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*Please note, all articles were commissioned by the titles shown; some were abridged for length, though not for content; a (very) few were spiked before publication.*

*[Cover Photo: Tim Ockenden, Press Association]*
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Patrick owes much of his practical communications experience to Princess Diana, who chose him to be her equerry and only private secretary/chief of staff. He served the Princess for eight years, responsible for every aspect of her public life, charitable initiatives, and private organization. He travelled with her to five continents, working with government officials up to head of state. Under relentless media scrutiny, his tenure covered the period of Princess Diana's greatest popularity as well as the constitutional controversy of her separation from Prince Charles. In recognition of his service, HM Queen Elizabeth II appointed him a Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order.

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2001: In a tabloid sting operation in a London hotel, a daughter-in-law to the queen has been exposed using her royal links to leverage a business deal; in an ill-judged attempt to distract the media, a palace press officer inadvertently ignites a blaze of unfounded speculation about the couples’ sexuality...
Patrick Jephson, who was a courtier for eight years, urges the Royal Family to ignore their unscrupulous media manipulators and to begin real reform before it's too late.

At about this stage in a royal crisis, the internal press briefings start to become easier. The winces are outnumbered by the sighs of relief. A few tentative, self-congratulatory thoughts are permitted. The ship of monarchy has ridden out another storm in a tea cup.

Supporters of the royal status quo, which is still most of us, will be tempted to share the relief. What a lot of fuss about nothing...

Except that this time the sheer disproportion of the countess's offence and the political reaction sounds an ominous warning that royal advisors will surely not want to ignore as they put away the Wessex file.

A Westminster-style register of interests, which has been proposed by Labour MPs, is perhaps the most damaging piece of the fallout from the Dorchester incident. Ostensibly reasonable, it's hard to reject with any conviction and it appeals to the resentful serf element that has been such a vocal part of the recent media feeding frenzy.

It's the most damaging because it will give us the right to pry into things that many of us feel are none of our business. We will pry anyway, of course, but it still won't feel right. And it will only add legitimate outrage to the mixture of anger and despair that we must assume is being felt by the inhabitants of the various royal residences (yes, they have feelings too).

It won't even offer much protection against future such... um... misjudgements by the “minor royals”. Nor will the investigation by the lord chamberlain, which we're assured will provide guidelines for any of them who feel the need to dabble in commerce.

As it happens, such guidelines – or a version of them – already exist. A slim volume is available to the small number of officials who advise senior royalty, presumably the product of previous embarrassments such as the excruciating attempt by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor to sell tat on American television. Which reminds us that this is not a new problem.

As I recall, the advice is hardly delphic, amounting roughly to an exhortation not to do anything that might bring the monarchy into disrepute. And really, that says it all. It's certainly all you can say to a group of people whose raison d'être is to be above the rules invented for the hoi polloi.
That way, the magic has a chance to survive, if we want it to. It certainly won’t survive the resentful scrutiny of a register of interests, even if such a document could ever be accurately drawn up.

This begs a few questions. Self-regulation is the only sort of regulation that will ever work with people who are above common reproach. But how can it be applied if the only sanction – the threat of incurring the Queen's displeasure – is ineffective?

Rules must now be invented, not because the management has pre-empted the problem and is now applying stern correction, but because an enterprising tabloid reporter pretended to be a foreign businessman.

Half a dozen words of majestic displeasure would perhaps have done more to reassure loyal subjects than the lengthy explanation that was put out as the Queen's response.

Let the spin doctors with whom Her Majesty is now so expensively equipped fill in the supporting stuff about “breaking new ground in this day and age”, if they really must. We want to believe that we have a Queen who will put the fear of God into any relative who even thinks of exploiting their kinship.

The Queen has formidable disciplinary powers over family matters, but the perception of her authority is being dissipated by spin. So we are stuck with the justice of the media lynch mob: vulgar, impertinent, demoralising and depressingly effective.

So what price the magic now? The Queen's generation has witnessed the rapid fading of imperial red from the atlas of the world. Even when Tony Blair went to Fettes, she still reigned over vast swathes of Africa, the Caribbean and Asia, not to mention the Old Commonwealth.

In my years in the household I often wandered through our great palaces, wondering at the survival of our essentially Victorian monarchy in the face of such irreversible national decline. Quaint, certainly, and enjoyable too, in a Ruritanian sort of way. But no more guaranteed a future than the Queen's birthday celebrations on St. Helena.

But wait a minute. Haven't the papers been daily reminding us that the Queen's heir is the dynamic force for change that emerges from the Wessex wreck like a beacon of hope?

Indeed they have, thanks to the assiduous efforts of the Prince of Wales's own image-management consultants. But it's not hope that their work illuminates. It's despair.
Internecine warfare has been part of our court life ever since we invented royalty. Usually it stays safely behind palace walls. Its emergence into the public consciousness at this critical point is highly significant and deeply worrying to loyal observers.

It has reached a point where no realistic reading of today's royal stories is complete without wondering which opposing teams of royal spin doctors are responsible for which damaging headlines.

Unfortunately, it seems that the spin alchemists have only the politicians' code of ethics. No more should be expected of them. Which would be okay if their royal employers had the best politicians' wisdom and moral self-assurance to redress the imbalance. But not all of them do. Instead they seem bewitched by the siren voices of their unscrupulous media manipulators.

Not only is the royal ship now heading for the rocks, but the officers are squabbling on the bridge and paying the pushier passengers to have a go at the helm.

I hate to say it, but the Prince of Wales is not a reformer. He is not even a moderniser. He’s a tinkerer, and a self-indulgent one at that. His well-publicised desire to jettison the “minor royals” sometimes looks like a handy way to bag the remaining deckchairs for himself.

The minor royals are not the heart of the problem, however they might irritate their elders' media advisers. At the core of our royal family's dilemma is their tendency – which we have allowed them – to treat the truth as an optional extra.

In his marriage, the Prince of Wales had the best real safeguard of the monarchy’s future. The marriage's failure is a sharp reminder of royalty's human frailty. So is its understandable vulnerability to soothing PR overtures. But our instinctive sympathy struggles with what has followed. For example, I'm sure Sophie got this right [taped in the sting] a lot of people don't want Camilla to be queen.

But she won't be queen, say the prince's apologists. By which they mean she won't have that title. If you believe that removes her from our national shop window, then you are misinformed about how power is really brokered in the royal hothouse.

The titles are irrelevant. When public duty is your life and not just your job, as it is for a prince, the real influence is always going to lie with those who try to make that life bearable for you, such as Camilla. It does not lie with those who seem determined to make it more difficult for you, even if they are paid to be your professional conscience.

From this depressing thought it is tempting to see the monarchy as an institution in terminal decline, its members “bonkers”, its slow degeneration robbed of dignity by media
attempts to resuscitate it for profit. Meanwhile, our morbid fascination with its self-
destructive progress has become an unwholesome national pastime. Eventually even this
will lapse into despair or apathy.

The monarchy’s enemies are now openly circling. Outright republicans will still have a long
wait, but recent events have given them justified hope of the feast to come. A register of
royal interests will be just the appetiser. Worse: those on the menu retain the false hope
that one more scrap of “reform” will send their tormentors away satisfied.

What is the alternative to this grim future in which dwindling royal reserves of respect and
influence are frittered away on media Danegeld?

The Queen’s subjects remain mostly loyal, but their loyalty is no longer given for free. That
same loyalty is the monarchy’s only real hope, and the media alchemists are turning it from
gold to something base and tarnished.

It is that trusting loyalty that is being so cynically traded in the spin doctors’ attempts to
show us the monarchy’s fabled “way ahead.” The way ahead is a dead end. Censorious MPs
and disenchanted editors have the roadblocks ready, even if the royal bus corrects its habit
of steering for the nearest ditch.

Royal PR advisers are true to their professional origins, with a tendency to concentrate on
style at the expense of substance. Hence recent laborious and superficial attempts at
repackaging the leading players in what is damagingly, if accurately, seen as national
entertainment. Putting PR style onto Hanoverian substance only shows up the flaws in
both.

Rather than repackaging, what is needed is real reform – a campaign for real monarchy.
That means less of them, less of their opinions, less of their hypocrisy, less of their
conspicuous consumption. It especially means fewer of their “communications” experts
and the news they inevitably generate.

(In fact, why not replace the entire royal spin effort with one Joyce Grenfell-like figure and
give her a single, crackling telephone line and plenty of knitting. The result could hardly be
any worse and those hacks who got through could at least experience honest
condescension instead of an invitation to conspiracy).

We should ask for more, as well as less. More modesty. More humanity. More industry.
More spirituality and less mysticism. In short, more of the things that set Them apart from
Us, and earn them the pedestal we seem determined to set them on. It might even make
them look happier.
Until then, the broadest smiles will be on republican faces. And while it's true that scaring us with President Hattersley jokes is the royalists' last and cheapest resort, it doesn't alter a basic English appetite for the Crown. How Scottish, Welsh or even Irish attitudes are bearing up might be less reassuring.

Anything less than root and branch reform is now too late. When I sat in their counsels, I learnt with unease that royal people have little sense of time running out. Not surprising, perhaps: it is their life we are talking about, their reason for existence, not their job. Meanwhile, everything about their daily surroundings feels reassuringly permanent.

Perhaps the exception was the Princess of Wales, for whom I worked for eight years. I observed that she saw that her privileged position was not a right, but had to be re-earned daily.

How she did the re-earning set her at odds with her in-laws, perhaps because of her disconcertingly public, if erratic, pursuit of what she saw as “truth.” This may explain why the family she married into has not adapted well to the touchy-feely regime the spin doctors have prescribed. It's not the right medicine for them and it shows.

Which leaves only Prince William. In his genes we can assume his mother’s wily ability to read the public mood has been mixed with her instinctive – if misdirected – sense that changes are needed. But these survival aids will be hard pressed to flourish against the influences that are already moulding him. The young prince must be an irresistibly attractive pupil for those who would educate him in the presentational arts that his father has embraced.

Any reform is difficult for an institution that runs on precedent. The reforms now expected of the royal family will perhaps be the hardest they have ever faced. They may exceed what the Queen and her heir can countenance. Time will tell – but time is no longer on their side.

Should they fail, a solution has already been provided by the much-derided hereditary process. Plans should be drawn up for Prince William’s early accession. This would confound the growing fashion for a republic, concentrate the kingdom’s instinctive loyalty and give the older generations of his family a dignified role as mentors.

A simultaneous review of the sovereign's constitutional function would be a natural step. And a register of royal interests could be put back where it belongs, in the agitprop bedsit.

2019 retrospect: some of the predictions look a bit apocalyptic, but the core message of the perils posed by spin still apply – and even more to digital spin - as do the warnings about high living and hypocrisy. A twenty-year PR campaign to rehabilitate Mrs Parker-Bowles has
backfired, with a recent poll* showing less than 14% in favour of Camilla becoming queen. In the same poll, a majority would also prefer the Crown to skip a generation and pass directly to Prince William. Luckily for Charles, no votes are at stake; but for a monarchy that reigns by consent, these are troubling figures. At least, they should be...

*YouGov for PA, August 2017
THE LAST TIME I spoke to Princess Diana was 21 years ago, and we were both having a pretty awful day. I was hand-delivering my letter of resignation as her private secretary, and she was adjusting to the news that her beleaguered support organization was about to have a tedious vacancy at the top. Not only was this highly inconvenient, it also broke a cardinal rule of royal employment: such vacancies should only occur with the prior approval of the royal employer. Instead, I had had the temerity to resign, without her consent and she hadn't even had the fun of firing me first. No wonder I felt a death ray being aimed at me from the famous blue eyes. Even as I tried to meet it head on, I reflected on the stupidity (or was it arrogance?) of those who forgot the ice and steel programmed deep into the aristocratic DNA of Lady Diana Spencer.

But then, as she took the envelope, I thought I saw the look in her eyes soften. I might have been, at that moment, a candidate for instant execution, but there had been many other moments – almost eight years of them – when I had been a loyal, useful and even indispensable accomplice in what had been a wild ride through the royal universe. By chance and by choice I had been strapped into the rocket ship with her. But now the thrills were too few, the gyrations too giddy and our once-soaring flight path seemed to be headed inexorably earthwards. I wanted off. Yet even then, as we awkwardly shook hands in farewell, the look she gave me stirred a familiar protective reflex that has only grown with the years since her highflying odyssey came to such a catastrophic end.

‘The end of the fairy tale’ is a phrase too often used glibly to describe the failure of the Prince of Wales's first marriage. While the wedding in 1981 had many of the elements of a fairy story (the Archbishop of Canterbury used the words during the ceremony), the sequence of events begun that day in St Paul’s had a horror-story ending in the Alma tunnel in Paris. And as we have heard from all the main protagonists, any Disney-type magic was in very short supply from beginning to end. Disturbingly, in its place, a far more pernicious fantasy has been cultivated. It has suited many critics to have us believe, in the words of Penny Junior, the Duchess of Cornwall’s biographer, that Diana was ‘an injured soul, a poor damaged creature who needed help’. To support this convenient assertion, a systematic attempt has been made to have the Princess remembered as the pathetic possessor of a personality disorder, incapable of royal duty and an impossible burden on her stoic husband. Even allowing them credit for some poodle patriotic motive, those responsible for this campaign seem to have cared little for the feelings of her sons, and
even less for the ethics of publicizing a diagnosis of someone unable to answer back – and without the tiresome formality of clinical examination.

Consider instead the possibility that the fairy tale ended for some far simpler and depressingly mundane reasons: adultery, jealousy, neglect and deceit prominent among them. It was Diana’s determination not to be discarded as an inconvenient mistake, but instead to take on her critics and beat them at the royal game that provoked a panicky attempt to persuade the world that she should be diminished, marginalized, if possible, forgotten. One has only to ask who benefits from such political-style spin to understand the damage it does to a revered institution like the monarchy, which commands a loyalty no politician dare claim.

More credit, then, to her sons for, it seems, awakening to their opportunity to protect their mother’s true legacy. In their own words ‘the time is right to remember her positive impact,’ and in last month’s beautiful and heart-warming documentary they made their own uncontestable tribute to her achievements, not least as a loving parent. Perhaps even more significant was their recognition of her role as mentor in the authentic emotional engagement that a new generation of monarchists – like it or not – hopes to find in their ruling family.

To such moving personal memories, a fuller portrait of the Princess would add some distinctly public achievements too. Diana as mother is an image that might soften a stony heart, and Diana as global charitable icon might impress a skeptical one. But the memories that some hearts should find unsettling – an unease which perhaps explains why they’ve been all but eradicated – are those of Diana doing her constitutional duty as queen-in-waiting. Luckily for me, I witnessed many of these at first hand. I accompanied her to one-on-one meetings with heads of state and of government from Buenos Aires to Tokyo, Washington to Moscow, Paris to Cairo, Islamabad and Harare. As they posed for photographs with the statuesque advocate for so many of the world’s least-fashionable causes, these leaders somehow seemed unaware of her status as a poor damaged creature. And not one would have questioned her aptitude or capacity for diplomatic duties she fulfilled with unfailing grace and good humor.

No sign either of this damaged creature as, still younger than Harry is now, she donned combat fatigues to visit one of her regiments on operations in Northern Ireland; or faced down a baying mob of anti-nuclear protestors to christen a Trident nuclear missile submarine; or navigated the corridors of power in Brussels and Geneva in support of causes – not least British trade – for whom she was a seasoned asset and campaigner. So, let those who continue to question her sanity ponder this instead: that the injured soul
who comforted lepers, hugged babies with Aids or visited the criminally insane, perhaps understood better than most the courage needed to acknowledge one's own frailties. Worth bearing in mind, the next time you encounter disdain directed at Diana, the media manipulator, the temperamental inadequate or cheerleader of the emotionally incontinent.

Such thoughts and many more were jostling in my mind as I trudged away from Kensington Palace that awful day, two decades ago, the reproach in those blue eyes still burning. It burns today, nevermore than when Diana's alleged failings are co-opted to serve the latest artful raid on our benign loyalty. As we look back in gratitude, we should also look forward with concern for the kind of monarchy we want. In considering the answer, the late Princess of Wales's experience is more than just an enduring example: it is also warning of what happens when royalty and decency become irretrievably estranged.

Of all the accusations made against Prince Charles – fairly and unfairly – for his part in the Diana tragedy, none is more damning in my eyes than that he sanctioned this attack on his ex-wife's sanity, in order to smooth his next wife's path to the throne.
SECTION 1

WHO OWNS DIANA?
DELUSION AND CONTROL
It is twenty years since we lost Princess Diana. In those two decades, many in the royal establishment expected – and even perhaps hoped - that our attention might now switch to the more predictable, if less mesmerizing, charms of the remaining Windsor cast. It hasn't worked out like that, as illustrated by the fuss attracted by Channel 4’s latest Diana documentary.

Having seen the final version, and having made my own small contribution to the story it tells, I find it difficult to share some critics’ well-aired outrage over its use of video tape shot by Diana's voice coach during their practice sessions. These are definitely not sneaky snapshots of a woman caught unawares, but instead show a professional public figure, methodically honing her speaking skills in front of the voice coach's camera. Though not intended for broadcast at the time, twenty years after her death Channel 4 are surely right to see them as legitimate additions to the historical record.

Bewitchingly, they reveal a very thoughtful and often funny princess finding her voice as the teller of her own story. It was this rare ability to infuse her public speeches with disarming personal candour that made Diana such an effective communicator. One of the reasons we remember her, and still want to hear her voice, is that she spoke not with technical fluency but with an authenticity that comes from the heart (or gut if you prefer). Her audiences instinctively recognized that what she was telling them owed far more to her own emotions and experience than from the efforts of her speechwriters. That was her coach's intention, I believe, and very effective it has proved.

So why the fuss? To get the answer, we must look beyond how the tapes came to light – calm down, they’ve been on YouTube for years - and look instead at the message they convey. As I've said, they show Diana finding her voice; and to understand why that might worry some people, consider for a moment the context in which she was speaking. It was 1992, the infamous Annus Horribilis which saw two royal marriages publicly disintegrate and the devastating Windsor fire, among other lesser calamities. It was a time when, with good reason, Diana felt herself to be under attack from advisors and friends of her estranged husband, who had chosen as their main weapon the accusation that she was mentally ill. Classy.

Now, I have better reason than most to know that the Princess could be a mercurial and impulsive figure, in whom the flame of an angry fire could sometimes burn uncomfortably hot. On a bad day – and luckily they were FEW – you'd think Boadicea with a headache
might be an easier boss. But guess what. She had every reason to be angry, trapped with the knowledge that her husband loved another woman. And she had reason to be angry too when the sympathy and guidance she needed – to say nothing of simple encouragement and appreciation for her royal duties – seemed to arrive in very small measures, however generously intended.

What Diana fans should find wonderfully appealing about this film – and her critics find naggingly disconcerting – is that the figure we see on screen is unmistakably articulate, realistic, modest and fun. It's her irreverent, spontaneous and indomitable spirit that comes through loud and clear, despite the difficulties that beset her in those tempestuous months. When you see and hear this Diana, it's hard to believe that her value to the nation, along with her very sanity, has been the subject of well-placed, hostile speculation.

And, don't forget, all this at an age considerably younger than Prince Harry is today.

At a time when, to their great credit, both her children are encouraging us to remember their mother in a positive light, this film is a well-timed, well-made and well-intentioned addition to the standard anniversary menu. And if it takes a little longer to digest, at least it won't have you reaching for the sick bag.
We've all heard it this summer and Di-fatigue is unlikely to be reversed by the official programme of remembrance. The Wembley Concert was truly moving in parts, especially the video inserts which recalled Diana at her spontaneous, compassionate best. I'll admit they reduced me to tears, and not just because here and there I caught glimpses in the background of a younger, slimmer, more idealistic me.

Tears may also be shed in the relatively modest surroundings of the Guards Chapel when the Princess is remembered by a carefully-vetted congregation. Another cocktail of sentiment, though probably of a brand more acceptable to royal traditionalists.

But neither of these events, for all their good intentions, is likely to change perceptions of the late Princess. They may temporarily make us feel good about ourselves – because on the face of it, we've done the right thing by the ghost of Diana. They may even make us reflect comfortably on our royal family's notable powers of self-preservation – because the ugly mood portrayed in the film The Queen is now safely a decade behind us.

But for sceptics and devotees alike - not to mention the indifferent majority – it's unlikely there will be anything new to carry away from this year of memories. Nothing to change our opinions of the woman who for fifteen years - let it not be forgotten - was going to be our next queen.

Which is ironic, really, because if nothing else, Diana always left you with something new to think about. Even her severest critics could find themselves vulnerable to this unexpected talent.

To take just one example. During my eight years as the Princess's equerry and private secretary I would often travel to work on the same train as the Spectator columnist Auberon Waugh. I would watch as he filleted the morning papers with a clever little knife before taking the cuttings away with him at Paddington, ready to be minced and served up to his appreciative readership.

He was an arch critic of my boss – a fully paid-up member of the club which saw her as an over-hyped lightweight, a media-obsessed harpy for whom no intelligent person should spare a single serious thought. At last I summoned up the nerve to approach the great man of letters. Perhaps he would care to meet the object of his scepticism and judge for himself...?
The dare worked, as I rather thought it would. So began one of the most unlikely - and least remembered - acquaintances of Diana's public life. In fact, it might even be called a friendship of opposites. Confronted with the reality of the Princess, Waugh recognized that what went on between her ears might be at least as worthwhile as what went on in her heart.

Of course, Diana was the first to admit her lack of conventional academic achievement. But anyone who knew her would agree she could be smart. Intuitive, articulate, observant - she was all these.

As a cabinet minister remarked to me – not altogether approvingly – her understanding of mass communication came less from the head than from the gut. It was a gift politicians envied and courtiers dreaded. She did her own PR – and her reputation rose or fell accordingly, as she well understood.

Central to the public's perception of the Princess was what she did. Her support of humanitarian causes followed a simple but effective formula: good works were graced and enhanced by her presence – that was her role and it worked very well.

Its success lay in the easily-grasped image of a beautiful and charismatic young woman doing what she could to improve the lives of those less fortunate – lepers, AIDS babies, addicts, battered wives, refugees and the rest. Even in still photographs you can get a sense of the Princess's emotional empathy. It became her trademark style of royal humanitarian work.

Wembley reminded us of its continuing appeal. The video clips of the Princess were as fresh and emotive as they were nearly twenty years ago. And although this tenth anniversary might be the last time the royal A-list turns out in her honour, the memory of Diana's blend of compassion, glamour and vulnerability promises to endure.

Whatever her faults, Diana's forgivability lay in the belief that she was essentially sincere – that what you saw was a truthful insight into her character. And most of us liked what we saw.

Honest, warm, charming, sincere. Not the whole story of her complex character, as I have reason to know, but still adjectives that sit easily with the image projected onto the giant Wembley screens.

Try these by comparison: modern, relevant, accessible, value-for-money. The bywords of royalty since Diana's death are the language of the marketing consultant. Such a formulaic
strategy is born of necessity, not popular demand. The sad reality is that the process of replacing Diana in the royal shop window doesn't merit a single attractive adjective.

Moves to erase that reality and “modernise” the royal family will always face one crucial limitation. The gaps in the window dressing become the focus of public attention. In a rock star that doesn't much matter. But in a future head of state, it matters very much indeed.

Is the President of the United States a celebrity? Is Her Majesty the Queen? Those who aspire to similar heights should be alarmed when their activities become the small change of showbiz correspondents. Celebrity corrodes enduring values like a deadly acid – beginning from the inside.

Here we come to a central misunderstanding about the late Princess of Wales. Except for brief indulgences towards the end of her life, she never pursued celebrity. Celebrity and celebrities pursued her and sometimes it suited her purpose – and her charities’ fundraisers – that she should reward their exertions. She knew that, in such fickle waters, a conspicuous link between charity and celebrity is royalty's only flimsy lifeline.

The gulf between celebrity and royalty needs regular re-emphasis. Missing from the Wembley video clips was the more regal Diana - Diana the future queen. Of course, it wasn't that sort of party. Less excusably, however, I bet it won't be obvious in any other officially-sanctioned memorial event. A Diana shorn of her HRH is now the officially-approved version of the People’s Princess.

History's verdict will be fundamentally defective if it reduces the late Princess of Wales to one-dimension: a doe-eyed teenager in a nursery, a Red Cross pin-up or a vengeful divorcee posing on a millionaire's yacht.

History – and this summer of remembrances – will be false without reminders of her other talents, talents which must not be consigned to the footnotes of her life.

Alongside memories of Diana with Mother Teresa, we should recall Diana with figures of more earthly power - Diana the graceful diplomat with the Emperor of Japan or the Presidents of the United States, France, Argentina and many other countries...and all in her own right.

Remember, too, Diana the Honorary Air Commodore inspecting an attack jet, or the Colonel-in-Chief visiting her regiments on active service – one of which, on amalgamation, chose her name as its new title.
A balanced tribute includes Diana as a hard-working member of the core royal team - promoting British exports at a Brussels trade fair, opening a tractor factory in Lahore or naming a nuclear missile submarine - the latter in defiance of baying protesters.

And what of Diana in solemn tribute at the bomb-ravaged war memorial in Enniskillen or making a brave, impromptu walkabout in the Falls Road during the Troubles?

If these reminders of Diana's more traditional royal virtues are fading, one reason may be because they all flourished during her brief solo royal career. The years during which she emerged from her husband's control offer tantalising glimpses of the mature, world-class royal asset that slipped through our fingers.

To distract us from that melancholy thought, it suits the arbiters of official royal memory that the regal Diana should be obscured with puffs of sentimental haze. Thus are we seduced into easy memories of Diana the well-intentioned but flaky darling of the victim industry – a camera-hungry clothes horse, a royal misfit over whom it would be better now at last to draw a tactful veil. Her less fluffy achievements are to be boxed up and put away, as if to make up for failure to constrain her in life.

Such is the limitation of sentiment as a vehicle for our tribute to the Princess. It's akin to the limitation of celebrity. Both induce the illusion of warmth – but neither provides light.

One of many glib observations about Diana is that she casts a shadow over the future of the royal institution. But the reality is simpler, and harsher, than that. It's her role as a spotlight, drawing the eye into every nook and cranny of the royal apparatus, for which we should have the courage to thank her. And though, like any light, it can show us things we'd rather not confront, it can also be used to guide the way ahead.

All of this summer's sentiment will have achieved nothing if it fails to illuminate the real reasons we should remember Diana. First is that she came into our royal family as our future joint head of state. The girl on the steps of St Paul's that sunny day in 1981 embodied the future hopes of monarchists all over the world. We should spare a thought for that moment and for the lasting lessons which followed, even as we remember its tragic sequel in 1997.

Second, it is a delusion to believe that Diana's royal magic can be passed to a new generation in the poisoned shot-glass of celebrity or the sweet warm mug of sentiment. Her ability to evoke adoration and tears wasn't the result of a clever spin campaign. Ultimately it was because, for all her faults, she was a proud and dutiful woman who visibly tried her utmost even though cast into an impossible marital trap.
There was something else about her, too. As future anniversaries count the passing years, her successors may yet find that a fuller understanding of her life lights their way towards it.

Auberon Waugh recognized its radiance in her. As he wrote to me after his last meeting with the Princess of Wales:

“She is a free spirit.”

Amen to that.
Diana and memorials go together. At least they do for me. As her equerry and subsequently her private secretary for eight years, I arranged for her to stand respectfully in front of them in Whitehall and Heliopolis, in Rawalpindi, Kathmandu and Hodegaya, to remember just a few. It was a chance for me to make the point that, though she might be a fashion star and compassionate saint to her worldwide army of fans, she was first and foremost a senior member of the British Royal Family and determined to do her duty as such. Each time I handed her the wreath or just observed the perfectly-judged tilt of her bowed head, I knew there were few who had ever done it better.

I knew it for certain one bright, freezing morning in Enniskillen. Nobody does an armistice day service like a proud Ulster town, especially when that service had only recently been the scene of a bomb attack that killed a dozen mourners. The scars of the attack were on the buildings and on the faces that surrounded the simple memorial.

Diana stood at the head of the silent crowd for two long minutes while I watched the police snipers methodically sweep the rooftops through their rifle sights. It was 1994 and the threats weren't all of the type that you can see. Back home the royal establishment was growing ambivalent – to say the least – about a Princess of Wales who dared blow the whistle on her false marriage.

There were many, I knew, who had my boss in their metaphorical crosswires. Yet here she was, with the Queen's blessing, doing her job to customary perfection as a symbol of dignified national emotion. I hoped the message carried loud and clear across the Irish Sea to the mutters in the anti-Diana camp.

At last the bugles sounded the reveille. As the notes faded, I watched with relief as the elegant figure in the black coat and distinctive hat moved from her designated spot, a splash of white paint on the icy tarmac. The story isn't complete without the saga of that hat.

On the Queen's Flight jet to Belfast Diana was trying – and theatrically failing – to choose a favourite from the two she had brought with her. As sometimes happened, I was asked to adjudicate. “Hat A or Hat B?” she asked, brightly. I fumbled for a tactful reply (as she well knew, I actually preferred Hat C which had been rejected before we even left Kensington palace). “Well, Hat A looks very royal...” She laughed. “Thanks. I'll wear Hat B then!” You get the picture.
This week, Diana and a memorial will be in the news again. This time it's her own. I hope she would like it. I hope she would also like the fuss that it's stirred up. The Queen will lead the Royal A-team at the official opening. Not to be outdone – as they might see it – the senior Spencers will also be on parade. Just getting the two clans together on the same spot is a tribute to Diana's pulling power.

It's also, of course, a tribute to the clans' recognition that anything less than a semblance of public rapprochement will be presented as a public brawl. It's a seismic event, rich in symbolism, guaranteed to stir a flicker of interest in the most jaded student of Buckingham Palace Kremlinology. In other watchers, to whom the monarchy is primarily a matter of emotion, it will release a range of reflex responses – among them sadness, surprise and satisfaction.

Satisfaction is perhaps a rare response to much royal news of recent years. A glance back at events since the fairy-tale wedding – a gambit that should have secured the dynasty - reveals a pretty bleak landscape. Two decades of anni horribili have left a lingering hangover of disillusion and sourness where once there was pride and affection.

Only last week the biggest royal story was the appearance of Camilla Parker Bowles in Prince Charles's financial review – her first in an official royal document – along with claims, in questionable taste, about his prowess as a fundraiser. What one newspaper described as Charles's “rackety” personal life is still the chewing gum stuck to the shiny shoes of monarchy.

How reassuring, therefore, to see the Queen take the lead in an act of remembrance that will strike a welcome chord in most of her subjects. As Diana's senior advisor, my single greatest daily worry was not how to keep my quixotic boss off the front pages, or how to get her nicely photographed when – inevitably – that's where she ended up. It wasn't even the task of trying to chart the course of her growth as a phenomenal but impulsive worldwide force for good. Overriding all these was the constant need to reconcile the radical princess with the traditional royal establishment from which her status derived.

I felt a deep loyalty to both. I was – and remain – convinced that the one was diminished without the other. But, as their paths inexorably diverged, I found myself performing an increasingly painful version of the splits.

At the time, as the “War of the Waleses“ thundered around my ears (and sometimes between them), I was only dimly aware that my experience was being repeated all over the country. On the road with Diana I had seen people's love for her at a thousand walkabouts, in grim industrial streets and on picturesque village greens. She earned that love, not just
by looking lovely, but by her often overlooked hard work in the daily royal grind of hospices and factories and – being Diana – of AIDS clinics and drug projects too.

When she died, the people won over by her camera-pleasing style and visible compassion displayed their feelings in unprecedented emotion as her coffin passed through the streets of the capital. But most of these were the same people, I knew, who would later pay similar homage to the Queen Mother and loyally support their local Golden Jubilee party. For them, as for me, loyalty to Diana was also loyalty to the Crown.

Granted, not all of them may yet feel the same readiness to splash out loyally on Highgrove brand scented bath oils or even yummy Duchy biscuits. The country was – and still is to an almost institutionalised degree – divided into a “Charles” camp and a “Di” camp. But deep in its doggedly loyal guts, it yearns to remain united in “The Queen's camp.”

How profoundly reassuring therefore to see the Queen symbolising this yearning by representing us at Diana's memorial. She did it before, by respectfully bowing her head as the princess's coffin passed Buckingham Palace, and so representing those whose grief was felt at a distance, geographically or emotionally. We should thank her for reminding us – and, perhaps, some members of her own family - that royalty is the best cure for the wounds that royalty inflicts. We should thank her too for showing us that, even when it costs a bit of pride, there's nothing so spiritually restorative as Doing The Right Thing.

Which brings us to surprise. Anyone surprised to see the Queen taking the lead at such an event – and I've heard a few – underestimates her. Quite apart from personal obligation or the moral justification described above, there's a presentational savvy at work here. “Closure” may be a popular psychobabble concept but that's no reason to discount it. After all, this is allegedly the era of a new, accessible, (italic) relevant monarchy – an era in which it's OK to hold a pop concert at the palace or call Her Majesty “Mummy” if that's what post-Diana fashion requires.

Such deference to the transitory demands of popularity may pay lasting dividends, though I doubt it. It's certainly a misreading of Diana’s appeal, which had more to do with perceptions of honesty and sacrifice than mere touchy-feeliness. Nevertheless, in the wake of her death royalty has invested heavily in the seductive skills of public relations. But the marriage of PR and the Windsors has not always been a happy one. A new post of “Communications Secretary” was created at Buckingham Palace but after only two occupants the experiment was called off, with no very obvious ill-effects.

Whatever effort it has cost the royal family to summon up their feelings of respect and reconciliation, it will be generously repaid in the minds of subjects who had begun to doubt
their willingness to pay the honour due to a dead future queen. And I'd be surprised if it took an expensive PR genius to think that one up.

Meanwhile, in presenting his annual review, Charles's ever-growing bodyguard of communications staff has produced enough ego-boosting statistics to win an award for industry. They should look up from their ledgers and reflect that most royal good works are found out in the end. Until then the Heir's many accomplishments are surely demeaned by an office culture that thinks it necessary to count how many hands he's shaken in the past year (more than 10,000, apparently). It's hard to imagine the Queen instructing her staff to amass such trivia, let alone boast her acts of charity.

The controversy over the choice of memorial is surely no surprise. Like any public art, the memorial will probably please more people than it offends but then that never made a headline. Kathryn Gustafson's aim has been to appeal to the senses of its visitors rather than the cameras of the press. The one person whose opinion might matter – Diana herself – is unavailable for comment so those who claim to know what she would have thought might as well relax and enjoy the experience.

More disappointing has to be the DCMS organisers' reluctance to take advice on drawing up the guest list. The unintended result has been a whiff of pettiness that taints the magnanimity that is the day's principal value. It's hard to understand how so many of Diana's friends came to be omitted since there would still have been room for the all-important charities, the contractors, bureaucrats and assorted flunkeys. There would even have been room for Mrs. Parker Bowles. What an opportunity lost, not least for students of royal seating plans. And, since you ask, no I wasn't invited either.

Any sadness over the guest list will pass. The new granite will mellow, the water will grow weedy and dogs, pigeons and graffiti artists will add their tributes to the beautiful masonry. Elsewhere the royal drama will move inexorably on into acts still unwritten. But the sadness in the hearts of people who loved Diana, or even just loved the idea of Diana, will take longer to fade.

This may, I fear, exasperate any anti-Di diehards who hope Tuesday's ceremony will nail the lid on her coffin once and for all. We can feel the hope, however, that for William and Harry the public monument may grow to be a comfort for what will always be a private pain. Of all the unfair cards in the hand they have been dealt, the knowledge that their mother the People's Princess is now the people's possession must be one of the hardest to contemplate.
But here's a thought, offered with that perhaps unwelcome reality in mind. The more Diana is remembered, in words and pictures as much as in water and stone, the more people will have a chance to value what we all have lost. Not valued as some icon of unlikely perfection — which would undoubtedly have made her laugh — and especially not as a victim, driven by her predicament to extremes of self-pity or revenge. Like most of us, alas, Diana was a real mixture of very human characteristics, good and not so good. That reality only becomes worth a memorial when you add the equally true fact that, in her short life, she caused so much hope and happiness to be felt by so many people. I doubt if you could count them.
Twenty-three years ago the House of Windsor metaphorically tapped us loyal subjects on the shoulder and invited us to welcome Diana Spencer into our collective life. Such a royal wish was easy to obey – Prince Charles's photogenic young fiancée seemed just the sort of new recruit the monarchy needed. So welcome her we did, with an enthusiasm that must have delighted the royal strategists. Hundreds of thousands of us duly celebrated The Fairy-tale Wedding that would secure our monarchy far into the future.

Having been invited, we continued to keep Diana in our lives. This was perhaps easier for me because she actually employed me for a large chunk of mine. Travelling around the world with her I realised that people liked her so much that for many she became almost an extra member of the family. An exasperating one at times it's true but one who somehow always earned our forgiveness.

This reaction wasn't just sentimental, however beguiling her blue eyes sometimes seemed. There was steel in Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales and it was as much by her guts as her uncanny ability to spread hope and happiness that she earned that forgiveness.

Not everybody's forgiveness, of course. There was (and is) a powerful minority who found it hard to rejoice at her popularity. They suspected her motives and resented her success at carving out a role as a glamorous worldwide force for good.

Most of these Diana-sceptics confined their criticism to disapproving mutterings in smart addresses in London and Gloucestershire. A few allowed their unattributable gripes to appear in sympathetic establishment newspapers. But such knavish tricks were usually confounded. Criticising Diana only seemed to make her a more sympathetic figure, especially once it was known that her husband had a non-negotiable arrangement with Mrs. Parker Bowles. Diana's own unhappiness and misjudgments just seemed to make her more intuitive at understanding our own.

So when, only sixteen short years after we had been asked to welcome her, we were unexpectedly asked to say goodbye, millions felt a bereavement so strong that it became indelibly marked on our memory. Diana came into our lives as our future queen, not as a soap star. That alone makes her worth remembering – and worth respecting too, as the Queen eloquently demonstrated when she opened the Diana Memorial.

As a nation we like to remember things, especially things that make us feel special. Trying to forget Diana is a tall order – and not just for those of us who knew her well. What
happened to her during those sixteen years was drama on a Shakespearian scale – just think of love, betrayal, sacrifice, beauty and death. The curtain may have come down on the tragedy seven years ago today. But our farewell to Diana is not yet complete. It probably never will be.

The reasons are practical as well as emotional. For a start there is the little matter of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner’s investigation into how she met her death. Even when that investigation is complete the Royal Coroner has still to finalise his inquest. He deserves our sympathy, not least because his work has been made no simpler by the discovery that Diana had predicted that she would die in a car and that her husband was responsible. Even before this devastating disclosure, a persistent worldwide belief had taken root that Diana’s violent demise was the result of a conspiracy by the British establishment. You don’t have to believe in that thrilling possibility (and I for one emphatically don’t) to recognise that it might not help the soothing process of consigning Diana to the footnotes of history.

Nor is it very soothing to consider that her place in Prince Charles’s bed has been taken by a woman he shows no inclination to marry and whose ambitions and constitutional position become daily more ambiguous. Alongside that uncertain, even tacky prospect for the future, the memory of the young and idealistic Diana becomes even harder to eradicate.

It’s a memory that is renewed each time we see a photograph of her sons. William in particular carries the blessing (or the burden) of Diana’s camera-friendly looks. Her DNA in our future heads of state is now an ineradicable biological fact. Time may fade that reality. But nobody can deny it.

So when you hear people moan that the Diana story has outstayed its welcome, pause to consider what they really mean. Are they saying the Diana tragedy has no lessons for the future conduct of the royal family? Or is it just that the lessons are too painful to contemplate? Diana is unlikely to fade away while her sad experience still has the power to raise awkward questions like these. The good news is that if they are prepared to look, the people who live and work in palaces may find Diana’s ghost does more than frisk along those deeply-carpeted corridors. It may have a lesson to pass on...

Not, perhaps to their surprise, about Duran Duran or even about AIDS. It might be about something far more traditionally royal. Duty.

The Royal Family is synonymous with duty. I once saw a senior courtier suggest to a reluctant Prince of Wales that it was his duty to attend some unappealing engagement.
Charles's response was withering. The message was clear: the royal family live duty and don't welcome lectures on the subject. Even so, it seems inescapable that having brought Diana onto the national stage the Windsors had a duty to make sure that her life in the limelight was happy... and if it couldn't be happy then at least bearable for us in the audience to watch. As we now know only too well, the Fairy-tale Marriage was misconceived, the couple's public togetherness was a sham and Diana's growing isolation drove her to extremes of self-pity and revenge. Ultimately it drove her to her death.

Her critics would argue that “Caring Di” was in fact Flakey Di – an unstable airhead, a clothes horse with a disarming smile that hid a vicious temper. One of Charles's favoured biographers was even encouraged to diagnose her as suffering from mental illness. The implication was that everybody had tried their best but really the girl was impossible... so no one's really to blame.

And as I discovered to my cost, the image of the compassionate princess was not always kept up behind the scenes. Diana did have a temper and she wasn't always entirely rational about where she aimed it. Caring Di could also be tetchy, scheming and unreasonable Di. But from my position as her most senior advisor I could clearly see that even on a bad day she usually gave far more – to her country, her family and her staff – than she took for herself.

If she was difficult then it was because she had good reason to be. Ironically, her husband and his family were the only people who could truly understand her predicament but two-way communications – never easy – broke down as the marriage collapsed. The wonder to me was not that Diana got a bit stressed out towards the end of her life, but that she hadn't gone much crazier much earlier. In short, she was a thoroughbred, a priceless but highly-strung asset to the royal stable and worth keeping happy with the best sugar lumps around.

Tragically, sugar lumps – in reality clear guidance and support in a form she could accept – were not available in sufficient quantities. Or if they were she couldn't recognise them. As a result, she eventually jumped out of the royal stable and both she and the whole royal farmyard have been infinitely poorer for it.

If Diana taught us a lesson about duty it's worthless if it only carps about the past. Our royal family didn't get where it is today by crying over spilt milk. Its glory is the affection its people have for it. But its strength is the belief it has in itself. That strength is at its most admirable in the person of the Queen – an unshakable beacon of duty throughout the royal storms of the past couple of decades. Significantly the Queen, having bowed to Diana's cortege - an act of huge symbolic value – bowed only briefly to reflex calls for her to
emulate the so-called touchy feely princess. In a gesture to “modernisation” Buckingham Palace for a while was graced with a brace of communications secretaries (aka spin doctors). Both are now long gone. I like to think it's because the Queen recognises that window dressing soon looks tatty and what matters in the long run is the quality of the goods.

To me and to many others, Diana was top quality goods. Her appeal in the long run owes more to perceptions of honesty and sacrifice than to touchy-feely superficiality. Mis-timed they may sometimes have been and embarrassing too but her attempts to turn her predicament to good use were genuine. The duty to be honest was more important to her than the duty to keep silent. For many of her critics that was at best an indulgence and at worst an unforgivable sin. If it was either, she certainly paid a high price for it.

Her undoubted concern would be that nobody has to pay such a high price in the future. Most especially not her sons. They are her living legacy and if there are lessons to be learned from her life it is they who have the most to gain by recognising them.

But here's a worrying observation. The signs aren't good. In Clarence House, window dressing still seems to be the order of the day. Charles’s response to bad press is to hire more (and more expensive) press advisors, some of whom have aped the worst tactics of political spin doctors. His private life in the words of a recent newspaper editorial remains “rackety.” His many real achievements risk being buried under the weight of the Duchy of Cornwall’s profits. And his sacrifices for the nation attract little of its sympathy.

This is not a promising atmosphere in which William and Harry can breathe in the virtues of duty, sacrifice and service that will be their handholds in the unenviable climb fate has dealt them. However, if they and their advisors take the trouble to look they will notice that their mother’s experience provides them with shining examples of all three – along with conspicuous examples of what can go wrong.

End of lecture. If I were still a courtier I would now get a rocket for preaching duty to royalty. But perhaps that's another lesson from Diana's legacy: the royal family, especially its future leaders, will need more courtiers prepared to annoy them by speaking openly. I wish I'd had the guts and skill to do more of it when I had the chance. And incidentally, if rockets are being handed round, may I suggest Prince William fires one at whoever advised him he had nothing to learn by turning up at the D-Day commemorations this summer?

So let's not rush to nail Diana in her coffin – especially not with unctuous demands to let her “rest in peace.” We have recently acquired an expensive memorial to mark in granite her status as a treasured national figure, now very much dead. As time passes, she will join
the likes of the Queen Mother, far above the reach of tabloid tittle-tattle and secure in her hard-won reputation for good works. But equally let's not artificially over-promote her saintly qualities or radiant beauty. She would be the first to scoff at the idea that she was more virtuous than any other fallible human being... and she was always quick to complain about the size (and squintness) of her nose or the clumsiness of her feet.

Instead we should relax and enjoy the happy memories she has left us. And we should look for lessons in her fate. Her memory will fade quickly enough when it has ceased to have relevance for our contemporary reality. Meanwhile, be wary of those who try to give that fading process a helping hand ...
The inquest is almost over. About time too, you may say. Yet even as they heave a sigh of relief, those who thought the whole exercise a colossal waste of time and money may have felt an unexpected pang of loss as memories of a happy, hopeful young princess briefly returned.

Perhaps I felt it more than most. Twenty years ago this month the Princess of Wales welcomed me with a smile to the world of palaces - and palace politics. Although I didn't yet know it, this was a world in which high royal principles were already losing out to very human failings as Charles and Diana's marriage unraveled.

Crowns need high principles. So do coroners - and we can thank Lord Justice Scott Baker that, whatever the cost and whatever the imperfections, his single-minded pursuit of the truth has rescued the inquest from those who tried to exploit or belittle it.

That the jury will this week deliver its verdict in the shadow of the royal coat of arms is no empty symbolism. An unintended by-product of the inquest has been to remind us that preserving the integrity of such symbols is fundamental to monarchy's survival in a sceptical age.

