

Elizabethan History Pre-Course Preparation



Welcome to Elizabethan History! In preparation for September we would like you to begin getting to know Elizabeth I as a character and to get a feel for the Tudor period itself. In order to do this we would like you to complete the series of activities below. We hope that you find these enjoyable and interesting and that they provide you with a flavour of what is to come in September. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas **IN THE FIRST LESSON BACK IN SEPTEMBER** when this work will be handed in to your Elizabeth teacher.

Portrait Analysis – getting to know Elizabeth!

1. Annotate the 3 portraits in the pack with your ideas on what they might reveal about:
 - Elizabeth I as a Queen/woman
 - Key events that occurred during Elizabeth's reign
 - Things that were important to the lives of people living in Elizabethan England
2. Read *Elizabeth I: An Overview* (included in the pack) and use what you have read to put the sources into context (like you do with own knowledge at GCSE). Show this by annotating the portraits further with anything you have learnt from this reading that might help you to explain what these portraits are showing. Don't forget to think about the dates of the portraits when doing this.
3. Find an Elizabethan portrait of your own and annotate it as you have with the portraits that we have provided. (www.npg.org.uk/ might be a good starting point for this).

Ian Mortimer, *The Time Traveller's Guide to Elizabethan England* – getting to know the Tudor period!

Read the introduction to this book (included in the pack) and then bullet point 3 things that strike you/stand out to you about Elizabethan England at the end of it.

Finally, there are a few administrative tasks that we need you to have ready for September

1. Buy an **A4 LEVER ARCH** file and **6** dividers and bring this to the first lesson back in September
2. Ensure you have a dictionary and thesaurus at home
3. Bookmark <http://heathenhistory.co.uk/elizabeth/> as we will use this website regularly

Inspired? If you can't wait until September to find out more you could:

- Visit the National Portrait Gallery in London – entry is free and it has many amazing original Tudor portraits.
- Visit <http://heathenhistory.co.uk/elizabeth/> and use the reading/watching lists to find out more about the Tudor period. This includes both fiction and non fiction.

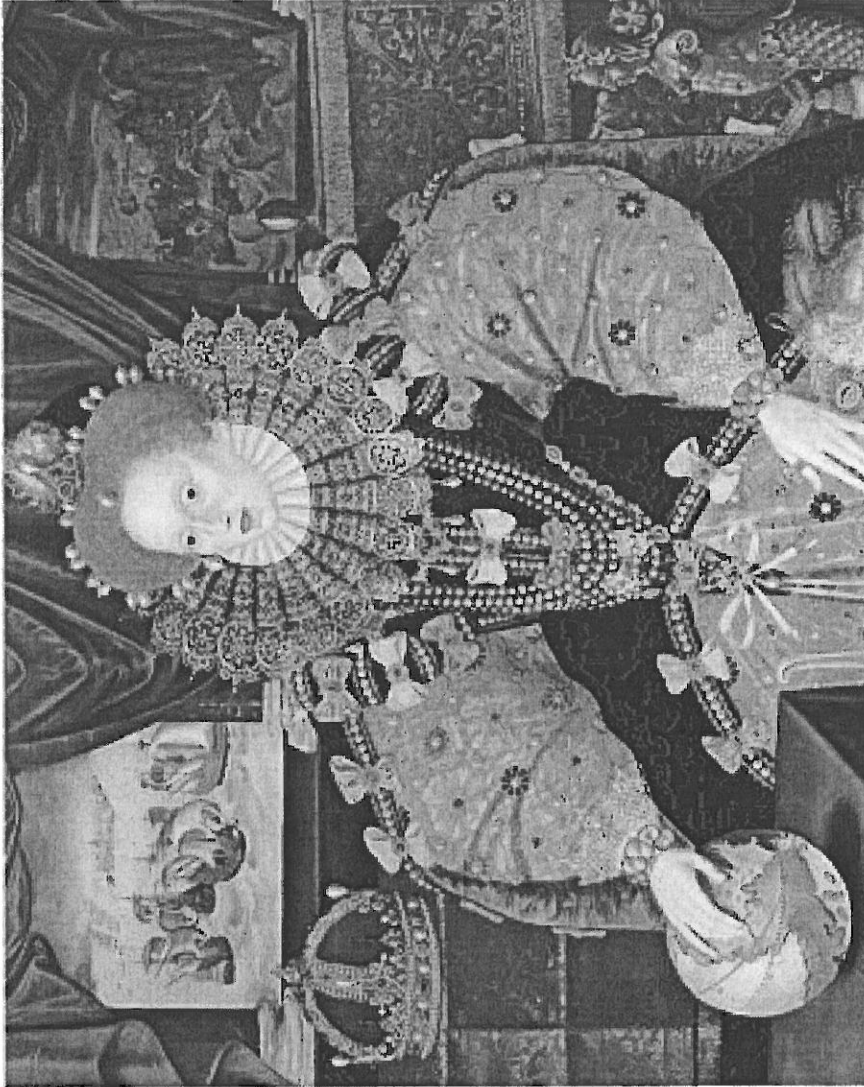
If you need any help or have any questions about this preparation work you can contact any of the teachers below by email:

