

Elizabeth: Queen of souvenirs

London: Queen Elizabeth II lives on at the Cool Britannia gift shop across the road from Buckingham Palace.

Four years after the queen's death, the shop is doing a brisk business in mugs, tea towels and key rings bearing the likeness of Britain's longest-reigning monarch as the nation marks the centenary of her birth on Tuesday. Items featuring her son King Charles III? Well, not so much.

"We still sell more than the king any day," said Ismail Ibrahim, the store's manager.

The late queen's memory looms over the monarchy after a 70-year reign that saw her evolve from the glamorous young sovereign who cheered Britain during the gloomy post-war years to the beloved national grandmother who rallied the country during the



A plate with photos of late Queen Elizabeth II is on display for sale at a souvenir shop in London on Friday. (AP)

Covid-19 pandemic.

Key presence

When she died in September 2022, Elizabeth was the only monarch most Britons had ever known. Even now, mention of "the queen" is more likely to evoke thoughts of Elizabeth than of Queen Camilla, Charles's wife.

But the passage of time has

also tarnished the late queen's legacy. While she is celebrated as a symbol of tradition and continuity who helped unite Britain as the end of empire, economic struggles and mass migration changed the nation's perception of itself, revelations about the former Prince Andrew's links to the sex offender Jeffrey Epstein have raised questions about

why she let the problem fester for years.

"Despite her absence, Elizabeth II remains this key presence whenever we think about the monarchy," Ed Owens, author of *After Elizabeth: Can the Monarchy Save Itself?* told The Associated Press.

"She's certainly the most significant figure in the history of the institution in the last 100 years and, I think, therefore deserves probably the attention that's going to be focused on her in connection with what would have been her 100th birthday."

The festivities include a Buckingham Palace reception where Charles will congratulate centenarians who share the late monarch's birthday, and the dedication of a memorial garden at Regent's Park in central London. An exhibit of the queen's fashions is already underway.

AP