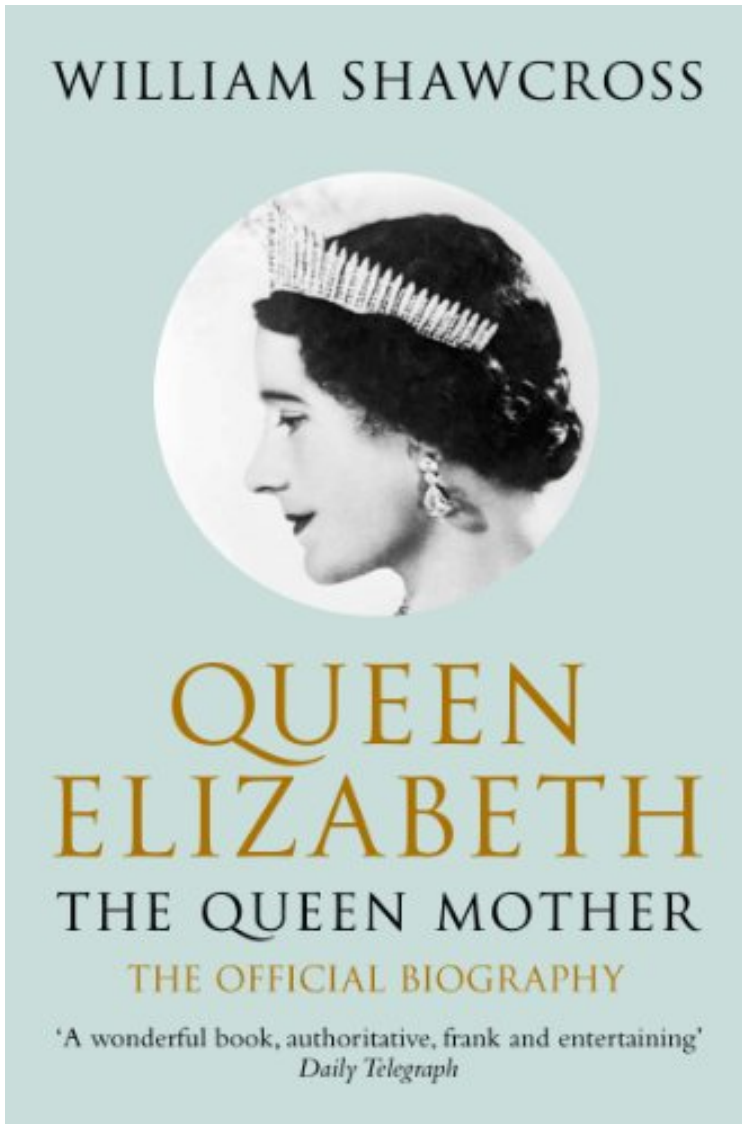


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Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother: The Official Biography (English Edition)



Par William Shawcross
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWritten with complete access to the Queen Mothers personal letters and diaries, William Shawcross's riveting biography is the truly definitive account of this remarkable woman, whose life spanned the twentieth century. Elizabeth Angela Marguerite Bowes Lyon,the youngest daughter of the Earl of Strathmore, was born on 4 August 1900. Drawing on her private correspondence and other unpublished material from the Royal Archives, William Shawcross vividly reveals the witty girl who endeared herself to soldiers convalescing at Glamis in the First World War; the assured young Duchess of York; the Queen, at last feeling able to look the East End in the face at the height of the Blitz; the Queen Mother, representing

the nation at home and abroad throughout her long widowhood. 'This splendid biography captures something of the warm glow that she brought to every event and encounter. It also reveals a deeper and more interesting character, forged by good sense, love of country, duty, humour and an instinct for what is right.

