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History

ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND, c1568–1603

REVISION GUIDE AND WORKBOOK

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REVISION
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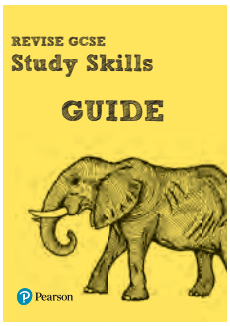
Series Consultant: Harry Smith

Author: Brian Dowse

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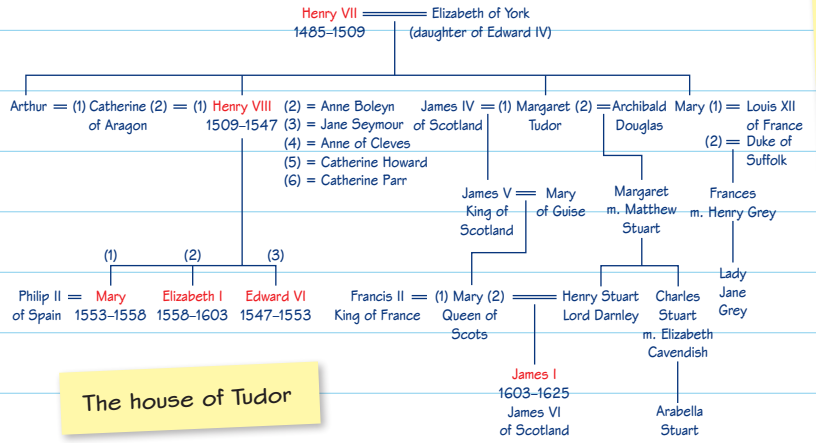
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Elizabeth's background and character

Elizabeth became Queen of England in 1558. Many people at the time felt this meant she could not rule alone. However, Elizabeth had a number of strengths as a ruling monarch.

Elizabeth's family background



The house of Tudor

Elizabeth inherited the throne from her sister Mary. However, Elizabeth's position on the throne was insecure, as her mother – Anne Boleyn – had been executed for treason. Elizabeth was then declared illegitimate, so there were doubts about her right to rule. Also, Elizabeth was Protestant while many of her subjects, especially in the north of England, were Catholic. This meant Elizabeth had to be politically clever if she was going to survive.

Elizabeth's character and strengths

Elizabeth was confident and charismatic – this enabled her to win over her subjects and command support in Parliament.

Elizabeth was well educated – she spoke Latin, Greek, French and Italian.

Elizabeth was resilient – she had spent time in the Tower accused of treason and facing possible execution. She could cope with the pressures of being queen.



Elizabeth at her coronation

Elizabeth had an excellent grasp of politics – she understood the interests and ambitions of her subjects, and was able to use her powers of patronage effectively.

To find out more about patronage in Elizabeth's court, turn to page 2.

Although Elizabeth was Protestant, the number of Protestants in England was growing, making her position as queen more secure. She could claim Divine Right with growing confidence.

Reinventing the role

- Elizabeth used her strengths to re-invent herself as a different type of monarch. She liked to show that she was no ordinary woman. She argued that she could govern England on her own and did not need to marry.
- Throughout her reign Elizabeth portrayed herself as a strong, legitimate, popular monarch, who was married only to the country and not to a king. This is reflected in paintings such as the one above, showing a confident but feminine queen.

Key terms

Charismatic – possessing great personal appeal and able to win people over.

Legitimate ruler – someone who is legally and morally entitled to rule.

Divine Right – the idea that God alone appoints the monarch; so to challenge the monarch is to challenge God. Successful monarchs claimed Divine providence (Godly approval) of their actions, to strengthen their legitimacy.

Protestants – Christians who no longer accepted the pope's authority and many of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

Now try this

Describe **two** advantages Elizabeth had when she became queen in 1558.

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Court life

The court was one of the many institutions of Elizabethan government, which also included the Privy Council, Parliament, **Lord Lieutenants** and **Justices of the Peace** (JPs).

JPs and **Lord Lieutenants** were part of the local government, and ran different parts of England on behalf of the queen. The court, Privy Council and Parliament helped run the country as a whole.

The court – made up of noblemen who acted as the monarch's advisers and friends. They advised the queen and helped display her wealth and power. Members of the court could also be members of the Privy Council.

could be members of

The Privy Council – members of the nobility who helped govern the country. They monitored Parliament and JPs, and oversaw law and order and the security of the country.



Elizabeth I became Queen of England in 1558.

monitored and advised

Parliament – advised Elizabeth's government, made up of the House of Lords and the House of Commons.

The House of Lords was made up of noblemen and bishops.

The House of Commons was elected, though very few people could vote.

Parliament passed laws and approved taxes (**extraordinary taxation** – extra taxes required to pay for unexpected expenses, especially war).

appointed

Justices of the Peace – large landowners, appointed by government, who kept law and order locally and heard court cases.

appointed

Lord Lieutenants – noblemen, appointed by government, who governed English counties and raised the local **militia**.

Patronage was important in Elizabeth's court. This is where the monarch rewarded her supporters by granting them lands, jobs and titles. People who received these lands or positions could use them to become wealthy.

How the court worked

- Courtiers could use their presence at the court to try to influence the queen.
- The court involved up to 2000 people. Of these, many were employed as servants to protect and provide for the court.
- There was a strict dress code. Courtiers were expected to wear clothes made of gold and silver cloths and dyed velvet as well as ruffs, which expanded in size over the course of Elizabeth's reign. So attending court could be an expensive business.
- The court took care of Elizabeth's personal needs (food, accommodation, entertainment) and helped her govern.

Where the court met

- The court often met at one of Elizabeth's many palaces, such as the palaces at Greenwich and Hampton Court.
- Elizabeth's court moved around the country on Royal Progresses, staying at the houses of members of the nobility, who had to meet the expense of entertaining the queen and her courtiers. This included providing hospitality as well as gifts for the queen.
- Elizabeth was able to use the court to control her public image. For example, she used portraits to put across the image of herself as a woman in control of her court and her country.

Now try this

Explain **two** features of Elizabeth's court.

A **feature** is an aspect of a topic. In this case the topic is Elizabeth's court and an example of a feature would be the Privy Council.

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Elizabeth's ministers

Elizabeth had a number of key advisors and ministers, including William Cecil (Lord Burghley), Robert Dudley (the Earl of Leicester) and Francis Walsingham.

William Cecil (Lord Burghley)

- Elizabeth's longest-serving minister/advisor.
- Became Secretary of State in 1558.
- Was created Lord Burghley in 1571.
- Also acted as Lord Treasurer, so was responsible for the government's money.
- Had considerable influence over Elizabeth and government policy, including:
  - the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587
  - the war with Spain, leading to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.
- A passionate defender of Elizabeth's religious settlement, opposing Catholic or Puritan attempts to undermine it.



This 17th-century engraving of Elizabeth I shows William Cecil on the left and Francis Walsingham on the right.

