

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #051

The British Royal Family

May 5, 2020

[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] The show where you can learn fascinating things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:19] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about the British Royal family.

[00:00:27] I'm sure you probably know a bit about them.

[00:00:30] You'd recognise the queen and you probably know what I mean by Buckingham Palace.

[00:00:36] Well, today we are going to go a little bit deeper.

The British Royal Family

[00:00:41] We are going to ask ourselves how the UK has managed to keep its **monarchy**¹ while several other European countries decided to get rid of theirs, some in **spectacular**² **fashion**³.

[00:00:54] And we'll ask ourselves what they actually do and what the future might hold for one of the world's most famous families.

[00:01:04] So it is quite an exciting one.

[00:01:08] Before we get right into that though, just in case you hadn't listened to the last episode, I just wanted to remind you that we have made some small changes to the way the podcast works.

[00:01:21] Firstly, we've **split**⁴ the membership into two different groups.

[00:01:25] Listener, if you just want to listen to all of the podcasts and Learner, if you also want the transcripts and key vocabulary.

[00:01:33] But more excitingly, there are two new developments that I would love for you to use.

¹ a country that has a king or queen

² very exciting to look at

³ a way of doing things

⁴ to (cause to) divide into two or more parts, especially along a particular line

The British Royal Family

[00:01:40] Firstly, anyone who is a member of Leonardo English, and if you're listening to this episode, then that's you, anyone who is a member of Leonardo English can now suggest topics for episodes.

[00:01:54] The team has a big list of exciting subjects that we want to cover, but I also want to include you in this, so if you want to hear more about a particular subject, then **assuming**⁵ that they are things that we think will be interesting to other listeners, then we will actually make a podcast about them.

[00:02:16] So try that out.

[00:02:17] Head into your dashboard at leonardoenglish.com and start making those requests.

[00:02:24] And secondly, this is something that I'm super excited about.

[00:02:28] We are going to start doing monthly live Q&A, question and answer, sessions.

[00:02:35] The idea for this is that they will be small, **intimate**⁶ groups, no more than 12 people to start with.

[00:02:42] We'll choose a topic to discuss, likely related to the podcast topics from that month, and it'll be an opportunity to talk, ask questions, and of course, practice your English.

⁵ to accept something to be TRUE without question or proof

⁶ private and personal

The British Royal Family

[00:02:57] So **keep your eyes peeled**⁷, keep a lookout, for an invite for the first one of those later on this month.

[00:03:06] Okay then let's talk about The Royal Family.

[00:03:10] The focus of today's episode is going to be on the current Royal family, the current queen and her **extended**⁸ family.

[00:03:21] But to do this it is of course useful to have a bit of background and to understand a bit about the history of the British monarchy, the kings and queens that had ruled Great Britain, or at least parts of what we now call Great Britain over the years.

[00:03:42] There have been kings and queens in Britain for over a thousand years now.

[00:03:48] While some people claim that the **monarchy** only really started with the arrival of William the Conqueror in 1066 there were some kings and queens before then, even as early as the ninth century.

[00:04:06] And although you might have thought that Britain had never got rid of its **monarchy**, that we were so passionate about our kings and queens that we had never thought of revolution and chopping off their heads, that isn't quite right.

⁷ to watch carefully for someone or something

⁸ long or longer than usual

The British Royal Family

[00:04:23] In fact, England did get rid of its **monarchy** even before our friends across **the Channel**⁹, the French, even before they did.

[00:04:34] There was a brief period called the Commonwealth of England, which started after King Charles the First was **executed**¹⁰ in 1649, but it only lasted 11 years when the monarchy was restored.

[00:04:52] So the brief **flirtation**¹¹ with **republicanism**¹² only lasted 11 years and England and then Great Britain has had a king or queen ever since.

[00:05:08] And today's **monarch**¹³ is, as you will know, Queen Elizabeth.

[00:05:14] She has been queen since 1952, 58 years ago, making her one of the longest serving **monarchs** in British history.

[00:05:24] She only needs to keep going for another five years, and she will beat Queen Victoria who **reigned**¹⁴ for a massive 65 years.

⁹ the area of sea that separates England from France

¹⁰ to kill someone as a legal punishment

¹¹ a situation in which someone behaves as if sexually attracted to another person, without being seriously interested

¹² belief in or support for government by elected representatives of the people, rather than government by a king or queen

¹³ a king or queen

¹⁴ to be the king or queen of a country

The British Royal Family

[00:05:36] But something you might not know is that Queen Elizabeth was never meant to be queen.