As the story of Diana's death now prepares to take its official place in history, it has already left us its first lesson from the past. It's not an easy one. That is because, along with the sense of loss, there is another emotion on the loose: guilt. It is an unsettling emotion, especially in palaces, where being royal also means being right all the time - at least in theory.

Not since Edward and Mrs. Simpson has royalty divided the country as it did over Diana's death. Some divisions remain. France's President Sarkozy may hope that his camera-pleasing consort will be loved as much as Princess Di, but it is unlikely he would have found many to share his enthusiasm at Windsor Castle during last month's state visit. Similar differences about how and how much Diana should be remembered are certain to be found at a dinner table not far from you.

Did Diana set out to divide? Certainly not. Given sympathetic guidance, she was as devoted to her royal duty as any Windsor. In eight years as her equerry and private secretary I saw enough of her talent and dedication to put the question beyond doubt.
For most of that time she was a highly professional member of the royal A-list - a fact which, to her critics, was an often inconvenient truth.

Diana's divisive potential only asserted itself when she felt she was the victim of an injustice. For example, she resented the royal establishment's stony attitude to her attempts at extra-marital happiness, in contrast to what she saw as its mute indulgence of her husband's well-organised liaison with Mrs. Parker Bowles.

Confronted by such perceived unfairness, the aristocrat in demure Lady Di burnt with indignation, eventually erupting in a volcanic display of defiance. Her connivance in Andrew Morton's revelations, her rash Panorama broadcast and her head-spinning career as an independent royal celebrity blew the intricate tapestry of royal magic to bits.

It's a gloomy memory. Perhaps it lingers in some royal minds. At last month's Integrated Health Awards, the Prince of Wales offered this apocalyptic assessment of his own lifetime: "Over the past 50 years we have witnessed the fragmentation of every aspect of our lives, and of Nature herself. I happen to believe, for what it's worth, that there is an urgent need for the restoration of harmony and balance."

The Prince's intention was to open our eyes to the dangers of life divorced from the unity and healing properties of the world we inhabit. For those of us whose world has recently focused on the inquest, his words have an unexpected relevance.

For example, we might charitably hope that such healing sentiments will now be extended to Mohamed Fayed - a bereaved father who, as the coroner reminded us, still deserves our sympathy.

The forces of tradition - as Wallis Simpson discovered to her cost - are never more outraged than when poked in the midriff by a pushy foreigner. For years, Mr. Fayed has been jabbing the establishment's solar plexus like a Terminal 5 passenger who's reached the head of the complaints queue.

We can also unite in recognition of Prince Charles's achievements as a philanthropic entrepreneur, as an advocate of religious tolerance and a passionate environmentalist. After the ordeals of the past 20 years, in many eyes he emerges an older, happier husband and a diligent father.

Perhaps, when the verdict is delivered, the divisive forces will fold their tents and melt away. But we must still look carefully at what's left in their place. As the inquest uncomfortably reminds us, the awkwardness of "the whole truth" is that it spreads
responsibility for Diana's fate widely. This was a case when looking the other way should not have been an option - least of all for those with principles to uphold.

Too many of us looked away from her. We averted our eyes and often our sympathy from the young mother seemingly so intent on self-destruction. A woman in whose youth and beauty we had been happy to bask when the going was easy.

So we lost the bright, sassy, compassionate princess. With her we lost a disfranchised chunk of British society for whom she was the most relevant and often the only point of identity with the country's foremost institution. An institution charged with the duty of unity.

We lost a champion of unloved causes - lepers, addicts, the mentally ill, Aids sufferers, the elderly - a champion whose spontaneity and spirit made her respected and welcomed on the international stage. We lost the public figure who made us the envy of the world.

We lost a royal star, recalled a decade after her death by a French President searching for a role model for his wife. We lost a gifted leader in whom massive national expectation and individual affection had been invested. And - however unwelcome the thought might be to some - we lost a Queen-in-waiting.

For all this loss, there will be no inquest.

Those of us who looked away were often those best placed to help, however great the effort might have been. Her husband and many of his family. The friends they shared, most of whom edged away when her gaze became too hard to meet.

The apparatus of royalty, myself included. The editors, the spin doctors, the astrologers, the bishops - not to mention the worms happy to diagnose the newly dead Diana as mad. Who will claim an entirely clear conscience?

All of us have our excuses, and nobody should question the devotion of her own protection officers and others who served her. The Queen often expressed sympathetic concern, though sadly not even she could deter the princess from regularly upsetting her own applecart. Diana was not always the easiest person to help, as I know better than most.

But the duty we and our Royal Family owed Diana was not to adore her in the good times but to stick with her in the bad. Take away the pomp and circumstance and what's left is a failure of care to a 19-year-old girl from a broken home, suddenly elevated to the future hope of the world's proudest royal house.
Without a country estate to entertain her energetic sons, and denied the home she sought at her own family seat, it's easy to see how a divorced mother might welcome the material compensations and open-handed family warmth offered by Mohamed Fayed. Many others - some of them royal - have enjoyed his generosity without a blush.

He may still believe that the Windsors are Frankensteins and Camilla is a crocodile. Disappointingly for Fayed-baiters, the inquest spent little time testing these allegations. It had a duller purpose: a painstaking analysis of how the Princess and her companion met their deaths.

The chain of events that put Diana in the Mercedes that night had its origins long ago and far away from Paris. Take, for example, the effect of a birthday party at her marital home in the summer she died. While the Prince and his mistress were pictured with the Queen, Diana staged a rival swimsuit show on the nearest available millionaire's yacht.

What a sad gesture. How futile. And, even without the benefit of hindsight, how avoidable. Years before Diana was sneaked out of the back door of the Paris Ritz, the journey that ended in the horror of the Alma tunnel might have been guided into any of a dozen safer avenues.

No coroner will be asked to investigate that failure of direction. No witnesses will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about it. But follow the trail of evidence and you may find that it leads to the steps of St Paul's Cathedral on a day of hope and sunshine in 1981.

Royal people are no better than the rest of us at dwelling on past mistakes. But if you're in the dynasty business - or planning to marry into it - the awkward, embarrassing and ultimately tragic story of Diana Spencer has an enduring relevance.
On the day that Princess Diana died, after a morning of numb disbelief and phone calls, it was a relief to go grocery shopping. When I reached the checkout line I was surprised to see at every till a yellow bucket into which shoppers were tossing loose change. Lots of it – and even some notes too. When I got closer I saw the label on the side: “For Diana Charity.”

I hesitated before adding my small contribution. On the one hand, I was touched by the spontaneity of the desire to create some practical benefit from the tide of emotion sweeping the country. But on the other, I was troubled. Who was organising this and which “Diana Charity” did they mean?

For most of the previous decade I’d had an insider’s view of the princess’s charity work. As her private secretary, it was my happy task to organise her contact with all her patronages and I was one of only two trustees of her personal charitable trust. I knew that, to Diana, her charities were her daily inspiration and often her lifeline to normality too. The whole subject needed the most delicate handling, especially now that she was dead. Her humanitarian work was ended and anyone who claimed to perpetuate it in her name also took her reputation in their hands.

Eventually, I assume, all the money donated in similarly haphazard fashion all over the country found its way to reputable causes. Hopefully they included some of Diana’s 200-odd official patronages, a cross-section of the voluntary sector which covered the spectrum from AIDS and leprosy to drug abuse, meningitis, the elderly and the disabled. Some of that supermarket generosity may even have found its way into the biggest bucket of all, the Diana Memorial Fund, the well-intentioned but flawed vessel intended to carry the princess’s good name – and lots of money – to the distant horizons of posterity.

Now the Fund is to be scrapped. Its many beneficiaries will surely be sad but there may be others less upset at the passing of this diminished reminder of the first and noblest wave of Diana sentiment. Set up with the finest motives – and many fine words - from the outset it seemed unable to comprehend the essential simplicity of Diana’s charitable instincts. I admit my heart sank as I saw the trustees line up for their photo call. A worthy crew no doubt – but I wondered how many in their hearts felt able to safeguard, let alone sustain, Diana’s 16-year record of public service.

Some anxious observers, including a few familiar with the princess’s aversion to committees, suggested all the dosh should go to one single centre of excellence for childcare. Its purpose would be self-explanatory and earn lasting gratitude for the much-
loved woman who would be its permanent inspiration. And there were plenty of blue chip experts among her existing charities who could make it happen – quickly, sympathetically and without a whisper of scandal. Job done.

The opportunity was missed. Instead of a quick and finite act of transparent charity, the Fund seemed more concerned to market its own version of the Diana brand. Not content with the extensive range of Diana’s charitable interests when she was alive, it found new ones to which it could shackle her name. A grant to Balkan bee keepers was just one of several I might have had trouble justifying under her unblinking blue gaze.

Perhaps distracted by the siren-song of reflected virtue, the committee at the helm was lured onto the rocks of hubris. “Diana” margarine cartons and other attempts to copyright a world-famous and very dead historical figure carried more than a whiff of arrogance. And soon there was the calamitous six-year debacle of the fight with Franklin Mint.

This naive attempt to defeat an American corporation in the American courts ultimately cost the Fund its credibility, not to mention £5m in legal fees and £13.5m in a bizarre out-of-court settlement. Most painful of all, it dragged Diana’s name into the kind of controversy that she would have deplored.

Unabashed, the Fund sailed on, still retaining an earnest belief in itself as the authorised guardian of the Diana flame. Long detached from first-hand knowledge of the princess’s own wishes, it draped itself in dreary verbiage. Where once there had been glamour and passion, now there were po-faced pronouncements about “the rights of the disadvantaged” and a “lasting legacy of social change.”

All very fine in the committee room but just the kind of sloganeering that would have earned from my earthy and patrician boss a snort of amusement. She loved taking a pin to pomposity, as I learned to my cost. It was her sense of the ridiculous as much as her compassion that made her so welcome at the hospice bedside, the refugee camp and the fundraising gala.

It was also her recognition that being a royal patron didn’t in itself deserve special praise. Taking credit for other people’s good works is a royal occupational hazard and, for the most part, she was suitably wary of it. Her job was to focus public concern on the unsung work of those who really did the caring. On a good day (which was most of them) she had no trouble expressing humility in the presence of such saintly people, lightened with humour and sprinkled with the magic dust of her beauty and charisma. That was her job and it gave her vital rewards of satisfaction and fulfilment.
As the recent triumphs of Hollywood and the ARK dinner fade into memory, advisors to The Duchess of Cambridge, now reportedly contemplating the massed ranks of charities begging her patronage, will know that raising money is the easy bit. Be the bucket yellow plastic in a supermarket or gold-plated at a glitzy gala, if it has a royal name on the side you can usually sit back and just watch it fill up. It’s what happens next – to the money and the patron - that matters for the long haul.

Royal patrons may not often actually get busy with the bedpans but they earn donations nevertheless. If they do it consistently, elegantly and with the right degree of humility, they earn love and respect too.

Some of Diana’s words came back to me that black summer day in 1997 as I drove away from the supermarket and its generous, trusting shoppers queuing to donate their hard-earned change. It was two years earlier and she was in New York to receive a prestigious “Humanitarian of the Year Award” from the hands of a Nobel Peace Prize winner. She seldom agreed to accept such recognition but had made an exception after much pleading from the organisers who described her fundraising powers as “lightning in a bottle.”

“Quite right” I said. “You’ve earned it.”

Her eyes on the night-time Manhattan skyline, she was quick to correct me. “I don’t really deserve this.” But then, after a moment, she added a thought that perhaps sums up the simple secret of successful royal philanthropy. It gives a clue as to why the memory of Diana will long outlive the Fund that took her name. It might even help explain all those yellow buckets in the supermarket. As always, it came with a laugh.

“...but I’m working on it.”
In last week’s Spectator Freddy Gray warned that some royal press officers now resemble celebrity publicists, spoon-feeding whole narratives to lapdog hacks, ultimately to the detriment of the Monarchy.

Gray traces the poisonous origins of the current glossy operation. In the late ‘90s senior St James’s Palace courtiers fell for political-style PR (aka spin) as a clever way to transform Prince Charles’s then-mistress into a future queen. Some very unsavoury tactics followed. In one example (not cited by Gray but proving his thesis) in a bid to discredit William’s newly-dead mother, one top advisor lent his personal support to a royal biographer to air a quack “diagnosis” that Diana had been mentally ill. The intention was clearly to imply that Camilla might not be everybody’s cup of tea but at least she wasn’t a fruitcake.

Pretty shameful from the office of our future head of state, you might think, and I would agree with you. We might guess that Diana’s children didn’t much like it either.

That biographer was of course Penny Junor and the resultant book Charles Victim or Villain? (1998) is a reminder of the depths some royal spin doctors were prepared to plumb.

The author of Born to be King is a very different Penny. With the zeal of a penitent, she roundly condemns those who could stoop so low. Forsaking “the mire of cunning spin and favouritism” (p 233) she embraces (p 308) the enlightened doctrine Prince William has laid down for his handlers: “Please, please always, always tell the truth.” Hallelujah!

This being a more overt Palace/Penny co-operation, don’t expect shocking insights or disclosures. Her recycled stories of Charles and Diana’s titanically misconceived TV confessions almost inspire a twitch of nostalgia. Back then there was at least the chance of someone going spectacularly off-message.

Not anymore; Born to be King is safe to display in the gift shops of the new homogenised Windsor brand. Penny’s bright crisp style suits the theme of monarchy’s golden future very well. She leads us at a brisk canter – there’s lots of horsey stuff - through all the familiar landscapes of William’s life so far.

St Andrews, Chile, the Cotswolds, Kenya, Kate and the rest – a colourful scrapbook enlivened by regular appearances from Harry, the always-entertaining other half of a formidable duo. We’re treated to lots of brotherly banter to please those who think royal people are just like us and a good leavening of charity work, public duty and solemn introspection to remind us that they’re not.
Sometimes Penny reveals an under-employed talent for more subversive humour, such as when a former private secretary to Prince Charles muses on the connection between Jonathan Dimbleby and Josef Goebbels (apparently they both haff vays to make you talk). (p 84).

A few whiffs of the old mire sneak in: partisan testimony from former staff gives a hint of the snake pit atmosphere in which William and Harry grew up. The pictures she paints of the new age of truth are rosy in comparison and believing them will come even easier once somebody fixes a few obvious factual errors (e.g. William, as king, will be “Colonel-in-Chief of the Armed Forces”).

By the last page one overriding impression remains, as it should: after the bitterness of his early years it is all the more to the Duke of Cambridge’s credit that he and the Duchess are establishing themselves as the decent and dependable future of the monarchy.

What’s more, they’ll still be doing their royal duty long after the latest crop of palace news managers have collected their PR Industry Awards and gone off to the private sector, taking their royal address books with them.
Diana: The Witnesses in the Tunnel has suffered a fate common to many programmes about the late Princess of Wales. Before broadcast it has been roundly condemned, mostly by people who have not seen it.

What is its crime? It uses two still photographs to illustrate the heroic efforts of the doctors who tried to save the lives of the Princess and her bodyguard as they lay in their wrecked car.

When first informed of these photographs last week I was quick to make an unthinking condemnation. "I'm sickened" I told the journalist who rang me up. And so I was.

These, after all, were apparently gratuitously distressing photographs of the woman for whom I had worked for nearly eight years and for whom, despite our occasional differences, I retained a deep respect and affection.

In answering as I did, I had made a reflex response to a question about Diana – a reaction which I felt was entirely decent and impervious to persuasion. The kind of response that bedevils so many attempts at an objective view of the whole Charles and Diana marriage saga. The kind of response which I have often criticised in others.

I should have known better. This is a very well-made programme which invites us to look again at the culpability – or lack of it – of the photographers who were first on the crash scene in the Pont d’Alma tunnel. Until now, the undisputed villains of the piece.

I should add that, in context, the photographs which are the cause of the controversy are consistent with many taken of the deeply moving crash scene - sombre but not inappropriate or offensive (and I was ready to be offended). Nor are they seen here for the first time.

It would be easy to make yet another programme about Diana's death, especially if you chose the well-travelled conspiracy route or the equally glib “paparazzi murderers” theme.

The producers have chosen to do something else. Something actually rather noble. They have questioned some of our easy assumptions about that dreadful night and in the process raised the possibility that the photographers we all love to hate might actually be more victims than villains.
They must have known they wouldn't get many thanks for it and they will not have been disappointed. Clarence House has duly released to the press a letter condemning the programme, its central argument being the distress of Princes William and Harry.

It's an unanswerable argument. The love of children for their mother versus the unprintables who bring you Big Brother. And for many people that will be the end of the discussion.

I hope, however, that there will be some in the Royal establishment who pause to consider the implications of what might easily develop into censorship by sentiment.

Consider an alternative reaction. One in which the condemnation of those who have not seen the programme – in this case William and Harry – is acknowledged for what it is: an irreproachable expression of love for a mother whose absence they must mourn every day.

And let it be given more, not less, value by an equally sincere reaction: that of those whose love and admiration for the Princess is no less genuine but which sees no threat to her memory in a rational examination of some of the circumstances surrounding her death. Especially, as in this case, when it opens our eyes to the possibility of a grave misunderstanding, perhaps even an injustice.

The pursuit of truth, in the media or anywhere else, is not something which Diana's defenders need fear. The Princess I knew built for herself a reputation as a strong, compassionate royal force for good. It's a reputation well able to withstand the attentions of C4 and other chroniclers, good and bad.

Perhaps the thought could be gently offered to William and Harry that their mother’s memory may be at risk from many quarters - but not from TV documentaries such as this.

Their love for their mother is a force of almost sacred potency. Those who would exercise its powers would surely be wise to do so with due caution...especially in this anniversary summer.
SECTION 2

VELVET AND STEEL: THE DIANA TOUCH

[Photo by: Kent Gavin]
With the approach of what would have been Princess Diana's 50th birthday we can expect a flurry of those “what if she had lived” articles. Entertaining perhaps, but hardly useful. The first Mrs. Wales might by now be solving conflicts, banishing poverty, feeding the world's hungry or even breeding spaniels in happy rural obscurity. Alas, we will never know.

Instead we have an even greater enigma. Why is it that fourteen years after her death she continues to figure so large in popular imagination? The emphasis here is on “popular.” It's no secret that until Prince William brought his mother's engagement ring back onto the front pages, many in the royal establishment would have been content to draw a veil over the Diana episode. But for all their efforts, in most of the world it is still Diana who provides the prism through which our royal family is viewed. It is alongside Diana that Kate is measured as a princess and it is his mother's likeness that royalty fans from Colchester to Calgary search for in the future king.

The Diana story continues to strike a chord, and not just with those who can remember when, once upon a time, a shy and idealistic 19-year-old was presented as our next queen. What happened next won't be quickly forgotten either.

The tale of an innocent woman cruelly wronged loses none of its grip in these post-feminist times. Diana may have had her faults but she also had guts and could fight dirty if she felt sufficiently aggrieved. In narrative terms, the combination of beauty, pluck and compassion is hard to beat. Add a strong dash of injustice and you have the stuff of mythology.

All the best myths have a solid kernel of truth and in Diana's case we don't need to look far to find it. As things currently stand, our next queen-figure is likely to be the woman who spent her own 50th birthday partying at Diana's marital home while the princess sought false refuge on a billionaire's yacht.

If we had to take a guess why William's mother persists in attracting public interest and – overwhelmingly – public affection, that poignant contrast between the triumphant mistress in Gloucestershire and the distressed single mum lost in the South of France offers a pretty good clue. Just as our current seasonal crop of traditional royal images – Trooping the Colour, the Garter, Ascot – reassure us about the symbolic strengths of our monarchy, the absence of Diana from the national scene reminds us what we have lost.

We have not lost a great intellect (as she would have been the first to admit), a gifted artist or a visionary genius. Diana was not short of wit or dignity or a sense of duty. But she had
an extra quality that frustrated her critics during her lifetime and has done little to soften their disdain since her death.

It's a quality that can't easily be defined in words. However, for any who saw her with the discarded casualties of life, among whom she found her own purpose, it was easy to recognise. Lepers, AIDS orphans, rough-sleepers, drug addicts, criminals and the generally-unloved found in her the human face of a remote institution.

Monarchy, like a household brand, exists first in the mind and heart of the beholder. Clever packaging can only achieve so much: ultimately, the relationship is an emotional experience and in Diana the Windsor brand was blessed with a powerful symbol of compassion. At a time when so much public life seemed inexorably dehumanising, she was a welcome figure of glamorous concern – and one prone to the same human frailties as the humblest of her future subjects. Without getting too pop-psychological, it's hard not to agree with Maya Angelou:

“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Of course, when your primary duty is to embody unchanging national values, how you make people feel must sometimes seem very much a secondary consideration. This may explain why Diana’s touchy-feely style of royalty didn’t always get a good press. It is sometimes alleged that she pioneered a fashion for public emoting that demeaned her royal office and sapped the moral fibre of the nation. Yet to accompany her to a children’s hospice or the bedside of a dying refugee was to witness a woman who never let her emotions take charge – but who never entirely masked them either.

If a culprit is needed for any national emotional incontinence, it's too easy to point the finger at the girl from a broken home who grew up to be the most famous woman in the world. Even at her most melodramatic she can hardly be accused of bewitching a whole generation into misplacing its stiff upper lip. More likely the emotional restraint which had been both our guide and our jailer was ready to evolve into a new and arguably healthier reflex in which feelings could be given a voice. It just needed somebody brave or naïve enough to broaden the Windsors’ emotional repertoire and Diana qualified on both counts.

The result didn’t suit every taste but, as we saw at William and Kate’s wedding, the public appetite for genuine emotion is best satisfied when there’s a royal hand on the spoon.

Here’s the pitfall: if Diana was the most obvious means by which emotion has energised our ruling family, she also set a trap for those who followed. Any royal emotion is analysed and judged with relentless scrutiny. Good and bad alike are exaggerated while perceived
insincerity is judged most harshly of all. Diana herself was at her most vulnerable when reality parted company from her image. Towards the end of her life, as she struggled with the after-effects of a toxic marriage, emotional confusion did little to reassure her anxious public. No wonder some feel nostalgic for an era when royal faces wore an appropriate expression or none at all.

Special caution should be exercised, therefore, by those courtiers who are given (or who take) responsibility for disclosing to us their employers’ emotions. From organising where royal people go, whom they meet and which ribbons they’ll cut to telling us their feelings is a perilously short step. It’s a tempting one too, especially when royal emotion can be recruited to spice up an agenda that might otherwise be allowed respectful obscurity. In particular, royal displeasure – against government policy, an individual subject’s shortcomings or even an unwelcome TV documentary – is a currency whose value must be scrupulously guarded.

Far better, in these sceptical times, to let royal deeds speak for themselves. With her knack for reading the public mood, unencumbered by spin doctors and impatient of the men in suits, Diana let her actions do the talking. And if the results were sometimes uncomfortable, at least they were perceived as genuine. If we were to choose the princess a 50th birthday gift, we could do worse than wish her sons a measure of their mother’s emotional courage – and the wisdom to reconcile it with their grandmother’s sense of duty.
In the late 1980’s, I was happily minding my own business as an officer in the Royal Navy – a vocation which I expected would be my life’s work. But providence had other plans. One day, the frigate in which I was serving returned to port in Plymouth and there on the jetty was the familiar figure of the senior officer who had the unenviable task of assigning people like me to future appointments in the service. Seeing him was enough to give me the jitters – he had the power to grant your heart’s desire…or fulfil your worst career nightmare.

At last, after discussing several other more conventional options, he came to the final item on his list. Would I, he asked, be prepared to let my name go forward as a possible candidate for the job of equerry to the Princess of Wales…?

Would I? I struggled to look calm. In 1987, the Princess was the untarnished icon of compassionate royal glamour. This was years before embarrassing tapes, scandals, separation and divorce soured the image of her fairy-tale marriage to the Prince of Wales, who himself at the time was still a paragon of modern royal virtues. It was made clear that I had only the slimmest chance of being selected – there were five other candidates including a pair of army officers from famous old regiments. I was content just to have made the shortlist.

A few weeks later I found myself whisked off my ship and sent to London for interview. But this interview was different from any other: a private lunch at Kensington Palace with the most beautiful, most famous, most photographed woman in the world – the woman who would one day be our Queen.

Knowing I had only a one in six chance of success I reconciled myself to the thought that this would probably be the only time in my life that I would meet Princess Diana so I had better enjoy every minute of the experience. So I made myself relax and make the most of the food, wine and conversation.

We talked about everything from royal tours to bank managers, from William and Harry’s education to the fundraising value of pop concerts. And when eventually I headed back to the grey familiarity of my life at sea, I comforted myself with the knowledge that at least I would have a story to tell my grandchildren…

It was therefore quite a shock to be telephoned by the Princess’s senior lady-in-waiting who asked me very simply if I’d like to take the job…
It was a job that would change my life – and the life of my family – for ever. Instead of lasting just two years it grew to fill almost a decade. I started as the Princess's Equerry – a temporary military aide – but in a couple of years I found myself as her first (and only) Private Secretary, the top of the courtier's professional tree. What's more, for better or worse, it almost exactly covered the most turbulent times in the history of the Royal Family since the Abdication Crisis of 1936.

Realising that she and Prince Charles were on diverging paths, in 1990 Diana asked me formally to leave the navy and set up her own office. She put me in charge of her whole household with responsibility it seemed for every aspect of her life: from her public programme of engagements, including press, protocol, security and correspondence to the tiniest detail of her domestic arrangements, including office and domestic staff, drivers and accounts.

There were some days when I might have coffee in Ten Downing Street, lunch in Buckingham Palace, a cup of tea in the Kensington Palace pantry, cocktails at a foreign embassy and a fundraising dinner at Coleridge's with the Princess. As well as placing big demands on my supply of ironed shirts it was a job of giddy power and often terrifying responsibility. It was pretty bad for the waistline too.

But memory is kind. Most of my recollections from the experience are happy. And even my less happy memories at least taught me the human fallibility of monarchy and therefore – with luck – gave me a better understanding of its value too.

One of monarchy's main roles is to be part of the theatre of national life – ceremonies such as the state opening of parliament or trooping the colour are colourful drama reflecting important constitutional realities. In theatrical terms, an Equerry is a glorified production assistant – metaphorically running around with a clipboard, organising a hundred small details to make the performance go off without a hitch.

Using the same metaphor, a Private Secretary is the producer and director of the show. It's not for the faint-hearted: any hitch that makes the show less than perfect is his (or her) fault. And since the British famously put on the best royal drama in the world, the job of Private Secretary can sometimes feel like a scary high wire act... especially when the main performers are vying each other for a place in the spotlight, as sometimes seemed to be the case with Charles and Diana.

When I took the job, I expected it to be a long-term commitment. Traditionally, Private Secretaries serve for many years and generally enjoy a life of comfortable habits. True, in
recent times, the orderly routine of a courtier’s life has become more fraught. But the perks are still considerable and the working environment is...well, literally palatial.

However, in the case of the Prince and Princess of Wales, life as a member of their staff in the 1990's was often very fraught indeed. It is widely believed that the fairy-tale marriage of Charles and Diana was actually a serious mismatch from the start. But such a verdict would only be partially fair. As I saw for myself on many occasions, Charles and Diana were able to work together as a world-beating double act.

They were blessed with goodwill at home and an unparalleled degree of popularity abroad. They were parents of two children to whom they were both devoted. And very often they seemed actually to be fond of each other.

But they had a heavy national obligation to behave as befitted a future king and queen. Working as a team required a hundred compromises from each of them. It required a willingness to co-operate in public and co-exist in private. Most of all it required tolerance of each other’s shortcomings including, ultimately, infidelity. When both sides recruited rival supporters in the media, reconciliation became impossible.

When Charles and Diana separated in 1992, in common with other members of their staff I found myself in a personal and professional dilemma. On a personal level, there was the relentless stress of trying to manage a disintegrating organisation in the glare of intense publicity. New crises seemed to follow each other almost every day until I think we were all a little punch drunk.

At the same time there was a certain professional satisfaction in coping with the worst that events could throw at us and still salvage something from the wreckage. In Diana’s case, once the trauma of the separation began to heal, she was able to stretch her wings as an independent royal operator.

Freed from the constraints of a dead marriage she found that a busy programme of public engagements – most of them humanitarian – provided her with a level of job satisfaction that she had never previously known. It also seemed to make her happy, even if she sometimes complained to me about how hard she was working.

It was only when she took the decision to discard many of her charitable patronages that, it seemed to me, her life lost an important source of self-fulfillment. Cutting herself off from the discipline and rewards of royal duties had a corrosive effect on her image and her self-confidence.
Like any of us, with time on her hands she increasingly dwelt on the vulnerability of her situation rather than its limitless possibilities. Eventually it led her to the Panorama interview – a decision that I felt was a sad self-indulgence. I resigned soon afterwards little knowing that the following year I would go to her funeral.

It was while I sat in Westminster Abbey on that strange, tragic day that I found myself remembering happier times. Around me I could recognise many familiar faces from the Princess's patronages and I’m sure they too were recalling their own special Diana experiences.

For me, probably the most vivid of these related to our overseas tours as Diana flew around the globe as Britain's most glamorous humanitarian and diplomatic representative. The destinations soon began to look like the index of a world airline directory: the USA, Russia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Argentina...

In 1995 alone I counted 25 international trips, and running them all to the high standards Diana expected was my responsibility. I seemed to be constantly packing and unpacking my suitcase, worrying about protocol and wrestling with the logistics of the Diana roadshow.

New York was a frequent destination – perhaps Diana's favourite. On her first solo tour – in 1989 – she visited the Harlem Hospital Center in one of the city's toughest neighbourhoods and changed the world's perception of AIDS by cradling in her arms a baby who was dying from the disease. Speaking fifteen years after the event, one of the hospital's doctors spoke to me about the incalculable benefit of Diana's simple, symbolic act. If nothing else, we should remember Diana as a force for enormous good as she helped change attitudes to drug abuse, mental health issues, leprosy, AIDS and landmines.

Amazingly, she seemed to thrive on even the most daunting and psychologically demanding visits. Giving hope to those in desperate need or drawing attention to the plight of those at the bottom of the pile were part of her special vocation. She knew such visits could produce tangible benefit from her global public profile. She invested huge amounts of her own emotion in the task and re-wrote the royal book of etiquette in the process.

Somehow, even without the emotional support of a happy marriage, she managed to draw on deep reserves of compassion and determination within herself. She would respond with warmth and an open smile to sights that had me dumb with shock and pity. Afterwards, she would often express her emotion in laughter, bad jokes, singing and – occasionally – blasts of anger over some administrative glitch, real or imagined.
Very rarely, the suffering she encountered would slip through even her emotional coping mechanisms. I remember bedtime in an African AIDS orphanage. The children – little more than toddlers – had all lost their families to the disease. They themselves would all be dead before their sixth birthday. Diana watched as the children were gently put to bed by the nuns who cared for them. She helped tuck some of them in... but as the nuns helped them say their prayers Diana had to look away. I saw the tears on her cheeks.

Of course it wasn’t all earnest good works. I have a particularly poignant memory of the last foreign visit I made with Diana. Appropriately, it was to New York where she was receiving a humanitarian award from Dr Henry Kissinger. It was an evening of true Manhattan glamour as 1500 guests packed into the Hilton ballroom. Later, when I escorted her back to her suite in the Carlyle Hotel, she invited me in for a glass of champagne. It was a typically thoughtful gesture and as we looked out at the night-time skyline of the world’s most exciting city she was in reflective mood.

We admired her humanitarian award – a lump of heavy glass on a granite base. I said to her: “All these years I’ve been flying around the world telling people you didn’t accept awards – your job was to hand them out. But I think you were right to accept this one. You’ve certainly earned it.”

“Oh no” she replied. “But I’m working on it.”
Inside a royal aeroplane there's a special kind of excitement as the doors are about to open. If it's for the start of a big foreign tour – if there is a president waiting at the bottom of the steps and the world's press penned on the tarmac – than the excitement verges on the hyper. The difference is.... nobody can express it – not by a raised voice, not by a shaky hand, not even with a look. If you're the person in charge only the pounding of your heart tells you that your whole career may depend on getting the next few moments right.

If you could bottle that kind of suppressed energy you'd be a billionaire. In my eight years with Princess Diana, organising tours all over the world, I sometimes thought we were addicted to the stuff.

Once, when we were flying to Egypt for a high profile official visit, I almost had an overdose. It had been a difficult flight. We had landed in Turkey en route to deliver Diana's husband for a private holiday with a group we all knew to include Camilla Parker-Bowles. As we flew east, into the gathering darkness and all the uncertainties that lay ahead in the ancient desert kingdom, I looked across the table at my unhappy boss and saw that she was crying. Whatever her own part in the state her marriage had reached, she was paying a cruel price for it now. Too cruel, I thought. And what lousy timing.

But as we descended towards Cairo she dried her eyes and went to the royal loo. A few minutes later she emerged a changed woman. Cold water, fresh make-up, smart hair and a designer suit had transformed her into the picture of international compassionate glamour. Best of all, the look in her eyes told me she was going to give this tour everything she'd got... by sheer determination, professionalism and talent she would show her critics back home – and, I suspected, her husband – that she was every inch deserving of her proud royal title.

The footage of Diana getting off that plane into a blaze of flashbulbs in the warm Egyptian night appears in a documentary being shown on Channel Five this Monday evening. I'm there too – younger, thinner and with no grey hairs. I'm standing just inside the aircraft door, looking at the Princess with a grin that – from this distance in time – looks a bit smarmy. Ah well. That's the trouble with seeing yourself on TV...it's like all your worst home-movie moments rolled into one.

Actually, with hindsight, I think the expression on my face was caused by two things. One was the effect of all that suppressed excitement – it plays hell with your face muscles. Second was the feeling of relief I always felt when I saw that we were (a) in the right
country, (b) I'd remembered the name of the government minister who was waiting to shake Diana's hand and (c) that somewhere at the end of the red carpet there was a limousine waiting to whisk her off to the good night's sleep she needed.

To which I should add a third factor. Everybody coped with the after-landing tension in their own way. Diana's dresser and butler would get busy preparing the cabin baggage and hanging dresses for a rapid exit to the special car I'd arranged to meet them at the other door. The policemen would try to make their walkie-talkies work and check they had all the mysterious bulges under their jackets in the right order. The Lady in Waiting would practise looking cool and elegantly demure – something they all did very well.

The press secretary would crick his neck looking out of the porthole to see if the media were properly marshalled for the arrival shots. The doctor would collect his little black bag and tenderly prepare the blood fridge for offloading. The cook would finish writing his postcards. The baggage master would stretch his arms and crack his knuckles in preparation for the exertions about to begin as he climbed into the cargo hold to take charge of our mountain of baggage. The secretary would put her shorthand pad back into her handbag and carefully file away a vital sheaf of itineraries and briefing papers.

So what was Diana's routine that put that look on my face? She'd pat her hair, pull down her jacket and straighten her skirt. She called out to her team “Everybody ready? Too late if you’re not…” Then she'd square her shoulders and as she passed she smiled. “Just another episode in the everyday story of royal folk…!” Then she was off down the steps and into the royal routine she had taught herself to play to perfection.

I say that she taught herself… but she had served a very valuable apprenticeship touring as a couple with Prince Charles. The documentary shows rare footage from inside the plane as they arrived in Australia in the early years of their marriage. You can feel the anticipation as the Prince and Princess prepare to leave the familiar surroundings of the royal compartment and head out into the noise and heat of a bright Australian morning. In the background you can see some of the twenty-plus tour party getting organised. “After you, after you!” says Diana to her husband and it brings a lump to your throat to see them apparently working so well together.

Even when I joined the royal payroll a year or so later, most tours were still carried out by Charles and Diana together. Kuwait, Bahrain, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Hungary… the pace was hectic. They were practised royal performers, reconciled to doing their duty in public and leading largely separate lives in private.
But to see them work the crowd in a busy Hong Kong square, to watch them charm diplomats and businessmen at a reception or to feel their genuine compassion for a group of disabled children was to witness a world-beating double act. It wasn't hard to be proud of our archaic royal system when you saw Charles and Diana on the deck of the Royal Yacht Britannia waving to well-wishers as the Royal Marines band played A Life on the Ocean Wave.

Even then, Diana tended to draw a disproportionate amount of attention. She couldn't help it. Whether it was Australian schoolchildren or a troop of native dancers, it was Diana's name that always seemed to be called out the loudest.

But there was a magic about her that went beyond a bright smile and some snappy clothes. Watch the footage of Diana and Charles arriving at Budapest airport. During the playing of the national anthems, as the guard of honour presents arms and the men stand stiffly to attention, unseen by anybody the wife of the Hungarian president is silently weeping with emotion.

Unseen by anybody except... Diana. In a heart-warming gesture – affectionately recalled by the president in the programme – Diana quietly takes his wife's hand and comforts her during the rest of the ceremony. It's a gesture of instinctive humanity beyond the dreams of the smartest PR advisor. That was typical of the princess's gift for the job she had been given.

Alas, as we see in the documentary, by the time of the Korea tour of late 1992 the double act looked painful rather than unbeatable. This was the annus horribilis and within weeks Charles and Diana had announced their separation. There would be no more joint tours.

However, like a butterfly shedding her chrysalis, Diana found that her new life as an independent royal operator allowed her to spread her wings. As her private secretary I was in charge of all her public engagements and soon I was criss-crossing the world setting up overseas working visits and then doing the journey all over again, this time at her shoulder to see that everything worked smoothly.

In 1995 alone I counted 25 such tours – the destinations soon began to look like something from a world airline directory: the USA, Russia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Argentina... I seemed to be constantly packing and unpacking my suitcase, worrying about protocol and wrestling with the logistics of the Diana roadshow.

New York was a frequent destination – perhaps Diana's favourite. On her first solo tour – in 1989 – she visited the Harlem Hospital Center in one of the city's toughest neighbourhoods and changed the world's perception of AIDS by cradling in her arms a baby who was dying
from the disease. Speaking fifteen years after the event, one of the hospital's doctors speaks movingly in the film of the incalculable benefit of Diana's simple, symbolic act. If nothing else, I hope the programme sends a powerful reminder of the Princess as a force for enormous good as she helped change attitudes to drug abuse, mental health issues, leprosy, AIDS and landmines.

Amazingly, she seemed to thrive on even the most daunting and psychologically demanding visits. Giving hope to those in desperate need or drawing attention to the plight of those at the bottom of the pile were part of her special vocation. She knew such visits could produce tangible benefit from her global public profile. She invested huge amounts of her own emotion in the task and re-wrote the royal book of etiquette in the process.

Somehow, even without the emotional support of a happy marriage, she managed to draw on deep reserves of compassion and determination within herself. She would respond with warmth and an open smile to sights that had me dumb with shock and pity. Afterwards, she would often express her emotion in laughter, bad jokes, singing and – occasionally – blasts of anger over some administrative glitch, real or imagined.

Very rarely, the suffering she encountered would slip through even her emotional coping mechanisms. I remember bedtime in an African AIDS orphanage. The children – little more than toddlers – had all lost their families to the disease. They themselves would all be dead before their sixth birthday. Diana watched as the children were gently put to bed by the nuns who cared for them. She helped tuck some of them in... but as the nuns helped them say their prayers Diana had to look away. I saw the tears on her cheeks.

Of course it wasn't all earnest good works. I have a particularly poignant memory of the last foreign visit I made with Diana. Appropriately, it was to New York where she was receiving a humanitarian award from Dr Henry Kissinger. As he recalls in the documentary, it was an evening of true Manhattan glamour as 1500 guests packed into the Hilton ballroom. Later, when I escorted her back to her suite in the Carlyle Hotel, she invited me in for a glass of champagne. It was a typically thoughtful gesture and as we looked out at the night-time skyline of the world's most exciting city she was in reflective mood.

We admired her humanitarian award – a lump of heavy glass on a granite base. I said to her: “All these years I've been flying around the world telling people you didn't accept awards – your job was to hand them out. But I think you were right to accept this one. You've certainly earned it.”

“Oh no” she replied. “But I'm working on it.”
I’m sitting next to Princess Diana as her limousine carries us slowly through Kensington Gardens. I know it’s a dream but I can’t wake up. In fact I’m not sure I want to.

The driver is taking it cautiously because we are using pedestrian footways through the park and we don’t want to begin the evening by running over a pet dog – or worse.

It’s an unusual route but the police have decided it’s the best way to reach the Serpentine Gallery - a picturesque 19th Century lodge in the prettiest corner of London’s Hyde Park that usually displays cutting-edge modern art.

Tonight it’s the setting for spectacular of a different sort. Vanity Fair is hosting an A-list dinner and the guest of honour is even now pulling up at the gallery’s north entrance. As Diana steps out of the car I take my customary two or three steps to the side. An aide who gets into a photograph usually isn’t doing his job.

She’s instantly bathed in the flickering blue light of dozens of flashbulbs. The press are stacked four deep. There must be sixty of them. The image of smiling Diana, wearing what is soon to be an iconic little black dress, becomes one of the most famous we will ever see.

It’s a pretty dress. Diana’s smile is at its most beguiling. Her perfect figure is surrounded by an aura of charisma that’s virtually visible. And all over the world, people are about to hear her husband confess his adultery on their television sets...

* * * * * * *

Fifteen years later, I’m back at the Serpentine Gallery and this time I’m definitely not dreaming. I haven’t been through these doors since that night when the world learned a harsh reality about Diana’s marriage to the future king. It was a reality that was to lead inexorably to separation, divorce and ultimately tragedy in a Paris underpass.

Tonight I’m the guest at a celebrity book launch. There are crowds of quite famous people sipping good champagne and enjoying the evening sunshine. The book is about Diana and here comes its author, also in a little black dress. Coincidence...?

Tina Brown kisses me on the cheek and thanks me for my help with The Diana Chronicles. I mumble something that’s supposed to be modest. Then I tell her the truth. “It’s a great book. I’m enjoying it. Even I’ve learned new stuff about Diana. And if I read it at night...I get vivid dreams that take me back to those days...”
The author seems pleased by this but there obviously won't be time to tell her my dream about driving here with Diana. Already she's moving on into the throng, the next greeting ready on her lips. It's a busy evening for her.

I step away from the crowd and find a quiet space by the railings that overlook the park. From here you could almost throw a canapé into the Diana Memorial Fountain. A pretty waitress offers me a tray of ammunition. It would be a terrible waste of superior cocktail food - so I eat the smoked salmon blini instead.

Diana used to call any kind of fishy canapé a “breath-freshener." Imagine how many times she must have been offered smoked salmon in sixteen years of public life. That little joke must have saved her sanity - if not her breath - more than once. I smile at the memory - and wonder what she'd have made of it all.

I feel sure she'd be pleased. This is the smartest party in London and everybody's here to remember her. Quite right too. There are plenty of people who'd be happy to see her slip quietly into historical oblivion.

It might be convenient for some in the royal establishment – but that was never her style. “She won't go quietly” was her warning to Martin Bashir in her notorious Panorama interview. I silently raise my glass to the flawed but defiant Diana who made that prophetic promise.

Nevertheless, I'm feeling slightly impatient. It's inevitable as soon as any non-fiction book is described as definitive – as Tina Brown's deservedly is.

You know what it's like. You're reading the newspaper when suddenly you stumble across an article on a subject you really know something about. Chances are, the report is full of casual inaccuracies. It makes you seethe.

That's why my heart sinks when there's a news report about Diana or as in this case a new book about her – especially one that purports to be full of new insights. For nearly eight years Diana was my direct boss. I was her chief of staff. As one observer put it: I was “the producer of the Diana show.” The Princess is a subject I know something about.

That's why I'm in two minds about this new book. I'm glad the Princess is being remembered...but I dread reading ignorant remarks about her – especially when they lead to sweeping conclusions about her character.

So, you might say, just ignore them. But it's hard. For years, media experts have been confidently predicting the end of interest in Diana. But what do the experts know. On the tenth anniversary of her death, Diana is still big business – cash registers are the most
reliable indicators of public fascination with any subject and by that test alone, interest in the Princess is flourishing.

Others try to resist the tide of Diana books and articles by urging that she be allowed to “rest in peace.” Now, I write books and articles about Diana so must declare an interest in keeping her in the public consciousness. What's more, because working for her accounted for a large chunk of my own life, I get a certain personal satisfaction from seeing her remembered.

Even so, I suspect the repose of Diana's soul is beyond the control even of the big publishing houses. Besides, this line of argument – so superficially sympathetic - is too often hijacked by those with an anti-Diana agenda who resent the attention she gets in death, very often because she annoyed them in life.

Nor is it possible convincingly to stem the flow by citing concern for the feelings of her family. As William and Harry said only last week in television interviews, they have their own private memories of their mother, separate from the verbiage that still swirls around her.

Meanwhile they are actively promoting her memory with a concert and a memorial service. They now recognise that Diana is a figure of historical importance – an icon of popular culture and imagination. Such phenomena are rare and when they occur it’s easier to get the River Thames to reverse its course than stop people talking and writing about them. You might as well ban discussion of Marilyn Monroe, or Joan of Arc or Mother Teresa.

I suppose I'm frustrated because so much of what is written about Diana muddies rather than clarifies our understanding of the woman behind the myth. Some of that is due to ignorance and sheer bad writing – the perennial “cut and paste” style of lazy royal biography. There are plenty of these to choose from.

In other cases there is deliberate intent to project a distorted image in order to serve a particular agenda. Given Diana's polarising effect, this usually divides biographers into the hagiographical – such as Paul Burrell – and the merely abusive such as Penny Junor or Howard Hodgson who see blackening Diana as the best means of promoting their hero Charles. Neither approach serves Diana’s memory well and, I suspect, the latter approach does long-term damage to Charles’s reputation too.

So are there any nuggets to be gleaned from the unstoppable flood – or should sensible readers opt to stay on the riverbank and mock the sentimentalists who wade around in the murky stream that’s pouring from the presses during this summer of Diana anniversaries?
Here’s my advice. Put on your rubber gloves and fish around in the silt till you can grab Tina Brown’s book *The Diana Chronicles*. It won’t be difficult to spot – it has a lurid shocking pink cover, with an unconvincing facsimile of Diana’s signature on the front.

