

This month the Queen and Prince Philip will attend the three-day Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth, Australia. As IAN LLOYD explains, it will be the monarch's 16th and, quite possibly, final tour of the land she visited 57 years ago when she became the first reigning monarch to set foot on Australian soil

**E**LIZABETH II HAS involved herself in many aspects of the country's life. She has seen at first hand its many natural wonders, from the spectacular Blue Mountains range outside Sydney to the Great Barrier Reef. She has tried to meet Australians from all walks of life, as well as, during her 1963 visit, forging a link with remote communities she couldn't visit. Using the Flying Doctor network in Alice Springs she made a unique broadcast to those living and working in the outback.

**RIGHT: The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh greet well-wishers in Bourke, a small settlement 500 miles northwest of Sydney, in March 2000**

When visiting Australia the Queen has been able to undertake some of the ceremonial duties as sovereign, from opening Parliament in Canberra in 1954 wearing her Coronation gown, to inaugurating the 2002 CHOGM meeting in Coolool, Queensland. She is patron of a large number of Australian organisations, from the Royal Humane Society of Australia to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. She also holds a number of positions in the Australian Armed Forces and in 2003 honoured the vast contribution made by the country's servicemen and women when she unveiled the Australian War Memorial at Hyde Park Corner in London. ▶

# QUEEN OF AUSTRALIA





PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW HARRIS

**CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:**  
The Queen is escorted by the Mayor of Cairns on her way to the city's Parramatta Park for a welcome ceremony on 13 March 1954

Her Majesty goes on a walkabout in the streets of Brisbane in March 1977 during her Silver Jubilee tour of Australia

The monarch is accompanied by Prince Charles and Princess Anne on a visit to the Royal Easter Show in Sydney in April 1970

The Queen and Prince Philip attend the Commonwealth Games closing ceremony in Brisbane in October 1982

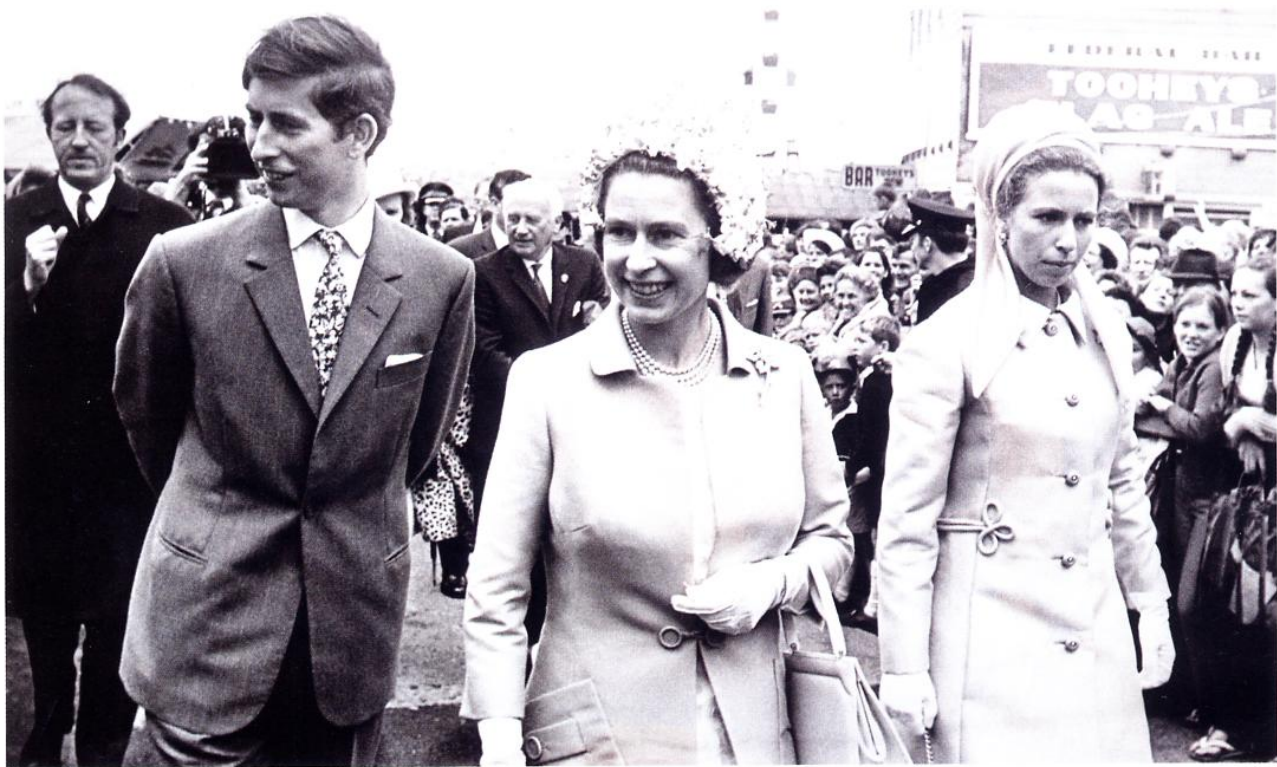


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The Governor-General represents the Queen in Australia. The current one – the 25th – is Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, who was appointed by Her Majesty on the advice of Australian government ministers. Although executive power is vested in the Queen as head of state, in practice the Governor-General exercises it on her behalf.