Miss Bee – sbee@littleheath.org.uk

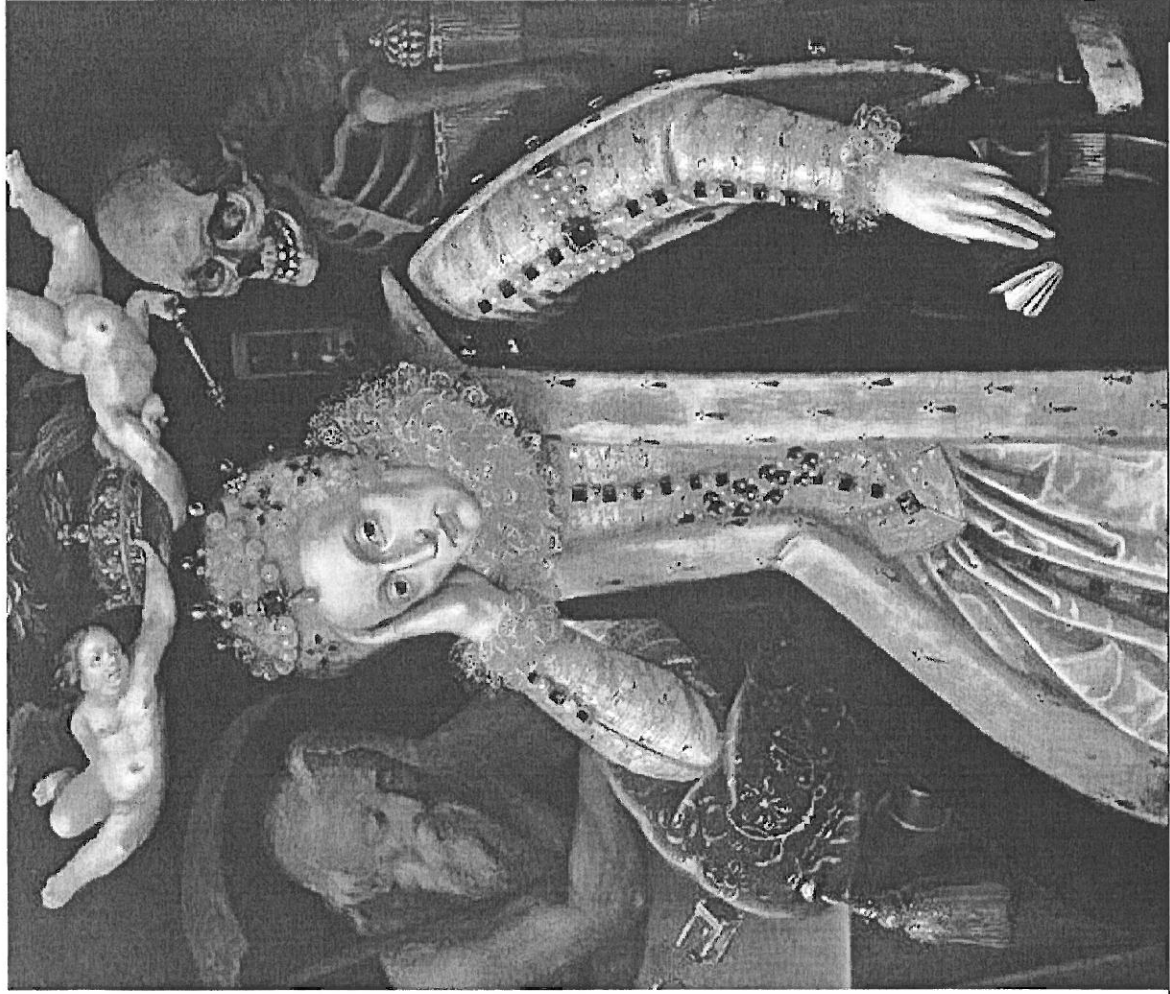
Miss Collins – tcollins@littleheath.org.uk



Attributed to William Scrots (British), Elizabeth I as a Princess, 1546-7, oil on panel. Royal Collection. London.



Elizabeth I, the Armada Portrait Attributed to George Gower, C.1588



12. English School (seventeenth century), *Queen Elizabeth I (1533 - 1603) in Old Age*. Circa 1610. Corsham Court, Wiltshire/Bridgeman Art Library

Elizabeth I: An Overview

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/elizabeth_i_01.shtml

A different kind of Queen

The reign of Elizabeth I is often thought of as a Golden Age. It was a time of extravagance and luxury in which a flourishing popular culture was expressed through writers such as Shakespeare, and explorers like Drake and Raleigh sought to expand England's territory overseas. This sense of well-being was embodied by Queen Elizabeth who liked to wear sumptuous costumes and jewellery, and be entertained in style at her court. But life in Tudor England did not always reflect such splendour. The sixteenth century was also a time when the poor became poorer, books and opinions were censored, and plots to overthrow the Queen were rife. Elizabeth's ministers had to employ spies and even use torture to gain information about threats to her life.