When you get it home and settle down for a nice quiet read you may want to keep your rubber gloves on. This is no sanitised fairy story. This is history as it really is – unpredictable, scary and sometimes even cruel. This is, after all, a tragedy and everybody knows how it ends.

But it wouldn't be real life if it wasn't also by turns revealing, ludicrous and sometimes genuinely uplifting too.

In fact, it’s uncanny how a description of this book might so easily also be a description of Diana herself. Which, in a biography, is probably a telling indicator of how accurately and intimately it tells us about its subject.

Best of all, it reveals Diana to us in a brilliantly-framed setting. In her twenties, Tina Brown edited the British society magazine *Tatler* when the young Lady Diana was taking her first shy steps onto the public stage. For Ms. Brown it was the ideal literary grounding for this attempt to define the woman she once described as “the mouse that roared.”

From *Tatler* Tina Brown went to New York and stayed there, becoming the brightest ex-pat star in its literary and social heavens first as editor of *Vanity Fair* and then of the *New Yorker*. There could be no better training for the task of assessing Diana – a woman who has to be seen in the context of the culture, politics and society of late 20th century Britain.

For this book Tina Brown returns across the Atlantic like a forensic anthropologist, scrutinising the tribes that make up the British social order and laying bare their strange customs and characteristics.

But this is no low-budget expedition, no solo quest for minor academic recognition. *The Diana Chronicles* is a big, brash, glossy production – as you’d expect when one of New York’s most pitiless society tornadoes blows into the darkest crevices of modern British royalty.

Do you plan to work in a British Royal Palace? Then read this first. It’ll tell you all you need to know about these monumental relics of former greatness that now uncomfortably combine the roles of time capsule and corporate headquarters.

In fact the book is densely packed with fascinating detail. Brown’s research has amassed such a density of material that minor inaccuracies (for example when she says Diana was driving a BMW several months before the car was actually delivered) are simply blasted aside, along with any qualms about the authenticity of her sources on major issues.
This degree of confidence is only attainable from a systematic and well-funded research machine. As I discovered, Tina Brown's investigators roamed their material with impressive thoroughness, hoovering up information by the bagful. It's the panache with which she transforms the piles of facts and factoids into such a glittering tapestry that makes Brown's efforts so credible – and so wickedly enjoyable.

What's more, it's a tapestry that has received almost universal plaudits in the UK. That is not because Brown's book makes any stunning new revelations. True there are some previously-unheard contributors such as the American couple for whom teenage Diana nannie. But the overall verdict is praise for the way in which she takes a picture we think we know and then shoves our noses back into it till we see every mesmerising pixel.

I thought I knew Diana but here I've discovered detail of her early life and the effect of childhood unhappiness on her thought processes that open whole new areas of understanding.

In an attempt to be scientific, every time I found a particularly revealing or inspired insight on a page in the book I marked the place with a post-it note. My copy is now festooned with yellow slips – the insights come that thick and fast.

To take just one example, in my own biography of Diana (Shadows of a Princess, HarperCollins 2000) I observed that to the Princess the press were a surrogate family, that publicity was a drug and that newsmen were therefore “lover and pusher combined.”

Tina Brown's female perception that Diana's love affair with her father's home-movie camera compensated her for other shortcomings in the father-daughter relationship suddenly clarified a truth that I had only observed but which now I could understand.

In just one other example, Brown puts her finger on a key reason why Diana on her own could always outsmart Charles's platoons of press officers in the battle for popularity: “she was better informed than the highest-paid spin doctor on the machinery of her coverage on any hour of any day...”

And what coverage. In her battles with her in-laws Diana's instincts were those of the successful politician or the CEO of a Madison Avenue Ad Agency, appealing over the heads of her more cautious paid advisors (often unhappily me among them) to reach right into people's hearts.

On other pages I marked stylistic quirks of Ms. Brown's writing that stopped me in my tracks. Take this example:
“...there was no other rival for [Diana's] heart but twenty-eight-year-old Charles Philip Arthur George, HRH the Prince of Wales, Earl of Chester, Duke of Cornwall, Duke of Rothesay, Earl of Carrick, Baron Renfrew, Lord of the Isles and Prince and Great Steward of Scotland – or ‘Arthur’ as he liked to be called when he climaxes...”

Yes, this is royalty having sex. There's lots of it and – if you’ve remembered to keep your metaphorical rubber gloves on – you will find that it's all credible, in context, even-handed - and wonderfully effective in shining merciless light onto characters we think we know.

Most poignant of all, Brown recognises that the tragedy didn't have to run the course it finally took. But for the skillful sexual and emotional manoeuvrings of Camilla Parker-Bowles, the fairy-tale marriage of Charles and Diana might have been preserved in a pragmatic, worldly compromise.

It's a conclusion I can agree with, from my own knowledge. Just as I can agree with Brown – the expert media veteran – in her assessment that the smart end of the media spectrum shamelessly connived with the establishment to re-write history in the Windsors’ favour, condemning Diana to the margins of the royal story, trivialising her achievements and questioning her very sanity.

This book belongs at the other end of the media spectrum. It's as flashy as a tabloid newspaper and homes-in on your emotions like a laser-guided bomb. And like the tabloids the royal establishment loves to malign, it gets all the really important bits absolutely right.

Now. That's no dream...
Perhaps Miss Middleton... will be our future queen.” I speculated in a Sunday Newspaper nearly three years ago. The editor was more cautious. “More likely, she will not” he made me add. I wish I’d stuck to my guns – and stuck on a bet too. The smart money now says that brand Windsor is about to get a much-needed injection of fresh young glamour to complement its established octogenarian market leader.

As the product manager for the last major foray into young glamour, I thought the New Year marked a suitable moment to look back at the Diana experience – to see if it has any relevance for the next English rose to take on the mantle of queen-in-waiting.

Miss Middleton’s 2007 stretches ahead of her like an enchanted garden. But on closer inspection, it’s not so much a garden as a maze. It will be full of enticing avenues that lead to thorny dead-ends. There will be only one way through... and she must follow it for the rest of her life. So if she’s not looking for that kind of commitment, if she doubts her sense of duty, this might be one of the last chances to find the emergency exit.

Not that she seems to be looking for a way out. She has already been given clear signs of royal acceptance – plus a less visible gift that may prove more valuable than anything her prince lovingly left under the Christmas tree: public goodwill.

A royal engagement can perk up the most jaded monarchist and even make a monarchist out of a non-believer. It isn’t just Woolworth’s who are jumping the gun with souvenir wedding plates. Newspaper proprietors, tea-towel manufacturers and every other ticket holder on the royal gravy train (even royal pundits) are audibly salivating at the prospect of a new princess to tuck into.

So it’s encouraging to find opinion generally to be unanimous about Ms. Middleton’s status as a Good Thing. It reminds us that the English in particular retain a remarkably benign attitude to their fallible ruling family.

Such generosity of spirit by us subjects may, of course, be nothing more than cover for bovine inertia. No matter. If she is observant, Kate will already have noticed that benign indifference is better medicine for royalty than any amount of spin-doctored synthetic popularity.
She and her advisors – a group whose membership I hope she vets with ruthless care – should be in no doubt that royal syrup and royal poison both come gift-wrapped. History provides plenty of shining examples and several horrible warnings too.

Let’s not forget that, at about the same stage in her public introduction, Lady Diana Spencer was unequivocally a Good Thing too. So, in their day, were Captain Mark Phillips….and even Sarah Ferguson. Looking back a little further, Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyons was, of course, a Very Good Thing Indeed.

On the other hand, Mrs. Wallis Simpson was generally held to be a thoroughly Bad Thing. As for Mrs. Camilla Parker-Bowles, in many eyes the verdict seems to be Not Quite The Thing.

As well as providing some food for thought, this list might remind Kate that if she marries into the royal family her status as a “thing” will be inescapable. History reduces the most engagingly human of figures to “good things” or “bad things.” It isn’t just the tabloids that will dehumanise you even as they linger over your most human attributes.

There could be no harsher example of the royal dehumanising process than Lord Stevens’ report. Its 832 pages probably weren’t on Kate’s Christmas list either but a cool assessment of their relevance to her future might be the best present she could give herself. Buying accessories for Jigsaw may leave spare time for a university-trained mind to pause briefly on the less festive aspects of assuming Diana’s role as national cover-girl.

It is sometimes rather cynically said of the Windsors that they “forget nothing and they learn nothing.” To forget nothing of Diana’s all-too human failings while simultaneously learning nothing from their causes would be a great disservice to Kate. An even greater disservice to both women would be to remember William’s mother only from the distorted viewpoint of Di-phobic courtiers and cronies.

Luckily, in Prince William, Kate has an archive of memories that should far outclass any sour offerings from the older generation. Having watched Diana coach a ten-year-old William through his first major walkabout – on a sunny St David’s Day in Cardiff – I don’t doubt he will draw on that memory and a hundred others to guide his bride when the time comes.

On that day, William squared his shoulders, swallowed any nervousness and resolutely did his duty. Introducing himself to thousands of shouting, cheering and pleading faces was a daunting prospect – one which might have intimidated the most seasoned royal performer.
His mother led him through it by example – taking her time, smiling, listening, leaving a glow of happiness behind her. She knew that just a couple of words from her might become a lifetime memory for anyone in earshot.

Given the chance similarly to mentor Kate, I'm sure Diana would have welcomed the opportunity. Diana sometimes spoke to me of her wish to have more children, girls for preference. It's not fanciful to imagine Diana's affection for a daughter-in-law who compensated for that unfulfilled wish. And with that affection would have come a desire to share the benefits of the many painful lessons she learned during her own royal apprenticeship.

Finding myself in the audience as Lord Stevens presented his report, I had plenty of time to muse on how a successor to Diana might – please God – avoid becoming the object of another such public post mortem. As CCTV images of the princess's anxious final departure from the Paris Ritz flickered on the screen, I recognized the expression on my former-employer's face: I am being messed around – and there had better be a good explanation!

And maybe – after the explanation had been given, the journey completed safely and happier years had passed the unlikely figure of Diana as mother-in-law would have leaned across the lunch table at San Lorenzo and passed on some painfully-learned nuggets of experience.

Perhaps recalling her own mistakes, she might have offered Kate this thought. No matter how beautiful or gifted – and no matter how much the media exaggerate any God-given virtue – modesty must be your watchword. Modesty about achievements in particular. You will learn that much royal work comprises just turning up wearing the appropriate expression on your face.

Good works are seldom what you do – instead they're what other people do... usually poorer, better qualified, harder working and generally more saintly people than you. Their good works are what you grace with your presence. That's your unique contribution so learn to be content with it – and attractively self-effacing, too.

Perhaps Diana would then have pointed to our current queen and her consort as a happier role model than her own marriage. For all her grievances against her in-laws – real and imagined – Diana knew that the basic requirement is to look relaxed in each other's company and do the job expected of you. Nothing more is needed.

And as a bodyguard deftly dealt with the bill, conversation might have shifted to the material rewards of a princess's life.
Perhaps Kate, unencumbered by Diana’s aristocratic bloodline and upbringing, will retain a wholesome bourgeois thriftiness in her attitude to the wealth with which she will now find herself so generously provided. Even so, Diana might have added, though the Duchy of Cornwall’s pockets are fabulously deep, go easy on the conspicuous consumption.

You will be the focus of enough envious eyes – so remember that living in a very big house surrounded by servants and riding in a gold carriage are all the excess that your future subjects will readily tolerate in their royal family. Don’t overlook the priceless symbolic value of tupperware boxes...and try to develop a famous enthusiasm for turning off unnecessary electric lights.

Lord Stevens stopped short of blaming the pursuing paparazzi for Diana’s death in the Alma tunnel. Whatever their various unattractive qualities, the Parisian photographers were a well-known menace and proper measures could and should have been taken to cope with them. Many times I drove with Diana as they swooped around her car like bandits round a wild-west stage-coach but thorough planning kept her safe – and even a little amused by their dare-devil antics.

To Kate I am sure she would have explained that, contrary to popular belief, the media are not the source of all the royal family’s woes. Far too often, Fleet Street has been recruited by royal press officers (even by royal people directly) to promote, spin or suppress royal stories. Even today, the correct way to read a modern royal newspaper story is first to ask who briefed it... and why.

Diana learned to her cost – and Charles still shows little sign of learning – that inviting the media in to serve your short-term agenda is a damned sight easier than getting them out again when their usefulness has been squeezed dry. What’s more, journalists are people too and they will remember if you’ve two-timed them...and their memories can be just as long as the Windsors’.

Remember, too, that mobile phone cameras and the internet far out snoop the amateur eavesdropping that brought us the Squidgy and Tampax tapes. Your embarrassing mistakes will live on in cyberspace.

Loyalty deserves a special word. Whichever interpretation you use, remember it works both ways. Royal employees of all ranks will still reliably bow and curtsey but in the 21st Century such institutionalised deference increasingly has to be earned – not by your lawyers but by you.... every single day.

Diana might conclude on a happier note. Kate and William may be the last best chance for the Windsor dynasty but they have a lot going for them: camera-friendly looks, lots of
money and they actually seem to like each other. Not a bad reply to give any question about the nature of being “in love.”

Best of all they have a replenished reservoir of public goodwill on which to draw. Recent history has shown how rapidly that reservoir can drain away. It needs to be treated as the valuable, volatile resource it is. So, like William in Cardiff fifteen years ago, keep your chin up, smile and, if you must talk, talk as if the whole world is your friend. And when you have problems – as you undoubtedly will – share them with each other, not with the world.

Now the car is at the restaurant door. The departing Princess turns with a smile as if to add something...
Seeing baby Prince George's tottering first steps reminds us that he and his parents are taking the British royal story in a new direction. Where it will lead, not even they can know but one thing is certain: with Prince Charles now likely to be remembered as the placeholder king, the Windsors' destiny is squarely in the hands of William and Catherine and their camera-friendly toddler.

Which means that it's more than just Spencer-Churchill genes that Prince George is likely to inherit from William's much-missed mother. Look for a continuing imprint of Diana's unique royal style. To me, having spent eight years at her side, it's clear that Diana's legacy, like her noble DNA, will live on through future generations.

This should be good news for the royal dynasty. Her life is a lasting lesson in the opportunities and hazards of living under the spotlight. Unveiled on the royal stage as a shy teenager, Diana quickly learned that the old lines in the royal playbook were not always the key to job satisfaction for a modern princess. So in the few years given to her she wrote a new script. Her emotionally-engaged approach won global public affection but took its toll on her personal reserves of compassion and resilience, depleted as they were by betrayal in marriage and coolness from some in the palace old guard.

Her response to her critics was a formidable mix of the aristocratic and the earthy: a glint of steel wrapped in a warm heart. Instead of sitting in her palace moping, she went out into the world with a smile and a hug, bringing a touch of royal magic to those who thought themselves forgotten: AIDS patients, the mentally ill, drug users, broken families, lepers and street-sleepers – the list was long and always growing.

As a mother she blended spontaneity with well-measured majesty. Her children were born into a bubble of luxury, deference and duty yet she made sure they learned about life in the real world too. So if you went for a haircut in Notting Hill you might find a young prince in the next seat; moviegoers discovered, when the lights came up, those shapes in baseball caps in the dark were a real princess and her princes; even waiting in line in McDonalds was part of Diana's training syllabus for a future king.

It was her own way of preparing her boys for their daunting destiny. One day we were on a royal jet returning from William's triumphant first “meet the people” public event in Wales. While he went to talk to the pilots we did some routine paperwork and then she said to me “You know, Patrick, it's different for them: my boys are the age when parents tell their children not to talk to strangers – but I have to tell mine that talking to strangers is what they must do, for ever.”
So at this time of year, as summer fades and memories come to us of the awful day when Diana died, the pictures in my mind are a glorious, poignant jumble. Diana in the White House and at Versailles; christening a nuclear submarine and reviewing her regiments on parade; at prayer with Mother Teresa and by candlelight at the bedside of an African orphan, dying of AIDS.

And then there’s Diana the yummy mummy, waiting in line for a cheeseburger with her boys. This August we can remember them all and be grateful that, in his grandmother Diana and great-grandmother Elizabeth, Prince George will have the best royal examples he will ever need.
SECTION 3

YOUR MAJESTY

[Photo by Kent Gavin]
“God Save the Queen!” sang the whole school at morning prayers, with a fervour that reflected our delight that lessons had been cancelled so we could line part of the route along which the Monarch would pass during her visit to Stirling, ancient seat of Scottish kings. Highlight of her programme that day was the unveiling of a larger-than-life statue of Robert the Bruce, famous victor of the Battle of Bannockburn and no friend of royal visitors from south of the border. But as we all knew, the Queen was as much a Stuart as anything else and in those days (the early sixties) Scottish nationalism was a curiosity rather than a republican-tinged tartan tide. Soon afterwards we were rewarded by a glimpse of Elizabeth II in the back of a fast-moving Rolls Royce and were suitably thrilled, as much by our escape from double maths as by such a close encounter with the head of state. My chief impression was that, through the rain-streaked car window, she looked just like my mother. Her impression of us, a straggling line of damp grey flannel and runny noses, we never did discover.

Half a century has passed. The world has changed beyond recognition. Those snotty little boys are balding and paunchy, the Scotland of Alec Douglas Home has become the fiefdom of Nicola Sturgeon, saltires have replaced union jacks and Rolls Royce is now a subsidiary of BMW. In my own small way, I was privileged – not always willingly - to see some of the most wrenching changes at first hand, as Princess Diana’s private secretary and daily go-between with the Queen’s office. In the dark days of her son and daughter-in-law’s infidelities and divorce, when the royal universe wobbled like a Duchy Originals lemon posset in a gale, her resolute neutrality sent a sharp message to a fractious court, as a mother might silence a nursery squabble with one impatient glance. The Queen’s role as head of the family carries an authority that doesn’t have to be wielded to prove its awesome power; Her Majesty’s displeasure is not lightly incurred, nor is it quickly forgotten.

When I was still an apprentice equerry, I was on duty for a state visit part of which was a very formal and grand lunch given by the Queen at Buckingham Palace for our distinguished guest and his entourage. It was an example of the kind of diplomatic stagecraft on which we British pride ourselves though in the world of high-powered palace protocol it was as near to routine as you could get while still wearing a starched collar and morning coat. As the new boy I kept a low profile, taking it all in as I watched the senior courtiers run nonchalantly through the familiar procedure, rounding up the visitors for the procession into the dining room. But to my surprise, I began to realise that something had gone wrong. The experts - private secretaries, ladies-in-waiting and other top management
- hadn't completed their whipping-in duties, the guests were looking lost and already the efficient Queen was in her customary position, waiting for the off. Her look said it all: why isn't everybody ready?

Suddenly I felt her eye on me. So much for my low profile. What are you going to do about this? said the look, with some emphasis. And along with the understandable impatience of a professional surrounded by amateurs, I saw a momentary vulnerability. Here was the Queen keeping the show on the road, but where were all the people who were supposed to be helping her? I served almost a further eight years in the Royal Household, but I never forgot that look, either its galvanising effect or its hint of reassuringly human frailty.

Sometime later, towards the end of my stint as a treader of red carpets, I was honoured with the award of a modest decoration as a mark of my service. At the Investiture, and later when she received me on my departure from the Palace, Her Majesty's words left me in no doubt that her keen blue eyes (and no less keen ears) missed nothing that happened in her extended organisation. What mattered rather more to me was that she left me in equally little doubt that she recognised and appreciated my efforts in the corner of it that had been my responsibility. By such impressions are loyal followers made.

We can be grateful that Robert the Bruce is still astride his snorting bronze charger, Stirling Castle has been lovingly restored and Elizabeth II is still providing lazy schoolchildren with a great excuse to swap lessons for a bit of energetic kerbside flag waving. Even my mother is long gone, yet our national matriarch is now our longest serving monarch ever. A whole generation of parents who would now be approaching ninety grew up with Princess Elizabeth. Like her – and like my mother – they served in uniform, braved the Blitz and brought children into an austere post-war world. The young Princess's vow to her future subjects – that her whole life, be it short or long, would be dedicated to their service – echoed the sacrifice of self to duty that we now associate with our nation in its Finest Hour.

In Elizabeth's family memory, the fall of the thrones of Russia, Germany, Spain, Greece and Italy are not so much history as current affairs. The longevity of the British Monarchy, we are told, is due to its unerring instinct for pragmatic evolution; Elizabeth has come to personify this process, from disbanding the debutantes to paying tax, kissing colonies fond farewell and decommissioning the Royal Yacht. A process of painful national evolution (or decline, according to taste) has been soothed by the seemingly-imperturbable profile we still find on our stamps and coins and which still graciously raises a white-gloved hand from fabulously gilded state coaches on great national occasions. An enduring, reassuring symbol of all the great and good qualities we naturally associate with Britain at its best.
Which brings us to Ant and Dec.

Thanks to ITV’s selection of two such popular stars to present its 90th birthday tribute we will have an extraordinary opportunity to see for ourselves an example of this royal evolution in practice. Almost as long ago as that far-off visit to Stirling, the Queen agreed to an unprecedented level of access for the BBC’s “Royal Family” documentary. The nation goggled in amazement as the cameras revealed the Windsors at work and play as never before. For me, the sight of the Queen presiding over a picnic in the beautiful setting of Royal Deeside while Prince Philip took command of the barbecue was just further reinforcement of the comfortable belief that They were really just like Us, only a bit posher. Even then it had a voyeuristic thrill which may in part explain why the whole project was soon judged a damaging mistake, never to be repeated. “Letting daylight in on magic” was traditionally thought to be fatal to monarchy’s chances of survival, a point many thought was proved by the subsequent national disillusionment when the kingdom's most perfect family was seen to share some of its most unfortunate marital shortcomings too.

Yet Royalty’s love for television did not remain subdued for long. Year by year, the cameras and soundmen, the directors and the girls with clipboards were allowed deeper and deeper into the world of palaces and Range Rovers, the Royal Train and the Mews. Weddings, funerals, overseas tours and significant birthdays all attracted their keenly-anticipated TV “specials.” One by one, members of the Royal Family appeared on the box to reveal titbits of their lives or – a favourite of Prince Charles – to share their interests, philosophies and charitable activities for our general edification. Notoriously, the Prince and his wife took to the small screen to attract sympathy for their respective versions of their unhappy domestic drama. All of these electronic visits to the nation's sitting rooms seemed a good idea at the time, and most had their ardent exponents among ambitious courtiers and the growing procession of expensive spin doctors who gratefully accepted the invitation to try their hands at royal image polishing. Yet arguably, none of them has done any good: royal TV is like a high-carb diet – delicious but it might make you queasy.

Will Ant and Dec deliver a show that finally qualifies as wholesome nourishment? To judge by the pre-broadcast teasers, they certainly haven’t been short of exclusive material. One message is already coming across loud and clear: The Queen is closely involved with the raising and royal preparation of her great-grandchildren. That’s reassuring news for those who know how much the dynasty depends on the wisdom that will be Her Majesty’s most valuable legacy to her descendants. Of course, this is nothing new: despite whatever earthquakes were shaking the rest of the royal world their mother Diana unfailingly ensured that William and Harry had regular close links with the Queen. Most often an informal tea, arranged with minimal notice and maximum jollity. The benefits for their
young minds, not to mention for family cohesion, must have been immense. As I saw for myself, the Princess always found these sessions with Granny immensely supportive, even if the two women never alas fully overcame the communications barriers between them. The close, affectionate and mutually enlightening relationship shared by William and his grandmother is at the heart of monarchy’s long-term health. It looks increasingly like the key to its very survival.

Interviews with the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry have been heavily previewed and look certain to reinforce the next generation’s place in loyal royalists’ hearts. Meanwhile, adorable details of Prince George – who we’re told calls the Queen Gan-Gan - and his new sister Charlotte Elizabeth Diana must be odds-on to win new converts to the blessings of an inherited hierarchy.

One thing we will never know is what Gan-Gan herself actually thinks about all this. Another televised tribute, even when presented with such winningly cheeky deference, is unlikely to alter one iota the unshakeable optimism and resolute sense of duty that has served Her Majesty – and the rest of us – so well these past nine decades. I’m sure she will smile and say all the right things when her family of TV stars seek her opinion. She will undoubtedly enjoy the feast of equitation arranged for the occasion by the organisers of the Windsor Horse Show. The whole exercise is, after all, an affectionate and respectful expression of gratitude and celebration for a woman who can remember when the cavalry regiments of the Empire wheeled and jangled past Buckingham Palace. But inside, I like to think she’d rather be putting on tweeds and boots and going for a good long walk in the gentle Scottish rain.
The Kenyan cook's grandson and the king-emperor's grand-daughter looked very happy together. In fact, along with their spouses, they created an object lesson in how any disparity – in race, age or background – can be turned to advantage in a common cause. And when, as in this case, the cause in question is nothing less than “to reaffirm one of the oldest, one of the strongest alliances the world has ever known” then we can be reassured that all the week's ceremonial effort has had some tangible benefit.

That's a thought we might hope the Queen shares, because so much of the effort was hers. Both this week and last, in Ireland and at home, it has been her presence that has humanised momentous events. Alongside the loftier figures of an Uachtaráin and POTUS ("President of the United States"), our own head of state gave a grey-haired master class in the effectiveness well-aimed soft firepower.

“Wow!” was famously Mrs. McAleese's verdict, courtesy of lip readers. Perhaps similar terminology was to be heard as the Obamas made themselves at home in the Belgian Suite at Buckingham Palace (and not just when they found that the plumbing actually worked).

Much has been written of the personal warmth which accompanied the carefully-scripted official displays of friendship between the Monarch and the President. It's always wise to be cautious when speculating on the real feelings underlying the public images. Even so, we can reasonably conclude, for instance, that respect for his hosts as exemplary members of “the greatest generation” surely comes naturally to the President, raised as he was by his grandparents.

Respect is always a hot topic when leaders meet in front of cameras. On an earlier visit there was synthetic outrage that the First Lady had spontaneously placed a friendly arm on the Sovereign's back. Anyone watching Michelle Obama dispense hugs to schoolgirls knows that such disarming gestures are second nature to her (Princess Diana would have approved). Less well-reported was the equally-spontaneous way in which Her Majesty reciprocated Mrs. Obama's refreshing lack of inhibition.

That freedom from inhibition, we can guess, adds to the Queen's apparent affection for these visitors, each with such remarkable personal stories. The pleasure she no doubt felt arranging a carriage ride for the Obamas' daughters may not have been very different from the willingness with which she agreed to plans for bomb-proofing the President's suite. The duties of a thoughtful hostess are as instinctive to the Queen as hugging is to Michelle Obama. No wonder they took the chance, so we are told, to “stay in touch.”
generations communicate this well there is, in the President's slightly star-struck phrase, “a lot of wisdom to be found if you're willing to listen.”

The Queen has turned the years to her advantage. She was already in the second decade of her reign when this President was born. She has personally known twelve of his predecessors. Figures who to Obama are part of history are to Elizabeth II part of the family scrapbook. That must be helpful when putting the gun salutes, the motorcades and the grand speeches in perspective. According to the New York Times, the visitors were “trying to look presidential without looking superior.” Fortunately for us, that's one feat the Queen doesn't even have to attempt.

Such is Britain's current enthusiasm for all things Obama that someone might already be planning to erect a statue of the man who, whatever his ultimate political fate, will surely find a place in future school texts if only as the first African-American President. One of his predecessors is already being commemorated in stone and bronze. A statue of Ronald Reagan is to be unveiled in Grosvenor Square on 4th July. However skillful the sculptor's hand, it’s unlikely to eclipse another image from the Queen's presidential photo-album - that of herself on horseback with The Gipper at her side.

That photo recalls a time when, like today, it was the military dimension of the Anglo-US alliance that quietly underscored the ceremonial. The decade of The Falklands, Libya (sound familiar?) and the Soviet Evil Empire is inextricably entwined with memories of Reagan. Reagan pictured with the Queen and, as a reminder that not all female power is soft, with Margaret Thatcher, too.

The Reagan-Thatcher alliance – at least in spirit - was very much alive and well last Tuesday in Washington, DC. On the same evening that Obama raised his glass at the state banquet in London, back in Washington the centenary of Ronald Reagan's birth was being celebrated in grand style at a black-tie dinner a block or two from the White House.

Among the speakers were the Defence Secretaries of both the US and the UK. Liam Fox caught the mood with a lucid reminder of why the special relationship really is essential. It was Reagan and Thatcher, he concluded, who saw off the Red Menace and it was up to us in our turn “not to let them down.” Cue thunderous applause and much enthusiastic whooping.

As the US Army Chorus sang stirring serenades, several hundred devotees noisily reminisced the heyday of the Ronnie and Maggie show. The nostalgia was as warm and comforting as the evening breeze from the Potomac and – perhaps assisted by Plymouth martinis - when we stood to give Lech Walesa a moist-eyed ovation, it seemed we really
had been transported back to a time when our enemies were in plain sight and the world
was a simpler place.

Later, back in the hotel, the TV was showing clips from the day's events in London. There
were winces as Obama fluffed his Toast at the banquet, groans as the Presidential limo
grounded on the embassy ramp (that was in Dublin but nobody noticed) and incredulity
when the commander-in-chief appeared to forget which year he was in. Reagan - so often
mocked as senile by the British media – never managed that.

Watching non-Democrats view the scenes of Obama-mania reminded me of that queasy
sensation sometimes felt by Brits in America during the Bush years, when we were loudly
congratulated on our good fortune to have Tony Blair as Prime Minister. Seen through less
adulatory American eyes, the splendid theatricals enjoyed by the Obamas in London were
entertaining enough – their meeting with the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge was
described in the US press as an encounter with “one of the few couples in the world even
more famous than they are” – but hardly front page.

Perhaps that was because in America, as in Britain, the economy is the real news and
Obama’s responses to the combined press corps on this subject were anything but
inspirational. Back home, the Senate this week delivered its own verdict on Obama’s
proposed budget by delivering a humiliating rejection of 97 votes to nil. And that with a
Democrat majority.

Against this background, it’s easy to portray Obama’s current European tour as just a
coolly- calculated attempt to woo the all-important ethnic vote before next year’s election.
Add the opportunity to look statesmanlike and popular on the international stage at a time
when the Republicans have yet to look competitive – and the message of a President
playing to the home audience is unmistakable.

This should surprise nobody, even if it does make us special friends feel that little bit less
special. Europeans may still be bewitched by the cook’s-grandson-made-good story but the
Kenya magic doesn’t cast a spell on the conservative heartland of America.
Obama may be an object of devotion to crowds in Europe but in America his approval
ratings are these days less than god-like. So, for a president thirsting after a second term,
every Irish vote is worth the detour to drop in at the ancestral Obama village pub for a
quick Guinness photo call.

And with Guinness, comfortingly, we find ourselves back with the Queen before whom,
during her visit to the St James’s Gate Brewery in Dublin, a special pint was reverently
placed. Her Majesty who, unlike the President, has no blue-collar credentials to polish,
confined her appreciation to a look of polite interest. When, if ever, can news footage of an elderly lady contemplating a glass of black liquid have carried such historic significance? You don’t have to have lived – as I did – in Ireland in the 70’s to appreciate the momentous value of the Queen’s visit to the cause of reconciliation.

That glass in Dublin and its more genteel companion at this week’s banquet share a huge weight of symbolism – of an old enmity soothed and an old alliance strengthened. The common factor is one human being upon whom the weight of history, and of the years, seems to have nothing but a rejuvenating effect. Long may they continue to do so.
Everybody has a Queen moment. Mine came when I was ten years old. She was just a flash of Royal profile in the back of a Rolls-Royce, but it still brightened a rainy morning in a grey Scottish town. We’d been excused an hour of maths so we could stand in the cold to pay our moment of respect. It seemed a very fair deal to me and I became a fan of Her Majesty on the spot.

Later, when we sang the National Anthem at school assembly (that was in the days when such an idea didn’t sound weird), I thought for the first time about the familiar words. Glorious seemed a desirable quality for a Monarch, but Happy? I didn’t know what made the Queen happy then.

Forty years on, I’m glad to say I still don’t. However, I remain a fan. And as the Princess of Wales’s equerry and then private secretary, I had eight lucky years in which to experience the Queen’s management style at first-hand. My admiration now is based on her shrewd pragmatism, sense of duty, kindness and willingness to sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of her family and subjects.

That pragmatism was perhaps never tested more than during her son and Heir’s very public and acrimonious separation from Princess Diana. During years of suspicion and discord, the Queen resolutely declined to take sides. And when some in Charles’s camp tried to portray his as the side which Royal loyalists should automatically support, she authorised her Lord Chamberlain to circulate an instruction that she regarded both parties as equally deserving of sympathy.

At a low point in that painful conflict, another ten-year-old - Prince William - went with his mother to tea with the Queen. It was one of several conscientious efforts both women made to keep open vital lines of communication where William and Harry were concerned. Later, I asked the Princess about it. She thought before answering: “The Queen is very good she listens. And she is sad.”

I could believe it. But, crucially for me, I could also believe that though she kept herself above the fray, the Queen had managed to convey her commitment to her grandchildren and her concern for her daughter-in-law’s well-being. It’s true, I sometimes wished that concern and perhaps appreciation too could have been expressed in ways that Diana recognised as the encouragement and direction I’m sure they were intended to be.
But though differences in age and temperament intervened, at least the sentiment had been expressed and acknowledged.

I saw another example of the Queen's refreshingly pragmatic and no-nonsense approach when an unexpected problem arose during a Charles and Diana diary planning meeting. These could be pretty fraught affairs, especially when the couple found their public programmes diverging as a result of their deteriorating marriage.

It was proposed that Charles should attend an undemanding but rather irksome engagement one of the traditional landmarks of the Royal year like the Royal Variety Performance or Chelsea Flower Show which clashed with something he felt would be a more productive use of his time. Advisers discussed the issue at length but nobody could get around the fact that it was his turn to take the job on.

Diana had an idea. Why don't you ring her up, explain the problem and ask if she would mind doing it again this year?

It sounded so obvious but actually this was a revolutionary suggestion. The whole cumbersome apparatus of programme planning and co-ordination had grown up so that members of the Royal Family didn't have to engage in that sort of direct communication. That's the way we courtiers liked it - it helped us keep tabs on them and kept us busy sending each other memoranda and draft planning sheets.

But Charles accepted Diana's proposal straight away, walked across to his desk and picked up the phone. In moments he had been connected to the Queen and we could tell that she was listening sympathetically as he outlined the problem. The conversation was brief. Then he turned to the meeting and said: The Queen has agreed to do it again this year.

Problem solved, and all because the Queen was ready to bypass the usual Palace bureaucracy. It also showed just a hint of her readiness to help solve problems for her family.

At around the same time I got my own message from the Queen. She was investing me with a routine award to mark so many years' service to the Royal Family. As I stepped up to receive the decoration there was a moment when her arresting blue eyes fixed me with a look that combined Royal appraisal with human understanding. She left me in no doubt that she knew that serving in the front line of the War of the Waleses was no royal picnic.

For those of an earlier generation, for whom emotional indulgence was a luxury denied them by war, the Queen's range of moods regal/grumpy/amused seems quite sufficient for the role of national figurehead. It may be unfashionable and it certainly lays her open to
accusations of insensitivity when a media-friendly display of touchy-feelyness might be just what the spin doctor ordered.

But these days we don’t really need to see the Queen as a remote and emotionless figure. Remember her obvious distress at the decommissioning of Britannia or the small figure in the raincoat in the burnt-out ruins of Windsor Castle. Many of us can now identify with a Queen who is much more than a gloved hand waving from a limousine.

The BBC’s current broadcasts of family home movies show an even more revealing picture of a warmly engaging person and it comes as no surprise to learn that births, divorces and deaths affect her every bit as much as the rest of us.

There is an aspect of the Queens working style that’s not often acknowledged because it isn’t often seen outside palace walls. But it’s reassuring to know that within the smiling Monarch we all recognise there is also the authoritative executive chairman: well-informed on day-to-day operations, deeply experienced in the business and unlikely to overlook any lapse in standards.

In my early days as an equerry, I attended a formal lunch given by the Queen for a visiting head of state and his extensive entourage. It was a high-powered event, requiring strict protocol and the kind of ceremonial slickness for which the British are famous.

I kept out of the way while senior courtiers effortlessly went through the process of shepherding the visitors into line before lunch. Except this time something had gone wrong. The experts hadn’t done their job. Distracted or momentarily blasé, private secretaries, ladies-in-waiting and other senior management hadn’t escorted their allocated guests into line, but already the efficient Queen was in her spot, looking to see what was causing the delay.

Her eye fell on me, as I tried to look invisible (the Queen’s eye has that unnerving quality). Where is everybody? said the look, with some emphasis. And just for a moment, along with some understandable impatience, I saw a flash of vulnerability. The Queen was doing her bit, but what about the people she relied on to make the whole show work properly?

The momentary glitch soon passed. But I never forgot the galvanising effect of the Queen’s disapproving eye, even on her most exalted courtiers. It was a valuable lesson for a new boy to learn. The days of absolute monarchy may be buried far back in our history, but as head of the modern royal organisation, the Queen’s authority over employees and family members alike still resonates with the power of an ancient tradition.
One of her main skills has been in recognising that a focus of national unity must embody qualities that every subject can admire without simultaneously displaying opinions or traits that invite dissent. A Queen who is distant and nice allows us to think the best of her, while a Queen who is distant and regal allows us to feel special among the nations, even as we admire the crown on the cap badge of the policeman who has just booked us for speeding.

There is no appetite for a republic in England, which still loves its social distinctions. And among the outlying realms and possessions, from Cardiff to Canberra, none of the proffered alternatives looks sufficiently attractive, at least while Elizabeth reigns.

One reason might be that, for the Queen, her whole life is her duty. Not many of her family can begin to claim such a single-minded and unspoken determination to put country before self.

Meanwhile, even if politicians should enjoy the most dramatic upturn in public esteem, they will still fundamentally be perceived as being in the whole dirty business of government for personal gain to boost their bank balances, their egos, or both. Nobody can accuse the Queen of being on the throne for personal gain; those days ended with the Stuarts. Nor is she the type to worry about ego. The issue doesn't arise when you can hang a crown on the bedpost.

That just leaves the ordinary human need to be loved and appreciated, and nobody who saw the opening of the Commonwealth Games last month can have missed the obvious devotion of the Duke of Edinburgh at her side or the waves of affection from the crowds in Melbourne.

There was one more ten-year-old who came to mind while I was thinking of the significance of the Queens 80th birthday. Last week I took two of my daughters to a cinema in Plymouth to see the new Pink Panther movie. One scene really surprised me. Cousteau’s boss, Chief Inspector Dreyfus, is enthroned in his grandiose office and behind him are photographs, obviously positioned to impress any visitor: Dreyfus with the Pope, with Mother Teresa, with Queen Elizabeth.

It’s a significant choice. The film-makers decided that nothing would impress audiences around the world more than an image of our Queen, alongside the two greatest religious icons of our age.

Leaving the cinema, we came to the statue of Sir Francis Drake, the great commander and explorer who had sailed from the same Devon shores to defeat the Spanish Armada in the name of the first Queen Elizabeth. What better guiding virtue to sum up the second Elizabeth’s life than the one Drake encapsulated in his most famous prayer: “There must be
a beginning of any great matter, but the continuing unto the end until it be thoroughly finished yields the true glory.”

As we celebrate her 80th birthday we can be grateful that we don’t really know if the Queen is happy. All we need to know is that she does her duty. And that really is glorious. Long may she reign.
Nearly twenty years ago, as a nervous new-boy equerry to the Princess of Wales, I was in charge of organising her attendance at the royal charity premiere of a film called Dangerous Liaisons. I had never heard of Stephen Frears the director and I don't remember how low he bowed when the Princess offered him her hand.

I wish I could. His latest film is The Queen - a story of the struggle between the forces of tradition and modernisation that was precipitated by Diana's death. Such weighty issues dominate the screen for more than 100 minutes. But at various points in the plot an equerry - as I was then, a naval lieutenant-commander - pops up to deliver his party piece, a lecture on bowing and curtseying. A horrid thought struck me. My God, perhaps that was Mr. Frears's unconscious memory of me.

Eighteen years on, unlike Dangerous Liaisons, The Queen won't get a royal premiere, let alone a Diana royal premiere. It probably won't be selected for a royal family Balmoral cinema night either. But that shouldn't put you off going to see it. It might just be the best and most important film ever made about the Windsors.

Any attempt to portray the edgy atmosphere of the week Diana died will touch a nerve in anyone who witnessed such unprecedented scenes of public grief. Just the memory can send stiff-upper-lip traditionalists and heart-on-your-sleeve emoters jumping into the familiar trenches they dug for themselves during Diana's ill-starred career as our future queen. Having graduated from equerry to Diana's private secretary, I found myself somewhere in the middle trying to reconcile both camps... and jolly uncomfortable it often was.

So a film that plunges us straight back into that battle-ground of conflicting emotions was bound to offend at least half of me...wasn't it?

There's a certain pleasure in the anticipation of being deeply offended. All pre-release publicity about the film has been so adulatory that I was chafing to find fault with all those naive researchers and self-appointed royal experts. I read the tributes from the Venice Film Festival. So what if Helen Mirren in a wig almost looks like the Queen. And Farmer Hoggett - sorry, James Cromwell - does a very good Duke of Edinburgh. And Michael Sheen's grinning Tony Blair displays more ivory than a Steinway.

But just you wait, I thought. I was THERE. Not, perhaps, for the tense week portrayed in this dramatisation but at least for most of the preceding decade. I was quite sure that five
minutes into the film I'd be tut-tutting triumphantly that the private secretary wouldn't be saying *that* and the phone procedure is all wrong and the royal aeroplane's seats aren't anything *like* that shade of blue. And *why* isn't Prince Charles wearing a sporran with that kilt?

Imagine my disappointment when I found that *The Queen* started well and just got better. Pity my monarchist reflexes when they failed to cringe. Sympathise with my Diana loyalties which refused to bridle. Feel my pain as the sheer quality of the film-making snuffed out all my attempts at nit-picking.

Even the sporran issue lost its power to enrage. I staggered out of the screening room like a man mugged – robbed of every pre-prepared whinge, gripe and insider's know-it-all smirk.

In particular, it's hard to see how Peter Morgan's script could be improved. It will put a smile on your lips and a lump in your throat. It will give you a digestible lesson in basic constitutional history and won't ever have you reaching for the sick bag. It certainly lives up to its claim to have been "forensically" researched.

Not, please note, that this is a documentary. The forensic research is limited by what the people who really know were prepared to say to the people who were being paid to find out. The rest is supposition, though of good enough quality to merit a Royal Warrant.

So when The Queen voices her bewilderment at the speed and turn of events... or when Prince Philip affectionately addresses her as "cabbage" .... or when Tony Blair belatedly blasts Alastair Campbell for his cynicism.... the only thing we know for sure is that we aren't hearing actual quotes. Nevertheless, such is the trust Frears and Morgan establish with their audience that the limits of artistic licence never feel overstepped.

In fact, thanks to that licence, fiction can be recruited to drive home some hard truths. The Queen's poignant encounter with a fugitive stag in the wilds of her Balmoral estate powerfully conveys the isolation of her life-sentence of divinely-imposed duty. Her reluctant agreement to the flying of a flag at half-mast over Buckingham Palace reveals her steely pragmatism when the chips are down.

As Prince Charles, Alex Jennings's guilt-wrecked opportunism exposes the raw reality of his camp's impotence in the face of Diana's Teflon-coated popularity. Alastair Campbell (Mark Bazeley)'s calculating exploitation of events reminds us that politicians have their own courts too – and their own Svengalis.
Of special interest to me, the Queen's duty private secretary Robin Janvrin (Roger Allam) is seen performing his profession's trickiest task as he patiently decrypts his royal employer's thought processes to an outsider – and translates the response into a message that will elicit the desired royal reaction.

Even if I can’t find anything much to complain about, will anybody else? Well, Land Rover might be upset by the (fictitious) incident in which their vehicles' legendary off-road capability momentarily proves fallible. The League Against Cruel Sports will be dismayed to find how much remains to be done to convert Royal Deeside to its way of thinking. Robin Janvrin's many admirers will be disappointed to find him portrayed in such uncharacteristically lugubrious style. Occupants of Clarence House – past and present – might prefer to carry their popcorn to a different show entirely.

Blair-bashers may be pained to experience a grudging admiration for the young prime minister who visibly grows in statesmanship as he rises to the biggest constitutional challenge since the Abdication. (Question for historians: did Stanley Baldwin ever wear football strip when speaking to Edward VIII on the telephone?).

Disappointment also awaits the Diana sceptics. Thanks to an inspired selection of newsreel footage and imaginative editing, the Princess's absence from the cast list becomes a positive bonus. Images from every phase of her life – by turns innocent, radiant, manipulative or saintly – are the nails which fix the fictional narrative to the framework of remembered facts.

And note the irony: among a conspicuously talented cast of professionals, Diana is the only major character shown playing herself. We are left to ponder a mystery that has poor Prince Charles wringing his hands – which is the real Diana and which the actress?

Least content, I suspect, will be republicans. Sure, they will find lots to reinforce Cherie Blair (Helen McCrory)'s dismissive verdict on the royal family as a bunch of dysfunctional tax-evaders. But as the closing credits roll we are left with the comforting thought that, whether she is dealing with her fractious kingdom or her broken-down Land Rover, our monarch can bend enough to see which bits need fixing to keep the old jalopy on the road.
SECTION 4

YOUR NEXT MAJESTIES*

*Could be tonight
Monarchists are probably looking back at the latest royal media convulsion with weary disbelief. Republicans must look back with glee. An allegation of royal sexual misconduct which should have been defused behind palace walls was allowed to explode in a blaze of worldwide publicity. Now a toxic cloud of doubt and disenchantment hangs over Prince Charles, obscuring the good works which, in these meritocratic times, are the heir’s principal claim on our support.

Why has all this happened? The question must trouble monarchists everywhere. Someone must be to blame - the press, incompetent courtiers, money grubbing flunkeys, take your pick. But the answer is simpler – and harsher - than that.

