

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF  
**QUEEN ELIZABETH II**



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# QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Princess Elizabeth Alexandra Mary was born by caesarean section on 21 April 1926 at 17 Bruton Street, London and later christened at the private chapel at Buckingham Palace. She was the first child of "Bertie", Duke of York, who was to become King George VI.

## **Childhood**

Princess Elizabeth, or Lilibet as she was better known, was a pretty baby with big blue eyes and golden hair. She was christened on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1926. Her christening gown had been worn by the Prince of Wales and King George V and was made of the finest Honiton lace tied with pink ribbons.

In July 1926, her parents, the Duke and Duchess of York, embarked on a tour of the Commonwealth. They left early in 1927 and were separated from their young daughter for several months. Every four weeks the Princess sat for new portrait photographs which were telegraphed to the Duke and Duchess at port of call.

Princess Elizabeth's parents returned to London in June 1927 bringing hundreds of gifts for her. They then moved into 145 Piccadilly where they were to live for nine and a half years and enjoy a happy family life. Princess Elizabeth idolised her father and as she grew up, she seemed to model herself on him.

Princess Elizabeth developed a strong attachment to family pets and at the age of seven she had her first corgi called Dookie. Now, The Queen is always surrounded by her dogs at every opportunity and corgis have become one of her trademarks.

As a child, the Princess's favourite games involved playing at horses and she began learning to ride at the age of five. Horses were always an important part of her life and time with them has always been one of the Queen's favourite ways to relax.

## **Christmas at Sandringham**

Christmas at Sandringham was a magical time for the Princess. In the ballroom of the House stood a magnificently decorated eighteen-foot Christmas tree freshly cut from the Sandringham Forest and next to it were tables piled high with exquisitely wrapped gifts labelled individually by the royal couple for their guests. King George V and Queen Mary joined the children in hanging the gifts from the branches.

On Christmas morning, the Royal Family walked across the lawn to the local Church of St Mary Magdalene (Sandringham Church) before returning to the House for a five-course Christmas lunch. Afternoon tea was served at four and then the family presented gifts to a long line of staff in the

ballroom. Three hours later, a six-course dinner was served! On New Year's Eve, there were games and drinks.

Princess Elizabeth's second Christmas was really extra-special as the King and Queen converted her personal railway coach into what was described as "a fairy land". Around the sides of the coach, bunches of holly were intertwined with glittering silver foil. From the roof hung a huge Christmas cracker, the cushions were covered with printed chintz representing fairy stories and on the floor was a picture rug.

## **A Sister**

A sister to Princess Elizabeth was born on 21 August 1930 and she was named Margaret Rose. Princess Elizabeth called her "Bud", for as she explained, her sister was too young to be a rose yet.

The sisters were educated at home in a sunny room filled with maps and books. They developed very different personalities. Princess Elizabeth was conscientious, serious and attentive to detail with a definite Royal air about her; Princess Margaret was precocious, boisterous and always in mischief.

## **Death of the King**

In the New Year of 1936, the King, known to his grandchildren as Grandpapa England, took to his bed at Sandringham and the Queen took the Princesses out for a walk in the snow and explained that their grandfather was very ill. Princess Elizabeth was taken in to say goodbye to him and looked very unhappy when she and her sister left for home. King George V died just before midnight on 20 January 1936.

Bertie's elder brother became King Edward VIII but reigned for only 325 days and the last months of 1936 were overwhelmed by the abdication crisis. The Duke and Duchess were to become the new King and Queen. Princess Elizabeth then came into direct line of succession to the throne and the family moved to Buckingham Palace.

## **Princess Elizabeth falls in Love**

In the summer of 1939, the King decided to retire the *Victoria and Albert* which was no longer seaworthy, and he insisted on making a nostalgic last voyage aboard her with his family to Dartmouth Naval College. It was here that Princess Elizabeth was to meet Prince Philip of Greece. She was thirteen years old.

Prince Philip was eighteen years old and with Viking colouring and natural good looks. He showed off by rowing dangerously near the Royal yacht *Victoria and Albert* as it sailed away with the Princesses on board. Lord Mountbatten, the Prince's uncle, noticed that Princess Elizabeth "stared at him and for the rest of the day followed him everywhere".