In 1558 the Protestant preacher John Knox wrote, 'It is more than a monster in nature that a woman should reign and bear empire over man.' So was he right? Were women fit to rule the country? The people had lived through the unpopular reign of Mary I, known as 'Bloody Mary' for her merciless persecution of Protestants. Lady Jane Grey was Queen for only a matter of days before being toppled and eventually executed. And Mary Queen of Scots made a series of ill-judged decisions which led her to the executioner's block in 1587.

Elizabeth was a different kind of Queen: quick-witted, clever and able to use feminine wiles to get her own way. Elizabeth could be as ruthless and calculating as any king before her but at the same time she was vain, sentimental and easily swayed by flattery. She liked to surround herself with attractive people and her portraits were carefully vetted to make sure that no physical flaws were ever revealed.

She relied upon the ministers close to her but would infuriate them with her indecision - 'It maketh me weary of life,' remarked one. Faced with a dilemma - for example whether or not to sign the execution warrant of Mary Queen of Scots - Elizabeth would busy herself with other matters for months on end. Only when the patience of her ministers was running short would she be forced to make up her mind. She had a formidable intellect, and her sharp tongue would quickly settle any argument - in her favour.

Early years

So what influences had shaped the young Elizabeth? Her mother was the ill-fated Anne Boleyn who had caught the eye of Henry VIII at court. He was soon bewitched by her, arranging to divorce Catherine of Aragon and quickly making Anne his second wife. But her fate was sealed when she failed to provide Henry with what he desperately wanted - a son. Everyone, from court astrologers to Henry himself, was convinced Anne would give birth to a boy. It was a girl, Elizabeth. Henry, beside himself with disappointment, did not attend the christening. When Elizabeth was just two years old her mother was beheaded at the Tower of London.

Elizabeth was brought up in the care of governesses and tutors at Hatfield House and spent her days studying Greek and Latin with the Cambridge scholar, Roger Ascham. In later years Katherine Parr, Henry's sixth wife, took a keen interest in the young Elizabeth and made sure that she was educated to the highest standards. Elizabeth was taught the art of public speaking, unheard of for women at the time. But the ability to address a large number of people, from ministers in Parliament to troops on the battlefield, stood Elizabeth in good stead for the future. She learnt how to turn the tide of opinion in her favour, and this became one of her most effective weapons.

Elizabeth is crowned

The main part of Hatfield House, built after the reign of Elizabeth I © On 17 November 1558 it is said that Princess Elizabeth was sitting under an oak tree at Hatfield House when a horseman appeared with the news that would change her life forever. Elizabeth, aged twenty-five, was now Queen of England. Mary I had died unpopular with her people and tormented by her own inability to produce an heir. The country now looked to the young Queen for salvation. A new era was dawning, the age of Elizabeth I.

The celebrations for the Coronation, two months later, were spectacular. As Elizabeth walked along the carpet laid out for her journey to Westminster Abbey, the crowds rushed forward to cut out pieces as souvenirs. Elizabeth made sure that everyone - down to the lowliest beggar - played a part, pausing to listen to congratulations from ordinary people on the street. She knew that, in political terms, she needed their support but she also felt a deep sense of responsibility for their welfare. For their part, the people were thrilled with their new Queen. Elizabeth was an instant hit.

As soon as her Council had been appointed, Elizabeth made religion her priority. She recognised how important it was to establish a clear religious framework and between 1559 and 1563 introduced the acts which made up the Church Settlement. This returned England to the Protestant faith stating that public worship, religious books such as the Bible and prayers were to be conducted in English rather than Latin. The new Book of Common Prayer was introduced, adapted from earlier Books used under the Protestant Edward VI.

But Elizabeth was careful not to erase all traces of Catholic worship and retained, for example, the traditions of candlesticks, crucifixes and clerical robes. By pursuing a policy of moderation she was attempting to maintain the status quo and, although Puritans were particularly upset by the continuance of some Catholic traditions, an uneasy compromise was reached and maintained throughout her reign.

The question of marriage

The welfare of her people was of paramount importance to Elizabeth and she once remarked, 'I am already bound unto a husband which is the Kingdom of England.' But her reluctance to marry was to become one of her biggest headaches and would cause her ministers, particularly the anxious Lord Burghley, sleepless nights. Marriage was a political

necessity and a way of forming a useful alliance with a European power. Children would secure the line of succession. This was Elizabeth's duty and she should get on with it.

Her ministers knew and Elizabeth certainly knew. But there was no announcement, no wedding bells. The years passed until in 1566 Parliament refused to grant Elizabeth any further funds until the matter was settled. This was a big mistake. No one told the Queen what to do and, using the skills of rhetoric she had been taught, Elizabeth addressed members of Parliament. The welfare of the country was her priority, not marriage. She would marry when it was convenient and would thank Parliament to keep out of what was a personal matter. This was clever talk from the Queen. She knew the political implications of remaining unmarried but effectively banned further discussion.

