

Does the Monarchy Still Matter?

BY SARAH LYALL
IN LONDON



FAST FACTS: UNITED KINGDOM

AREA: 94,548 sq mi (slightly smaller than Wyoming), including England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

POPULATION: 62 million (U.S.: 310 million)

PER CAPITA GDP*: \$35,100 (U.S.: \$47,400)

LANGUAGES: English, Welsh

MAJOR RELIGIONS: Christianity, 72% (a majority are members of the official Church of England); Islam, 3%; Hinduism, 1%; other or none, 24%

*Per capita GDP is often used as a measure of a nation's wealth.

The royal family on the balcony at Buckingham Palace in London. See the Teacher's Edition for a Who's Who guide.

WILL THE GRAND WEDDING OF A CHARISMATIC PRINCE BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO AN ANCIENT INSTITUTION?

Stop the presses! On April 29, in the United Kingdom's capital city of London, a handsome young man will marry his college sweetheart.

As you may have heard, this won't be your average wedding. For one thing, it will be held at Westminster Abbey, a church where British Kings and Queens have been crowned as well as buried since the 11th century.

Celebrities and politicians will

attend the festivities, surrounded by armies of reporters, photographers, and security guards. An estimated 2 billion viewers around the globe—including even you, perhaps—are expected to watch the wedding on television.

The groom-to-be is Prince William of Wales, 28. A grandson of Queen Elizabeth II, William is second in line to become King. His bride-to-be is Catherine Middleton,

29, known as Kate. Because she comes from an ordinary middle-class family in the ordinary English town of Bucklebury, she could be the first British Queen of nonroyal blood. To many millions of people, Kate's story is nothing less than a fairy tale come true.

A Mythical Past

It's been more than a century since Britain's monarchs have had any real power. So why do they still fascinate people—including Americans, who declared their independence from King George III back in 1776?

In one sense, it's because of the

way the royals connect to a long-gone, almost mythical past. And the opulence of their lives—the ornate palaces, the jewel-encrusted gowns, the servants in their fussy outfits—is so removed from our own.

But the wedding mania is also due to who Kate and William are. Bright and beautiful, they are photographed everywhere, often in dashing attire. Their eight-year romance, which began when they were students at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, has brought a breath of fresh air to an institution—the **monarchy**—that has often seemed stale in recent decades.

William, or "Wills," as his mother

used to call him, has been an object of public fascination since he was a boy. He was born in 1982 to Prince Charles, Queen Elizabeth's son and heir, and Princess Diana, who came from an **aristocratic** family.

Talk about royalty-crazed: Charles and Diana's 1981 wedding was viewed by a global audience of more than 750 million.

Endlessly glamorous and with an uncanny ability to connect to the public, Princess Diana became one of the world's most celebrated women. Her every move was chronicled by photographers and gossip magazines. But she was only 19 when she married, and she

SOURCES: The World Factbook 2010 (CIA); 2010 World Population Data Sheet (Population Reference Bureau)

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Words to Know

- **aristocratic** (*adj*): belonging to the ruling class or the nobility
- **monarchy** (*n*): a government with a hereditary head of state
- **regal** (*adj*): having qualities of a King or Queen



Kate and Will on graduation day in 2005 at St. Andrews in Scotland

WEB WATCH
Kings and Queens You Should Know
www.scholastic.com/js



Charles and Diana, with Harry, left, and William in 1989, had anything but a "normal" life.



College students protested an increase in tuition last fall, attacking a car carrying Prince Charles and his second wife, Camilla, in London.



British Prime Minister David Cameron with Queen Elizabeth

21st Century Governments in Action

and Charles never seemed happy—as the press continually and often maliciously reported. The couple divorced in 1996.

A year later, Diana was killed in a car accident in Paris. Millions of people watched as the grief-stricken William, then 15, and his brother, Harry, 12, walked behind their mother's coffin during the funeral procession to Westminster Abbey.

Thereafter, the British press agreed to respect the boys' privacy—for the most part. "I just want to go to university and be an ordinary student," William said when he arrived at St. Andrews. He tried not to attract attention. Still, when he wasn't studying, he was sometimes photographed at parties or with a pretty woman on his arm.

William kept running into a fellow student named Kate. They became friendly. Then, seeing her on the catwalk at a charity fashion show, William turned to a friend and said: "Kate's hot!" They soon began dating.

Who is this regular Kate from a

regular family? People describe her as a shy country girl who, like William, loves outdoor sports. Asked by an interviewer to explain what first attracted him to Kate, William said that their friendship came before their romance. "We just spent more time with each other . . . had lots of fun and realized we shared the same interests," he said.

Unlike William's parents, who barely knew each other when they got married, Kate and William have spent years getting acquainted. Their long romance has had setbacks, and they split up for several months in 2007. The press labeled her "Waity Katie" because she was waiting around for him to commit.

