

TRIBUTE TO THE QUEEN AT 60

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in turn, had to consult the prime minister.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill was at first pleased with the romance. But the queen's private secretary, Sir Alan Lascelles, argued strongly against it.

To Churchill, Lascelles stressed the utter inadvisability of the queen approving her sister's marriage to a divorced man. Churchill finally agreed. The young queen felt forced to accept his verdict and asked her sister to postpone her decision for another year.

Lascelles further suggested that Townsend be sent abroad. The queen refused. She would not deny her sister the romances of her life. Then something happened that changed everything.

It occurred during the coronation. The royal guests were at Westminster Abbey, awaiting their carriages for the ride back to Buckingham Palace. Princess Margaret was exhilarated, bubbling. She saw a stray thread on Peter Townsend's breast pocket and kicked it away in an intimate, possessive gesture. A photographer caught it.

Until then, there had been no mention in the press of any possible romance between them.

A British newspaper reported: "It is quite unthinkable that a royal princess, third in line of succession to the throne, should even contemplate a marriage with a man who has been through the divorce courts."

Lascelles again put on the pressure. The queen now felt she had no choice. Townsend was posted as an air attaché in Brussels. Both he and Margaret agreed that they would not meet for a year.

"I shall curse him to his grave," Margaret later said of Lascelles.

The British public was on Margaret's side. A newspaper poll showed that 67,907 felt the two had a right to wed. 2,235 said no.

The year over, Townsend was now back from Brussels, the two lovers meeting at the homes of mutual friends. Crowds assembled everywhere they went. The world press zoomed in.

The two royal sisters talked together much and often. The queen promised to support Margaret in whatever decision she made.

Elizabeth's dilemma was that the Church of England maintained such a fierce face against divorce that divorced parties had not received royal honors or royal invitations. For a long time, no divorced person was even invited inside the royal enclosure at the Ascot races.

In his discussions with Elizabeth, Townsend was impressed by "the queen's movingly sympathetic acceptance of the disturbing fact of her sister's love for me."

The queen, however, now insisted that they make up their minds, and soon.

Princess Margaret went to see



Queen Elizabeth (right) didn't let Margaret's affair with Townsend come between them.

the archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Churchill, describing the scene, reported that the archbishop had carefully marked reference books to explain religious precedents to Margaret.

"Put your books away," Margaret told him. "I have made up my mind already."

When he heard her decision, the archbishop said: "What a wonderful person the Holy Spirit is."

In her official statement several days later, the princess declared: "I would like it to be known that I have decided not to marry Group Captain Townsend. I have been aware that, subject to renouncing my rights of succession, it might have been possible to contract a civil marriage."

"But mindful of the church's teachings that Christian marriage is indissoluble, and conscious of my duty to the commonwealth, I have resolved to put these considerations before others."

"I have reached this decision entirely alone, and in doing so I have been strengthened by the unfailing support and devotion of Group Captain Townsend."

Privately, she confided to friends: "It was Peter who didn't want to." With the major part of his income going to his ex-wife and to support his sons, he felt he would not be able to provide the proper life for his princess.

After some time had passed, Townsend wrote saying he planned to marry a Belgian woman.

"That evening, I decided to marry Tony," Margaret said.

Tony was photographer Anthony Armstrong-Jones. The irony was that his marriage, too, would end in divorce. □