

Elizabeth I

On 17 November, 1558, Princess Elizabeth sat beneath an oak tree at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire. She had spent much of her adult life here, away from the royal court. Her sister Queen Mary did not trust her, because she was not only popular but a Protestant as well. In 1554, Mary had even imprisoned her in the Tower of London for two months.

But now news arrived that Mary was dead and Elizabeth was the new queen. She travelled to London, where she was crowned eight weeks later. It was a time of great uncertainty. Many people feared that a young female monarch would not be strong enough to rule the country. There were two major problems to be solved at once: religion and marriage.

Mary's attempt to turn England back into a Catholic country had caused turmoil. In 1559, Elizabeth framed new religious laws with the help of her chief minister, William Cecil. These established England as a Protestant country. The queen became Supreme Governor (rather than head) of the Church, and priests had to use the English Prayer Book.

The problem of Elizabeth's marriage was never settled. Many kings and princes were keen to marry her, and her ministers wanted her to produce an heir to the throne.



Sir Walter Raleigh was a talented poet, soldier and explorer. He was one of Elizabeth's favourites in court, and had many rivals. He fell from favour when the queen discovered that he had secretly married one of her maids.

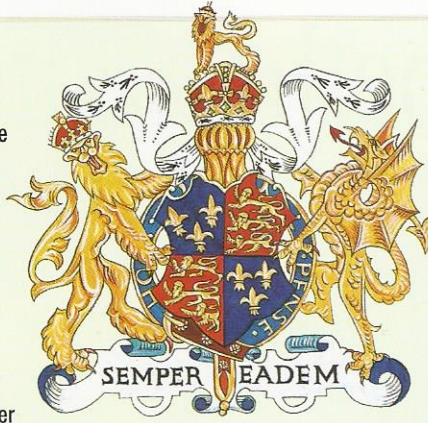


Portraits of Elizabeth I were painted to stress her grandeur. They were not meant to be accurate likenesses. Here, she wears a sumptuous costume and jewels. Her left hand touches the globe, as a symbol of her subjects' explorations and conquests. Portraits also had to flatter her, and those she did not like were destroyed.

- 1533** Elizabeth born in Greenwich Palace, London, to Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn.
- 1536** Anne Boleyn beheaded.
- 1554** Elizabeth arrested on Mary's orders and accused of involvement with rebellions; she is held in the Tower of London and released after two months.
- 1558** Death of Mary; Elizabeth becomes the new queen.
- 1559** Laws confirming the Protestant faith in England; Elizabeth rejects offer of marriage from son of Holy Roman Emperor.
- 1562** Elizabeth nearly dies of smallpox; parliament urges her to marry.
- 1569** Anti-Protestant rebellion in northern England.
- 1570** Pope excommunicates Elizabeth.
- 1571** Ridolfi Plot to assassinate Elizabeth discovered.
- 1572** Treaty signed between England and France.

THE ROYAL COAT OF ARMS

Queen Elizabeth's coat of arms showed a shield quartered with the lions of England and the feathers of Wales. Above was a helmet and crest, and around it was a French motto which means 'Evil Be To Him Who Thinks Evil'. Underneath was another motto in Latin, which means 'Always the Same'. The supporters on either side were the lion of England and the dragon of Wales. Henry VIII's Parliament had passed the Acts of Union between 1536 and 1543, bringing Wales officially under English rule. It also became a Protestant country, and a Welsh translation of the New Testament appeared in 1567.



The Tower of London acted as Elizabeth's prison for two months prior to her reign. Once she became queen, it served as the prison for several traitors who were intent on overthrowing the Protestant queen and returning the country to Catholicism.

But Elizabeth realized that a foreign husband would make her unpopular and lessen her own power.

England now needed friends abroad. After the queen's new Protestant laws, many Catholic countries became enemies. The pope 'excommunicated' Elizabeth, cutting her off from the Catholic Church and declaring that she had no right to rule. But the queen found an ally in the French. In 1572, England and France made a treaty promising to help each other if they were attacked by another power.