That is not to say that Elizabeth didn't enjoy the company of men. On the contrary she thrived on the adoration of her ministers and knew that flirtation was often the easiest way to get things done. In the political arena she encouraged the attentions of Henry, Duke of Anjou, and later his brother Francis, Duke of Alençon, which could form a useful alliance with France against Spain. But neither proposal led to marriage. As the political landscape in Europe changed, the Queen knew that she would need room to manoeuvre. More than that, Elizabeth simply did not wish to be married. 'If I followed the inclination of my nature, it is this,' she said, 'beggar woman and single, far rather than queen and married.'

Elizabeth's favourite

Despite all these tactics Elizabeth was capable of falling in love, and the one who came closest to winning her heart was Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. They had known each other for years, and he was one of the first to be appointed to her Council. But their intimacy alarmed the other ministers. Leicester was an unknown quantity. He had the ear of the Queen and might poison her mind against them. Their anxiety amused Elizabeth, and this gave her an excuse to exert her independence every now and then. But just how close was she to Leicester? The Queen asserted her virginity throughout her life, but was also an attractive woman who thrived on male attention. Whether or not the relationship was ever consummated remains open to speculation.

The dashing Earl of Leicester was something of a showman. He wanted to impress the Queen and, in the summer of 1575, threw a party at Kenilworth Castle which no one could forget. It took years to prepare for. He altered the layout of his castle, building luxurious new apartments for the Queen and her huge entourage. The entertainment lasted several days with fine banquets, jousting and spectacular firework displays. He had shown the Queen how much he adored her and, just as he had hoped, eclipsed everyone else. It was Leicester's finest hour.

No matter that the entertainment at Kenilworth practically bankrupted him. That was par for the course. Ministers longed for the glory and prestige a visit from the Queen would bestow on them, and would decorate new residences in her honour. Houses were even converted into the shape of an 'E' to flatter her. But years of work and expense often ended in disappointment when she failed to visit.

Elizabeth was clever to encourage this degree of devotion. She was well aware that plots were being hatched against her and that she needed the undivided loyalty of those around her as protection. In 1568 one such problem presented itself to Elizabeth in the shape of Mary Queen of Scots.

The Scottish Queen

Mary was born at Linlithgow Palace in Scotland in 1542, the daughter of James V of Scotland and the French Mary of Guise. She became Queen of Scotland aged only six days following the death of her father, and spent her early childhood with her mother in Scotland. In 1548 the French King, Henry II, proposed that the young Mary would be an ideal wife for his son, Francis, the marriage forming a perfect alliance between the two countries at a time when England was attempting to exert control over Scotland. Mary went to live at the French court and at the age of fifteen married Francis, heir to the French throne.

Francis II reigned for only a few months with Mary as his Queen and, when he died in 1560, Mary was left without a role. She decided to return as Queen to Scotland, agreeing to recognise the Protestant Church as long as she could privately worship as a Catholic. The Scots regarded this with some suspicion and John Knox stirred up anti-Catholic feeling against her. It was not, however, until she married Lord Darnley in July 1565 that things took a turn for the worse. As time passed it became clear to Mary that her husband was, in fact, an arrogant bully with a drinking problem. Now pregnant with Darnley's child she turned for support to her secretary, David Riccio.

From this point on, events spiralled out of control. In March 1566 Darnley and his accomplices burst in on Mary at Holyroodhouse and stabbed Riccio to death. A year later Darnley himself was murdered, his residence in Edinburgh blown apart by an explosion. Mary had grown close to the ruthless Earl of Bothwell and rumour soon spread that Bothwell and Mary had been responsible for the murder, particularly following their hasty marriage a few weeks later. But by now the Scots had had enough of Mary and, imprisoned at Lochleven Castle, she was forced to abdicate the Scottish throne. Her young son was crowned James VI on 29 July 1567.

Mary and Elizabeth

But Mary was not giving up without a fight. Having already shown herself to be a poor judge of character, Mary now made the huge mistake of misjudging Elizabeth. If only she could meet her, she thought, Elizabeth would rally to her cause. Ignoring the pleas of her advisors Mary managed to escape from Lochleven and, disguised as a man, fled the country. She landed on English soil ready to meet her fellow Queen.

But Elizabeth had other ideas. Mary was the granddaughter of Henry VIII's elder sister, Margaret, and so had a claim to the English throne. She had married Darnley whose lineage could be traced back to Henry VII, creating an even stronger claim. Worse still, Elizabeth had herself been declared illegitimate in a statute which had never been formally repealed, and knew that many Catholics considered Mary to be the rightful Queen of England. Her

presence in England could spark a Catholic uprising. Mary was immediately taken to stay at Carlisle Castle by one of Elizabeth's ministers but as days turned into weeks, she became suspicious. Eventually, sent to stay in the unwelcoming Tutbury Castle, the truth dawned on her. She was a prisoner.