[00:05:43] She was never directly **in line to the throne**¹⁵.

[00:05:48] Her uncle Edward the Eighth, her father's oldest brother, he was **destined**¹⁶ to be King, but after he couldn't marry the woman he wanted to marry, he **abdicated**¹⁷, he gave away the throne and it passed to his younger brother George the Sixth, Queen Elizabeth's father.

[00:06:11] And when he died, the throne went to Elizabeth.

[00:06:17] So this queen was never meant to be queen, but she has done the job for 58 years, much longer than most people do any normal job.

[00:06:30] And I do use the term 'job' here because even though some people might think that being queen just means sitting around all day drinking tea and not doing very much at all, the queen does actually have quite lot to do, as do the members of her family, The Royal Family.

[00:06:54] The Royal Family have between them about 2000 engagements that they carry out every year.

¹⁵ to be the person who will become king or queen after the present ruler

¹⁶ intended (for a particular purpose)

¹⁷ If a king or queen abdicates, he or she makes a formal statement that he or she no longer wants to be king or queen

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[00:07:04] These engagements might be opening hospitals, schools, sporting events, meeting world leaders, charity work, of course, typically ceremonial things, but they do do a large amount of it.

[00:07:23] The queen who recently celebrated her 94th birthday had 292 engagements in 2019 - that's almost six a week.

[00:07:36] That's a lot of meeting and greeting, a lot of **small talk**¹⁸ and shaking hands and certainly a lot of work for someone who, if they were doing a normal job, would probably have retired 30 years ago.

[00:07:53] And she isn't even the hardest working Royal in terms of **duties**¹⁹.

[00:07:58] Her son, Prince Charles, did 550 official engagements in 2019 and her daughter, Anne, did just under 500.

[00:08:12] And they also are, as we say, **no spring chicken**²⁰, they aren't that young themselves.

[00:08:19] Charles is 71 and Anne is 69.

¹⁸ conversation about things that are not important, often between people who do not know each other well

¹⁹ things that you have to do because it is part of your job, or that you feel is the right thing to do

²⁰ to be no longer young

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[00:08:24] So The Royal Family actually does quite a lot, a lot more than most people think that they do.

[00:08:34] And in terms of popular opinion of The Royal Family, of what people think of them, overall the British public approves of the **monarchy**.

[00:08:45] And the older you are, the more likely you are to approve of the **monarchy**.

[00:08:51] From a survey in 2018, 57% of people in the 18 to 24 age group said that they approved of the **monarchy**, but 77% of those in the 55 plus age group approved.

[00:09:11] And while, even in the age group with the lowest approval rating, the 18 to 24 age group, only 25% of them said that they disapproved, the rest said that they didn't feel strongly either way.

[00:09:27] So only a small percentage of the UK population actually disapproves of the **monarchy**.

[00:09:35] And it's worth spending a bit of time talking about why this actually is, why it might be lower than some people in more republican countries might think it would be.

[00:09:48] Firstly, the current Royal family knows that it has a certain role to play in public life, a certain place in British society.

The British Royal Family

[00:10:01] And that is to be **rolled out**²¹, to be brought out for **ceremonial**²² occasions and to provide a sense of **collective**²³ spirit for the people, to provide a sense of nationalistic **unity**²⁴, and to provide a sense of **continuity**²⁵ and united history of the country.

[00:10:24] But in almost every other respect, to be completely **neutral**²⁶, to not express an opinion on anything.

[00:10:33] The queen, despite being technically the head of state and having the power to **appoint**²⁷ and **dismiss**²⁸ a prime minister, she never expresses any public opinion about anything really, political or otherwise.

²¹ (informal) put out on display

²² related to, used in, or involving a ceremony (= a fixed set of formal acts performed on important social or religious occasions)

²³ of or shared by every member of a group of people

²⁴ the state of being joined together or in agreement

²⁵ the fact of something continuing for a long period of time without being changed or stopped

²⁶ not saying or doing anything that would encourage or help any of the groups involved in an argument or war

²⁷ to choose someone officially for a job or responsibility

²⁸ get rid of, dispose of

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[00:10:50] Indeed, after the Brexit vote in 2016, there was a lot of **speculation**²⁹ that she actually disagreed with the way that the vote had gone because of some of the clothes that she wore.

[00:11:07] She never said anything, but she once wore a blue hat with yellow stars that did look quite a lot like the flag of the European Union.

[00:11:19] And it was thought that she was wearing this as a mini protest against the Brexit vote.

