

Queen Elizabeth I



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Queen Elizabeth was born in Greenwich Palace on September 7, 1533. She died on March 24, 1603, of natural causes. Her father was Henry VIII. His second wife, Anne Boleyn was Elizabeth's mother. King Henry wanted a son, but received a daughter, instead, from his second wife. Before Elizabeth's third birthday, Henry had her mother beheaded in charges of adultery and treason. Elizabeth was brought up in a separate household at Hatfield (not known). King Henry's third wife gave birth to a son. This boy was named Edward. Edward was declared first in line for King Henry's throne, while Mary (Daughter of Henry's first wife) was declared second, and Elizabeth was declared third and last in line for the throne. Elizabeth received a thorough education that was normally reserved for men. She was taught by special tutors of whom, the most known, was a Cambridge humanist by the name of Roger Ascham. Roger Ascham wrote about Elizabeth, " Her mind has no womanly weakness. Her perseverance is equal to that of a man and her memory long keeps what it quickly picks up. With the help of these tutors, she was not only fluent in two languages, but in four languages. She was fluent in the languages of Greek, Latin, French, and Italian. When Henry died in 1547, her brother, Edward, took over the throne at ten years of age. Edward, with a short reign on the throne, died in 1553, and Elizabeth's half, older sister, Mary took the throne. Mary, like Edward, died on November 17, 1558, after a short time on the throne. In October 1562, Queen Elizabeth almost died of small pox. In 1584, Europe's other major protestant leader, William of Orange, was assassinated. For the first time in her life, Elizabeth showed some concern. She was now, the only major protestant leader in Europe. At this time, Elizabeth's Privy council drew up a Bond of Association which pledged that its signers, in an attempt on Elizabeth's life, would kill the

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assassins along with the claimant to the throne who the attempt was made for. In the mid 1580s, it was clear that a direct military confrontation between England and Spain was unavoidable in the near future. Word reached London that the Spanish king, Philip II, had started to assemble together an enormous fleet that would sail to the Netherlands, and join forces with a waiting Spanish army led by the duke of Parma. After joining forces, this fleet would proceed to invade and probably conquer the now protestant England. The always conservative queen reluctantly had authorized sufficient funds to maintain a fleet of maneuverable, well-armed fighting ships, to which other ships from the merchant fleet would be added. In July 1588, the "Invincible Armada" reached the English water and the queen's ships. In one of the most famous naval encounters of history, the queen's ships defeated the enemy fleet, which then in an attempt to return to Spain, was all but destroyed by terrible storms. At the time when the Spanish invasion was expected, Queen Elizabeth decided to review in person, a detachment of soldiers assembled at Tilbury. She was dressed in a white gown and a silver breastplate and she rode through the camp and proceeded to deliver a celebrated speech. Some of her councilors had cautioned her against appearing before a large and armed crowd. But she told them that she would not distrust her faithful and loving people. Also, she was not afraid of Parma's army. At this time, she says, "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have a heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too." She then promised, "in the word of a Prince." Francis Bacon wrote, a few years after Elizabeth's death, "She imagined, that the people, who are much influenced by externals, would be diverted by the glitter of her jewels, from noticing the decay of her personal attractions."

Bacon's cynicism reflects the darkening tone of the last decade of Queen Elizabeth's reign, where her control of her country's political, religious, and economic forces and over her representation of herself began to show severe strains. Bad harvests, continued inflation, and unemployment caused strain and a loss of public morale. Charge of corruption and greed led to widespread popular hatred of the Queen's favourite, to whom she had given large and much-resented monopolies. Queen Elizabeth continued to make brilliant speeches, to exercise her authority. But she suffered from bouts of melancholy, ill health, and showed signs of increasing debility. As Sir Walter Raleigh remarked, " a lady surprised by time." On march 24, 1603, having reportedly indicated JAMES VI as her successor, Queen Elizabeth died quietly. The nation accepted the new King quite enthusiastically. But long before her death, she had transformed herself into a powerful image of female authority.