hers two days before the announcement when a tray of 12 was sent by Garrard to Windsor Castle where, after dinner, she, Charles and the Queen all gathered to make the choice. The ring cost £28,000 and the Queen paid for it.

A copy of the announcement will

The Archbishop of Canterbury (left, the current prelate, Dr Rowan Williams) usually officiates at royal weddings. PM David Cameron and the Queen (below) will both be informed ahead of a public announcement, and the monarch will need to give her consent. Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy (right) may compose a poem to mark the happy occasion



Key details such as the venue and the dress designer will follow the announcement

appear in the *London Gazette* as well as the next morning's *Court Circular* – which is also published on the Queen's new Facebook page. It will feature on the Palace website and William is likely to be the first of Britain's monarchs to put his engagement on Twitter.

Once the news is out, the floodgates for merchandising will be opened with everything from tea towels to tiaras to mugs and plates. The Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy, may also put pen to paper to mark the historic date, though she has been scornful in the past of such occasional verse.

Kate's parents are free to issue a statement if they like, but in practice, the soon-to-be in-laws tend to give relaxed comments to the news crews that gather outside their homes. Diana's father Earl Spencer memorably stood with the crowds outside Buckingham Palace on the day of his daughter's engagement in 1981 and was relaxed and chatty with reporters.

PICTURE PERFECT

Traditionally, later on the day William and Kate will appear for a photocall. The bride-to-be will have given considerable thought to her outfit, since the photos will not only be flashed around the world but will be used for wedding souvenirs and book covers. The location for the photos will be interesting, as the couple will want to avoid comparisons with Charles and Diana's shoot in the gardens of Buckingham Palace. Clarence House or Highgrove are more likely venues.

By then the couple will also have decided where Kate will live in the run-up to the wedding. With the Prince away on duty with his Air Sea Rescue unit, his St James's Palace apartments are a possible solution – the first of many decisions the couple will have to make in the months ahead.

But the public will have to wait to hear about the attendants. Bridesmaids are likely to include



The couple stand side by side at a friend's wedding last month – fuelling the rumours that their own engagement is imminent. Bookmakers now believe that the proposal will take place before Christmas

Kate's younger sister Pippa and William's cousins, Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie and Lady Louise Windsor. Prince Charles had two supporters – as royals call their best men – and William is likely to follow suit by choosing Prince Harry and Peter Phillips. Other key details such as the dress designer, the venues of the wedding and reception will also

follow the announcement, as will William and Kate's new titles.

If her husband decided not to accept a Royal Dukedom, Kate would be known as HRH Princess William of Wales, but the Dukedoms of Cambridge, Sussex or Clarence have been suggested as possibilities.

One of the last decisions they will make is the honeymoon. They could

follow the example of Prince Charles and the Queen and choose Balmoral. However, the couple enjoy privacy and sunshine – so their favoured holiday spot of Mustique is sure to be in the running. **H**

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ADDITIONAL REPORTING:
THOMAS WHITAKER

An engagement would mean that at last Kate could spend Christmas with William at Sandringham with other royals (below). Her parents were recently invited to Balmoral, seen as a sign of closeness between the two families

A potential engagement souvenir (left). Memorabilia celebrating the unions of Charles and Camilla (right and below), and Charles and Diana (bottom)