“We have nothing to hide and nothing to fear” promises the prince's private secretary Sir Michael Peat. I hope he crossed his fingers because it certainly wasn't always so. Nearly a dozen years ago I was part of a small, anxious group gathered round the long mahogany table in the St James’s Palace conference room. Outside, a media storm of hurricane ferocity was raging. Only one subject could cause such obsessive interest – the collapsing marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales.

As the royal couple's senior advisors we had to draft the Prime Minister's statement that the marriage was effectively over as well as a stack of briefing sheets. We were sailing into uncharted constitutional waters, desperate for a few reference points to show us the way forward. An allegation of royal sexual misconduct and all the legal trimmings would have seemed light relief by comparison.

We worked with a sense of shared misfortune and did the best we could. I doubt if anyone could have done much better, given the mess we were in. It was tempting to wish our joint efforts might have been spent avoiding the mess in the first place but it was far too late for that.

The press secretaries had to guess the questions that would be fired at them. Together, we tried to write the answers. But the magnitude of the crisis dwarfed our trite phrases some of which - “there is no third party involved...” - were plain rubbish.

We were avoiding the heart of the matter. Eventually, I think it was the man from the Queen's office who put his finger on the obvious omission. “There's only one thing people want to know. Why has all this happened?”
Bullseye. We courtiers and the royal people we served had been entrusted with running the head of state organisation for the British people and we had obviously made a complete horlicks of it. What excuse could we offer?

Perhaps to our credit, we actually drafted an answer. In a nutshell it was along the lines of “everybody tried their best but...” In other words – we’re all human so just give us a break. And a break, or a great many breaks, was what the patient British people gave.

Now, more than a decade later, the Prince's latest private secretary seems to be saying much the same thing. Friendly newspapers have been rallied to the cause. Even milords Bell and Bragg vouchsafe assurances that everyone is doing their best. That's all right then.

Faced with such heart-warming sentiments it becomes easier to draw a veil over the whole sordid episode. In fact to dwell on it would be unfair and, in some subconscious way, disloyal too. All right-thinking people can relax as normal royal service is resumed with the dramatically well-timed arrival of baby Wessex. The royal ship of state can sail serenely on.

Nevertheless, here are a few thoughts to wish it safe passage.

A more honest answer to the question Why has all this happened? would have been that we in the royal business brought it on ourselves. We did this by sacrificing truth to short-term expediency. No wonder Michael Peat's rebuttals must sound flat even in his own ears. People remember all too clearly the streams of hints, briefings and outright denials with which the rival Wales camps tried to distort the truth about Charles and Diana's adultery. They increasingly recognise that Charles then compounded the error by using political-style news management to rehabilitate his image and deodorise his relationship with Mrs. Parker Bowles.

It's very simple: people don't like being spun to. They don't like it from politicians and they certainly don't like it from a royal family which still expects and requires their trusting deference.

An inevitable consequence of such cold-hearted pragmatism is that vulnerable people get hurt. Whatever the truth of Corporal George Smith's medical condition – and the prince's spokesmen cannot know the whole truth - his treatment has been outrageous. I knew him as a cheerful, reliable, loyal soldier who had earned his medals fighting the Queen's enemies. Now her son sanctions Smith's mental health to be ridiculed on prime-time TV.

Even Stalin might have wondered if using such tactics against a war-scarred member of his own regiment was altogether wise. The accusations against the prince may or may not have been “risible” but his reaction has been made to look more like that of a cornered
rodent than a future king. Instead of panicky denials there was an opportunity for dignified compassion here. It was lost.

In such a poisonous atmosphere, just as vulnerable people get unfairly hurt, opportunists get unfairly favoured. The valet, the butler, the spin-doctor all received over-generous helpings of royal patronage – not least because, in their own ways, they were purveyors by royal appointment of easy options.

Being supplied with easy options is, historically, one of the perks which compensates for the frustration of being Prince of Wales. But the bill always arrives eventually and it must be paid out of precious reserves of public esteem. How prescient of the prince, therefore, to appoint such an accomplished accountant as his senior advisor.

How prescient also to have chosen such a steadfast, indeed, non-negotiable life-partner. As we are currently reminded, behind the headlines there is a human being who perhaps depends as never before on the support he receives from those closest to him.

Yet it is inescapable that his ambiguous domestic arrangements have compounded and maybe even caused the prince's current troubles. Left unresolved, they will continue to sabotage all efforts to show him in his best light. To take one small example, they will certainly stretch the ingenuity of the protocol experts now planning Mrs. Parker Bowles's joint official trip with the prince to Jordan.

In 1992 we sat around that table in St James’s Palace with the reasonable hope that public goodwill was on our side. We also knew that, for all their faults, the people we served represented values and principles that commanded widespread support and trust.

Since then years of bad luck, bad judgement and bad faith have brought us to this squalid national embarrassment. Whatever the Prince of Wales stands for it surely can’t be any of this.

His advisors could do worse than start the repairs with a good mission statement. Lord Bell would surely approve. It needs to be short and to the point. It needs to remind us what the monarchy does for us. Most of all, it needs to cover every moral dilemma the prince now faces.

Luckily they've already got one. It's on all the stationary. *Ich Dien... “I serve.”*
Camilla Parker-Bowles is back in the news. This time she’s not dressed in jodhpurs chasing foxes across the shires. Last week’s newspapers show her instead at a glitzy fundraiser at the Royal Albert Hall with a new dress and a new hairstyle. More significantly she also has a sharp new line in PR which, if the Daily Mail’s show business correspondent is to be believed, has successfully seen her crowned “queen among the royalty of the fashion and music worlds…”

From such superficial events do constitutional crises grow. As with so much of what we read on royal subjects, we are only seeing part of the story. The real issue here has only burst into the papers because of a bitter behind the scenes row between Camilla and Prince Charles's private secretary. What makes it a crisis for Buckingham Palace is the fact that Camilla is deliberately orchestrating events and setting the media agenda.

Why?

The new offensive is to do with nothing less than Mrs Parker-Bowles's future status. And since, we are told, this will “non-negotiably” be on the arm of our next head of state, we’d better see past the showbiz royal news and take a hard look at the issues Not Camilla, queen for a night but Queen Camilla – or something - for ever. So what? The British Constitution has swallowed elephants in the past and survived. This may not be a gnat but it’s hardly Cromwell's Ironsides either. We'll muddle along.

Well here’s a thought while we muddle. The ambition that brought Camilla this far has not died. The methods she has used are still in play. They include capacities to trample on underlings and leak to the press that would make Alistair Campbell blush. There is a clear warning from the past that might have been written for this development. As the historian - Donaldson said of the Edward VIII's abdication in 1936:

“Throughout history, the favourite of the king has been regarded as an honourable position and only few women have dared to look beyond it.”

To the government of the day in 1936, Wallis Simpson seemed ready to risk that dare and so she – and her enthralled king – had to go. Before anybody tempts Mrs Parker-Bowles to take the same dare, now would be a good time to stop and reflect.

Having had considerable experience inside the hothouse of royal and especially Prince of Wales family politics, I can perhaps offer a guide to what’s important amid the chatter.
When they discover that for eight years I worked as Princess Diana's equerry and private secretary, people show a variety of reactions. Some look pitying, some look disgusted and some even ask me what she was really like (well, how long have you got...?). But probably the only really irritating reaction is from people who say it must have been dreadful/wonderful going to all those pop concerts.

For someone who attracted the pejorative nickname “Disco Di”, the princess I knew didn’t much like pop music. She went to precious few pop concerts and endured them with theatrical reluctance, however worthy the cause. That was because she knew that in reality it was her husband who was far more often to be found grinning self-consciously at a line-up of girl bands/boybands/ageing Gary Blokes. The fact was, she resented the teenybopper label as much as he enjoyed the philosopher-mystic tag. Both are equally misleading.

Over the years since her death I’ve occasionally re-experienced that resentment on her behalf as, innocently or maliciously, people have resurrected this demeaning image of a celeb-struck overgrown schoolgirl. I experience it whenever I see photographs of her husband with cultural giants from Baby Spice to Byoncé. And I experienced a particularly queasy twinge reading about the Albert Hall Fashion Rocks extravaganza last week.

Whoever chose the venue has a lovely sense of irony. Try to imagine Victoria’s genuinely high-minded Prince Consort looking down at the throng of assorted show-offs, sycophants and snorters. Try to imagine Charles explaining to him who the generously upholstered lady might be who shares the bobs and bows aimed in his direction. Try not to imagine Albert’s reaction as he overhears Camilla discussing her need for snazzy tights to enhance her rock-star image...

Digesting such drivel is a depressing business. Not because the charity behind it all is undeserving – of course it isn’t. And not because so much vapid extravagance is offensive. It’s how a lot of modern fundraising works, for better or worse.

What makes my heart sink is that we’ve been here before.

Such a rash of adulatory Camilla coverage is not mere coincidence. For somebody with a carefully-cultivated image as the comfortable countrywoman Mrs. PB operates a high-powered PR strategy, courtesy of Mark Bolland. It was he, as Charles’s Deputy Private secretary, who conceived and implemented the plan to put Camilla publicly at the Prince’s side. Later, in the clear out that also saw the Peat Inquiry into financial irregularities at St James’s Palace, he transferred his services to Camilla. So when we read the reverent accounts of how she “effortlessly stole the limelight from the celebrities” it’s not because we’re expected to believe it. It’s because there is a subliminal message being transmitted.
Those familiar with such subtlety will already have deciphered it. It goes something like this: I've earned my chance to play celebrities. I'm a mature and worldly consort to a man with a difficult job. And I am not content to stand aside while others try to exclude me from his life.

Those others principally feature Sir Michael Peat, formerly the Queen's energetic treasurer and a surprising candidate for the high-stakes job of guiding the heir's footsteps and guarding his back. As the Prince's private secretary, Peat is head of his much-abused support organisation. He is responsible for taking the blame for everything that goes wrong, just as he is responsible for making sure that the Prince gets the credit for anything that goes right. It is, you may imagine, one of the most difficult jobs in an institution that has seen its employees' enviability rating plummet in recent years.

Through the pages of tabloid newspapers and by the many other channels at her disposal, Camilla has let it be known that she regards this faithful royal servant as “the enemy”. She has even likened him to an item of sanitary ware - an interesting choice of insult as anyone who recalls the crudity of the Camillagate tapes may agree.

Only this week her sources tearfully revealed to a shocked world that rotten Sir Michael had tried to stop her going to the Albert Hall frockfest, on the grounds that she would distract press attention from the beneficiary, the Prince's Trust. The Prince himself had had to intervene to put the flunkey in his place. Camilla shall go to the Ball he said (eventually) and so she did.

Such is Charles's dependence on Mrs. Parker-Bowles that, at one time, every sinew of his organisation, every ounce of influence and every shred of royal dignity was subordinated to the task of getting her into his life. And now that she's finally made it the whole apparatus, instead of being dismantled, is being refuelled and rearmed to get her onto the throne.

This may come as a surprise to those who remember the original pretext for the contortions required to elevate Camilla from royal mistress to her current level of respectability. The impression was given that she just wanted to mop the royal brow and live quietly in the background. The star-crossed lovers were to be reunited in middle age... Nobody could carp at such a fragrant Mills and Boone conclusion to what had been a pretty blood-stained decade of anni horribili.

Yet here we are again, grubbing around in the kind of royal slurry that makes the heretical words British Republic sound like the best idea since Magna Carta. By slurry I specifically mean the corruption that comes from applying neo-political methods of news.
management (spin) to an institution that, if it has any purpose at all in the 21st century, exists to embody and sustain certain traditional principles.

These principles can be many things to many people – that’s one of the secrets of the Windsors’ longevity. Another is the irrepressible British desire to think the best of them in all circumstances, whatever low farce or high tragedy they attract. Naïve, surprising, deplorable even but undeniably true: there is no appetite for a republican movement even if our ruling family retreated to a rain swept grouse moor and refused to go near the Albert Hall ever again.

The reverse would happen. Loyal monarchists could ascribe every virtue in the book to the tweedy family who are seldom seen and pop cognoscenti could concentrate on the Bjorks and Blokes without Camilla’s teeth getting in the way.

One thing that offends even this easygoing tolerance of royal frailty is the possibility that complaisant subjects are being duped. Not the innocent duping of Ruritanian oddities such as the Queen’s Speech or the Royal Assent but the calculated manipulation of news to create a false public emotion.

As we have seen, the politicians are learning this the hard way. The reserved but trusting tolerance given to a leader who embarks on a necessary war is transformed in a blink to angry resentment if it’s suspected that he’s taken that trust under false pretences.

Obviously, nothing in Camilla’s promenade at the Fashion Rocks charity gala comes into the same universe as events in Iraq. However, they share this principle: people resent being spun to.

And while realistic opinion accepts that the task of achieving political goals sometimes benefits from well-orchestrated media briefings, the appeal of the monarchy is that it provides an innocent object for our affections at our less worldly moments.

In other words, if we’ve been spun to by people who receive (or worse, feel entitled to receive) our good-natured loyalty, they shouldn’t be surprised if we feel correspondingly resentful when they’re found out.

Camilla Parker-Bowles has a special responsibility here. She has not earned her position on our national podium. She owes it to good-natured British tolerance, not the universal acclaim of a besotted populace. That tolerance was given in generous quantities for reasons that certainly included a desire to heal recent wounds and give Charles the prospect of a happier domestic life. Less elevated reasons might have included a desire to fill newspapers and show how broadminded we are in a society so plagued by divorce.
None of these form a sound basis for a safe accession. The destructive demons that cursed royalty in the eighties and nineties are stirring again. Conflicting interests are filling a power vacuum with opportunistic posturing. Is anybody in charge?

My experience on the front line in the War of the Waleses – that traumatic period as the Fairy-tale Marriage tore itself apart - was that much unhappiness could have been avoided with better management. Specifically, the active intervention of powerful people early enough to do some good. Lofty ostrichism has been a successful Buckingham Palace tactic in the past... but not always.

There are even more relevant warnings from the past of what can go wrong if good people do too little for too long. Trust an expert to identify the root of a problem. The grandest of the Edwardian courtesans, Alice Keppel, knew a thing or two about mistresses who aim too high. Her great granddaughter currently lives with the Prince of Wales.

Asked her opinion on the shambles of the 1936 abdication crisis the old lady acidly replied: “Things were managed better in my day.”

Quite.
Imagine you are Prince Charles. This will be easier if you have ever been the subject of sustained hostile media coverage but even if you haven't it's still worth the effort for a moment or two. A glance at some of the papers might give you a hint as to how you are feeling. Then again, it might not...

Accused by your dead ex-wife of plotting to have her killed do you feel “disappointed” and “frustrated” (Daily Telegraph) or “haunted and haggard” (Daily Express)? Are you “glad” that the coroner’s inquest will finally “knock down” such conspiracy theories (Daily Telegraph) or do you dread it as a “shattering indignity” (Daily Express)?

Confused? Then why not turn to a Charles expert, Jonathan Dimbleby, for the decisive verdict. Reassuringly he pronounces that Charles is “pretty strong.” Phew. But wait, there’s more... The Prince is also, according to his biographer, “vulnerable.” Amazing.

In other words, surprise, nobody knows. But it’s a fair bet the Prince and his loved ones are not sitting trembling behind closed doors at Highgrove this weekend fearfully awaiting the arrival of Mr. Burgess’s interrogators. Perhaps the Prince may have to provide a statement but that hardly amounts to shattering indignity. Even the possibility of an appearance in the witness box is but a distant prospect. Meanwhile, life will continue its agreeable routine because, over many years, Charles has evolved an effective mechanism for coping with distasteful news.

Thanks to layers of officials most of the stuff is well filtered before it reaches him. Time spent lamenting over newspapers – hysterical or otherwise – is time that could be better spent in the garden. And what is another tabloid sensation when your part in life’s great mystery is set for years to come? Even friends will hesitate to speak their minds – “’must’ is not a word you use to princes” was a warning not reserved for Tudors, as many of Charles’s ex-advisors know to their cost.

Anyway, it’s too late for advice, however oleaginously coated. The Coroner’s Inquest into his late wife’s violent death is now an inexorable legal process. Any who witnessed, as I did, its impressively dignified opening last week will have been struck by the understated authority with which Mr. Burgess intends to pursue the truth “fully, fairly and fearlessly.”

Such a clearly stated objective strikes a welcome but unfamiliar chord. How nice to hear a public official say such a thing to the world’s media and still leave you feeling he means it.
It's equally nice – and equally unfamiliar – to hear such a sentiment in the context of the British Royal Family.

So when we hear – via a source, naturally – that Prince Charles officially welcomes the Inquest we can at least partially believe it. Never mind the awkward reality that thanks to a culture of fretful spin our foremost national institution has become a playground for conspiracy theorists. Never mind the fact that Charles has done everything he can to erase his wife's memory, often by suggesting that to do otherwise offends a respect he clearly doesn't feel. Never mind that he pursued a policy of systematic deception to promote public acquiescence to his mistress. Never mind the less than exhaustive pursuit of truth in the little matters of official gifts, bullying and rape allegations in his household or the collapse of the Burrell trial.

Never mind any of that because here at last is a process that is immune to Royal infection. The Coroner's duty to the Crown is synonymous with his duty to the truth. What a relief. Mr. Burgess, we can be sure, is not going to get all confused into thinking that an oath of loyalty to the crown is the same thing as blind loyalty to members of the royal family. He is not angling for a royal tradesman's warrant, a place next to a duke at a charity auction, an Ascot Enclosure ticket or a tour of the Highgrove Garden. If he doesn't get a picture of William and Harry for his Christmas card he won't wonder what he's done wrong.

The thought of such a phenomenon on your case is enough to make anyone feel vulnerable, so perhaps Mr. Dimbleby was right. Of course you welcome it, like you welcome a visit to the dentist. Try offering a royal warrant to tooth decay.

Perhaps, unconsciously, that was also in the mind of the loyal bystander during Charles's visit to Hereford last week who shouted out to Charles “the country is behind you.”

If the shout was an expression of unquestioning devotion on behalf of the United Kingdom, he was probably wrong. If it was an expression of sympathy for a plucky underdog, I'm afraid he was probably wrong again. But if he meant that the country generally supports the principles which Charles's fancy titles are supposed to represent (Dieu et mon Droit and all that) then he was probably correct.

The trouble for Charles – and what may indeed be making him look more than usually thoughtful – is that right now the country probably thinks Mr. Burgess embodies those principles even more than he does. There will be plenty of time to consider the implications. This visit to the dentist is going to last well into next year.
But chin up. When the Coroner finally puts away his drill sometime in 2005 and invites us to “rinse please” we may find that his Inquest has done Charles a favour. Provided he emerges unscathed, his claim to the entitlements of royalty – and the crown itself in due course – will have had a much-needed polish. That should put a smile on lots of faces. Especially in Hereford.
Love is in the air and I'm as romantic as the next chap. I'd like to believe – to quote a dozen dewy eyed tabloid columnists – that love conquers all. It's just that, as a Diana man, my happiness for Charles and Camilla is tempered by the thought that most conquering inflicts collateral damage...and theirs has been no exception.

I know that I should rejoice that two middle aged people have been able at last to celebrate their love in public - heck, I'm remarried myself. I know that the Queen has given their union her blessing. And I also know that, as a Royal Highness, Camilla will be entitled to have me bow to her... in the unlikely event that I find myself in her presence.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm no republican. Bowing to royalty always came easy to me. For eight years my working day began and ended with a bow. It was a relaxed, instinctive acknowledgement of the way royalty is different from us mere subjects. It was a reassuring reminder that the world was still an orderly place, that rules and traditions governed our archaic head of state apparatus. I suppose it symbolised the fact that royalty represented principles that commanded my respect and allegiance. I happily gave both.

At least I did, until I was forced to ask myself – sometime in the early 1990's – whether loyalty to my boss the Princess of Wales was still compatible with my prior loyalty to the crown. It was a pretty tortured question. I knew Diana was no saint. I knew that she was disingenuous in trying to place all the blame for her marriage difficulties on Charles. But I also knew that she had been shabbily treated. Though she could be defiant, she was no rebel either. If the patience could have been found (and granted, that was asking a lot of her in-laws), with the right words of encouragement she could very well have been the glamorous, compassionate future of the monarchy. Instead she is dead and, as the Charles camp is currently rather quick to remind us, in circumstances that do little credit to her memory.

Loyalty is sometimes a matter of instinct. In my guts I felt that if modern constitutional monarchy stood for anything it stood on the side of the weak against the strong, for the victim not the oppressor, for idealism against heartless expediency. In each category I felt that Diana, for all her faults and self-inflicted problems, was the more innocent party. I was reassured by the knowledge that, by repeated small signs, the Queen thought so too.

So I decided, all those years ago, that loyalty to Diana was compatible with loyalty to the Crown. I still think so today, despite current assertions that Charles and Camilla's newly
respectable status will enable everyone to “move on” – preferably taking with us the belief that Diana was but a momentary aberration in the serene history of our ruling family.

Perhaps the clinching evidence in my internal loyalty debate was the Camillagate tape. Not its unsettling brand of intimacy - each to his (or her) own, as they say and anyway, what do you expect if you listen to other people's private conversations. No, what chilled me was the evidence of a coolly efficient romantic subterfuge which was clearly the result of long practice. I compared it with Diana's chaotic emotional life, her vain quest for the love she needed, the sheer futile naivety of her attempts to repay her husband in his own coin. There is a remorseless, panic-inducing quality about all-conquering love – especially if you happen to be standing in its path, as Diana knew she was.

Whatever desperate measures she later felt driven to, nobody can doubt her impressionable vulnerability when, at nineteen, she was entrusted to the royal family's safekeeping. Perhaps she wasn't cynically sacrificed to Charles's pressing need for a virgin bride, though it's a debatable point. What's beyond debate is that Charles – and Camilla – were older, more worldly-wise and in the event just ruthlessly better organised than her. For me that made Diana, in the words of a contemporary media review, “more squished against than squidging.” And by my understanding of monarchy's principles, it also made her all the more entitled to my support.

That support grew in conviction as I watched Diana find the strength to build a moral ascendancy over the competition. Constant exposure to real suffering through her expanding charity work lent her a depth that her rival has never seemed quite to match. “That Rottweiler!” Diana used to spit when referring to the Prince's mistress – but by the last years of her life she had outgrown such impotent abuse. “My husband needs his lady friend and that's all there is to it” she would say with a shrug of acceptance that could wring your heart. And then, with increasing good nature, she would speculate aloud about Charles's tortuous romantic intentions – a pastime she guessed she shared with the “third person” in her marriage.

Leaving aside the emotional appeal of casting in my lot with the beleaguered princess, I also recognized that the fairy-tale marriage – however misshapen it had become – was still the cornerstone of the Windsors' future. The monarchy is an institution addicted to the concept of duty, even if sometimes a little inconsistent about its application. But there should have been no difficulty in recognising that it was everybody's duty to make that marriage work. Among other things, that meant married former girlfriends should keep well clear, however plangently they might be entreated to return to soothe the troubled princely brow.
I remember being told at the time that Camilla’s secret return to the Prince’s side (and, inevitably, his bed too) was engineered by friends concerned for Charles’s equilibrium. What could be more loyal than that, was the implication.

What indeed. Those loyal friends’ handiwork is clearly linked by an uninterrupted chain of consequences to the forthcoming happy nuptials. These too, by rather more than implication, are now to command our loyalty. But how much better if those same loyal friends had spent their energy on supporting Charles and Diana as they dutifully stuck with their marriage through its inevitable ordeals, rather along the lines suggested by the Archbishop of Canterbury that long-ago day in St Paul’s Cathedral.

But enough of that. Why rake over the painful past? We have a modern Archbishop of Canterbury to squash any awkward religious scruples. And look, we have a lovely new royal toy to play with (for how else can you describe the prospect of a Princess Consort). For goodness’ sake let’s move on...

An ability to move on is of course one of our constitution’s great strengths. April’s marriage is in many ways just a typically pragmatic royal solution to a typically avoidable royal pickle. It’s a sign of monarchy’s strength, we are told, to accommodate inevitable human frailties while at the same time reminding us of the wholesome principles it exists to uphold. Obviously the current circumstances require a different set of principles from Charles’s first marriage. Then it was about forsaking all others, plighting troths and what the bride will wear. This time it’s all about forgiveness, fresh starts and... what the bride will wear. It’s rather reassuring really.

Not reassured? Me neither. In bad moments it just reminds me that Hanoverian-style obduracy still wins in the end, cheered on by sentimental subjects for whom patriotism means buying a commemorative wedding mug. In fact, in very bad moments it seems to be teaching us that adultery plus ambition multiplied by a slick PR campaign equals promotion to the first rank of royalty.

Of course I resist such thoughts. I try to agree with Jonathan Dimbleby when he assures me in Friday’s Guardian that “for once, we can all rejoice, unequivocally.” How I envy him his lack of equivocation. How desperately Clarence House must be hoping he’s right.

I remember the day during the annum horribilis of 1992 when we made the fateful announcement that Charles and Diana were to separate. Now, as then, I’m sure the men in suits will have laboured hard and long to negotiate and draft the words, to anticipate all possible questions and concoct a bucketful of soothing answers. Now, as then, they will have toiled over titles, protocol, finances and – theirs being a classic bureaucracy - access to
the office photocopier. They will have put aside any private doubts, focused on the task in hand and, for all I know, comforted themselves with thoughts of the next Honours List and an early escape to the private sector. In the end, however, they, like we, will have done all that they can. It only remains to brief an attentive press conference, nervously monitor the news bulletins...and wait.

In a sense, the waiting will never be over. First signs are that, predictably, the marriage has reawakened painful memories. Many people have returned to polarised positions in the Di camp (“How could he?”) and the Charles camp (“Ahhh, love conquers all”). Many more have just turned away from the whole performance through a combination of boredom, disillusion and embarrassment. That’s not Charles and Camilla’s fault, or at least certainly not theirs alone. It’s the inevitable consequence of the recent suspicion that royalty counts principles as expendable as princesses. That’s why, when the underlings – in the shape of a Parliamentary Accounts Committee – poke their noses into your bulging coffers or – in the shape of vulgar newspapers - make cruel capital out of your choice of fancy dress it’s jolly handy to have a royal wedding to pull out of the hat.

But royalty is not just about entertainment and it has long since divested itself of the magic in which we used to disguise it. At its best it is about service – remember ich dien? It’s a two-way contract between a happily deferential kingdom and a modest, dutiful head of state in whom its people can take quiet pride. Under Elizabeth II – as under her father and grandfather – that contract enabled the monarchy to amass vital reserves of respect.

Those reserves are already dangerously depleted, replaced by a toxic royal mixture of self-promotion, self-indulgence and self-preservation. Not surprisingly, pride in our royal arrangements - quiet or otherwise – has been declining for quite some time. Monarchists, especially thinking monarchists, will anxiously be waiting to see if our new First Lady-in-waiting has the inclination or the ability to reverse the trend. Her suddenly numerous advocates assure us that she has. But for the time being, HRH or no HRH, Camilla may find quite a few of the bows and curtsies are delivered with a certain watchfulness... if at all.
It’s tempting to find a juicy conspiracy theory behind the Queen’s announcement that she won’t be going to her son’s second marriage ceremony. It’s a poisonous legal stew, say the lawyers, salivating. The constitutional implications are severe, say the doom watchers happily. It’s a snub, say the newspapers. No, she’s just respecting Charles’s brilliant decision to make it a low-key ceremony, say Clarence House. Pull the other one, say the rest of us. But having run Diana’s household throughout the War of the Waleses, I’m certain of one thing: the culprit is much more likely to be cock-up than conspiracy.

Not that that makes the current mess any more palatable. We’re talking about our national showroom here and whatever the Queen’s real reasons (which we will never know), Charles and Camilla’s wedding is becoming a national embarrassment. Nor can they – or we – just blame the stuffy courtiers: this is what happens when self-indulgent royal lovebirds hijack the stately old bus of British constitutional monarchy and head off into uncharted territory: the wheels fall off.

Who’s going to come to the rescue? In times of crisis, royal advisors look to Downing Street for help – as they should. But I doubt if the New Labour breakdown truck is in any real hurry to get to the scene. Especially if there are more little mishaps in store (and with six weeks to go, it’s a brave mechanic who says there won’t be).

How did it happen? Well perhaps the love bus didn’t heed a signpost from history.

“Things were better managed in my day.” So said Camilla’s great grandmother Alice Keppel about the last time a Prince of Wales married his mistress. That was the Abdication crisis of 1936 and granny Alice knew what she was talking about – she had been the chief mistress to Edward VII. Although King Teddy took his pleasures seriously, he also took good care to treat his Queen – the saintly Alexandra - with the respect she deserved. Charles found that bit of the mistress game too difficult, as Diana found to her cost. But Alice was right: keeping hold of your mistress and your reputation was really just a matter of good management.

Fast forward to 2005 and good management still seems in short supply. Reputations aren’t doing too well either. Regularising his “non-negotiable” relationship with Camilla was supposed to be the crowning achievement of Charles’s post-Diana spin campaign. The future could still be happy-ever-after and HRH the Duchess of Cornwall at least sounds royal, especially when it’s included in the Church’s weekly prayers.
But after a promising start the wedding bus now looks like something rejected by Scrapheap Challenge. No wonder the Queen decided not to be taken for a ride. If and when the heavy lifters get the thing back on the road Her Majesty will be found waiting at the church – or at least St George's Chapel – ready to welcome the survivors with a touch of real royalty and a suitably modest reception. That's worth a loyal cheer.
Can anybody answer this puzzle? Prince Charles has associated himself with the preservation of dozens of national treasures – everything from Salisbury Cathedral to dry stone walls via the Prayer Book and roast beef. Wherever something venerable and valuable is under threat, chances are a letter appealing for help will find its way to Prince Charles’s office. And, surprisingly often, help will be forthcoming. A note to a minister, an offer of patronage, even a cash donation – the prince instinctively reacts to protect our heritage.

Yet in his single-minded pursuit of Camilla Parker Bowles he has taken a wrecking ball to the most precious treasure of all – the British people’s belief in their monarchy. Amongst a skip-load of worrying polls charting attitudes to the impending royal wedding, clearly the worst is the one that shows a full two thirds of those questioned believe the wedding will damage the crown.

That’s leaving aside the damage being inflicted on the Church of England, the Commonwealth or the causes to which the prince has given his name.

It’s ironic that Charles has devoted so much energy and credibility to causes that are not strictly central to his role – grey goo or climate change come to mind – yet seems prepared to sabotage the one issue that could be described as his real job: protecting and preserving our constitution.

You hope he’s taken a long cool look at the risks and decided that the pain will be worth it, that some greater good will be served. You really hope that it’s not just a heedless grab for what he wants and damn the consequences. Yet that is increasingly what it seems.

Why has he done it? Why does our next head of state seem to care so little that his romantic requirements have made us an international laughing stock?

Perhaps it’s love. “Whatever love is” as he notoriously philosophised to the apprehensive Diana Spencer during their engagement broadcast. This time, it seems, he’s worked out his definition of love and whatever it is it describes his feelings for Mrs. Parker-Bowles.

Perhaps it’s the romance of spring, perhaps it’s the wisdom of increased maturity or the clarity of hindsight but whatever the formula, this time it’s the Real Thing. And who, in a
country where a third of all marriages now end in divorce, would begrudge him his chance of long-postponed domestic contentment?

I heard another, less sentimental, definition of love during a visit with Diana to one of her favourite charities, Relate the National Marriage Guidance Council. Not surprisingly, the princess felt she had some personal experience of the charity’s line of work.

“So what is love?” she asked the counsellor, characteristically cutting to the chase. To her credit, the counsellor didn’t hesitate: “Well, it may not sound very romantic but the working definition I use is that love is the ability of a couple to meet each other’s needs.”

This was around the publication of the devastating Camillagate tapes and it occurred to me that Diana was, not for the first time, analysing her husband’s need for Mrs. Parker-Bowles. It’s a conundrum that many have pondered since. Without revisiting the seamier elements of the tape, it was reasonable to conclude that Charles’s requirements were pretty specific and that Camilla fulfilled enough of them to justify her “non-negotiable” status.

The same irreplacability can be found in the Prince’s determination to hang on to the services of his former valet Michael Fawcett – despite the risks this poses for the reputation of his household.

Such irreplacability is probably due to Camilla’s willingness to share Charles’s view of his life as a barely tolerable burden – and to cast herself in the role of unwavering sympathiser. What she gets in return is surely not limited to the bumper box of material goodies that comes with being the prince’s lover. We can assume that most of Camilla’s other needs are being met as well. In short, the arrangement looks like as good a definition of love as you could wish for.

Unfortunately, it’s also a precise definition of what constitutes the work of a good royal mistress. In all the years of their secret affair, when Diana and Andrew Parker-Bowles were dupes to be thrillingly outsmarted, Charles and Camilla played out the age-old game of the prince and the courtesan.

But the game had one unbreakable rule: As the historian --Donaldson said of the Edward VIII’s abdication in 1936:

“Throughout history, the favourite of the king has been regarded as an honourable position and only few women have dared to look beyond it.”

The last lady to take the dare was Wallis Simpson in 1936. Then, led by the Prime Minister, public opinion decided that was a dare too far. Edward VIII’s response – to go with dignity into exile with the woman he loved – was the tragic but principled reaction of a man who
knew that his ultimate duty was not to his own convenience but to the people he had aspired to lead.

Seventy years on, many of the key factors are the same. A divorcee has set her sights on a future king and seems set to score a bullseye. The watching public are split between disapproval, indifference and mild acquiescence. But this time – mercifully – the Prince of Wales at the centre of the storm has not yet inherited the throne. And the Prime Minister has other things on his plate, even if he cared sufficiently to intervene.

So Charles will be spared anything more tiresome than a bad press (which he won’t read anyway). There will be no riots at the Windsor Guildhall for the foreign media to film and no dignified exile for him. Instead he can happily collect his reward for a skillful campaign of adultery and public deception – confidently relying on the special blend of indifference and goodwill that British people generally show their royal family.

But he would be wrong to think his reward comes at no cost. For Charles to have his cake and eat it there is a hefty bill and it will be paid by everybody who was brought up to admire the example set by Elizabeth II.

Of course nobody has the right to judge whether Charles and Camilla are entitled to a happy ever after. On a personal level they deserve that as much – or as little – as anybody else.

But, having dismissed the option of retiring to a life of comfortable married obscurity and having rejected the option of a morganatic marriage, Charles and Camilla have opted for the highest possible profile – as King and Queen (or something) in waiting. That being the case, we’re entitled to take a pretty searching look at the consequences for the monarchy.

It’s an institution which nowadays exists not just to attract tourist dollars but also to act as a unifying symbol and a reminder of some important principles – duty, honour and sacrifice are perhaps the easiest to recall. And they are easy to recall because our present queen and her father are rightly seen as embodying them in spades.

Has Charles lived up to those principles in a way that might win sympathetic tolerance for his high-risk domestic plans? His supporters certainly have a point when they say he is committed to his duty, unless that is you think it might have been his foremost duty to do rather more to spare us the royal crises of the past twenty years.

The Prince’s own publicity machine spouts statistics of his busy life at the touch of an internet button. The Prince’s Trust is rightly Exhibit A in the defence case although, as with
most royal charity heroism, the wise patron makes light of his or her own modest contribution.

But sadly, no amount of window dressing hides the central, unmentionable fact. Even if Charles's thoughts on organic biscuits or high-rise architecture strike a popular chord, they are little consolation for his failure to follow up on the 1981 St Paul's Wedding vows.

Of course, Diana - even as the younger and more naïve partner - shared the responsibility for that wedding. And, as I should know, she could be difficult. But any objective test of her public work testifies that she would have made a terrific queen. She could be defiant when she felt unjustly treated but she would have repaid patience, kindness and guidance with a lifetime of service to her country.

She was no demented rebel, whatever Charles's so-called supporters shamefully try to pretend. In what is presumably a misguided attempt to polish Charles and Camilla's relationship, the approaching wedding has seen some in the prince's camp re-cycle slurs on Diana's reputation.

You might have expected that Charles would see it as his duty publicly to denounce the "friends" who have leaked private correspondence from which we conveniently learn that he was the helpless victim of a deranged wife. You might have thought it was his duty to block an authorised biographer's attempts to portray his wife as mentally ill. You would be wrong on both counts.

Come to think of it, did Camilla, a married woman, think it was her duty to patronise, undermine and ultimately usurp the Princess of Wales? If she did then it's a strange qualification for being promoted to second highest woman in the land. And if instead she was blinded by love – or ambition – then that's not exactly gracious either.

It unhappily confirms a theory that is widely held about the Prince of Wales: that anything he does can be sanctified in the name of duty. In that way he exploits the blind devotion of those who see no distinction between loyalty to the man and loyalty to the office from which he draws his power and privileges. It may be disloyal to Charles the man to criticise his affair with Mrs. Parker-Bowles... but it is emphatically no disloyalty to the crown.

So much for duty. Honour requires rather less space. As I know to my cost, there is no honour in adultery, however hard you try to dress it up. Charles has employed an expensive set of image managers to deodorise his relationship with Mrs. PB – the wife, incidentally, of a brother officer. For his money he got a campaign of political-style spin that has permanently devalued his standing with the media. I hope the Duchy of Cornwall's auditors think it was money well spent.
Which brings us conveniently to sacrifice. In return for lives of truly royal privilege the British in modern times have expected their royal family to endure a tactful amount of sacrifice. Edward VIII sacrificed the throne for the woman he loved. The Queen Mother sacrificed her family's safety by staying in London during the blitz. The Queen herself, at an early age, publicly sacrificed her life to the service of her people.

Even Diana is widely seen to have been sacrificed on the altar of the Windsors' dynastic convenience.

The prince's sacrifices, by contrast, are less visible. The impression of a man expensively cosseted from the trials of normal life is no illusion. Quite right too, you might say. His life has trials enough of its own and anyway, we like to think of our royal princes living like, well, royal princes.

But that being the case we equally don't like to hear them complaining and unfortunately Charles has made himself practically synonymous with complaint.

With marriage to Camilla, Charles will lose credit for the only real sacrifice he might have claimed – that of denying himself the love of his chosen woman. You can almost hear the debate in Buckingham Palace: “If Charles gets to marry Camilla, will he finally be satisfied?”

And there the question rests. Is it going to be “all's well that ends well” … or are we on the threshold of a new era of royal ructions as Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cornwall explores the possibilities of her exciting new world?

If the idea of Camilla waving regally at you from the balcony of Buckingham Palace doesn't feel quite right then I suspect that you're not alone. The assurance that she “intends to” be a mere Princess Consort just looks like playing with words. A clear statement that she will not take the title of queen would be a good start. If that takes new legislation then better debate it now, not in the feverish aftermath of the sovereign's death.

One final virtue is worth mentioning. It's often said that it takes a big man to say sorry. There has been talk of Prince Charles saying sorry to Andrew Parker-Bowles and for all I know that's already happened. But the general rule is that royalty doesn't apologise. For anything. If we want to keep this archaic system for choosing our head of state we must accept that being royal means never having to say you're sorry. A bit like love, really.

Which is just as well for Prince Charles, because his apology list might be a long one. It might include anyone who thought the future of the monarchy – and Diana Spencer – were safe in his hands. It would surely include his parents, whose example of duty once again stands as a beacon for others to follow.
One person who perhaps deserves an apology more than anybody sadly isn’t available, even if her husband got around to making it. So where would Diana be on 8th April – tethered with the other former girlfriends and husband in St George’s Chapel... having the mother of all lunch parties in her favourite London restaurant... or looking cool and compassionate in an African minefield...? We can speculate. But one thing is for sure: in one form or another, she won’t be far away.
"I hope you're not going to be horrid about poor Prince Charles," said my friend the priest when she heard that I might be asked to write about the troubled royal wedding. I assured her that wasn't my intention, resisting the temptation to tell her that the Prince does a pretty convincing horrid himself when it suits him – as I know to my cost.

Diana knew it too. Once, on tour, I witnessed the effect on her of a princely rebuke. It was in public, deftly delivered so that ostensibly only she heard. Her "work" face didn't alter, but she couldn't suppress a flush of hurt embarrassment. She'd been doing her best, I thought, and the slight was as unfair as it was calculated. Later Diana laughed it off. "I just have to remember," she said, "really I've got three children!" Luckily such signs of the royal mean streak were rare but the experience was instructive: Charles is not a man to cross.

As the Prince's faltering progress to his next wedding enters the home straight, it's a good time to remember that for the royal family, human weakness sits unhappily alongside an archaic assumption of royal superiority. There's a frailty here that they share with us common folk, especially in the tortuous business of relationships. In the words of the American playwright Clare Boothe Luce: "A man has only one escape from his old self: to see a different self in the mirror of some woman's eyes." If ever a man needed an escape it was Charles in the shadow of Diana's obstinate popularity. And if he found it in the eyes of the woman who shared his complicity in the Diana tragedy we shouldn't be surprised.

The dilemma must be familiar to many monarchists. Self-righteous feelings about what is appropriate behaviour in our future king and his queen-figure soon come into conflict with the simple human impulse to allow others their chance of happiness. In the words of Tom Uttley in Thursday's Daily Telegraph, rather than making smart comments about Camilla and the constitution perhaps we should all instead be whipping up "a frenzy of public goodwill" for the happy couple.

Nice idea. But it may be asking rather a lot except, perhaps, in a few comfortable addresses in Gloucestershire and London. The wedding dedication will be attended by a greater percentage of the nation's well-wishers than is traditional – or healthy – for a royal celebration. Nevertheless, we are usually prepared to be benignly indulgent to our royal family, even when they come up with new and challenging ways to test our devotion. It's a fair assumption that eventually we will resign ourselves to whatever titles, costumes, cars and palaces the Mark 2 Walese choose for themselves. So don't expect riots outside
Windsor Guildhall: everybody loves a wedding, as Charles's advisors seem coolly to have calculated.

With this in mind, I try to emulate my clerical friend's charitable attitude. But when I take a read-out on my reserves of goodwill for Charles and Camilla, the result couldn't honestly be called a frenzy. Even when I follow the more popular option of not giving a toss, something still nags me. Indifference to royal matters in general and That Wedding in particular may be fashionable but in my experience that's just a veneer. People still care about our national shop window, sometimes passionately. And it doesn't take a professor of constitutional law to know that a viable monarchy depends on its subjects for more than their willingness to shrug their shoulders and look the other way.

Moreover, it's an awkward fact that our future king has sometimes been less than statesmanlike in the methods chosen to pursue his "non-negotiable" objectives. His weakness for the magic manure of political-style spin has long since poisoned the ground in which he hoped to grow acceptance of Camilla as queen. It's a poison that still infects his relationship with the public – and Camilla's too. Her much vaunted aversion to the limelight has not prevented her from indulging in some DIY news management of her own. Next time you read a royal "exclusive", take a guess at who's doing the secret briefing. It's not all made up by the tabloids, you know.

It's hard not to point out in passing that it needn't have been like this. In the past, Charles had the difficult but workable option of an arrangement with Diana to preserve his first marriage. We will rue that missed opportunity for generations. But even now, Charles has rejected an opportunity to choose a less contentious path. He could have made his marriage to Mrs Parker Bowles morganatic. It might have been constitutionally innovative but he does enjoy his reputation as a radical. It would have taken the venom out of speculation about "Queen Camilla", albeit with the loss of the bowing and scraping Her future Majesty would be due (except that she claims she doesn't want it anyway). Crucially, it would also have won over many who retain an affection for his first wife.

Instead, the Queen Camilla issue will linger as unfinished business. Once the wedding euphoria has evaporated – say, on April 9 – people will remember uneasily that Charles's mother is entering her ninth decade. That thought should concentrate the minds of those who talk airily of postponing decisions on Camilla's exact future status.

Only a fool will ignore the reality that the former Mrs PB must become queen (or something) in the instant it takes her husband to become king. Just because that possibility may not arise – please God – for years doesn't diminish the huge symbolic power at stake in the choice of her title. Ducking that decision just perpetuates the doubts over Camilla's
status that the wedding was supposed to settle. And before you protest "but she doesn't want to be queen!" you might ask yourself who told you that – and whether you believe them. While you're at it, consider this: in the past 30 years, how many of Charles's spokesmen have actually known – let alone spoken – the truth about Mrs Parker Bowles?

Now try this for size. We must embrace the idea of the new Duchess of Cornwall (Camilla) taking the place in national prayers from which the previous Duchess (Diana) was prematurely, even heartlessly, erased. If you find it hard to say the words of Mrs Parker Bowles's new title with the loyal conviction they should command, then you are not alone.

That doesn't necessarily make you a die-hard Di fan. It just means that the manipulation of goodwill has left you feeling uncomfortable about the royal future. Here and around the Commonwealth, the imposition of Camilla on an indifferent or unwilling public will convince many waverers that nothing in the Windsor wardrobe really fits any more.

With all respect to my clerical friend, mentioning that dangerous possibility isn't being horrid. Nor – with equal respect to Tom Uttley – is it spiteful. Still less is it treachery. It's intended to be a small slice of unwelcome reality – the type of thing royal advisors are supposed to serve up to their employers every day in return for their courtly lifestyle.

Failure to deliver or heed that kind of message just stores up more trouble. Look and you will see the damage in the wedge the marriage seems to have driven between the Queen and her heir. You can smell it in the fashionable contempt for what should be the focus of our national aspirations and unity. You can feel it in the betrayal of loyal subjects, raised with the example of Elizabeth II, now finding traditional royal virtues brought low.

Let's hope the Prince and Duchess's chums feel it too, even as they work up a bit of a frenzy. Until a visit by Camilla attracts a respectable crowd onto the wintry streets of a provincial city, it might be wise of them to keep the champagne on ice.
The wedding of Prince Charles and Mrs. Parker-Bowles is less than a week away...

‘God Bless the Prince of Wales . . .’ began the headline in the Australian newspaper. I was in Melbourne during Prince Charles's recent visit (his first in over a decade) and the local media’s coverage was sparse but, on the whole, polite. Calling for blessings on the Prince is not much in fashion here at the moment. Calling for blessings on his marriage to Camilla Parker Bowles even less so.

