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QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Over the next six pages, CSW brings together tributes to Queen Elizabeth II from civil servants who worked with her. Here, **Suzannah Brecknell** explores the institutional and personal links between the UK's longest-reigning monarch and the officials who served her many governments

Queen Elizabeth II received a Red Box almost every day for over 70 years, with documents including policy papers, cabinet minutes, Foreign Office telegrams, and a daily summary of events in parliament.

She was known as an assiduous reader of those boxes, with a keen memory for details – so much so that, according to No.10 researcher in residence Michelle Clement, Harold Wilson would “often remark that a prime minister had to do their homework ahead of an audience with the Queen, or she was likely to catch them out”.

Wilson was the fourth of 15 prime ministers who served under Queen Elizabeth II and their lengthy weekly audiences were taken as a sign of mutual respect. His return to office in 1974 followed perhaps the best-known example of the important, but informal, connection between top officials in government and Buckingham Palace.

Wilson's predecessor Edward Heath had called an election at the start of the year, which returned a hung parliament. Heath did not immediately resign, seeking instead to form a government with the support of the Liberal party. When these negotiations failed, Heath stepped down and the Queen invited Wilson to form a government. He did so, and within a few months called another general election in which he

secured a (small) majority that enabled him to continue as prime minister for five years.

As the political discussions took place over a tense weekend in March, cabinet secretary John Hunt and the Queen's private secretary Martin Charteris, supported by the PM's principal private secretary Robert Armstrong, were quietly teasing out the constitutional principles and procedures that should be followed.

Hunt, Charteris and Armstrong formed what is known as the “Golden Triangle” which connects the Queen as head of state to the head of government. On discreet walks through St James's Park, or chatting in their quiet offices, they ensured the monarch would not be put into a tricky constitutional position, whether by seeming to intervene in a political process or by being asked to agree to a new election too quickly.

The memo which Armstrong wrote at this time would later be pored over by his successors Jeremy Heywood and Gus O'Donnell when, alongside Charteris's successor Christopher Geidt, they helped steer the Queen and politicians through another hung parliament in 2010. And after Theresa May's 2017 election returned a minority government, Geidt was once again working with Heywood (by that time the cabinet secretary), moving temporarily into a small room near Heywood's in the Cabinet Office so that he was on hand to



TRIBUTE > HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

offer advice and provide that golden thread connecting the Queen and her government.

While most examples of this connection revolve around keeping the Queen out of politics, the relationship between key officials may also have proved useful at other key moments.

Catherine Haddon, senior fellow at the Institute for Government, points to the days after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales as an “acute political moment for Tony Blair, and a famous case of a politician intervening in the working of the Palace”. While some of the key discussions were direct between Blair and members of the Royal Family, a lot of the handling of the situation



was through officials and advisers from government and the palace working together.

Haddon notes that Liz Truss, prime minister for less than two days before the Queen’s death, will be benefitting from the fact that her cabinet secretary Simon Case worked for the Royal Family as Prince William’s private secretary, and will therefore have good relationships with key individuals in the Family as well as their courtiers.

Yet it would be a mistake to think that Queen Elizabeth’s connection to the civil service was limited to these high-level relationships. “There is a mystique about the Golden Triangle,” says Haddon “which gives an impression of an arm’s-length relationship between the two institutions, but there are many ways in which the civil service is connected to the monarchy, from the mundane to the high constitutional.”

Teams in No.10 and the Cabinet Office, including the Privy Council Office, deal with the palace the most often – and No.10 keeps a close watch on most of these communications to ensure that they are handled appropriately. But there are teams across the civil

service whose work connects with the Royal Family in different ways. The Crown has different connections in the devolved administrations, for example, while FCDO teams will work on Royal Tours and state visits. Then there are the various departmental teams who are responsible for championing and collating nominations for an honour in one of the monarch’s twice-yearly lists.

There are also officials across government whose work may end up in a Royal Red Box. Former senior civil servant and IfG programme director Alex Thomas remembers the “frisson” of knowing that

certain pieces of work may end up on the monarch’s desk, or of recognising that the Queen was somewhere awaiting the arrival of bills that needed Royal assent – as late into the night as needed. Her involvement in government work may be largely formal, but she still plays an active role, he notes. “During a reshuffle, for example, you need to make sure that the palace and the Queen are teed up. You can’t just say ‘Her Majesty has been pleased to approve the following appointments...’ she does actually have to approve them.”

