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As the Sun set behind the hills of the Kent North Downs, on September 8, the UK had entered the era of Charles III.

The passing of Elizabeth II (Elizabeth Alexandra Mary Windsor) April 21, 1926 to September 8, 2022 saw crowds gathered here in the UK. Their responses to journalists and the condolences sent by world leaders, cited her as a constant in people's lives, she had been an icon of British decorum and dignity, and a stateswoman. A reader, Eric Doyle, from California, sent over to us a spontaneous appreciation of the Queen:

“Her Majesty earned the love and respect of the entire world. What an example of intelligence, kindness, and courage. She has set high standards and taught us a finer way to think and live. Well Done!”

It is a time to recall how the Queen, though a constitutional sovereign, played a vital role in global diplomacy. If our species is to turn around the Earth Crisis, it can only do so through a world of political stability.

The life of Elizabeth II (1926-2022) spanned an impressive one fifth of the total time since the birth of Elizabeth I (1533-1603).

The passing of a long-lived sovereign is cause to spend a moment remembering a broader sweep of history.

The Queen reigned during a long episode of peace in the UK, albeit with the fears of the Cold War and eruptions of terrorism and social unrest. On the whole, however, those living in the UK have been able to enjoy an enviable political stability as their norm.

Between the two Elizabeths the world saw an immense cultural, scientific and technological revolution, with Europeans exploring and then occupying the Earth's continents, carrying plants, animals and peoples between distant geographical locations. The forthcoming November traditions here in England remind us of the instability of human societies.

The Nov. 5 bonfires celebrate a failed attempt to cause an explosion beneath the House of Lords, and King James I (1566-1625) was to be among the victims. This was an episode in an ongoing series of religious wars, with martyrs on both sides. Together with the gruesome burning of an effigy of one of the conspirators, Guido (Guy) Fawkes (1570-1606), these may not be close to the minds of most people in the UK today - who want to enjoy a firework party. Assuming a healthy human life span of 80 years, we are looking back a mere 5 lifetimes ago.

The mood of Remembrance Day (Nov. 11) requires us to meditate on the sacrifice and huge human loss in the First World War (1914-1918) and Second World War (1939-1945), and major conflicts since. WWII was a lifetime ago.

Below left: New Ash Green bonfire (Nov. 6, 2021). Below right: Remembrance Day. Hartley, Kent (Nov. 11) Dec.2021).





Memories of the Platinum Jubilee, June 2022; with fireworks at Longfield, Kent from Megan Bruce.

Onwards and into the challenges of the 21st Century.

As we each look back with our own recollections, at the years that are behind us, and what we make of them, we must look forwards into what will be the most challenging era of human existence. Around the world, we see apparently irreconcilable religious and ideological conflicts continuing with the same fervent urgency that drove the gunpowder plotters in London in 1606. Meanwhile, with actions that remind us of ancient history onwards, and perhaps for the oldest people among us, with memories of the 1930's and 1940s, we see bullying dictators seeking to restore the pride of nations, by regaining (from other nations) territories once claimed by empires at their peak.

We have passed through COVID19, and then into a Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has added further economic (and ultimately, societal) threats to the free world, with a winter energy crisis looming in Europe. Beyond that are the ongoing problems of climate and the other multiple threats of the Earth Crisis. If life, we are told, is not a dress rehearsal, then neither must the political arena seem, as it does too often, like a kind of reality game show. There's no second prize for saving humanity, and, quite possibly, no one will be there to hand it out. All of us must play a part in creating an ethos in which political leadership requires the calibre appropriate to its challenges.

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About Prime Meridian.

Prime Meridian is published by the Ecospheres Project, a research and media collaboration. It looks at the cycle of the seasons in South East England and looks out from the Prime Meridian into the global environment and beyond, into the search for other habitable worlds.

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