

# Life in Elizabethan England during the Renaissance

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Elizabethan England (in the mid 1500's to early 1600's) was dubbed the "Golden Age" because England was thriving, culturally, socially, and economically. England had earned riches from Latin America in gold and tobacco, Queen Elizabeth had resolved all international conflicts, and England was one of the most advanced countries in world exploration.

Additionally, the arts were thriving, with "Shakespeare's masterpieces of the stage, Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, Edmund Spenser's Faerie Queen, and Sir Philip Sidney's Defence of Poesie" being written and performed on stage all in this period. Most everyone was financially stable, and London was the hub for fine arts. Who was Queen Elizabeth and what kind of influence did she have on English culture of the time? Queen Elizabeth I, her reign extending from 1558 to 1603, was one of the most prominent powers of the world and her legacy is still remembered today.

"London became a cultural and commercial center where learning and literature thrived" while she was in power, as she believed the arts should remain intact and was even a fan of theatres being built everywhere in London. At the beginning of her reign, "there were violent clashes throughout Europe between Protestant and Catholic leaders and their followers". She was able to resolve these issues and England rose from these conflicts to world supremacy. What was the political climate of Elizabethan England?

How was this climate different than the age immediately preceding Elizabethan times? As mentioned before, there was much conflict between Protestants and Catholics, but when Queen Elizabeth came into power, she

made sure that England and all areas within control were made peaceful once more. This allowed for political tensions to ease, and thus the Golden Age began. During this time, "England was firmly established as a leading military and commercial power in the Western world".

What was the role of women in Elizabethan England, and how did it compare to the role of men? Women married quite young, the youngest average being around 17 and the oldest being around 24. They wore floor-length dresses (often times with corsets or the like), and very rarely worked. If they did, it was mostly domestic duties like sewing and tailoring. Men, on the other hand, enjoyed all areas of life: working, going to the theatre, traveling around London as they pleased, with their wives (their property) waiting for them at home most often.

However, the degree of their leisure depended on what family a man had been born into, whether it be rich or poor. Still, men were still considered above women and the social and political climates reflected as much. What were the major social classes of the time, and about what percentage of the population did these classes comprise? Within royalty, the highest in the rankings were dukes, the second highest were marquises, and then descending from there, there were earls, viscounts and barons.

In normal society, however, there were the highest rankings in the social sphere: nobility, knights, esquires and clergy, the medium ranking in the social sphere: landholding commoners (freeholders, leaseholders, and copyholders), and the lower ranking: townsfolk, laborers, servants, and the lowest of lows: the unemployed or "beggars". What forms of entertainment were most popular? Theatre was above all the most popular entertainment

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(even Queen Elizabeth enjoyed it). Other forms of entertainment included tennis, and bowling on the lawn, also known as just “bowls”. And of course, gossip was one of the preferred pastimes.