Touchpoints between the civil service



and the monarchy range from this grand work to the more arcane, Thomas recalls. In one role he oversaw the team charged with approving the use of Royal names and symbols. This involved politely declining one company's request to name an oven after Princess Beatrice, and writing to an Italian hotel which had decorated its swimming pool with a mosaic of the crown worn by the Queen at her coronation. The hotel never replied to the letter, though Thomas later learnt the mosaic had been removed.

Clearly the Queen had no personal role in these examples, but there were plenty of

Palace. There are many stories of her charming dignitaries from across the world, sometimes navigating choppy diplomatic waters with skill borne of many years of experience.

While we have recollections and stories from these public events, it is rarer to read about her interactions with civil servants. It seems, from what we do know that she did develop a personal connection with senior officials she saw regularly.

Lord Butler, for example, served as cabi-

net secretary during some of the trickiest years of the Queen's reign in the 1990s. Her regard for him was demonstrated in 2003 when he was made a member of the Order of the Garter, an honour in the monarch's personal gift which usually reflects a particular service to the throne. The Queen was also said to have shown personal and genuine concern for Jeremy Heywood when he became gravely ill in 2018.

In tributes given to CSW, Lord Sedwill describes the "unique blend of wisdom, warmth and wit" apparent at his meetings with her while Lord McDonald describes his admiration for her growing as he met her regularly through his time at the Foreign Office.

In 2010, the Queen visited the Cabinet Office to show her gratitude to civil servants who had supported coalition negotiations while keeping the Crown away from politics. She made similar visits to other departments after key occasions, in part reflecting her belief that her job was to be seen, but also her desire to recognise public service – a desire also shown by the many civil servants who were invited to join the regular garden parties at Buckingham Palace.

In these visits the Queen impressed even the most senior officials. O'Donnell recounts that the permanent secretaries of 2010 – including one Keir Starmer, then head of the Crown Prosecution Service – made a particular effort on the day she attended Wednesday Morning Colleagues. After that meeting she not only agreed to but – as O'Donnell recounts – actually suggested hosting the Civil Service Awards at Buckingham Palace.

There is, Thomas suggests, an "affinity" between the monarch and the civil service.

"There is a sense in which you see yourself as part of the same system that the Queen sat on top of," he says, adding that "without getting too overblown, there's a parallel between the stewardship of the state and the country that the monarchy is charged with and the stewardship of effective government, giving good advice to ministers, keeping the show on the road, that is part of the civil service's job."

As the country marks the death of a sovereign who, through years of visits and Christmas broadcasts, became something of a national grandmother. Civil servants may well be reflecting on her life as a lynchpin of the constitution. She was a working head of state who performed her duties with careful discretion, and dedicated public servant who constantly, quietly, lent her support to civil servants. ■

“There is a sense in which you see yourself as part of the same system that the Queen sits on top of”
Alex Thomas



THE ULTIMATE PUBLIC SERVANT

Former senior officials and others pay tribute to Her Majesty the Queen, reflect on her relationship with the civil service and share their memories of personal encounters with the monarch

The Queen was the ultimate public servant. She got what public service is all about and she therefore had huge respect for public servants, and civil servants in particular.

During the coalition talks I was working closely with Christopher Geidt [then the Queen’s private secretary], and the intention was actually to keep the Queen above it all and to stop her getting dragged into this or that faction. That worked very successfully, and she was very pleased by that. She invited “the Golden Triangle” – namely the cabinet secretary, the Queen’s principal private secretary and the prime minister’s private secretary, who in this case was the late, great Jeremy Heywood – to the palace for a very intimate lunch, in which she displayed her interest in all things civil service-wide. As a result of that, I explained to her about our Wednesday Morning Colleagues meetings [of permanent secretaries] and she said that it sounded really interesting, so I said “Well, come along!” – and she did. I think some of the attendees were quite nervous: I’ve never seen so many haircuts, new suits, dresses. It was the best turned-out set of perm secs I’ve ever had. And they were all there, surprise surprise, including heads of agencies. A full register, and on their best behaviour (see pic below).