Robert Dudley (Earl of Leicester)

- Ambitious and a close confidante of the queen, especially in the early years.
- Dudley received estates from the queen and became an influential figure on the Privy Council. This new power brought him into conflict with William Cecil.
- It was rumoured that Elizabeth and Dudley were lovers, a rumour reinforced by the unexplained death of Dudley's wife, Amy.
- Dudley's behaviour caused scandal, especially his affairs with Baroness Sheffield and Lettice Knollys, wife of Walter Devereux, the Earl of Essex. Both affairs resulted in children and led to him being banished from court.
- He was a strong supporter of Protestantism in England and the Spanish Netherlands, where he led military expeditions.

Francis Walsingham

- Member of Parliament (MP) for Lyme Regis before becoming the queen's private secretary in 1573.
- Closely involved in attending to the queen's security.
- Ran a network of spies, **agents provocateurs** and informers who uncovered plots against the queen, including the Babington and Throckmorton plots.

Agents provocateurs were people employed by Walsingham to encourage those who were against the queen to plot against her. This justified the later arrest and execution of the plotters.

Turn to page 23 for more on the Babington and Throckmorton plots.

- He used ciphers (codes) in all correspondence and developed ways of deciphering the codes of those who plotted against the queen.

Why were Elizabeth's ministers important?

- ✓ Elizabeth trusted her ministers and allowed them to shape government policy during her reign.
- ✓ Cecil and Walsingham had seats in Parliament and were able to monitor the opinions of those in the Commons and the Lords. They could persuade MPs to turn government policy into law.
- ✓ The desire to influence the queen led to rivalries at court, especially involving Robert Dudley and William Cecil and later between Robert Cecil and Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex.

Turn to page 7 for more on the Earl of Essex.

Now try this

Study the image of Elizabeth, Cecil and Walsingham above, which was produced in the 17th century after Elizabeth's death. In what ways does it suggest that Cecil and Walsingham were important?

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Relations with Parliament

Elizabeth needed to call Parliament if she wanted to pass laws and raise taxes. She sometimes faced opposition within Parliament to laws that she wished to pass or taxes that she needed to raise.

Why was Parliament important?

- Since the Middle Ages, the monarch could not raise new taxes – known as subsidies – on their own without consulting Parliament.
- Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, established the principle of the King in Parliament. This meant any taxes and legislation demanded by the king had much better authority if approved by Parliament – the House of Commons and the House of Lords.
- MPs and members of the House of Lords could use Parliament to criticise the government and even the queen herself.
- Parliament could also act as a pressure group, for instance demanding during the 1560s and early 1570s that the queen resolve the succession issue by taking a husband.

The need to manage Parliament

- It was the job of privy councillors, many of whom held seats in Parliament, to persuade MPs and peers (members of the Lords) to pass the laws the queen required.
- By 1569 this was usually easier in the House of Lords, where many peers were bishops or courtiers. In the House of Commons, MPs needed to be persuaded using a mixture of threats and bribes.
- Privy councillors often sat on key parliamentary committees, to speed up the introduction of new laws. Elizabeth sometimes attended these committees, to help 'persuade' MPs to pass laws.
- The Crown could bribe and scare voters to try to influence who was elected to Parliament. This helped ensure that elected MPs were sympathetic to the government and the laws they wanted.

For more on patronage see page 2.

Issues discussed by Elizabeth's Parliaments

The succession: many MPs wanted Elizabeth to find a husband, give birth to an heir and so resolve the issue of who would inherit the throne after her death. A legitimate heir would reduce the possibility of civil war and foreign invasion.

Religion and the Church of England: the religious settlement of 1559, by which England became a Protestant country. It was also debated in Parliament in 1571 and 1587.

The poor: especially vagrants, who were seen as an increasing threat in Elizabethan society.

Taxes or subsidies: how much Parliament should raise as taxes at the monarch's request.

Parliamentary rights: especially the right of MPs to criticise the government without fear of arrest.

To find out more about laws that tackled poverty during Elizabeth's reign, turn to pages 13–14. For more on religious laws passed during Elizabeth's reign, turn to pages 19, 21–23 and 25.

The limits on Parliament's power

- Elizabeth did not call Parliament very often. She summoned 10 Parliaments between 1558 and 1603, which met for 140 weeks in total.
- Most MPs were men of business who wished to return to their estates, making them less likely to want to confront the government.
- Many MPs saw confronting the government as time-consuming and risky, and they could be punished for doing so. Indeed, Elizabeth could bully MPs who challenged her. For example, Peter Wentworth's determination to uphold the principle of freedom of speech led to him twice being locked in the Tower.



Elizabeth (top centre) before Parliament. The Lords are sitting and the MPs are standing.

Now try this

Study the image of Elizabeth before Parliament above, which was produced in the 17th century after Elizabeth's death. What does the image suggest about the relationship between the queen and Parliament?

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Marriage and succession

The key problems faced by Elizabeth and her Parliament were that of her marriage and the **succession** (who would rule England after Elizabeth's death).

Why was the succession important?

- The key point of Elizabeth marrying was to produce a male heir. This would strengthen the monarchy by ensuring a male successor.
- Little was expected of female rulers in the 1500s, as it was unusual for a queen to govern alone. Unmarried women without an heir were seen as vulnerable and weak. A husband, who would govern on the queen's behalf, and a male successor, were therefore seen as vital to a female monarch's survival.
- If Elizabeth did not marry, there would be a disputed succession, as there was a wide range of possible successors. These included Mary Queen of Scots; her son James VI of Scotland; the descendants of Henry VII's sister Mary Tudor; Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon (the Yorkist claimant); and the Infanta of Spain, Isabella Clara Eugenia. This could lead to civil war after Elizabeth died.

Why did Elizabeth never marry?

- Elizabeth was reluctant to marry, famously claiming in 1559 that she would be happy to have 'lived and died a virgin'.
- Elizabeth's marriage suitors included Robert Dudley; Philip II of Spain; Henry, Duke of Anjou; Eric of Sweden; and the Habsburg Emperor Charles IX. None was considered suitable.
- Philip II, Mary Tudor's former husband, proposed to Elizabeth early in her reign. Elizabeth declined; a Catholic king was unacceptable to strict Protestants and Puritans, who feared a return of Catholicism.
- Dudley was disliked by Elizabeth's courtiers.
- Marrying Charles IX, Henry, Duke of Anjou or Eric of Sweden could lead to military alliances and expensive wars.
- Any marriage would deepen divisions at court and lead to civil war. Elizabeth preferred to avoid this outcome by presenting herself as the Virgin Queen married to the nation.

Parliament and the marriage

- Many in Parliament were keen for the queen to marry, but did not want a Catholic suitor such as Philip II or Charles IX.
- By the 1570s the only remaining marriage candidate was Francis, Duke of Alençon, the King of France's brother. The Privy Council and Parliament were split on the issue:
  - Many Puritans opposed the idea of a Catholic being close to the throne, especially after the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, when French Protestants (Huguenots) were killed.
  - Others saw the marriage as a way to strengthen the monarchy.

