

# Game of thrones

As millions mark the Queen's Jubilee, we ask: is there still a place for the monarchy in Australian life?

Yes

DAMIEN FREEMAN

Australia's Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, touches down in London just as the Royal Household makes the finishing touches for London's biggest royal event in decades. A carriage procession, a 1,000-vessel flotilla and a picnic and concert in the grounds of Buckingham Palace are all part of this long weekend's festivities to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. All are intended to excite the interest of her British subjects in her anniversary. Prince Charles is to be despatched here later in the year to help her Australian subjects mark his mother's milestone.

Why should we care about Prince Charles's visit to Australia, or the anniversary in his mother's life that he will come here to celebrate, and which the Governor-General has gone there to celebrate? Why should Australians care about events in the lives of any of the royals? Or, for that matter, why care about their deaths?

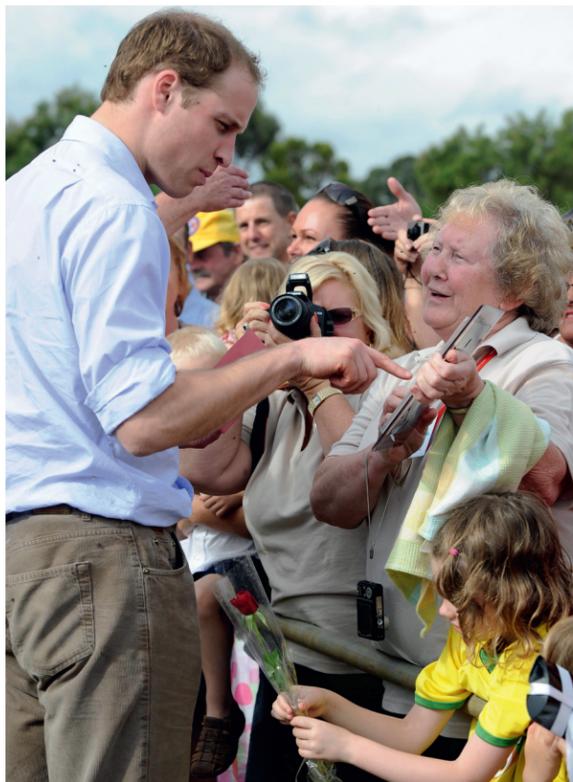
Shortly after the death of the Queen's father, King George VI, the philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote: 'People here are supposed to be affected by the King's death. But as 100,000 people die every day, I cannot feel much about it.' Clearly the overwhelming majority of his kinsmen felt otherwise. Why?

In his television series *In Search of Holy England*, which aired on the ABC some years ago, Rabbi Lionel Blue described his feelings upon learning of the King's death. He was reading for a degree at Oxford at the time. When the death was announced, he felt an immediate impulse to travel to Westminster to attend the lying-in-state. He explained that he felt touched by the thought of a simple man who had suddenly found himself in an office which he had never wanted, and to which he felt ill-suited. Blue said there was something about the way the insecure King overcame his stammer and discharged his duties during the war years which affected him. It was part of the irrational hierarchy in which the King made his contribution to public life.

Perhaps that was once something to be valued in public life, but do such sentiments still matter? Five years before the King's death, the young

Princess Elizabeth chose to mark her 21st birthday with a broadcast from South Africa, in which she made a declaration of service which was heartfelt; one to which Elizabeth was to maintain a lifelong devotion. It was hardly surprising to find that Prince William's 21st birthday passed without a formal expression of his devotion to public service. One could not imagine Prince William making a declaration like Princess Elizabeth's today.

During Prince William's 'private' visit to Australia, last year, his personal interest in public service was much in evidence. The very public visit was private in the sense that Prince William's program reflected his own interests rather than official duties. He asked to meet indigenous Australians and was taken to the Block. He asked to meet young Australians who had made a contribution to public life and the NSW Premier put on a barbecue at Mrs Macquarie's Point. He asked to meet survivors of Black Saturday and was taken to fire-ravaged Humevale, Whittlesea, Flowerdale and the Kinglake Ranges. In three days, he demonstrated a genuine personal interest in Australians' experience of adversity



Royal visit: Prince William in Murrabit, Victoria last year

and their commitment to helping others.

