

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

Queen Victoria, beloved by her subjects, died in 1901.



GENERAL

When Queen Victoria died on January 22th, 1901, she was the only monarch most of her British subjects had ever known. She had been Queen for 63 years, the longest reign in British history. These years saw the growth of a huge empire. **What is an empire?** (*A network of colonies all controlled by the same country.*) **Why do you think they say “the sun never set on the British Empire”?** (*The British Empire reached so far and wide that the sun was always shining on part of it.*)

Victoria was queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from 1837 to 1901 and empress of India. We know more about Queen Victoria than almost any other person in history. For more than 80 years people commented on almost everything she did. From age 13 until a week before she died, she kept a diary. She wrote hundreds of letters to her friends and family around the world and most of them have been saved. She wrote two books about her life. There are many portraits of her and she was the first British monarch to be photographed.

She was born in 1819 and grew up at Kensington Palace in London. **Can you name another English princess who lived at Kensington Palace?** (*Diana, Princess of Wales.*) Victoria was an intelligent girl. She read lots of books, spoke several languages, and could sing and draw. But she was an only child and lived a secluded life. The center of her life as a princess was her doll collection. She owned 132 dolls with fancy costumes and unusual names. **Does this sound like a good way to grow up?**

Victoria became queen after the death of her uncle, King William IV, in 1837. She was only eighteen years old at the time. Two years later, her cousin Albert, a German prince, came to visit

the English court.

Albert was very handsome and Victoria immediately fell in love with him. She proposed to him five days after his arrival. Prince Albert accepted, and in February 1840 they were married. He soon became the most important influence in her life and served as her private secretary.

Victoria and Albert built royal residences on the Isle of Wight and at Balmoral Castle in Scotland, and never spent much time in London. They had nine children. In 1861, Prince Albert caught typhoid and died at the young age of 42. Victoria was so grief-stricken that she did not appear in public for three years. She never entirely got over the loss of Albert. She was a widow for 40 years, and until the end of her life she had her maids lay out Albert's clothes for the next day. Throughout her reign, Queen Victoria worked hard to carry out her ceremonial duties as head of state. **Do you know who actually runs the government in Great Britain?** (*The Prime Minister and Parliament.*)

Victoria's long reign, and the pride that people associated with her name, gave rise to the term "Victorian England." This was a period that was characterized by styles and values that reflected Victoria's own personal tastes and beliefs. She had forty grandchildren and forty great-grandchildren. Their marriages with other kings and queens gave her the name of "grandmother of Europe." **Do you think that British royalty today has the kind of influence Victoria had? Why are we still so fascinated by the British royalty?** END