Parliamentary opposition undermined plans for Elizabeth to marry Francis, Duke of Alençon.

- By the 1590s, Elizabeth's authority had been strengthened by the defeat of the Armada, and Parliament had accepted the fact she would remain unmarried.

Parliament and the succession

- By the 1590s Parliament wanted clarity on a successor but Elizabeth refused to name one – to give in would reduce her authority.
- By the late 1590s, many assumed that James VI of Scotland, Mary Queen of Scots' son, would succeed Elizabeth – as he was a Protestant.
- However, Elizabeth did not formally name James as her successor. There were still many potential successors and to name James would have deepened rivalries and increased tension.
- James VI of Scotland therefore only became James I of England in 1603 on Elizabeth's death.

The succession was decided by the queen and Privy Council and not Parliament, showing the limits on Parliament's power.

Now try this

Explain why Elizabeth was reluctant to name an heir before her death in 1603. Give **two** reasons.

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Elizabeth's authority in later years

By the 1590s, towards the end of her reign, Elizabeth was an ageing queen. She faced growing opposition within court and in the countryside, where bad harvests led to the risk of rebellion. Elizabeth remained a powerful monarch but there were signs she was losing authority.

Elizabeth's strengths at the end of her reign, 1590–1603

Essex's rebellion had been defeated, showing that Elizabeth was still in charge. Also, Essex's rebellion was directed not at the queen but at her advisors.

Elizabeth's authority was reinforced by military successes such as the expedition to Cadiz in June 1596.

Elizabeth remained in good health until relatively late in her reign.

The death of Mary Queen of Scots meant there were **no rival threats to Elizabeth's throne**.

As a result of the food shortages at the end of Elizabeth's reign, there was an uprising in Oxfordshire in 1596. In 1601 in Kent, a man was asked to attend court for saying, 'it will never be a merry world until the queen is dead'. This sense of unrest extended to Parliament, where calls of 'God save Your Majesty' were far less enthusiastic than before.



Elizabeth, painted at the end of her reign, in 1595, by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger. It is one of a very few portraits that show signs of the queen's ageing.

Turn to page 7 for more on Essex's rebellion of 1601. For more on the death of Mary Queen of Scots see page 28.

Why was Elizabeth losing authority at the end of her reign?

Elizabeth was getting older, more bad-tempered and less clear in her judgement. The French ambassador, writing in 1602, described her as 'impatient', while she lost her temper in front of the Polish ambassador in 1597.

Her key advisors were dying. Francis Walsingham died in 1590, Francis Knollys in 1596 and William Cecil in 1598. This weakened her control of the court and Parliament.

There was growing infighting in court, especially involving 'new men' such as Robert Devereux (the Earl of Essex) and more established figures such as Robert Cecil (Lord Salisbury, son of William Burghley). These men fought for influence and the queen's favour (patronage), which weakened her government.

Courtiers began challenging Elizabeth's authority. The Earl of Essex nearly drew his sword on Elizabeth and had to be restrained by others from doing so. This led directly to Essex's rebellion.

Elizabeth was losing financial independence. She was forced to call Parliament in 1593 and again in 1601 to raise taxes. This weakened her position and exposed her to parliamentary demands about the succession.

Bad harvests in the 1590s led to food shortages and discontent, undermining Elizabeth's popularity and threatening rebellion. The situation was made worse by increased taxation to pay for a military expedition to Ireland in 1601 as well as falling wages.

For more on the system of patronage at court, see page 2. Turn to page 5 for details on parliamentary demands about the succession.

Now try this

Explain **two** ways in which Elizabeth's authority was weakened between 1590 and 1603.

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Essex's rebellion, 1601

Essex's rebellion was led by Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. It resulted from a weakened government and a difficult political situation towards the end of Elizabeth's reign.

Who was the Earl of Essex?

- Robert Devereux was a politically ambitious courtier, professional soldier and favourite of Queen Elizabeth.
- However, by 1598 he had fallen out of favour with the queen, after he distributed gold captured at Cadiz to his men rather than passing it on to the government. He had also failed to capture the gold on the Spanish treasure fleet crossing from South America to Spain.
- Essex was banished from court but was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and told to crush the Irish rebellion led by Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone. However, he failed to do so.



Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. Note the size of the ruff around his neck as evidence of his status.

Why did Essex's rebellion take place?

Elizabeth's power and authority were weakening. This led to more rivalries at court.

Rivalry between Robert Cecil and Essex. Both men competed for the queen's affections. By the late 1590s the court and the Privy Council were filled with Cecil's supporters. A rebellion would strengthen Essex's position.

Finance. Essex was not a wealthy man. His financial position depended on patronage from the Crown and was weakened when Elizabeth banished him from court and failed to renew his licence for the import of sweet wines. A successful rebellion would strengthen his finances.

Essex's ambition. Essex overestimated his support in both the court and the country.

Humiliation. Elizabeth had slapped Essex in the face in 1598, telling him to 'go and be hanged', and he had to be prevented from drawing his sword in reply. He had also been banished from court. A successful rebellion would restore his status.

Military failure. Essex failed to put down a rebellion in Ireland, which led to accusations of treason. As a result, in 1600 a Special Court removed Essex from all Crown offices and placed him under house arrest. Rebellion was his only way to escape.

The rebellion, February 1601

Essex gathered 300 of his supporters at Essex House, which he had fortified.

↓

The Lord Chancellor and other royal officers visited Essex, but he imprisoned them.

↓

Essex rode into London to gather support. This failed as the Mayor of London had told people to stay in their houses.

↓

He returned to Essex House, where he was arrested and sent to trial and the Tower.

Why did the rebellion fail?

- Essex overestimated his support. Many of the nobility, even those who sympathised with him, were not prepared to risk their positions and lives by challenging the queen.
- Government spies in Essex's camp, including Ferdinando Gorges, undermined the rebellion. For example, Gorges released Essex's prisoners so Essex had no hostages to negotiate over.

The consequences of the rebellion

- Support for Essex collapsed.
- Essex was found guilty of treason and executed.
- Cecil and his supporters dominated the court.

Now try this

Give **two** reasons why Essex's rebellion failed and explain each reason.

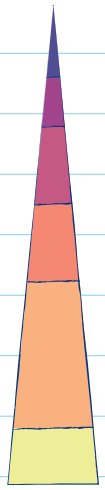
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Living standards and fashions

Elizabethan society was very rigid and quality of life depended on social position. Those at the top of society were better off than those at the bottom.

The population of England grew from about 3 000 000 in 1530 to around 4 000 000 in 1600. London also grew rapidly during the 1500s, with a population of around 200 000 by 1603.

Social hierarchy: countryside



The nobility – major landowners; often lords, dukes and earls.

The gentry – owned smaller estates.

The yeoman farmers – owned a small amount of land.

