

No-nonsense Prince who always puts his duty first

By Ian Lloyd
Royal Writer

THE Duke of Edinburgh turns 90 on Friday.

Yet, rather than resting, he has recently resumed his hobby of oil painting. His creations are described as "strong colours, vigorous brushstrokes . . . totally direct, no hanging about".

Exactly what you'd expect from the hardworking, sometimes outspoken, stalwart of the Royal family!

Friday will be a typical working day for Prince Philip, who is Britain's longest serving royal consort. He'll hold a reception to mark the centenary of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and later he'll chair a conference and hold a dinner at Buckingham Palace.

It may not be everyone's idea of a fun-packed day but, like the Queen, he has always put duty before pleasure.

Like his daughter Princess Anne, he is a born grafter.

Last year he carried out 365 royal engagements — neatly averaging one a day — and on top of that there would have been planning meetings, briefings and 200 or so letters a week to deal with.

He's responsible for the running of the private estates of Sandringham and Balmoral, and is Ranger of Windsor Great Park.

Next Sunday the Duke will be joined by three generations of his family, including newlyweds, William and Catherine, for a service to mark his 90th birthday, to be held in St George's Chapel, Windsor.

The prince carries his years lightly.



Meeting the crowds on a Royal visit to New Zealand in 1954.

According to the Princess Royal, "He said to me the other day that he's in the 'still' phase of his life, because people say to him, 'you're still doing this, you're still doing that'".

The Duke was born on June 10, 1921, the fifth child and only son of Prince and Princess Andrew of Greece.

Greece was in the middle of a war with Turkey when Philip's mother, Princess Alice of Battenberg, gave birth on the island of Corfu.

The baby was christened Philippos which means "friend of the horse" — not a bad choice of name for someone who has been involved in equestrian sport ever since.

When he was 15 months old, the monarchy was overthrown.

Alice and her children were evacuated from Corfu in the cruiser HMS Calypso. Baby Philip was taken on board in an orange box and the family then settled in Paris.

Philip's teenage years were fraught with tragedy. His mother was committed to a sanatorium with schizophrenia and he didn't see or talk to her for five years.

His father, Prince Andrew, decamped to Monte Carlo with his mistress.

When he was 16 his sister, Cecile, was killed in a plane crash with her husband, two sons and an unborn child. The following year his uncle, acting as his guardian, died of bone cancer.

Despite a difficult start, Philip has been an inspiration to millions.

THE QUEEN'S FAITHFUL, STRAIGHT-TALKING

The Grand

He's put his foot in it again!

FOR all his good works, Prince Philip has also famously put his foot in it more than a few times over the years, writes Alan Shaw.

Here are a few favourite royal gaffes. ■ In 1995, he asked a Scottish driving instructor, "How do you keep the natives off the booze long enough to pass the test?"



■ At the Royal Variety Performance, he asked Tom Jones, "What do you gargle with, pebbles?"

■ He once said of Canada, "We don't come here for our health. We can think of other ways of enjoying ourselves."

■ Only a man whose wife never makes the dinner would say, in 1966, "British women can't cook!"

■ On a visit to the Cayman Islands, he asked, "Aren't most of you descended from pirates?"

■ He asked a young Kenyan native woman who presented him with a gift, "You are a woman, aren't you?"

■ To an aborigine while visiting Australia, he asked, "Still throwing spears?"



■ Joking with a blind disabled girl with a guide dog, he said, "Did you know that they have eating dogs for anorexics now?"

■ To a British student who'd been travelling in Papua New Guinea, "You managed not to get eaten then?"

■ Of an African leader in traditional dress, he said, "You look as if you're ready for bed."

'PHIL THE GREEK'

Although he is often cheekily referred to as "Phil the Greek" the prince has no Greek blood in him since the ruling dynasty actually came from Denmark.

His family name was in fact Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glocksburg, and while he can speak English, French and German fluently, he can only understand a smattering of Greek.

Philip was first educated at an American school in Paris run by Donald MacJannet, who described Philip as a "rugged, boisterous... but always remarkably polite" boy.

In 1928, he was sent to the UK to attend Cheam School, living with his maternal grandmother at Kensington Palace and his uncle, George Mountbatten, at Lynden Manor in Bray, Berkshire.

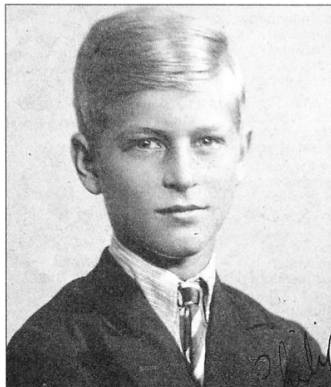
Philip later attended Gordonstoun, leaving in 1939 to join the Navy.



■ A young Philippos.



■ Practising with a bow and arrow, Philip (left) at the MacJannet American School at St Cloud, Paris.



■ Philip pictured in 1933, aged 12.

ROBUST HEALTH

The Duke is renowned for his good health despite his advanced years.

His most persistent affliction has been arthritis in his right wrist, caused by playing polo and exacerbated by thousands of handshakes.