This is a wonderful book, authoritative, frank and entertaining' Daily

TelegraphExtraitPROLOGUEWednesday 19 July 2000 was the day chosen for the pageant celebrating the hundredth birthday of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother. In London, the day did not begin well. There were bomb scares, the controlled explosion of a suspicious bag, and many trains were cancelled. Senior police officers considered whether the whole event should be abandoned. It was not. The celebration, on Horse Guards Parade in Whitehall, had been designed as a joyful tribute to Queen Elizabeth and the hundreds of organizations with which she was connected. In warm afternoon sunshine, as the National Anthem was performed by massed military bands, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and a choir of a thousand singers, Queen Elizabeth, dressed in pink, arrived with her grandson the Prince of Wales in a landau escorted by the Household Cavalry. After she had inspected the troops, she and the Prince sat on a flower-bedecked dais (though she stood much of the time) to watch the parade together. It began with a march-past of the regiments of which she was colonel-in-chief, followed by the Kings Troop of the Royal Horse Artillery and the Mounted Bands of the Household Cavalry. One hundred homing doves were released as a young boy sang Oh for the Wings of a Dove. Then came a cavalcade of the century, a light-hearted look at the hundred years she had lived through; more of a circus than a parade, it included 450 children and adults, with a variety of stars. Among the scenes and players who passed in front of her were soldiers of the First World War, ballroom dancers from the 1920s, a Second World War fire engine and ambulance, Pearly Kings and Queens from the East End of London, and people in 1940s dress celebrating victory in 1945. Then came a series of post-war cars Enid Blytons Noddy in his yellow car, the first Mini Minor, James Bonds Aston Martin, an E-type Jaguar. More recent and perhaps more surprising twentieth-century memories were recalled by Hells Angels on their bikes, punk-rock youths in black and the television characters, the Wombles. After this eclectic depiction of the previous ten decades, representatives of 170 of the more than 300 civil organizations, charities and other groups with which Queen Elizabeth was associated marched past her. This part of the parade began with Queen Elizabeths page leading two of her corgis, the breed of dog which had for so long shared her life. There were more animals: camels (ridden by members of the Worshipful Company of Grocers, whose emblem is a camel), horses, an Aberdeen Angus bull, North Country Cheviot sheep, chickens, racehorses. The groups waving gaily as they passed included the Girls Brigade, Queen Elizabeths Overseas Nursing Services Association, the Cookery and Food Association (a hundred chefs all in their whites), the Mothers Union, the Poultry Club of Great Britain, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the National Trust, the Royal College of Midwives, St John Ambulance Brigade, the Royal School of Needlework, the Colditz Association, the Battle of Britain Fighter Association, the Bomber Command Association and, bringing up the rear, twenty-two holders of the Victoria and George Crosses, Britains highest awards for heroism, followed by the venerable Chelsea Pensioners marching stiffly but proudly in their bright red uniforms. Everyone in the stands stood up as these brave men and women passed. RAF planes from the Second World War a Spitfire, a Hurricane, a Lancaster bomber, a Bristol Blenheim flew overhead, followed by the Red Arrows trailing red, white and blue vapour trails. And all the while the bands and the orchestra played on and the choirs sang. Hubert Parrys glorious anthem I Was Glad, which had been sung at King George VI and Queen Elizabeths Coronation in 1937, was followed by First World War music-hall favourites such as Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag, Keep the Home Fires Burning and (nicely vulgar) My Old Man Said Follow the Van. Three hundred children from the Chicken Shed Company danced. Altogether some 2,000 military personnel and more than 5,000 civilians celebrated on Horse Guards Parade. The whole event lasted an hour and a half, and at the end the Queen Mother made a short speech of thanks saying it had been a wonderful afternoon and a great joy to me. The crowd cheered, the National Anthem was sung again, and Queen Elizabeth got into her car to make a lap of honour past thousands of happy, cheering people before driving off to St James's Palace, where she climbed the stairs to the State Rooms and spent the next hour and a half at a reception, sitting down only to talk to the singer Dame Vera Lynn. Two weeks later, on the morning of her actual hundredth birthday, 4 August, a large crowd gathered outside her London home, Clarence House. The gates were opened and Queen Elizabeth came out to take the salute when the Kings Troop, the Royal Horse Artillery, marched past. In front of the crowd the royal postman, Tony Nicholls, delivered her the traditional message sent by the Queen to all her subjects who reach their hundredth birthday. The Queen Mother started to open it and then passed it to her