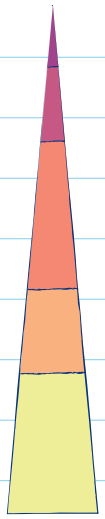
Tenant farmers – rented land from the yeoman farmers and gentry.

The landless and labouring poor – people who did not own or rent land, and had to work or labour to provide for themselves and their families.

Homeless and vagrants – moved from place to place looking for work.

Ninety per cent of people lived in the country: less than 1 per cent were nobility or gentry; less than 10 per cent were farmers; about 90 per cent were landless, labouring poor, homeless and vagrants.

Social hierarchy: towns



Merchants – traders who were very wealthy.

Professionals – lawyers, doctors and clergymen.

Business owners – often highly skilled craftsmen, such as silversmiths, glovers (glove makers), carpenters or tailors.

Craftsmen – skilled employees, including apprentices.

Unskilled labourers and the unemployed – people who had no regular work and could not provide for themselves and their families.

Ten per cent of people lived in towns: 10 per cent of these were merchants, professionals and business owners; 90 per cent were craftsmen and the unemployed.

Obedience, care and conformity

- In Elizabethan society, you owed respect and obedience to those above you and had a duty of care to those below you.
- Landowners ran their estates according to these ideas, taking care of their tenants, especially during times of hardship.
- In households, the husband and father was head of the household. His wife, children and servants were expected to obey him.

People who broke the **Sumptuary Laws** could be fined, imprisoned or even executed. People had to conform to (obey) the rules.

Fashions

People's dress depended on social position.

The **Sumptuary Laws (1574)** stated that:

- only royalty could wear ermine
- only the nobility were allowed to wear silk, sable fur, and gold and silver fabrics
- only royalty, gentry and members of the nobility could wear the colour purple
- ordinary people including merchants, professionals and business owners had to wear wool, linen or sheepskin, and were restricted to certain colours.

Now try this

Write a short paragraph to explain why dress and fashion were important in Elizabethan society.

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Prosperity and the gentry

Growing **prosperity** (wealth) and the rise of the gentry were key features of Elizabeth's reign.

Who were the gentry?

The gentry was made up of knights, esquires and gentlemen who lived in the countryside.

- ✓ 'Knight' was originally a military rank, but in Elizabethan times it became a mark of honour, with the title conferred (given) by the queen.
- ✓ Esquires, also known as 'squires', had knights as their ancestors.
- ✓ Gentlemen had become wealthy landowners by acquiring large amounts of property.

The gentry did not work with their hands for a living – they were not manual workers.

What was the 'rise of the gentry'?

- This phrase refers to how the gentry grew in size, wealth and influence in Elizabethan England.
- Some members of the gentry, such as Walter Raleigh, Francis Walsingham and Francis Drake, became more influential at court and in government. This meant the influence of many noble families at court declined.
- Other members of the gentry were able to join the nobility, whether through marriage, wealth or the willingness of the queen to give them a title (make them a Lord). For example, William Cecil became Lord Burghley in 1571.
- Many members of the gentry became increasingly wealthy. They could afford to build and extend houses in both the towns and the countryside.

Growing prosperity in Elizabethan England

The economy grew during Elizabeth's reign:

- There was growth in traditional industries such as wool as well as newer industries such as iron, tin and copper. These materials were exported, increasing the wealth of both merchants and the gentry.
- London, a city of 200000 people by 1603, grew in importance as a centre of finance and trade.
- **Privateering** brought in gold and silver stolen from Spanish treasure ships in the Atlantic.
- This prosperity boosted the wealth of the nobility, gentry and merchants, who increasingly owned houses in London.
- Professionals, including lawyers, also saw their incomes increase.

By 1603 a relatively small number of people in Elizabethan England (the nobility, gentry and merchants) had become extremely wealthy.

Privateering was providing financial support for raids on Spanish ships and/or colonies, then splitting the profits.



Montacute House in Somerset was built in about 1598 by Edward Phelips, an MP and member of the gentry, whose family had lived in the area for over 100 years.

A divided society

Not everyone was wealthy in Elizabethan England.

- Most people, especially the labouring classes, remained relatively poor and struggled to provide for themselves.
- During the 1590s bad harvests and rising prices, as well as falling wages, meant that many ordinary people (labourers) struggled to provide for their families.
- Others became vagrants, moving from place to place in search of work and often reduced to begging.

The wealthy, including members of the gentry, increasingly saw the poor as a threat to their prosperity. This was because, in times of hardship, the poor's involvement in riots and rebellions threatened the gentry's lives and property.

Turn to pages 12–14 for more on poverty during the Elizabethan period.

Now try this

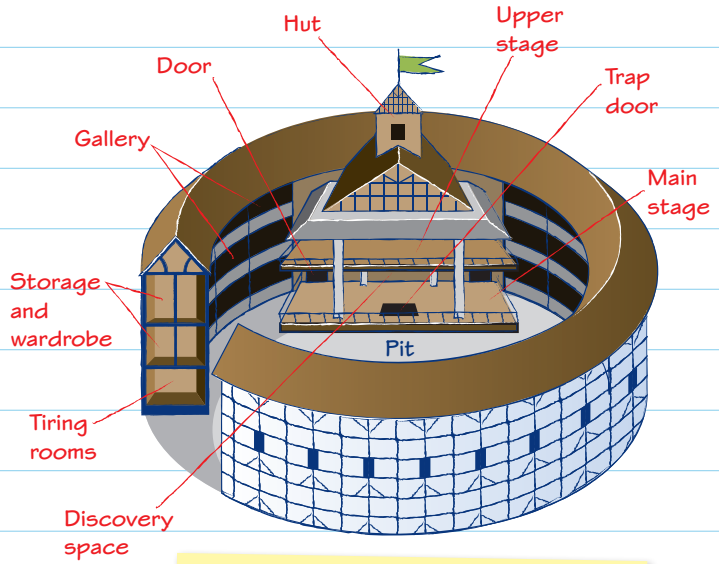
List **three** reasons for the growth in prosperity in Elizabethan England.

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The Elizabethan theatre

The theatre was an important source of entertainment in Elizabethan England, producing plays that were a mirror of their time, as they reflected the society in which they were performed.

Theatre design



The structure of an Elizabethan theatre

The structure of an Elizabethan theatre reflected English society.

- Ordinary people or 'groundlings' watched the plays standing in a pit.
- Wealthier people sat in stadium-style seats around the stage.
- Members of the gentry and merchants sat in the galleries and on occasion on the stage, with plays performed around them.

Tiring rooms allowed actors to change into costumes for performances. Actors could also be lowered onto the stage from above using a system of wires and pulleys.

The theatre

- Mystery Plays, popular with many Catholics, were replaced with new, secular (non-religious) plays. These were shown in purpose-built theatres, such as the Red Lion, the Globe and the Rose.
- Comedies, performed by teams of professional players funded by wealthy noblemen, were very popular. Sponsors included the queen and the Earl of Leicester, and their performers were known as Queen's Men and Leicester's Men.
- All social classes attended the theatre, so purpose-built theatres had to be built to accommodate growing audiences.
- Elizabethan playwrights included William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson.
- Elizabethan actors were also important and included Richard Burbage.
- Examples of Elizabethan theatres included the Globe, the Bull Ring, the Newington Butts and the Bear Garden.

