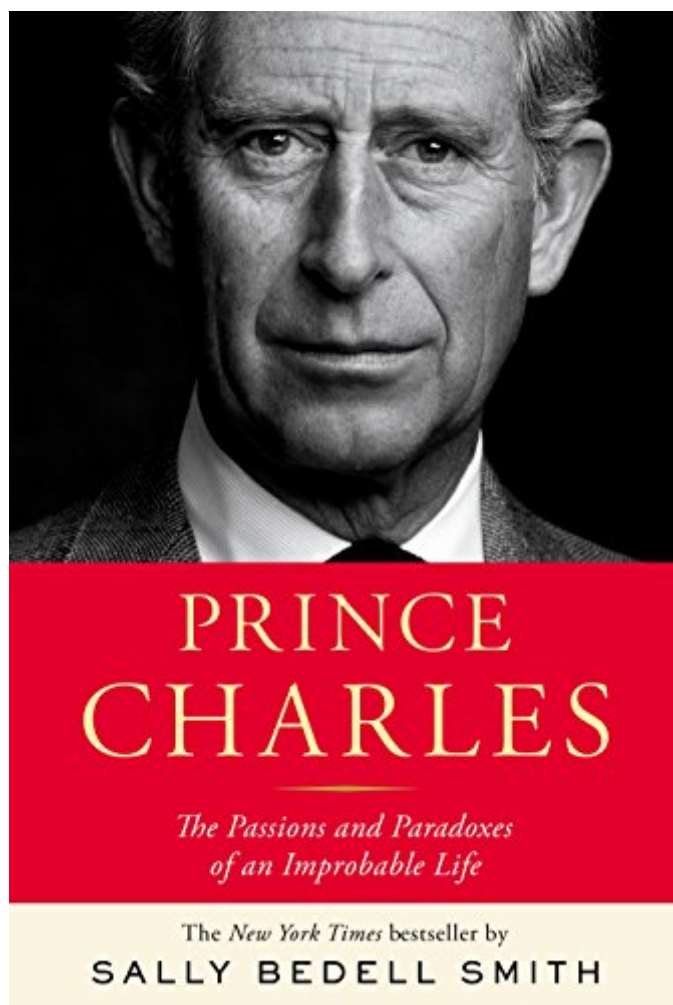


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# Prince Charles: The Passions And Paradoxes Of An Improbable Life



## Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER — The life and loves of Prince Charles are illuminated in a major new biography from the New York Times bestselling author of *Elizabeth the Queen* — perfect for fans of *The Crown*. Sally Bedell Smith returns once again to the British royal family to give us a new look at Prince Charles, the oldest heir to the throne in more than three hundred years. This vivid, eye-opening biography — the product of four years of research and hundreds of interviews with palace officials, former girlfriends, spiritual gurus, and more, some speaking on the record for the first time — is the first authoritative treatment of Charles's life that sheds light on the death of Diana, his marriage to Camilla, and his preparations to take the throne one day. Prince Charles brings to life the real man, with all of his ambitions, insecurities, and convictions. It begins with his lonely childhood, in which he struggled to live up to his father's expectations and sought companionship from the Queen Mother and his great-uncle Lord Mountbatten. It follows him through difficult years at school, his early love affairs, his intellectual quests, his entrepreneurial pursuits, and his intense search for spiritual meaning. It tells of the tragedy of his marriage to Diana; his eventual reunion with his true love, Camilla; and his relationships with William, Kate, Harry, and his grandchildren. Ranging from his glamorous palaces to his country homes, from his globe-trotting travels to his local initiatives, Smith shows how Prince Charles possesses a fiercely independent spirit and yet has spent more than six decades waiting for his destined role, living a life dictated by protocols he often struggles to obey. With keen insight and the discovery of unexpected new details, Smith lays bare the contradictions of a man who is more complicated, tragic, and compelling than we knew, until now.

Praise for *Prince Charles* — “[Smith] understands the British upper classes and aristocracy (including the royals) very well indeed. . . . [She] makes many telling, shrewd points in pursuit of realigning the popular image of Prince Charles.” — William Boyd, *The New York Times Book Review* — “[A] masterly account.” — *The Wall Street Journal* — “Thoroughly researched and insightful . . . In this profile, it is clear [Smith] got inside the circular barriers that protect the man and his position. The Charles that emerges is, as the subtitle suggests, both a paradox and a creature of his passions.” — *The Washington Times* — “[A] compellingly juicy bio . . . Windsor-philes will be mesmerized.” — *People* — “Prince Charles paints an affectingly human portrait. . . . Smith writes about [Charles's life] with a skill and sympathy she perfected in her 2012 biography of Charles's mother.” — *The Christian Science Monitor* — “Comprehensive and admirably fair . . . Until his accession to the throne,