Some commentators, such as Simon Heffer in this week’s Spectator magazine, have suggested that the Great British Public is just too stupid to recognise just what good news Her Future Majesty really is (in refreshing contrast, writes Master Heffer, to her “jumped-up prima donna” of a predecessor). But this attempt to recruit new friends for Camilla by being rude about the late Princess of Wales reveals confused thinking among some self-appointed supporters of the Prince of Wales.

The Royal Family has always been an amplifier for public emotion. Think of the celebrations at the time of the Prince’s last marriage. Think of the mourning for the Queen Mother. And let's not forget the national sense of loss when Diana died. Such public displays of emotion may not be to everyone’s taste, but that doesn’t make it clever, let alone wise, to mock the people who express them.

I can’t summon up much enthusiasm for Mrs. Parker Bowles but, like many who can, I come from a generation that was brought up instinctively to respect all things royal. In our childish hearts we even came to feel that the Royal Family was practically an extension of our own – like grand but familiar cousins. Television documentaries such as the now notorious Royal Family of 1969 deliberately fostered that sense of togetherness. So it was as members of the same national family that we enthusiastically took up the royal invitation to welcome Diana Spencer as our newest special cousin (or daughter or sister).

Despite all that has passed in the intervening years, many of us see no reason to reverse that welcome, however incomprehensible this may be to some of Charles’s cheerleaders, or inconvenient for the new Mr. and Mrs. Wales. This doesn’t make us disloyal to the crown. It just means that, as in many divorced families, we take sides, often following our most elementary sense of who was the more innocent party.

Such bickering over who’s guilty and who’s innocent, who’s to blame and who just needs to grow up for God’s sake, is inevitable. Piquantly, it is Charles’s supporters who point out our good fortune in having a much-divorced Royal Family to represent accurately our divorce-
prone kingdom. It's something we should grow up and accept, they say. But all this is just a
distraction from the only legitimate area of public concern about this latest royal wedding.

The Camilla fans are quite entitled to discard much criticism of the marriage as ill-informed,
and probably impertinent too. (No one has the right to judge Charles and Camilla's
entitlement to happiness – certainly not from any position outside their closest family
circle.) But the core of the criticism lies in legitimate constitutional concern. And if they
listen carefully they might detect something more than Neanderthal mob hostility in
popular attitudes to That Wedding.

Understanding the “mob”, by whatever name you call it, has always been an essential skill
for any royal dynasty that cared about its survival. It was the threat of the mob that
convinced George V to deny his cousin, the Tsar, safe haven in 1917. It was the mob who
cheered George VI and the Queen Mother when they visited the blitzed East End. And it
was the mob who cheered and later wept for Diana.

The great Victorian constitutional authority, Walter Bagehot, recognized the mob as a key
partner in the contract between monarch and subject: “A constitutional monarchy has . . . a
comprehensible element for the vacant many, as well as complex laws and notions for the
enquiring few . . .” Bagehot’s “vacant many” think with their emotions first – and their
emotions about the imminent imposition of their new Princess of
Wales/Queen/Consort/Whatever are decidedly mixed. Under Bagehot’s formula, the
monarchy's “comprehensible element” is its role as the focus of national unity and values.
In the 21st century the monarchy still exists because we still think it does a better job of
providing that “comprehensible element” than a republic would.

So what use is Bagehot in helping us to understand the momentous constitutional events
we are now witnessing?

The latest opinion polls tell us that a majority of the Vacant Many think that the wedding is
damaging to the monarchy. Furthermore, the prospect of Queen Camilla (the inevitable
consequence of the law as it stands) produces a mob response just a paving-slab short of
 tumbrils and the Bastille.

The machinery required to get a royal divorcee through a royal re-marriage – though
beyond Bagehot's scope and probably his imagination too – serves as a pretty good
example of his “complex laws and notions.” But it's not all about machinery. This is, after
all, the most human of issues. It's about a man and a woman doing what comes naturally
and trying to make that okay with the rest of us.
Luckily, the Victorian constitutionalist was able to put things on a human scale: “So long as the human heart is strong and the human reason weak,” writes Bagehot, “royalty will be strong . . .” The Vacant Many, guided by their emotions, are predictably going to let their hearts rule their heads. In fact, their strong hearts have arguably been the saviour of our country and its archaic constitution more often than our politicians’ sporadic attempts to use human reason. Perhaps it’s in deference to her people’s hearts that the Queen will not be in Windsor Guildhall for the civil administrative procedure required to plight Charles’s latest troth. She has opted to wait up at the castle, ready with hymns and a nice cup of tea to give her qualified approval to the registrar’s work.

Meanwhile Bagehot’s “enquiring few” – the metropolitan sophisticates and their unlikely chums from the hunting field – will squeeze into the Guildhall to enjoy the triumph of reason over mass emotion. But they should beware an uncomfortable lesson from history. Reason was always the republican’s friend, not the monarchist’s. Just ask Louis XVI. It may be reasonable of the Prince to marry his mistress. It may be irrational to raise even a cheep of dissent. But winning hearts is still the toughest part of the marriage campaign.

Of course it’s possible that we will all wake up on April 9 ready to sing “God Bless the Duchess of Cornwall.” A happy Prince of Wales, surely, is good for the monarchy, and it must be better to have Camilla out there on the Palace balcony rather than skulking in darkest Gloucestershire. So let the Royal Train be made ready and the Queen’s Flight jets revved up. Bring on the celebrity balls, glittering film premieres and exotic overseas tours. Set Charles's indispensable factotum Mr. Michael Fawcett loose with the chandeliers and flower arrangements and let's show them how real royalty parties!

Bring on, too, the whispered words of sympathy and direction that only a wife can give. Best of all, bring on the recognition that is Camilla's due and call her what she really is: Princess of Wales and Queen in Waiting. . . Cue fireworks and fanfares!

It seems a shame to interrupt, but here are a few thoughts to consider while we wait for the invitations to reach our part of the swamp.

Putting Camilla on the Buckingham Palace balcony will confront the Vacant Many with a controversial figure who excites decidedly mixed emotions. Suddenly, she has been promoted to the second highest woman in the land for little more, it seems, than her ability to give Prince Charles what he wants.

How will the mob react? Will its members feel like bowing respectfully, cheering enthusiastically – or staying at home? Worse, will any of them feel mad enough – or drunk enough – to boo? This is the moment when the Vacant Many could find a way to tell Prince
Charles that while he may just have got himself a new wife, he's also arranged delivery of a new queen to the country's front door. Not only does this package look rather suspiciously wrapped, it hadn't been ordered and still has to be paid for. The householders might just feel entitled to have an opinion about their unexpected windfall . . . and how it came to land on their mat.

None of which is likely to make life easier for the dignified figure who will be standing at the centre of the balcony – the Queen we probably want God to save now more than ever. And though skulking in Gloucestershire may not be as regal as being measured for a Versace dress or being photographed with Laura Bush, it would have one advantage. It would take the heat off all those who sold us Camilla as a simple county mum whose only ambition was to feed the dogs and keep the home fires burning for her man.

Talking of domestic bliss, this might be a good opportunity to pitch a team-building session to the Clarence House support organisation. Running the Prince of Wales's household was never a job for the faint-hearted, and it's just got a lot tougher. One thing we already know – it's certain we will be kept well-informed. Charles long ago dispensed with old-fashioned royal conventions of never complaining and never explaining.

Too much time spent fretting about the media has cost Charles credibility among those who prefer their royalty unspun. Smart PR can change how people think (for a while) but it won't reach their souls. Which, conveniently, brings us back to Bagehot. “So long as the human heart is strong and the human reason weak, royalty will be strong . . .”

Nowhere were hearts more strong for the monarchy than in Australia. “I did but see her passing by, yet I'll love her till I die,” was Prime Minister Robert Menzies's lyrical tribute to the Queen during a tour in the 1960s. It was a quotation much recalled last month when Charles came to the end of his brief tour of Australia – a country of which he is still, theoretically, destined to be head of state.

Looking at modern Australia, Bagehot might recognise that the country's heart is actually beating as strongly as ever – but it has transferred its affections to another. By a strange quirk of romantic fate, the new object of its favour is home-grown. Crown Princess Mary of Denmark (with whom Charles was regrettably portrayed in a one-sided contest for public interest) was formerly a Sydney estate agent. “Our Mary's” transformation to wholesome modern royalty is a very classy act and indisputably genuine. It would touch any royalist's heart with a flutter of devotion.

As I sat in a Melbourne café reading my newspaper it certainly touched my heart, but sadly she is not my princess. I suppressed my envy and carried on reading. The newspaper's
coverage of the Prince's visit talked of him as whimsical, modest and even “a bloody good bloke”, but there was also something else: a head-scratching, nose-wrinkling, uncomprehending bafflement that Mrs. Camilla Parker Bowles of Wiltshire, England, was, barring a change in several laws, going to be the next queen of Australia.

I wondered if even Bagehot could have enlightened all those dumbstruck Australian readers. His view of the monarchy was that it made government easier for ordinary people to understand. “The best reason why monarchy is a strong government is that it is an intelligible government.” Yet here it was producing the very opposite effect.

I suddenly felt the depth of my own incomprehension. Perhaps somebody just made it all up. Perhaps we're all going to wake up and well discover it's 1967 again. But this is really happening here, and in Australia, and anywhere else around the world where the British Royal Family still stands for something. This time next week our constitutional map will have changed for ever.

In Australia – and who knows where else too– there may already be no time left for King Charles, let alone for Queen Camilla. That newspaper in Melbourne didn't quote Bagehot; it didn't need to. Its headline was gentle enough, but also quite emphatic. It read: “God Bless the Prince of Wales . . . and Fond Goodbyes.”
The good luck might have taken its time arriving but for Charles and Camilla any jinx over their marriage was finally lifted yesterday. Postponing their wedding by a day meant that the sun shone on the respectably-sized crowd that had come to watch, even if the clouds moved in as the couple arrived - a few minutes early – in a Rolls Royce of truly royal dimensions.

Holding the civil ceremony in Windsor town centre gave the event a populist touch that would have been impossible behind the castle ramparts. In the end, though hardly the fairy-tale of 1981, this really was a “peoples' wedding.”

Not all the people, of course. There were a few dissenters – one banner read “Illegal, Immoral, Shameful” but it concluded in big letters “God Save Queen Elizabeth!” There were even a few boos as the Prince and Duchess emerged from the Guildhall. But as the Rolls drove briskly away from any more such tactless behaviour, the organisers could breathe a hard-earned sigh of relief. The rest of the day would be conducted according to a more familiar royal script.

Whether you think of Camilla as a wicked usurper or as the bright new jewel in our national crown, she will now be part of the family for those many Britons who still think of the Queen and co. as rather grand relatives.

“Isn't she lovely!” said several voices outside the Guildhall. “She's not exactly Di is she?” said another. Unsurprisingly, the new Duchess of Cornwall is already defined in many eyes by memories of her predecessor. And it's true, you didn't have to be a Diana die-hard to find images of the late Princess superimposing themselves on the scene.

I pictured the Windsor scene as it might have appeared to her. The crowd would have been familiar – it was a good average size by her standards and emitted the same buzz of suppressed excitement. Even some of her former bodyguards were now on duty for Charles and Camilla. That would have raised a smile.

But there weren't any flowers to collect and nobody seemed to be expecting a royal walkabout. That might have had something to do with the huge numbers of edgy-looking constabulary. Camilla walkabouts are being saved for another day.

As I took in the scene I remembered that, long before she died, Diana had stopped being derogatory about her husband's “ladyfriend.” Her concern then, as it would have been now,
was for her children. And these young men looked content enough as they waved their father and step-mother off from the Guildhall.

Whether we welcome the new Duchess, ostracise her or just ignore her will depend on our attitudes to how she arrived on our doorstep in the first place. There are many among her supporters who tell us confidently that we will inevitably warm to her as we get to know her. Perhaps we will.

But there is a problem and it still lurks, even on a happy day like this. Our welcoming thoughts struggle with the knowledge that public perceptions of the Duchess have already been thoroughly manipulated. For the best part of a decade she’s been the focal point of a subtle promotional campaign – a campaign that she had more than a hand in instigating and which was well known in media circles. And there’s a fundamental problem with such spin: it’s temptingly easy to turn it on... but you can't choose how or when it gets turned off.

As was disclosed last week by Charles's former media manager Mark Bolland, it's now seven years since Camilla enlisted Peter Mandelson to work his electioneering magic on her own campaign for a prominent public role. That ambition was powerfully fed by Charles’s desire – in Bolland's words – to “fight” Diana's popularity. So was born a sustained programme of political-style spin that hijacked Charles’s reputation to serve the needs of his true-love's rehabilitation.

The methods used were drawn from every shelf of the spin-doctor's medicine cupboard, and from some pretty dark corners too.

Hopefully such tactics – and the need for them – are in the past. Yesterday the campaign saw its main objective achieved: Mrs. Parker-Bowles is now a real Royal Highness. And there's a fair chance that, British deference and indifference being what they are, nobody will bother too much about any questionable methods used to get her the fancy handle.

To assist the process we are being told that the Duchess is a model of earthy virtues mixed with a star quality that marks her as a future Queen Mother figure. We are also reminded that she and Charles enjoy a warm and relaxed intimacy - which may come as little surprise to anyone with a memory for tabloid exclusives.

Many of the friends who conspired in Charles and Camilla’s extra marital affairs, who conceived and executed their mission plan for public acceptability and who would happily wish away all Diana’s achievements will have joined in yesterday's prayer of penitence. In return for sharing in the contemplation of past errors they can now look forward to the undoubted splendours of the now legitimised Clarence House court.
So what, you might say. That's the way of courts down the years. And if the result is a contented Prince of Wales then we should all be jolly glad.

And so we should. Despite every mishap, every unhappy memory that lies behind and every constitutional hurdle that lies ahead, we are where we are. Not everybody gets a second chance but the newlyweds have – and so have we. Those of us who failed to warm to Camilla when she was Mrs. Parker-Bowles now have another chance to warm to her as HRH the Duchess of Cornwall. And if the Queen thinks that's good enough then so will most of her subjects.
Sounds wrong? It didn’t sound right in 1936 either and soon King Edward VIII was sailing into exile. Now the names have changed but the questions haven’t. Queen Camilla anyone…? Keep holding your breath.

I’m no expert on opinion polls but – even allowing for every margin of error – 90% of anything is rather a lot. That’s the proportion of respondents in this week’s Express poll who voiced their objection to the idea of Camilla becoming queen when the Prince of Wales becomes king.

It’s amazing what people will forgive. The Queen Mother even forgave Mrs. Simpson for forcing her husband unexpectedly onto the throne and thus, as she believed, to an early death.

But even the most generous of people find it hard to forgive when they have been deceived. And they certainly don’t forget. That’s the lesson of the Express poll and here’s why.

Prince Charles spends a great deal of money and man-hours on media relations, not least where his wife is concerned. Unfortunately, all that investment doesn’t automatically buy popularity – as the Express poll shows.

However, the poll has sparked an interesting debate. Some people have argued that it is “constitutionally illogical” to oppose the former royal mistress being crowned. The Prince of Wales will become king and therefore, automatically, his wife will become queen.

These are the facts, they imply, as if addressing some very dim-witted children. Don’t argue, don’t make a fuss – and for heaven’s sake don’t point.

Now, I don’t think anybody is arguing with the constitutional logic. But just because it’s logical doesn’t mean we have to like it.

I don’t believe those 90% of Express readers are dim-witted. They know that kings and queens aren’t elected so, technically, of course their views are constitutionally irrelevant. If he really wanted to, Charles could have Camilla crowned Queen of Sheba or even Queen of Hearts and those readers could do nothing about it.
Still less do I believe that Express readers are anti-monarchist or unpatriotic. How Charles's chums would love to have us believe that it's our patriotic duty to give him every single thing he wants. As we know very well, what the Prince of Wales wants, the Prince of Wales eventually gets, including an expensive new wife. It doesn't automatically follow that we have to like it. Or her, for that matter.

In fact, telling us that our opinions don't count is exactly the kind of patronising arrogance which, too often, is the first resort of Camilla's would-be champions. It's the kind of arrogance that gets the royal family a bad name. It assumes that public opinion is just a nuisance which can be ignored or belittled or even, if necessary, cowed into silence.

It's disturbingly easy to hear authoritarian undertones in the Prince's response to news and opinions that displease him. Vanessa Feltz isn't the only one to notice that Charles's spin doctors have spent years trying to sell Queen Camilla to the media.

In their eagerness to do his bidding some of his advisors have resorted to methods of news management previously associated only with power-hungry politicians – a world from which our royal family and the principles it embodies are supposed to remain strictly apart.

So it's not just inside palace walls that values have been compromised for the Prince's convenience: the Camilla campaign has permanently corrupted the relationship between royalty and press.

The Express poll has now chucked a spanner in the Clarence House spin machine. Its well-funded team of operators will try to ignore it, at least publicly, and they may very well succeed.

But beneath the bluster there will be gnawing feelings of uncertainty. And if there aren't, there certainly ought to be. If I were paying their wages I'd want my press people to answer a very straightforward question: Why does such a convincing majority still think Camilla doesn't merit being our next joint head of state?

The paid experts may reply soothingly that time and subtly-worded public reassurances (with weasel words like “there is no intention”) will work the necessary magic. But will they dare give the less palatable reason? Let's try to help them.

We can dismiss straight away the idea that so many people just don't like Camilla very much. British people – Express readers among them – tend to look upon their royal family with affection or at least benign indifference. This attitude among their subjects has probably been the Windsors' greatest asset.
Camilla has been a major beneficiary of the public's easy-going tolerance of royal foibles. People have been generous in their understanding of how even the leading family in the land can suffer the same breakups as the humblest.

Our respect for our monarchy is deep and instinctive and Charles and Camilla have drawn heavily on those reserves of public goodwill. In other countries, such a story of adultery, deceit and betrayal in high places might have led to riots in the streets. That's not the British way. We may tut-tut in private but in public we'd rather shrug and go shopping than burn down Highgrove.

Reserved we may be – but given the chance to vote in a poll, the result is far more outspoken. The Express poll is a worrying sign that Camilla's account at the bank of public goodwill is seriously overdrawn.

The public face royal people show even to their friends can be a misleading guide to their true character. The reality is that very few people actually know Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall. The ones who claim loudest that they really know the real woman might just be kidding themselves – as hundreds of royal “friends” have discovered to their cost through history.

It's not a claim I make. Even when she was the notorious third person in my former boss's marriage, the only clear impression I gained was of her power to influence people.

It's hardly surprising that people look at the Duchess and aren't quite sure what they're getting. I'm surprised palace press secretaries can keep track. When she was Charles's mistress his spokesmen tried to tell us she didn't exist. When she was his fiancée they tried to tell us she was just a yummy mummy who wanted discreetly to keep up his fragile morale. Now she's his wife they're trying to persuade us she's a priceless national asset... a Queen Mother in waiting.

You'd think we'd be grateful for such a miraculous transformation. Instead, those unappreciative Express readers have blown a giant raspberry. Even the most obedient of Charles's cheerleaders in the media will venture only that Camilla is “accepted” by his future subjects.

Actually, we don't have to look very far for the reason. The British people may be generous in their ability to forgive royalty's very human frailties. But they take exception to being deceived.

The real reason the Express poll is so bad for Charles and Camilla has nothing to do with her hairstyle or taste for extravagant holidays. Nor is it about what appear to be her
increasingly grand ways. But it is the reason why her desire to be respected as a genuine royal performer may take a long time to be granted. If ever.

The reason people voted as they did is simple. They have not forgotten the stealthy tactics used to manoeuvre the Duchess into her present exalted position – within grasping range of the crown itself.

They have not forgotten the sunny day in 1981 when, outside St Paul's Cathedral, Charles literally held in his hands the best guarantee for the future of the monarchy – the institution which is dear to the hearts of Express readers and their fellow subjects.

Many will remember the feeling of reassurance and national pride as they watched the attractive young couple who kissed on the Palace balcony – just as they will remember the decades of unhappiness which followed, culminating in tragedy in the Paris underpass.

They may forgive much – but beneath their tolerant shrugs they remember the trauma of the most serious constitutional crisis since the Abdication of 1936.

They are not stupid. They know that years of highly organised adultery are likely to have left a legacy of deceit at the heart of Charles's organisation. To this day they see that culture of doublespeak in his public preaching and his private indulgence – indulgence which his wife shares to the hilt.

They know that to err is human – but that the real sin is in trying to cover it up. Ask Bill Clinton. Ask Lord Browne [former CEO of BP who resigned in disgrace after making a false statement to a court].

They remember the denials – the promises that Camilla was just a friend, that she was not responsible for Charles's divorce, that the Prince had no intention of remarrying.

They remember that Camilla was portrayed as having no royal ambition, that she simply wanted quietly and discreetly to support the man she loved.

And now they have noticed that the latest in this long line of deceits is that there is “no intention” that Camilla will be Queen.

The Express readers have given their answer and Charles's press officers would be wise to pass it on. Sorry, Clarence House. We've heard it before. And we're not buying it.

The constitutional logic is inescapable. If – and it's a bigger if than Clarence House likes to admit – Charles is ever crowned king, then Camilla will be crowned queen beside him.
That's what our constitution says and that's what it will continue to say, barring the unlikely event that our elected representatives change it.

So for goodness sake, have the guts and the courtesy to tell it to the people straight.

Unless you can do that, don't expect the polls to get much better anytime soon.
The Prince of Wales is much admired for his willingness to champion what he feels are overlooked or unfashionable causes. Such willingness is a powerful argument in favour of a system which allows the Heir to the Throne comparative latitude when it comes to expressing his views – a liberty that must be given up when he ascends the Throne.

In fact it’s a role that, as I have seen for myself, the Prince positively embraces. Today we’re told by a former Deputy Private Secretary that Charles sometimes sees himself as a dissident when it comes to expressing contrary views about government policy. And though this is perhaps a rather thrilling concept for a man who doesn’t welcome dissidence in many aspects of his own life, it raises some serious issues about the royal family and the media.

The current wrangle over the leaking of “the great Chinese takeaway” raises a question about what constitutes “privacy” when it comes to Charles’s dissident views. It also poses a question about the desirability of having our next unelected head of state interpreting his role in this way. It’s either noble and valuable – the Dalai Lama might agree – or it’s a dangerous self-indulgence, as seems to have been the view of some advisors in the past.

In choosing to fight the media over publication of a personal journal, the Prince of Wales has staked more than his dignity on the outcome. That’s because it is widely perceived that his office has operated a system of double standards when it comes to the Prince’s “privacy.” A legacy of his popularity battle with Diana, some of Charles’s advisors have done deals with newspapers to get them to print favourable stories. The problem that has now arisen is that, if the advisors then complain that the same newspapers are printing unauthorised stories, they risk making Charles look a bit of a hypocrite.

The Prince of Wales has the same rights as the humblest private citizen when it comes to keeping his personal documents confidential. So say Charles’s lawyers in their action against the MoS. Many reasonable citizens – humble and otherwise – might tend to agree.

The same citizens might also feel that the Prince has had a bellyful of the press (remember his overheard remarks on the ski slopes about “those awful people”?). The time has surely come, as his lawyers have argued, to draw the line “as tightly as we can” around the journals in question and, it follows, around any other documents that the Prince might feel are personal in the future.
This instinctive sympathy of reasonable citizens is still the Windsors’ greatest treasure, albeit one some of them seem to take a little too much for granted. However, as with so many royal stories, there is more to all this than meets the eye. Whatever his lawyers might like us to think, the Prince is not the humblest citizen. Nor is he the helpless victim of heartless tabloid exploitation. The old idea of the royal family never answering back – historically its best defence against HTE – has been dead for many years. That's not least because Charles's expansive office is top heavy with spin doctors and nowadays has few scruples about getting its answering back in first if it feels like it.

Such political-style news management was either a bold piece of modernisation by the Prince's advisors or it's a tacky attempt to have one's media cake and eat it. Even his friends might suspect it's the latter and worry that the Prince feels he can simultaneously pronounce from an ivory tower while also indulging in the selective leaking, briefing, and story trading that are the political press manager's stock in trade.

For most of the time, this policy operates beneath the radar of public attention. It supports many of the glossy set-pieces that are the royal public face but it is not intended for public consumption. A bit like Charles's private journals. Unfortunately, the price of getting press support for project X (for example making Camilla queen) is that Fleet Street doesn't feel obliged to show the respectful restraint it perhaps should when planning to print story Y (for example “The Great Chinese Takeaway”).

Now the lawyers will do their stuff and no doubt the best legal team – or possibly both – will claim victory when the dust settles. That might be a good time for the Prince's advisors to broach what is obviously a difficult subject. They might ask their employer to examine his motives every time he feels compelled to act the dissident. There will be times when such motives are above suspicion and a true reflection of widespread public concern. They will even be in the best interests of the Throne he will one day inherit.

But there will be other occasions – many more – when dissidence is better left to elected representatives, pressure groups and healthy media debate. Royal intrusion in such areas not only poisons the debate – it risks making the Crown look hypocritical. And nobody elected The Prince of Wales to do that.
“In short, an excellent outcome” exults Prince Charles's principal private secretary, declaring victory in the prince's breach of copyright case against the MoS. His relief is infectious, and understandable.

But there might also be a hint of dismay that Charles still faces months more litigation and revelation.... allegedly in pursuit of privacy he seldom hesitates to waive when it suits him.

Some very expensive lawyers will now find protracted ways of telling us what we already know: that unlike his mother, Charles puts himself in a constitutional twilight zone where his influence is restrained only by fallible advisors and press ankle-biting. We also now know that common laws on privacy can be adapted to fence this zone around with barbed wire. It makes you wonder why the prince's men are in such a hurry to tell us that it's all good news.

Sir Michael Peat is gambling with more than just his boss's dignity in this case. With all due respect to the skill with which he plays a tricky hand, I'm just wondering if his emphatic interpretation of the judge's 86 page ruling really rings true. Real English court successes – especially royal ones – are usually best left quietly to speak for themselves.

I remember when my then-boss the Princess of Wales won a high-profile privacy case against another tabloid, our lawyers and our own common sense persuaded us to resist the urge to crow, at least in public. It was good advice and, in the long run, somehow made the victory all the more satisfying. The papers took note also. They need royalty just as royalty needs them, however unwelcome that reality might be.

So the sight of our future head of state scrapping in the street with a mass circulation tabloid is pretty unedifying, justifiable only with a clear-cut knockout victory for the good guy.

And who is the good guy in this case? Scanning the range of reactions, there seems to be some doubt. At first glance, there might be satisfaction that a tabloid has apparently been put in its place. There will be many who automatically assume that royalty versus press is a bit like sheep versus wolves... it's quite nice when a wolf gets a nip on the nose from a woolly ruminant.

It's tempting to share Sir Michael's satisfaction at the victory of his much maligned boss over a rapacious newspaper. Tempting... but misplaced. For as Sir Michael knows – and as the rapacious newshounds certainly know - the Prince is not exactly a defenceless victim of
heartless tabloid exploitation. Nor is he just a harmless eccentric with a knack for feel-good causes. Despite the fogyish image, he is a highly experienced public operator, whose office has employed some of the best spin doctors on the market. Charles’s news management machine has become as much a part of his life as the celebrated Highgrove organic sewage system…. quietly doing its fragrant business well away from areas visible to the general public.

As we now know, that business has included surreptitious briefing to promote his views on matters of the day. Those views, by his own rather proud admission, are frequently those of a political activist. It follows that, right or wrong, his interventions are divisive. They don’t just pit monarchists against republicans – they pit monarchists against each other and create new royal agnostics. For an institution that exists only by benign majority consent, that’s a high-risk policy, to put it no stronger. When newspapers have the temerity to point out that awkward fact, jumping on one’s high horse about privacy is hardly an adequate response.

That may be why the best news for Sir Michael – and the worst news for a legitimately interested public – was the judge’s ruling on the constitutional convention of royal impartiality. In this case, he stated, it was immaterial. No matter that our constitution offers little redress when this or other conventions are adjusted to suit the prince’s wishes. No matter also that his future subjects might be entitled to know, if not the content of his political views, then at least their true extent. On the contrary - in the particular circumstances of the case, Charles has the same rights as a private citizen.

But in the real world – however often he may lament the fact - the prince will never be a private citizen. Anything he says on any subject will arouse opinions and sometimes passions. That’s what makes royal rank such a two-edged sword. Putting up two fingers to a state banquet for ghastly old waxworks can be fun and self-censorship must be difficult when employees and friends are such an unreliable source of honest criticism. That reality can distort the judgement of everybody concerned. At the very least, it seems to have resulted in careless handling of sensitive documents.

This perhaps is the clue as to why the prince launched such high-risk litigation. Even if he is a veteran of decades of media wars, even if his staff are canny dispensers of royal media titbits, it is an essential part of the prince’s view of the world that he is life’s victim – a dissident in constitutional manacles, tortured by the unfair attentions of Fleet Street. By taking this action, with all its risks, Charles has reinforced that view not just in the eyes of a sympathetic public but to himself as well.
The psychology is easier to understand when you imagine yourself inside Clarence House looking out. Prince Charles's courtiers have always earned their salaries the hard way, balancing their boss's mercurial passions with the realities of a world from which he can choose to isolate himself but they cannot. Going to law against the Mail on Sunday, though scary, was at least a clear point of principle on which to fight a landmark battle: so much less morally stressful than all that dodgy behind the scenes briefing.

By hiring lawyers they could feel they were putting that sentiment into tough action. Before the judge they had a chance to repeat the mantra of their boss as a good man grievously wronged. If they subsequently lost, well... the point would still have been made to a large slice of the sympathetic public and – just as important – they could reassure the prince that the good fight had been fought against impossible odds. And if they won – well the triumph would be all the sweeter because the prince's victim status had been vindicated.

The trouble is that, just as Charles is not the outright good guy, the judge's ruling is not the outright victory that Clarence House will have wanted. True, it can be portrayed as such but the signs are that many observers aren't taking the official line at face value. For one thing, knowing Charles's form on selective media co-operation, they think he doth protest too much. For another, the victory has been won at the expense of publicising the very matters he claimed he wanted to keep private – a PR own goal which reveals much about his priorities. And this match isn't finished yet...

Two years ago the Prince of Wales prophesied to an American TV audience that the British people would only appreciate him after "I'm dead and gone." The good news is that the Prince has no plans to leave us just yet. In fact he is actively making plans for the day he becomes king. Of course it's to be expected that contingency plans are made for the orderly transfer of the crown to the new monarch. But why are these plans increasingly occupying the former senior courtier now preparing for the most significant day in Charles's life?

Sir Stephen Lamport is surely the man for such a delicate job. The consummate former diplomat was senior advisor to the Prince during the traumatic times around the death of Diana and then supervised the PR offensive that saw Camilla rehabilitated from homewrecker to royal consort. There's nobody better qualified to do the Prince's bidding.

Charles so prized his services that when Lamport left the Palace in 2002 he was rewarded with a knighthood, in stark contrast to his three predecessors. Snapped up by the Royal Bank of Scotland, Sir Stephen is now its Group Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs.
As long ago as 2004 it was reported that the former courtier was taking time out from his banking duties to chair an internal palace committee into the implications of the Prince's accession to the Throne. Clarence House continues to play down the significance of the appointment – “everyone knows he's doing that” says a spokesman – but won't comment on whether Sir Stephen's workload on “special projects” is now being stepped up.

It's all rather worrying. Despite the spokesman's assurances, I bet not “everyone” knows what's going on. Can we be sure that the Queen is being kept properly informed about exactly what Sir Stephen is up to – and the timetable he's been set?

It's legitimate to wonder what all the rush is about. After all, our current monarch is mercifully in exceptionally good health, regularly riding her horses and soon to embark on a strenuous state visit to America in addition to all her usual programme of duties.

Of course Clarence House has never been exactly bashful about its readiness to take over as soon as the call comes. Perhaps even sooner. Discussion about the Queen's Abdication was hardly discouraged by Charles's previous spin doctor Mark Bolland as he struggled to resuscitate the Prince's reputation post-Diana.

Even now, any whisper that the Crown might just skip Charles altogether draws not amused contempt from his office but a flash of trip-wire, vehement rebuttal. Such anxiety suggests a tendency to believe one's own publicity ... and a deep-seated lack of confidence about the future.

It's revealing that in recent years Charles has greatly expanded his own household, awarding his senior staff grandiose titles and generally giving the outward impression of a king in all but name. This must be reassuring to people on the inside whenever questions are asked (as they should be) about the Prince's profligacy, or his dabbling in politically-sensitive subjects or his wisdom in using his position to intimidate critics. Not to mention a gift for attracting allegations of eco-hypocrisy not only to himself but increasingly to other members of his family too.

Charles's staff will be all-too aware of last week's YouGov poll which shows a majority in favour of William becoming our next monarch. When William marries and starts to produce heirs of his own, the spotlight will linger even longer on the picture-friendly younger generation. That is inevitable and even healthy for a monarchical system which positively celebrates the theatre of its ability constantly to renew itself.

But it can't be easy for the Prince of Wales. It must awaken painful memories of trying to share the spotlight with Diana. No wonder he tends to look gloomy, despite the happiness he is now free to enjoy in his private life. And no wonder his advisors are busy shoring up
the image – for internal consumption as much as external – of a king not so much in waiting as already practically in office.

Sir Stephens’ work on the accession is a logical extension of this. Here is a senior, talented and no doubt handsomely paid royal expert daily daring to dream that Charles's reign might be just fifteen hours away rather than the more likely fifteen years. What better way of keeping up morale in an organisation that meanwhile has to occupy itself with marking time.

Let's assume Sir Stephen's hard work isn't wasted. What would a Charles kingship be like?

The Prince describes himself as a historian. He will know that to see how things might be in the future, a good guide is to see how things were in the past. So as Sir Stephen looks in his crystal ball he will surely see the new king's continuing achievements as guardian of British traditions and excellence as well as a talent for charity fundraising.

Unfortunately for the Prince even royal history can't be re-written. We can only hope that there's at least one thing missing. That's a return to the style of court ordained by Charles and faithfully implemented by the then plain Mr Lamport just ten years ago. Conveniently forgotten are scandals from that period like the questionable handling of allegations of male rape made by the now-dead footman George Smith or the selling of official gifts by former valet Michael Fawcett (aka “The Fence”), now splendidly reinstated as de facto head of Charles and Camilla's domestic household.

We might hope also that Sir Stephen's plans don't include a return to the political-style spin doctoring that was the hallmark of the Prince's media handlers under his control. It was a regime that connived at the whispering campaign that Diana was mentally ill, that didn't hesitate to brief even against other members of the royal family to improve Charles's own image and that traded newspaper stories about William and Harry to engineer favourable headlines.

It was a regime which also fostered the constitutionally-suicidal concept of Charles the Dissident, specifically tipping off newspapers about his opposition to government policies and publicising gestures like the future king's snubbing of the Chinese state visit of 1999.

It's a revealing example of the tensions that will lurk in a Charles kingship. His advisors may now promise that when king he will follow the Queen's example of dignified silence. If only it were that easy. Chinese politicians may not be to Charles's liking (remember the “appalling old waxworks” observation) but we can be sure they have a long memory for such calculated insults. Not to mention a growing influence over our national economic health and – allegedly – an armlock on the planet's climate.
Let's hope Sir Stephen the diplomat has a plan for that too.

[It is probably no coincidence that Sir Stephen Lamport KCVO DL subsequently forsook banking for the top lay job at Westminster Abbey where, as, Receiver General, he is a central figure in all great royal religious events such as weddings and... coronations]
Succession Planning is all the rage in big corporations, and not just at Manchester United plc. The smooth and orderly transfer of power from CEO to CEO is essential if the shareholders are not to be spooked.

For the House of Windsor – whose modern PR operation positively invites comparison with a wealthy corporation - the succession experience has not always been a happy one. Luckily for today's subjects, few have first-hand memories of the Abdication Crisis of 1936. Most of us have lived our whole lives secure in the knowledge that our head of state is a reassuringly fixed point in an unsettled world. Just thinking about the day when the Queen is no longer with us feels worse than disloyal – it stirs unspoken insecurity about our own mortality as individuals and even as a people.

Perhaps that is why there has been such a flap over news that the Queen has sensibly delegated attendance at November's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to her son and heir. Perhaps that is also why her son's attendance at yesterday’s State Opening has been interpreted as especially significant. The picture says it all: two ladies in white wearing tiaras sit next to two admirals wearing lots of medals. Such is the youthfulness of the Queen and her Consort and such the, um, maturity of her son and his wife that you could almost blink and think you are seeing double.

And that is how it will be. In the blink of an eye, one woman in white and an admiral will be replaced by a slightly younger model of each. The Beefeaters, the page boys and even the turgid words of the Speech will continue as before but the central characters will be played by today's understudies. That is the glory of our Constitution, as we are plainly being reminded.

How does that make you feel? Perhaps you are reassured by this visible evidence of continuity. Perhaps – like many younger people – you wish it were William and Kate who were metaphorically warming up on the touchline. Perhaps – like some of my American friends – you think it's all rather lovely and quaint but not really anything to do with the real world.

In any case, for better or worse, it doesn't really matter what you think. It's a rhetorical question since nobody's going to ask our opinion, unless you count the comments section in the online Telegraph. So perhaps it would be more relevant to ask a different question: how does it make Prince Charles feel?
The approved answer would be along the lines that he serves in support of his mother and, insofar as he has spared the disagreeable prospect any thought at all, stands ready to wear the crown when it passes to him. If pressed, his advisors might mutter platitudes about sensible contingency planning and the need to be ready whenever the call should come.

However, behind closed doors, the truth may be slightly different. Heirs by definition have to wait their turn and for some it has been an irksome burden. Edward VII, when Prince of Wales, famously chafed at having to wait while his mother Victoria sailed on into an interminable sunset. Prince Charles – having served even longer as next in line – could be forgiven for feeling a touch of the same impatience. A life lived permanently on “pause” must become wearing after a while, whatever the compensations. All the more credit to him that the Prince has devoted his years of apprenticeship to serving the country he so obviously loves. Even more to his credit, he has never appeared publicly to be anything other than content to bide his time.

But in private he would hardly be human if the predicament of his situation did not touch a restless nerve. On this subject, as on many others, their master's frustration will have been faithfully felt by his courtiers. These conscientious men and women are already tasked with preparing for a drama-free transfer of the crown and their boss's wishes on this sensitive subject will be familiar to them. So, either in accordance with his instructions or even in anticipation of them, the Prince's people have been busy not just with preparations for his Coronation but also for life thereafter. Nor will their hearts necessarily be heavy as they work: this could be their future too and they didn't get their feet onto royal red carpet without being healthily ambitious.

We are not allowed to know much about what that future will look like. This secrecy is very much in tune with our decent reluctance to contemplate in any detail the post-Elizabethan age. There are hints of what the new administration will be like, and you don't have to be a Clarence House Kremlinologist to spot them. Austerity is unlikely to trouble the new court very much, given the splendour of its current circumstances. Seeing the proliferation of ever-grander titles in the Prince's household, lovers of royalty's Ruritanian aspects can rest easy. Nor need constitutionalists worry since the opinionated-Prince will forswear his self-defined role as stoker of public controversy once he is on the Throne. Or so they say.

The trouble with planning is that it acquires a momentum of its own. It sometimes seems that the Prince's strategists are unfettered by his own admirable reticence, with contingency planning now even felt in the distant reaches of royal charity and patronage. The task facing the Prince's army of press officers must be particularly difficult, given their historically pro-active role in comparable succession media frenzies in the 1990s. Perhaps it
was memories of an earlier zealous spin doctor – notoriously fond of a good Regency tease – that yesterday provoked an audible smack from Buckingham Palace as it put down the latest speculation.

That speculation will continue, however, not least thanks to the ambiguous role currently assigned to the Duchess of Cornwall. The image of Camilla in the House of Lords yesterday clearly presents her in the role of Queen-in-waiting alongside her King. It repeated the message of her regal pose at last week’s succession ceremonies in Holland. These picture-stories are helpfully accompanied by well-timed media references to her all-round queenliness.

Ever since the Prince’s solemn assurance that Mrs. Parker Bowles was no more than just “a good friend,” respectful eyebrows have been raised at any mention of her official status. Will he now really be content for his wife to be mere Princess-Consort? For many loyal people, to be acknowledged by her husband as his queen is no more than her well-earned reward. For many others (no less loyal), the prospect of Camilla wearing the crown in public as well as in private may stir a more complicated mix of emotions. Perhaps that is why her hard-working official tweeter has been tantalising us in recent days with Her Royal Highness’s favourite recipe for pea soup.

The first days of the next reign will offer neither the leisure nor the cool objectivity required to resolve the consort issue. Yet consensus is essential for the smooth transfer of authority, itself the hallmark of democracy. It’s appropriate that the current succession debate has been given a Commonwealth dimension. Many of the elected leaders who gather in Colombo in November might acknowledge the democratic tradition which is perhaps the most valuable legacy of their countries’ experience of the British Crown. Ironically, the King-Emperor who helped bring the Commonwealth into the world was himself crowned only as a result of the least smooth succession in modern history. Reluctant and unprepared, the Queen’s father was propelled onto the Throne by the failings of others.

He made the best of it, and earned his peoples’ love by letting his innate sense of duty guide the way. We are lucky indeed to have seen that simple instinct live on in his daughter and in the Commonwealth of which she is such a champion. Those who tweet of regency might be better employed praying our luck holds.
Loyal monarchists are having a tough weekend, assailed by a story that the heir to the throne influenced BBC schedules to shield innocent viewers’ eyes from some dark secret. If this weren't enough, we also learn that his brother the Duke of York is implicated in an underage sex scandal. And though we may prefer to believe predictable palace promises that there is no trace of truth in either story, much damage has already been done. Even here in America, the august New York Times is repeating the allegations against both Charles and Andrew, as are mainstream TV news stations.

Does it matter? For an answer, where better to look than American viewers’ oracle on all things British, Downton Abbey: “The truth is neither here nor there. It’s the look of the thing that matters.” says the Dowager Countess of Grantham, surely channelling the late Queen Mother.

Whichever way you read this weekend's royal headlines, it sure ain’t looking good. This is all the more disappointing if you consider that just before Christmas American airwaves – and those of much of the world – were filled with chirpy coverage of William and Catherine's reliably wholesome visit to New York. Even with Catherine’s endearingly unrehearsed side-eye glance at a bossy schoolteacher, the couple lacked the star power exerted by William’s mother when she hugged an AIDS baby in Harlem 25 years ago. But they nevertheless sent a reassuring message of dependability to any who were wondering about the long term bankability of brand Windsor.

Now all that good work has been undone. Far from reassuring, the current message is of a dynasty in the grip of paranoia about a documentary made by the UK's national broadcaster and a sex saga that owes more to the Borgias than the bourgeois monarchy of the Middleton era.

To find a clue about the cause of the current stinky headlines we must cast our minds back to William's mother. The BBC documentary that has so alarmed Clarence House is said to reveal the less than high-minded tactics allegedly used by Charles's advisors to rebalance the popularity see-saw away from her and towards him. The programme is also believed to explore how the same tactics were used to assist Mrs. Parker-Bowles's smooth ascent to queen-in-waiting.

There is much about this unsavoury chapter that deserves to be forgotten, if only in the interests of public good taste. Those who lived through it may still struggle to believe – let alone forgive – the way in which our foremost national institution was entrusted to the
unscrupulous hands of political-style spin doctors. Their potions included that elementary rule of personality politics: make your client look good by making the competition look worse. Even if, as in this case, that includes members of your client’s own family.

It seems likely that the BBC documentary has lifted the lid on that dormant cauldron and even a whiff of what might escape has Clarence House speed dialing its lawyers. Whoever else deserves our sympathy in this mess, it must surely include the current intake of royal image managers trying to comprehend the excesses of their predecessors. They may also ask why it was necessary to take such risks with fragile royal reputations just to advance one man’s battle with a long-dead princess.

It is ironic that news of Prince Andrew’s difficulties should conveniently surface just when needed to sweep allegations of Clarence House’s BBC gagging from the headlines. There was a time when such remarkable synchronicity could have been unerringly traced back to the fretful Wales camp. Those days are mercifully in the past but the Duke of York’s often-unfairly battered reputation is undoubtedly under assault as never before. Too late now to regret bad friendship choices made long ago under the hot Caribbean sun; the billionaire friend turned out to be a sexual predator into whose debt the Duke and his wife should never have stumbled. At least we may give thanks that unlike Sir James Savile and Prince Charles, no photos exist of Andrew and this pervert wearing kilts and broad smiles.

What few spin doctors like to admit is that their clients’ reputations are more often than not raised or reviled by the capriciousness of the news cycle rather than any expensive media strategy, even one crafted by royal appointment. So the time-honored regal response to bad news – ignore it and it will go away – may very well work just fine in these circumstances. Unfortunately, however, the Prince of Wales’s advisors have chosen a more confrontational path. It’s one that risks attracting legitimate concern about royalty’s unseen influence over many aspects of national life, and not just in the media.

Meanwhile William and Catherine, now the popular fixtures in monarchy’s centre-stage, may be forgiven for some frustration at finding their faultless performance cast against such a dismal backdrop. They may also wonder – like the rest of us – why in the royal world the look of the thing and the truth can’t co-exist a little more happily. For guidance on how to make those willful nags trot in harness, they need look no further than William’s grandmother.
SECTION 5

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESSSES
Photographs of Prince William skiing with a girl companion [Kate Middleton] made the front page – and many of the inside pages – of The Sun on Thursday. A suitable distraction from real news, you might think, on All Fools Day. But since this story – or a version of it – is likely to consume a king's ransom in paparazzi fees over the next decade or so, this may be a good moment to consider its more serious implications.

As is well known, the prince and the press have been enjoying an extended honeymoon. While he was a teenager, a PCC-brokered deal to leave him alone was obeyed by the royal press rat pack with almost miraculous self-restraint. It's less than a year since William went out of his way, in a rare interview, to put his gratitude on record. Now, the next expression of royal gratitude may be indefinitely delayed.

