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# Queen Elizabeth II

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See the intricacies of the  
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**Stewart Ross**

Award-winning British author



# Queen Elizabeth II

by Stewart Ross

**for  
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## **Queen Elizabeth II For Dummies®**

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# Introduction

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The subject of this book is one of the most memorable figures in recent world history, one of the very few who have become a legend in their own lifetime. This is all the more remarkable because Queen Elizabeth II did not seek power and influence, nor did she force her way onto the world stage through ambition or vanity. She inherited a job she had not asked for, and - because she sees it as her duty - she performs it with exemplary diligence, and has done so for over seventy years.

Whether or not you approve of the institution of hereditary monarchy is beside the point. Elizabeth did not have any say in the matter - she was dealt a hand and told to get on with it. So she did. It took her close to the very heart of things, meeting Winston Churchill, Jack Kennedy, Nelson Mandela ... being there when the Berlin Wall went up and when it came down ... witnessing the tragedies of her sister Margaret and Princess Diana. As you will discover, the story of Elizabeth's life is the story of the modern world.

## *About This Book*

To help you make sense of Elizabeth's life, especially if you come from outside the UK, I have included a fair slice of British history and stuff about Britain's byzantine unwritten constitution. I have also done my best to be objective in coverage and judgements, though I hope not to the point of blandness. I want you to enjoy using this book as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

Throughout the book, I've used UK English - the Queen's English! Among other things, you may spot more uses of

the letter “u” in words than you’re used to, and “s” and “z” popping up in unusual places (if you’re from the US). I feel it is important to write about Elizabeth in her own nation’s version of our language.

When there are so many books, websites, blogs, podcasts, and so on, dealing with Queen Elizabeth II, what does *Queen Elizabeth II For Dummies* offer that’s unique, making it stand out from the crowd? Here’s an insight into my approach:

- » **A neutral read.** Unlike many authors approaching Elizabeth II, I have no axe to grind, no political point to prove. I don’t believe she’s a saint or a sinner, just an ordinary yet extraordinary humanbeing. I give you the whole picture, warts and all.
- » **A non-chronological read.** What makes this book so useful, like all *For Dummies* titles, is the way it is organized for reference *and* for a pleasant read. You can dip in, check out a fact or a topic, and dip out again; or you can relax and read through a whole chapter or two.
- » **An easy-to-understand read.** To help the user, *Queen Elizabeth II For Dummies* uses handy icons, regular explanations of complex issues (I highlight these explanations with the use of *italic text*), sidebars about interesting-but-not-essential subjects, and the helpful use of bullet points.
- » **A humorous read.** Life is nothing without a smile – wherever possible, I’ve tried to handle the subject with wit and precision, pointing out the oddities and quirks that festoon the British monarchy.

Several places in the book have links to web addresses. If you’re reading a digital version on a device connected

to the internet, you can click the web address to access the site directly, like this: [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com). Alternatively, you can type the address into your browser.

To make the content of *Queen Elizabeth II For Dummies* more accessible, I have divided it into six parts:

- » **Part 1: The Road to the Throne** places Elizabeth's early life in the context of the evolution of Britain's constitutional monarchy.
- » **Part 2: The Young Queen** covers Elizabeth's coronation, her early years on the throne, and the daily life of a working royal.
- » **Part 3: The Need to Adapt** looks at how Elizabeth slowly – and at times reluctantly – adapted the centuries-old institution of monarchy to the rapidly changing post-war world.
- » **Part 4: Stormy Waters** deals with the series of painful events that beset Elizabeth in the lead up to her *Annus Horribilis* of 1992.
- » **Part 5: Steadying the Ship** brings the bitter-sweet story of Elizabeth's reign to the present day, taking in joyful jubilees, painful losses, and hopes for the future.
- » **Part 6: The Part of Tens** includes ten prime ministers Elizabeth has worked with, ten tricky situations she had to navigate, ten actors who have portrayed her on screen, and snapshots of ten of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Finally, if I may, a short blast on my own trumpet. I have been teaching and writing about history at all levels, from primary school to university, for half a century. This book is a distillation of years of practice in clarifying the complex – and I hope it works like that for you.



# ***Foolish Assumptions***

As I sat writing this book, I conjured up a picture of you, the reader, in my mind. How did I imagine you?