Elizabeth, meanwhile, was paralysed by indecision. She did not wish to meet the woman she considered her rival, but knew that if she released Mary her own life would be in danger. Elizabeth remained, however, fascinated by the Scottish Queen. Mary was said to be a great beauty who exerted a strange power over men and, whenever any minister returned from a visit to the now belligerent Mary, he was quizzed by the Queen on her looks, her clothes, her attractiveness compared to herself. Similarly Mary would ask after Elizabeth. But the two Queens never met.

Plots and conspiracies

As predicted, Mary quickly became the focus of plots to overthrow Elizabeth and return England to the Catholic faith. In 1569 the Northern Uprising failed when the Catholic Earls, marching southwards, discovered that Mary had quickly been moved from Tutbury to Coventry and their plans to rescue her were thwarted. The Ridolfi Plot of 1571 went further by enlisting Spanish support to depose Elizabeth and place Mary on the throne. It was clear that, as long as Mary Queen of Scots was alive, Elizabeth's life would be in danger.

Francis Walsingham, one of Elizabeth's most loyal ministers, was acutely aware of this. He set out to nail Mary and, in 1586, his moment came. Walsingham's spies discovered that she was secretly corresponding with a group of Catholic plotters and, having intercepted her letters, they forged a postscript in her hand asking for the identities of those involved. The names and details were duly supplied by the plotters. At last Walsingham had proof of her guilt.

Mary is executed

Mary's trial began on 15 October 1586 at Fotheringhay. But she was not allowed a lawyer and, attempting to defend herself, was not even permitted to consult her own papers. Found guilty of treason, Mary was sentenced to death. Problem solved. But Walsingham had reckoned without the Queen's reluctance to sign the execution warrant. To Elizabeth, Mary was a fellow Queen. To execute any Queen was a precedent she did not wish to set, for her own sake. She also feared that Mary's relations in Europe would take revenge on England. As the weeks passed, Elizabeth procrastinated. For someone who disliked making decisions, this was torture.

In February 1587 the warrant was finally signed and the execution took place before the Queen could change her mind. But when Elizabeth heard the bells pealing to celebrate the death of Mary Queen of Scots, she was horrified. It had all happened too quickly. The warrant had been taken to Fotheringhay before she was ready. Elizabeth was inconsolable and locked herself in her room. She wept for days.

As she had feared, Catholic Europe reacted swiftly to the news and the Pope urged Philip of Spain to invade England. Mary's execution would be one of the factors contributing to the Spanish Armada the following year. Her death took a heavy toll on Elizabeth, one observer noting, 'I never knew her fetch a sigh, but when the Queen of Scots was beheaded.'

Elizabeth's final years

The 1590s proved a difficult decade for Elizabeth. The question of how to govern Ireland had created terrible problems for the Queen over the years but 1594 saw the start of the Nine Years War in which hundreds of English troops were killed. Elizabeth sent out the impetuous Earl of Essex who only managed to create further difficulties. Her most trusted ministers, including Burghley and Walsingham, passed away. Leicester, to whom she had remained close, died in 1588 and Elizabeth kept his last letter beside her bed until her own death.

The Queen herself was not as sharp as she once had been. Ministers often dealt with matters without consulting her, and she became paranoid about the threat of assassination. But by now Elizabeth was nearly seventy. Her health deteriorated and, when death came on 24 March 1603, it was: 'mildly like a lamb, easily like a ripe apple from the tree'. The crown passed to the Protestant King James VI of Scotland who became King James I of England.

The mourning which followed her death was unprecedented. However, details of the legacy she left the country are open to interpretation. Certainly, her reign had seen England prosper and become a major player in Europe. Protestantism was now firmly established as the country's religion. The people had enjoyed stable government, and Poor Laws had created a new framework of support for the needy. But problems remained. There was widespread corruption amongst ministers involving the abuse of monopolies and tax evasion. Local government was inefficient. Elizabeth had often shied away from making difficult decisions and this had sown the seeds for future conflict, particularly in Ireland.

Elizabeth's greatest achievement lay in the relationship she had forged with her people. She was ahead of her time in her grasp of public relations, and her popularity had remained undimmed. 'This I account the glory of my crown, that I have reigned with your loves,' she said in her Golden Speech of 1601. Elizabeth was rewarded with loyalty and, enhanced by the glow of nostalgia, her own unique place in history.

Ian Mortimer: Time Traveller's Guide to Elizabethan England.

Introduction

It is a normal morning in London, on Friday 16 July 1591. In the wide street known as Cheapside the people are about their business, going between the timber-covered market stalls. Traders are calling out, hoping to attract the attention of merchants' wives. Travellers and gentlemen are walking along the recently repaired pavements of the street, going in and out of the goldsmiths' and moneylenders' shops. Servants and housewives are making their way through the market crowds to the Little Conduit near the back gate to the churchyard of St Paul's Cathedral, some with leather water vessels in their arms, others with casks suspended from a yoke across their shoulders. The morning sun is reflected by the glass in the upper windows of the rich merchants' houses. A maid looks down on those in the street as she cleans her master's bedchamber.