Since William turned twenty-one, the PCC have lifted their strict monitoring of the deal and it was therefore only a matter of time before somebody threw such unaccustomed restraint aside. All it needed was a big enough story.

Now, with pictures that they can claim are potentially of a future queen – and hence "in the public interest" – Britain's biggest-selling newspaper has found a story that's big and fluffy enough to knock a hole in the wall around the prince's privacy.

Barely pausing to condemn such audacity, most papers have poured through the breach waving royal romance stories of their own and overlooking a significant irony. The original privacy deal was framed by the chairman of the PCC's code of conduct committee, Les Hinton - a senior executive in NewsCorp, The Sun's publishers.

Poor William. One of his worst fears has been realised: he has been stalked, photographed and exploited. This is harassment and the culprits have rubbed salt in the wound by claiming that such covert pictures enable his fans back home to share his alleged joy at having "got a girl." The don of tabloid snappers, Jason Fraser, invites us to share the young couple's happiness. How disingenuous can you get?

But perhaps it isn't quite as simple as that. In the tortuous relationship between royals and media reptiles, it seldom is.

We can imagine the prince's reaction. In his father's household, his rare communications are treated with respect bordering on trepidation. William's anger and/or distress will have electrified the Clarence House press office. The call will have gone out – armies must be mobilised to avenge such a flagrant violation of the prince's privacy. A blistering example
must be made of the perpetrators. We may not be able to clap the offenders in the Tower but, by God, we'll teach them not to mess with us!

We might also imagine that Prince Charles's new communications secretary, Paddy Harverson, will have seen The Sun's coup as a personal challenge. Jason Fraser may have confidently predicted that Clarence House wouldn't retaliate. Mr. Harverson may have concluded that it was a dare he couldn't refuse.

Retaliation swiftly followed, therefore. Clarence House has banned The Sun indefinitely from covering official William or Harry photo calls. The Sun, in turn, has branded Clarence House guilty of cruel persecution of their lovable snapper-in-chief, Arthur Edwards who, they pointed out, hadn't even taken the offending shots.

The paper's editors can have expected no less. Luckily, their readers don't have to choose between sympathy for Arfur and sympathy for William. They can, as always, enjoy the pictures and simultaneously tut at the sneaky way they were obtained. It's a time-honored tradition, the media equivalent of the Changing of the Guard.

Ten years ago I was witness to an earlier example of the tradition. I was in Cairo with The Princess of Wales on an official tour. She liked to begin each day with an invigorating dip in the ambassador's outdoor swimming pool. One morning her swim was covertly photographed by freelance members of the British press party who had bribed their way onto the roof of a building that overlooked the embassy garden.

The pictures – though they undoubtedly showed her to be in prime physical shape – enraged Diana. The press secretary rushed to turn her anger into tangible punishment. The offenders were banned from press facilities for the rest of the tour.

There it could have rested. The victim had been avenged. The culprits had been vilified. The innocent majority of the press party (including Arthur Edwards, working towards his MBE) glowed with righteousness.

That was when Diana got cold feet. Her sensitive antennae quickly detected rumblings in the press camp, among whom something like union solidarity could flare up with disconcerting speed. What was the point of expending all this effort on making the tour a success if the customary blanket coverage of its most photogenic moments was now jeopardised?

The swift retaliation went discreetly into reverse. It wasn't a climb-down, heavens no. We, after all, owned the moral high ground. But, like it or not, Diana depended on a friendly rat pack just as it depended on her. And, such was Diana's luck that, within days, she was able
to send her own doctor to minister to Arfur, stricken with an Egyptian tummy bug. Now that was PR.

I don't suppose Mr. Harverson knew about Diana's experience but he's plainly no mug. He knows that William, no less than his brother and father, can't afford to make a deadly enemy out of Arfur and his employers.

An inheritance of the reign of the previous Clarence House spin doctor is that The Sun, like the rest of Fleet Street, is accustomed to being wooed by Charles's minders. Forget the trade in official gifts; the real scandal of the prince's household was the trade in royal exclusives, particularly William exclusives.

Having wittingly or otherwise been a party to that trade – which saw stories suppressed as well as splashed – it's not in William's interest to overplay the martyr card.

Mr. Harverson seems to agree. The PCC, once the guard dog protecting William's privacy, has been allowed to sleep undisturbed by complaints from Clarence House. Buckingham Palace press office, so keen in the past to weigh in against offenders, has made clear its aloofness from the brawl. And the length of The Sun's ban is unspecified, suggesting that so long as Arthur Edwards MBE doesn't misuse his enforced free time, there may be remission for good behaviour.

Already, favoured diarists are clearly being briefed that The Sun's portrayal of young love isn't love, actually – let alone Love Actually.

Meanwhile, what of the undisputedly innocent player in the melodrama? Perhaps Miss Middleton, William's companion, will be our future queen. More likely, she will not. For better or for worse, the royal whirlwind will put her down again as suddenly as it has picked her up.

Gently, we hope. As Clarence House may have noticed from recent history, spinning a happy ending for a royal romance is a lot more difficult than bashing old chums at The Sun.
Last Saturday was the Queen’s official birthday. The military splendour of Trooping the Colour evokes strong passions in all loyal subjects. My contribution to the special day was to lie in bed too long before hurriedly donning the full dress uniform of the weekend freelance writer: flip flops, shorts and a baggy tee shirt. Plus a big hat to keep the sun off. No bears were harmed in the making of this headgear.

Armed with orders from the Commander in Chief I marched to Sainsbury’s where I joined a battalion of footsloggers doing our duty among the gleaming rows of bottles and tins. Rousing muzak filled the air. Everybody knew the drill and nobody on parade fainted from the heat. Such confident professionalism takes years of practice.

Many complicated trolley manoeuvres later I began the procession back to barracks, acknowledging with a nonchalant salute the traditional greetings of Big Issue sellers and charity muggers as I went. Allowing time for a short tiffin break – iced latte and a glance at The Mail – I was back at base by 11.30 hours. There I allowed myself a brief moment of modest pride. It’s true: We British do these things better than anybody else in the world.

With the ceremonial over for the day, I wondered what to do next. Walking back from the shops, I’d heard snatches of military music drifting on the breeze. Since we live so close to Buckingham Palace my wife – being American - suggested we should wander up to The Mall to see the fun. So we did. And jolly good it was, too – especially with a vintage Lancaster bomber leading the fly-past.

Each to his own. Some miles to the west, Prince William and Kate Middleton were enjoying a strenuous day at the polo ground. Being in the middle of his Sandhurst course, perhaps William didn’t feel the need for marching at weekends too and decided to make the most of his leave. So instead of waving from the balcony of BP he was at play in the sunshine under the loving gaze of the girl he calls “my adorable Kate.”

Quite right too – especially since, without any serious denial from royal sources, this young woman is now being widely touted as our future queen. (Camilla can be discounted for the role, having repeatedly said she doesn’t want it).

Nevertheless, that didn’t stop several commentators accusing the Prince of being absent from place of duty. Perhaps they had forgotten that for William – and, possibly, Kate too – Troopings of the Colour will be an unavoidable annual ritual until he dies. So chukka off.
Forgive the levity. Eight years as equerry and Private Secretary to the Princess of Wales reminded me - eventually - that taking yourself too seriously is a sure route to ridicule. Or at least it should be. Sadly it’s a lesson that’s hard to master if your natural habitat is carpeted in red.

For all her innate royal talent, Diana was never slow to laugh at herself. Not the studied self-deprecation of some of her in-laws but an instinctive recognition of the comic contradictions of being royal in modern Britain. Constitutional monarchy may be a familiar and pragmatic way of supplying ourselves with a head of state. But it still tests our critical faculties to sustain the idea of a superior caste – a caste that exists to give physical form to the temporal power of the nation… and which therefore can claim not only loyalty but also a form of infallibility.

Perhaps nobody felt the need to try advising William about his weekend arrangements. Or perhaps they did – and are now paying for it. Palace work is not for the faint-hearted so, if any advisor did cop a royal reprimand for his temerity, I suggest he or she enjoy the office’s free Ascot tickets and try to forget all about it.

Luckily for me, William’s mother had a surprisingly strong sense of duty and an eye for the absurd which was usually unerring – even when judging her own behaviour. After a long hard day in the leprosy hospital or the AIDS orphanage or the hospice she was not above bemoaning the fate which had dealt her such a constrained and emotionally fraught life. But it would only take a raised eyebrow from her paid professional conscience (me) to elicit a snort of laughter and a reproach to herself. “What you’re telling me Patrick is ‘just shut up Diana and do your job!’”

This is the “job” for which Kate Middleton now appears to be applying. Twenty-five years after Diana joined the royal firm it seems a good time to ask what Ms. M is letting herself in for – and what this might mean for the rest of us… including those who probably don’t instinctively turn to this page when seeking their ration of royal speculation.

Twenty-five years ago we were in a comparable position: a popular young prince was summoning up the resolve to marry an undeniably pretty young English rose. A rose who, furthermore, had announced that she was ready for whatever the future held “so long as I have Prince Charles at my side.”

Unfortunately, through a combination of bad luck, bad judgement and bad faith, that chance to secure the happy future of the Windsor dynasty was fumbled. Today, the heir to the throne enjoys a marriage which has all the appearance of a dynastic stopgap until once again the lottery of heredity can work its magic on our national future. Only this time, the
stakes are that much higher: what odds am I offered for the survival of the Windsors if they slice their next big shot at the goal of workable matrimony?

If that sounds a bit unromantic then blame the cynicism injected by years on the front line of the “War of the Waleses.” Before their wedding, an interviewer once asked Charles and Diana if they were in love. “Of course!” smiled Diana. “Whatever ‘in love’ means.” Added Charles. It was surely a fair response from a man of philosophical aspirations. But it left his bride looking distinctly queasy.

Let me offer this answer. When it comes to dynastic efficiency, love is best defined by that old marriage guidance formula: it is no more and no less than an ability and a willingness to meet each other's needs. It was William's parents' conspicuous failure to surmount this elementary test that doomed them – and us – to the present royal cul-de-sac.

Unfortunately for William and Kate, there is another party to any planned nuptials: us. The capacity of British subjects to view their royal family with benign indifference has been proved remarkably elastic over the past two decades. That's not to say that it is infinite. A rising generation that owes no instinctive deference to the crown puts an ill-defined but definite limit on how much more national embarrassment we are willing to shoulder for the privilege of being a kingdom. Badly handled, William’s marriage may reveal that limit quicker than we think.

The omens aren't uniformly good. Look at what happened the last time the royal party planners threw a wedding. The debacle at Windsor last year is just one example of an alarming erosion of institutional memory in our palaces. An obsession with short-term popularity has taken the place of evolution founded on sound precedent. So it might be safest to remind ourselves – and any royal readers – what lessons Diana's fate may have left us. As an organisation that prides itself on its history, the royal establishment must already have drawn up its own list. Perhaps it looks like this...

First, and rather obviously, the marriage of the future head of state must be built upon the rock of mutual affection and respect, not upon the sand of blind egocentric neediness. For an example of how it can be done we need look no further than the current queen and her consort. From what I could see on Saturday they looked relaxed in each other's company and they did the job expected of them. Nothing more is required – not bleats to biographers, not leaks to journos, not pop concerts or even humanely baked biscuits.

Have William and Kate found that rock? It's impertinent even to ask. Lucky them if they have – and lucky us too.
Second, tiresome though it will be to them and their court, modesty must be their watchword. Modesty about their achievements would be a good start... it's almost a state secret but most royal work actually comprises turning up wearing the appropriate facial expression. It can be surprisingly difficult but even so it should never be trumpeted as anything particularly arduous - let alone grounds for self-pity - especially to themselves. Eventually William's mother forgot that good works were what she graced with her presence not what she actually practised. It didn't make her any easier to work for.

Modesty of lifestyle comes a close second. Yes we want royalty that looks royal. But for most people, the palaces and the household cavalry tick the necessary boxes. Extravagant blowouts for purse-proud American social mountaineers have a counterproductive effect - even if it is all for the Prince's Trust. Not to mention the damage they can do to your ability to spot a crook.

Honesty shouldn't just be something you look for in your dinner guests. Being the fount of national honour doesn't necessarily translate directly into personal virtue, although there will never be a shortage of false friends to reassure you of your royal high-ness. All the more important that honesty should begin with how you see yourself - because nobody else (except if you're lucky your darling spouse) will reliably tell you that you're about to invite derision.

Honesty is perhaps most difficult in dealings with the press. Spin doctors and their royal clients offer each other a lethal range of mutual attractions - but there's only ever one winner. Ask the Duchy accountants how much Charles has spent on communications advice over the past twenty years. Even now, as he grusses about a secretary's alleged betrayal over a book deal, it seems he hasn't learned that letting the media in is a damned sight easier than getting them out when their usefulness has been exhausted.

Contrary to popular belief among royal folk, the media are not the source of all their woes. Out of commercial opportunism, out of mischief and, sometimes, out of naivety, the media have far too often been co-opted by royal press officers into a conspiracy of botched PR. No wonder the correct way to read a modern royal media story is first to ask “who briefed this?” and secondly to wonder why they bothered.

So, Ms. Middleton should perhaps try to find out who briefed The Mail on their two-page spread this week disclosing the exciting makeover secrets of Team Kate. Or who is placing the stories that Camilla is guiding her footsteps as she tiptoes into the limelight. Whoever it is, they don't really have her interests at heart.
Finally, on a list that might be endless, loyalty can cover a useful range of royal virtues. Royal flunkeys of all ranks will reliably bow and curtsey but such reflex deference increasingly has to be earned. Every day. Get it right and – who knows? – William and Kate may find it is repaid tenfold. That’s not because they have the fiercest lawyers but because people will always want to think the best of them. Which is not a bad reward for the lifetime of sacrifice we expect them to make.

Oh, and while on the subject, try to keep the sacrifices visible. William’s great uncle sacrificed the throne for the woman he loved. His great grandmother sacrificed her family’s safety by staying in London during the blitz. His grandmother publicly sacrificed her life to the service of her people. And his mother is widely seen as having been sacrificed on the altar of dynastic convenience. A bit of visible sacrifice will earn him many weekends of polo, months of skiing and a lifetime of privilege.

So, on second thoughts, it might have been wise to decline the polo invite last Saturday - however worthy the cause - and put in an appearance at the royal coal face. The polo and the good causes will always be there. But how many more chances will there be to enjoy Prince Philip’s jokes on the balcony. Duty can still be fun. Apart from anything else, you missed a really super fly-past.
The church bells will not ring out for William and Kate. So let's get over it. As Clarence House points out, in an eloquently terse statement, it's a private matter. That, we can be sure, is Prince William's view.

Is it Kate Middleton's view? Probably. And her mother's...? Probably again. But somewhere, somehow a friend or relative will talk. The same friend or relative perhaps who has kept us informed about the rock-solid maturity of the relationship Kate has with William, the cosiness of her chats with the Queen or even her worldly acceptance that sometimes boys will be boys and pretty Brazilian students will be treated to a hands-on experience Kate might have thought was reserved for her alone.

The same sources might very fairly point to the fact that Kate has kept up her end of the bargain, looking demure in Boujis as much as at Sandhurst, stoically enduring paparazzi ambushes and only reluctantly – and successfully – complaining about media intrusion. In short, she has been a trouper.

And what is her reward? We shall see. The role of royal cast-off is a hard one to play, especially for someone who showed such obvious potential for the part of princess. We may hope that, among all the other emotions she must be feeling, eventually Kate will allow herself a slight sigh of relief.

There will be little relief for Clarence House in the next few days. What will concern Prince Charles's courtiers now is damage limitation. Even if the break-up was as “amicable” as has been claimed, they will be holding their breath about what comes next.

I remember in the days before Charles and Diana announced their separation (also described as “amicable”) we wrote reassuring rubbish like “there is no third party involved” and “there is no prospect of divorce.” It's the kind of thing people say when they are looking for glimmers of light in a scarily unpredictable situation.

As we laboured late into the night on scores of draft press briefings I thought what a shame it was that we couldn't have applied our collective energies to keeping the royal couple together. But it was too late for that. It was a terrible mess – and we had to deal with the situation as it was, not how we wished it was. It will be the same today.

Has anybody tried to keep William and Kate together....or will the news be greeted with relief by royal grandees who tut-tutted that Miss Middleton was aiming a little too high for one of her background? It's possible that the “third party” in this case was not some love
rival but the ghost of royal snobbery. The coalminers in Kate’s ancestry might have been the aristocracy of the working classes…but noble birth is still a useful tick in the box if you plan to be queen. The former Camilla Shand was side-lined by such thinking when her royal boyfriend went off to the services. Let’s hope that’s a piece of history that will not be repeating itself, with Kate as permanent shadow from the past.

Talking of the Duchess of Cornwall, there just might be a tinge of relief that she and William’s father will continue their tenure as royal newly-weds for a while longer yet. The vision of a virile young heir-in waiting and his enchanting young princess is one which some in Clarence House would surely be happy to see eventually – but perhaps not just yet. After all, monarchy is theatre and Charles has limited patience with those who would share his spotlight.

Somewhere in Clarence House somebody has drafted contingency plans to deal with the fallout. A few unattributable leaks to friendly journalists they can probably cope with. But don’t rule out several sleepless nights while royal minders fret over the possibility of some really damaging revelations and a permanent dent in William’s reputation.

When the fallen petals of a failed romance have been swept away we are left with a stark reality. The hereditary monarchy depends on the safe, orderly and popular transfer of the crown from one generation to the next. It wasn’t just Woolworths who jumped the gun with their wedding plates. There was a collective hope that in Kate Middleton, William had found someone whom he had grown to love in the tranquility of St Andrews and with whom he could build a relationship strong enough to withstand all the storms of modern royal life.

Woolworths might have sold a lot of plates and magazines might have sold a lot of glossy copies but the really crucial fact would have remained: William has formed a relationship that is going to stop the marital rot that plagued his father’s generation and the entire institution of monarchy – in Canberra and Calgary as well as in Carlisle – will be more secure as a result.

This morning we can no longer say that. Instead, behind their net curtained windows, the planners in the palaces must put away their planning grids that would have helped them crown their careers with a royal wedding for the 21st century. They will comfort themselves with the thought that if the nettle had to be grasped at least that uncomfortable deed has been done.

The British monarchy didn’t survive for the last thousand years by crying over spilt milk. The Queen, in particular, embodies the brisk, no-fuss approach to calamity which was perhaps her generation’s greatest strength.
So we can be reassured that royal life will go serenely on, without the help of Kate Middleton. We can admire photographs of Prince William driving his tank and looking externally unscathed by this near-miss from Cupid's arrow. We might even agree with Shakespeare who said that “A soldier is better suited than with a wife.”

But in the end the central question will remain: if not Kate Middleton, then whom?
Kate Middleton should perhaps be warned not to take too seriously what Queen Victoria said about marriage: “I feel sure that no girl would go to the altar if she knew all.”

Nevertheless, marrying Victoria’s great-great-great-great grandson Prince William – as now seems may be Kate’s destiny – is not for the faint hearted...or the indecisive.

In recent days she has suffered a baptism by fire as dozens of paparazzi have staked out her West London flat. Even a veteran public performer might flinch under the attention of so much shouting and so many flash guns and motor drives. It’s fair to say that Kate has coped well with the ordeal, staying cool and dignified and looking chic into the bargain. It’s a good sign.

Not such a good sign, however, is the way in which William’s family and advisors seem to have been caught unprepared by the media fascination with Kate. With more than 25 years of experience since Diana endured a similar explosion of interest, the royal authorities have opted for a mix of threats and complaints – a poor alternative to taking firm and discreet control of Kate’s day to day wellbeing.

In an avoidable escalation, London Bobbies [police officers] have become conspicuously involved – to the annoyance of taxpayers and hence damaging to Kate’s reputation.

The former head of Diana’s security detail proposes a simple solution. Prince Charles should spend his own money to employ a few ex-royalty protection officers who have experience of handling over-attentive pressmen. It’s low-key and it works. You might say it’s the British Way.

The paparazzi issue is symptomatic of problems that Kate – like Diana before her – will experience when and if she becomes a princess. It’s a graphic demonstration that her life will never be entirely her own again...and her fate is in the hands of a palace organisation that has a notoriously imperfect track record in providing “happy ever after” marriages for young royal brides.

So for Kate the best bet may be to do all she can to take her destiny into her own hands – for her own sake and, incidentally, for the sake of the British Crown.

Even a brief look at Diana’s experience might suggest five general guidelines:

Work on your relationship – and you will cope with all that the strange and lonely life of royalty can throw at you and your husband.
Recognise the importance of unflashy, consistent public work. It’s good for your own fulfilment…and for your worldwide image.

Avoid conspicuous self-indulgence… you are a dutiful royal princess, not a transient creation of the celebrity culture.

Be good. That way you’ll earn all the bows and curtsies that come your way – and your lawyers will starve (hopefully).

Best of all… be happy. A lifetime of public service still has its rewards. Find the ones that work for you - and you need never have to say (to quote Victoria again):

“A marriage is no amusement but a solemn act, and generally a sad one.”
The fog which lay over Heathrow last Tuesday had already kept us sitting on the motionless Boeing for an hour and a half, our take-off indefinitely delayed. Perhaps in the hope of soothing impatient passengers, the Captain came on the PA to confirm the news I'd received by text a few minutes earlier. He was thrilled to inform us that Prince William and Kate Middleton were now officially engaged. There was a pause, as if for cheers or at least a spontaneous ripple of applause. The silence lengthened. Somebody coughed. Newspapers rustled.

I looked around the cabin. There must have been close to three hundred of us – mostly middle-aged, middle-class Brits and Americans. Several tourists. The very audience most likely to be pleased that the British monarchy had once again found the genetic and intellectual wherewithal to regenerate itself. These were the kind of people, myself included, who could remember a sunny day in 1981 when another telegenic couple stood on the balcony of Buckingham Palace and, with a kiss, sealed the happy and glorious future of our country's most admired institution. For ever, or so it seemed. In our innocence, we had no trouble cheering and clapping then.

By the time William and Kate step onto that balcony next year, the urge to cheer will surely grip us all once more. Meanwhile, however, my unscientific sample of public opinion merely looked at its watches and dreamed of a flight attendant with a drinks cart...

Anyone surprised that a certain cynicism has crept into our relations with the Windsors must have successfully managed to forget the events of the past thirty years; years that saw the monarchy brought to its lowest ebb since 1936 thanks to a toxic blend of bad luck, bad judgement and bad faith.

And although now out of intensive care, the royal patient remains vulnerable. That’s at least partly because so many of its wounds were self-inflicted. As William’s parents discovered, addictive bouts of media manipulation and self-pity earned them not more sympathy but less, even from the soft-hearted British public.

So will an injection of honest Middleton bourgeois blood now prove a sovereign remedy, as is widely asserted? We’ll soon find out, because the antibodies are already at work. Headlines that on Wednesday oozed syrup over next year’s nuptials by Thursday were oozing bile about its expected cost. Welcome to the rest of your media life, Catherine.
Before her champions gallop off to slay the putrid dragons of Fleet Street, it’s worth recognising that Kate and her fiancé have inherited a tainted PR chalice. Not so long ago, teenage William was the strongest potion in the royal spin doctors’ bag of black arts – with a reliably mood-altering effect on hungry press hounds. The poison of political-style news management that embittered the War of the Waleses lingered well into the Camilla era and is unlikely to have been entirely purged from the nooks and crannies of Kate’s antique new world.

Sorry about the glance backwards. But without a rigorous analysis of what they see in the rear-view mirror, those helping William and Kate steer their way to a happy future risk repeating the wrecks of the past. Continuity may be one of the great strengths of our constitutional monarchy but it positively invites comparison with shining examples and horrible warnings that have gone before. Indeed, by his eloquent choice of engagement ring, William has made the link for us. “There are three of them in this engagement” goes the waggish conclusion.

While we’re on the subject, next July will see what would have been the thirtieth anniversary of that other fairy tale wedding - one that turned out to be infamously crowded. Until this week, those fearful of pursed royal lips thought twice before mentioning William’s mother in polite palace circles. But that’s the trouble with inviting people to admire the awesome sweep of your history: it’s not always possible to control which bits they’ll pick out for special inspection. So now we find Diana skipping gracefully across acres of wedding coverage and only a grouch would see any harm in that. Only a grouch, surely, perceives the late Princess as a ghost at the feast. For those with nothing to hide, she’s less ghost than guiding light, inviting us to look honestly at the workings of the royal machine and offering clues about how to make it work more happily.

For her part, Kate seems commendably keen to get stuck in and “learn the ropes” as she winningly told Tom Bradby. It’s reported that palace advisors have even prepared special instructional videos for Kate so she can study Diana’s match-winning technique. True or not, there could surely be none better qualified to give a master class in how to win hearts.

But all those top tips on how to emerge gracefully from the back of a limo will be wasted if you don’t really understand and accept why you’re on the royal road show in the first place. Otherwise, when you hop out of your eco-Jag, the smile you’ve prepared for the rain-lashed civic reception committee won’t fool the cool hard eyes of the press pack. Even worse, it won’t fool you when you examine it in the mirrors of all those freshly-painted royal loos that stretch ahead of you like guardsmen on parade. Royalty is still theatre, and today’s cyber-groundlings will quickly sense if your heart’s not in the performance.
That, in a nutshell, was what did for William’s parents. Acting the part of happy couple – remember all those denials of trouble in the marriage? – became too much for them. It became too much for their support team. In the end, it almost brought down the curtain on the whole royal epic. So, on the brink of this happy new royal dawn, it’s hardly surprising that almost as much newsprint is being splurged on advice for the couple as on who will make the dress. This wedding really matters. This one has to work. Even the most ardent monarchist will admit that the royal applecart may not survive another major matrimonial upset – and probably wouldn’t deserve to.

Of course, the best advice in the world is worthless unless it’s actually received, understood and acted upon. Royal ears – at other times so wonderfully receptive to the concerns of ordinary folk - can suddenly harden against lectures from suits who ride the royal gravy train.

Kate will not be short of advice, much of it 24 carat quality and delivered in clear, affectionate tones. But among the nuggets will be lumps of dross, by turns slanted, ingratiating and opportunistic. Unfortunately, it all comes gift-wrapped and she’s at liberty to choose which looks most inviting. Let’s hope she’s blessed with friends and family who don’t lack the courage to tell her things she’d rather not hear. Let’s hope her courtiers have guts as well as fat pensions. Let’s pray her husband’s chief happiness is her contentment.

Contentment especially in her sense of usefulness. One of my earliest memories of working for the Prince and Princess of Wales was a joint planning meeting – a low-key, weekly chore attended only by officials and chaired by an avuncular (and now sadly departed) private secretary. The proceedings were, as usual, dominated by the Prince’s business. His many assistant private secretaries competed for the ambitious courtier’s most precious possession: royal face-time for themselves and their portfolios. After what seemed an eternity, the PS gathered up his papers to conclude proceedings and then, in a charming afterthought, turned to Diana’s lady-in-waiting with an indulgent smile: “and Her Royal Highness will, as usual, continue to do very little... but do it very well indeed.”

Being patronised – even from a kind heart – was an experience that ultimately added to the slow blowtorch of proud Diana’s resentment. The rest is unhappy history. So Kate – and the rest of us – must keep our fingers crossed that her embryonic royal career does not become a mere appendix to her husband’s – itself an appendix to her father-in-law’s, itself an appendix…and so on. The ropes that she so admirably says she wants to learn had better be ones that fill her pristine new sails with fair winds, not fall slack in her willing hands.
Elsewhere in Tom Bradby’s interview, she gamely said that she intends to work hard. Add modesty and a willingness to make visible sacrifices and her list of essential core royal attributes is virtually complete.

All credit to Bradby for revealing to us an attractive young couple whose most attractive features are to look happy in each other’s company and appear committed to the extraordinary path providence has assigned to them. It’s sobering to think they may be treading that path for another thirty years before it leads them to the throne. How reassuring, then, to hear Prince William say with absolute sincerity that they look forward to spending the rest of their lives together.

Thank God for such princely clarity. Monarchy’s strength surely lies in being at ease with simple truths – the kind the rest of us can recognise and share, or at least admire. Its reputation needs no fretful PR bodyguard but just a habit of those quiet good deeds that are always found out in the end.

Then Dieu et mon Droit – whatever that really means to you - will surely look after itself.
Royal Wedding sick bags are available on the internet. Not, as you might expect, for use at Royal stag parties but as a light-hearted comment on the impending solemnisation. Says artist Lydia Leith: "The sick bags aren't specifically political, or at least weren't made as a dig...I wanted to contribute to the tradition of what I see as a very British humour."

And why not. Unlike the spiteful little “Stuff the Royal Wedding” stickers that appeared before Charles and Diana's Happy Day, Ms Leith's souvenirs at least have a practical purpose.

They also show us how attitudes to our foremost institution have changed. No longer a victim of Thatcher-era agitprop, it sometimes seems the Royal Family has joined the "Keep Calm and Carry On" posters (from which the sick bags seem to draw some of their artistic inspiration) as a reminder that once upon a time patriotic stiff upper lips always came with a crown on top.

Part of the reason for this change has been the Royal Family's unfortunate habit of squandering chances of marital success. Part has been its steady drift from the Court and News pages to the Celeb and Showbiz sections. Some is their fault. Some is ours.

Try to imagine any of Prince William's party chums crying into their cocktails about Ms Leith's sick bags, except with tears of laughter. It's easier to imagine her masterpieces being delivered wholesale to the Mahiki ready for the Big Night.

Whether or not you think of this as progress, it has to be better than the bear-baiting mood of the 90s or the betrayed idealism of the 80s. Now, just in time to restore our faith in the future, William and Kate can hit the red carpet at St Andrews today confident that the Kingdom of Fife will turn out to wave and cheer.

The young couple revisiting the scene of their early courtship will be a sight to gladden every loyal royal heart. In a few, it may even strike a pang. Some of us will remember William’s mother at a similar stage in her engagement – a blushing confection of Sloane Ranger frills, unsure of her role, her hair-do or her husband yet gamely offering a smile and an amateur hand to the smitten, hungry crowds.

It isn't hard to spot the difference between Diana, barely in her twenties, and Kate, thirty years later and a decade older. Even without the benefit of a fiancé's unambiguous support, it's easy to imagine the stylish Miss Middleton carrying off her debut to perfection,
much as she did on the day she high-stepped down the St Andrew's catwalk in a little see-through number, to much ardent admiration.

It's an enjoyable moment to re-live. But we might also take a moment to call up that distant image of the young Diana, struggling to cope with royal apprenticeship as well as her own need for acceptance and approval. Something about that struggle touched hearts all over the world, earning for Diana an unexpected extra gift to go with all the flowers and applause. Sympathy.

It was a sympathy that forgave her mis-steps on what was to become a lonely road. It ultimately found expression in the unrestrained mourning of her death. That very public sense of loss – an embarrassment to some - was visible repayment for Diana's willingness to offer rather more than could usually be found in the standard royal emotional repertoire.

Princess Catherine will no doubt discover her own brand of magic and we, in turn, will surely discover a brand-new way to appreciate our future monarchs – untouched by prurience on our part or self-pity on theirs.

Nevertheless, retail-trained Kate will know that like any other brand, royal magic's reputation is hard to earn and horribly easy to lose. The Queen's reputation is not the creation of a team of spin doctors. Nor is that of her daughter. Polls regularly remind us that Brand Anne is trusted to do the job and valued accordingly. The Princess Royal is a paragon of princessly virtues – hard-working, uncomplaining and bracingly aloof. But even if Kate can establish a reputation for the first two (and let's hope she does) her admirable bourgeois genes disqualify her for the third.

The compensation is that those same genes are the ones that will win our hearts – not because she is effortlessly at ease in her daunting new role but because she finds it hard. We'll cheer for Kate not because she looks fantastic and every inch a future queen but because inside we know she's desperate not to screw up.

In other words, it's her vulnerability that touches our hearts – just as it did with awkward, gutsy young Lady Di.

So even as the suits toiled in their comfy palace offices to double-check each detail of today's programme, with luck they didn't fret too much about the even longer list of things beyond their control. Perfect planning can keep an anxious courtier's career on track but it only really hits the heights as the prelude to perfect spontaneity – the best kind of unstuffy, unforced approachability that humanises royalty but never cheapens it. The kind that allows vulnerability and does not fear it.
Here Kate's genes help again. At a safe distance from the sometimes-toxic atmosphere of the court, she grew up in a secure world of happy family normality. Certainly that's what we should be quite content to assume. It's a world into which William has been welcomed and which we can guess now seems to him like a life-giving source of untainted air.

Naturally, we try to safeguard the things that are precious to us. We'd all like to control as much as we can of the things that affect our lives. Yet royal people – in theory so well equipped to control everything and everyone around them – must feel that in practice they control very little. The frustration must be maddening and surely only sharpens the urge to grab any chance to reverse the imbalance.

But normality and control don't mix. Yesterday in Wales and today in St Andrew's the joyful outcome of days of careful preparation will be wonderfully displayed – a textbook operation from chapter one of How To Be Royal. But of all the sensations created by so much careful planning, normality won't be one of them. In fact the organisers of St Andrew's 600th Anniversary Appeal would feel short-changed if it were. Instead, what we see is normality's over-dressed cousin, Royal Normality.

For William and Kate a lifetime of this deceptive, alternative normality awaits. Their survival plan probably depends on oases of real normality such as their Anglesey Cottage or the Middletons' comfortable home and their future equivalents. From these refuges they will be expected to emerge to do their duty on our behalf.

Who would then blame them if they were tempted to see their work as torture – a temptation his father doesn't always manage to resist, as William may have noticed. Let's hope they realise that, by looking from a different angle, the torture chamber is actually something else completely. It's a bit like one of those historic halls at St Andrew's where the undergraduate Kate and William first flirted. Outwardly rather grim and stony but hiding unexpected happy surprises in the least likely places. Open your eyes and you may see it offers the chance for growth, inspiration, enlightenment and – whisper it – fun.

DAILY TELEGRAPH 20th NOVEMBER 2010
When I was growing up, one of my family's most precious possessions was a rather ordinary fountain pen. Its place in our mythology was assured because once upon a time (the late 1950's at a guess) it had been used by the Duke of Edinburgh to sign the visitors' book of the destroyer in which my father was then serving in the Mediterranean Fleet.

Today, it might be hard to appreciate the significance of such a mundane detail, just as it's a bit of a struggle to imagine a British Mediterranean Fleet. But many will recall a time when a routine royal signature could powerfully represent the unity of crown, duty and British identity. For our family, as for most others, it was a simple acknowledgement of an obvious fact.

Pens are still hurriedly produced when royalty squares up to an open visitors' book. But I doubt if the little ritual still carries quite the same tribal significance as it did sixty years ago. Just as the Mediterranean Fleet has sailed into history so too has the status of royalty as unquestioned embodiment of who we are and the values we hold.

The eve of a Royal Wedding might seem an odd moment to make the point. After all, according to some polls, the royal family is enjoying a popularity boost on the back of William and Kate's obvious happiness.

Nothing could better represent the royal family's continuing sense of duty than for the groom to wear the uniform of the Royal Air Force in which he is a serving pilot and which – incidentally – is currently engaged in operations on what the Mediterranean Fleet would surely have considered its front doorstep.

Yet despite this reassuring evidence of royal continuity, there's no doubt the wedding and all its works still leave some sections of the population underwhelmed. Despite the Prime Minister's enthusiastic team-talk, it's reported that applications for wedding street parties are down on previous comparable events - a drop not entirely attributable to council red tape. There's evidence, too, of a certain geographical divide with residents nearer to Bucklebury, Berks more likely to be putting out the bunting than their fellow-subjects in the provinces.

Anecdotally it's not hard to detect more than a little ennui on subjects of such vital national importance as the dress/cake/hat/hair stylist etc. Not all may be quite as dismissive as a bemused American acquaintance - “he's rich, she's thin – get over it” – but even the stoutest monarchist may be finding it hard to keep the anticipation at fever pitch.
Why, even in the Daily Telegraph one can find advice on how to escape the wedding and its crowds, noise, souvenirs and coercive group-think. Thousands of loyal subjects may make the pilgrimage to join the tourists waving flags in The Mall. But if the weekend travel sections are anything to go by, thousands will also flee to the nicer parts of the continent to sit it out for the duration.

Which group can claim the deeper patriotism? Perhaps those cheering in front of the Palace as they await That Kiss. Perhaps those who raise their prosecco pool-side in a distant languid toast. Perhaps the benignly indifferent majority as they duly note the renewal of a comfortable national institution even as they get on with the serious business of mowing the lawn.

Though they may choose to express it in different ways and with varying degrees of ardour, all are similar in this: their love of country only has one officially-sanctioned outlet. The Monarch.

If you doubt it, try getting an English majority for an alternative national anthem. On this subject, Celts - count me in - can relax and enjoy being spectators, the more so since commentators invariably refer to the happy couple as “the future king and queen of England.” This is an English identity puzzle which lies at the heart of England's relationship with its royal family. It's a relationship that gets haphazard forensic analysis every time there's an event like a royal wedding.

Or a royal funeral. Some people viewed the very public mourning of Princess Diana as profoundly un-English. So intensely did they hold this conviction that it almost seemed, given the chance, that they would consign to an inferior class of citizenship anybody whose upper lips tremulously failed the national stiffness test. This despite the fact that, for 15 years, the deceased was to have been the next queen to all subjects equally. Thus does a monarchy reveal its power to divide as well as unite.

Meanwhile, there are those who question the other side of the equation, seeing much about the Windsors that falls short of a national ideal. They might point, for example, to the wedding guest list which includes an eye-popping number of dubious pew-blockers, from Kazakh billionaires to Spanish tile tycoons and German car salesmen.

Such choices certainly stir national sentiment – but perhaps not of the intended variety. The impertinent derision such invitees invite is entirely predictable, entirely healthy and reassuringly English. One wonders which advisor failed to make the point, particularly to The Prince of Wales whose thrifty instinct to repay his well-heeled friends with royal wedding currency devalues more than it can possibly enrich.
In slight contrast, William and Kate's guests seem to feature the jolly and the jolly useful rather than the merely purse-proud and pushy. And let's not forget that a measure of good-old fashioned royal hauteur is a necessary part of their future role. Rumours of the death of English deference have been greatly exaggerated: just watch those feudal reflexes twitch as curtsies home in on the new princess.

Deference works both ways. Unwelcome as it must sometimes be for them to remember, William and Kate’s decisions – good and bad – will affect how the country feels not just about them but about itself too. There are reasons for optimism: both share affectionate links with Scotland, both made a well-advised early visit to Northern Ireland and Kate even sang the Welsh anthem with conviction.

Yet a long road lies ahead of them. Television coverage might almost persuade us that the wedding is but a prelude to a happy new world of rejuvenated monarchy. It is not. Rather, it is the prelude to what may be a thirty-year palace traffic jam. It's as if the Audi dealer had sold us a shiny showroom model and then said we can't have the keys till we're too old to drive. You don't have to be a PR director to know that's a great way to lose customers.

Ah yes, you say. But anything can happen before then. Wasn't it the Prince of Wales himself who deflected speculation about the future by musing: “Who knows what the Good Lord has in store for us?”

Indeed, we may wonder – for us and for him. Not all the polls make happy reading for the next in line. One reason might be staring out at him from the guest list. We might even add to the day's enjoyment by imagining the nearly-ninety-year-old Duke of Edinburgh’s thoughts as, with an admiral's eye, he surveys the motley crew making themselves comfortable in the Abbey. Anyone got a pen?
"I feel sure that no girl would go to the altar if she knew all."

Not very on-message for this long weekend of celebration, but perhaps Kate Middleton's great-great-great-great grandmother-in-law wasn't feeling very sunny the day she delivered that gloomy opinion of marriage. And although Queen Victoria and Albert turned out to be one of the greatest of all royal love stories, her misgivings might, if we're honest, be worth a moment's reflection.

Weddings – especially royal weddings – are a great excuse for a party. But even as the glorious new chapter is being swept in on a noisy wave of goodwill and Alka-Seltzer, the comfortable familiarities of the past are quietly taking their leave and slipping out of a side door, never to return. What bride or groom hasn't momentarily, secretly, even if just for a nano-second mourned the loss of the old certainties even as the organist – or Royal Air Force trumpeters – lets rip with a triumphant fanfare?

After so many years of courtship, it's fair to assume that Kate does "know all," at least as Victoria might have defined it. But what she doesn't know is what comes next. Weddings are about the future – and all its uncertainties. Matrimony is designed to help us face that unknown with all the reinforcement provided by the now legally-attached cupcake at our side. But, as practised by the Church of England, weddings are also intended to equip us with a strength from on high which is even more enduring.

Much has been made – as it should - of Kate Middleton's decision to be Confirmed as part of readying herself for marriage. This is not just a refreshing sign of her spiritual awareness. Symbolically it reinforces the central role of the Church of England and its teachings in the future life of the Crown.

Will her small act of individual piety be offensive to the country's other religions? Of course not. As we are frequently reminded, we live in a land of many faiths. Perhaps Kate recognises that, rather than attempt to please all of them, it might be better to earn their combined respect by sticking with one and serving it consistently.

Many will be reassured by such conventional instincts. A national hunger for certainty can be detected as a recurring theme in this wedding. Newspaper preoccupation with a hundred incidental details seems only to emphasise the unchanging appeal of the marriage ceremony itself – the music, the prayers, the vows. It is these aspects that register more deeply than all the royal trimmings, however splendid.
This is surely as it should be. In an age of family breakdown, social isolation and general anxiety about the future, the fact that the most modern faces in royalty choose to submit to one of its most ancient rituals has a powerfully stabilising and comforting significance.

Let's hope there's more of this to come. After the excitements and upheavals that characterised William's parents' shot at marital bliss, now would be a very good time to show that the next generation has learned the value of calm predictability. There is no need and no appetite for another royal round of melodramatic gestures, daringly visionary insights or pseudo-radical posturing. Leave that to the politicians and the luvvies. If they end up looking like prize prats it might damage their egos but it won't damage our constitution.

As an alternative model, some urge royalty to recapture a lost golden age of dullness. A blurring of the line between royalty and celebrity may have prompted this suggestion but the real culprit has been some royal households' addiction to political-style news management. The unholy alliance of PR and royalty has enriched the practitioners, diminished their royal clients and left the rest of us alternately queasy and cynical. This is a great opportunity finally to cure some palace press offices of their lingering weakness for Blair-era spin.

Not least because our entire head of state apparatus should be above such manoeuvrings. Nor do innocent royal folk need overelaborate protection from mainstream British media, many of whom have shown themselves capable of extraordinary contortions of self-censorship for fear of displeasing the Windsors.

Royal hacks are very seldom cold-hearted curs, dedicated to inventing nasty lies about their helpless royal victims. Given a regular diet of positive stories they will reliably swallow them whole. It's only when they sniff a cover-up, hypocrisy or blatant deceit that they can be roused to hunt gamier meat. They are not vermin to be “outfoxed,” as Prince William gleefully but tellingly described the tactics used to throw them off the scent of his stag party. Handled with good manners and honesty they can be royalty's faithful companion. Challenge them to a running skirmish, however, and don't be surprised if they get under your feet. Or worse.

It may be painful to admit, but royal people are big customers of the media. How else can we be told how hard they're working? I was once on a royal tour when, for some reason that seemed important at the time, the travelling press party went on strike. The dispute was settled quicker than you can say “eighteen-page exclusive Hello! photo-spread.”
If William and Kate are content to build a track record of low-key royal service; if they uncomplainingly put in the hours on bleak British winter streets and in sweltering foreign aid projects; if they let their recognition of other people's good works satisfy their own need for praise; and if they can smile and wave till their muscles ache.... then the royal spin doctors will be gloriously redundant. So will Fleet Street's attack dogs. Not to mention the royal injunction lawyers. If that's dull, let's have more of it.

While we're at it, let's have plenty of dullness on the domestic front too. William and Kate have already built a solid foundation for their future together so we can hope for a quality of family life that's a constant source of joy for them and for the country. Of course, that requires a talent not often associated with royalty – a willingness to compromise. It works best when teamed with a gift sadly beyond the reach of William's parents: an ability to delight in each other's successes.

But there will be no getting away from it: being a royal couple is different. For all William's understandable craving for normality, theirs will be a life lived in a strange parallel universe whose population is a couple of dozen at most. In the face of such isolation, it would be all-too easy for a vulnerable spouse to succumb to the ever-accommodating ear offered by "friends." Nor, let's face it, will the offer always be limited to ears. So the care with which friends and advisors are jointly vetted and approved must be unrelenting.

Dull is a pretty good standard to aim for at work too, if by "dull" we mean reliably conscientious. Edward VIII referred dismissively to his royal duties as "stunting" but such private disdain eventually seeps through the royal mask. Tedious and tiring much routine royal duty certainly can be – but that's why it's called duty. Ultimately, it's the reason royal chests are so splendidly adorned with ribbons and tin ware, all of which their owners must be able to believe were at least partly earned, if only to preserve their sanity and our polite acquiescence.

Meanwhile, requests will pour in to William and Kate's offices imploring them to give speeches. Deciding which to accept – and then deciding what to say – can be a process fraught with danger.

The experience of William's parents might suggest advice along the following lines: "make a virtue of not having any public opinions about anything. That shouldn't be such an impossible imposition. After all, we're only allowed to have one opinion about you, officially at least. Your bright ideas, however well-intentioned, will have consequences not because of your superior knowledge but because of your surname. So before telling us how to change (or save) the world, it might be better first to get elected – or at least ordained."
“Until then, stick close to the unexciting words offered by your patronages and ministers and let your quiet good works speak for themselves. If you really must get creative, create some really excellent new platitudes.”

Despite such a regime of conventional royal obligation, none of this need be soul-destroying. Quite the reverse. With the resources at their command, there's nothing to stop William and Kate creating shared lives blessed with growth, wisdom and inspiration. And, for the less lofty-minded, it's a certainty that William and Kate are going to be the biggest, hottest ticket on the planet for as far ahead as you care to look.