- » You have an enquiring mind about the British Royal Family.
- » You're interested in politics, current affairs, history – and probably a bit of gossip, too!
- » English (though not necessarily British English) is probably your first language. If it's not, then you're definitely fluent. This is not a book for the English-language beginner – unless you have bags of patience and a large dictionary.
- » You may well have watched the TV series *The Crown* or the film *The Queen*, and want to know more about what was going on and how much of it is true.

Recognize yourself? I hope so, because this book is for you.

## ***Icons Used in This Book***

Throughout this book, icons in the margins highlight certain types of valuable information that call out for your attention. Here are the icons you'll encounter, with a brief description of each.



TIP

Helpful insights and tips. I use these to draw your attention to a strange or uncertain point that I think will interest you, and personal insights from me.



**REMEMBER** This is the key information within the book. If you take away nothing else from these pages but the stuff flagged by these icons, you'll have Queen Elizabeth II and her reign pretty well covered. To siphon off the most important information in each chapter, just skim through to these icons.



**TECHNICAL STUFF** Non-essential stuff that is interesting but not vital to getting to grips with the Queen. I use these icons to indicate background material on British politics, history, tradition, or constitutional convention.



**WARNING** Watch out! I use this icon to point out where fiction, especially in *The Crown*, drifts wide of fact for the sake of a good story, or to explain incidents that you may have heard about but are unsure how true they are. Myth is fun, but it can lead to serious or hurtful misunderstanding.

## ***Beyond the Book***

Queen Elizabeth is almost 100 years old, and the British history that created the monarchy she inherited is more than 1,500 years old. That's an awful lot of information, and I couldn't possibly shoehorn all I wanted into this book. Happily, beside the abundance of information and guidance within these pages, you can get access to even more help and information online. To check out this book's online Cheat Sheet, just go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and

search for “Queen Elizabeth II For Dummies Cheat Sheet”.

## ***Where to Go from Here***

Though the structure of this book is roughly chronological, that doesn't mean it's designed to be read from start to finish like a story book. You can start anywhere you want, depending on what you're looking for or what you're interested in.

Let's take a few examples of where you might want to start, if you don't fancy rolling up your sleeves up and getting stuck into [Chapter 1](#):

- » If you'd like to know a bit more about the relationship of Prince Charles with Princess Diana, dip into [Chapter 16](#).
- » There's plenty on Prince Harry, his marriage to Meghan and their decision to opt out of royal duties in [Chapters 24, 25](#) and [29](#).
- » What about Elizabeth's wealth? Try [Chapter 17](#).
- » Find out about Elizabeth's religious faith in [Chapter 19](#), or her love of horses, dogs and other animals in [Chapter 22](#).

The detailed Table of Contents is also a good place to begin. And if you can't find what you want there, don't forget the index. Wherever you start, welcome to the extraordinary world of Queen Elizabeth II!

## **Part 1**

# **The Road to the Throne**

## IN THIS PART ...

Queen Elizabeth II may not be as instantly recognizable as Lady Diana or Prince Harry, but without her no one would have even heard of Di or Harry. The nonagenarian monarch is the rock on whom rests every other current member of Britain's famous (and sometimes infamous) Royal Family.

That said, Queen Elizabeth does not stand alone. She is the latest in a line of kings and queens that stretches back into Britain's dim and distant past. From her ancestors she has inherited the glittering trappings of power, as well as customs, traditions and – most problematic of all – attitudes. The responsibilities these bring are enormous.

The Queen was not born into her current role. She was raised as a princess, but not as the future monarch. Only when her headstrong uncle chose love over the crown did her future suddenly change. Her father became king and she heir to his throne.

From that moment onward, it was only a matter of time.

# Chapter 1

## Queen Elizabeth II: A Global Icon

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### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Carrying the weight of history on her shoulders
  - » Following in her family's footsteps
  - » Being a multi-tasking Queen and mother
  - » Understanding the secrets of Elizabeth's success
- 

Great Britain is the only country in the world without a name on its postage stamps. This is not just because Britain invented adhesive postage stamps with a 'we were here first' attitude when it comes to mail; it's also because Brits reckon an image is all that's needed for others to recognize where UK mail has come from.

The image is not a map, nor a man-made feature, nor an animal. It is a portrait of the *Head of State*, meaning Britain's reigning monarch. For almost three-quarters of a century, longer than any other person to hold the office, Great Britain's stamps have been adorned by the profile of Queen Elizabeth II.



