[**The royal rub**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1711387/the-royal-rub)

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NO monarch in history could have planned their own funeral in such detail (as Queen Elizabeth II did), and no subjects could have executed it with such dignified finesse. The Incas had their rituals, the Chinese their Ming mounds and terracotta warriors, the ancient Egyptians their pyramids and gilded sarcophagi, but no ruler has been laid to rest so publicly, with so much respect and genuine regard.

From the moment her cortege left Balmoral Castle until her final interment in Windsor 10 days later, there was not a moment when cameras were not trained on her coffin or her grieving family. She had spent her life in the glare of the media’s gaze. That relentless intrusion continued until her coffin sank into the royal vault.

Over the 70 years of her reign, the late queen had perfected the image of monarchy. Most people have forgotten Lord Altrincham’s trenchant criticism of her high-pitched voice as a “pain in the neck”. She corrected that with elocution lessons. Some criticised her dowdy clothes. She then adopted brightly coloured outfits with matching flowered hats which ensured that she stood out in a crowd. She humoured the media because she knew without it she would have been like Queen Victoria, a distant myth.

In public, she always said the right thing and never put a foot wrong. She kept her personal opinions to herself or relegated them to the privacy of her daily diary.

She stood absolutely impassive and expressionless.

To have witnessed her in the performance of her public duties (as I was privileged to do) was to see a consummate actress, memorising her part from the briefing book that scripted her daily movements. That book specified who she would meet, when, where and why. Every half-hour was accounted for in advance, and once approved by her was followed meticulously.

Queen Elizabeth II came twice to Pakistan with her less discreet but equally conscientious husband Prince Philip. In 1961, her host was the president general, Ayub Khan, who, before 1947, had served in her father’s British Indian Army. Fifty-four years old, he treated his younger royal guest with an almost avuncular gallantry.

In 1997, president Farooq A. Leghari — almost 15 years the queen’s junior — hosted her in Islamabad. His unstoppable loquaciousness delayed her flight to Karachi, disrupting an already compressed programme there. After spending half a day at Karachi, the royal party came to Lahore. That evening’s programme had already been etched: a drive by car to the Lahore Fort, dinner in the Diwan-i-Khas, a display of fireworks and then a return drive to Governor House.

Nawaz Sharif, then prime minister, decided to play host in his home city. Because president Farooq Leghari had driven with the queen in the state landau to Parliament House, Nawaz Sharif wanted to repeat the ritual at Lahore. He had the carriage and horses brought by overnight train from Rawalpindi to Lahore. Hurriedly, at almost the last moment, the palace staff was informed that the queen would now be expected to drive to the Fort where she would disembark at the Picture Wall gate. From there, she and Nawaz Sharif would ride in the horse-drawn carriage up the steep road leading to the Diwan-i-Aam. Suggestions that the road may prove slippery for the horses or that as there would be no one in the cavernous unlit brick canyon to see the queen were brushed aside by the Prime Minister’s Office.

The procession was duly formed and proceeded fortunately without mishap up the steep incline. At the Diwan-i-Aam, the party disembarked and then walked towards the Diwan-i-Khas.

Again the prime minister had his own ideas. He wanted the 200 or so VIP dinner guests to welcome the royal guests at the Diwan-i-Aam, and then walk behind them into the dining area in the Diwan-i-Khas. I anticipated the result. The queen would enter an empty quadrangle. Sure enough, she and the PM came and walked past the only two people there — my wife and myself.

“Please clap,” the prime minister whispered to us in Urdu.

When the main party had taken their places in the dramatic proscenium setting of the marble pavilion built by the Mughals, the national anthems of both countries were played. I watched the queen’s reaction. She stood absolutely impassive and expressionless, but I did notice that for some time she rubbed her thumb against her forefinger.

When the anthems had been played, dinner was served. The high table had waiters; the rest of the guests scrambled for a wedding-style buffet.

All too familiar with our social discourtesies, I had held on to two chairs for the queen’s ladies in waiting. Once they had settled, I asked one of them: ‘When Her Majesty is angry, does she by any chance rub her thumb against her forefinger?’

“How did you know?”

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