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Princess Resilient

CATHERINE 'Taking Each Day As It Comes'

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JOHN WALTON/ALAMY

OPPOSITE: The Duke of Gloucester at Ascot racecourse on the second day of the 2024 royal meeting

Richard Gloucester

While King Charles III's cancer treatment limited his public appearances, other royals increased their official duties to support him. Among them was the Duke of Gloucester, who will be 80 this month. By CORYNE HALL

PRINCE RICHARD Alexander Walter George, the younger son of Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester (third son of King George V) and the former Lady Alice Montagu Douglas Scott, daughter of the 7th Duke of Buccleuch, was born on 26 August 1944. His brother Prince William was almost three years his senior. When Richard was four months old his father was appointed Governor-General of Australia and it was there that the family spent the next two years, returning to England in 1947.

At Barnwell Manor, their 2,500-acre Northamptonshire estate, the duke and duchess raised their sons with as little formality as possible. With their father the boys played croquet and cricket, enjoyed bonfires and picnics and learnt to shoot.

A summer highlight was a week at Balmoral Castle, where they played with Prince Charles and Princess Anne. Once Anne, aged about five, burst into Richard's bedroom as he was preparing to leave, seized the dirk from his stocking (he was wearing the kilt) and plunged it into the mattress. 'I've always wanted to do this!' she cried. Richard took the blame, explaining later, 'I couldn't tell on her.'

He was educated at home before attending Wellesley House preparatory school in Broadstairs and then going on to Eton. While reading architecture at Cambridge he met his future wife.

Birgitte van Deurs was born in Odense, Denmark in 1946, the daughter of Asger Preben Wissing Henriksen and Vivian van Deurs. When her parents separated, Birgitte took her mother's maiden name. Richard was attracted to this shy young woman and romance blossomed.

The prince graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1966 and did a year of practical work at the Ministry of Public Building and Works. After returning to Cambridge to complete his degree, he became a practising partner in a London architectural firm. Meanwhile, Birgitte, who was fluent in five languages, began work at the Royal Danish Embassy in London. ➤

The couple announced their engagement on 15 February 1972, with the wedding arranged for 8 July at the parish church of St Andrew's, Barnwell. This enabled Prince Henry, who had already suffered several strokes, to attend the reception, though not the church service. It was a modest affair by royal standards. The press was excluded from the church and there were no bridal attendants.

The 50 guests included Prince Richard's godmothers – Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone – as well as the Prince of Wales and Princess Margaret. Richard's godfather George, the Marquess of Cambridge, and his wife Dorothy were also present. On her marriage Birgitte became a member of the Church of England and a British citizen, taking the style and title HRH Princess Richard of Gloucester.

Richard and Birgitte planned to move into a converted warehouse in Rotherhithe, southeast London. The prince set up his own architectural business and his wife eased herself into royal life. Then, just six weeks after their wedding, the bachelor Prince William of Gloucester was killed in a flying accident. Richard became heir to his father's dukedom and any hope of a quiet life evaporated overnight.

With the death of his father on 10 June 1974 Richard and Birgitte became Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. They moved to a large apartment in Kensington Palace, using Barnwell Manor – the home of Richard's widowed mother (now granted the title Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester by the Queen) – as a weekend retreat. While bringing up their three children Alexander, Earl of Ulster (1974), Lady Davina Windsor (1977) and Lady Rose Windsor (1980) they became full-time working royals.



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RIGHT: The Duchess of Gloucester with five-month-old Richard at Admiralty House in Sydney, Australia, 30 January 1945

BELOW: Prince Richard, by now a year old, with his father, the Duke of Gloucester

BELOW RIGHT: Richard on his way to school – Wellesley House in Broadstairs, Kent – by train for the autumn 1954 term



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As a first cousin of Queen Elizabeth II, the duke was often called upon to represent the monarch at home and abroad. The couple's travels – jointly or separately – covered far-off countries such as China, Nepal, New Zealand and the Philippines. In August 2008 they visited the Solomon Islands to mark the 30th anniversary of independence. In 2013 they represented Elizabeth II at the inauguration of Pope Francis. They have undertaken tours of the United States and represented Her late Majesty at the coronation of King Tupou of Tonga in 2008.

As well as attending many state and ceremonial occasions Richard Gloucester is associated with more than 150 charities and organisations and, since records were first compiled in 1979, he has undertaken in excess of 8,600 royal engagements.

Unsurprisingly many of his patronages relate to architecture and conservation. He is patron of the Society of Antiquaries of London, the World Monuments Fund Britain, joint patron of the Thames Landscape Strategy and royal vice patron of the Almshouse Association. As patron of the Richard III Society, he attended the reburial and commemorations of Richard III (Duke of Gloucester before his accession to the throne) at Leicester Cathedral in 2015. ➤

ABOVE LEFT: Princes Richard and William depart from Buckingham Palace for cousin Lilibet's coronation, 2 June 1953

ABOVE: The Gloucesters at their London home, York House, St James's Palace, 1949

LEFT: Prince and Princess Richard after

Richard is Royal Colonel of 6th Battalion, The Rifles, patron of the Worshipful Company of Patternmakers (a City of London livery company that supports the footwear industry), and of the Pestalozzi International Foundation, which offers educational opportunities to underprivileged children from around the world. From 1971 to 2005, the duke was president of the Institute of Advanced Motorists, joking that when he took up the appointment he was 'currently driving an Austin 1300', a modest motor car.

He published three books of photographs: *On Public View* (1970) focusing on London's statues, *The Face of London* (1973) and *Oxford and Cambridge* (1980).

The duke is also Chancellor of the University of Worcester and Grand Prior of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem. He was appointed a Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter in 1997, a Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order in 1974 and has received honours from the monarchs of Norway and Sweden.

In 1995 mounting costs forced the duke to lease Barnwell Manor and move Princess Alice into Kensington Palace. She died there aged 102 in 2004.

Outside of work the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester enjoy attending the opera at Glyndebourne. On evenings when there are no engagements they, like other members of the royal family, often eat dinner in front of the television.

Their children's marriages have given the couple six grandchildren. Alexander, Earl of Ulster saw active service with the Royal Hussars and in 2002 married Dr Claire Booth. They have children Xan, Lord Culloden (2007) and Lady Cosima (2010). Lady Davina married Gary Lewis, a New Zealander of Māori descent, in 2004 and they had daughter Senna and son Tane before divorcing in 2018. Lady Rose and her husband George Gilman, who married in 2008, have children Lyla (2010) and Rufus (2012).

In March 2022 the Duke of Gloucester tested positive for Covid, forcing him to miss the annual Commonwealth Day service. He recovered in time to attend the thanksgiving service for the life of the Duke of Edinburgh later that month.

Having downsized to the Old Stables in the grounds of Kensington Palace in 2019, the Gloucesters put eight-bedroom Barnwell Manor on the market for £4.75 million in 2022. It was reported recently that the property had been sold, allegedly at a reduced price.

Although some engagements had to be postponed to avoid clashing with the election campaign, as the Duke of Gloucester reaches his milestone birthday he continues to support the monarchy as a full-time working royal.



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ABOVE RIGHT: The Duke of Gloucester commemorates Anzac Day 2022 at the Dawn Service at London's Hyde Park Corner

RIGHT: The duke meets guests at a rainy Buckingham Palace garden party on 21 May

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: Princess Alice with her son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren Davina, Alexander and Rose in her Kensington Palace garden in July 2001

The duke and duchess attend a Big Help Out



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