REMEMBER

Since the time of Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547 – see the nearby sidebar to find out what ‘r.’ means), England’s monarchs have been called ‘Your Majesty’. The title had previously been used only for God. The weight of history grows heavier if we give the Queen her full title: ‘Elizabeth II, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of her other realms and territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith.’ That’s quite a mouthful!

## REIGNS AND LIVES

Dates prefaced by an ‘r.’ are the years of a monarch’s reign. Dates given without an ‘r.’ are the years of a person’s life or an event. A single date preceded by a ‘b.’ is the year a person was born.



TIP

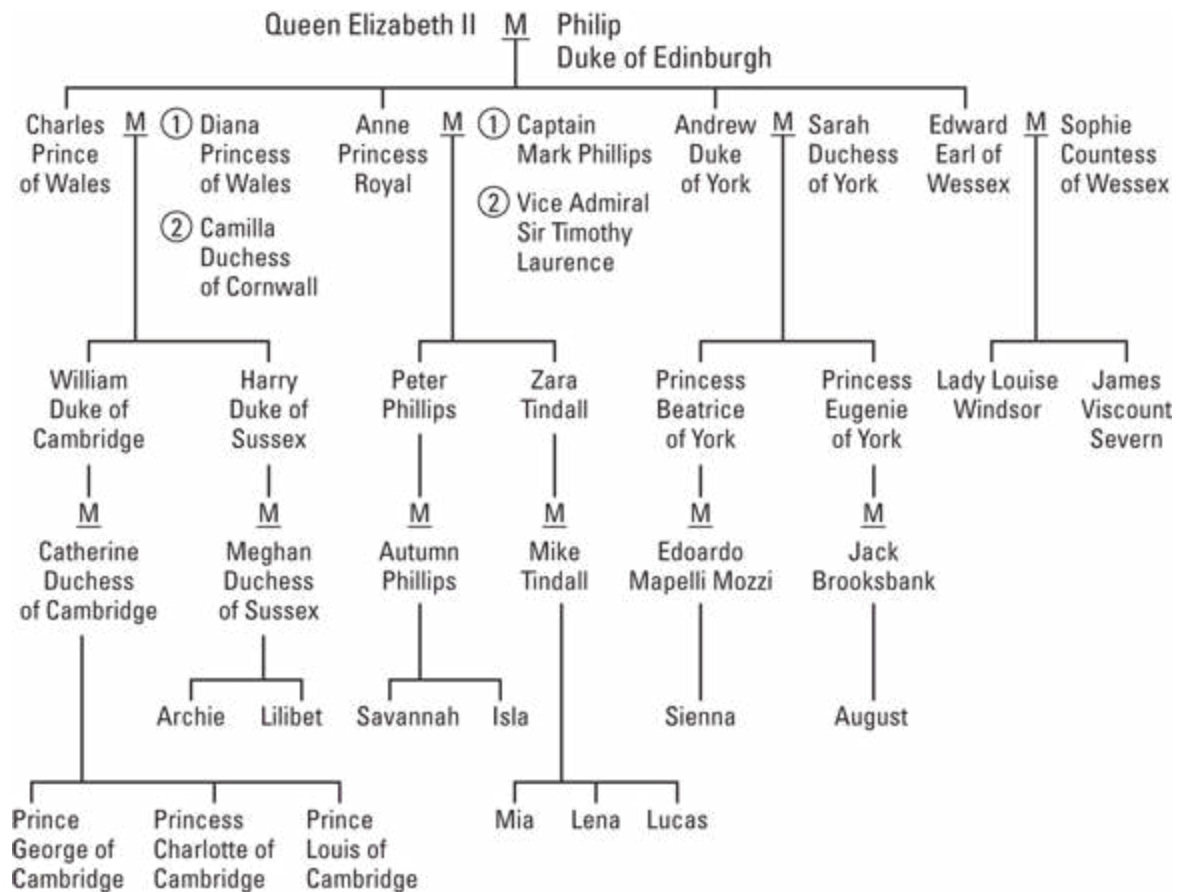
The inheritance is as daunting as the job title. As we get to grips with what makes Elizabeth tick, bear in mind that she sees herself as a sort of athlete in a relay race. The royal baton was handed to her by her father (see [Chapters 5](#) and [6](#)); her job is to hand it on intact to her heir. That, above all, is what drives her.



