

Contents

Introduction	7
1 Royal England.....	9
2 Natural England	18
3 Visitor's England.....	29
4 Transporting England.....	41
5 Sporting England.....	49
6 Secret England	67
7 Island England.....	76
8 Inventing England	87
9 Aristocratic England.....	100
10 Fighting England	109
11 Building England.....	120
12 Educating England	127
13 Celebrating England.....	133
14 Eccentric England.....	145
15 Criminal England	153

16 Gruesome England 162
17 Screening England..... 171
18 Eating England 180

1

Royal England

'I don't care what kind it is, just get me a beer.'

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh,
on being offered a glass of Italian wine



MORE Q.E. THAN Q.I.

- In 1947, before Princess Elizabeth married, she was sent clothing coupons by hundreds of her father's loyal subjects. These were intended by the donors to be used to buy material for her dress, but sadly they had to be returned. Regulations concerning wartime rationing meant they were not transferable and that it was against the law to give them away.

Bizarre England

- In happier, more plentiful times at her 1953 Coronation, Queen Elizabeth II's robes used so much fabric and were so heavy that the Archbishop of Canterbury was asked to give Her Majesty a gentle shove to launch her along the nave of Westminster Abbey.
- In 1991, the Queen was denied access to a private enclosure at the Royal Windsor Horse Show by security personnel. One of the guards apparently mistook her for 'some old dear who got lost'.
- Her Majesty's Christmas message is presumed to be an annual fixture but is clearly optional, as in 1969 she gave it a miss. Apparently she believed the public had seen enough of her in a television documentary, *Royal Family*, broadcast earlier that year.
- As well as a silver teapot, hot milk and water, Her Majesty's 7.30 a.m. wake-up tray includes a plate of biscuits for her beloved dogs. Since getting the first of these, Susan, in 1944, she has to date owned some thirty corgis. (Several are in fact dorgis, following an incident involving a dachshund owned by Princess Margaret.)
- The Queen has long banked with Coutts & Co. The company installed a cash machine in Buckingham Palace, although it has never been suggested that this was for the sovereign's personal use.
- Whilst Her Majesty's private diaries have not been published and are unlikely to be so, the entry for VE Day (8 May 1945) is known. It read: *Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly, Pall Mall, walked simply miles. Saw parents on balcony at 12.30am – ate, partied, bed 3am!*

- The Queen doesn't require a number plate, but has one anyway – JGY 280, as far as we know a combination of no special significance – which George VI gave her on her eighteenth birthday. As an Auxiliary Territorial Services-trained wartime mechanic it is nice to think she might be quite handy with a spanner should any of her cars conk out.

THE LANGUAGE OF LUGGAGE

At official functions the Queen uses her handbag as a kind of semaphore. If she puts the handbag on a table, it alerts staff to the fact that she wishes to leave in five minutes' time. Transferring it from one arm to another during a conversation means she has had enough of talking with the same person.

The bag famously contains no money, although in reality the Queen does keep a crisply folded five- or ten-pound note for church collections. She also carries various good luck charms from her children. These include several miniature models of corgis and a photograph of the Duke of York on his return from the Falklands War.

Her Majesty even has her cars modified to accommodate the famous accessory. When a Daimler in which she had travelled between Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle came up for auction, it was found to be fitted with an armrest designed to hold the handbag, and a hotline to Downing Street (this was disabled before the sale).



PUTTING A CAT AMONG THE PRINCES

A royal birth can make or break a nation, and historically new arrivals have not always been greeted by unalloyed joy.

Prince Edward (1470–83)

At the time of his birth, Edward's father had been deposed, and his wife, the commoner Elizabeth Woodville, was forced into hiding. Baptized 'like a poor man's child' and initially denied the title of Prince of Wales, on his father's death he was declared illegitimate and locked in the Tower of London. Murdered some time afterwards, as one of the two 'Princes in the Tower', the mystery of his death continues to fox even the most determined historians.

Prince Arthur (1486–1502)

As the son of Henry VII and the grandson of Edward IV, Arthur's arrival cemented the union of the squabbling houses of Tudor and York. His betrothal to Catherine of Aragon also offered the promise of an important political alliance with Spain, but then his early death meant we got his brother Henry instead: six wives, the destruction of the monasteries, and all the constitutional and religious upheaval anyone could want.

Prince Edward (1537–53)

Blessed with two daughters but desperate for a son, Henry VIII ordered a 2,000-gun salute at the news that his third wife had been delivered of a boy – but then lost his queen as the result of prolonged labour and an exceptionally difficult birth. The child fared only slightly better, succeeding to the throne as a nine-year-old but dying six years later.