Suddenly there is a great commotion near the market. 'Repent, England! Repent!' yells a man at the top of his voice. He is dressed in black, handing out printed leaflets as he strides along. 'Repent!' he shouts again and again. 'Christ Jesus is come with his fan in his hand to judge the Earth!' This man is no mean fool; he is a prosperous London citizen, Mr Edmund Coppingier. Another gentleman, Mr Henry Arthington, also dressed in black, is following him, striding from the alley called Old Change into Cheapside. He too calls out, declaring that 'Judgement Day has come upon us all! Men will rise up and kill each other as butchers do swine, for the Lord Jesus has risen.' The printed bills they hand out declare that they are intent on a complete reformation of the Church in England. For the illiterate majority in the crowd, they call out their message: 'The bishops must be put down! All clergymen should be equal! Queen Elizabeth has forfeited her crown and is worthy to be deprived of her kingdom.'

London, in the form of William Hacket. Every man and woman should acknowledge him as a divine being and lord of all Christendom.

William Hacket himself is still lying in bed, in a house in the parish of St Mary Somerset. He cuts an unlikely figure as a latter-day messiah. His memory is excellent – he can recall whole sermons and then repeat them in the taverns, adding amusing jokes. He married a woman for her dowry, then spent it and abandoned her. He is well known as a womaniser, but he is even more famous for his uncontrollable and violent temper. Anyone who witnessed his behaviour in the service of Mr Gilbert Hussey will confirm this. When a schoolmaster insulted Mr Hussey, Hacket met with him in a tavern and pretended to try to smooth over the disagreement. After he had won the schoolmaster's trust, he put a friendly arm around his shoulders. Then, suddenly, he seized the man, threw him to the floor, flung himself on top of him and bit off his nose. When he held up the piece of flesh, the astonished onlookers entreated him to allow the bleeding schoolmaster to take it quickly to a surgeon so that it might be sewn back on, preventing a horrible disfigurement. Hacket merely laughed, put the nose in his mouth and swallowed it.

In his bed, Hacket knows what Mr Coppinger and Mr Arthington are up to: he himself gave them instructions earlier this morning. They believe he is the reborn Christ largely because he is such a persuasive and fervent character. Together they have been hatching a plot for the last six months to destroy the bishops and undermine the queen's rule. They have spoken to hundreds of people and distributed thousands of pamphlets. What Hacket does not know is that a huge crowd has started to swarm around his two prophesying angels. Some are curious, some are laughing at their proclamations; others want to join them. Most want to see Hacket in person. Such a large crowd is pressing against them that soon Mr Arthington and Mr Coppinger are trapped. They seek refuge in a nearby tavern, The Mermaid, and manage to escape by the back door, before returning to the parish of St Mary Somerset and their slugabed messiah.

News runs through the city. By noon the city watchmen are marching from house to house. By one o'clock all three men have been sought out by the authorities and arrested. Within two weeks, two of them are dead. Hacket is tried for high treason, found guilty and sentenced to death. On 28 July he is dragged on a hurdle to the

and beheaded and butchered in the traditional manner, his headless body being cut into four parts, each with a limb attached. Mr Coppinger dies in prison: the authorities claim he starved himself to death. Mr Arthington enlists the support of powerful friends on the privy council and thereby saves his life, publishing his renunciation of all the things he has said as part of his penance.¹

This is an unusual episode and yet it is evocative of Elizabethan England. Had it taken place two hundred years earlier, Hacket and his gentlemen supporters would have been given a wide berth by the nervous citizens, unused to such sacrilegious uproar. Had it taken place two hundred years later, these events would have been a cause for popular ridicule and a cartoonist's wit. But Elizabeth's England is different. It is not that it lacks self-confidence, but that its self-confidence is easily shaken. The seriousness with which the authorities treat the plot, and the ruthless efficiency with which they suppress it, are typical of the time. It is not every day that a man is publicly proclaimed as the risen Christ, and it is extraordinary that well-respected gentlemen believe the messiah to be a violent, philandering, illiterate lout; but it is not at all unusual for Elizabethan people to adopt an extreme religious viewpoint, or for them to fear the overthrow of the monarch. The last few decades have seen so much change that people simply do not know what to believe or think any more. They have become used to living with slow-burning crises that might, at any moment, flare up into life-threatening situations.

This picture of Elizabethan England will come as a surprise to some readers. In the twenty-first century we are used to hearing a far more positive view of Elizabeth's 'secluded isle'. We refer to the queen herself as Gloriana. We think of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and Sir Francis Drake circumnavigating the globe in the *Golden Hind*. We think of writers such as Francis Bacon and Sir Walter Raleigh, the poets Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney, and the playwrights Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. Surely a society that created such architectural masterpieces as Hardwick Hall, Burghley Longleat and Wollaton Hall cannot be said to be anything other than triumphant? Surely a small kingdom that sends mariners into battle off the coast of Central America cannot be accused of self-doubt?

