

Elizabethan era



The Elizabethan era was the epoch in English history of Queen Elizabeth I's reign (1558–1603). Historians often depict it as the golden age in English history. The symbol of Britannia was first used in 1572 and often thereafter to mark the Elizabethan age as a renaissance that inspired national pride through classical ideals, international expansion, and naval triumph over the hated Spanish foe. In terms of the entire century, John Guy (1988) argues that " England was economically healthier, more expansive, and more optimistic under the Tudors" than at any time in a thousand years. 1] It was the height of the English Renaissance and saw the flowering of poetry, music and literature. The era is most famous for theatre, as William Shakespeare and many others composed plays that broke free of England's past style of theatre. It was an age of exploration and expansion abroad, while back at home, the Protestant Reformation became more acceptable to the people, most certainly after the Spanish Armada was repulsed. It was also the end of the period when England was a separate realm before its royal union with Scotland.

The Elizabethan Age is viewed so highly because of the periods before and after. It was a brief period of largely internal peace between the English Reformation and the battles between Protestants and Catholics and the battles between parliament and the monarchy that engulfed the seventeenth century. The Protestant/Catholic divide was settled, for a time, by the Elizabethan Religious Settlement, and parliament was not yet strong enough to challenge royal absolutism.

England was also well-off compared to the other nations of Europe. The Italian Renaissance had come to an end under the weight of foreign

domination of the peninsula. France was embroiled in its own religious battles that would only be settled in 1598 with the Edict of Nantes. In part because of this, but also because the English had been expelled from their last outposts on the continent, the centuries long conflict between France and England was largely suspended for most of Elizabeth's reign.

The one great rival was Spain, with which England clashed both in Europe and the Americas in skirmishes that exploded into the Anglo-Spanish War of 1585–1604. An attempt by Philip II of Spain to invade England with the Spanish Armada in 1588 was famously defeated, but the tide of war turned against England with an unsuccessful expedition to Portugal and the Azores, the Drake-Norris Expedition of 1589. Thereafter Spain provided some support for Irish Catholics in a debilitating rebellion against English rule, and Spanish naval and land forces inflicted a series of reversals against English offensives.

This drained both the English Exchequer and economy that had been so carefully restored under Elizabeth's prudent guidance. English commercial and territorial expansion would be limited until the signing of the Treaty of London the year following Elizabeth's death. England during this period had a centralised, well-organised, and effective government, largely a result of the reforms of Henry VII and Henry VIII. Economically, the country began to benefit greatly from the new era of trans-Atlantic trade.