REMEMBER

Throughout this book, you’ll encounter Elizabeth’s extended family, heirs, and line of succession. Check out [Figure 1-1](#) for a diagram explaining who’s who in the modern Royal Family (and flick back to this page

as you're reading through the book - I honestly don't expect you to memorize this sort of thing!).



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**FIGURE 1-1:** Queen Elizabeth II's family tree.

This chapter looks more closely at the Queen's historic inheritance and the range of work involved in trying to maintain it. It concludes with a few suggestions as to why, showing stoic toughness and blessed with not a little luck, in most people's opinion by the time of her Platinum Jubilee (2022), she had made a fair fist of it.

## *Carrying the Weight of History*



Queen Elizabeth's paternal grandmother, Queen Mary, sometime Empress of India, was an impressive figure. She demanded that Elizabeth curtsy whenever they met, and instructed her awestruck grandchild that kings and queens never smiled in public.

Though no academic, Queen Mary was a keen historian. Her specialization was genealogy, specifically the genealogy of her family. Born in 1867, she clearly remembered Queen Victoria (r. 1837-1901) and proudly recalled how King George III (r. 1760-1820) was her great-grandfather (find out more about these monarchs in [Chapter 3](#)). From this austere figure of her impressionable childhood years, Elizabeth was left in no doubt as to the weighty significance of her royal heritage.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

Perhaps appropriately, in 1913, Britain's latest armour-plated battlecruiser was named after Queen Mary. It lasted less well than its namesake, exploding and sinking during the Battle of Jutland, 1916, in World War I.

You can read more about Queen Mary in [Chapter 4](#).

## ***Heading up a monarchy 1,500 years in the making***

Elizabeth was born in 1926. Though Britain had been severely shaken by the bloodletting and vast expenditure of World War I (1914-1918), during the years of the Princess' childhood it was still a major world power. Its industry and commerce were formidable. The sprawling British empire - the largest the world had ever seen - remained more or less intact. If self-governing

Dominions (see [Chapter 10](#)) were included, it stretched from New Zealand via India and large swathes of Africa to northern Canada.

That a country less than half the size of Texas should achieve so much was a source of national pride. This was reflected in the history taught to the young Elizabeth by family members and tutors (see [Chapter 4](#) for more on her early life). She learned that, though there had been setbacks, British history was generally a story of progress. And a number of worthy monarchs had sometimes been part of that progress.

Here are a few of the more important ones she may have been told about:

- » **Alfred the Great (r. 871-899):** The doughty King of Wessex (an Anglo-Saxon kingdom in southwest England) who resisted and then overcame an invasion by barbaric Vikings.
- » **William the Conqueror (r. 1066-1087):** The Duke of Normandy in northern France who seized the English throne, thereby paving the way for his country to become a major European power.
- » **Henry V (r. 1413-1422):** A warrior king whose victory over the French at the Battle of Agincourt (1415) inspired William Shakespeare's memorable patriotic verses.
- » **Henry VIII (r. 1509-1547):** A ruthless patriot who freed England from papal (Catholic) interference and put himself at the head of the Church of England.
- » **Elizabeth I (r. 1558-1603):** A potential role model for Elizabeth II (though she denied it!) who demonstrated how a queen could reign as competently as any king.

- » **Charles II (r. 1660-1685):** A highly intelligent king with an innate political sense who guided the monarchy through a tricky post-republican era.
- » **Victoria (r. 1837-1901):** Elizabeth's great-great-grandmother whose reign laid the foundations of Britain's modern constitutional monarchy.

As well as these stand-out characters, the young Elizabeth would probably have found out about a whole host of others. A good many were pretty average. She can't have imagined enjoying a tea party with the ineffective Henry VI (r. 1422-1461) or the oddly named Harthacnut (r. 940-942). Nor with George I, who spoke scarcely any English. And poor Edward V (r. 1485) wasn't on the throne long enough to take tea with anyone. (Not that the Brits knew what tea was back then.)

Did the Princess thrill at the martial exploits of the warrior king Edward III (r. 1327-1377)? Was she fascinated by the idea that monarchs, like her doting but grumpy grandfather George V (r. 1910-1936), were placed on the throne by God, as propounded by James I of England (r. 1603-1625; aka King James VI of Scotland)? Maybe some of the tales she heard gave her nightmares. According to Shakespeare, the source of all the best stories of medieval skullduggery, Richard II (r. 1377-1399) was slain with an axe, John (r. 1199-1216) was poisoned by a monk, and Richard III (r. 1483-1485) had two little princes murdered in the Tower of London.



