

## By Royal Appointment

It was a great honour to be invited to Windsor Castle on Saturday to interview HRH Queen Elizabeth. I know several journalists, with far greater experience than me, have been refused this amazing opportunity and privilege. As I drove down the Long Walk, the castle glimmered on a warm April day and my anticipation mounted. The Royal Standard, no longer flying at half mast, danced happily in the breeze. Just one week on from Prince Philip's funeral, the family's official mourning period had ended. I had prepared and sent my questions in advance for the Royal Press Office's approval.

I was greeted by the Queen's Private Secretary, Sir Edward Young who explained I would be taking tea on the lawn, socially distanced from Her Majesty. I arrived as HRH was taking a seat, with two corgis racing around her ankles. I was struck by how small she seemed, bent with age but with the most glorious smooth complexion and a warm friendly smile. She was wearing a rose pink wool coat with matching dress and a double row of pearls. Her pearl and diamond brooch had a dark vein running through the centre and her accessories were black. I noticed the immaculate make-up with perfectly co-ordinated lipstick to her outfit as introductions were made.

We exchanged a few pleasantries and I was asked how my journey was?

I started by thanking Her Majesty for seeing me, offering my condolences and asking why she had agreed to an interview at this difficult time?

"I know that Prince Phillip would want me to carry on. That's why we only had two week's mourning, it's what he wanted, to get on with life and living. One has a duty and a role to play. The country, and indeed the world, is going through a very difficult time. Many people are grieving, but that is something to do in private."

The tea was poured, the Queen lifted the delicate cup and took a sip. I cleared my throat, but before I spoke she looked at me intently, with her piercing cornflower blue eyes,

"I agreed to the interview as I wanted to thank everyone for their kind messages and support at this time of deep sadness, but to confirm I have no intention of stepping down or retiring. There will be difficult times ahead for everyone."

"M'am, I understand that you met with Prince Harry, whilst he was in the country, is there anything you would like to say about the meeting." Her face lit up.

"My grandson and I speak regularly, I was grateful for his support and for him travelling to his grandfather's funeral. After I saw him, he was going for dinner with The Duke of Cambridge and his family at Kensington Palace." She nodded, showing her approval and I knew this subject was closed.

"You have recently become the oldest reigning monarch M'am, what is your secret to longevity?"

"Taking an interest in everything, one has to keep one's brain active: my horses, the dogs and running the family business!" she swept her hand towards Windsor Castle "

I also recommend a wee dram of whisky every evening, it worked well for my Mother."

I knew at that moment that it was 'business as usual' for the firm.