Philip was actually Danish rather than Greek. The Danes had been invited to hold the Greek throne in 1863 after Greece had achieved independence from Turkey. Philip was of the Danish royal house, usually known as the Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburgs. He was also a great-great grandchild of Queen Victoria.

## **The Second World War**

When war broke out, the Princesses stayed up in Scotland and then went to Sandringham as usual for the first Christmas. In the New Year, the Princesses went straight from Sandringham to Royal Lodge at Windsor and then in the summer of 1940 they moved into the Castle itself and were to spend most of the war years there.

During the war when Prince Philip was at sea and on active service, he and Princess Elizabeth wrote to each other and occasionally he visited Windsor whilst on leave. The Princess had a photograph of him on her bedside table. The King and Queen stayed at Buckingham Palace and the Queen learnt to fire a revolver.

Early in 1945, Princess Elizabeth enlisted in the ATS (Army Territorial Services). Although she did not sleep in one of the dormitory huts nor have her hair checked for nits, she did make a genuine attempt to be part of the war effort. She learnt about driving including heavy trucks and maintenance of vehicles.

The Princess ate in the Officers' Mess each day where the diet consisted of horsemeat and soggy greens and pilchards in tomato sauce, although she did have a small jug of condensed milk which was a treat that nobody else enjoyed. Each evening she drove back to Windsor for work on Constitutional Law and Politics.

At the end of the summer of 1946, the King agreed to an informal engagement between Prince Philip and Princess Elizabeth. However, he wanted to put his daughter to a final test and so insisted that she took part in the royal tour to South Africa in February 1947. She remained true and pined for ten weeks.

The South African tour marked the first ever twenty-first birthday celebrations in one of the Dominions by an heir to the British Throne. Princess Elizabeth made her dedication-speech offering her whole life "whether it be long or short, to be devoted to the service of my people".

## **A Fairytale Wedding**

On 28 February 1947, Prince Philip of Greece became a British subject, Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten, RN. The engagement was officially announced on 10 July 1947. Prince Philip was created His Royal Highness and was given the title of Duke of Edinburgh.

The wedding took place on 20th November 1947 at Westminster Abbey. Princess Elizabeth's gold wedding ring was made from the same Welsh nugget from which her mother's ring had been made.

After a luncheon for 150 at the Palace, where the couple appeared to cheers on the Royal balcony, they honeymooned at Broadlands in Hampshire, the Mountbatten estate.

The newly-weds took a Royal train from Waterloo station. Staff were carrying seventeen pieces of luggage: fifteen were the Princess's and two were Prince Philip's! The dining car was elaborately set out for tea, and amongst the entourage was the Princess's favourite corgi: Susan. Susan died in 1959 and her grave can be found in the grounds of Sandringham

## **Family Life**

In January, the couple were living at Buckingham Palace while Prince Philip was working at the Admiralty. They moved into Kensington Palace at the end of the month and then by February, Princess Elizabeth was pregnant. In March, Prince Philip left the Admiralty and took an officer training course at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich.

On 14th November 1948 the Princess gave birth to a son to be named Charles Philip Arthur George. He was born at Buckingham Palace and weighed in at 7lb and 6oz.

Meanwhile, King George VI was suffering from ill health and he was diagnosed as having arteriosclerosis (obstruction to the arteries of his legs). He underwent massages and homeopathic remedies and was soon to have a successful operation in the spring of 1949.

Towards the end of the year, the Prince and Princess moved into Clarence House and then in November, Prince Philip took up Naval duties in Malta as he had been pestering the King to be allowed back to sea. Princess Elizabeth flew out to join him four days later and they spent an enjoyable few weeks together swimming and picnicking in secluded coves. She became pregnant with her second child. The Princess then gave birth to Princess Anne Elizabeth Alice Louise on 15 August 1950 at Clarence House. She was enjoying being a wife and mother before becoming Queen.

## **The King's Illness**

By late May, the King was again unwell and went down with severe influenza. His left lung was infected, and doctors saw a suspicious shadow. Princess Elizabeth deputised for him at the Trooping the Colour and it was clear that she might have to become Regent, so Prince Philip had to return to her side.

