

Shakespeare in his Historical Context

Before Elizabeth

King Henry VIII wanted a son, because he believed women could not rule well. When his first wife Catherine of Aragon had a girl (Mary) he asked the Pope for a divorce. The Pope refused, so Henry made himself Head of the Church of England. His second wife, Anne Boleyn, had a girl too (Elizabeth). Anne was executed. His third wife died giving birth to a son (Edward). Henry had six wives altogether. To get more money, he shut all the monasteries, which were very rich. The monks had taught children, so most schools closed. After Henry's death, Edward VI was only a boy. His advisers founded new schools and made England more Protestant. Edward died young, and his sister Mary became queen. Mary married Philip of Spain and made England Catholic again. Protestants were burned as heretics. She also died without children, so Elizabeth became Queen Elizabeth I.





Elizabeth's government

Elizabeth ruled the country

court in the Privy Council.

mixture of charm and

with the help of her advisers at

Parliament provided her with

money from taxes. She used a

strictness to rule. She knew

what was happening in the

country through government

officials and a network of spies.



TIMELINE

Henry VIII Luther begins the Reformation

Henry becomes 1534 head of Church

Monasteries 1536-9 dissolved 1539 Bible in English

Edward VI 1547

Mary I 1553

Elizabeth I 1558

Shakespeare born 1564

Enemies abroad

Elizabeth tried to keep peace

by diplomacy and charm, but

in 1588 Philip of Spain tried to

invade England to bring back

the Catholic Church. His

'Armada' was defeated by English ships and the weather.

Catholics in Ireland rebelled

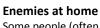
against English rule there.

The people and Parliament

A lot of old land-owning families (the nobles) were becoming less important. Nobles met in Parliament in the House of Lords. The merchants in the towns were getting richer. Most ordinary people worked on the land or in a trade. They learned their trade as apprentices, then worked in another town as journeymen before becoming masters. Householders could vote for representatives in Parliament in the House of Commons.



Under Elizabeth, the Church of England was independent from Rome. It combined elements of Catholic and Protestant beliefs. The Bible and Prayer Book were in English. Church attendance was compulsory. But some extreme Catholics (Papists) and extreme Protestants (Puritans) rejected the Anglican compromise.



Some people (often because they wanted the Catholic Church back) plotted to kill Elizabeth and put her cousin Mary Stuart (who had been Queen of Scotland before the Protestants there drove her out) on the throne instead. Elizabeth finally had her executed. Later the Earl of Essex tried to rebel against Elizabeth. Nobles guilty of treason were beheaded. Ordinary traitors were executed in public by hanging, drawing and quartering.

Essex's rebellion 1601

Spanish Armada 1588

James I 1603

Gunpowder plot 1605

Shakespeare died 1616 Thirty Years' War 1618

in Europe

Charles I 1625

Civil War 1642



Commonwealth

Restoration 1660 Charles II

Voyages

Famous sea captains like Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Martin Frobisher sailed to distant lands. They stole treasure from the Spaniards in the Caribbean. Raleigh founded a colony in Virginia. Trading companies started to trade in North America and India.



Elizabeth did not marry and had no children. When she died, Mary Stuart's son James, the Protestant King of Scotland, became King James I of England too, uniting Scotland and England. During his reign there was a Catholic plot to blow up the King and Parliament, after which Catholics were persecuted, and Puritans left the country to worship in their own way. Some were given land in Northern Ireland, while others went to America as the Pilgrim Fathers. James's daughter Elizabeth married Elector Frederick of the Rhineland. James's son Charles became king, but quarrelled with Parliament. After a civil war, he was executed in 1649 and England became a republic under the Puritan Oliver Cromwell.



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