TIP

The sovereigns I've mentioned are by no means a complete list and the details offered are scanty. Don't worry, we'll meet them again in greater detail in

[Chapters 2](#) and [3](#). They are here simply to illustrate the enormous weight of history that bore down on Elizabeth's shoulders the moment she knew she was destined to wear the Crown. Whatever she thought of the long line of kings and queens who came before her, she was their heir and could never, ever forget it.

She owed it to them, and to history, not to mess things up.

## ***Ruling the jig-saw kingdom***

Non-Brits frequently refer to Elizabeth II as Queen of England. Though this is not wrong, it is incomplete. The reason why becomes apparent when scrolling down the list of countries that springs up automatically when completing an online form. After searching in vain for 'England' or even 'Britain', down among the 'U's one finds 'United Kingdom' between 'United Arab Emirates' and 'United States'. In the British Isles, Elizabeth is Queen of the United Kingdom, a jig-saw realm.



**REMEMBER** Even Brits get confused by this one! The 'British Isles' is a geographical name for a group of 6,000+ islands off northwest Europe. The two largest are Britain (made up of the countries of England, Scotland and Wales) and Ireland. The 'United Kingdom' is the European bit of Elizabeth II's realm. It comprises England, Scotland and Wales, plus the province of Northern Ireland.

Like many countries, the United Kingdom started small and expanded over time. Between the years 43 and 410, England and Wales (but not Scotland or Ireland) were

part of the Roman Empire. After the Romans left, the British Isles split up into a number of tribal units.

By the sixth century AD, some tribal chiefs were calling themselves kings, and may even have taken the title *Bretwalda* ('Britain ruler'). The title didn't mean much because England, let alone all Britain, was nowhere near a single kingdom, but it certainly made them sound more impressive.

The United Kingdom's jig-saw came together in four steps of unity:

- » In the ninth century AD, the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex fought back against Viking invaders from Scandinavia. Bit by bit, they added Viking and Anglo-Saxon territories to their realm until, by the time of King Athelstan (r. 895–939), all England lay within a single kingdom. Athelstan is Elizabeth II's thirtieth great-granduncle.
- » The *Normans* (meaning 'Northmen' from Normandy in modern-day France) conquered England in 1066 and then Ireland in the late twelfth century. With two of its four constituent parts in place, the United Kingdom was now half-way there. The English and Irish parliaments were amalgamated in 1801.
- » Wales was conquered by Edward I (r. 1277–1307) in the thirteenth century. To placate the Welsh, who had – and still have – their own ancient language, King Edward 'gave' them his infant son to be 'Prince of Wales'. The title has been given to the heir apparent ever since (see the nearby sidebar). It currently belongs to Prince Charles, Elizabeth's eldest son. With the addition of Wales, the United Kingdom was three-quarters complete.

» Scotland took a long time to pull together its scattered and mountainous territories into a single kingdom, and finished the process only with the acquisition of the Orkney and Shetland Isles in 1472. The 1503 marriage of James IV (supposedly a distant ancestor of mine, r. 1488–1513) to a sister of England’s Henry VIII, laid the foundations for the union of the two crowns. This came about when Scotland’s James VI succeeded Queen Elizabeth to become James I of England. Full political union of England and Scotland followed in 1707.

But, of course, this is no more than a snapshot of the complex history of the United Kingdom! (See [Chapter 2](#) for more details on the backstory of the British monarchy.)



**WARNING** Readers with Irish ancestry may already know that the union outlined above did not last. In 1921, Southern Ireland (also known as Eire or the Republic of Ireland) left the UK after years of tension and bloodshed. As a result, Elizabeth is Queen of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. During her reign, more Irish troubles and a Scottish independence movement further threatened the unity of her realm (see [Chapters 15](#) and [21](#)).

## WHAT’S AN HEIR APPARENT?

The person in line to succeed a monarch on their death or abdication is their *heir*. The *heir apparent*, traditionally a first-born son, is someone whose right to succeed cannot be taken away by the birth of someone else. An *heir presumptive*, often a first-born female or a cousin of the monarch, is an heir whose right to succeed is lost on the birth of a more eligible child.