The problem is that our view of history diminishes the reality of the past. We concentrate on the historic event as something that has

time, is happening. For example, when we hear the word 'Armada', we think of an English victory, in which the threatening Spanish ships were scattered and defeated in the battle of Gravelines and after which Sir Francis Drake was feted as a hero. Yet at the moment of attack everything was up in the air. As Drake boarded his ship at Plymouth, he would have known that there was a real possibility of the Armada landing successfully and his own ship being sunk. He would have known that a change in the direction of the wind could alter everything – leaving his strategy in jeopardy and his fleet in danger. We can no longer imagine the possibility of the Armada disgorging its troops on English beaches. Our view of the event as a thing of the past restricts our understanding of contemporary doubts, hopes and reality.

I wrote my first *Time Traveller's Guide* in order to suggest that we do not always need to describe the past objectively and distantly. In that book I tried to bring the medieval period closer to the reader, describing what you would find if you could visit fourteenth-century England. Where would you stay? What might you wear? What would you eat? How should you greet people? Given that we know so much about the period, it stands to reason that the historian should be able to answer such questions. There are limits, of course: the historian cannot break through the evidence barrier and actually re-create the past. Moreover, imagining a personal visit is decidedly tricky in some matters of detail. You may well understand why the earl of Essex rebelled against Elizabeth in 1601 – but how did he clean his teeth? Did he wear underwear? What did he use for toilet paper? These things aren't so well evidenced. We must exploit what little evidence there is to satisfy, if only partially, our collective spirit of enquiry.

What will strike you first if you visit Elizabethan England? I imagine that, to start with, it will be the smells of the towns and cities. After a few days, however, I suspect it will be the uncertainty of life. You will be appalled to see dead bodies lying in the street during an epidemic of influenza or plague, and the starving beggars in their filthy rags. You will be disconcerted to notice vulnerability even at the top of society. Elizabeth herself is the target of several assassination attempts and uprisings – from a gentry rebellion, to her physician supposedly trying to poison her. Uncertainty pervades every aspect of life. People do not know whether the Sun goes round the Earth or the Earth goes round the Sun; the doctrines of the Church contra-

know if their ships will be stranded in a North African port, with the crews massacred by Barbary pirates and their cargo stolen. To gauge what Elizabethan life is like we need to see the panic-stricken men and women who hear that the plague has arrived in the next village. We need to see the farmers in the 1590s, staring at their rain-beaten, blackened corn for the second year in succession. This is the reality for many Elizabethan people: the stark horror that they have nothing to feed to their sick and crying children. We need to appreciate that such people, be they Protestant or Catholic, may well connect their starvation with the government's meddling with religious beliefs and traditions. We need to see them looking for something stable in their lives and fixing on the queen herself as a beacon of hope. Do not imagine the proud figure of Queen Elizabeth standing stiff and unruffled in her great jewelled dress on the deck of a serene ship, floating on calm sunlit waters. Rather imagine her struggling to maintain her position on the ship of state in heaving seas, tying herself to the mast and yelling orders in the storm. This is the real Gloriana – Elizabeth, queen of England by the grace of God, the pillar of faith and social certainty in the dizzying upheaval of the sixteenth century.

Like all societies, Elizabethan England is full of contradictions. Some practices will impress you as enormously sophisticated and refined; others will strike you with horror. People are still burnt alive for certain forms of heresy, and women are burnt for killing their husbands. The heads of traitors are still exhibited over the great Stone Gate in London, left there to rot and be a deterrent to others. Torture is permitted in order to recover information about treasonable plots. The gap between the wealthy and the impoverished is as great as ever and, as this book will show, society is strictly hierarchical. Humble houses – sometimes whole villages – are destroyed to make room for the parks of the nobility. People still starve to death on the high roads. As for the political situation, a brief note by a government official describes the state of the nation at the start of the reign:

The queen poor, the realm exhausted, the nobility poor and decayed. Want of good captains and soldiers. The people out of order. Justice not executed. All things dear. Excess in meat, drink and apparel. Divisions among ourselves. Wars with France and Scotland. The French king bestriding the realm, having one foot in Calais and the other in

This description is far removed from the 'golden age' interpretation of Elizabeth's reign – but there are at least as many positive contemporary verdicts as there are negative ones. In 1577, Raphael Holinshed publishes a chronicle in which he describes Elizabeth's accession in the following words:

After all the stormy, tempestuous and blustering windy weather of Queen Mary was overblown, the darksome clouds of discomfort dispersed, the palpable fogs and mist of the most intolerable misery consumed, and the dashing showers of persecution overpast: it pleased God to send England a calm and quiet season, a clear and lovely sunshine, a *quietus est* from former broils of a turbulent estate, and a world of blessings by good Queen Elizabeth.