The importance of the Elizabethan theatre

Elizabethan plays reflected the society in which they were performed. For example:

- Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* reflected the growing fascination with witchcraft that gripped some sections of Elizabethan society. For others the play represented the debate between Calvinists, who supported predestination (the idea that our lives are decided for us by God), and those who believed in free will.
- Plays reflected the vulgarity of many Elizabethans. The **bawdy jigs** performed in theatres such as the Globe referred to adulterous wives, milkmaids, prostitutes, thieves and muggers.

Bawdy jigs were songs and dances performed by Elizabethan players often wearing clown costumes. They usually contained rude words and actions, and sometimes the audience was encouraged to join in.

Now try this

Give **two** reasons why the theatre was important in Elizabethan times.

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Attitudes to the theatre

Different social groups had different attitudes towards the theatre during Elizabeth's reign.

Why was the Elizabethan theatre so popular?

- It was a cheap form of entertainment – people could stand and watch plays for very little money.
- It appealed to all social classes. Even those who could not read and write could follow the performances, some of which were put on in inns and taverns. Purpose-built theatres designed by James Burbage contained galleries for members of the gentry and nobility.
- Plays appealed to people's different tastes, with history plays (for example, Shakespeare's *Richard III* and Marlowe's *Edward II*), comedies (for example, Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*) and tragedies (for example, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*).
- Elizabeth I enjoyed acting, and encouraged the development of acting and theatre at court and elsewhere.



An Elizabethan theatre used as a bear pit. Theatres doubled up as bear pits, brothels and gambling houses, allowing them to cater for a range of interests and tastes.

Elizabethan social groups and why they enjoyed going to the theatre

The queen – Elizabeth I never attended the theatre but enjoyed watching plays at court and funded a group of actors.

The nobility – could get seats on the stage itself, allowing them to show off their clothes, wealth and prestige. They often funded teams of actors, adding to the nobility's sense of importance.

The gentry and merchants – could buy **boxes** in the theatre, where they could entertain their friends and business partners.

The poor – could gain cheap admission, allowing them to stand close to the stage. This is why they were known as 'groundlings'.

A theatre **box** is a small separate seating area with a good view of the stage, for a limited number of people (usually around 3 to 5).

Negative attitudes towards the theatre

Many **Puritans** disliked the theatre, arguing:

- it encouraged bawdy, drunken behaviour as well as sinful habits such as prostitution
- many of the players were disreputable
- many plays contained immoral references to sex, drunkenness and witchcraft.

Puritan distaste for the theatre was especially strong among the merchant classes in London.

Turn to page 24 for more on the Puritans.

Theatres often attracted large crowds of poorer people, which some people saw as a threat to public order and a source of theft. People who owned property close to theatres often opposed them for this reason.

The government's attitude to the theatre

- The government worried that the content of plays might encourage rebellion.
- Under Queen Elizabeth, political and religious subjects were forbidden on stage.
- From 1572 published plays required a licence, which prevented them from addressing political issues.
- In 1574 the Common Council of the City of London issued a statement describing how the theatre brought 'corruptions of youth and other enormities' and 'great disorder'.
- By 1596 all theatres were banned from presenting plays in the City of London. All theatres had to move south of the River Thames.

Now try this

Give **two** reasons why people were concerned about the theatre in Elizabethan times.

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Reasons for the increase in poverty

There were many reasons why poverty and vagabondage increased in Elizabethan England, including population growth, bad harvests, sheep farming and enclosure.

What was poverty during Elizabeth's reign?

- ✓ Spending more than 80 per cent of your income on bread
- ✓ Being unemployed or ill, so you could no longer provide for yourself or your family
- ✓ Being unable to afford the rising cost of food
- ✓ Needing financial help (poor relief) or charity (alms)

Vagrants were people without a settled home or regular work. Many vagrants were also seen as vagabonds – idle and dishonest people who wandered from place to place, committing crimes.

What types of people were poor?

Studies of parish records suggest that the poor fell into the following groupings.

- **Widows** or **women abandoned by their husbands and their families**, as women were paid very little.
- **The sick and the elderly** who were unable to work.
- **Orphaned children** – 40 per cent of the poor were under 16 years old.
- **People on low wages.**
- **Itinerants, vagrants and vagabonds** – homeless people who moved from their parishes looking for work. They were often involved in crimes and worried those in authority in Elizabethan England.

Reasons for the increase in poverty in Elizabethan England

Population growth. The population of England grew from 3 million in 1551, to 4.2 million by 1601. This increased demand for food (driving up prices) while increasing the labour supply (driving down wages). This meant many ordinary people could no longer provide for themselves or their families.

Growth of towns between 1500 and 1600, such as London and Norwich, drove up the cost of rents, while food prices rose as food had to be brought in from rural areas to be sold.

Bad harvests (in 1562, 1565, 1573, 1586 and the 1590s) hit subsistence farmers (those who ate what they grew), reduced the food supply and drove up prices.

Economic recessions in the 1580s caused by trade restrictions, such as those involving Spain over the Netherlands, created unemployment and poverty.

Increasing demand for land. As the population increased more people needed land. This drove up rents and resulted in entry fees (up-front sums paid at the start of land rental). Many people could not afford to pay these.

Sheep farming. The growth of the wool trade after 1500 meant that many farmers preferred to rear sheep rather than grow food.

Enclosure. From 1500 onwards land was divided into fields for animal husbandry, arable farming or both ('up and down farming'), and given to farmers who farmed for profit. This denied people use of common land (land that could be used by everyone), which meant they were unable to provide for their families.

Monasteries had provided help for the poor until their dissolution under Henry VIII in the 1530s. Now those struggling had no support.

Enclosure drove many people off the land altogether, leaving them with nowhere to live or farm. They became itinerants and vagrants.

Now try this

How important was population growth in causing poverty in Elizabethan England? Write a paragraph to explain your ideas.

You need to consider other causes of poverty as well as population growth to answer this question.

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Attitudes to poverty

The Elizabethan government responded to the problem of poverty in different ways and, over time, attitudes towards the poor changed.

Traditional attitudes to poverty

Many Elizabethans distinguished between:

- the deserving or impotent poor (the old and the sick) who could not help themselves
- the idle poor (those who could work but chose not to do so).

It was felt the poor should be given every opportunity to better themselves. Those who refused to do so should be punished.

Many Elizabethans remained suspicious of the poor and demonised them as counterfeits and criminals. Vagrants and vagabonds who deceived or threatened the public were dealt with severely: they could be whipped, imprisoned, enslaved or even hanged if caught begging.