[00:11:27] And then when the queen met Donald and Melania Trump in 2018 she wore a **brooch**³⁰, a piece of jewelry, given to her by Michelle Obama, which was interpreted by the British press as being the Queen's secret way of saying that she didn't approve of Donald Trump.

[00:11:53] But this is all **suspicion**³¹, the British public really doesn't know very much about the real queen, about what she actually thinks about anything.

[00:12:06] And this is on one level, a pretty strange situation.

²⁹ the activity of guessing possible answers to a question without having enough information to be certain

³⁰ a small piece of jewellery with a pin at the back that is fastened to a woman's clothes

³¹ a belief or idea that something may be TRUE

The British Royal Family

[00:12:12] There is this lady who has been **in the public eye**³² since she was born and has been queen for almost 60 years.

[00:12:22] She is one of the most recognisable **brands**³³ in the world and has one of the most recognisable faces in the world.

[00:12:30] Of course her face is on every British banknote and every coin.

[00:12:36] I'm sure now that if you've closed your eyes and pictured the queen, you would have a pretty good idea of what she looks like.

[00:12:44] Yet she has remained unknowable, silent on almost every issue, and she rarely has any kind of real **dialogue**³⁴ with the public.

[00:12:58] There is something called the Queen's speech, where on Christmas day, just after lunch, the queen will address the people in a televised message, normally just wishing everyone well and talking about some of the main events of the past year, but not really saying very much at all, and certainly not expressing much of an opinion.

[00:13:27] So this is a pretty strange situation, certainly one that friends and family from republican countries, places like France and Italy, something that they really struggle to understand.

³² to be famous and written about in newspapers and magazines and seen on television

³³ a type of product made by a particular company

³⁴ conversation that is written for a book, play, or film

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[00:13:42] For countries that have **got rid of**³⁵ their own **monarchies**, **got rid of** their own kings and queens, it can be quite strange to think that one of the largest countries in Europe and certainly still an important power in global politics, has this royal family that the public overall approves of but doesn't really seem to know anything about.

[00:14:10] And they say, why do you keep them?

[00:14:13] Why aren't people **rising up**³⁶ in the streets saying, get rid of them?

[00:14:18] There is of course, a **proportion**³⁷ of the UK public that does want to **abolish**³⁸ the **monarchy**, to **get rid of** the British Royal family.

[00:14:29] And there are a few reasons why they want to do it, some more **valid**³⁹ than others.

[00:14:37] Let's first take one that is often **quoted**⁴⁰, and that is from a cost point of view.

³⁵ to not now have an unwanted or unpleasant task, object, or person

³⁶ to rebel or cause revolution

³⁷ the number or amount of a group or part of something when compared to the whole

³⁸ to end an activity or custom officially

³⁹ based on truth or reason; able to be accepted

⁴⁰ to repeat the words or ideas that someone else has said or written

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[00:14:45] In a country where there are people who are homeless, where hospitals are overcrowded and schools need investment, why does the British taxpayer **tolerate**⁴¹ spending money on the maintenance of The Royal Family.

[00:15:04] It is a sensible question, but even from a cost point of view, the cost of the **monarchy** is still slightly debated.

[00:15:16] A recent study by The Daily Telegraph, which I should point out, is very much a pro-**monarchy** newspaper, suggested that The Royal Family costs each adult in Britain only 62p per year, so under a dollar per year.

[00:15:36] But republicans **dispute**⁴² this figure saying that when you factor in, when you consider, things like security, it's about three or four times more.

[00:15:49] Still not a huge amount of money, **in the grand scheme of things**⁴³.

[00:15:55] However, the cost isn't really the main issue.

[00:16:00] It is the idea that having a monarchy is **contradictory**⁴⁴ to what a modern state should stand for.

⁴¹ to accept behaviour and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them

⁴² to disagree with something that someone says

⁴³ considering everything

⁴⁴ If two or more facts, pieces of advice, etc. are contradictory, they are very different from each other

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[00:16:09] By default, a **monarchic**⁴⁵ system isn't fair.

[00:16:12] Not everyone can be king or queen.

[00:16:15] You have to be born in a particular family at a particular time, and only then you might just become the next King or queen.

[00:16:26] So it's not based on **merit**.

[00:16:28] The oldest child of the last **monarch** becomes the next **monarch**, whether that person is a potential Nobel prize winner or well, not.

[00:16:39] They become king or queen and **so be it**⁴⁶.