Holinshed is addressing a Protestant minority who are literate and wealthy enough to buy an expensive two-volume publication. But we do not need to look through his rose-tinted spectacles to see many national achievements and cheering developments. Elizabeth's reign sees an extraordinary period of wealth creation and artistic endeavour: English explorers, driven by the desire for profit, proceed into the cold waters of Baffin Island and the Arctic Circle north of Russia. Despite the wars with France and Spain, no fighting takes place on home soil, so that for most Englishmen the whole reign is one of peace. In addition to the famous poetry and plays, it is an age of innovation in science, gardening, publishing, theology, history, music and architecture. Two English sea captains circumnavigate the world – proving to sixteenth-century people that they have at last exceeded the knowledge of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. No longer do thinking men claim they can see further than the ancients by virtue of their being 'dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants'. They have grown to be 'giants' themselves.

One of the most striking differences between Elizabethan England and its forerunners lies in the queen herself. Elizabeth's personality and the role of a woman are two things that make England in 1558–1603 a very different place from the England of Edward III or even that of her father, Henry VIII. More than ever before, the character of the monarch is intrinsically woven into the daily lives of her people. She is without doubt the most powerful Englishwoman in history.³ It is

to her. Her choice to steer England away from the Catholicism of her sister, Mary, and to re-establish an independent Church of England, as pioneered by Henry VIII, affects every person in every parish throughout the realm. Even if her subjects accept her religious choices, and never raise their heads above the religious parapet, her decision-making touches their lives in numerous ways. The Prayer Book changes, church symbols are torn down and bishops are replaced. An individual might become *persona non grata* just because of his or her religious doubts. If ever there was an argument that rulers can change the lives of their subjects, it lies in the impact of the Tudor monarchs. Elizabeth's kingdom is very much *Elizabethan* England.

This book follows my medieval guide but it does not entirely adopt the same form. It would be tedious to make all the same observations about aspects of daily life that contrast with our own society. Moreover, in writing about Elizabethan England, it would be inappropriate to follow exactly the same formula developed to describe the realm of two hundred years earlier. It is not possible, for example, to relegate religion to a subsection in this book: it has to be a chapter on its own, being integral to the ways in which Elizabethans live their lives. The England of 1558 has much in common with the kingdom in 1358, but a great deal has changed. As a result this book is not only concerned with the way Elizabethan England compares with the present day; it also examines how it compares with, or differs from, its medieval roots.

The historian is always a middleman: the facilitator of the reader's understanding of the past. I am no different, even though this book is written in the present tense and based on the premise that the most direct way to learn about something is to see it for yourself. However, in a book like this, my relationship with the evidence is unusual. Obviously literary texts have been important (plays, poetry, travellers' accounts, diaries, contemporary surveys), as have a wide range of printed records. But making sense of all this evidence as indicative of lived behaviour requires the historian to draw on personal experience. As I put it in *The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England*, 'The key to learning something about the past might be a ruin or an archive but the means whereby we may understand is – and always will be – ourselves.' This goes for the reader's lived experience too. For example, I presume that readers of this book have not seen a bull-

is involved, and thus to know that the Elizabethans' love of this form of entertainment makes them profoundly different from modern English people.

I have been reluctant to include details from outside the period of the reign. Very occasionally I have cited post-1603 evidence, but only in order to illustrate a procedure or practice that certainly existed before 1603. There is more citation of pre-1558 sources: much of Elizabethan England is composed of relics from the late medieval and earlier Tudor periods. This applies obviously to the castles, town walls, streets and churches; but it also applies to books that were printed for the first time in earlier reigns and which are reread and often reprinted in Elizabethan times. It especially applies to legislation: most of the law is based on medieval precedents, and it goes without saying that all the laws in force at Elizabeth's accession date from an earlier period. It is important to remember that every house and structure that we call 'medieval' or 'Tudor', because of its date of construction, is also Elizabethan. The same applies to many phrases and customs that were in use and practised before 1558. On this point, readers will note several references to the wonderful Latin phrasebook *Vulgaria* by William Horman, first published in 1519 (I used the 1530 edition). Horman is vividly expressive of the most basic aspects of daily life, so we learn that 'unwashed wool that grows between the hind legs of a black sheep is medicinal' and 'some women with child have wrong appetite to eat things that be out of rule: as coals'. As his purpose was to provide daily Latin in order to encourage the resurgence of the spoken language, we can be confident these examples reflect the experiences of his readers. And while anything written by him about fashionable clothes or religion is, of course, hugely out of date by 1558, what he says about some pregnant women's appetites is as true today as it was in 1519. Bearing in mind these caveats, I have done my best faithfully to represent England as it existed between Elizabeth's accession on 17 November 1558 and her death on 24 March 1603.

Welcome, then, to Elizabethan England, and all its doubts, certainties, changes, traditions and contradictions. It is a jewel-encrusted muddy kingdom, glittering and starving, hopeful and fearful in equal measure – always on the point of magnificent discoveries and brutal rebellions.