Reasons why attitudes to the poor were changing

Attitudes towards the poor changed during Elizabethan times. There were various reasons for this:

- the fear that poverty led to disorder and was a potential cause of rebellion
- the cost of dealing with the poor, especially the poor rates
- population changes and enclosure meant the poor were an increasingly visible presence in Elizabethan England
- changing economic circumstances, including problems with the wool trade, bad harvests and enclosure, forced the authorities (Crown, Parliament and Justices of the Peace) to develop a more constructive attitude towards poverty.

Policies towards the poor in Elizabethan times

Action	Type of change	Detail
Poor rate	**Continuity** – these measures existed before Elizabeth's reign and continued throughout Tudor times.	A local tax organised by Justices of the Peace (JPs), with the proceeds spent on improving the lives of the poor. The poor were given money or things to make and sell.
Charity		Often funded by local wealthy people, who gave their name to the charitable foundation – e.g. Lady Cecil's Bequest for Poor Tradesmen, Romford.
Statute of Artificers, 1563	**Progressive** – government's response to increased unemployment caused by falls in the wool trade.	Those refusing to pay the poor rates could be put in prison. Officials who failed to organise poor relief could pay a penalty of up to £20.
1576 Poor Relief Act		JPs were required to provide the poor with wool and raw materials, to enable them to make and sell things. The poor who refused to do so were sent to a special prison known as the house of correction.
1572 Vagabonds Act	**Repressive** change that targeted vagrants. Parliament felt vagrants posed a threat to public order and had to be deterred through harsh punishment. Yet the Act also recognised the need to help the poor by providing them with work.	Vagrants were: • whipped and had a hole drilled through each ear as a mark of shame, to warn others of their vagrancy • imprisoned if arrested again for vagrancy • given the death penalty for a third offence. The Act introduced a national poor rate, to provide support, including money and work, for the impotent poor. JPs had to keep a register of the poor. Those in authority (JPs, parish councils, and so on) were tasked with finding work for the able-bodied poor.
1601 Elizabethan Poor Law	**Administrative** change that standardised the treatment of the poor across England.	• Impotent poor cared for in almshouses/poorhouses • Able-bodied poor to work in a 'house of industry' (workhouse) • Idle poor sent to a 'house of correction'/prison • Pauper (poor) children became apprentices.

Now try this

Explain, using examples, how attitudes to the poor changed during Elizabeth's reign.

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Government action

Poverty was a major problem during Elizabeth I's reign, as it placed a growing financial burden on communities and carried the risk of rebellion. The Elizabethan government was concerned about the increasing numbers of the poor and acted to resolve the issue for a range of different reasons.

You can revise the government's policies towards the poor on page 13.

As the number of poor people increased, **it became increasingly expensive to look after the poor**, especially in the 1590s after poor harvests. This put a financial burden on taxpayers who, under the terms of the 1572 Poor Law, had to pay the Poor Law Tax to provide relief for the poor. The government therefore needed to act to reduce this tax burden.

Many Elizabethans felt threatened by the poor, whom they saw as a potential threat to their property and safety as well as a source of rebellion. This was particularly the case in the 1590s when poor harvests and falling wages led to unrest in the countryside, especially in Oxfordshire and Devon. Government action was needed to control the poor and prevent future rebellions.

Why did the government take action in response to the increase in poverty?

Attitudes towards the poor had changed. Before the Reformation in the 1530s (when the English Church became Protestant), people had felt a responsibility to provide alms (charity) for the poor as a way of shortening their time in Purgatory (a place Catholics believe you go to after death). However, the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII had led to a decline in these Christian values and so people were less sympathetic towards the poor in the Elizabethan period.

The poor became increasingly visible in many Elizabethan towns, provoking hostility from wealthier people. This hostility was reinforced by stereotypes of the poor and vagrants that suggested they were both threatening and deceitful. This meant that many beggars were physically attacked and driven out of town, again putting pressure on the government to act.

The seriousness of the problem

Poverty was a growing problem in Elizabethan England.

↓

The population of England increased from 3 000 000 in 1551 to 4 200 000 by 1601.

↓

This situation was made worse by rising prices and a debased coinage (the falling value of money).

↓

Many people, even in work, could no longer afford to provide for themselves and their families.

Poverty was particularly bad in London, which during Elizabeth's reign became the most heavily populated city in Europe. London was a magnet for the poor, who flocked there from elsewhere looking for work. This created a serious problem with vagrancy.

The effectiveness of government action

The Elizabethan government put various measures in place to deal with the poor and these had some success in reducing poverty.

- 👍 Poor relief became the responsibility of government, including local governments, especially parishes, rather than individual charities. This meant the poor were provided for and did not starve. As a result, even in the 1590s when harvests were poor, there was no rebellion or disorder.
- 👍 Elizabethan poor laws, especially the Poor Law Act of 1601, remained in place for a long time, suggesting that the legislation was successful.
- 👎 However, government measures failed to tackle the underlying causes of poverty: low wages; enclosure; poor harvests; a rising population. This meant the problem of poverty continued throughout the 17th and 18th centuries.

You can refer to this page and page 13 when answering this question.

Now try this

Explain why government attempts to reduce poverty during the Elizabethan period were successful. Give **two** reasons.

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Hawkins and Drake

John Hawkins and Francis Drake were English sailors involved in exploration, the looting of Spanish ships, the sale of goods in West Africa and the slave trade – selling African slaves in the West Indies.

John Hawkins, 1532–1595

- Hawkins was England's first slave trader.
- In 1562 he sailed from Plymouth with three ships and violently kidnapped about 400 West Africans, later selling them on as slaves in the West Indies.
- Between 1562 and 1567 Hawkins and his cousin Francis Drake made three voyages to West Africa and enslaved between 1200 and 1400 Africans. They kidnapped villagers, sometimes with the help of native Africans.
- Hawkins then crossed the Atlantic and sold his 'cargo' to the Spanish.

Many Africans died on the voyage owing to the terrible conditions in which they were kept.

The slave trade involving West Africa and the West Indies was known as the **triangular trade.** Those involved in the trade made huge profits from selling the people they kidnapped into a life of slavery as well as from the sugar and tobacco produced on slave plantations.



Hawkins was unashamed of his part in the slave trade. His coat of arms showed a bound slave.

Francis Drake (c1540–1596)

- Drake was an English sea captain, privateer, navigator, slave trader and politician.
- He carried out the second circumnavigation of the world, from 1577 to 1580.
- He began an era of privateering and piracy on the western coast of the Americas – an area that previously had been free of piracy.



Engraving of Drake, c1583. The globe refers to his circumnavigation of the world.

Colonisation means of settling in and taking control of a foreign country.

Why were voyages of exploration made during Elizabethan times?

Expanding territory. Voyages of exploration enabled explorers to claim territory for Elizabeth's government, especially in the New World, leading to settlement and **colonisation**.

Private investment. Private investors, including Elizabeth I ('the Crown') and her courtiers, funded many of the voyages of discovery. Although this was risky, the rewards could be enormous.

Improvements in ship design. Ships or galleons had bigger sails, were faster and easier to move, and had greater firepower against attack by pirates. They also were more stable and could take on more supplies, encouraging longer voyages and exploration.