Then after that she said: “What else can I do for you?” Well, you will remember that I launched the Civil Service Awards in 2006, which we had done at Lancaster House. I told her we were looking for a new venue. She said: “How about Buckingham Palace?” I asked her if she was kidding, but she assured me she wasn’t, so we did it at Buckingham Palace. She and Prince Philip spent a lot of time at the Awards themselves, speaking to different groups of officials, which was wonderful.

One general point is that I think she did a great service to everybody, particularly to cabinet secretaries, by her weekly audiences with the prime minister. It was a bit of a mutual therapy session. They would go in and talk to each other about anything. And it was one of those meetings where afterwards it was don’t-ask-don’t-tell: I never asked prime ministers what had gone on, and they never told me. But they always seemed to find it very reassuring, and they came back happier. I think they were talking about the wicked problems of the day, but both of them would have their own personal wicked problems. Like during John Major’s time – the whole Diana and Charles issue was really complicated and very hard for the Queen. And later on there were all sorts of other issues that would have come up which prime ministers would have found very hard. So for both of them, they could pour out what they really thought, knowing it wouldn’t go anywhere.

Another story that springs to mind is the time that [US Federal Reserve chairman] Alan Greenspan had been given an honorary knighthood by Gordon Brown. Because of last-minute parliamentary business, Gordon couldn’t go up with Alan to see the Queen at Balmoral, so I went instead. We were going to do a tour of the estate

and then go in for lunch, but because the weather was bad, the plane was delayed. So instead we went straight into this very intimate lunch with the Queen and members of her family, the corgis round our feet. She sat next to Alan Greenspan and asked him something like “how’s the US economy doing?” and Alan being Alan



“When the Queen attended our Wednesday morning perm secs meeting, everyone was on their best behaviour. I’ve never seen so many haircuts and new suits and dresses”
Gus O’Donnell

went into a very detailed description of the state of the US economy – you know, third-quarter GDP changes – and I could see she wasn’t completely... I don’t think she was intimately acquainted with the various indices of growth in the US economy. But she was she was incredibly polite about it all. She was very good in situations like that.

Lord Gus O’Donnell, cabinet secretary, 2005-2011



I suspect I learnt of the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II slightly before many others. Not because I had access to privileged information (those days are long gone), but because I have a teenager and social media was inevitably quicker off the mark than the mainstream channels. I was struck that the younger generation, who knew the Queen only as an elderly great-grandmother, were as stunned and upset by her loss as their elders, for whom she had been a source of loyalty, unity and stability for decades.

Several years ago, the late Queen expressed an interest in visiting and thanking the civil service for our work: *her* civil service, as my distinguished predecessor Robin Butler has reminded us. We hosted her at the Home Office and brought in civil and public servants representing the huge diversity of our activities in a “market stall” format to enable her to see as many different people and functions as the time permitted. As always, she displayed that remarkable quality of making everyone feel not just special but most special; I overheard at least three people claim afterwards that she had spent more time with them than anyone else.

“She had a remarkable ability to make everyone feel special. After an event at the Home Office, I overheard at least three people claim she had spent more time with them than anyone else”

Mark Sedwill

As the visit drew to a close, a colleague’s young daughter, who had the task of presenting a bouquet, froze, mesmerised by the moment. The Queen bent down, smiled that joyful smile, and asked whether the flowers were for her. Tension broken, the presentation went ahead. In delivering a vote of thanks, I referred to values shared across the public service and called for a show of appreciation for the nation’s greatest public servant. The cheers almost took the roof off.

I also had the occasional private audience with the Queen when, as cabinet secretary, I was part of the “Golden Triangle” with the PM’s and her private secretaries, supporting the crucial constitutional relationship between head of state and head of government, and had a glimpse into why all her 15 prime ministers valued so much their weekly audiences.

It is that unique blend of wisdom, warmth and wit – bridging the deep responsibilities of head of state with the personal qualities to connect with the hearts of our youngest citizens – that I shall always remember when I think of her. Thank you, Ma’am for a life of extraordinary service. God bless you. And God save the King.

