

This is a moment to reflect

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I wondered whether I could avoid commenting on the death of Prince Philip here. On reflection, I decided I could not.

At a personal level I can entirely sympathise with the Queen's loss. And although they will be to some degree reconciled to it, I can also sympathise with the loss that the rest of his family will be feeling. It is quite extraordinary that Prince Charles has reached his seventies before losing a parent. I doubt it makes it much easier.

That, though is not the issue I am most concerned about here, important as noting these feelings is. What is also extraordinary is that at the age of 63 I have never known anything but the Queen as the UK head of state, with Philip by her side. In fact, to really remember anything else you would now have to be over 75, so long has the Queen been on the throne and Philip been her consort, without that title.

The Queen, of course, carries on. She seems in remarkable good health. Her mother made it to beyond 100. I see no reason to expect that she will not. But, inevitably, Prince Philip's death reminds anyone that this era will come to an end. A reign that began when there was still an empire, post war rationing, very little television, a more explicit class system than we suffer now, and dependence upon industries now long gone will one day draw to a close.

What then? The House of Windsor will not end, but is it really the basis from which the heads of a modern state should be recruited? The very fact that there are many who seem to think that the succession should skip Charles (who could easily be 80 before he inherits) suggests that the idea of primogeniture is already open to question. The possibility that an heir within this family might already be unfit is, then, considered plausible even by some who support the monarchy. What if that was universally true? Might it be that the rather uncomfortable idea that genes determine ability to govern could have had its day?

I have little doubt that for much of the time Prince Philip did rather doubt the idea that he governed. It would not in the slightest bit surprise me if many of those sharing the

privileges that wealth and its associated status provide in our society are also in denial about any supposed benefit, because they too can live frustrated lives. Our inability to appreciate what we have is almost unlimited, it seems. But govern, in a very real sense, he did.

I am not blaming him or the Queen for that. They were people of their era. I accept that. The question, though, is a simple one. Has that era passed? And if so, what next?

There is still time to ask. It is right to do so, even now, because this matters to those to come, and by its very nature the progress of an hereditary monarchy is always dependent upon deaths occurring. That makes this the moment to reflect, in my opinion.