

## Elizabeth I



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Elizabeth I – the last Tudor monarch – was born at Greenwich on 7 September 1533, the daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife, Anne Boleyn.

Her early life was full of uncertainties, and she seemed to have no chance to ascend to the throne after the birth of her half-brother Edward in 1537. She was then third in line behind her Roman Catholic half-sister, Princess Mary. Roman Catholics always considered her illegitimate and she only narrowly escaped execution after a failed rebellion against Queen Mary in 1554.

Elizabeth succeeded to the throne on her half-sister's death in November 1558. She was very well-educated (fluent in six languages), and had inherited intelligence, determination and shrewdness<sup>1</sup> from both parents.

Her 45-year reign is generally considered one of the most glorious in English history. During it the Church of England was established. Its doctrines were laid down in the 39 Articles of 1563, a compromise between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

Although autocratic<sup>2</sup>, Elizabeth had astute political judgement and chose her ministers well.

Elizabeth's reign also saw many brave voyages of discovery, including those of Francis Drake and Walter Raleigh, particularly to the Americas. These expeditions prepared England for an age of colonisation and trade expansion, which Elizabeth herself recognised by establishing the East India Company in 1600.

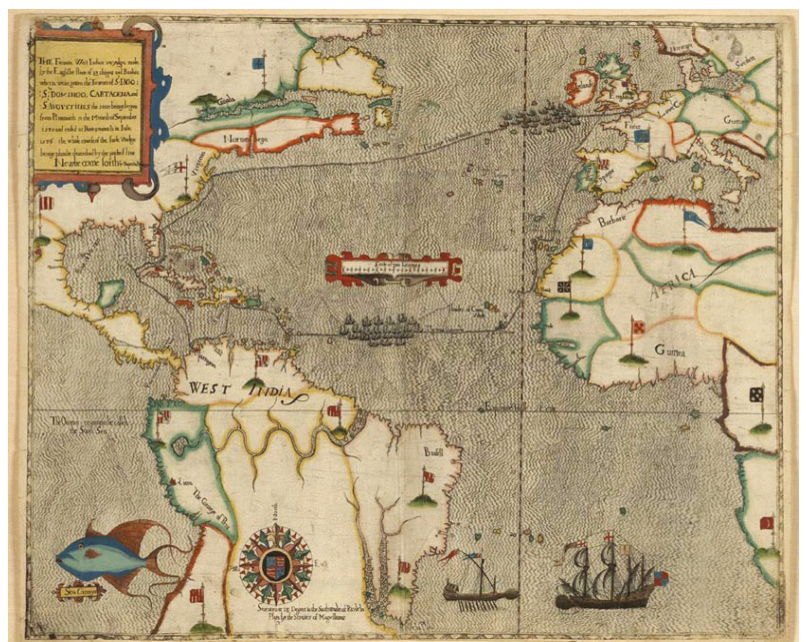
The arts flourished during Elizabeth's reign. Theatres grew – the Queen attended the first performance of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Composers such as William Byrd worked in Elizabeth's court.

The image of Elizabeth's reign is one of triumph and success.

The Queen herself was often called 'Gloriana', 'Good Queen Bess' and 'The Virgin Queen'.

However, Elizabeth's reign was one of considerable danger and difficulty for many, with threats<sup>3</sup> of invasion from Spain and from France. Much of northern England was in rebellion in 1569-70. A papal bull of 1570 specifically released Elizabeth's subjects from their allegiance<sup>4</sup>, and she passed harsh<sup>5</sup> laws against Roman Catholics after plots<sup>6</sup> against her life were discovered.

Sir Francis Drake's  
West Indian Voyage.



### Glossary

1 intelligence and sharpness in practical matters – 2 authoritarian – 3 menaces – 4 loyalty to the sovereign – 5 rigid – 6 secret plans

One such plot involved Mary, Queen of Scots, who had fled to England in 1568 after her second husband's murder and her subsequent marriage to a man believed to have been involved in his murder.

As a likely<sup>7</sup> successor to Elizabeth, Mary spent 19 years as Elizabeth's prisoner.

Later she was tried, found guilty and executed in 1587.

In 1588, the English navy scored a great victory over the Spanish invasion fleet of around 130 ships – the 'Armada'. The Armada was intended to overthrow<sup>8</sup> the Queen and re-establish Roman Catholicism by conquest, as Philip II believed he had a claim to the English throne through his marriage to Mary.

During Elizabeth's long reign, the nation also suffered from high prices and severe economic depression, especially in the countryside. The war against Spain was not very successful after the Armada had been beaten and, together with other campaigns, it was very costly.

Despite the combination of financial strains<sup>9</sup> and prolonged war after 1588, Parliament was not summoned more often. There were only 16 sittings of the Commons during Elizabeth's reign, five of which were in the period 1588-1601. Although Elizabeth freely used her power to veto legislation, she avoided confrontation and did not attempt to define Parliament's constitutional position and rights.

Elizabeth chose never to marry, using her marriage prospects as a political tool in foreign and domestic policies. She died at Richmond Palace on 24 March 1603, having become a legend in her lifetime.

(Adapted from [www.royal.gov.uk](http://www.royal.gov.uk))

### Glossary

<sup>7</sup> apparently destined – <sup>8</sup> overturn – <sup>9</sup> pressures



### ↓ TEXT COMPREHENSION

Answer the following questions.

- 1 Which dynasty did Elizabeth belong to?
- 2 When did she become queen?
- 3 How long did she reign?
- 4 What were her qualities?
- 5 What was Elizabeth also called?
- 6 What were the main conflicts during her reign?
- 7 Why did Elizabeth pass harsh laws against the Catholics?
- 8 What was the role of Parliament in Elizabethan times?

### ↓ WRITING

Fill in the chart below.

#### MAIN CHANGES DURING THE ELIZABETHAN ERA

| Religion       |  |
|----------------|--|
| Foreign Policy |  |
| Art            |  |
| Wars           |  |
| Internal Plots |  |