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We'll Never See Her Like Again

That's the verdict of freelance cameraman, Ian Lloyd, who has been photographing the Queen Mother for over 20 years. He has covered her visits overseas and travels 10,000 miles a year following her in Britain. He has amassed over 40,000 images of the nation's best-loved royal... and enjoyed every minute



I fell in love with the Queen Mother in 1978. I was 18 and she was 78, though the age gap has never been a problem in our relationship since, as far as I'm concerned, she's the youngest "older woman" I've ever met.

Getting older is something we mortals have to put up with; former Queen-Emperesses clearly choose to ignore it.

I remember photographing her on her way to Cheltenham races two years ago. Her car pulled into a side road so she could meet a group of teenagers, and pause for a chat. Having asked them, "How's the football going this season?" "When does the cricket start?" and "How's the revising going?" she suddenly turned to look over her shoulder at a row of white-haired ladies outside the nursing home opposite. Rolling her eyes heavenwards she told the youngsters "Well, I'd better go and talk to the old folk!" The joke of course was that, at 98, she was 20 years older than most of them.

She hates any mention of her frailty. A year ago I saw her stumble on the steps up to the royal box at Sandown Races. When she returned six weeks later the official who had caught her the first time

said, "This is where you tripped last time." The Queen Mother, clearly irritated, said: "I didn't trip, I caught my heel!"

She absolutely hates her walking sticks. One of her ladies-in-waiting said last year, "I can't tell you how many the Queen has given her. She'll get them out if they're going to have tea together but then put them away again afterwards." Two months ago after a service at Wellington Barracks, she got to her car, held her two sticks in the air one at a time, and threw them in the back.

The Queen has even installed a stairlift for her mother at Sandringham. Thora Hird might be happy to ride up and down on hers, but the Queen Mother prefers to walk down if she thinks her daughter isn't watching.

I love the way the Queen plays second fiddle to her mother if they appear anywhere together. Each year, at the end of July, the two of them meet at Sandringham just before the Queen Mother's birthday. The Queen Mother takes the flowers from the crowd and passes them back to the nearest pair of hands whether they happen to belong to a policewoman or Queen Elizabeth II (picture G). "Where's Mummy going

now!" says the familiar high-pitched voice, as the golf buggy, recently resprayed in the Queen Mother's blue and buff racing colours, trundles off to meet more people.

The Queen Mother is of course part of the glue that keeps the family together. I remember in 1992 when Charles and Diana were about to split up, the Queen Mother did her best to include Diana in the familiar family line-ups, bringing her forward to stand next to her outside Clarence House on her 92nd birthday (pics E and F).

The Queen is always rigidly aware of her dignity, the Queen Mother is more relaxed especially when things go wrong. After a service at Westminster Abbey in February 1989, she missed her footing getting into her car, and sank on to the car floor. As she did so one of her legendary high heeled shoes shot under the chassis. The Dean scrambled under her Daimler to find it and handed it to her. The Queen would have quietly slipped it by her side but the Queen Mother just grinned as she took it from him then, as her car glided forward, she wound the window down and, leaning out, waved her shoe as the car set off towards Parliament Square.



The Queen Mother loves being photographed and will stage-manage a photo with the best of them. On a visit to a youth club, with a bit of prompting, she picked up a cue and potted a shot on a snooker table. Three times, on visits to the East End she has suddenly thrown her timetable completely awry by deciding to call into a local pub and, on each visit, has asked if she could pull a pint, which of course endears her to the whole of Fleet Street.

Ten years ago at the end of a visit to Dover, she turned to the press and said, "Now, is there anything else you want me to do?"

She even stage-manages photos at the races. Anybody watching this year's Derby will have seen her glued to the race, using her binoculars and studying her race card avidly. She does this at every racecourse (pics A and B), though the truth is that, with deteriorating eyesight, she can't see a thing and she refuses to wear glasses in public. For her, image is everything and she once said, "It doesn't look good if I don't pretend to be watching."

It is of course excellent public relations and she has always known instinctively just how to relate to people.

Once at Sandown when it was bucketing down with rain, seeing my misery she came over and asked how the cameras were coping with the wet weather. At church in Dover the same year, there she was battling her way through a gale, laughing as everyone's hats got blown off and the vicar's robes flapped all over the place (pic C).