Lord Mark Sedwill, cabinet secretary, 2018-2020



Our late Queen well understood the constitutional principles which underpin the civil service and knew our history. As head of the service I once attended a dinner at Windsor Castle. At the end of the dinner she took me to the library and showed me handwritten letters which Disraeli had written to Queen Victoria after each cabinet meeting, recounting their discussions in detail. She remarked that prime ministers no longer had the time to write such letters. I agreed and said I wasn’t going to try to make Mr Blair write them to her. She went on to say that cabinet minutes had originally been introduced to keep the monarch in touch with current discussions, in place of the letters previously written by prime ministers. That was why she got copy number 01 each week (this was in the days of paper copies). A small detail, perhaps, but a neat way of reminding me of the constitutional relationships.

It was an honour to be in the service of the Queen. She was a monarch of great wisdom and dignity. She will stand out in the history of our times. We were lucky to have her for so long.

Lord Richard Wilson, cabinet secretary, 1998-2002

Queen Elizabeth was the sovereign during the whole of my professional life in the civil service. I always regarded, and continue to regard, the sovereign as the embodiment of the British state. It is worth recalling that, like the Armed Forces and the other Crown services, the civil service owes its allegiance to the sovereign. We owe our duty to the government of the day because it is the government appointed by the monarch.

I make this brief excursion into our constitution to demonstrate that all of us who are servants of the Crown have a higher duty than simply to our political bosses. Speaking for myself, I found that my duty to Queen Elizabeth was not only demanding but inspiring. Her Majesty’s standard of service throughout her long life, to which so many tributes have been made, was one to which many of us may aspire but can never attain. Moreover, she carried out those duties with a grace, dignity and humanity of which the whole nation can be proud. She caused other nations to envy us.

This is a difficult and challenging time for the new King, as well as a moment of acute personal sadness for him. Nevertheless, he has had a long apprenticeship. He is his own person, as every individual should be, but he has demonstrated over many years his devotion to the welfare and success of this country and its citizens, as well as to the challenges that are being faced by the wider world. His mother has demonstrated the value of our monarchy. I wish our new sovereign well and pledge to him my loyalty and support as he carries forward that heavy responsibility.

Lord Robin Butler, cabinet secretary, 1988-1988
(words excerpted from House of Lords speech)



One of the privileges of ambassadorial life was the relationship we had with the Queen. We were proud to be members of Her Majesty's diplomatic service. The Queen came to Paris when I was ambassador to unveil a statue to Sir Winston Churchill. Nothing could better have symbolised the relationship between Britain and France since the Second World War. The dignity with which the Queen performed her duties was a lesson to us all, British and French.

I hosted a dinner for her in our embassy and, according to custom, proposed a rather pompous toast to the president of the French Republic and to Her Majesty the Queen. "What a nice couple," she replied. It was that mixture of dignity and informality, at times almost irreverence, that was so captivating to millions in Britain and around the world.

I also had the privilege to be at Her Majesty's side when she received new ambassadors. She had been doing this for about 50 years and loved it when things went slightly awry. I remember that a distinguished ambassador arrived by carriage at Buckingham Palace and had forgotten his credentials. An ever-helpful equerry gave him a brown envelope and said, "Present this to Her Majesty and all will be well." The rather nervous ambassador presented it to the Queen, who was pleased to accept the empty brown envelope and said, a dignified twinkle in her eye, "How very kind, ambassador."

The privilege of representing the Queen was real. As ambassadors, we all wanted the Queen to come to visit us because we knew that would have a hugely positive impact on our relations with the country concerned.

Lord Michael Jay, permanent under-secretary of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2002-2006 (words excerpted from House of Lords speech)

I am old enough to have known another sovereign – I was 12 when the Queen ascended to the throne. Britain was a pretty grey place. Something lifted. First of all, we saw the wonderful dress she wore, which was made with an incalculable number of pearls that came from various parts of what was then still the empire. From this rather grey world we began to see something that was rather lovely and cheery. She was very beautiful. It was a great occasion. My family, like many, bought its first television set to watch the proceedings. So she started with a tremendous show, which I think greatly improved the morale and general happiness of our society.