Smith's portrait will stand as the definitive study. (starred review) "[A] fascinating book that is not just about a man who would be king, but also about the duties that come with privilege. Walter Isaacson "Sally Bedell Smith has given us a complete and compelling portrait of the man in the shadow of the throne. It's all here, from the back stairs of the palaces to the front pages of the tabs. Tom Brokaw

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you are looking for a comprehensive and sympathetic portrayal of Prince Charles, you may want to pick this book up. It doesn't attempt to camouflage Charles' flaws. And it chronicles Charles' strengths. For too long the Royal Family wasn't able to marry the people who might have been best suited for them such as a divorced person, a commoner, or a woman with a past. Thankfully, in part to Charles and Diana's disastrous marriage, that has changed for William and Harry. My two primary take-aways from this book - and I've read all 600+ pages of it - regarding Charles is that self-pity may triumph over gratitude occasionally over his lot in life. Yes, he's been waiting 60 plus years to be King of England, but he has had extraordinary opportunities. To Charles' credit, he has made

much of those opportunities in original ways. And that's the second take-away. I was amazed at the amount of endeavors he has been involved in to benefit others, and most of them have been successful except for when a staff member embezzles large amounts of money. Because Charles is involved in so many enterprises, the oversight has been lacking in a few instances. But the net gain is positive. The enterprise which fascinates me as a designer is the community which Charles has been involved with: Poundbury. Poundbury is an experimental newly constructed town on the outskirts of Dorchester in the county of Dorset. The land is owned by the Duchy of Cornwall. If you google images of it, it is charming. We need more Poundbury's in the world. It was inspired by Seaside, Florida. You learn in this book that Charles has funded at-risk youth opportunities. One youth became a multi-millionaire entrepreneur. The actor Idris Elba also was schooled through Charles' programs. Some other interesting observations gleaned from this book:\*

- \* Charles kept asking Duchess Devo of Devonshire of Chatsworth for some art of Lucian Freud's until she gave in\*
- \* a PR initiative was undertaken to integrate Camilla into Charles' life publicly so that public opinion would finally approve of their marriage\*
- \* the experimental community in Scotland near Dumfries hasn't thrived as much as Poundbury due to the economy there\*
- \* Charles felt let-down when his parents, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, only stayed 20 minutes to view Poundbury, one of his most successful projects\*
- \* Charles lays on the floor at Highgrove by an open window to listen to folks' comments upon visiting his beautiful garden\*
- \* William and Harry approach philanthropy as a team focusing on three main categories: conservation, mental health and the military. Their initiatives are much more short-term compared to Charles's.\*
- \* There is friction occasionally between Buckingham Palace and Charles' team\*
- \* Charles doesn't spend much time with Prince George - Charles is too busy

What you have to admire is that even though Charles was pretty much straight-jacketed into choices about his life by his parents - especially Prince Philip who is the opposite of his son and chose activities and experiences for Charles which would have suited Philip the best - Charles has eventually carved out a life which suits him. Some of Charles's melancholy is perhaps pent-up from a fairly miserable childhood about which he didn't have much affection or happy experiences. Gourdonstoun School sounds like torture which could have caused a mental breakdown in a less mentally sturdy individual. Charles stuffed most of his early misery, and it comes leaking out occasionally in some of his comments I think. Rejection or criticism now feels like the original pain of criticism in Charles' early life when Philip may have wanted Charles to be more like him kind of thing. Psychologists tell us that our subconscious doesn't distinguish between a hurt now and a hurt from an early life when we were more powerless, so we may respond as we would have liked to when we were a child and fairly defenseless. The good news is that the Royal Family

has learned from past mistakes, and William and Harry have benefited to live happier lives which suit their personalities and the 21st century. This book is highly readable, and didn't seem overly-long if you read a few chapters a night. It's not sensational, but it doesn't gloss over mistakes and read like a hagiography either. If you like Charles, or the Royal Family, you should enjoy it.

"The book balances out the popular image of Diana as being totally blameless for the problems in the marriage."

Gives a very fair account of , an interesting and willful man . How his missteps were handled and his bad luck coped with Well written JMS

I have read a lot of articles etc. about Charles, Diana and Royal family over the years so this book didn't illuminate anything new.

Boring. Didn't get through the entire book.

A bit repetitive but otherwise an interesting read.

A bit tedious in spots but overall good. Different perspective.

