

ROYAL VISIT



Queen Elizabeth II arrives in Halifax at the start of a nine-day visit to Canada. CHRIS JACKSON/GETTY IMAGES

# Home, for the 22nd time

The Queen reveals her feelings for Canada – even as Canadians debate the role of the monarchy

BY OLIVER MOORE HALIFAX

She may be 84 years old and just two years away from celebrating 60 years on the throne, but her arrival in Halifax showed the kind of sturdy stock Queen Elizabeth II is made of.

In the pouring rain, the Queen walked steadily and deliberately down the stairs of the Canadian Forces plane that brought her and Prince Philip from London. There was no sign of frailty as she held her own umbrella. Later, she showed not a hint of discomfort as the cold wind whipped during the official welcome ceremony at the edge of Citadel Hill.

It was the first time in 16 years the Queen has been in the province, and hundreds of Nova Scotians lined up for hours to get a look.

The Queen returned the crowd's affection by hinting at the depth of her attachment to this country.

"My mother once said that this country felt like a home away from home for the Queen of Canada," she said in brief remarks to the drenched onlookers, sprinkling her English with excellent French.

"As Queen of Canada for nearly six decades my pride in

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David O'Shea, 15

this country remains undimmed," she added. "It's very good to be home."

Preparations are already under way for the Queen's diamond jubilee in 2012. But every visit – this is her 22nd to Canada – raises the delicate question of whether it could be her last.

"How often do you see a Queen?" asked 15-year-old David O'Shea, clutching a handful of pink peonies sodden after a three-hour wait.

The Dutch Settlement teenager never had a chance to give the monarch those flowers. He admitted second-guessing his decision to come as the rain pelted down, but said in the end he was glad, worried this might be his last chance to see her.

"I like the symbolism [of the monarchy] and what it represents."

The weather was not expected to be much better Tuesday when the schedule takes on a heavily nautical flavour. The

Queen, who served in the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service during the Second World War, will oversee an international fleet review. She will disembark on the Halifax waterfront near HMCS Sackville, the last remaining corvette to have seen convoy duty during the war.

The nine-day visit will take the couple also to Manitoba and Ontario, where they will celebrate Canada Day on Parliament Hill Thursday.

"We could imagine no better gift on our national birthday than to share it with our Queen," Prime Minister Stephen Harper said as he welcomed the royal couple to Halifax.

The visit also allows some pleasure to be mixed in with the duty. The Queen, who is a noted connoisseur of horses, will attend the 151st running of the Queen's Plate in Toronto on Saturday.

Tour organizers are predicting a huge crowd on Parliament Hill. But a new poll suggests that the feeling for the monarchy does not run deep.

The Canadian Press Harris-Decima survey found that 45 per cent of respondents weren't aware of the royal tour. Forty-four per cent would

support a referendum on the future of the monarchy and almost half – 48 per cent – agreed that the monarchy is "a relic of our colonial past that has no place in Canada today."

"It's something that isn't relevant to them any more," said Tom Freda, director of Citizens for a Canadian Republic. "The British empire hasn't been a significant part of the world in decades and still we maintain this colonial link."

Mr. Freda said Canadians should start preparing for the passing of the Crown from Queen Elizabeth to her son Charles, which he believes is a logical moment to reconsider the need for what his group calls a "non-resident monarch."

But Matt Bondy, a spokesman for the Monarchist League of Canada, argued that the Crown has been "Canadianized" over the decades and should not be seen as foreign. "The Crown is a Canadian institution," he said.

Public discourse on the monarchy also has been raised by the imminent replacement of Governor-General Michaëlle Jean. The Queen's representative is nearing the end of her term and a successor could be named during the Queen's visit.