Elizabethan ladies of fashion. Clothes for the wealthy grew more ornate throughout Elizabeth's reign. Both sexes wore clothes which were padded, quilted, embroidered or stiffened with whalebone. The sleeves on women's dresses were separate and tied or pinned to the bodice, with padded pieces to disguise the join.



Dozens of grand houses were built in Elizabeth's time. Some retained features of the old fortified castles, such as the moat, but this was more for decoration than for defence. Others were huge palaces, or 'prodigy houses', with many windows and interiors adorned with tapestries, carvings and stone staircases.



Elizabeth signed Mary's death warrant. She took a long time to agree because she was unwilling to execute someone who was not just of royal blood but her own cousin. Elizabeth also realized that Mary's death might give Catholic plotters overseas a better excuse to assassinate her.



Elizabethan Life

1558 Thousands perish in epidemic of influenza and famine caused by bad harvests.

1559 Protestants, led by John Knox, occupy Edinburgh.

1560 Scotland breaks with Rome and formally becomes Protestant.

1563 New laws fix hours of work for labourers.

1565 Potatoes brought to England from the New World.

1572 New Poor Law gives parishes the duty of providing for poor and old people.

1574 Scots pass law to control wandering beggars.

1580 Longleat House in Wiltshire completed.

1587 Burghley House in Lincolnshire completed.

1588 First complete Welsh translation of the Bible.

1589 First flushing lavatory built by Sir John Harington.

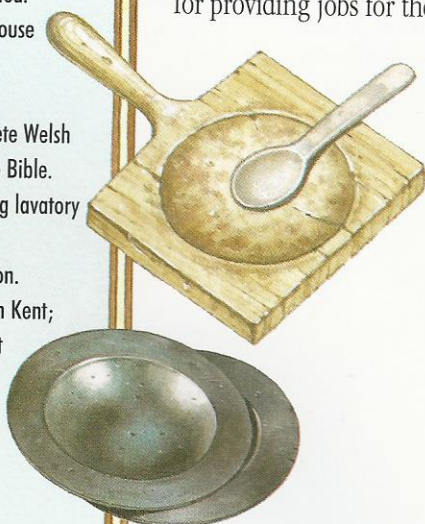
1596 Food riots in Kent; protesters against land enclosures march from Oxfordshire to London.

At the beginning of the Tudor Age, Britain's population increased for the first time since the Black Death. That growth continued (in spite of outbreaks of famine and disease) through Elizabeth's reign. By 1603, the population of England and Wales had risen from 3 million to 4.25 million.

More people meant greater demand for food and goods. Industry began to prosper and more land was cultivated to grow crops. But this was not good for everyone. As farmland became more valuable, landowners enclosed more fields for their sheep and cattle to graze. Villagers had less space to grow crops and feed their own animals. Rents and prices rose, as well – much faster than workers' wages. The old feudal system of the Middle Ages had broken down by the 1570s, leaving many labourers without jobs or land. This caused a massive increase in begging. Parliament passed a series of Poor Laws to try to deal with them. In 1572, each parish was made responsible for providing jobs for the poor.



Coins were made of pure gold or silver in early Tudor times. But Henry VIII debased (spoiled) the coinage by mixing it with base metals such as lead. In 1561, Elizabeth restored coins to their proper purity.



Meals, for most people, consisted mainly of bread, soup and boiled meat. Rich people could afford luxuries such as sugar, wine, spices and bread made from white flour.

WORKING CLOTHES

Ordinary people could not afford to copy the fantastic and colourful costumes of the wealthy. They wore clothes that were more comfortable and practical, but very drab. Men wore a loose-fitting shirt and breeches

of coarse woollen cloth. Women wore a kirtle (dress) and apron of the same material. These were usually coloured brown or blue with simple vegetable dyes. The clothes would rarely get washed, and in winter underclothes were never removed at all. Outer garments and boots were made of leather.

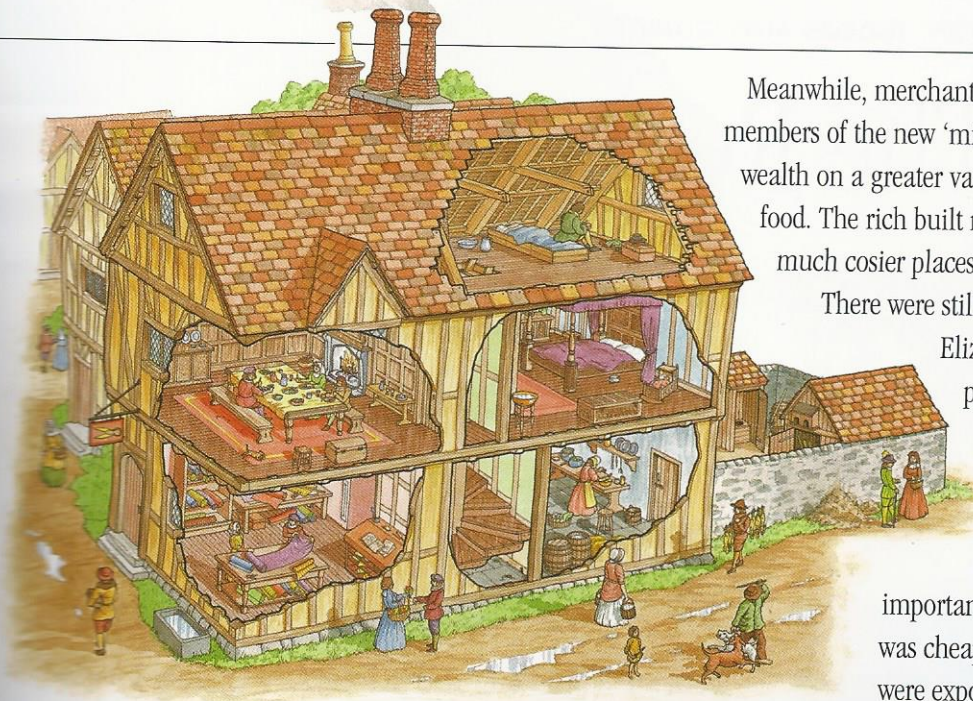


Meanwhile, merchants, sheep farmers and other members of the new 'middle class' could spend their wealth on a greater variety of clothes, furniture and food. The rich built magnificent houses, which were much cosier places than the grim old castles.

There were still at least nine million sheep in Elizabethan Britain – two for every person! Sheep were vital not just in farming but in trade. The production of woollen cloth was the country's biggest industry, and was especially important in the north, where labour was cheaper. Wool and finished cloth were exported to mainland Europe. Other important exports included coal and

copper. London, Britain's biggest city, had a population of over 200,000 in 1600. It was overcrowded, noisy and smelly. One visitor described the city as 'the filthiest in the world'. Queen Elizabeth feared that London would grow so large that it would become a focus of riots. She tried to limit the number of new buildings and inhabitants.

Over 90 per cent of Britons still lived in the countryside and depended on townspeople to buy their produce. However, the state of the roads was a barrier to trade. They were little better than muddy tracks. Traders sent their cargo by river or sea whenever they could.



Town houses and shops were built with a timber frame covered with bricks and plaster, and roofed with clay tiles. Servants slept in the attic. The family living room and bedrooms were on the first floor, and the kitchen and storerooms on the ground floor.

The streets of an Elizabethan town would be crowded with street stalls, shoppers, carts carrying goods, horsemen and country people bringing in their goods to sell. Shops of craftsmen such as metalworkers and cutlery were on the ground floor of houses. Each workshop or inn had its own sign, as many people were still unable to read. Pickpockets looked for victims in the crowd.



The Renaissance in Britain



- 1491** Death of William Caxton, printing pioneer.
- 1564** William Shakespeare born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire.
- 1567** Opening of London's first proper theatre, the Red Lion.
- 1575** Tallis and Byrd publish a collection of their musical settings.
- 1580–1600** Nicholas Hilliard paints series of miniatures.
- 1589–91** Shakespeare's first plays written and performed.
- 1590** Edmund Spenser begins writing his poem *The Faerie Queene*, which glorifies Queen Elizabeth.
- 1591** William Smythson designs Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire.
- 1599** The Globe playhouse opens in London.
- 1616** Death of Shakespeare.

During the Elizabethan age, only men were allowed to act on stage. They played all the parts in a play, even the female roles.



The Globe playhouse was where Shakespeare's company performed plays. Spectators could pay one penny to stand as 'groundlings' below the stage, or two pennies to sit in the sheltered galleries.

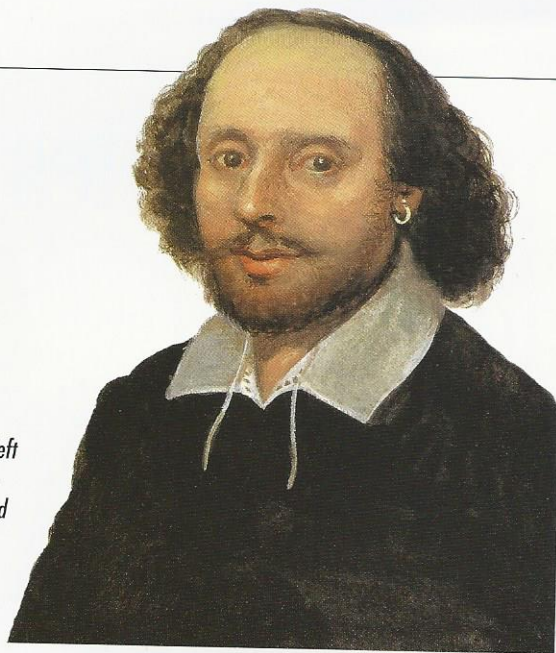


Ornate glassware and pottery, decorated with engraving or with designs in silver and gilt, were produced by craftsmen. A lot of precious metal and gemstones came from the Americas.

Since about 1500, Britain had felt the effects of the Renaissance. This 'rebirth' had seen an outburst of fresh creativity throughout Europe. Starting in Italy in the 14th century, it had spread. Painters, writers, sculptors and scholars began to look at the world in new ways, and use new techniques and theories.

In Britain, the painter Nicholas Hilliard produced exquisite miniature portraits of courtiers and monarchy, including Elizabeth herself. Thomas Tallis and William Byrd composed beautiful choral music and Robert Smythson designed stunning palaces. Writers, such as Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson, drew huge audiences to new city playhouses.





Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, in 1564. He left the town as a young man to work in London, but returned as a rich and successful playwright when he retired. His birthplace can be visited today.



WILLIAM CAXTON

Caxton was a cloth merchant who learned the new craft of printing. He used single pieces of type for each letter. These were put together to form a page of print, then broken up and used again. Caxton published over 100 titles, covering history, religion and adventure. Among them were the life of St Jerome (above), Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Malory's stories of King Arthur.

William Shakespeare, the most famous playwright of all, created a new type of verse drama, which gave a vivid picture of the Elizabethan world. In comedies such as *Twelfth Night* and tragedies such as *King Lear*, he explored the range of human feelings. Until late Tudor times, actors worked as travelling bands. But by 1600 several playhouses had been built in London, notably the Globe, where most of Shakespeare's greatest plays were first seen. These theatres boasted music and special effects.

The spread of Renaissance ideas was made easier by the development of printing. Until the 1470s there had been few books in Britain. Each one had to be copied out by hand. In 1476, William Caxton produced the first printed book in Britain, using techniques invented in Germany. Soon, new printing presses were set up, turning out quantities of cheap books and pamphlets. For the first time, information and ideas were available to anyone who could read. The printed word became an important way of forming public opinion.

This reconstruction of the Globe theatre was completed in 1997 and sits next to the river Thames just 200 metres from the site of the original Elizabethan theatre.



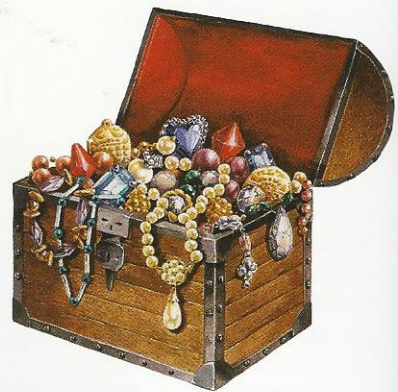
Explorers, Pirates and Armadas

- 1497** John Cabot reaches coast of Newfoundland.
- 1555** The Muscovy Company founded to trade with Russia.
- 1562** John Hawkins begins carrying slaves from West Africa to the Caribbean.
- 1568** Revolt in Netherlands against Spanish rule; Elizabeth sends help to rebels.
- 1570** Pope excommunicates Elizabeth.
- 1576–83** Attempts by Frobisher and Gilbert to find a northwest passage.
- 1577–80** Drake circumnavigates the world.
- 1585** First, unsuccessful New World colony founded on Roanoke Island.
- 1586** Spanish finalize plans to invade England; Babington Plot against Elizabeth is uncovered; Mary Queen of Scots is sentenced to death.
- 1588** Spanish Armada sets sail and is attacked in the English Channel; the Spanish retreat northwards; 60 ships survive.
- 1595** Raleigh's trip in search of El Dorado fails.
- 1600** East India Company founded to trade with Asia.
- 1607** Colony of Virginia founded.

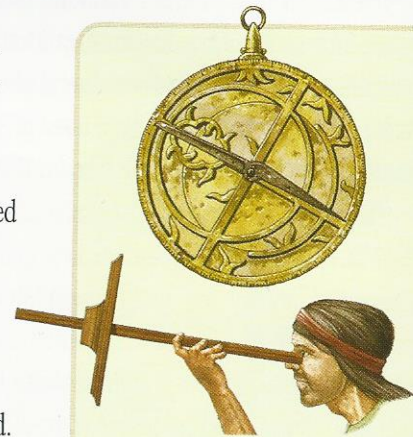
***Ships sailed vast distances** so that explorers could find new sea routes for trade. Some explorers aimed to reach the Far East, by sailing westwards across the Atlantic – but they found the American continents in the way!*

When the Tudor Age began, Europeans were on the brink of amazing discoveries about their world. Merchants were eager to expand their business, and find new sea routes. But the sea was also one of the greatest threats to Britain's safety.

There was one place above all that merchants wanted to reach – the Far East. In Cathay (China) they could buy wonderful silks, gold and porcelain. In the Spice Islands (the Moluccas) they could buy precious cloves and nutmegs. The trouble was, nobody knew the way. Then, in 1487, Portuguese ships rounded the southern tip of Africa. This opened up an easterly sea route to India and the Far East. In 1492, Spanish ships under Christopher Columbus set out for China in the opposite direction – westwards. To Columbus's surprise, he found the vast continents of the Americas instead.



Plundered treasure. Drake's piratical expeditions made him very rich. On his round-the-world voyage, he captured treasure worth £25 million from one galleon alone!



FINDING YOUR WAY

Navigating a Tudor sailing ship was a mixture of experience and guesswork. The captain could find out his latitude (how far north or south he was) by using an astrolabe or a backstaff. By looking at the Sun through these, he could measure its angle above the horizon. However, working out longitude (how far east or west), without reliable clocks, was much more difficult.



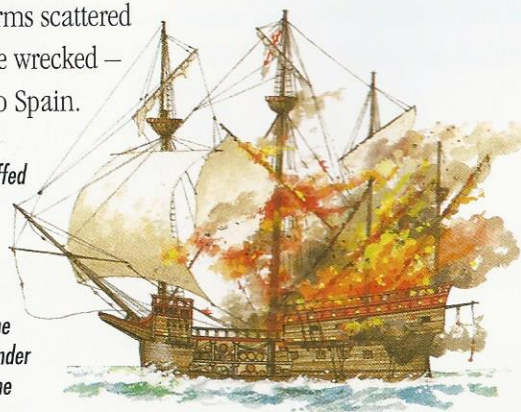
Britain joined in the adventure. In 1497, John Cabot sailed westwards from Bristol in search of silks and spices. He landed on the coast of Newfoundland. There were no exotic goods to buy, but something that was just as valuable – fish. North America and the Caribbean became a crucial part of Britain's trading empire.

Meanwhile, other explorers were trying to find other ways to the Far East. In 1577, Francis Drake set off to lead the second expedition to circumnavigate the world, following in the footsteps of the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan. Drake returned three years later in 1580.

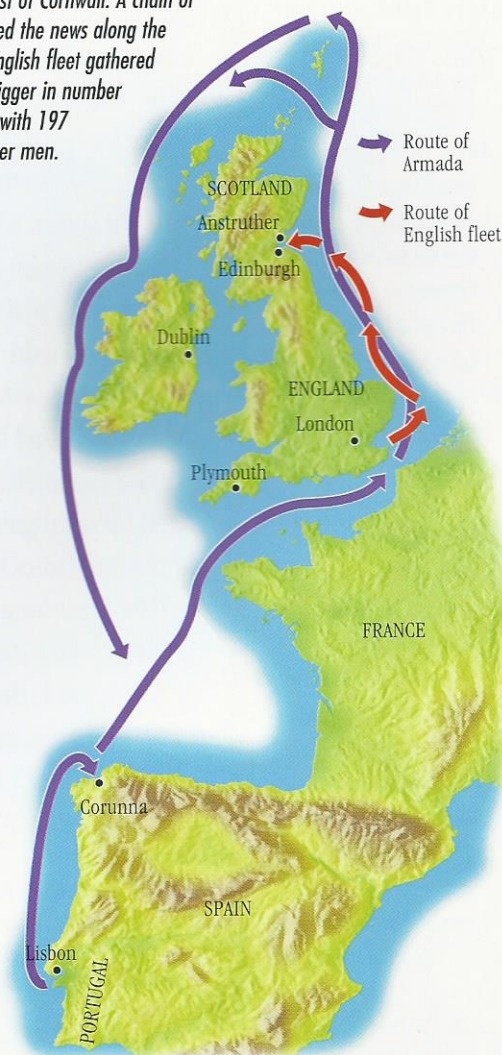
In the meantime, trouble had been brewing between Britain and Spain, who wanted to return Britain back to Catholic rule. In July 1588, an invasion fleet, or Armada, of 130 Spanish ships reached the English Channel. The English fleet harassed the invasion force all the way up the narrow Channel. The Armada anchored off the Dutch coast for safety.

Then the English commander Lord Howard sent in eight blazing 'fireships'. The terrified Spaniards were forced away from the shore and the two fleets clashed in a battle off Gravelines. The Spaniards suffered terrible losses and gave up the invasion. They headed for Spain, round the north of Scotland, but fierce storms scattered the fleet and many were wrecked – only 60 ships made it to Spain.

The eight fireships were stuffed with anything which would burn – including tubs of butter! The guns were loaded with double shot, and went off when the fire reached them. The ships were released at night, under full sail, to be blown towards the tightly packed Spanish fleet.



The Armada was first sighted off the Isles of Scilly, to the west of Cornwall. A chain of beacon fires relayed the news along the south coast. The English fleet gathered to attack. It was bigger in number than the Armada, with 197 ships, but had fewer men.



The route taken by the Spanish Armada. After the Battle of Gravelines, it escaped northwards because that was the way the wind blew. Many Spaniards were washed up on the Irish coast.