The Queen Mother has a perfect manner with people. One day, the policewoman on duty at the garden gate that leads to the Queen's private quarters was told that the Queen Mother's car was due any minute. Swinging the huge black gates back, she was horrified when suddenly one of them jammed halfway open. No amount of tugging would release it. As she bent trying to pull it free, she noticed a white-gloved hand tugging above her and a voice asking, "Can I help?" The Queen Mother, even then, was over 90.

Along with Princess Margaret, she never forgets her friends. On the way back to Buckingham Palace from the Trooping The Colour each year, the two of them always give a special wave to the staff and their families and friends as they pass Clarence House (pic M, page 12).

On one occasion, I photographed her

receiving a garden bench after opening a police convalescent home (pic H). "Shall I sit on it?" she asked, looking over to the press. Stroking the back of it she declared, "It will look lovely at Royal Lodge". Privately one of her staff told me "she needs a new bench like she needs a hole in the head". And I formed the impression that she has a set of them stacked up from earlier visits.

Not surprisingly the Queen Mother is popular with older people and she talks to them about their youth, their war experiences, their families and their pets (pic D). It must be a bit dispiriting for her on occasions, because organisers of her visits often enthusiastically scour the country for people the same age as her. "May I introduce Mr Sedgemen, Ma'am, he was born in the same month as Your Majesty". At which point she smiles down at someone who's fast asleep in a wheelchair.

At the other end of the age spectrum, she gets on surprisingly well with young children (pics L and N, page 12). I remember a little boy telling her, "I've seen your daughter, she's the Queen you know". The Queen Mother bent down to his level and, in a similarly awe-struck voice, replied: "I know. Isn't it exciting?" >



J



K



L



M



N



P

◀ She is a naturally theatrical person. After her last hip replacement, I was outside the hospital the day she was due to be released. Any other royal would just get in the car and go. With the Queen Mother, it was a heavily orchestrated performance. The hospital press officer kept telling us, "Just another five minutes", her chauffeur, Arthur, kept the car back so it wouldn't block the view, nurses lined the steps, and eventually the double doors swung back to reveal centre stage the newly-rejuvenated 98-year-old. Busby Berkeley couldn't have choreographed it better.

For the theatre, she still dresses in prewar splendour, especially for her annual birthday treat. Resplendent in her silk evening dress and dripping in diamonds, she sits alongside tourists and regular theatregoers as she watches the play or musical. I've seen her sing along to *The Sound of Music* and *Oklahoma* and, at *Crazy for You*, I could make her out in the darkness, frequently slipping her hand into a box of chocolates resting on her knee.

She is buoyed up by a constant supply of liquid juniper berries and a bit of help from Messrs Gordon and Gilbey. I've never seen her drunk but she has on

occasions been exuberant. Someone told me once, when returning to London on the royal train, the royal party became, in modern parlance, "a bit tanked up". When they arrived at Euston, the stationmaster stepped forward to greet them and the Queen Mother swept her arm theatrically in the air while telling him, "What a perfectly lovely station!"

It also leads her to become just a little bit flirty. I was outside the Law Courts in central London when the Queen Mother came up to a soldier on guard near her car. "What a lovely uniform!" she told him, staring directly in his eyes and running a soft pink hand across his lapel. At Tidworth barracks, she had a justifiable reason to touch a battledress, since the Queen's Dragoon Guards were on their way to the Gulf War and had just been issued with special desert camouflage. "Isn't that a marvellous idea," she told an officer, while feeling the shirt of a squaddie standing to attention in front of her. (pic J).

She even has her own tug-of-war team in Caithness where she owns the Castle of Mey, the northernmost castle in Britain. The team is made up of 10

brawny estate workers who enter alongside other local teams. They are of course a marked contrast to the elderly group of confirmed bachelors who make up her court (pic K). I mentioned the tug-of-war team to one of them, and he said, looking completely aghast, "Don't mention that, they need new members and she asked me to go in it!" Clearly, this was an unlikely idea that apparently raised a few royal titters.

I've often been asked: "What is she really like?" The truth is we have no idea. A former home secretary told me that the real Queen Mother is nothing like her public persona and a very senior general confirmed this a few years later, telling me that her soft, marshmallow exterior hides a truly tough lady. In all the thousands of photos I've taken, I only ever captured one (pic P) when she didn't look too happy to see the press enter the room just before she made her speech.

She is a consummate professional – and people from all walks of life respond to her infectious *jolie de vivre*. I've never personally known a public figure so widely loved. I'm sure we'll never see her like again. We should treasure her while we can. ■