

CURSE OF THE ROYAL SPARE



The scandals may have faded from memory, but on the 20th anniversary of her death, Princess Margaret remains one of the saddest royal stories for having chosen duty over love, writes **Kerry Parnell**

Before Prince Harry and his much-publicised troubles, there was another spare heir struggling with her place in the palace. Princess Margaret, who died 20 years ago this year, was like Harry, never out of the headlines.

"To many people, Princess Margaret was the black sheep of her generation of royals. But that reputation did not necessarily trouble her," read her obituary in the New York Times, after she passed away aged 71 on February 9, 2002. After all, she once reportedly said, "Disobedience is my joy."

So far, so similar. But while Harry broke free of the royal restraints, Margaret, when faced with the choice of giving up her title to marry the man of her choice, ultimately chose to stay.

One can only wonder if she would have lived a less-troubled life had she chosen differently.

Margaret's love for royal equerry Group Captain Peter Townsend was revealed when she was spotted brushing the fluff off his shoulder at her sister Elizabeth's coronation in 1953.

The newspapers were abuzz with the romance, and the public enchanted, but, like Meghan Markle, Peter was divorced. Unlike in 2018 when Harry wed Meghan, it was seen as scandalous. The same quandary had resulted in the abdication of Edward VIII in 1936.

In 1955, the Queen informed Margaret the government said in order to marry Peter, she must renounce her title. She "laid herself on the altar of duty in the best traditions of her family", said royal biographer Robert Lacey.

Margaret was born on August 21, 1930, at Glamis Castle, Scotland, the second daughter of the Duke and Duchess of York.

She and Elizabeth were famous princesses of the day – the public couldn't get enough of the pretty, identically dressed pair. But when their uncle abdicated on December 11, 1936, their future – and equality – changed irrevocably.

On hearing the news, Margaret is reported to have said to her sister, "Does that mean that you will have to be the next queen?", adding, "poor you".

“(She) laid herself on the altar of duty in the best traditions of her family”

Despite the disparity, the pair were inseparable, with a sibling bond that would never be broken – unlike that of Prince William and Harry.

"When my sister and I were growing up, she was made out to be the goody-goody one," Margaret later told author Andrew Duncan. "That was boring, so the press tried to make out that I was wicked as hell."

They spent the war years together at Windsor Castle. Margaret said: "We packed for the weekend and stayed for five years." The pair famously enjoyed a night of anonymity when they broke out of Buckingham Palace and joined the crowds during VE celebrations.



Princess Margaret was the epitome of royal glamour. This portrait was taken by her husband in 1967.

But being anonymous was never something that appealed to Margaret, a great beauty. Her 21st birthday portrait by Cecil Beaton, resplendent in her Dior gown, looks straight out of a fairytale.

She was legendary for her imperious and often appalling behaviour. Dinner parties could not commence until she

arrived – even if she was hours late.

Nancy Mitford wrote of one event meant to start at 8.30pm, when at 8.30 Margaret's hairdresser arrived, "so we waited for hours while he concocted a ghastly coiffure. She looked like a huge ball of fur on two well-developed legs".

She could also be extremely rude. When she met Twiggy, the model introduced herself saying, "I'm Lesley Hornby, ma'am, but people call me Twiggy", to which she replied, "How unfortunate", before turning her back.

But Margaret was determined to do things her

way – she bought her own tiara she wore at her wedding to photographer Antony Armstrong-Jones in 1960.

The Poltimore Tiara proved the better investment, as the marriage ended in divorce in 1978. It also featured in one of her most infamous photographs – of the princess in the bath in

DEVOTED SISTERS SIDE-BY-SIDE TO THE END



1940

The inseparable royal sisters in a portrait taken when Princess Elizabeth was 14, and Margaret, 9. Picture: Getty

1946

Margaret by her sister's side at the Royal Lodge just after World War II.

1973

1997

The sisters at the Badminton Horse Trials during the final years of Margaret's marriage to Antony Armstrong-Jones and (left) at the funeral of Princess Diana. Pictures: Getty

THE OTHER SPARE HEIRS

■ **GEORGE V** One spare heir who got the top job was Prince George, second son of Edward VII, after older brother Prince Albert died aged 28 in 1892.

■ **GEORGE VI** It was the same story for George V's children. When first son Edward VIII abdicated in 1936, Prince Albert became George VI, father to the Queen. His brother Henry,

Duke of Gloucester, became Governor-General of Australia after brother George, Duke of Kent, who was meant for the role, was killed in an air crash aged 39.