And yet, George Williams, professor of constitutional law at UNSW, wrote during the visit: 'Having Prince William as our future king represents a failure, not on his part, but of ourselves.' He continues: 'The idea that someone should be born into the highest position in Australian government is more than quaint; it is objectionable. It is inconsistent with what is otherwise a democratic and egalitarian system.'

Is it quaint to think that the highest office in Australian government is the one which appoints the officer who appoints the prime minister; rather than thinking that the highest office in Australian government is that of the prime minister who chairs the cabinet and serves as the chief executive officer? Far from being quaint, I should think the analysis is closer to being objectionable. However one resolves the issues concerning the head of state, surely there is no disagreement that the prime minister is the head of government in Australia.

On a deeper level, it is also objectionable to think that a system that promotes democratic and egalitarian values cannot also find a place for other values. Cardinal though its importance may be, democracy is not the only value that matters in communal life. E.M. Forster touches on another value in his description of Mrs Wilcox in *Howards End*:

One knew that she worshipped the past, and that the instinctive wisdom the past can alone bestow had descended upon her — that wisdom to which we give the clumsy name of aristocracy. High-born she might not be. But assuredly she cared about her ancestors, and let them help her.

Prince William is as high-born as they come. But he also cares about his ancestors and lets them help him in his public life. The guiding hand of the late Princess of Wales was ever-present in his manner during his Australian visit.

It would be unacceptable for the highest office in Australian government, i.e. the prime minister, to be selected on the basis of aristocracy. But does that mean that there is no place for Forster's sense of aristocracy in the Australian polity? In an interview for the Anglican media in Melbourne some years ago, the celebrated cartoonist Michael Leunig offered an interesting perspective on the significance of the monarchy in contemporary Australia:

The monarchy has no actual effect on us... It represents the notion of irrational hierarchies. Perhaps there is some need for hierarchies that are irrational if they are fair and just... There are some things

that transcend the rational democratic process and we have to pay respect to that... The Queen does not repress us, we don't kowtow to the Queen; we kowtow to Hollywood, we kowtow to television, we kowtow to the bank. We are an absolutely subservient, compliant, slavish, beaten people in many respects... I think the pageantry and the pomp is one of the things that actually elevate us away from the bank and commerce and America and the media.

Hollywood, television, and the bank are among the forces that encourage people to seek as much privilege for themselves as they can without sparing a thought for the degree of responsibility that ought be entailed by such privilege. The monarchy presents a different attitude to privilege. No one can deny that the Queen and her family are among the most privileged souls to walk this earth. But it is privilege that she and both her parents understood to entail responsibility: *noblesse oblige*. And it is evident from Prince William's three days in Australia that he has been guided by the instinctive wisdom of his ancestors in his attitude to privilege.

I, for one, am pleased to think that there is a place in Australia for irrational hierarchies that are fair and just. The very limited place of the monarchy in Australia is one of them.

When the Queen visited Australia on the eve of our celebrations for the centenary of Federation, she remarked that the forthcoming centenary

will be a time of justified celebration, but I hope it will also be a time of pause and quiet reflection. At that time I shall reflect — perhaps with that hint of surprise which comes with age — that my formal commitment to Australia will have spanned almost precisely half of this country's life as a federated nation.

Perhaps it was such counsel that Julia Gillard had in mind more than a decade later when she explained at this year's opening of Parliament that the Queen has been a 'wise and encouraging guide' for Australia as it matured over the past 60 years.

The maturing of Australia as a nation has involved recognising its failure to affirm some important values earlier on in its journey. But as the nation changes in order to accommodate such values, let us hope that there is still a place for older values. The Queen's Diamond Jubilee is an occasion to affirm them.

Damien Freeman's *Roddy's Folly*: R.P. Meagher QC — art lover and lawyer (*Connor Court*) was launched by Tony Abbott at the University of Sydney in April. He teaches ethics and aesthetics at Pembroke College, Cambridge.