[00:16:43] So there are, of course, some quite persuasive arguments for republicanism in the UK, but it is still an idea that is supported by a relatively small **proportion** of the population.

[00:17:01] But for how long republicanism will remain a minority view is uncertain.

[00:17:09] The Queen is almost a hundred years old now, and she can't rule forever.

[00:17:15] When she dies the next in line to the throne is Charles, and he is not nearly as popular as his mother, nor as his son, Prince William.

⁴⁵ relating to or suitable for a king or queen, or relating to a monarchy

⁴⁶ used to say that it is necessary to accept the situation as it exists

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[00:17:28] And while Prince William is relatively popular now, as he is viewed as quite normal, at least by the standards of The Royal Family, if he has to wait to be king for as long as his father, well, he'll be waiting for quite some time.

[00:17:46] And tastes and fashions change, just because he might be popular now that is certainly no guarantee that he will still be popular if he becomes king in 30 years' time.

[00:18:01] What The Royal Family are very good at though, or at least they are now good at, is changing and knowing when they need to change.

[00:18:13] This particular Royal family, The Windsors, has had to be good at adapting, at changing.

[00:18:21] Starting from 1917 when they had to change the name of the Royal house from the German Saxe-Coburg and Gotha to the British sounding Windsor, they have realised that they will only survive if they have the support of the British public, that the **goodwill**⁴⁷ of the public is the most important thing.

[00:18:47] And as soon as they lose this, the **monarchy** will be gone forever.

[00:18:54] So it is understandably a concern for the British Royal family and that they are doing everything they can to remain viewed positively.

⁴⁷ friendly and helpful feelings

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[00:19:05] But interestingly enough, the main strategy for remaining popular is basically by being completely **bland**⁴⁸, by not really **putting a foot out of line**⁴⁹ or showing any kind of personality.

[00:19:22] The strategy for remaining popular is by being present, by continuing the same traditions of things like opening buildings, charity work, that Christmas day speech and other ceremonial things.

[00:19:39] The role that The Royal Family plays is, on one level, just to exist, to be constantly there and to provide a sense of stability for the country.

[00:19:55] The queen, of course, has a pretty impressive **track record**⁵⁰ at doing this.

[00:20:01] She has had 14 British prime ministers and has met 12 US presidents.

[00:20:09] And of course the country has changed hugely during her time on the throne while she as an individual, hasn't really changed very much at all, or at least it's hard to know because the British public doesn't know the real queen.

[00:20:29] She and her family exist in the background performing this strange **ceremonial** role.

[00:20:39] Always there, but quite unknowable.

⁴⁸ not having a strong taste or character or not showing any interest or energy

⁴⁹ doing something that you should not do or to behave in an unacceptable way

⁵⁰ all the achievements or failures that someone or something has had in the past

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[00:20:44] British history, and also the history of other European **monarchies** has taught this royal family that the further it goes from this position, the further it **sticks its neck out**⁵¹ and shows any sort of real character or individuality, the more dangerous things become for it.

[00:21:07] They only need to look at Marie Antoinette or the Russian **tsars**⁵² to see what happens when a Royal family is too out of touch with the people and expresses too much of a personality.

[00:21:22] That's one of the theories about why The Royal Family has been particularly difficult with any new members that have brought any kind of personality, different views, or come from different backgrounds.

[00:21:38] Whether that's Princess Diana or Meghan Markle, any new views or differences, anything that draws too much attention is not seen as a good thing.

[00:21:52] The survival **tactic**⁵³ seems to be to **blend into the background**⁵⁴, to do the official **duties**, to open schools, be **patrons**⁵⁵ of charities, give Christmas messages, and just generally be there, exist while not doing anything that might offend anyone at all.

⁵¹ To personally assume or expose oneself to some risk, danger, or responsibility; to imperil oneself or put oneself in harm's way

⁵² (until 1917) the male Russian rulers

⁵³ a planned way of doing something

⁵⁴ to be invisible against one's surroundings

⁵⁵ a person or group that supports an activity or organisation, especially by giving money

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[00:22:14] So what this means is that, while everyone in Britain knows of The Royal Family, no one in Britain really knows The Royal Family.

[00:22:27] Okay, that is it for this little look at the British Royal family.

[00:22:33] As a Brit myself, it is on one level completely mad that we have a head of state who is an **unelected**⁵⁶ woman in her nineties.

[00:22:44] But on another level it makes complete sense and it would be unthinkable to imagine Britain any other way.

