

A ROYAL CELEBRATION

FABULOUS AT 50 SOPHIE OF WESSEX

THE QUEEN'S DAUGHTER-IN-LAW HAS NEVER LOOKED HAPPIER OR MORE BEAUTIFUL



'She's one of the most hard-working members of the Royal Family'
- CAROLYN HARRIS

'Our wedding day was great fun and over too quickly'
- PRINCE EDWARD



Buckingham Palace celebrated the milestone 50th birthday of one its most beloved members, Sophie, the Countess of Wessex, with the release of a stunning new portrait. Wearing a crisp white shirt, her blond hair trimmed in a stylish long bob and her skin glowing, Sophie looks as beautiful as she did at her 1999 wedding, when the former Sophie Rhys-Jones married the Queen's youngest son, Prince Edward.

In the years since, Sophie has evolved from girl-next-door into dedicated, respected royal. Take her Jan. 20 birthday celebrations, for example. Sophie wouldn't dream of asking for the day off. Rather, she took part in back-to-back royal engagements in London before reportedly celebrating quietly at home with Edward and their children, Lady Louise, 11, and seven-year-old Viscount Severn.

"She's one of the most hard-working members of the Royal Family," royal historian Carolyn Harris tells *Hello!* "She undertakes numerous engagements, including the kinds that don't often make headlines."

FROM BRENCHLEY TO BUCKINGHAM

Like her sister-in-law the Duchess of Cambridge, Sophie, from Brenchley, Kent, was born a commoner. She trained as a secretary and later entered the field of public relations, opening her own firm, RJH Public Relations. Along the way, she met her prince at a charity tennis tournament in 1993.

They dated for more than five years before marrying, with some attributing their long courtship to Edward's determination to avoid the fate of his three siblings, who have all gone through divorces.

The couple – the bride in an ivory silk gown by Samantha Shaw and the groom in a morning suit – married on June 19, 1999, at St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle in front of 560 guests. Edward has called the day one of the best in his life. It was "great fun and over far too quickly."

In Sophie, the Queen gained a devoted daughter-in-law and, eventually, a close friend. The two share a passion for riding and history

Sophie was a publicist when she first met Prince Edward at a charity tennis match. Today (left, in a portrait by Richard Young to mark her 50th birthday) she is a respected member of the Royal Family. She learned her work ethic from the Queen. 'It doesn't matter how tired you are – carry on,' Sophie has said.

FROM RIGHT: MARK CUTHBERT/GETTY IMAGES; JOHN STILLWELL/GETTY IMAGES; TIM GRAHAM/GETTY IMAGES; MARK CUTHBERT/JULIAN PARKER/GETTY IMAGES; JOHN STILLWELL/GETTY IMAGES



and are said to lose track of time when they visit the royal archives at Windsor Castle. "Sophie first of all respects her as the Queen, then as a mother-in-law, but she also understands that she is a human being and treats her that way," says the Queen's cousin Elizabeth Anson.

In the Queen, Sophie has found a mentor. "She does things in such a measured way, and I hope I've learned to try not to bounce into the room," the countess said recently.

The Queen has also taught her the importance of duty, a lesson Sophie learned early ▶

Some 200 million people tuned in on television to watch Edward marry Sophie at St. George's Chapel in 1999. Bfitting the private pair, their ceremony was relatively low-key for a royal wedding. Above: The couple look just as much in love on her 50th birthday while cutting a birthday cake during a royal engagement at St. Anselm's Church in London.

WEB
WANT TO SEE MORE?
THE EVOLUTION OF
THE COUNTESS OF WESSEX
VISIT HELLOMAGAZINE.CA



The Queen and Sophie both enjoy riding. As grandmother and mother, they also share their devotion to Lady Louise and Viscount Severn (inset, with the Queen in 1998). 'Edward and Sophie are such hands-on parents and totally unstuffy,' says a friend of the Wessexes (below, left, in 2013).



'Sophie's children are her world,' says a family friend

in royal life. For two years after her marriage, she tried to continue her career, but after a journalist recorded a private conversation in 2002, she resigned. Today, she is the patron or president of more than 70 charities and regularly represents the Queen abroad. She will likely take on more duties in coming years, notes Carolyn, especially because Edward is expected to inherit the title of Duke of Edinburgh upon

his father's death.

The Countess is also a deeply committed parent. After recovering from a life-threatening ectopic pregnancy, she went on to have Lady Louise in 2003 and James, Viscount Severn, in 2007. "Sophie's children are her world," says a friend. At 50, perhaps that's the best gift of all. **Q**

REPORT: CARLI WHITWELL

FASHION QUEEN



At 50, Sophie is a perfect 10 when it comes to fashion. Some credit the Duchess of Cambridge's influence for Sophie's recent style statements. The countess favours some of Kate's favourite designers, including Emilia Wickstead, Alexander McQueen and Montreal native Erdem (far right, in 2012). She and Kate also share a fondness for lace (above, right, with a matching Jane Taylor hat), gowns (left) and A-line skirts (above, left). Or perhaps her fashion simply reflects a growing confidence in herself. "Certainly, I just look in the [closet] in the morning and think, 'What do I feel like wearing today?'" Sophie recently said. Either way, she's passing that passion along to her fellow citizens: in 2013 Sophie became the first royal patron of the London College of Fashion.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: UK PRESS/GETTY IMAGES; DUKE OF YORK/CAMERA PRESS; MAX MUMBY/INDIGO/GETTY IMAGES

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: CHRIS JACKSON/GETTY IMAGES; DAVE M. BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES; ANTHONY HARVEY/GETTY IMAGES; ARTHUR EDWARDS/GETTY IMAGES; SAMIR HUSSEIN/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES