

The Reign of Elizabeth I 1568-1603

GCSE History – Elizabethan England

Part One: Elizabeth and her Government

Key people

Monarch

Elizabeth I (1533-1603)

Elizabeth was the last of the Tudor monarchs, dying in 1603 without producing an heir. Her reign is described as a 'Golden Age' in English history due to religious stability, voyages of exploration, developments in culture and fashion and the wealth some in England enjoyed.

Privy Councilors

William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520-1598)

Elizabeth's most trusted advisor, Cecil was named Secretary of State in 1558. He sought to avoid war, unite the country with moderate policies and was a devout protestant. He was made Lord Treasurer in 1571.

Francis Walsingham (1532-1590)

Known as 'The Spymaster', Walsingham was Elizabeth's eyes and ears against potential plots. A radical Puritan, he was fiercely loyal to Elizabeth and uncovered multiple plots against her.

Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (1533-1588)

Elizabeth's childhood sweetheart and friend, Dudley was fiercely loyal to Elizabeth; there were even rumours of a relationship between the two. He was made Master of the Horse, meaning he was responsible for Elizabeth's safety.

Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex (1565-1601)

One of the Queen's favourites towards the end of her reign, Essex led an uprising against the Queen and was executed for treason in 1601.

Key terms

Accession

Come to the throne; crowned as monarch

'Divide and Rule'

Elizabeth's tactic of encouraging competition between privy councillors to ensure their loyalty.

Gentry

Members of a 'middling class' who are increasing in wealth and power.

Heir

Next in line to the throne.

Illegitimate

Not legally entitled to take the throne.

Justice of the Peace

Members of the gentry tasked with controlling local populations.

Lords Lieutenant

Given orders from the Privy Council and tasked with keeping authority across England. They were in charge of Justices of the Peace.

Lord Treasurer

Minister in charge of England's finances.

The Royal Court

The Court was simply wherever the Queen was. It included the Queen's household (500 ministers, advisors, nobles, servants).

Parliament

House of elected officials. The monarch decided when to call parliament, usually to ask for taxes.

Patronage

Showing favouritism by giving individuals important jobs in return for loyalty.

Privy Council

Council of advisors used by the Queen to govern England.

Progresses

Elizabeth tours England, visiting nobles' houses.

Key events

Elizabeth's early life

- Daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Made illegitimate in 1536.
- Difficult relationship with siblings as England went through multiple religious changes.
- Intelligent child who spoke 6 languages, read widely, able to converse and talk about politics.

Elizabeth's problems at ascension

- **Heir** – unmarried with no heir to the throne.
- **Female ruler** – doubts over young queen's ability to rule
- **Legitimacy** – some doubted Elizabeth's legitimacy
- **Religion** – England is divided between Catholicism and Protestantism.

Elizabeth's government

- **Privy Council** – Close advisors to the Queen responsible for running the country; Elizabeth appointed 19 men. These men were loyal to the Queen and would compete to impress her. She used Divide and Rule to control her Privy Councilors.
- **Progresses** – Elizabeth travelled the country, staying in the houses of nobles. This was done to check that laws were being followed and to show Elizabeth was visible.
- **Patronage** – Elizabeth would promote and give favour to certain ministers. This was done to make ministers seek Elizabeth's approval and admiration.
- **Parliament** – Elizabeth regarded Parliament as an inconvenience and mostly called them when she needed taxes. She even went 29 years without calling parliament. She was furious when MPs began to question her about the issue of marriage. In 1572, MP Peter Wentworth was imprisoned for asking for MPs to have Freedom of Speech.

Essex's Rebellion

- **Robert Devereux (Earl of Essex)** was one of Elizabeth's favourites towards the end of her life.
- He was sent to Ireland to put down a rebellion. Without consulting the Queen, Essex made peace with Irish rebels.
- When he returned to England he marched on London in an attempt to 'rescue' the Queen from her councillors. It looked like he was leading an uprising against the Queen.
- He was tried and executed in 1603.