The King's health became worse and it was discovered that he had cancer. He was operated on to have his lung removed but was unaware of the seriousness of the operation and he never knew he had cancer.

By Christmas, the King seemed much improved although his broadcasted message was rather haltering, and his voice was weak and exhausted. It was decided that Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip should begin the tour of Australasia without him and a trip to Kenya was included at the Princess's request. Queen Elizabeth II has now become the most travelled monarch in Britain's history.

On the morning of the 6th February, the King died. He was found by his valet when he went into the Royal bedroom at Sandringham with the King's breakfast. The Queen was informed and then Princess Margaret who was inconsolable. Princess Elizabeth immediately became the new Queen and flew back to England straight away.

## **The Coronation**

The Coronation took place on 2 June 1953. The Queen wore a heavy purple velvet and ermine robe over a coronation gown with a long train. The dress itself was made by Norman Hartnell and was smothered in jewels, lined with layers of taffeta and crinoline and stiffened with horsehair. Hartnell was concerned about the weight of the dress causing The Queen to stumble and so, without her knowledge, he sewed a tiny four-leaf clover of emerald spangles into it for luck.

The Queen decided that the name Mountbatten-Windsor would be used by her descendants other than those entitled to use Royal Highness and Prince or Princess. However, she herself retained the name of Windsor alone as did her three children. This was her way of perpetuating her husband's family name.

## **An Expanding Family**

On 19 February 1960, The Queen gave birth to a second son, Prince Andrew Albert Christian Edward at Buckingham Palace. He was the first child to be born to a reigning monarch since Queen Victoria's last child, Princess Beatrice in 1857. He was christened on 8 April in the Music Room at the Palace.

The Queen's sister, Princess Margaret, became engaged to Antony Armstrong-Jones and the wedding took place at Westminster Abbey on 6 May. The Duke of Edinburgh was to give the bride away. Princess Anne was one of the bridesmaids.

In 1963, The Queen became pregnant for a fourth time. After Christmas at Sandringham with the family in high spirits, the new year began quietly. The Queen gave birth to another son on 10 March 1964 who was named Edward Antony Richard Louis. The Queen was tired and weak, and she was ordered to have complete rest.

From this year, Christmas was spent at Windsor due to the sudden growth of The Royal Family. However, since the 1990s, the Royal family have once again enjoyed the traditional break at Christmas in Norfolk, although it is a tight squeeze at Sandringham, with the Queen having four children, eight grandchildren and currently, eight great-grandchildren altogether to celebrate.

## **Death of the Duke of Windsor**

In 1972, The Queen learned that her Uncle David, the Duke of Windsor (formerly King Edward VIII) was seriously ill with cancer. She visited him in Paris while she was on a state visit to France. He passed away late in May and she arranged for the Duchess of Windsor (formerly Mrs Wallis Simpson) to be brought to Buckingham Palace.

Later that year, The Queen and Prince Philip celebrated their silver wedding anniversary, and The Queen used this occasion to mingle with her people as she had never done before.

## **The Silver Jubilee**

In May of 1977, The Queen was present at the opening of Sandringham to the public, breaking all tradition in an effort to raise money to pay for expensive repairs.

1977 was also The Queen's Silver Jubilee year. Prince Philip gave her a special present of a painting of three of her favourite mares with their foals in a paddock at Wolferton at Sandringham with the red roofs of estate cottages in the distance.

On 7 June, the Silver Jubilee ceremony took place. Over a million people (probably more than had attended the coronation) crammed the Mall in London as the gilded State Coach carried The Queen and Prince Philip from the Palace gates. The service lasted fifty minutes and then The Queen began the "walkabout" to which she had most looked forward and the love of her people overwhelmed her.

## **Troubled Years**

On 13 June 1981, an attempt was made on The Queen's life while she was riding side-saddle to the Horse Guards Parade for the Trooping the Colour. A seventeen-year old youth fired a pistol at her and was then seized by the police and The Queen, unhurt but shaken, continued. The bullets were found to be blanks.

In 1982 the Falklands War broke out and Prince Andrew was involved as a sub-lieutenant flying helicopters from the aircraft carrier Invincible. Fortunately, by mid-June the war was over and the Argentineans had surrendered.

