

Margaret Thatcher: Funeral Next Wednesday

Baroness Thatcher's funeral will be held at St Paul's Cathedral next Wednesday and attended by the Queen, it has been announced.

Britain's longest serving prime minister and the only woman so far to hold the role will be given a ceremonial funeral with full military honours. It is the same status as that accorded to the Queen Mother and Diana, Princess of Wales, although some Tories want a full state ceremony. The funeral will be the first of a former prime minister attended by the Queen since Sir Winston Churchill's state ceremony in 1965. She will be accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, and other heads of state and foreign dignitaries from around the world are expected to attend. Lady Thatcher died at The Ritz in central London on Monday morning after suffering a stroke. She had battled ill health for a number of years. Downing Street said the date of her funeral was agreed at a meeting attended by her family and officials from Buckingham Palace. The day before the ceremony, Lady Thatcher's coffin will be transferred to the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft in the Palace of Westminster. There will be a short service following its arrival before the coffin rests in the chapel overnight. The streets will then be cleared for a procession taking the former leader's body from parliament to Church of St Clement Danes, the RAF Chapel on the Strand. At the church, it will be transferred to a gun carriage drawn by the King's Troop Royal Artillery. The streets will be cleared for the procession on to St Paul's. There the coffin will be met by a guard of honour as members of the armed services and pensioners of the Royal Hospital Chelsea line the steps. The public will not be able to attend the funeral service itself but will be able to line the route of the procession. Parliament is expected to be suspended for the event, which means the first Prime Minister's Questions since the Easter break could be cancelled. Cabinet Office minister Francis Maude, who is in charge of some of the arrangements, said: "There's already a huge amount of interest. There's a guest list and people will be invited over the coming days. It will be a big event. I think there's a huge amount of people - not just in Britain, but around the world - who will want to pay their respects to her." Some Tory MPs have expressed disappointment that the 87-year-old has not been granted a state funeral, as wartime leader Churchill was. Peter Bone, MP for Wellingborough, said she should have "the highest kind of funeral that can be allowed". "I would have thought a state funeral would be very appropriate. She was the first female prime minister. She was also the greatest peacetime prime minister we ever had," he told the Daily Mail. However, friends have indicated that she did not want such treatment. She had specifically said she did not want to lie in state and that a fly-past would be a waste of money. For a state funeral to be granted to a non-royal, a parliamentary vote would have to be passed to permit the release of public funds. Parliament is also being recalled from the Easter break on Wednesday to allow MPs to voice their tributes, although the decision has angered some MPs.

Labour's John Mann questioned why taxpayers' money was being spent on bringing back MPs when tributes could have been paid next week, when parliament was due to resume. "It is perfectly valid that, when a prime minister dies, MPs can pay tribute, but this could be perfectly properly done on Monday," he said. He added that he would not be attending the session tomorrow, saying: "I will be at the dentist's." Prime Minister David Cameron, who has already hailed Lady Thatcher as "a great Briton", is expected to give a statement to the Commons, followed by Labour leader Ed Miliband. Mr Miliband said on Monday that while he "disagreed with much of what she did", he respected "her extraordinary achievements and her extraordinary personal strength". The former Tory leader was hailed across the world as a towering politician, although there was also jubilation at her death from critics angry at some of her most controversial actions in office. While some mourners laid flowers in tribute outside her home in Belgravia, London, others took to the streets to celebrate her demise. Some 200 revellers took to the streets in Bristol, where six police officers were injured in a scuffle as bottles and cans were thrown. There were similar scenes in south London, where more than 100 people gathered in Brixton - the scene of fierce riots in 1981, two years into Lady Thatcher's first term in office. A crowd of 300 also gathered in Glasgow's George Square, where in 1989 protests at the introduction of the infamous poll tax took place. Many on the Left have condemned the social impacts of Lady Thatcher's policies encouraging the free market and stripping power from unions during her 11 years in power. Her death was also welcomed by veterans of the Falklands conflict in Argentina, who blamed her for the deaths of the 649 troops who died during the 74-day war. But the news was received with "great sadness" by islanders on the Falklands, who flew the union flags at half mast and hailed her intervention 31 years ago.