He gave up playing polo in 1971, the year of his 50th birthday, and has had to change his greeting style from a firm-gripped handshake.



A FINE ROMANCE

Philip found fulfilment in his navy career.

He joined the British Navy on the eve of war and spent the next six years on active service.

He was mentioned in despatches after the Battle of Matapan, and going on to witness the Japanese

surrender in Tokyo Bay in August 1945.

During the war he had corresponded and occasionally met with his distant cousin Princess Elizabeth.

The romance grew after the war and in the autumn of 1946 the two reached what Philip calls "an understanding," which was a private engagement, though it would be another

year before they could publicly announce their news.

The wedding at Westminster Abbey on November 20, 1947 was the first state occasion since the war.

It took place against a backdrop of austerity and rationing and Winston Churchill called it "a flash of colour on the hard road we have to travel".



■ The Duke of Edinburgh kneels to pay homage to his wife, the Queen, during her Coronation in Westminster Abbey on June 2, 1953.

LOCAL GOD

For centuries, islanders on the Anglo-French colony of Vanuatu believed in a story about the son of a mountain spirit venturing across the seas to marry a powerful woman.

They believed that unlike them, this spirit had pale skin.

Somehow the legend became associated with Prince Philip.

The islanders would have seen his portrait — and that of the Queen — in government outposts run by British colonial officials.

Their beliefs were bolstered in 1974, when the Queen and Prince Philip made an official visit to the islands.

COMPANION SHOWS NO SIGNS OF FLAGGING



Old Duke



“He is someone who doesn't take easily to compliments but he has, quite simply, been my strength and stay all these years, and I, and his whole family, this and many other countries, owe him a debt greater than he would ever claim, or we shall ever know.” — the Queen



■ The Queen and the Duke play with their children, Charles and Anne.

FAMILY FIRST

In 1948 Elizabeth had Prince Charles, followed two years later by Princess Anne. The siblings have differing views on their father. Philip is on record as saying his

eldest son thinks he was “unfeeling” to him.

Anne disagrees and recently said the Duke set an “extraordinary example” of being a good parent. “I rather surprisingly hear my children

say that I was quite a good mother, and I think I would say that with spades of my father.

“He made an effort to be there, particularly I think

on a regular basis at bedtime.”

Elizabeth was only 25 and Philip was 30, when George VI died, and she became Queen, forcing the Duke to end his naval career.

‘DARLING PA’

At the inquest into the death of Diana letters written by the prince to his daughter-in-law were read out to the jury. They were surprisingly caring and in one he told her, “If invited, I will always do my utmost to help you and Charles to the best of my ability . . .” Diana always started her letters to him with “Darling Pa”. He’s one of the few people who knows how difficult it is to marry into the royal family.



A LASTING LEGACY

At first Philip found life at court very restricting for someone with his dynamism and forward-thinking personality. But he carved his own career path.

In 1956 he founded the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme, a programme of activities aimed at 14-24 year olds, offering them physical challenges and services to the community.

He went on to be patron of some 800 organisations, many to do with the environment.

For many years he was the UK President of the World Wildlife Fund, and he has been Chancellor of the universities of Edinburgh, Cambridge and Salford.

HAPPY TOGETHER

Prince Philip has accompanied the Queen on all her overseas State Visits.

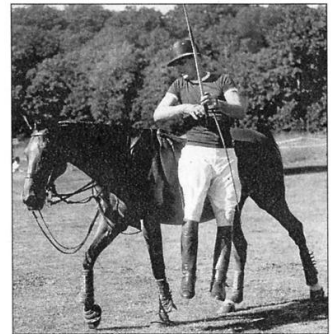
Most recently they were in Ireland where they toured the Guinness Brewery where a perfect pint of the black stuff was poured for them.

The Queen made no move to touch it, happy to remain a regal arm’s length away. The Duke stepped forward and made a quip about whether it was made from the waters of the Liffey, Dublin’s less than crystal clear river.

It is how they operate — the Queen retains her dignity, the Prince happy to throw caution to the wind.

State visits have often been when we’ve heard Philip’s legendary gaffes (see left) and the nation is divided about whether they are tactless or hilarious.

Maybe they’re his way of keeping sane in the often mind-blowingly dull world of royal duty.



■ The Duke jumps off his pony after the first chukka in a 1951 polo match.

ACTION MAN

The Duke has always been hands on. From designing the fountain in the private garden at Windsor Castle to a more bizarre challenge. Hearing that Cambridge University Tiddlywinks Championship needed an appropriate trophy he designed silver “wink” which is still presented each year to the winning team.

When it came to adding a new garden next to Balmoral Castle, the Duke not only designed it, but also hollowed it out himself using a mechanical digger.



■ Prince Philip took up carriage driving as a “geriatric sport” after retiring from playing polo. He once said that he thought it would be “a nice weekend activity, rather like a golfing weekend. Which it was, until some idiot asked me to be a member of the British team”.



■ The prince was a keen athlete at school.



■ The Duke bowling at Arundel in 1953.