Trade. English merchants needed new trading opportunities, as war with Spain and in the Netherlands had severely damaged the wool and cloth trades.

The development of standardised maps such as the Mercator Map of 1569 meant sailors and traders could be confident they were going in the right direction. This reduced the risks of exploration and encouraged further voyages.

New technology. The development of devices such as quadrants and astrolabes made navigation more precise, so voyages were safer and faster, leading to more exploration and trade.

Adventure. Some young Elizabethan men such as Francis Drake set off on voyages of discovery and exploration. Their published accounts of these voyages, though often inaccurate, persuaded others to venture into the unknown in the belief that fortunes could be made.

Now try this

Give **two** reasons why Drake and Hawkins were important figures in the development of exploration and trade in Elizabethan times.

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Circumnavigation, 1577–1580

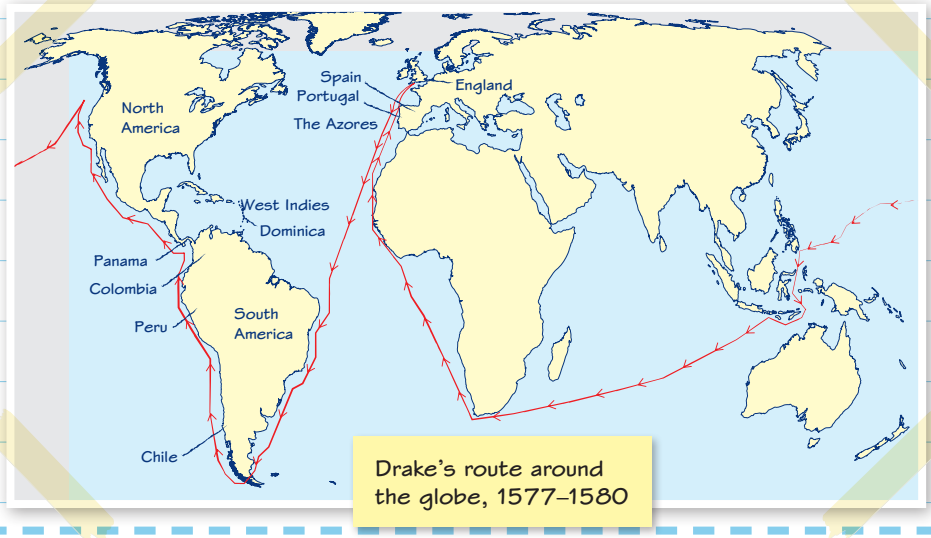
Between December 1577 and September 1580, Francis Drake **circumnavigated** (sailed around) the globe. After his voyage, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth and became Sir Francis Drake.

The Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan carried out the first circumnavigation of the globe, between 1519 and 1522.

Why did Drake circumnavigate the globe?

- **He was attacking Spain.** Drake did not aim to sail around the world. His main purpose was to raid Spanish colonies in the Pacific, as relations with Spain were declining at this time.
- **Revenge.** The Spanish had attacked Drake's fleet at St Juan de Ulúa and most of his men had been killed.
- **Profit.** Loot, booty and trade meant there were huge profits to be made from Drake's proposed journey to the Americas and beyond, so people were willing to invest in the expedition, including Elizabeth I.

Drake's circumnavigation



Drake's route around the globe, 1577–1580

For more on Sir Francis Drake and why voyages of exploration were made during the Elizabethan period, turn to page 15. To revise Drake's turbulent relationship with Spain, see page 29.

The benefits of Drake's circumnavigation of the globe

England's reputation as a seafaring power increased – in spite of the fact that only one of Drake's five ships, *Golden Hind*, survived the voyage. Drake had overcome considerable difficulties in sailing around the globe.

Drake's expedition resulted in Nova Albion, an area near San Francisco, being claimed as English territory, with Elizabeth as its queen. This encouraged further trade and exploration, especially to the New World, where colonies were established in New England in the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

England's naval power increased as a way of defending the country from invasion and protecting its trading interests.

Drake's achievement boosted the income of Elizabeth and her government. This improved England's status as a European power. It also made her a potential ally for other European states who saw Spain as a rival power.

English ships began to trade elsewhere – in China, West Africa and India. This established England as a major trading power.

Now try this

Give **three** reasons why England benefitted from Drake's circumnavigation of the world.

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Voyages and trade

One of the key purposes of Elizabethan exploration was to open up profitable trading routes, including the Northwest Passage and routes to West Africa, the Americas and the Far East.

The search for the Northwest Passage

Martin Frobisher made three voyages in search of a north-western route to China and the Far East:

- The first left in 1576 and reached Greenland.
- The second, in 1577, again reached Baffin Island, (now in Canada), but found nothing of value.
- A third expedition, in 1578, was completely unsuccessful and Frobisher returned to England with little of value.

Three further expeditions by John Davis (1585–1587) were equally unsuccessful.

Attempts to colonise the Americas

Expeditions to colonise the east coast of America were unsuccessful:

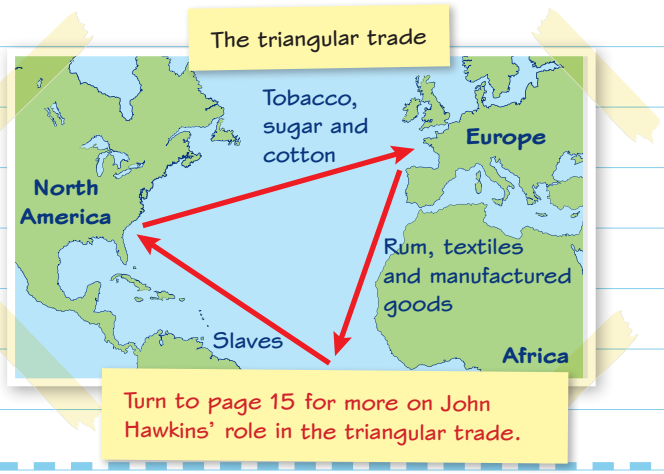
- An expedition in 1578 by Humphrey Gilbert was abandoned. His second, in 1583, reached Newfoundland, but many of the colonists fell ill and Gilbert himself died on the way home.
- Attempts to settle colonists in Virginia, on Roanoke Island (from 1585) also came to nothing. The colony was mysteriously abandoned.

West Africa and the triangular trade

The slave trader John Hawkins helped establish the triangular trade. This involved:

- selling goods in West Africa
- purchasing slaves in West Africa and selling them in the West Indies
- buying sugar, tobacco and cotton in the West Indies and returning to England.

This trade was strengthened when the Barbary Company, which traded off the West Coast of Africa, was established in 1585.



Turn to page 15 for more on John Hawkins' role in the triangular trade.