The other thing I want to say about the way she behaved over all these years is that she was a tremendous force for inclusion in our society. Little people mattered to her – that was widely understood and much appreciated by the general public.

We also witnessed something else. Not only did people see that the Queen represented us collectively,

"I proposed a toast to the president of the French Republic and to Her Majesty the Queen. 'What a nice couple,' she replied"
Michael Jay

but many in this society felt they had an individual connection with her. They did not know her in the conventional sense, but she connected with us, and put a lot of effort into doing so. That is one of the reasons why she was also so effective in the Commonwealth. People understood that she had thought about them and the situation, and here was the contribution she was willing to make.

On one occasion, there was a birthday party where we were both guests, held in the London aquarium. As she arrived, the Queen looked round at the colourful goldfish in the tanks near the entrance. "I haven't been here before," she said. I happened to be standing near her, and said, "Your Majesty, when you get much further into this place, you will find that it contains a lot of sharks." "Oh," she said, "How like real life."

Baroness Pauline Neville-Jones, Joint Intelligence Committee chair 1993-1994 and security minister 2010-2011 (words excerpted from House of Lords speech)

They say you should never meet your heroes. The late Queen was a hero from the beginning of my career. From the time I joined the Foreign Office in 1982, it was apparent that Queen Elizabeth II was the UK's top diplomatic asset. Her state visits were defining moments in the UK's relations with every country she visited; and heads of state vied for invitations to come to London.

I saw at first hand her soothing influence when helping to organise the state visit of King Fahd to the UK in 1987. Basically, the king of Saudi Arabia was enchanted by the Queen. The visit to Ireland in 2011 – the first by a British monarch to the Republic – was epoch-making from the moment the Queen arrived in Dublin wearing a dress in the exact shade of green in the Irish tricolour. To this day, Irish diplomats tell me of the

lingering positive effects of the visit.

I saw her impact when I was ambassador to Germany, where she paid her final state visit



in 2015. At the state banquet in Berlin, every German gasped when the Queen mentioned her meetings with Konrad Adenauer, the Federal Republic's founding father, who died in 1967, before many of them had been born.

Later that year I became PUS. For the next five years, I saw the Queen every week she was in London. I was present when new ambassadors and high commissioners presented their credentials. The Queen was masterly: welcoming, warm, knowledgeable and humorous, and all these good things invariably. Their excellencies left with memories they would remember forever and a determination to make good bilateral relations even better.

Regular contact reinforced my admiration for the Queen. I am glad I got to know my hero. She deserves all the plaudits heaped upon her in the last few days, a kind, constant, unflappable, wise and humble person. And the perfect Queen.

Lord Simon McDonald, permanent under-secretary of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2015-2020



The Queen talking to Dame Janet Paraskeva, a former first civil service commissioner

During my career Queen Elizabeth was the most effective and enduring source of British soft power. She played a leading role in historic events most of us have only read about. World War II, Korea, Suez, decolonisation, the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Even those who contest our imperial and colonial past could not fail to respect her. She embodied values people associate with the best of our country – modesty, humour, propriety, and unflinching determination.

Her 2011 state visit to Ireland was a personal triumph. In 2012 we were delighted that the very last official act of her Diamond Jubilee year was to visit the Foreign Office and meet our staff.

“She embodied values people associate with the best of our country - modesty, humour, propriety, and unflinching determination”
Simon Fraser

As permanent under-secretary, sporting my braided uniform and ostrich-feather hat, I would attend audiences at the Palace when Her Majesty received new ambassadors.

I was briefed on the ambassador and country in question, but she was always a step ahead. How could I compete? She had usually visited the country in question several times, and knew not only the prime minister, monarch, or president, but also their predecessors and parents.

Sir Simon Fraser, permanent under-secretary of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2010-2015

“Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II carried out her duties with grace and deep understanding of the issues of the day. She made fulfilling these duties look so effortless and she has been with us for so long, that we may not always have fully appreciated how integral a role she played in the British Constitution and how much she gave to this country.

As a privy councillor I witnessed her signing Orders in

Council and as an MP and later as a member of the House of Lords I would be one of the hundreds of parliamentarians being present at the state opening.

