

# 'More Birthdays! We Are Not Amused!'

A bit of cake, some games and presents – birthdays are always fun. The Mad Hatter in 'Alice in Wonderland' liked them so much that he even developed the idea of the 'Unbirthday' to make every day more fun. But seriously, how many birthdays does one person need?

The Queen of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth, it seems, needs several. Here's why:

The present Queen of the UK, Elizabeth II, was actually born on 21st April. This is the day on which she celebrates her own, personal birthday. Often this is a private affair; celebrated by close members of her family only. The firing of a gun salute is often the only public recognition of the day. The Queen's official birthday, however, is a very different affair.

Since the reign of King George II, the monarch of the United Kingdom has enjoyed the special privilege of an official birthday as well as their own. The custom started in 1748 during George II's reign. His actual birthday was in November and, knowing the British weather at that time of year, the sensible folk responsible for public

displays determined that June would be a better time of year for George's birthday. To make things even more complicated for George, the calendar style changed from Julian to Gregorian during his reign, making an originally October birthday (October 30th) into a November one (November 9th/10th)!

## Who Else Gets More Than One Birthday?

Paddington Bear is perhaps the most well-known example of the two birthday phenomena (after the Queen that is). In the books by Michael Bond, Paddington visits London and ends up in the household of the Browns. They agree that, like the Queen, all bears have two birthdays!

In many Catholic countries, a Saint's Day or a Name Day is celebrated as well as birthdays. This gives everyone two special days in the year. To figure out your Saint's Day, look at your first or Christian name and find a saint who shares this name. In other words, someone named Michael will share the Day of St. Michael and so celebrate on

29th September each year.

Some people have the fortune (or misfortune, depending on how you look at things) to be born on 29th February in a leap year. This means that their official birthday only occurs every four years in our calendar. Many solve the problem by celebrating each year on either 28th February or 1st March. Just think, though: maybe as you get older, only having a birthday every four years is best! At 40, you'd only have had 10 birthdays.



At this time, the celebrations began to commemorate not only the monarch of the day but the armed forces as well. Today, the Queen traditionally takes part in the 'Trooping the Colour' display on her official birthday. During the 'Trooping' parade, trained and operational troops from the Household Division (Foot Guards and Household Cavalry) assemble on Horse Guards Parade in Whitehall. The Queen carries out an inspection of the troops while riding in a carriage, then massed bands perform a musical troop and the escorted Regimental Colour is carried through the ranks. The Queen used to inspect the troops from horseback, riding her favourite mount, Burmese.

### Save the Date – But Which One?

While the date for the Queen's official birthday is generally the second Monday in June in Britain, this is not the case throughout the Commonwealth. Many other nations celebrate the British Queen's birthday with a public holiday and they don't always agree on when this should



be. Even states within the same country have been known to celebrate on different days!

### A Present for the Queen?

Thinking of giving the Queen a little something to celebrate one of her special days? What does one give the woman who has everything? Seriously – everything! Here are a few things to avoid as she already has them stashed away at Buckingham Palace:

You may think a tribal weapon would make a swell gift, but she already possesses both a Kiribatian sword made from shark's teeth and a Maori mere (a type of club).

Perhaps steering clear of animals would be sensible, considering the corgis might get jealous. Just in case, here are a few she's received as gifts already: a male elephant named Jumbo, two sloths from Brazil and a pair of red deer stags. Most end up at the London Zoo.

Considering 500 cases of tinned pineapples? She received these as a wedding present from Australia in 1947. At the time, with rationing still in force, they were probably very gratefully received!

Well then, what about an incredibly useful giant wine cooler in the shape of a grasshopper? She received one of these from the French president in 1972.



In Australia, for example, a celebration has been held since 1788. While most states now observe the sovereign's birthday on the second Monday in June (although this is mid-winter in Australia), Western Australia likes to do things a little differently. Western Australia Day, or 'Foundation Day', is celebrated there on the first Monday in June and so the Governor of Western Australia is given the job of proclaiming the day on which the state will observe the Queen's birthday each year. This might change depending on school terms, the Perth Royal Show dates or other holidays that may fall within the same range. Usually, the Queen gets a celebration there on the last Monday of September or the first Monday of October.

In Queensland, the celebration is now timed so that it creates a long weekend that coincides with the AFL and NRL grand finals. Obviously 'Aussie Rules' apply there!

Canada, too, has changed the official birthday date several times. The sovereign's birthday has been officially observed in Canada since 1845. At that time, a statute was passed to officially recognise Queen Victoria's birthday, which was 24th May. After Queen Victoria's death, the official date of the sovereign's birthday changed from 24th May, to 3rd June for George V and 23rd June for Edward VIII. George VI, Queen Elizabeth's father, had his birthday celebrated on several dates between 20th May and 14th June. Only in 1953, when Queen Elizabeth was a new monarch, was the date determined to be the Monday before 24th May. Victoria Day (the day always celebrated as Queen Victoria's special day) was also moved to this date. Although the two events are separate, they are still celebrated on the same Monday. This creates a bank holiday weekend in most Canadian provinces and territories known as 'May Two Four'. This is also, incidentally, the first guaranteed frost-free weekend for most of Canada and the date everyone plants out their petunias!

## Losing a Few Birthdays

Some former territories have used the celebration or non-celebration of the sovereign's birthday to make a political point. After a second military coup in 1987, Fiji ceased to be a Commonwealth realm. For a number of years, the Queen's birthday continued to be celebrated, although from then on, she was known as the Paramount Chief but not head of State. In 2012, the government of Commodore Frank Bainimarama announced that the holiday would be abolished. The date also ceased to be a public holiday in Hong Kong after the return of the territory to China in 1997.

In New Zealand, the Queen gets a birthday celebration on the first Monday in June but many have proposed replacing this holiday with Matariki (Maori New Year) in recognition of the first people of New Zealand. Some even think the holiday weekend should be renamed after Sir Edmund Hillary, a famous New Zealander who was the first person to ascend Mount Everest.

Regardless of how many official birthdays are changed to other dates or turned into celebrations of other things, the Queen won't be lacking for birthdays any time soon. Just imagine, though:

if she actually became one year older for each birthday celebrated, how old would she be by now?

## Birthday Dates for Your Calendar!

Here are a few of the overseas territories and Commonwealth countries that celebrate with the Queen (just not all at the same time!):

**Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha Islands** - third Monday in April

**Gibraltar/Channel Islands/Papua New**

**Guinea/ Solomon Islands** - second Monday in June

**Tuvalu** - second Saturday in June

**Saint Kitts and Nevis** - changeable each year

**The Norfolk Islands (celebrates the Queen of Australia** - AKA: Queen Elizabeth) on the Monday after the second Saturday in June!  
Got that?

