

The death of the Queen Mother

Sunday, 16 September 2007

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow) : I speak in this debate to represent the people of the east end who, as the whole country knows, held the Queen Mother in great affection. I shall speak not about what the Queen Mother inherited or passed on, but what the Queen Mother merited. She merited respect, and nowhere is that respect greater than in my constituency—land of the pearly kings and queens who were inspired by the sparkling monarch who picked her way through the rubble.

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As I drove to Parliament this morning, I passed the plaque at the bottom of my road that reads:

"here fell the first flying bomb on London."

Sixty thousand British civilians died during the war, 30,000 of them in east London. Indeed, the first early-day motion I ever tabled was on a memorial for civilians who died during that war. Earlier, the Prime Minister quoted the Queen Mother saying of the east end carnage:

"the destruction is so awful, and the people so wonderful, they deserve a better world."

The Queen Mother inspired the east end during the blitz. One eastender recalls that

"There was still an air raid on when she walked through the rubble. I always thought the world of her. She doesn't sit back pompous-like. I remember her putting her arm around people covered in blood and grime, and consoling them. I feel she knows what our lives were like."

As my neighbour Mary Isaacs said:

"She came down Bow road slowly, and oh what a lovely smile."

As another cockney woman put it:

"Ain't she lovely! Oh ain't she just bloody lovely!"

The century the Queen Mother spanned has closed. She was the last Empress. Although the world in which she was born and in which she moved has vanished, the characteristics with which she is associated endure, and we in the east end give thanks for them.