Sally Bedell Smith's *Prince Charles: The Passions and Paradoxes of an Improbable Life* will likely be the standard reference on Charles until the end of whatever reign he manages. Incorporating primary source research from high levels such as Nancy Reagan, for instance, allowed the biographer to view their correspondence with the Prince and this is far from a hagiography, with almost no one outside of William and Harry coming across well. A half star off for a bit of a strange conclusion about what his reign may look like after hundreds of pages stating otherwise leaves this at 4.5 stars, rounded up to 5 for one of the more fascinating books ever produced on the British royals. Bedell Smith identifies two keys to Charles very early on: that as heir to the throne, once he reached 18 the income from the Duchy of Cornwall allowed him both a tremendous lifestyle and near complete independence from the control of the Palace, and just as significantly, that his childhood left scars. On the latter, Philip made disastrous choices as an essentially absentee father who wanted to toughen up his then-pudgy son and Charles once described a particularly brutal

boarding school in Scotland where the windows were left open in the winter and snow piled on the bunks as *ÀfÂçÃ* *â* *–Ã* *Å*“Colditz in kilts*ÀfÂçÃ* *â* *–Ã* *Â*• *ÀfÂçÃ* *â* *–Ã* *â* *œ* and of his associated relatives, only the Queen Mother and Mountbatten appeared to remotely care about his best interests. The end product was an introspective, lonely, arts-loving young man that was a dilettante intellectually and distant from his far more practical parents; years later, Charles lashed out that after spending several years on a hugely important project to him, they had spent a grand total of 20 minutes of their lives bothering to visit it. Just as significantly, while his position only partially protected him from the worst brutalizations of the boarding school system (and a year in Australia constituted the sole happiness of his youth), he came away from his formal education almost entirely without friends of his own age. In turn, this set the stage for both Camilla and Diana. While Charles had any number of older female mentors, Camilla was really the first direct peer that he became emotionally close with. Her marriage to a serial philanderer (remarkably, both fathers took out an engagement notice in the Times to force a proposal) shocked Charles, who then engaged in a series of flings throughout the 1970s (when his popularity was nearly twice that of the Queen’s), nearly died in a skiing accident, and lost the one close older male figure in his life when Mountbatten was murdered - who Bedell Smith notes rather pointedly would have warned him off of Diana, and whose grand plan to marry his granddaughter off to Charles failed as they grew up as acquaintances without a romantic connection. The wrong person then entered his life at precisely the wrong time. Diana self-harmed long before she became involved with Charles, kept doing so throughout the marriage and viewed the urging to get treatment for it as a sign that the Palace was lined up against her (despite the fact that Charles had very little coordination with them *ÀfÂçÃ* *â* *–Ã* *â* *œ* he and Philip communicated by letters, and an interesting note is that Charles was in regular therapy throughout his marriage), and rather liked the fantasy of being married to him right up until she moved into the Palace and Charles left for a tour and found out what her day to day life would be like. What is a bit shocking is despite the wonderful things that Diana did in the public sphere, in private she appears to have been a nasty piece of work; her paranoia about Camilla was initially unfounded but present from the very beginning, and the marriage was essentially disintegrating from the day of the wedding onwards. Some of this was her immaturity and his foolishness, but later life Diana doesn’t *ÀfÂçÃ* *â* *–Ã* *â*,çt come across well either; she berated a heart surgeon she was dating for not taking her calls in the operating room, for instance, and a family friend, the van Cutsems, appear to have been far more significant in William and Harry’s upbringing than either parent even while both were still alive. It may be telling that the Princes had to be convinced to walk behind the funeral procession by none other than Philip, who noted

correctly that they would regret not doing so later in life. All that said, many of Charles' problems have been self-created. He comes across as remarkably out of touch at times, and Bedell Smith has any number of sources confirm a very disturbing personality trait: that he simply won't listen to advice and will cut out people from his life if they disagree with him. Ultimately, Charles is someone who would probably have been better off left to patronizing the arts - he carries an easel nearly everywhere, and knows Shakespeare and history better than several actors who have met him - rather than many of the roles that he has carved out for himself. This isn't to say that the last 40 years of his life have done no good; some like the Prince's Trust have done great things for youth along with his international conservation work in places like Romania, but others like his architectural dabbling and focus on sustainability are mixed, and still others like alternative medicine have been disastrous and dangerous. How will Charles do as King? That's the most important question, and something that Bedell Smith addresses somewhat unsatisfactorily, stating that he's well aware of the constitutional limitations of the role despite 500 pages implying otherwise, and detailing the chaos of his management style (although in one of the more apt comments, someone notes that future PMs will find their weekly visits with him somewhat less calming than with the Queen.) A sequel will have to be written in the next couple of decades, but for now this is the definitive work. 5 stars.

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