The pressure could be overwhelming, yet we can be optimistic for this partnership. How wise – how reassuring – that Kate's preparation includes reaffirming her own faith. That decision may open the way to a reawakening of values vital to the future of the monarchy: public honouring of the national religion; respect for the royal tradition of uncomplaining service; and an easy familiarity with the truth. Sounds like harmony to me.

When in need of guidance, William and Kate need look no further than the Queen, whose life of duty and sacrifice has earned enduring affection. Yet what the Americans call “the greatest generation” – of which Elizabeth II is a shining example – need have no monopoly of these traditional virtues. It seems to be William and Kate's generation who more easily see past the wedding theatrics outside the Abbey to the enduring certainties within. Given the chance, those certainties will liberate our future king and queen from the mistakes of the past and from any
What a day. To see and hear William and Catherine take their vows was a privilege made no less special by sharing it with an extended congregation of a billion or so. As a wedding production, this one surely scored as high marks for technical merit and artistic interpretation as any in Westminster Abbey’s history. With their own eternal beauty, the familiar words reached out to our hearts and in return our hearts reached out to the young couple who, despite their familiarity, it was as if we now saw anew.

We can see other things anew as well. The enduring strength of the great institutions of crown and church, parliament and armed forces – all now visibly transferring to the care of the rising generation. And who could fail to see anew the debt we owe the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh, whose presiding parental role gives a whole new meaning to the idea of growing old gracefully.

Grace was a word and a gift that kept coming to mind. One aspect in particular, especially when attention moved from the solemnity of the Abbey to the jubilation of the Mall. For the first time in nearly twenty years, Princess Diana’s engagement ring returned to the Buckingham Palace balcony.

To its lustrous blue eye the view of cheering crowds must have been reassuringly familiar. Poignant too, if you recall its first visit to this place. Looking slightly to its right/left, however, it would have spotted something new and probably – in that location - rather bewildering: the distinctive silhouette of the Duchess of Cornwall, elegant in cream and aqua.

The symbolism is as deafening as the roar of yesterday’s immaculate fly-past. The mother whose name has seldom been heard in polite royal circles for half of William’s lifetime is now back on the approved list. Even more firmly on the approved list, and in a more substantive form, is his step-mother. For those who like their gestures nice and clear, yesterday saw both women publicly reconciled in a way that brings nothing but credit to William and his bride.

A big family occasion is a great opportunity for such healing initiatives. We can guess that few will have been more pleased than the Duchess of Cambridge. Her experience as child of a happy family will surely bring sunshine to the sometimes gloomy palace corridors that are now part of her world. The Windsors have a not entirely undeserved reputation for nursing grudges – sometimes even against their own in-laws. So if his wife has helped
William demonstrate the benefits of reconciliation then everyone – but mostly him – can be the happier for it.

Of course, reconciliations seldom take root unless the original perceived offence has been purged. An honest acknowledgement of past failings is essential. After all, if bygones really are going to be bygones, then it helps to have some agreement about what’s to be sent to life’s great compost heap of time-expired emotion.

I remember a particularly fraught afternoon in Princess Diana’s cheerfully cluttered, flower-scented sitting room. It was late 1995, more than three years after her formal separation from Prince Charles. William and Harry were far away at boarding school. The matter under discussion was anything but happy.

With a look I had come to dread - partly truculent and partly apprehensive – my boss was waiting for my reaction to the bombshell she had just exploded in my overcrowded brain: she had secretly recorded an interview for Panorama. It was going to clear the air, set the record straight and generally put us on the path to a less complicated future. And I was not to worry.

I worried, and still do. I also tried to find the right words to persuade her that an olive branch might be a better message to send than what I guessed would be a one-sided re-statement of past grievances. The moral authority she would have gained from such a self-assured and magnanimous coup would have scored a knock-out in the unedifying contest for public sympathy in which she and her husband seemed permanently trapped.

She was not to be persuaded – or perhaps I just didn’t find the right words. Instead of reconciliation, another and this time conclusive twist was added to the downward spiral of relations with her in-laws. For the remainder of her life she moved inexorably away from the royal structure which, for all its faults, was always reliably protective.

Protection we can be sure is what William want for his vulnerable new bride. Protection especially from the unhappiness he must feel was so avoidably piled on his mother’s slender shoulders. Since the cornerstone of such protection will be a secure marriage - in which success and failure are experiences to be shared rather than triggers for distrust - much of the responsibility will lie in his hands.

An even-handed and relentlessly polite relationship with the media will be the best protection against the dangerous illusion that the press are an enemy to be bested at every turn. The extent and tone of media coverage of this event should remind us of its power to unite as well as divide.
Protection from physical harm doesn't need any elaboration, except to remember that Scotland Yard’s finest are better than any alternative – a point well underlined by yesterday’s faultless security operation.

Protection from the loneliness of the royal road and from the corrosive search for “relevance” is best secured through a consistent programme of low-key hard work, with all the job-satisfaction that royal status can unlock.

Most important of all is to find protection from the self-doubt that seems an inevitable by-product of being – even theoretically – always in the right. The worldwide adulation that’s just been ramped up ten notches by the wedding can play havoc with the most seasoned public figure’s sense of proportion. The best protection might often be found in remembering that a moment of royal humility can achieve more than a week of icy royal looks. It really is better to be loved than feared.

Without that regular acquaintance with humility there’s little chance of seizing those all-important reconciliation opportunities. Even if only in the form of an engagement ring, William’s mother has achieved reconciliation with the woman she had every reason to hold responsible for her cruelly dashed wedding expectations. In the words of William and Catherine’s own prayer, there could be little better example of “what is real and important in life” than this evidence of grace. That William has had the courage and wisdom to heal such a wound perhaps promises more for his eventual reign than anything else we saw in yesterday’s celebrations.
A week has passed in the new royal era. Prince William is back at his airbase. Kate is in the supermarket. The Queen is at Windsor Castle. The media circus has packed its satellite dishes and left town. The bunting has been recycled. Like a cartwheeling verger, we've watched the world turn upside down and then revolve right-way up again. Everything looks as it did before. But everything has changed.

These unremarkable days are actually momentous. Historians of tomorrow may look back on them as the point at which either the British Crown reinvented itself to prosper for another hundred years...or at which it gave one final hurrah before slipping into terminal irrelevance.

A touch melodramatic? Consider the options. On the one hand, with the wedding of the decade triumphantly behind us and the prospect of royal babies growing closer by the day, the monarchy is set fair. But on the other, by any realistic actuarial assessment, the next two candidates for the throne will be grandparents by the time they ascend it. That's obviously not in itself a bad thing – wisdom being one of the qualities most prized in a king – but in a country itself inexorably ageing, who could blame today's teenagers for being disenchanted by a system that will never deliver a head of state for their generation.

Meanwhile the royal relegation stakes are quietly delivering their own verdict on the future. In a rigidly stratified organisation like a royal family it couldn't be otherwise. Insert a new team in the first division and everyone shuffles down. We should mark last week's images of the brave Duchess of Kent, the dignified Duke and all the other uncles and cousins on parade. The Royal A-list is slimming its ranks and we won't see them refilled again.

The Buckingham Palace balcony was once the place to show Us how many of Them there were so we didn't worry about running out of Windsors. Now those previously consigned to the chilly wing positions might as well stay indoors with the coffee cups: we don't need that many spare parts, just the main machinery, please.

This is the cue for the optimists to claim the future is bright. Here is the monarchy adapting pragmatically to changing expectations, as it always has. In the new Age of Cambridge, we get the best of the new to complement the best of the not-so new. April 29th really did start the royal comeback and all we have to do is thank our lucky stars and settle back to watch William and Kate take the world by storm (as they surely will).
Meanwhile, buoyed by favourable opinion polls, the entire institution can enjoy the pleasant floating sensation felt whenever a rising tide lifts all boats. The glamorous newly-married couple have generated a popularity in which even less-favoured royal relatives can share.

So which is to be – glorious new age or slow, senile decline? One clue might be found in the most encouraging of all the post-wedding polls. A Reader's Digest survey concludes that William, scoring 93%, is the most trusted member of the royal family, beating even his grandmother the Queen into second place.

Trust is of course the holy grail of politicians. The fact that they find it so elusive – in the same poll the Deputy Prime Minister scored 32% - owes much to the common view that they're mostly a bunch of chancers who spin the truth to trick us into giving them our vote.

That's why royal attempts at spin are so short-sighted and so damaging. They lower our royal family to the level of politicians and celebrities and they infect courtiers with hubris. It's surely no coincidence that the most enthusiastic royal devotee of PR, William's father, in the survey lags far behind his unspun son. By contrast, William's high rating is surely because, at the altar, we saw two people at their most honest and uncontrived. We liked what we saw, we found it genuine and we want more of it.

In this context the royal optimists can feel encouraged. The best bits of the wedding were when we felt we saw through the layers of formality to glimpse the real William and Kate. The unscripted bits. Even – as we surely agree – the bits that weren't quite perfect. This is the authentic evidence of our own eyes, we and our friends recognise it and we love and trust it accordingly.

Having spent the best part of eight years watching close-up a royal superstar at work, I can certainly confirm that it's the ad libs that the crowd loves, much more than the courtiers' carefully-crafted speech or immaculate event planning. It might have been to my chagrin but, as one of the men in suits, I recognized I could only set the stage and provide the props; the magic had to be supplied by the royal performer.

So when The Duke and Duchess fly to Canada next month and then progress to California - California? Playground of the fake and shallow...are we quite sure about this, chaps? - we know that the producers who gave us The Wedding will deliver another perfectly-staged production. Which is just as it should be – since so much of royalty's function is theatre. But it will be those precious moments of spontaneity that will get the traveling press pack onside and us back home oohing and aaahing over our colour souvenir supplements.
Which brings us to a key issue for the course of the Cambridges' royal career and with it the fate of the crown they will inherit. The very quality which endears them to us – their unaffected spontaneity – is the one the planners can't control. Perfect planning may set the stage for perfect spontaneity – but perfect control will kill the spontaneity dead. And with it the trust and, ultimately, the love.

When Diana kissed William's father on the Palace Balcony thirty years ago it was an unscripted moment and all the more powerful for that. By contrast, TV producers knew to the very minute when to expect last week's balcony smacker. And very lovely it was too.

But one day, events will go off-script. Not badly - but enough to unsettle the men in suits. When that happens, I hope they won't fret too much. This is where the statistics of trust synchronise with the evidence of our eyes. This was where William's mother - who never had a full-time press officer - showed the limitations of the script and trusted her instincts.

It was untidy. It offended my petty bureaucrat's brain and mortally unsettled the palace old guard. You couldn’t have put it on a website. But it was real... and the world loved her for it. We can be confident the world will love her son and daughter-in-law for it, too. If the scriptwriters give them the chance.
These are salad days for the palace press offices. At last the papers are filled with a really big, really good news story. So much more fun than those tiresome questions about billionaire's jets or the Civil List.

Now there's an extra reason to celebrate: the palace’s big push into social networking to broaden its public appeal seems to be paying off handsomely. Words such as “deft,” “adroit,” and even “masterful” have been tossed in the direction of palace press offices more used to dealing with brickbats than bouquets. Suddenly it's springtime and even the thorniest bushes are in bloom.

This is perhaps the biggest but least-noticed wedding side-effect. Just a casual trawl through the official royal websites reveals a sophisticated organisation that is clearly pumping words into the blogosphere at a prodigious rate. Go to www.officialroyalwedding2011.org for example. It looks appropriately beautiful – not too regal, not too tacky - and has every mod con from embedded videos and a search engine to a royal wedding message book. Crowning glory is surely the order of service – so real you can almost smell the fresh printer's ink.

In the words of the official wedding website: “The range of social media around the event will include the Official Royal Wedding website, the British Monarchy Flickr account, Twitter, The Royal Channel on YouTube and the British Monarchy Facebook page.”

What a brave new dawn this is to be sure: reputation-management at the click of a mouse. This is the people’s monarchy for the 21st Century, out and about in cyberspace, a smile and an inoffensive word for every iPhone.

But there may be trouble ahead. Not for nothing has today's insatiable appetite for disposable information been likened to the effects of fast food. This is a monster whose appetite the palace is relentlessly sharpening. Nor can the creators of all this extra information claim, in their defence, that they were only answering a need. Addicts need their pushers and there are no prizes for guessing where the power lies in this relationship.

One might have thought that the people who brought you Duchy Originals would be alert to the dangers of consuming too much soft sweet mush. Even seasoned royal reporters have found their critical faculties neutralised by the relentless drip feed of banal wedding trivia. Carefully rationed-out like Easter eggs, prettily-wrapped tit-bits of information have led a grateful media along a carefully pre-planned path towards the ultimate treat, the
wedding itself. Then they can at last rip open the fancy packaging and gorge to their hearts’ content while we all share in the sweet happy glow...

And there it would be nice to leave them - and us – contented and replete. Meanwhile, behind palace walls, the guardians of the digital battlements put away their charts and timetables and award themselves some well-deserved pats on the back.

But then what?

It might be worth asking if all this software-induced euphoria is any more reliable than the April sunshine. We should perhaps feel the first tremors of unease when what is, after all, a glorified ad-campaign starts attracting praise from exalted levels of the PR industry. These are people to whom presentation sometimes becomes an end in itself. The less scrupulous among them regularly place perception ahead of substance. And they even include among their ranks some who would charge a fat fee to tell you that the truth is anything you can get gullible people to believe.

This is dangerous territory for an institution which exists to represent unwavering national values. The royal family has been here before: in the bad old days of the 80s and 90s when both sides of the Wales conflict fell under the influence of “friends” in the PR world who promised to help them dish the opposition and deodorise their own reputation. Even without the multiplying power of today's computer-driven 24-hour news cycle, it caused incalculable harm then and we should be alert to any sign of its reappearance now.

There is a risk that, like a virus, the easy PR fix lies dormant in that murky soup where pressurised palace press secretaries lunch with soothing reputation experts. It's not fanciful to worry that, in the energetic rush of the current digital charm offensive, the infection may reawaken. And this time it's magnified and multiplied by the megabyte firepower with which the royal image strategists are now armed.

Scaremongering? Try thinking the not-so unthinkable. An unauthorised, scandalous royal video clip appears on the net. It’s dismissed as a fake – it might be a fake - but the damage is done. As the You-tube hits pile up by the million, the cry goes up for action – of any kind – to stop the damage.

At a stroke, instead of controlling the machine, the palace cyber lords now realise the machine is controlling them. Frantically the messages are reconfigured. Denials, appeals for decency, pitiful tales of royal anguish are poured into the blogosphere. Internally, the search for culprits poisons morale as royal performers get stage-fright, friends become suspects and as everyone wishes the Court Circular had never given way to the tweet.
Across all the platforms so eagerly bestrode by the palace to trumpet good news, this drama plays out with amplified damage. Monarchy's greatest asset – the benign indifference of the majority – rapidly devalues. Happy ignorance becomes impossible, to be replaced by miserable uncertainty and creeping cynicism.

And as the royal lawyers hover, uncertain where to aim their next injunction, the realisation dawns - too late! - that too much royal information is infinitely more damaging than too little.

Reputations – recently raised so artificially high – now fall correspondingly low. Praise for a slick PR operation turns to condemnation of a stage-managed binge more befitting the values of tinsel town than the steadfast glories of the British Crown. Trust in royal websites becomes as cheap as trust in any other transitory adman's blurb – fit only for the spam bin.

It might almost make us ask why our royal family – which was never so unwise as to attempt its own Hello! - now feels it can pull off the trick with the electronic equivalent. Councils who waste taxes on self-congratulatory freesheets are rightly ridiculed, not just because they're a waste of resources but because they insult our credulity. In the long term, the electronic royal version is unlikely to earn any greater respect, especially when the thrill of interacting with cyber-royalty subsides. As all such fads do.

At the centre of this great blancmange of computer-generated publicity are two human beings trying to start a marriage. It's not going to be easy. Balancing them on a pinnacle of perfection, where every pixel has been pre-planned for maximum effect, isn't going to make it any easier.

As The King's Speech reminded us, royalty is at its most lovable when – to the despair of its handlers - it as its most imperfect and vulnerable. As William’s mother discovered, reputations are built not by expensive PR consultants but on good deeds carried out in distressing conditions while enduring every shade of human fallibility.

Real life is not computer-friendly. The truth is awkward, untidy and painful. So, sometimes, is marriage. When royal people slip from the standards we expect of them, they're going to need us to understand and sympathise – not sweep them from our screens like last week's app.

Enough computer talk. Better by far to concentrate on the happy chapter now beginning for our future king and queen. Let's picture them in the early summer sunshine enjoying the remote tranquility of beautiful North Wales. Let the hubbub of the wedding give way to birdsong and the sound of waves on an Anglesey shore. There are some things better left
unfed to the digital monster. Perhaps the palace Flickr enthusiasts should award themselves a nice long holiday...

Donations to the Royal Wedding Charity Fund can be made at:

WWW.ROYALWEDDINGCHARITYFUND.ORG
“I feel sure that no girl would go to the altar if she knew all.”

Not very on-message for this long weekend of celebration, but perhaps Kate Middleton's great-great-great-great grandmother-in-law wasn't feeling very sunny the day she delivered that gloomy opinion of marriage. And although Queen Victoria and Albert turned out to be one of the greatest of all royal love stories, her misgivings might, if we're honest, be worth a moment's reflection.

Weddings – especially royal weddings – are a great excuse for a party. But even as the glorious new chapter is being swept in on a noisy wave of goodwill and Alka-Seltzer, the comfortable familiarities of the past are quietly taking their leave and slipping out of a side door, never to return. What bride or groom hasn't momentarily, secretly, even if just for a nano-second mourned the loss of the old certainties even as the organist – or Royal Air Force trumpeters – lets rip with a triumphant fanfare?

After so many years of courtship, it's fair to assume that Kate does “know all,” at least as Victoria might have defined it. But what she doesn't know is what comes next. Weddings are about the future – and all its uncertainties. Matrimony is designed to help us face that unknown with all the reinforcement provided by the now legally-attached cupcake at our side. But, as practised by the Church of England, weddings are also intended to equip us with a strength from on high which is even more enduring.

Much has been made – as it should - of Kate Middleton's decision to be Confirmed as part of readying herself for marriage. This is not just a refreshing sign of her spiritual awareness. Symbolically it reinforces the central role of the Church of England and its teachings in the future life of the Crown.

Will her small act of individual piety be offensive to the country's other religions? Of course not. As we are frequently reminded, we live in a land of many faiths. Perhaps Kate recognises that, rather than attempt to please all of them, it might be better to earn their combined respect by sticking with one and serving it consistently.

Many will be reassured by such conventional instincts. A national hunger for certainty can be detected as a recurring theme in this wedding. Newspaper preoccupation with a hundred incidental details seems only to emphasise the unchanging appeal of the marriage ceremony itself – the music, the prayers, the vows. It is these aspects that register more deeply than all the royal trimmings, however splendid.
This is surely as it should be. In an age of family breakdown, social isolation and general anxiety about the future, the fact that the most modern faces in royalty choose to submit to one of its most ancient rituals has a powerfully stabilising and comforting significance.

Let's hope there's more of this to come. After the excitements and upheavals that characterised William's parents' shot at marital bliss, now would be a very good time to show that the next generation has learned the value of calm predictability. There is no need and no appetite for another royal round of melodramatic gestures, daringly visionary insights or pseudo-radical posturing. Leave that to the politicians and the luvvies. If they end up looking like prize prats it might damage their egos but it won't damage our constitution.

As an alternative model, some urge royalty to recapture a lost golden age of dullness. A blurring of the line between royalty and celebrity may have prompted this suggestion but the real culprit has been some royal households' addiction to political-style news management. The unholy alliance of PR and royalty has enriched the practitioners, diminished their royal clients and left the rest of us alternately queasy and cynical. This is a great opportunity finally to cure some palace press offices of their lingering weakness for Blair-era spin.

Not least because our entire head of state apparatus should be above such manoeuvrings. Nor do innocent royal folk need overelaborate protection from mainstream British media, many of whom have shown themselves capable of extraordinary contortions of self-censorship for fear of displeasing the Windsors.

Royal hacks are very seldom cold-hearted curs, dedicated to inventing nasty lies about their helpless royal victims. Given a regular diet of positive stories they will reliably swallow them whole. It's only when they sniff a cover-up, hypocrisy or blatant deceit that they can be roused to hunt gamier meat. They are not vermin to be “outfoxed,” as Prince William gleefully but tellingly described the tactics used to throw them off the scent of his stag party. Handled with good manners and honesty they can be royalty's faithful companion. Challenge them to a running skirmish, however, and don't be surprised if they get under your feet. Or worse.

It may be painful to admit, but royal people are big customers of the media. How else can we be told how hard they're working? I was once on a royal tour when, for some reason that seemed important at the time, the travelling press party went on strike. The dispute was settled quicker than you can say “eighteen-page exclusive Hello! photo-spread.”
If William and Kate are content to build a track record of low-key royal service; if they uncomplainingly put in the hours on bleak British winter streets and in sweltering foreign aid projects; if they let their recognition of other people's good works satisfy their own need for praise; and if they can smile and wave till their muscles ache....then the royal spin doctors will be gloriously redundant. So will Fleet Street's attack dogs. Not to mention the royal injunction lawyers. If that's dull, let's have more of it.

While we're at it, let's have plenty of dullness on the domestic front too. William and Kate have already built a solid foundation for their future together so we can hope for a quality of family life that's a constant source of joy for them and for the country. Of course, that requires a talent not often associated with royalty – a willingness to compromise. It works best when teamed with a gift sadly beyond the reach of William's parents: an ability to delight in each other's successes.

But there will be no getting away from it: being a royal couple is different. For all William's understandable craving for normality, theirs will be a life lived in a strange parallel universe whose population is a couple of dozen at most. In the face of such isolation, it would be all-too easy for a vulnerable spouse to succumb to the ever-accommodating ear offered by “friends.” Nor, let's face it, will the offer always be limited to ears. So the care with which friends and advisors are jointly vetted and approved must be unrelenting.

Dull is a pretty good standard to aim for at work too, if by “dull" we mean reliably conscientious. Edward VIII referred dismissively to his royal duties as “stunting” but such private disdain eventually seeps through the royal mask. Tedious and tiring much routine royal duty certainly can be – but that's why it's called duty. Ultimately, it's the reason royal chests are so splendidly adorned with ribbons and tinware, all of which their owners must be able to believe were at least partly earned, if only to preserve their sanity and our polite acquiescence.

Meanwhile, requests will pour in to William and Kate’s offices imploring them to give speeches. Deciding which to accept – and then deciding what to say – can be a process fraught with danger.

The experience of William's parents might suggest advice along the following lines: “make a virtue of not having any public opinions about anything. That shouldn't be such an impossible imposition. After all, we're only allowed to have one opinion about you, officially at least. Your bright ideas, however well-intentioned, will have consequences not because of your superior knowledge but because of your surname. So before telling us how to change (or save) the world, it might be better first to get elected – or at least ordained.
“Until then, stick close to the unexciting words offered by your patronages and ministers and let your quiet good works speak for themselves. If you really must get creative, create some really excellent new platitudes.”

Despite such a regime of conventional royal obligation, none of this need be soul-destroying. Quite the reverse. With the resources at their command, there’s nothing to stop William and Kate creating shared lives blessed with growth, wisdom and inspiration. And, for the less lofty-minded, it’s a certainty that William and Kate are going to be the biggest, hottest ticket on the planet for as far ahead as you care to look.

The pressure could be overwhelming, yet we can be optimistic for this partnership. How wise – how reassuring – that Kate's preparation includes reaffirming her own faith. That decision may open the way to a reawakening of values vital to the future of the monarchy: public honouring of the national religion; respect for the royal tradition of uncomplaining service; and an easy familiarity with the truth. Sounds like harmony to me.

When in need of guidance, William and Kate need look no further than the Queen, whose life of duty and sacrifice has earned enduring affection. Yet what the Americans call “the greatest generation” – of which Elizabeth II is a shining example – need have no monopoly of these traditional virtues. It seems to be William and Kate's generation who more easily see past the wedding theatrics outside the Abbey to the enduring certainties within. Given the chance, those certainties will liberate our future king and queen from the mistakes of the past and from any fear of what lies ahead.
It's probably not very PC to mention it but news of a royal visit to India still stirs up some fragments of Empire. Royal travel has certainly changed: think of the P&O steamer Medina, with her escorting squadron of cruisers, from which Prince William's great-great-grandfather George V disembarked amid serious pomp for the great Durbar of 1911. Or the Royal Yacht Britannia which as recently as the 1990s served as both his grandmother's floating palace and as a successful mobile expo centre for UK/India trade.

Enough nostalgia: this is 2016. That means, in the modern custom, we must accept that the royal couple are not just future king and queen but also the Posh ‘n’ Becks of the royal industry. We can imagine them descending on Mumbai tomorrow morning as they rub the sleep from their eyes and get organised. I'll never forget the feeling, no matter how many trips you did, as the minutes to arrival count down and the tension goes up. The cool serenity of the cabin is about to be thrown into orderly chaos as the performers in this royal show shake off seven sedentary hours and get their act together. When that aircraft door opens, India will burst upon them in a blast of foreign sounds and strange-scented air. I remember trying to ignore the butterflies in my tummy and get the right expression on my face because, after all those weeks of planning, reconnaissance and painstaking preparation, here comes the big exam. Have we remembered all the crucial Foreign Office briefing notes (and DON'T leave them in the seat pocket). Has every single earring, shoe-tree, sock and silk hankie made the journey with us, or are they still in Kensington Palace? Too late now. Shoulders back, everyone - and stick on those smiles: this is curtain up and the world is watching.

I bet the world likes what it sees. This is British royalty doing its job, boosting UK plc and allowing us to feel just a little bit special. This is no holiday junket, no taxpayer-funded freebie in the sun: this is top-level international good manners and damned hard work. It's not just Bollywood, Saloni dresses and boots for Bhutan hiking – important though they are; this is trade and culture, humanitarian headlines, solemn remembrance and diplomacy of a high order. This is the world of Prime Ministers and Kings, and even the elephants have been remembered. This is two proud nations with volumes of shared history and a bright shared future, now with William and Catherine leading the way. Everyone's going to do their best, and nothing will go wrong.

But once upon a time it did, rather badly. Another handsome prince and his distractingly-beautiful wife stepped off their plane onto Indian soil and into one of those nightmare productions where the audience wants to look away but just can't. It was 1992 and
William's parents were losing the battle to persuade us that the monarchy was safe in their hands. This was the annus horribilis and those of us with tender parts trapped in the backstage machinery could no longer deny that our two superstars had given up on sharing one spotlight. After one more disastrous performance (in South Korea) John Major was on his feet in the House of Commons, telling a bewildered kingdom that its next king and queen were to separate. I was one of a handful of senior officials simultaneously briefing the media at Buckingham Palace and my palms still get clammy at the memory.

So when Fleet Street's finest go into overdrive at the Taj Mahal next Saturday, we may tut-tut but we should really be glad. Just as India's great monument to love provided an eloquent backdrop for a lonesome Diana, so it will reinforce the message that her son has found the marital happiness that eluded his parents. He feels obvious pleasure in his wife's success both as a princess and mother; and he hasn't given her any reason, unlike some desolate royal wives before her, to seek consolation in the pursuit of good works.

Princess Diana did have to console herself, and she pursued good works with all the strength that royal rank and aristocratic birth could give her. By trial and error, she helped the Windsors do emotion better and showed her critics that forgivability – the gift of being given the benefit of the doubt - can be earned. Add quick wits, great genes and a blazing defiance when pushed, and you had a priceless national asset that really shouldn't have been allowed to slip through our fingers.

Even so, like the rest of us, the Princess had some very human failings. From my perspective, as “the producer of the Diana show” (in (Lord) David Puttnam's generous phrase) the most frustrating of these was her tendency to choose the role of victim when an enlightened and confident use of her many advantages would have made her stronger and happier.

When, in another low point for the '92 tour, she sabotaged the Prince's post-polio kiss, she saw the predictably damning media reaction as unfairly aimed at her. This and several other less visible skirmishes in the war with her husband – which intensified on tour - brought on bouts of self-pity and general bolshiness that, however understandable, made life difficult for her stoic lady-in-waiting and others.

All of this and more came to me from the Princess herself in numerous highly-charged phone calls which disrupted what I had hoped might be a quiet few days back at base in St. James's Palace. My absence from the front line in India was quite legitimate – unlike the solo tours Diana was already making, joint programmes were still run by the Prince's team - but my heart went out to her. Isolated by distance and surrounded by staff whose first loyalty was to her husband, she already sensed that her way out of the marital trap was
going to be long and dangerous. It was at these moments that being parted from her children pained her the worst.

If she ever reflects on Diana’s experience, Duchess Catherine would likely identify that same maternal ache as a shared cause of royal tour blues. The two future queens could make a strong case that the perks of the job, though over-generous in some sceptical eyes, often come with a hefty price tag that the critics never see.

So here’s to those who travel on William and Catherine’s coat tails as, I hope, they wearily reach for a celebratory G&T on the homebound plane. Between sips they might even muse on the strangeness of a job that mixes so many privileges with so much behind-the-scenes white-knuckle drama. Soon today’s Technicolor memories of touring India and Bhutan with the Cambridges will merge with all the others and they’ll be just a few more ex-courtiers with a good line in carefully-abridged reminiscences. But they’ll always have one advantage over the Class of ’92: if their royal bosses decide to kiss for the cameras, they probably won’t make a hash of it. New memories indeed, and what better birthday gift for the daughter of the last King-Emperor?
The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge – or "Kate et William" as the French press predictably prefer – are flying the flag for the UK on their first official visit to Paris. This wholesome exercise in soft power has already acquired undertones that the original planners are unlikely to acknowledge. The figure of Prince William’s mother is the main unspoken story of the visit and, especially, her death in a road accident in a Paris underpass. All no doubt fully expected, given that he and his wife are visiting the city during the twentieth anniversary of that tragedy.

Diana and Paris were already closely linked. She and Prince Charles made a spectacularly successful ceremonial tour in 1988 and she was back again in 1992 for an even more headline-grabbing solo visit. During this and several subsequent working visits to France that I organized for her I was able to watch as the city and the princess developed an affection for each other that was no mere frisson. With her appreciation of ballet, art, music and of course fashion it was love at first sight. Which is why, despite the inevitable talk of his mother’s death, we might hope that Prince William will allow time to recall that Paris is where his mother achieved the pinnacle of her royal career and enjoyed some of her happiest moments both as a princess and as a beautiful, strong and independent woman.

She had very expressive, very blue eyes. With them she could communicate a complete range of emotions with a speed and clarity that would beat the best internet connection. A few of us got so good at reading the messages that it was like having our own private radio network. One winter evening in 1994, on her second solo visit to Paris, Diana was guest of honour at a grand Barnardos/UNICEF banquet in the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles. Across the room I suddenly sensed her eyes transmitting a clear distress message: “Get over here fast!”

I discreetly left my table and, dodging waiters and packed tables of VIP guests, made my way to where the Princess was sitting. On her plate a small bloody corpse lay neglected – a pigeon that had given its life for the entente cordiale. I leaned close to hear my boss’s whisper. “God Patrick, that man. He’s all over me like a rash!” I looked past her shoulder at Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, former President of France; he was plainly impatient to resume his attempts at an ever-closer royal tete a tete. His romantic novel, coincidentally featuring a distinguished former French President and a beautiful Princess of Cardiff, was some years in the future so tonight he was presumably still at the research phase. Such scholarship.
Diana was never one to shirk her duty and, having drawn my attention to her sacrifice for queen and country, she giggled briefly at my advice – “think of England, ma’am” – and turned once more to the diplomatic coal face.

An hour or so later she was escorted the length of the Hall and out to her motorcade in a procession that brought 900 guests clapping to their feet. That support meant more than usual, given that she and Prince Charles had separated and her place in the royal hierarchy was under unfriendly scrutiny. I had an idea of the historic significance of a divorcing Princess of Wales receiving such a tribute in the palace of the Sun King Louis XIV. Against a backdrop of absolute monarchy, she had once again given a masterclass in how to be simultaneously vulnerable, defiant, regal and fun. It was a heartening image to take back to chilly London and one Prince William, then just twelve, may enjoy remembering.

For William and Catherine their official visit to Paris is one of the more enviable aspects of life in that cage: great national interests to support, sacrifice to be honoured, top drawer protocol, great media coverage and just a couple of nights away from the children. And you can eat the food.

Plus, they are in the hands of the Quai d'Orsay's protocol experts, grand masters of the arcane art. Best of all, they are supported by a British embassy that doesn't just look the part but provides a comforting base of effortless expertise and warm and thoughtful hospitality.

But it will also be a special challenge. They may have proved their royal ambassadorial credentials with successful Commonwealth and other high profile tours, but Paris is The Big Time. As Diana knew, success in the capital of Frenchness requires every ounce of royal charisma and all the resources of the royal dress-up box. It was one reason she loved the place: it demanded that she be at the top of her game.

The hosts, having cut the head off a king more recently than the English, still have an ambivalent attitude to inherited privilege. Their passion for egalite won't stop them wanting a touch of authentic Windsor regal hauteur; the crowds will be large and enthusiastic but are sophisticated observers of royal style too, and will be quick to spot any skimping on panache in the Cambridge road show. Even the local Brits, though friendly and respectful, are a tougher nut to crack than the ex-pats of Lesotho or Los Angeles. So, make a good impression in Paris and you can congratulate yourself that you really are worth it.

The scene of Diana's accident, the Pont d'Alma tunnel, doesn't appear in the official programme but that needn't rule out an unscheduled private detour. It was not a place I had chosen to visit either. But in late 2015, I found myself at a conference just a few
hundred yards from the tunnel. It was a ten-minute walk. From the parapet you can see
down to the road along which Diana and her companions had rushed – every sense alive
and, I hoped, laughing at the paparazzi motorcycles left far behind.

Walk to the opposite parapet and you can look down again, to the slope up which she had
been carried, her life now measured in minutes. And if you lean on the cool stone for a
moment, perhaps allowing the memories to flicker across your mind, you may find
thousands of scribbled messages on the wall, in every language and expressing every
depth of emotion. Some are poetic, others would embarrass a cheap greeting card. But
together they are a mesmerizing work of remembrance to touch a heart of iron.

It was only later, as I trekked an epic distance back to my hotel, that I saw the TVs in the
bars were no longer showing football but some news bulletin with lots of flashing blue
lights. Shops were being hurriedly shuttered. Then my phone lit up with anxious calls and I
learned of the slaughter at the Bataclan. And much later, as helicopters and sirens drove
away any chance of sleep, I realised that by lingering over the graffiti tributes at the Pont
d'Alma I had been just too late to catch a bus that would have taken me straight to the
Boulevard Voltaire and a close encounter with terrorist bullets.

In Paris today William pays his own tribute to the first responders who rushed to help the
injured and dying in France's recent terror atrocities. It's the kind of gesture that royal
people tend to do better than politicians and the Cambridges are no exception. As we
watch the future King and Queen express our shared appreciation to the rescuers, from
somewhere close by we may imagine those famously expressive very blue eyes looking on
with the kind of approval only a mother can give. And if they seem quite undimmed, it's
because twenty years is just a blink, after all.
The monarchy in Australia is a delicate relic, preserved through lack of a coherent alternative as much as through loyalty to the Crown. Its fragility is being further tested in the current media cyclone. Prince Harry's fresh-faced arrival in his grandmother's realm down under has certainly subjected the subject to some unwelcome attention from the local subjects, as it were.

Whether he leaves the royal link strengthened or weakened at the end of his gap year visit will be something about which you can be sure Buckingham Palace is on a set of genteel tenterhooks. His big brother may have taken the photogenic Chilean bog-scrubbing option but, by choosing Australia, Harry is sticking his brush into the murky waters of Commonwealth relations which still rate very big in Elizabeth II's world view. Will he leave a nice smell behind when he and his entourage of minders fly home to Betty Britain? In some noses at least, the answer is almost certainly yes. The stalwarts of the Vicky League and the ANZACS will take comfort from this rare expression of royal interest, especially given Prince Charles's known preference for Sienna over Sydney. Unlike us, Australians have had a serious debate about the monarchy and both pro and anti have earned respect for their views in a way that shames our reflex polarised attitudes to the issue. Many of us watched their referendum with envy. There is something undeniably moving in the humility of the crown symbolically submitting itself for approval.

Prince Harry's official photo call - with a worried-looking porcupine – symbolises the delicacy of his mission. Australian monarchists must be as apprehensive as the porcupine (sorry, echidna). The antis – those that affect to notice – wrinkle their noses and ask who's paying for the police. The conspicuous failure of the current press arrangements is unlikely to temper their republican instincts.

It's the same here. Will the rising generation of royalty end up covered in quills and blood... and will the cost of the show – in morals as much as money and embarrassment – be worth the pain?

We seem to be at another of those forks in the road about royalty. Choose one road – it's the smoothest and slopes nicely downhill – and we run into the worst bits of the circus that cursed both William and Harry's parents, whatever Charles's attempts to re-write his own part in the story: toxic celebrity, posturing, indulgence and finally farce or tragedy.
Every time William is photographed leaving a nightclub with his toff friends, every time Harry gets mobbed by Oz crumpet or demands to be left alone to play polo, the institution they will inherit takes a step down the smooth road to irrelevance.

Choose the other road – that's the narrow rocky one, of course - and royalty at least has a chance to retain its self-respect.

The princes' mother, who had already finished her apprenticeship by the time she was William's age, tried heroically to find her own route along this difficult path. Significantly, that journey can be seen to have started on her first visit to Australia with Charles and, defiantly, the infant William.

She was just 21 and the gesture of taking baby William with her, despite pressure to leave him behind, told anyone who was willing to see that here was a woman who took her duties as a mother as seriously as she took her position as future Queen of Australia.

That ability to be both emotionally approachable and innately royal touched a chord with sceptics who, even then, were unsure if they wanted their existing monarch, let alone another one. Watching her triumphant progress, who could be surprised that her overshadowed husband felt the royal landscape begin to shift beneath his feet.

I witnessed close-up for eight years the ordeal Princess Diana suffered in the marriage celebrated on that tour. What she endured leaves plenty of road signs for her beloved boys to heed – or ignore. A loyal echidna might mention a few of them to Harry…

“Never complain.” You will have lots to complain about. Just ask your father who is something of an expert in this field. But you mustn't ever ask for sympathy. That doesn't mean you won't get it but when it comes it will be given by an affectionate and forgiving public which, in the royal business, is just what you want.

This used to be linked with “Never explain.” That half of the old Windsor motto finally died with the Peat Report, a futile attempt to explain what happened to a lot of royal gifts, among other things. It's tough but you will have to be prepared to explain everything you do, often to impertinent people who have no right to know. Like MPs.

Work hard. Another tough one, especially given all the temptations and opportunities to play rather harder. Even more insidious is the temptation to pretend to work hard. Your staff will always connive at presenting you as a dutiful grafter – it makes them look better.
too – but the real trick that so few royal people seem to find is to know the difference between activity and achievement. The army may be a good start, when you feel ready for it, but after such a traumatic adolescence time spent getting emotionally sorted now will make you a happier prince later. And keep your options open: remember, hooray Guards officers aren't everybody's cup of chamomile.

Be especially wary of cod charity. Royal excess in the name of a good cause is still royal excess and will be resented long after the cause is forgotten. For an example, look no further than the smell beginning to come from your father's North American Trust – accusations of "cash for access" don't just apply to politicians anymore. Many of the biggest crooks who try to sit at your table will be demeaning a charity in the process. Maybe yours.

Remember, your mother never hired a spin doctor. Right or wrong, she made her own decisions about public relations and kept responsibility for them. You shouldn't waste good Duchy of Cornwall money on people who promise you easy media fixes. Your real qualities will emerge in their own good time and your real vices – let alone the ones that people make up for you – will still be your problem long after the spin doctor has gone, taking your address book with him.

Beware the toadies and the toys that come with being royal. The greatest gift a prince could wish for is a wise friend who tells him things he doesn't want to hear. You'll never be short of people ready to tell you what you do want to hear, just as you'll never be short of people to lend you their private jet, their yacht, villa or even wife. As you may have noticed.

If all this sounds like a lot of sacrifice, that's because it is. There are still compensations for being born into the ruling family and it's still permissible to have fun. But without a bit of visible sacrifice you're just another spoilt toff. And, like it or not, you and your brother are now the only hope the Monarchy has, in Australia or anywhere else. So, cobber, as they say... no pressure.
So, that's all right then. Prince Harry is either a gallant young officer letting off a bit of well-earned steam or he's the ultimate party animal doing what any red-blooded bloke would do given half a chance (and a Duchy of Cornwall credit card). Or perhaps he's a bit of both. Either way, it's a win-win for St James's Palace: Brigadiers and Essex Lads loyally on side, marching in step to a chorus of “Viva Las Vegas!”

And that's before you count the happy folks in that recession-hit desert resort, a city in which a statue to its royal publicist is surely soon to be erected. Talk about a special relationship!

You might almost think the whole thing was deliberately set up by those creative chaps who do image-management for the modern royal family. No wonder some palace press officers have been likened to celebrity publicists, spoon-feeding whole narratives to lapdog journalists.* We shouldn't be surprised when the prince cast as lovable rogue takes the hint and plays up to the part – and even a bit beyond.

Also as directed, most of the British media has obediently come to heel, hungry not to miss out on the next titbit the palace tosses in their direction. The neutering effect of the Leveson inquiry be blowed: royal hacks can't afford to be in the doghouse when sources close to the palace are handing out treats.

But it's not all good news. Prince Harry's latest escapade might mark the point at which British royalty's long degeneration into a branch of the entertainment industry becomes irreversible. Las Vegas 2012 is beginning to look like the last whimper of a dying creed – the notion that those placed in positions of public esteem enter a contract under which they will sacrifice certain freedoms in return for deference and privilege.

The taint of celebrity has been sprayed all over Harry's horse-play by the American gossip industry which feeds the voracious world beyond the reach of the PCC. British ex-pats have only to switch on the TV to study Harry's unorthodox technique for instructing girls in how to hold a pool-cue. Like me, they probably found the experience simultaneously disturbing and sullying. Let's hope none of Harry's future in-laws was watching.

A life devoted to duty – as exemplified by Harry's grandmother – rightly earns generous recognition and affection. It underpins the whole system that allows Harry and his relatives to enjoy their privileges undisturbed by revolting peasants. But add celebrity to the mix and the rules change. Sacrifice and respect are elbowed aside by pranks and prurience. It's a
process accelerated, not restrained, by press offices anxious to prove their worth and their ability to control the plot.

The trouble with Las Vegas-style images is that they get between us and any sacrifice Harry may make either as an army officer or as a pillar of the royal edifice. Youthful antics are best performed by youths and Harry - 28 next month - will increasingly risk the fate of comedians whose act sags from sexy to seedy overnight, a fate which also awaits almost any unwisely-exposed parts of his anatomy.

We may manage to laugh but our laughter should ring hollow. We are watching a comedy at the expense of a fragile institution – one on which the gloss of celebrity can quickly turn toxic.

For much of the Monarchy's recent good health we are invited to thank the smoothly-lubricated machinery of the palace PR machine. But under the bright lights of Sin City, some of the moving parts are losing their shine. The Windsors have invested heavily in corporate-style communications though it's debatable whether they are getting good value for money.

By their dash to market the younger members of the royal firm as wholesome family entertainment, complete with an infantilised narrative of their lives and loves, Prince Harry's press minders have unwittingly prepared the ground for this latest embarrassment. Happy to feed the digital mongrel when times are good – such as the Royal Wedding or a Jubilee-boosting US network interview – their outrage when the brute bites back doesn't earn much sympathy. Their stars don't need hyping on Facebook, just better chaperones.

Mind you, tweeting is a better use of courtiers' time than the kind of skulduggery practised by an earlier generation of press officers. One of the old crew has publicly boasted ** of conniving with a friendly editor (curiously, one of those recently charged over phone hacking) to rearrange the sequence of events when a certain young prince was caught smoking cannabis. A salutary visit to a drug rehabilitation clinic, touted by St James's Palace as a father's stern response to this youthful error of judgement, had actually happened before not after the offending royal spliff was inhaled.

That young prince was, of course, Harry Wales. At the age of seventeen, finding his transgression magically wiped clean by a cynically-ambitious press officer, a malleable parent and a forgiving public, it must have seemed that having his cake and eating it was a risk-free past time. In fact, looking around him, he might have thought it was the natural state of affairs.
Ten years on and palace press officers have cleaned up their act but Harry's magnetic attraction for both scandalous headlines and public soft-heartedness is undiminished. Older, more experienced and proven in battle against the Queen's enemies he will surely face with honest contrition any music that's coming his way from Army brass or palace panjandrums. You can almost hear the grown-ups reassuring each other: this time Harry will surely learn that there's a limit to how often his chestnuts can be pulled out of harm's way. So bring on the Apache helicopter, arrange a top-gun photo call and the ever-turning news cycle will surely work its healing magic.

So we should be pleased? Many suddenly-indulgent commentators would have us think so. Grey-haired royal experts compete to pull avuncular faces and commiserate with Harry's confounded bad luck to be lumbered with the role of younger sibling while reminding us what a jolly good sort he is.

Similar appeals to the public's sense of fun were made on behalf of Princess Margaret and Prince Andrew. The parallels aren't encouraging. Harry's uncle was himself a gallant helicopter pilot, lionised after the Falklands war and, coincidentally, photographed naked on a subsequent "letting off steam" holiday.

Yet the promise of those salad days has done little to bring him long-term public respect or, we may suspect, private happiness. His latest brave and typically big-hearted fundraising initiative – abseiling a thousand feet down the outside of the Shard – attracted sour headlines about high-living and dodgy friends. Sound familiar?

Mixed messages at home may have led to some confusion too. In Harry's early childhood, his father was overheard in conversation with his then mistress. In unsettling detail he expressed desires which – when examined in the cold light of day – raised questions over more than just his suitability to inherit the Throne. In comparison, waving your behind at a crowd of camera-wielding Americans is a copper-bottomed expression of royal dignity.