On 9 July of that year, an intruder managed to get into The Queen's bedroom while she was asleep and, despite her pressing an alarm button and telephoning for security, nothing happened. The Queen was furious with the lack of security and several policemen were fired or their duties changed. A number of people had seen the man but had failed to do anything about it. The man claimed that his aim had been to highlight The Queen's lack of safety: this he achieved, and security measures were stepped up.

On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1992, fire broke out at Windsor Castle in The Queen's Private Chapel, causing damage to apartments. In order to raise money for the restoration, in 1993 The Queen allowed the State Rooms of Buckingham Palace to be opened for the first time to the public during the summer, a practice which has continued every year since.

The tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1997 caused widespread mourning. The Queen broadcast to the nation on the eve of the Princess's funeral, paying tribute to her life and work.

2002 was a year of personal sadness for The Queen. Her sister, Princess Margaret, died on 9<sup>th</sup> February at the age of 71, following a stroke. Only weeks later, on 30<sup>th</sup> March at Royal Lodge, Windsor, Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother died. The Queen attended her funeral at Westminster Abbey before a private committal at St. George's Chapel, Windsor.

## **Elizabeth as Queen**

The Queen's role is as Head of the State and Head of the Nation. She opens Parliament, presides over the Privy Council, receives state visitors, gives a weekly audience to the Prime Minister, takes the Trooping the Colour ceremony, entertains the diplomatic corps, accepts ambassadors' credentials, confers honours, opens hospitals, launches ships, and signs Acts of Parliament.

The Queen has always been thorough, attentive and diligent. She remains the solid cornerstone of her family as well as of the Commonwealth and her style of monarchy is much like that of her grandfather: dutiful and representative; honest and unpretentious; deeply religious and very dedicated.

## **80<sup>th</sup> Birthday**

In 2006 The Queen celebrated her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday with a public walkabout in Windsor town centre. She also hosted a lunch for other people celebrating their 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on the same day and enjoyed a family dinner at Kew Palace.

## **The Golden Jubilee**

The Golden Jubilee of 2002 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of The Queen's Accession in 1952. The Queen is one of only a handful of British monarchs to reach such a milestone; the last had been Queen Victoria. Celebrations included visits to Jamaica, New Zealand, Australia and Canada; a tour throughout the UK, visiting 70 cities and towns; and a national weekend of celebrations, including two enormous concerts held in the gardens of Buckingham Palace.

## **Golden Wedding Anniversary**

On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1997, The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh celebrated 50 years of marriage.

## **Diamond Wedding Anniversary**

On 20<sup>th</sup> November 2007, The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh celebrated 60 years of marriage. They travelled to Malta which is where they lived as a young married couple from 1949-51 while The Duke was stationed there as a serving Royal Naval officer.

The previous day, they attended a Service of Thanksgiving in Westminster Abbey.

## **The Diamond Jubilee**

In 2012, Queen Elizabeth celebrated 60 years as our monarch. The Queen, accompanied by The Duke of Edinburgh, marked the Diamond Jubilee with a series of regional visits and engagements throughout the United Kingdom. A host of special events were organised to celebrate this momentous occasion including a pageant along the River Thames, a concert at Buckingham Palace, the lighting of a network of beacons across the country and a Service of Thanksgiving at St. Paul's Cathedral. Many people across the country, including school children, participated in street parties to celebrate The Queen and the Diamond Jubilee.

## **Longest Reigning Monarch**

On 20<sup>th</sup> December 2007, Queen Elizabeth reached a new milestone when she became the oldest British Monarch, overtaking her great-great grandmother, Queen Victoria, who lived for 81 years, 7 months and 29 days.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015, not only was the Queen the oldest British Monarch to reign, but she became the longest reigning monarch, and on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2017, celebrated her Sapphire Jubilee, an amazing 65 years on the throne.

## **The Queen Today**

The Duke of Edinburgh, now nearly 100, has begun a well-earned retirement, no longer attending engagements himself. The Queen however, still undertakes a large number of public engagements each year, whilst also receiving state visits, meeting with the Prime Minister and the Privy Council, dealing with a large correspondence and attending a number of official meetings. Now in her 90s, The Queen continues to actively serve her country which she is deeply committed and devoted to.