No  
BARRY EVERINGHAM

The Australian head of state is a woman of many hats, and to mark 60 years on the throne as England's 41st monarch since William the Conqueror she is sending members of her family far and wide in the most expensive PR exercise since Walt Disney launched Mickey Mouse.

The Australians will be receiving Prince Charles and his morganatic duchess, and there's more than just a touch of irony that this fun-filled couple have been chosen to represent our eighth head of state, who got the gig because of the adultery of her late uncle King Edward VIII and his would-be morganatic wife, a twice-divorced American socialite who just happened to have two ex-husbands living, as opposed to Camilla, whose only ex-husband was still breathing.

Edward proposed to the Empire governments of the day he be permitted to wed Wallis Simpson, but she would not be Queen nor would any children of the pair have inheritance rights. The proposals were rejected out of hand.

Charles has admitted committing adultery with a married woman and got away with it, even telling his paramour he wanted to come back as her tampon. Such a romantic wish would hardly have crossed Charles's great uncle's mind, as it has now been revealed Mrs Simpson had all the confused plumbing of a hermaphrodite. That's a story for another day. He married Camilla without a word being breathed to the Commonwealth nations of which he will one day perhaps be King, and as a sop to Diana-lovers dredged up the ducal Duchess of Cornwall title for her to use until she becomes his Queen.

Most Brits abhor adultery but go along with fornication. In this country, both activities seem to be acceptable, with same-sex marriages coming a close third. Whether the forthcoming visit will save the monarchy remains to be seen.

Elizabeth II's family is an extraordinary gaggle of people, most of whom are enthusiastically inbred, apart from William and Harry, whose mother was pure English and, in a rare departure, unrelated to their father. Charles is the union of the coupling of direct descendants of Queen Victoria's and close cousins on many lines.

The members of the royal family don't have jobs in the accepted description of the word, and their influence resides in not being seen to exercise it. OK for the poms, but all out of kilter here in egalitarian Australia.

The prop-up-the-monarchy visits to the diaspora have Commonwealth-wide monarchists trembling with delight, and in Australia the semi-official Australians for

Constitutional Monarchy has taken on the persona of an old *Women's Weekly* with a wealth of saccharine stories and pictures to mark the reign. The wild claim that the wedding of Kate and William cemented the future of the monarchy in this country is just that.

The behaviour of contemporary young royals and the Queen's misplaced enthusiasm for lifting the veil and letting daylight into the lives of her family has robbed them of the mystique once surrounding them and has turned them into celebrities. This is why the world turned on their TVs to watch a spectacle steeped in British tradition and starring two of the world's most attractive young people. We laughingly refer to a politician's republic — well, so what? Surely we are adult enough as a nation to select our own head of state from among our own citizenry and not be subjected to the birthright of a foreigner who doesn't live here.

The Queen has made 16 visits Down Under in 60 years and was the first English monarch to make the trip. Hardly an exceptional workload and the many visits made by members of her family on her behalf were reminiscent of unknown cousins knocking on the door on Christmas Day. They were expensive holidays for privileged people.

The claim that Charles was educated here and knows us is ridiculous. He was a two-term house tutor at Geelong Grammar's Timbertop campus, hardly a place where he would come into contact with everyday Australian young men and women. Camilla as far as it is known hasn't been here, but has a tenuous family link. Her former husband's brother is married to the daughter of the late Australian financial tycoon Sir Ian Potter. The monarch makes state visits to foreign countries to sell the UK. They are trade missions. This writer happened to be the only Australian reporter accredited to cover her historic tour of the states of the Arabian Gulf in 1979.

It was massive sales pitch for British expertise and weapons and brought in millions of pounds' worth of orders. Her time in Saudi Arabia was humiliating: the British government went along with the Saudi demand that HM become an 'honorary gentleman' so she could be in the presence of the Saudi king and that a massive arms deal with Riyadh could be finalised.

There is no doubt the Queen has been hard-working and dedicated, but her relevance to Australia has diminished and is becoming embarrassing. We are mature enough to have an Australian head of state who is no one else's representative — a person who calls Australia home.

Barry Everingham has been writing about royalty for 35 years.