[00:22:52] It certainly seems that The Royal Family isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

[00:23:00] They are quite adaptable, understand what is required of them, and it would take a big **scandal**⁵⁷ and a big change in public opinion for any major disruption to happen here.

[00:23:13] So if you are waiting for the day that you turn on the news in the morning to find that Brits have risen up and are marching on Buckingham Palace to **turf out**⁵⁸ The Royal Family, I think you will have to wait quite some time for that.

⁵⁶ not having been voted into a particular important job or position

⁵⁷ (an action or event that causes) a public feeling of shock and strong moral disapproval

⁵⁸ to force someone to leave a place or an organisation

[00:23:30] As always, I hope that you have enjoyed the show. If you have any questions, thoughts, feedback, or more than I would love to know, you can email hi@leonardoenglish.com.

[00:23:41] And as I said, I now want you, the members of Leonardo English to have a direct input into what we do next.

[00:23:49] So head to Leonardoenglish.com, login and hit request an episode.

[00:23:56] I can't wait to see what you have to say.

[00:23:59] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:24:04] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Monarchy	a country that has a king or queen
Spectacular	very exciting to look at
Fashion	a way of doing things
Split	to (cause to) divide into two or more parts, especially along a particular line
Assuming	to accept something to be TRUE without question or proof
Intimate	private and personal
Keep your eyes peeled	to watch carefully for someone or something
Extended	long or longer than usual
The Channel	the area of sea that separates England from France
Executed	to kill someone as a legal punishment
Flirtation	a situation in which someone behaves as if sexually attracted to another person, without being seriously interested
Republicanism	belief in or support for government by elected representatives of the

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people, rather than government by a king or queen

Monarch

a king or queen

Reigned

to be the king or queen of a country

In line to the throne

to be the person who will become king or queen after the present ruler

Destined

intended (for a particular purpose)

Abdicated

If a king or queen abdicates, he or she makes a formal statement that he or she no longer wants to be king or queen

Small talk

conversation about things that are not important, often between people who do not know each other well

Duties

things that you have to do because it is part of your job, or that you feel is the right thing to do

No spring chicken

to be no longer young

Rolled out

(informal) put out on display

Ceremonial

related to, used in, or involving a ceremony (= a fixed set of formal acts performed on important social or religious occasions)

Collective

of or shared by every member of a group of people

Unity

the state of being joined together or in agreement

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Continuity	the fact of something continuing for a long period of time without being changed or stopped
Neutral	not saying or doing anything that would encourage or help any of the groups involved in an argument or war
Appoint	to choose someone officially for a job or responsibility
Dismiss	get rid of, dispose of
Speculation	the activity of guessing possible answers to a question without having enough information to be certain
Brooch	a small piece of jewellery with a pin at the back that is fastened to a woman's clothes
Suspicion	a belief or idea that something may be TRUE
In the public eye	to be famous and written about in newspapers and magazines and seen on television
Brands	a type of product made by a particular company
Dialogue	conversation that is written for a book, play, or film
Got rid of	to not now have an unwanted or unpleasant task, object, or person
Rising up	to rebel or cause revolution

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Proportion	the number or amount of a group or part of something when compared to the whole
Abolish	to end an activity or custom officially
Valid	based on truth or reason; able to be accepted
Quoted	to repeat the words or ideas that someone else has said or written
Tolerate	to accept behaviour and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them
Dispute	to disagree with something that someone says
In the grand scheme of things	considering everything
Contradictory	If two or more facts, pieces of advice, etc. are contradictory, they are very different from each other
Monarchic	relating to or suitable for a king or queen, or relating to a monarchy
Merit	the quality of being good and deserving praise
So be it	used to say that it is necessary to accept the situation as it exists
Goodwill	friendly and helpful feelings

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Bland	not having a strong taste or character or not showing any interest or energy
Putting a foot out of line	doing something that you should not do or to behave in an unacceptable way
Track record	all the achievements or failures that someone or something has had in the past
Sticks its neck out	To personally assume or expose oneself to some risk, danger, or responsibility; to imperil oneself or put oneself in harm's way
Tsars	(until 1917) the male Russian rulers
Tactic	a planned way of doing something
Blend into the background	to be invisible against one's surroundings
Patrons	a person or group that supports an activity or organisation, especially by giving money
Unelected	not having been voted into a particular important job or position
Scandal	(an action or event that causes) a public feeling of shock and strong moral disapproval
Turf out	to force someone to leave a place or an organisation

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

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What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

You can email us at hi@leonardoenglish.com.