Twenty years later our next king (and the woman who will certainly be his queen) show no sign that past transgressions need impede their smooth ascent to the Throne. Their remorseless mistreatment of Harry's mother seems to bother them least of all. Observing all this, Harry can hardly be blamed if, fairly regularly as it turns out, he chooses to do just as he pleases and hang the consequences.

So let the lads cheer, the mums coo and the old buffers rheumily re-run their subalterns' indiscretions. Harry still gives more to the royal show than he takes away so let's just forget – if we possibly can - the lingering image of the leering oaf clutching his tackle while ogling strangers whoop encouragement.
Instead, let’s remember this: a very different image that should live in the minds of those who share Harry’s strange royal world. It’s of a distinctly sober royal highness filmed this week scrambling into a Cadillac Escalade in a bleak American parking lot. As he’s driven away to answer whatever reproach his family or their flunkies have prepared for him, he raises an arm.

But he’s not waving. He’s trying to hide his face.

* Freddy Gray in the Spectator, [26 May/2 June 2012]

**http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2003/oct/27/mondaymediaasection.themonarchy
“O! Let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven; keep me in temper; I would not be mad!”

King Lear’s desperate plea just gets more poignant as we realize that even as he shouts the words into a stormy night sky he already knows sweet heaven isn’t listening.

Shakespeare made the link between royalty and mental health four hundred years ago and he probably wouldn’t be surprised to find it as strong as ever in 2017. In my own time in the Royal Household, the mental wellbeing of their future subjects was a cause taken up by both Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Now Prince Harry and his brother are following their parents’ lead.

It’s a brave step. The whole world watched them walking behind their mother’s coffin on its agonizingly long, slow journey from Kensington Palace to Westminster Abbey, past hundreds of thousands of silent mourners. Having lost my own mother at a similar age, I could at least begin to understand a version of what they were feeling. In good traditional British fashion, like Prince Harry I never publicly showed my grief and for years denied its existence even to myself. Instead I kept it a shackled prisoner deep in my insides from where, against all my powers of self-control, inevitably it one day suddenly burst into the open. From what he has publicly said about his own version of that experience, I’m glad to hear that Harry too felt it a moment of liberating catharsis.

By taking the decision to speak publicly about his own mental health, Prince Harry has taken risks and broken taboos in a way that would have warmed his mother’s heart. It was she who went furthest in lending royal prestige to victims of unfashionable afflictions and their carers; she who had the courage to speak publicly about her own demon, a lifelong struggle with an eating disorder. Her championing of causes such as AIDS, leprosy, addiction, domestic violence, homelessness, as well as mental illness blazed the trail her younger son is now following.

Today it is easy to forget that in the late 1980s and early 90s, such causes were deeply risky territory for any public figure. There lingered an almost-medieval belief that illnesses like AIDS or schizophrenia were in some way deserved or at least self-inflicted. For Diana the future queen to stake her royal credibility on such issues provoked public controversy and – behind palace walls – bemusement bordering on disdain.

Some of the worst criticism came in the form of whispered insinuations from within the royal establishment, suggesting that Diana was on a virtue-signaling publicity mission to
boost her ratings. Some even made the despicable and cowardly claim that in choosing such company she was demonstrating signs of her own mental fragility. A typical cartoon of the time showed Prince Charles talking to a favorite houseplant about his fears for his wife's sanity.

As her advisor and chief of staff for eight years, I was all-too aware of the reputational risks Diana ran as I organized her visits to leprosy clinics, AIDS units, drug centers, night shelters and women's refuges, not to mention secure hospitals for the criminally insane. “Don't Do It Di!” was one of the friendlier headlines that such unconventional royal work attracted. It made me laugh: telling Diana not to do something was a surefire way of making her all the more determined to go right ahead. Even as a toddler Harry had inherited his full share of her contrariness – and then some.

So why did she do it? Sometimes I took the chance to ask her. “Don't you see Patrick?” she replied “I do it because I'm one of them!”

I knew she didn't mean that she thought she was insane - given the pressure she was under she was one of the most resilient, self-aware and grounded people you could ever meet, and very funny too. But I did recognize that she saw herself as an outsider, like so many of those she met whom society had labelled mad or deserving of exclusion for some other reason. Unable to find the right kind of support, encouragement or guidance from her husband or his family, she looked instead to her work for inspiration and direction.

And she found it – to a degree that much of the world, with her sons' encouragement, is still remembering with thanks twenty years after her death. Her instinctive compassion began at home, especially with concern for her boys' happiness in the strange, isolated roles providence had dealt them. Now through his own acquaintance with the purgatories of private loss and public criticism – to say nothing of combat - Harry emerges as a man reconciled with the burdens and temptations of royal status. Now we may hope he is free to be happy, as his mother would have wished above all else.

He is unlikely ever to be king of England although he may now, to echo his mother, be king in many people's hearts. Instead it will be his brother who eventually inherits the throne and all the uncertainties that by then may be besetting it. How lucky then for William and his country that Harry has had the humility and sanity to discover the truth of a happier Shakespeare line:

This above all: to thine own self be true
THE DAILY MAIL / MAIL ONLINE - 23RD FEBRUARY 2019
MEGHAN HAS ARRIVED AT A CROSSROADS: WHICH PATH WILL SHE CHOOSE?

The Duchess of Sussex was in New York this week, catching up with friends, having lunch and doing a little light shopping. It was a private visit, so there was no additional cost to the British taxpayer. This weekend Her Royal Highness is already back at work, flying the flag for Britain on a high-profile official visit to Morocco where she and the Duke will promote diplomatic relations, boost UK interests and support humanitarian causes.

Just another week in the everyday story of royal folk? Hardly. As Princess Diana’s private secretary I learned to recognize that the line between official and private travel is never just about the money. It’s a code that opens a Pandora’s box of unintended consequences. Rich people’s jets always come with a bill attached, even if it’s not the kind you can pay with a Duchy of Cornwall credit card. Favours must be returned, obligations quickly multiply and pretty soon royal free riders are handing over their most precious assets: credibility and dignity if not, please God, their lives.

The uproar created by Meghan’s brief Big Apple excursion could hardly have been greater if she had run naked down Broadway and burned a Union Jack in Times Square. Let’s keep a sense of proportion here. She happens to have rich celebrity friends and, if they behave as rich celebrities usually do, then good luck to her, surely.

Anyway, other members of the royal family, notably Prince Charles and Camilla, have often been known graciously to accept favours from the mega-rich, especially if there’s a jet, a yacht or a private island on offer. Just don’t tactlessly mention the environmental damage; this whole subject is a high-hypocrisy zone. Instead, relax, enjoy the exotic pictures and remember the words of Jimmy Stewart’s film character Macauley Connor: “The prettiest sight in this fine pretty world is the privileged class enjoying its privileges.”

Royal dramas of this kind tend to fizzle out pretty quickly, rightly written-off as tabloid trash fit only for tomorrow’s recycling bin. There will surely be some courtiers this morning (not least in Casablanca) who are trying this explanation on for size. Perhaps it will all blow over, they hope, and the British public’s love for its excitingly-disruptive American newcomer will resume undiminished. After all, it seems only yesterday she was winning hearts with bananagrams in Bristol and speeches on women’s education and women’s suffrage Down Under.

Then again, perhaps this time it won’t blow over. Here’s why. The juxtaposition of the baby shower excesses of New York and the sober mainstream royal duty of Morocco represents
a critical crossroads for the Duchess. Which path she chooses will determine not just her own future but also that of the Monarchy itself, whose fortunes are now linked by marriage and genetics with her own.

To quote Downton Abbey “The truth is neither here nor there, it’s the look of the thing that matters.” From any angle, the look of Meghan’s Manhattan partying is pretty unedifying. Not just for its excess – though that’s impressively unsettling – but for its calculated recklessness. Traditionally, when royal people screw up, it’s the courtiers – those bumbling “men in suits” of popular myth - who cop the blame; royal people never actually make mistakes, goes the time-honoured formula, they’re just badly advised.

But this time Meghan can’t use that excuse because, for reasons of her own, she has outsourced her support operations, including reputation management, to friends. As befits a self-declared champion of “women who work” as opposed to “ladies who lunch” (her own words) she owns this one, chaos, candy floss, flower charity, Gulfstream, the lot.

In a prelude to this week’s junket it was these friends who monopolized an issue of People magazine to “set the record straight” about how the Duchess was being victimized and bullied by her own family.

These same friends kept the media and the Twittersphere intimately informed of every breathless detail of the very un-British custom of the baby shower. We might ask if this is merely a dreary attempt to catch a bit of royal limelight for their own ambitions, social and professional (coincidentally, George Clooney has a new programme to promote), or if there is some other strategy at work in which these are just the early moves.

Because, intentionally or not, Meghan seems to be assembling an array of PR firepower which should make any palace press office sit up. Somewhere in the bowels of Buckingham Palace, anxious courtiers might reasonably be asking themselves, if this People stunt is how she treats her own flesh and blood, what might she be willing to do to her in-laws if and when they similarly incur her displeasure?

The decision to keep those men in suits in the dark about this private PR initiative will certainly add to their anxiety and cause them irritation - I should know, Harry’s mother did it to me. But it also cuts Meghan off from a support organization that, if sometimes irksome, exists to protect her from the traps that await newcomers to royal red carpet, including those set by BFs with agendas of their own to serve. Crucially, it also exists to protect and perpetuate the Monarchy: in fact, that’s quite properly its first priority.

Thanks to the baby shower, improbable as it seems, we now need reassurance that the Duchess of Sussex - and her friends - share that priority. She is a prominent member of the
British ruling family, entrusted with the country's reputation in everything she does. If she has conflicting loftier ambitions, let's hear about it.

Who else was kept out of the loop? Having organized several New York trips for Princess Diana I'm all too aware of the need to keep everyone from the Consul General to the NYPD properly aware of the VIP on their patch. Perhaps the Embassy in Washington had lots of warning of the treat in store, with ample time to orchestrate another faultless event, of the kind for which British embassies are renowned the world over. I wonder...

Because the truth is, for consuls, cops and dozens more concerned officials, “I didn't know” is hardly going to save their careers if disaster strikes on their watch. In reality, if you're a front-rank member of the Windsor brand, there's no such thing as a "private" visit to the City That Never Sleeps. Remember, any machine only runs as smoothly as the smallest cog.

Talking of that Windsor brand, here's another reason that the baby shower should thunder on. Ever since he emerged as the irresistibly cute naughty one of the two Wales brothers, Harry has occupied a special place in hearts the world over, a place reinforced by the poignant image of the little boy walking behind his mother's coffin. Any wife he chose would receive her share of that affection as a wedding gift, and Meghan duly received a generous slice of it. With that gift came a responsibility to recognize it as both priceless and fragile, and to protect it against every danger.

Just eight months ago, the world watched enchanted as the British Crown laid on its pixel-perfect wedding for the latest princess. Back then it seemed impossible that the bride who was its flawless centerpiece should fail to recognise what was being entrusted to her. Yet the excesses of Showergate now threaten the benign indifference of the British public - an accident of history that is the Windsors' most precious but also most volatile asset. Unfortunately for Duchess Meghan, in Windsor world it doesn't require wicked intent to set the centuries-old edifice a-tremble: not knowing what you don't know will do the job just as well.

In this context it's hard to remember Meghan's eager determination to “hit the ground running” in her new royal career, and not compare it with her sister-in-law Catherine's less exciting but in retrospect wiser intention “to learn the ropes.”

All Meghan's running has brought her at private-jet velocity to a lonely crossroads. It's a stark choice between the path of celebrity versus the path of duty, service and sacrifice. Did she recognize the looming crossroads before Prince Harry slipped that engagement ring onto her finger? As a gifted, intelligent, articulate and worldly woman the answer is surely...
of course she did. She will also know that in marrying the Queen's grandson she has allied her interests with the Windsors' instinct to protect their dynasty at any cost.

Meghan's crossroads is as old as monarchy itself. A whole tribe of gutsy royal women have been here before her – in the last hundred years several have been the spine and heart of the British Monarchy: Alexandra, who endured Edward VII's serial philandering and pioneered a new style of compassionate royal work; Mary, who steeled her husband in World War I and Elizabeth the Queen Mother who did the same in WWII; and the present Elizabeth, whose reign will likely never be surpassed as the standard for service before self.

The common factor was a recognition that royal privilege and perks have to be paid for, not by rich chums, but by a lifetime of service to the people whose bows, curtsies and taxes will always be willingly given in return. Better make that probably willingly.

Other women also passed this way. In the present reign there has been a high failure rate of church weddings of first-rank members of the Royal Family. Out of seven, only three have escaped the divorce courts. One of those statistics was Harry's mother, whose experience has hopefully also been carefully studied by Meghan.

In comparing the two women, differences quickly outnumber any similarities. Diana's sixteen-year royal career was already over and consigned to history before she reached the age Meghan is now. Meghan is no teen virgin but a divorced, media-smart and ambitious celebrity, empowered by all the arsenal of “woke” feminism. Her fate is emphatically in her own hands, as it should be.

Recent lurid headlines will fade, hurried on their way by the imminent arrival of what will surely be the most photogenic of babies. But the crossroads will obstinately remain. Perhaps the baby will help the decision by focusing attention on how the expecting Sussexes might enjoy the pleasures of parenthood in a less stressful atmosphere.

Luckily for them, and for us, 2019 brings a rare opportunity to rewrite the next chapter and give it a more likely happy ending. By announcing a withdrawal from British public life the Duke and Duchess would blamelessly buy time in which to mend fences with their family over the ocean, while simultaneously creating space in which to enjoy the delights of parenthood.

What better answer to those who would stoke rumours of a rift with the Cambridges, or make mischief from a simple baby shower, or poke snooty fun at banana messages and 5.00AM emails? To hell with them all.
And when the confines of Frogmore Cottage get their feet itching, the opportunities for overseas travel will redouble, and without the boring need for justification through official duties. Time spent in the vastness of Meghan's homeland would enable them to pursue dreams of being normal - modern royalty's go-to fantasy - to their hearts' content; and meanwhile, just a private jet ride away, a ready-made network of generous stars awaits, eager to help erase once and for all that blurry line between royalty and celebrity. Meghan's balked career as a passionate advocate for progressive causes could resume without the constraints of stuffy political neutrality - and little Sussex(es) could be forever free to mingle unrecognized in a society which gives inherited status the amused snort it surely deserves.

If all that isn't reason enough to get packing, consider this: when Harry's father ascends the Throne there's no reason to doubt he'll make good on his reported intention to reorganize the royal shop window and reduce the number of Windsors jockeying for balcony space. How liberating, how empowering, how totally socially virtuous it would be to beat him to the draw.
And I used to think tennis was boring! That was until scenes at Wimbledon’s No 1 Court, where a royal visit last week sparked acres of excited coverage that has run on and on and has nothing at all to do with any on-court action.

The Duchess of Sussex may have thought she was just dropping into a posh tennis club to watch her friend, Serena Williams, play a big match but the reality turned out to be very different.

The tennis was forgotten as a volley of complaints erupted over where she sat and with whom and what she wore. Oh, and whether she had the right not to be photographed.

A storm in a Pimm’s cup? Typical media midsummer hype?

Not this time, for two very good reasons, either of which indicates that something needs to change in the way Team Sussex engages with the tax-paying public.

Reason number one is the apparent failure by royal advisors to organise a low-key visit by the wife of the sixth-in-line to a routine day’s play at the All England Club Championships.

How difficult could that be? The Duchess of Cambridge had managed it the day before, starting out at Court 14, sitting alongside other fans and smiling and laughing as, surrounded by a sea of punters holding camera phones, as she made her way to the Royal Box.

And other royal tennis fans have been slipping in and out of Wimbledon “in a private capacity” without fuss for years. If you want to know how it’s done, watch the Duchesses of Cornwall and Kent or the Countess of Wessex in particular.

So, top tip for Sussex courtiers: when my former boss Princess Diana went to Wimbledon privately, she was aware that she was actually attending a prolonged photo-shoot.

She knew it, accepted it and even turned it to her advantage: more than once a run of bad Press for her was miraculously reversed with a front page picture or a glossy magazine cover showing her at her most carefree and stylish in the Wimbledon sunshine.

Here’s another: Diana generally never took any staff with her. The message was simple: no entourage means I’m off duty, enjoying myself among thousands of other keen fans. And my people are all back at the palace, as they should be on a weekday afternoon, toiling over my impressive programme of public duties.
Compare that with the images we've seen of the Duchess of Sussex with two friends, huddled like survivors in a life-raft, alone on a sea of empty green seats in what has been described as an exclusion zone.

Widen the shot and we saw that Meghan was ringed by a bevy of unsmiling men in suits, all of them ready, one assumes, to put their bodies between the Duchess and any incoming strawberries loosed off by the Taliban's SW19 tennis faction.

Of course, there might have been a credible security threat of which we're unaware that justified such a high-profile response.

Likewise, zealous Wimbledon officials, gripped by royal fever, might have cleared the surrounding seats on their own misguided initiative (it happens).

Or perhaps the royal party just timed their entrance badly, making themselves unintentionally conspicuous.

Certainly, some saw it as a Hollywood-style arrival, complete with minders and the Duchess's PA, and it was by any measure unthinkably un-Wimbledon, not to mention un-royal.

Whatever the reason, mindless or manipulative, the result made for bad optics as they say - and made even worse when it emerged this week that there had been awkward attempts by the Duchess's minders to swat away ticket-holders they suspected of taking selfies with HRH. (It turned out they weren't - they wanted shots of Serena on court).

Those unsmiling men who accompanied Meghan deserve our sympathy. They were set an impossible, in fact a demeaning task as I know from experience.

Once, at a big fund-raising dinner in New York, I attempted a similar futile feat as hordes of diners exercised their right to get their full money's worth by approaching the top table where Diana sat, cameras at the ready.

As my boss disappeared behind a blue blizzard of flash-bulbs, she cast an urgently reproachful eye at her support team seated a few yards away.

We gallantly responded to her distress call, interposing ourselves between the Princess and the excited snappers, tugging elbows and politely pleading for a ceasefire.

But we soon realised that King Canute had a better chance of turning back the tide than we had of denying the big cheque donors their souvenir photos.
In fact, our antics obviously risked spoiling the whole happy mood so we slunk back to our table, certain that any royal displeasure that came our way later would be better than creating a bad news story.

Back to Wimbledon: if this week’s wobble was an isolated incident in a sequence of faultlessly-delivered Sussex successes then we could take our impertinent nit-picking elsewhere, confident in the knowledge that the People's Prince and his Progressive Princess are just what the dreary old monarchy needs.

But far from being the exception, the No 1 Court privacy row fits a pattern of unsettling developments - from the extravagant New York baby shower fiasco in February and fracturing of the ‘Fab Four of William and Kate, Harry and Meghan, into duelling duets, to the secrecy surrounding the birth of their son, the £2.4m refurbishing of their new home and the controversial ‘secrecy’ of the Christening to name just a few – that is beginning to test the patience of the tax-paying subjects who subsidise the Sussexes’ celebrity lifestyle.

And as their patience withers, so does the fragile flower of goodwill that was the most precious but also the most delicate wedding gift entrusted to Harry’s beautiful American bride just 15 short months ago.

Who is to blame?

This week, the Duchess has been taking the heat but next week the news cycle will turn – pictures of the Sussexes with pop royalty Beyoncé and Jay Z at the royal premiere of The Lion King tomorrow [Sun] will surely magic away Wimbledon woes and more.

Yet I fear the finger-pointing may return, and it’s unlikely to be dispelled either by the couple’s charity initiatives or the carefully-curated Instagram feed to more than nine million followers, their Apple TV plans with Oprah, or Meghan’s reported collaboration to write columns in Vogue.

Such high-profile projects, however worthy in intent some might be, require absolute clarity to avoid questions about acceptable use of royal status and influence, or any conflict with the Sussex’s often reasonable calls for privacy.

They carry enormous potential risk for them and the monarchy.

Already, some unkind voices can even be heard calling for the actress-duchess to go back where she came from.

But loyal monarchists who join the chorus urging Harry and Meghan into celebrity exile are damaging the very institution they think they love.
It doesn't claim to be perfect, yet its imperfections have the familiar appeal of a well-worn and fragile antique.

It's not a democracy. We don't get to vote Windsors or Windsor wives off the Buckingham Palace balcony, so it was reassuring to see the Sussexes in a display of happy unity with the Cambridges at the polo last Wednesday – perhaps to reverse the Wimbledon optics. Such family imagery matters and none will need reminding that Prince Charles has hinted he intends to cut the numbers when he gets the chance.

So let's not heap blame on the royal residents of Frogmore Cottage. It's not good for them, or us, or the monarchy.

Luckily, there's a time-honoured mechanism for shifting fault onto shoulders much less royal; shoulders that volunteered to carry the often spiky burden of protecting royal people from all misfortune, their own misjudgments very much included.

Right now it is the Royal advisors to Harry and Meghan who must up their game - or else hand in their fancy racquets on their way out the door.

That's the way it has worked since the first king recruited the first courtier.

And so to reason number two why change is necessary in the way Team Sussex operates.

In 1955, during the great royal reputation crisis of Princess Margaret's sensational affair with palace equerry Peter Townsend (viewers of TV's The Crown will be familiar with the details), the great satirist Malcolm Muggeridge wrote: ‘Nothing is more difficult than to maintain the prestige of an institution that is accorded the respect and accoutrements of power without the reality.’

Nearly 65 years later, it's still a daily challenge to maintain that prestige.

With the inevitable end of the Queen's reign, it may sink from difficult to virtually impossible.

Monarchy's very survival could depend on us reaching a new agreement on what royal prestige really means.

One thing the trials of Team Sussex are already teaching us: when the line between royalty and celebrity gets blurred, royal respect goes straight onto the endangered species list.

Monarchy's prestige will face its biggest test when the twilight of Elizabeth II's golden age gives way to the looming controversies of the new reign, the crowning of Queen Camilla being just the first.
Already, hopes for the long-term survival of the monarchy are being pinned on the success, longevity and happiness of the reign of William and Catherine.

Good news: judging by what we've seen, those hopes are well-founded.

Muggeridge left royal prestige undefined but we all know it when we see it. The traditional royal virtues already visible in the Cambridges - hard work, transparency, sacrifice, duty, solid family values - are the monarchy's best chance of retaining its “respect and accoutrements”.

And if modernisers complain that such values are out of step with 21st Century Britain, then that's probably a good sign. Nothing is more depressing than royal people pointlessly trying to prove their relevance.

Where do the Sussexes fit into the Muggeridge model – and what does their first two years of royal life tell us about their long-term value to the constitutional monarchy that has served us so well?

Part of the answer might be found in a much more recent quote than Muggeridge's:

“If my name is going to be on something, I’m going to have my say.”

The words are Meghan Markle's and even though she spoke them before her elevation to royal status, they are surely still a revealing guide to her priorities.

Her name is certainly stamped on the innovative new brand of royalty that she and Harry are trailblazing, a brand that has promised much but as yet delivered only mixed results.

Their attitudes to privacy – as illustrated by the Wimbledon and Christening episodes – are either naïve or calculated.

Meanwhile, their weakness for preaching one thing and doing another – such as using private jets while urging environmental self-denial on the rest of us, or warning of the hazards of social media while pumping out their own Instagram platitudes – is a sign of internal confusion, at best.

None of this feels like the kind of prestige the Royal Family are going to need in future, even for those who see the Sussexes as key to winning royal recruits among the “woke” generation.

William and Harry commendably pay tribute to their mother as a continuing source of inspiration.
By harnessing star-power to a solid record of low-key, mainstream royal duty, Diana earned herself the most priceless gift any royal person could wish for – her own lasting version of that essential royal prestige.

It has been called “forgivability” – the quality that inclines people to give you the benefit of the doubt, even in the most unlikely circumstances.

It was a quality with which Diana was richly blessed - yet Harry is in danger of squandering it and his Duchess has yet to earn it, as her brush with the hazards of Wimbledon made plain this week.

What should she change?

A story about her late mother-in-law may provide a clue.

 Appropriately for Harry and Meghan, the story is set in Africa, a place close to their hearts and where they will head off on tour with baby Archie this Autumn.

Princess Diana had spent a long, hard day in the blazing sun, winning praise for her visits to projects run by her patronages the Red Cross, Help the Aged and the Leprosy Mission.

Back at the residence, tired and grumpy, she was entitled to let off steam. And she did, in a litany of complaints tossed peevishly over her shoulder at me as she climbed the stairs to her bedroom.

At the top, she turned with a final impatient rebuke for her private secretary, whose fault all this must surely be.

“What are you going to do about it, Patrick?”

Ouch. Now what?

Summoning my courage, I raised a quizzical eyebrow. This apparent insolence could be a career-ending moment and for a few seconds I thought she was going to explode with anger.

But, instead, her scolding turned to laughter.

Her last words to me that night still sound like the best advice any royal ear could be lucky enough to hear, all the more effective since she gave it to herself:

“OK, Patrick, what you’re really telling me is ‘Just shut up, Diana - and do your job.’”
SECTION 6

ICH DIEN*

*“Ich Dien” is Welsh for “I Serve” – the ancient motto of the Princes of Wales
Paul Burrell was on the edge of tears. I couldn't hear the words but I could see the pleading in his eyes.

He was begging the Prince of Wales for his job and the Prince was squirming. It wasn't supposed to be like this. Sacked staff were supposed to do their crying in private and then front up for their farewell handshake with a brave smile. Not ambush him at the staff Christmas drinks with an uncomfortably real display of emotion. A posse of private secretaries and personnel officers closed in on the two men and I turned back to my duties at the Princess of Wales's side.

That was Christmas 1992. The disintegrating Wales marriage had reached the painful stage of dividing up the contents of the marital home. That included the staff. There would be generous redundancy terms but the Prince's mind was made up: the new post-Diana Highgrove would be a Burrell-free zone. The all-seeing all-knowing butler and his young family were to leave their pretty Gloucestershire cottage and go... somewhere. Anywhere.

Now we've read his account of romps and rages at Highgrove we can understand why Charles had no place for the over-informed Burrell in his new life. I can also understand why the Princess so readily agreed to include Burrell in her new household at Kensington Palace. I'd been moved by the loyal servant's plight and anyway, in those embattled days, the compassionate gesture suited the Princess's tactics.

More than ten years later Paul Burrell has come back to haunt the royal family with a book of his experiences serialised this week in the Daily Mirror. In themselves, his revelations don't really shock. The intervening years have stripped away all shreds of privacy around the fairy-tale marriage that went sour, not least thanks to the public recriminations of the Prince and Princess themselves. Now, courtesy of Mr. Burrell, we learn that Prince Philip isn't all bad, Lord Spencer isn't all good and Prince Charles could be a bit tetchy when caught in adultery. So what.

For the Daily Mirror all this spells doom for the monarchy. They've paid a steep price to rummage in Mr. Burrell's mental attic and naturally they want their money's worth. Just as naturally, the rest of Fleet St want to spoil their party. We should all be familiar by now with such elementary gambits in the tabloid circulation war and the distorted news values that inevitably follow.
Even so, every time our foremost national institution gets dragged through the Fleet St slurry pit it emerges a more bedraggled and less cuddly sight. We are tempted to avert our eyes from such embarrassment, as I did at that Christmas party. But before we look away with the usual shrug we should ask if there is something going on that perhaps we really should worry about.

Mark Bolland thinks so. He was Charles’s spin doctor until chivvied out by the new private secretary Sir Michael Peat. Now he advises Camilla Parker-Bowles on her image – a position arguably at least as influential as he held before. In a recent article in the Daily Mail he persuasively argues that the monarchy is indeed at risk but not from Burrell-style revelations. He believes the real danger lies in public apathy, particularly from the rising generation.

The solution? The life-giving oxygen of publicity. More pro-active PR. And we should listen. Mark Bolland is an expert technician, credited – if that’s the word – with restoring Charles’s popularity in recent years.

But as technicians sometimes do, I fear he’s so engrossed in the technical challenge that he’s missed the broader context. My eight years of experience at the heart of the royal machine taught me that actually the opposite is true. With the shining exception of the Princess of Wales, the royal family is not natural advertising copy - a fact Mr. Burrell has helpfully reinforced.

This unfortunate reality can be blamed on genes, the media and the family’s own incorrigible death wish. A sensible option might be for the royal folk to stay safely in their well-guarded homes, happily doing whatever they please, emerging only occasionally and then only to do something useful.

Impractical perhaps but still a good basic principle. I’m reminded of Mark Bolland’s maxim that “you can’t spin mediocrity.” If by spin he means Charles and Camilla’s appearance at last week’s cringe-making Albert Hall charity Rock and Fashion gala, then I think he’s proved both our points.

This event, which the despised old guard advised against, produced images of the Prince and his “non-negotiable” partner which are memorable only for their incongruous, vapid triviality.

If the theory was that young people would be impressed by groovy Charles sharing a wicked joke with teen-sensation Beyoncé then it surely backfired. Like the rest of us, modern youth are quite capable of seeing through such a stunt and it’s patronising to think otherwise.
All those years with the Princess taught me that getting my boss photographed was easy. But since one picture is worth a thousand words, the hard part was getting the messages right. So what messages should today's royal advisors be plugging?

The obvious first one is the need to draw an emphatic line between royalty and celebrity. If the pop CD-buying generation get the idea that Mrs Parker Bowles thinks she's a sort of overgrown Baby Spice then they may be amused but they're unlikely to be uplifted. The transfer of kudos between celeb and royal personage only goes one way – why do you think the pop stars are always smiling wider than the HRHes?

The second may also be unwelcome to royal partygoers. The bows and curtsies have to be earned. So keep up the good work. In fact, do as much of it as you can in the cold, wet streets of deprived inner cities and in the demoralized farmsteads of the countryside. The Prince of Wales is respected for this above all else. But remember also that the servants' bows must be earned too. Every single day. Otherwise you shouldn't be surprised if the Paul Burrells send you a painful reminder.

The third follows a similar theme. The quality most admired in royal people down the ages has been sacrifice. The Queen publicly dedicated her whole life to the service of her people. Her mother was seen as sacrificing her family's safety for the sake of sharing Londoners' danger in the Blitz. Edward VIII was rehabilitated by the sacrifice of his ambitions to be king. Modern sacrifices tend to be more prosaic and harder to come by but they're still worth the effort. The Prince's reputation for self-indulgence, petulance and pontification suggests that his sacrifices haven't cut much ice yet. William and Harry take note. Please.

Which brings us to the last message. Like it or not, Diana is seen to have been sacrificed on the altar of Windsor dynastic convenience and then again on the altar of Windsor obduracy. The only reason Paul Burrell's memories command attention is because he worked for Diana. (So did I which, I suspect, is the only reason you're reading this). They may wish it otherwise but Diana was a gift the Royal Family were given for life.

As Diana's cortege passed Buckingham Palace the Queen bowed her head in respect. A legion of spin doctors couldn't communicate such a powerful message. It briefly lightened the hearts of those like me who saw both Diana and the Queen as representing the same set of principles.

That message now needs to be repeated. An unambiguous sign is needed that our ruling family sees the dead Princess as a memory to be cherished rather than a reproach to be endured. It would comfort millions. It would dampen Mr. Burrell's crusading zeal. It would be recognized and appreciated by Mr. Bolland's disaffected young generation.
Done properly it would prove a welcome moral restorative for the remaining years of the Queen's reign. It might even ensure her reign isn't the last.
“Whatever's going to come out at the end may as well come out at the beginning.”

It's an old political maxim and its enduring truth is obvious to anyone who can remember photographs of shamefaced public figures, driven from the spotlight by some all-too-human failing.

What's true for politicians is doubly true for the royal family. Now we're reading about another royal scandal and, surprise surprise, it's about allegations of the oldest human failing of all. Except we're not reading about it, because the royal servant at the centre of the allegations has obtained an injunction to prevent a newspaper printing an interview with another royal servant. To rub the point in, we're told that a senior member of the royal family has “demanded” that the story should not be published. Louis XVI would be pleased.

Confused? Angry? Many people are, not least because it inevitably looks like the royal family are getting judges to do them favours. Which is not really what centuries of British legal evolution is supposed to have achieved. It looks especially bad when the Paul Burrell trial fiasco is still fresh in our minds.

For this reason – not voyeurism or circulation-boosting – the press are right to warn about the danger the case poses to freedom of expression. For a judge to grant what is known as prior restraint is very rare indeed, for the good reason that it comes perilously close to censorship.

I know the people at the centre of this growing storm. One was near the top of the royal heap, one was a lot lower down the pecking order. I know what one is alleged to have done to the other and what one is said to have seen the other doing with and/or to a member of the royal family.

Salacious stuff. Such absurd convolutions to avoid widely-known specifics just fuel the imagination. And a well-fueled imagination is no help when we're trying to get at the truth. So it's important to remember: only the people directly involved know what really happened. But I know which one of them I'd trust to get closest to it. Both servants can rightly claim that they were good at their jobs, sacrificed their own family lives for the sake of their employer and were completely loyal to their royal boss. But they can't both be being loyal to the truth.

One, using a sworn affidavit, is now trying to communicate his sense of grievance against the other in the press. In response, the other has recruited top lawyers and a royal ally to
secure the full protection of the law. The law has given that protection - for the moment. Now everybody holds their breath. The embattled servants wonder whose version of the truth will go into history. The royal establishment wonders if a miracle will happen and perhaps it'll all drift out of the public mind. The lawyers calculate their fees and wait... An injunction in these circumstances is just a finger in the dyke.

As I watched the opposing legal teams scurry in and out of the aptly named Royal Courts of Justice, I remembered that old uncomfortable reality: in any scandal, it's not the original sin that causes the damage, it's the cover-up. Looking back, the “sin” may look tame – we are, after all, pretty broadminded these days. However bad it seems, it's only guaranteed to get worse if you hope it will go away. And if you try to get other people to make it go away for you, chances are you multiply the explosion when it hits.

What we're not broadminded about are attempts to suppress or distort the truth to protect the blushes of the people at the top. In this case the priority at the outset was not to establish the truth but to make it go away [Peat Report 1.140 p36]. But, as the parties concerned are learning all over again, the truth has a habit of coming back and biting you. And it bites harder in the hands of an aggrieved person, determined to obtain justice from those he feels betrayed him.

So, incredibly, a story that could and should have stayed safely behind palace walls is threatening to burst into the open, dragging with it huge issues of press freedom, equality before the law and the dignity – possibly even the survival – of the crown.

But wait. If the press were less fascinated by the royal family's dirty laundry people wouldn't need to get injunctions. As the judge said, matters of family and personal reputation are at stake here. And before we jump to lurid conclusions, remember only two or perhaps three people actually know what happened.

Of course it's not fair – politicians volunteer for a life of public scrutiny whereas the poor royal family are born into it. But these days some of the royal family are down in the dirt with the politicians – an automatic result of the decision to hire political-style spin doctors. To really Machiavellian spin doctors the truth is whatever they can get to stick. For royal folk – able to control so much of their lives - the truth is often just what they say it is. Mix spin doctors and royalty together and no wonder truth becomes an optional extra.

Perhaps we should just avert our eyes from another royal embarrassment. But the reason we can't and shouldn't look away is the same reason the judge gave us for not looking at all. Family and personal reputations are at stake but it cuts both ways. It won't have
escaped the judge’s attention – and the rest of us are unlikely to forget – that the royal “demand” has only been made on behalf of one family.

Let’s hope it’s the right one.
Princess Diana in an Angolan minefield is one of the last and most powerful images of her tragically-short life. When Prince Harry visits the same scene we're likely to see an equally dramatic photo of royal feet apparently dodging death in support of a great charitable cause.

More than two decades separate the two images of familiar royal figures trussed up in blue body armour – but beyond this similarity lie differences of royal style that tell us quite a lot about how Harry is following in his mother’s careful footsteps – and how he is charting his own very different path through the minefield of public life.

To understand the success of Diana’s anti-mines work – much of it in the face of hostility for straying into what critics saw as political territory – we have to look back to her earlier, more traditional royal tour to another African country Zimbabwe, four years before the famous Angola photo call. It was the first sub-Saharan tour that I had organized and although it had its fair share of challenges, it left the Princess – and me, for that matter – fascinated by that great continent.

As The Daily Telegraph then reported, it was “a triumph” of royal humanitarian diplomacy and soft power – one of a long list of Diana successes in countries as diverse as Argentina and Japan, Nepal, Egypt, France and the USA. In each case, the formula depended on a blend of conventional royal duty and a dash of spontaneous, innovative magic.

Harry, as we know, has inherited his mother’s gift for spontaneous charm. He’ll need every ounce of it during the Africa tour which he is about to lead, as it's probably the greatest diplomatic test of his royal career to date. It's also a test of his ability to repair the damage of a summer of hostile headlines.

So Harry fans – and anybody with a concern for royal reputations - will be looking forward to a windfall of up-beat news from the continent the Duke calls his second home. “Always something new out of Africa” as the Romans used to say and we can certainly expect more examples of the innovative approach that has become the Sussex trademark. But the wise royal traveler will surely also remember some tried and tested ideas from earlier trailblazers.

For example, Princess Diana saw the wisdom in the tradition that royal patrons are usually at their most useful when they keep a dignified distance from the machinery of charitable good works. And while this means they can't take much credit for the successes of the
organisations associated with their name, it insulates them from occasional hazards too. So when, for example, Diana visited a leprosy hospital in Zimbabwe it was as patron of the Leprosy Mission; she was an advocate for the untouchables – not the keeper of the cure.

It was the same with the other charities whose work she highlighted on the Zimbabwe tour – HelpAge International, the Red Cross and the National AIDS Trust; she knew that her role was not to teach them how to do their business but instead to use her power to draw the world’s attention to their dedication and skill... and need for financial support.

In the process she acquired, over time, a valuable understanding of each organisation’s work and was often able to make constructive suggestions. Crucially, though, she realized that suggestions, along with fundraising and publicity, were the best she could sensibly offer to the blue-chip charities who enjoyed her support.

The modern fashion for being a “hands on” royal champion is very much the Sussex style; it looks great and hopefully delivers a royal sense of achievement. But a more traditional arms-length relationship can still be as impactful and purpose-led as today’s socially-aware expectations demand. It has the added benefit that the royal patron can appear attractively modest about their own contribution – instead of needing it to be reinforced by their spin doctors.

On the downside, resisting the temptation to be hands-on also means resisting the temptation to amass a bureaucracy of grandly-titled (and remunerated) in-house support staff. Even in Diana’s years of maximum popularity she didn’t employ one full-time press secretary, let alone top-dollar external crisis PR experts. She let her actions – and her chosen patronages - do the talking for her.

This, combined with a diligent programme of low-key engagements in all corners of the UK, earned her vital “forgivability” so that she would usually be given the benefit of the doubt, by the media and by the tax-payers if not always by her in-laws.

This platform of popularity was the ideal launch-pad for her more controversial humanitarian initiatives. So when she went to Harlem and hugged a baby dying of AIDS, or joined the patients’ council at Broadmoor, or shook hands with a ward of lepers, or visited the homeless in the Waterloo bullring, or walked into a minefield (literally and figuratively) she could not be credibly accused of pulling a stunt to grab headlines or score points off a rival royal household. Instead, she was following her own moral compass, using her profile to shine a spotlight on those whom the world preferred to ignore.
Of these, none attracted more of her energy, influence or time than people troubled in mind. Mainly through the work of her patronage Turning Point she devoted years of engagements to learning as much as she could about mental illness, culminating in talking publicly about her own experience of a highly-unfashionable eating disorder. It says something about the climate of the time that she did so while some traditionalists dismissed her as mentally not up to the job.

I often wondered whether her critics could understand the strength she found to confront her own demons and turn them to the benefit of others.

She would surely be reassured to find something of that strength in both her sons’ support for the continuing campaign for mental wellness and pleasure at their many shared successes.

Perhaps she would feel equal pleasure at Prince Harry's plans to co-operate with Oprah Winfrey and a starry team of creatives in next year's Apple TV series on mental health. As Harry recently told Bryony Gordon in this newspaper: “If the viewers can relate to the pain and perhaps the experience, then it could save lives, as we will focus on prevention and positive outcomes.”

We must hope that the Duke himself is blessed with one of those positive outcomes.

It's largely in his own hands. He is, after all, the same age as his mother was when she took those steps onto dangerous ground in Angola. It would be hard to think of a more hazardous minefield for an earnest prince than the world of celebrity American TV.

The blurry line between royalty and celebrity doesn't offer a clear path to safe ground. Harry, as a new father, will surely wonder how best to protect his family from the hazards of being a socially-concerned modern prince. Luckily, he isn't the first to face the uncharted dangers and opportunities that go with royal rank. Any junior duke looking for advice from a very senior one might find wisdom in Prince Philip's words:

“It would have been very easy to play to the gallery but I took a conscious decision not to do that. Safer not to be too popular. You can't fall too far.”

Patrick Jephson was equerry and private secretary to HRH The Princess of Wales 1988-96. His latest book The Meghan Factor is available from Amazon.
The Duke of Sussex's unprecedented multi-front war on the media is either a stroke of genius – bamboozling his enemies with the speed and breadth of his attack – or it's a risky overstretch of finite resources, of the kind that decides the outcome of most long wars.

Not financial resources, obviously (although potentially years of top-notch legal work will rack up bills to make even a prince's accountant swallow hard) but the intangible and ultimately more decisive resources of public sympathy and personal resolve.

Public sympathy will reliably start in the Duke's corner but is notoriously volatile – hence probably a gamble on one or more swift settlements to steady the troops. As for the rest... all will hang on the scales of Justice.

Personal resolve is another matter. To stay the course up to and possibly including personal court appearances is a punishing trek on which to set out. Add a crowded baggage train of family, friends and patronages and the Sussexes have set themselves a Long March to whatever they have defined as victory. We must assume they've calculated that the cost of doing nothing is higher than the price of whatever this is. If not, now's the time to ask themselves what that price might be.

The Duke's current sense of resolve is clear from last week's explosive statement asserting wholesale press misbehavior.

Along with the Duchess's suit against the Mail on Sunday, Harry's blunderbuss opens a campaign which PR masterminds and legal brains have presumably been plotting for some time (the special website Sussexofficial.uk has been up and ready since March).

We're told that it was all part of the plan to pull the trigger in the heady climax of a successful tropical tour. So damn the consternation in the Palace or the FCO or on the faces of those poor loyal blindsided courtiers - I bet it felt absolutely great. The justified fury of a reasonable husband driven beyond endurance finds blessed release in legal processes and good old fashioned purgative prose. Applause, surely.

I went through something similar with Harry's mother when we sued The Mirror for sneakily-acquired pictures of her working out in a gym. In the heat of battle and gripped by self-righteous indignation the royal hand reaches resolutely for the mighty sword of truth and...

...waits. And waits.
Unless the head of the offending editor(s) can be served up on a plate with the speed to which royal customers are accustomed, the whole business can start to feel like a bad idea. Somebody else's bad idea, naturally.

Eventually, with the Princess of Wales, our legal champions reached a settlement but by then it was all rather deflating. We were on tour half a world away when the news of our long-awaited vindication came in. It was the middle of the night so I climbed out of my bed in the embassy and tiptoed across the chilly landing to slide the agreed cryptic note under my boss's door.

It didn't feel like a victory parade and, funnily enough, next day the familiar faces of the press pack wore expressions that were everything except contrite. And they were still just as peskily objective, as they always should be in a democracy of which (to borrow a phrase from Prince Harry's statement) they are the cornerstone. It occurred to me then that an attack of cold feet – at the beginning of the exercise, not at the end – might have been a blessing in disguise.

It seems Harry did not have time to cite any actual examples of the offences marching through his mind. It would have been worth the effort to do so, if he were seriously seeking an improved modus vivendi with the press he so obviously despises.

Documented evidence of the alleged “ruthless campaign” is presumably easy to find and would certainly have silenced some sceptics. Unquestionably, there has been ruthlessness – and cruelty – to spare online but the thoroughly-modern Sussex digital operation must have been prepared for that, not least psychologically.

Accusations of media bullying and prejudice are now being launched from the Duchess's former homeland. This can be a learning opportunity for some of her celebrity sisters: royal people have to learn the difference between bullying and criticism, between sarcasm and irony. It’s part of the historic deal that’s overseen by the British media holding to account public figures whose lives are subsidized by (usually) benign British taxpayers.

But when royal blood is up and the quarry is in plain view, it’s too late to suggest a nice soothing stroll in the autumn air and a happy review of one's bountiful royal blessings. Not the least of these being the welcome reality that, as sixth in line, without anybody minding very much one could push off to America or Africa or Elton John’s corner of Provence for a life of earnest good works and unassailable eco-virtue.

“Follow your dream” as the Duke exhorted young Africans last week. Words for the Sussexes to ponder as they survey the royal future through the sheeting rain over Windsor Great Park.
And what a dream: celebrity without apology, Gulfstreams without guilt, Sundays without the Sunday papers and happy anonymity for baby Archie. All this plus gold-plated endorsements from two former US first ladies one of whom, Michele Obama, hails Duchess Meghan as “a mold breaker.”

Well, no surprise, breaking British molds is risky business, can be messy and is definitely not for the faint hearted. It's hardly Dunkirk or even Afghanistan where bachelor Harry earned such respect, but now's the time for team Sussex to show what it's really made of.

There's just one small detail to be resolved. Win or lose in the courts, Harry and Meghan's royal destiny is still split between two worlds, much as they themselves seem split between the progressive idealism of Meghan's home state and the obstinate reality of Britain's preference for a comfortably conservative ruling family (and who doesn't need a bit of comfort in these troubling times?). Diana may have been something in the mold breaker stakes herself, but she never ducked Balmoral, lectured voters on democracy or borrowed invective more normally found in the White House to communicate with a free and fundamentally friendly press.

What’s it to be? Now would be a brilliant time to give Fleet Street and its deplorable insolent tendencies an unequivocal answer.

And here's a respectful suggestion: unclenching your fists will help.