I believe Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II will be seen as the most successful monarch ever to reign in British history. She was our Queen, a great grandmother, grandmother, mother and wife and as she put it herself – a servant to this nation. She was truly remarkable.

She has also been a constant and consistent foundation for the civil service The absolute

loyalty of the civil service was to Her Majesty the Queen, and through her, to her government. We now have a new monarch, King Charles III, who will seamlessly take over this role. Many of us may feel that we are not yet fully prepared for the change, but he clearly is. And the civil service will serve him with the same loyalty and dedication they showed to his mother.”

Baroness Gisela Stuart, first civil service commissioner and a former Labour MP



LETTERS TO CIVIL SERVICE STAFF



A message from **Simon Case**, cabinet secretary and head of the Civil Service

Dear Colleagues,

On this profoundly sad day for our country and the Commonwealth, I would like to share with you the letter that I have sent to His Majesty the King.

Your Majesty,

On behalf of all members, at home and abroad, of His Majesty's Civil Service may I convey our most sincere condolences, and our deepest sympathy, on the very sad death of your mother and our Sovereign, Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

From the moment Her Late Majesty was called upon to assume the duties and responsibilities of Sovereign, Queen Elizabeth II gave unstinting and devoted service to this country, her other Realms and to the Commonwealth.

As we come together now to mourn as a family of nations, we trust that Your Majesty will draw strength from the knowledge that your late mother was universally loved and respected.

Your Civil Service looks forward with optimism to your reign. You can count on our dedication to and pride in serving Your Majesty, just as we did Her Late Majesty.

I have the honour to be Your Majesty's most humble and obedient servant,

Simon Case

Today, we witness the end of an exceptional chapter in our nation's history. Around the world, only a very few people will remember our having any other sovereign. Our monarchy has endured for more than a thousand years and the great span of Her Late Majesty's reign surpassed all others.

Throughout nearly a century of dramatic social, political and technological change, Queen Elizabeth II as Princess and Queen stood for constancy and the perfect balance between continuity and change. When she came to the throne in 1952, Winston Churchill was prime minister and wartime rationing was still in place. Aged just 25, the Queen became head of state and the legislature, head of the Church of England and Armed Forces, head of state of the overseas realms and Head of the Commonwealth.

In a radio broadcast on the evening of her coronation, the Queen pledged that, 'throughout all my life and with all my heart I shall strive to be worthy of your trust'. It was a pledge that Her Late Majesty upheld to the end. Throughout her remarkable life and reign, and decades of service, the Queen was resolute in putting people and country first.

It was an honour and privilege to serve the Queen, and I know that the sense of loss we feel as civil servants will be shared by countless millions of others whose lives she touched and to whom she was a source of inspiration and stability. We will mourn her passing even as we draw comfort from her steadfast devotion to duty, and the profound respect, regard and affection felt for her around the world.

I know that every civil servant will continue to fulfil their responsibilities to the Crown and serve His Majesty the King with the same dedication and pride as they served Her Late Majesty. His Majesty will provide us with the leadership we need in the days ahead and beyond, and in turn we shall provide Him with our loyalty and support.

God save the King.

A message from
Jayne Brady, head of
the Northern Ireland
Civil Service

Dear colleagues,

I know that like me, so many of you will have been saddened to hear of the death yesterday afternoon of Her Late Majesty the Queen.

While many of us will remember the Queen as such a public figure, we are conscious that she was also a mother, grandmother and great grandmother. I will be writing on behalf of the Northern Ireland Civil Service to express our sincere sympathies to His Majesty the King and the Royal Family.

I had the pleasure of meeting Her Late Majesty on several occasions over recent years and like so many others was struck by her warmth, good humour and courtesy. It is fitting that we are now in a period of national mourning, also a period that allows us to reflect on Her Late Majesty's dedication to public service and in leading by example.

The national mourning will last up until the state funeral. During this period it is appropriate that in our work and behaviours we are seen to acknowledge the significance of Her Late Majesty's death.

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CIVIL SERVICE WORLD 

The staff of Civil Service World and all of us at Dods Group join the civil service in sending our deepest condolences to the Royal Family on the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

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