Today the pair seem very relaxed with one another. In a recent TV interview, they described how William once sought to impress Kate by cooking her elaborate dinners. But he regularly burned everything, leaving Kate to salvage the meals.

In a nod to tradition, William has given Kate his mother's engagement

ring, a sapphire surrounded by diamonds. "Obviously, [Diana] is not going to be around to share any of the fun and excitement of it all," the Prince said. "This was my way of keeping her close to it."

An Economic Boost

The wedding is a welcome distraction in Britain, where the economy is still suffering from the aftershocks of the global recession. Unemployment is high, and the government has raised taxes while cutting services. So a big party may be just what people need—as long as it doesn't cost too much.

Just how expensive will it be? The royal family, which is paying for most of it, is not saying—perhaps in the millions of dollars. Although taxpayers will have to foot the bill for things like security, the event is expected to provide a huge boost to the British economy. Hotels are selling out, and travel companies are offering William-and-Kate-themed tours. Businesses are peddling commemorative items

like plates and dishcloths with pictures of the couple on them.

While some members of the royal family are more popular than others—and some are not popular at all—everyone seems to like William. He can't become King until after the deaths of both Elizabeth and Charles, yet he has won over the public with his grin, spontaneity, and informality.

"This is a huge shot in the arm for the monarchy," says Kate Reardon, editor in chief of society magazine *Tatler*. "William and Kate are completely appropriate for this day and age, and they represent the monarchy for the next generation."

Parliament's Role

For centuries, Britain's Kings and Queens ruled with absolute authority. But in the late 19th century, Queen Victoria was forced to accept a series of reforms that transferred political power to Parliament and a Prime Minister.

Today, because Queen Elizabeth's role is largely ceremonial, Britons

often wonder what function the monarchy serves. Yet when royals like Diana and William come along, the public's fascination is reborn.

As a future Princess, Kate has had the eyes of the world upon her—examining her hair, her clothing, everything about her. Already, people stampede to buy any outfit she's spotted in, like the royal-blue dress she wore when she and William announced their engagement.

The couple says that they will settle in North Wales, where William is stationed with the Royal Air Force. Kate reportedly will focus on charity work. As much as possible, they plan to lead "normal" lives.

But what about her ascent to the throne, which could be only a few years away? Will the future Queen drop her informality and adopt the **regal** name Catherine? "I'm still very much Kate," she has said.

"She still feels like a real person," says Reardon. "People can project all their fantasies and daydreams onto her, and think, 'It could be me.'"

The U.K. Is a Parliamentary Democracy.

PARLIAMENT is the British government's legislative (lawmaking) body. It has two chambers: the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS is the more powerful chamber. Most major laws originate in the Commons, whose 650 members are elected for up to five years. The Commons can remove a Prime Minister if a majority casts a "no confidence" vote.

THE HOUSE OF LORDS approves or revises legislation. The House has traditionally been made up of Britain's aristocracy. Its 792 members (at present), who inherit or are appointed to their seats, serve for life. A series of democratic reforms, begun in the 20th century, may eventually require that this body be elected by the people.

THE PRIME MINISTER runs the government. The Prime Minister is not directly elected, but is chosen by the party that holds a majority of seats in the Commons.

The U.K. is also a constitutional monarchy. The Queen's power is greatly limited. She is now only a symbolic leader.

MapSearch



United Kingdom

What's the difference between Great Britain and the United Kingdom? The answer is Northern Ireland. The island of Great Britain comprises England, Scotland, and Wales. Only when you add Northern Ireland to the mix does it become the U.K. The nation's official name tells the tale: the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

This small country, which once dominated the world as the seat of the British Empire, is separated from mainland Europe by the English Channel. Although no longer an international powerhouse, the U.K. remains an influential member of the European Union and a strong ally of the U.S.

With the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, which began in Britain in the late 18th century, the U.K. became the first urbanized country. Today, about 80 percent of the people live in cities and towns. The biggest cities are London, Birmingham, Leeds, Glasgow, and Sheffield.

Study this map and the photos and captions, then answer the questions below.

Questions

Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. The capital of the U.K. sits on which waterway?
2. What is the northernmost city shown on this map?
3. Which part of Great Britain is farthest west?
4. Prince William's father, Charles, is the Prince of Wales. What is that principality's capital?
5. What geographic feature separates Northern Ireland from Scotland?
6. Which Scottish city or town is located at about 56°N and 4°W?
7. What connection between the U.K. and mainland Europe is shown on the map?
8. What political units make up the U.K.?
9. Which part of the U.K. shares an international border with another country?
10. What traditional garb have Scottish men and boys worn for centuries?



The Queen's Guard stands at attention as a horse-drawn carriage leaves Buckingham Palace, the Queen's residence, in London.



A man in the Scottish Highlands plays the bagpipes. Men and boys in the region have worn kilts since the 16th century.



With dwindling gas and oil reserves in Wales, coal mining is making a comeback there, where it was once the chief industry.

United Kingdom



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