equerry. Come on, use your sword, she said. Captain William de Rouet unsheathed his ceremonial blade and slit the envelope open. The message was written in the Queen's own hand and read, On your 100th birthday all the family join with me in sending you our loving best wishes for this special day. Lilibet.¹ Then, with the Prince of Wales, Queen Elizabeth climbed into a landau decked with flowers in her racing colours of blue and gold, and was driven to Buckingham Palace past the large crowds lining the Mall. The Prince was deeply moved by the rapturous reception for his beloved grandmother. It was, he thought, the British at their best and you always manage to bring the best out in people!² At the Palace, Queen Elizabeth appeared alone on the balcony. She waved to the crowds as she had first waved after her marriage in 1923 and, most famously, on Victory in Europe (VE) Day in May 1945. As the Band of the Coldstream Guards played Happy Birthday and the crowd roared its approval, she was joined by twenty-seven of her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nephews, nieces and many of their spouses. In her long life the world had undergone technological change with unprecedented speed, and political transformations of exceptional violence. It had moved from the age of travel by horse to that of travel through space. The First World War and the Russian Revolution had toppled the emperors of Austria, Germany and Russia. Many other European kings and queens had subsequently departed their thrones. The United Kingdom had suffered the trauma of the Great War and then faced almost continuous challenge from economic and political turmoil, from war and the threat of war through a world slump, the abdication of King Edward VIII, the Second World War, the Cold War. Queen Elizabeth had come to terms with massive changes: loss of empire, the growth of a modern multi-racial Commonwealth of newly independent states in Asia and Africa, and a social revolution in Britain itself which had begun with the first majority Labour government elected in 1945. The British monarchy was not isolated from the political and social changes. Indeed the abdication in 1936 was a self-inflicted wound from which it might not have recovered. It had adapted itself, and it had survived; more than that, it had retained the consent of the people essential to constitutional monarchy. This adaptation was largely due to the efforts of successive sovereigns and their advisers. But a key question, explored in this book, is the extent to which the consent necessary for its survival was generated by the woman who was for almost eighty years at its heart as Duchess of York, Queen and Queen Mother. In any biography of a public person there is a danger of overemphasizing the role of the individual in shaping events. This is particularly true when the individual has, like Queen Elizabeth, great prestige but no real power. Nevertheless, it remains legitimate to ask how Queen Elizabeth responded to the great personal and public crises of her life and what wider effect this had. How did she do it? What combination of qualities had enabled this young Scottish aristocrat to come into the Royal Family and play such a central role in the life of the nation for almost eighty years? What part did she play in her unique family, as a young married woman, as a mother, as grandmother and great-grandmother? And on the national stage, how did she earn and, more remarkably, how did she retain her popularity through all of the turbulent twentieth century? What were the drawbacks to her very particular style? What did she really contribute to the monarchy and to the nation in times of crisis and social revolution? Would the British monarchy have evolved in a very different way without her influence? And would that have helped or hindered the institution and the country? All these questions can perhaps be examined in the context of a few words from Walter Bagehot, the mid-nineteenth-century writer who is often seen as the greatest interpreter of modern monarchy: The nation is divided into parties, but the crown is of no party. Its apparent separation from business is that which removes it both from enmities and from desecration, which preserves its mystery, which enables it to combine the affection of conflicting parties to be a visible symbol of unity. From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* Fascinating . . . Anglophiles and lovers of the crown will relish every morsel." USA Today A totally absorbing and highly readable account of a remarkable life. . . . Shawcross's book is genuinely revelatory." The Times (London) Remarkable." Los Angeles Times Lively and elegantly written. . . . A rich portrait." The Economist Splendid. . . . An entertaining page-turner. . . . This masterly biography reveals a character whose charm was matched by courage, optimism, a strong sense of duty and a liking for fun. . . . A wonderful book, authoritative, frank and entertaining. It sets new standards for royal biography. . . . Anyone who finds royal biographies dull and dutiful is in for a surprise." The Daily Telegraph (London) A portrait of a remarkable life lived in step with a century of sweeping change." Bloomberg News A colossal book about a colossal life, a spectacular journey across the entire 20th Century through the eyes of a thoughtful woman who took the hand of a shy royal understudy and was propelled through modern history." Daily Mail (London) A behind-the-scenes glimpse at the Royal Family. . . . Fascinating reading. . . . Shawcross has written a remarkable book." Tucson Citizen [Written] with unprecedented access to the private papers of the queen mother. . . .

Her life is seen here as a mirror of the 20th century. "New York Post Required Reading Shawcross has been given access to the Royal Archives and they have yielded a rich harvest. . . . [There is an] immense amount of new material here. . . . He is to be congratulated for selecting so many juicy tidbits." A. N. Wilson, Daily Mail (London) Engaging. . . . Colorful. . . . Delightful as well as dignified." The Washington Times The correspondence in [The Queen Mother] is illuminating for both royal watchers and historians. . . . Divulges the Queen Mothers opinions on topics ranging from feminism to homeopathy." The Associated Press Impressively researched. . . . Shawcross avoids the traps [of] hagiography. . . . He succeeds in the difficult task of keeping his subject resolutely centre-stage in an elegant account." The Independent (London) Shawcrosss journalistic skills are evident in the innumerable dabs of pointilliste detail. . . . There are many unexpected vignettes. . . . He serves his subject well." Sunday Telegraph (London) Offers new and fascinating insights into the woman behind the pearls and pastel dresses." Mail on Sunday