■ **PRINCE ANDREW** It soon became apparent the Queen's second son Prince Andrew had no chance of the top job, then thanks to poor decision-making, no chance of any job.

■ **PRINCE HARRY** After going from third to sixth in line to the throne, Prince Harry decided he'd much rather depart the royal family altogether.

■ **PRINCESS CHARLOTTE** Thanks to a change in legislation, the spare heir no longer falls first to males and Princess Charlotte (right) finds herself first-reserve to brother Prince George.



nothing but the enormous headpiece.

As her marriage crumbled, she took lovers, including Roddy Llewellyn, 17 years her junior, whom she was snapped with at her villa in Mustique. It caused a sensation, as did her divorce. Roddy later said he had simply "followed his heart" and described her as "a

warm and witty woman, possessing a strong sense of duty and dedication to her country's interests". They dated for eight years.

It was on the island that she truly felt free. Gifted land there by Lord Glenconner, she built villa Les Jolies Eaux, and enjoyed wild parties and liaisons, including, it's long

been rumoured, with close friend Mick Jagger.

Eventually, her love of drinking and smoking – according to biographer Craig Brown, the princess's routine involved a vodka at 12.30, then lunch and wine – took a toll. Margaret's health declined and by 2002 she was wheelchair-bound. Following a series of

strokes, three days after the Queen's golden anniversary of her accession, she died with her children, Lord Linley and Lady Sarah Chatto, at her side.

Public reaction to Margaret's death was muted, but her sister was devastated. Seven weeks later, the Queen Mother died and the Queen's old guard was gone.



Stars and dramas of music festival we had to have

KATHY MCCABE

In 1991, Australia was in the grips of the "recession we had to have" with home loan interest rates at 17 per cent, youth unemployment at 25 per cent and the big end of town floundering as the Alan Bond and Christopher Skase media empires collapsed.

Troubled times inevitably provoke a soundtrack, and bubbling under the economic ruin was the underground alternative music scene, a disparate collection of tribes who embraced aggressive new genres from grunge to techno.

Promoter Ken West decided the tribes needed to be united, to be turned on to each other's musical passions, and in the midst of the economic gloom created the Big Day Out.

With his business partner Vivian Lees, the pair would fashion a unique alternative experience that not only changed the festival business in Australia but helped create superstars out of music's fringe-dwellers and misfits.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Big Day Out's inaugural event at the old Sydney Showground on January 25, 1992, West shared a clutch of chapters of his work-in-progress book, tentatively titled *Controlled Chaos*, online.

Hundreds of music industry insiders have been poring over the chapters launched on his Kenfest website; some to see if they're named, most to revel in West's "ramblings" about the inner workings and behind-the-scenes dramas of the event, which ended in 2014.

Like the time pop star Kylie Minogue – definitely not a Big Day Out kind of act in 1996 – performed *Where The Wild Roses Are* with Nick Cave; it remains one of the most celebrated moments in the event's history, signifying the festival's emergence into the mainstream of the Australian cultural landscape.

"The funny thing with Kylie on the road was that for us it was no big deal. She was a pretty suburban girl from Melbourne, had gone out with friends Mark Gerber then Michael Hutchence, and seemed to like the dark side. Nick ... actually was the dark side ..." West writes.

"She only performed on four shows and only sang one song but to the global media, it was a huge deal."



Nirvana and (above) a poster for their 1992 Big Day Out headlining appearance.

The debut Big Day Out in 1992 was a Sydney-only affair; the festival became a national travelling circus in 1993.

West and Lees booked Nirvana alongside the Violent Femmes, before their breakthrough album *Nevermind* blew up around the world, and when the band arrived in Australia they were surfing a tsunami of global success and frontman Kurt Cobain was suffering from heroin withdrawal.

"He also had a bad stomach ulcer thanks to taking Ritalin without water as a kid," West says.

"He was going nuts from his stomach pains and drug withdrawals. In short, he wanted to go home."

West's Big Day Out partner Lees gave the rock star "extra large aspirins", promising him they were "super painkillers" and Cobain was able to go on.

"As Viv said to me, 'This guy is really fragile, he just needs to know that we all care about him,'" West writes.

West gives a unique insight into just how big that first event was, even though it only hosted 9700 fans who each paid \$42 for their ticket.

"Soon after selling out I also got a call from the office of then prime minister Paul Keating to purchase three tickets for his kids. When I offered to just send some, my offer was politely rejected as free tickets can be considered corruption," West shares. "We then arranged tickets to be purchased from the Canberra outlet. Simpler times."

West plans to release *Controlled Chaos* in early 2023 to coincide with a Big Day Out art exhibition.