In November 1975 the Queen was unexpectedly dragged into a constitutional crisis when the Opposition leader, Malcolm Fraser, used his majority in the Australian Senate to block the Labour government's budget bills. The then Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, dismissed the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, and appointed Fraser as acting premier in his place.

The whole issue of the Queen's involvement in Australian politics was highlighted and examined. Buckingham Palace revealed the Queen had been kept informed of what had been happening in preceding weeks, but was at pains to point out that Kerr had not told her about Whitlam's dismissal until after it happened. Kerr said this was to protect the monarch, and is said to have told her later: 'Governor-Generals are expendable. The Queen is not.'

Twelve prime ministers have held office in Australia during the Queen's reign. By coincidence, the same number of British PMs and US presidents have served since Her Majesty's accession in 1952. ▶

The Queen arrives at the Sydney Opera House complex for the official opening ceremony on 20 October 1973

**CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:** Her Majesty inspects a guard of honour at the Field of Remembrance in Perth, 1 April 2000

The monarch, wearing the insignia of the Order of Australia, attends a dinner at Parliament House, Canberra, in 2006

The Queen and Prince Philip watch a show at Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park, Cairns, during her Golden Jubilee tour



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Sir Robert Menzies was in power at the dawn of the new reign and, like his British counterpart Winston Churchill, he was older than Elizabeth's parents. Today the Labour Party's Julia Gillard, born in Wales in 1961 and therefore younger than three of the Queen's children, holds the office.

Menzies, like Churchill, had a romantic regard for the monarchy and famously described himself as 'British to the bootstraps'. During the Queen's second visit to Australia in 1963, Menzies hosted a dinner for her at Parliament House in Canberra and in a cringeworthy use of a verse by the Elizabethan poet Thomas Ford, he turned to Her Majesty and said: *'I did but see her passing by, and yet I love her till I die.'*

The Queen's first three tours were lengthy undertakings. Her 1963 visit and her next one in 1970 both lasted five weeks. The longest of her reign was that first massive Commonwealth tour of 1953-4 when she came ashore at Farm Cove in Sydney on 3 February 1954 and spent the next eight weeks touring every part of Australia. The 27-year-old monarch, accompanied then, as on all subsequent visits, by the Duke of Edinburgh, travelled 10,000 miles by air during those two months, making over 30 flights as well as covering 2,000 miles by road in 207 car trips. They visited all the state capitals apart from Darwin and some 70 country towns – many of them by special royal trains. It is maintained that this extensive programme allowed 75 per cent of Australia's population to see the Queen at least once during her visit.

In 1970 the Queen and Duke were accompanied by Princess Anne and, for part of the time, by the Prince of Wales for the celebrations marking the 200th anniversary of the discovery of Australia by Captain James Cook.

By the 1970s improvements in aviation technology meant the Queen could make shorter, more frequent visits. In October 1973 she stayed for just a week when she opened Sydney Opera House, built at a cost of AUS \$102 million. A massive firework display followed the opening accompanied by Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and the event was shown live on television throughout the world.

Four years later, in March 1977, the Queen spent three weeks visiting every state in Australia as part of her Silver Jubilee celebrations; a quarter of a century later she would return during her Golden Jubilee year. ▶





Huge crowds turn out to see the Queen and Prince Philip in Adelaide in 1954

BELOW: Her Majesty is in Melbourne in March 2006 to open the Commonwealth Games

NEAL FEATHERS

The Queen and Prince Philip have supported the Commonwealth Games as keenly as they have the Heads of Government Meetings. In October 1982 they flew to Brisbane to attend that year's games and in 2006 were again in Australia when the games were held in Melbourne. In addition Prince Philip attended the 1962 Commonwealth Games in Perth and six years earlier represented the Queen at the opening of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics.

In 1986 the Australia Acts removed the residual powers of the British government to intervene in the government of Australia, two years before the Queen's visit to mark the country's bicentenary. Once again she travelled extensively across the nation; she also opened the new Parliament House in Canberra.

In 1999 a referendum was held to decide whether Australia should remain a monarchy or become a republic headed by a president. The majority of voters decided to retain the Queen as head of state.

During her tour the following year, she reaffirmed her pledge to serve as Australia's sovereign for as long as its people wanted her. 'I have always made it clear that the future of the monarchy in Australia is an issue for you, the Australian people, and you alone, to decide by democratic and constitutional means,' she said. 'It should not be otherwise.'

This pragmatic approach, together with the professional way the Queen has always carried out her duties in Australia, has earned Her Majesty great respect, even though support for the monarchy itself has inevitably waned since her first tour. It is amazing that a decade into the 21st century, this South Pacific nation has a head of state who is based some ten thousand miles away.

That this status quo still exists is surely down to Elizabeth II's personal integrity as well as her commitment to her role as Queen of Australia. ■



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