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Introduction

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 human being. 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. 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.