Trade in the Far East

- In 1582, Elizabeth I sent Ralph Fitch to be ambassador to the Emperor of China. He was captured by the Portuguese but managed to escape, travelling through northern India, Burma and Malaya before returning to England in 1591. His account of his travels showed that profitable trade in the East was possible.
- The **Levant Company** was set up in 1592 to trade with the Eastern Mediterranean. It supplied the English market with Turkish carpets, Mediterranean fruits and Persian silks, as well as spices and luxury goods. It successfully exported textiles to the Turks.
- In 1600 the **East India Company** was set up to trade with China, India and the East in cotton, silk, salt, tea and opium. It encouraged merchants and aristocrats to invest in these trading opportunities. By the late 17th century it dominated trade between England and India and had its own private army and trading ships.

How did England benefit from exploration and trade?

English traders and merchants made big profits from trading with other countries.

The Crown benefitted by charging duties (taxes) on imported goods. It also made money by granting trading licences to organisations like the Barbary Company and the East India Company.

Trade allowed new goods, including potatoes, tobacco, coffee, spices and dried grapes, to enter English markets.

Now try this

Describe **two** ways in which exploration and trade were important to the Elizabethan economy.

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Sir Walter Raleigh

Walter Raleigh was an influential courtier and explorer throughout Elizabeth I's reign.

Walter Raleigh (c1552–1618)

- He took part in a military expedition to Ireland in 1580. This gained him enormous favour with Elizabeth I and he was given land there following the defeat of a local rebellion.
- In 1584, Queen Elizabeth granted Raleigh a royal charter for seven years, which allowed him to explore, take over and rule any lands that were not Christian or ruled by Christians in return for one-fifth of all the gold and silver mined there. In 1587 he was named Captain of the Queen's Guard, the highest office at court.
- The royal charter enabled Raleigh to organise and make money from expeditions to the New World.



Walter Raleigh was an English nobleman and explorer, and a favourite of Queen Elizabeth.

Expeditions to the New World

1585: after a first fact-finding expedition in 1584, 107 settlers set out for Roanoke, Virginia, in North America.

1586: colonists return to England, abandoning Virginia.

1587: a new group of settlers sets sail for Roanoke.

1590: English sailors find Roanoke abandoned. What happened remains a mystery.

No further colonisation takes place until the early 17th century.

Other expeditions

1595: leads an expedition to the Orinoco river basin in South America, in search of the 'city of gold', El Dorado.

1595: attacks the Spanish coast, capturing the merchant ship *Mother of God*.

1596–1597: takes part in the capture of Cadiz, as well as raids on Spanish bases in the Azores.

1616: leads a second expedition to South America in search of El Dorado.

Raleigh is executed in 1618 for attacking Spanish shipping against the king's wishes.

Raleigh and Elizabeth

Raleigh's relationship with Elizabeth changed between 1580 and 1603.

- Military success in Ireland in 1580 made him a favourite, and Elizabeth granted him lands and made him a Captain of the Guard.
- He fell out of favour in 1592 for secretly marrying one of the queen's maids of honour, Elizabeth Throckmorton, and was expelled from court and sent to the Tower.
- Later military expeditions to Spain, leading to the capture of Cadiz in 1597, and South America, were an attempt to win back the queen's favour. This seemed to work as he was made Governor of Jersey in 1600.

Why was Raleigh important?

- He encouraged exploration and colonisation of the New World by getting investors (aristocrats and merchants) to fund expeditions. This set an example and led to further expeditions.
- Raleigh's failures, especially at Roanoke, Virginia, changed the way English governments approached colonisation. While Raleigh raised money among his friends, future colonisation used Joint Stock Companies, where investors bought shares in expeditions. These companies paid a share of the profits to the shareholders. This led to more investment.

Now try this

In no more than **two** paragraphs, explain how Raleigh's actions contributed to the settlement of the New World.

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The question of religion

Elizabeth's religious settlement meant that England became a Protestant country again and Catholics were seen increasingly as a threat.

The differences between Catholicism, Protestantism and Puritanism

	Catholics ('old religion')	Protestants ('new religion')	Puritans (strict Protestants)
Beliefs	Pope is head of the Church helped by cardinals, bishops and priests	No pope; it may be necessary to have archbishops or bishops	No popes, cardinals or bishops
	Church is intermediary (go-between) between God and people; can forgive sins	Personal direct relationship with God via prayer and Bible; only God can forgive sins	
	During Mass bread and wine become actual body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation)	Bread and wine simply represent the body and blood of Christ; there is no miracle.	
	7 sacraments (ceremonies)	2 sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion	
	Priests are celibate	Priests can marry	
Practices	Services in Latin	Services in English	
	Priests wear vestments	Priests wear simple vestments	
	Churches highly decorated	Churches plain and simple	Churches whitewashed with no decorations
Support	Catholics the majority in north and west England	Mostly south-east England (London, Kent, East Anglia)	Puritans found in London and East Anglia

Religious divisions in England before the Elizabethan settlement

- The Reformation divided the Christian Church between Catholics and Protestants from 1532 onwards. Catholics remained true to the Catholic Church in Rome, led by the pope, while Protestants no longer recognised the pope's authority.
- Henry VIII declared that he was Head of the Church in England and dissolved the monasteries; however, many of Henry's religious beliefs were Catholic. Edward VI moved England further towards Protestantism while Mary Tudor made England Catholic again.
- From the 1530s, many Protestants came to England to escape persecution in Europe. They settled in London, East Anglia and Kent.
- The north of England remained largely Catholic. There was a risk that Catholics in the north could rebel in order to overthrow Elizabeth and restore Catholicism.
- Some English Protestants became Puritans – strict Protestants with extreme views who wanted to purify the Christian religion by getting rid of anything that was not in the Bible. They first appeared in the 1560s and increased in number during Elizabeth's reign.

Key features of Elizabeth's religious settlement of 1559

The Act of Uniformity established the appearance of churches and how religious services were to be held. It required everyone to attend church.

The Act of Supremacy: Elizabeth became Supreme Governor (Head) of the Church of England. All clergy and royal officials had to swear an oath of allegiance to her.

The Royal Injunctions: This was a set of instructions to the clergy which included rules about how to worship God and how to conduct services.

An **Ecclesiastical** (Church) High Commission was established to keep discipline within the Church and enforce Elizabeth's religious settlement. Disloyal clergy could be punished.

The Book of Common Prayer (1559) introduced a set church service to be used in all churches. The clergy had to follow the Prayer Book wording during services or be punished.

Now try this

Give **two** reasons why Catholics would have opposed Elizabeth's religious settlement of 1559.

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The Northern Rebellion

The Northern Rebellion (1569–1570, sometimes called the Revolt of the Northern Earls) was a key turning point in Elizabeth's reign.

Why did the Northern Earls rebel?

- The earls and their followers wanted to make England Catholic again. They especially resented the appointment of James Pilkington, a Protestant, as Bishop of Durham in 1561.
- The earls had lost much of their influence at court under Elizabeth. They resented the 'new men', such as William Cecil, John Forster and Robert Dudley.
- Elizabeth's refusal to name an heir, or to marry and have a child, created uncertainty. The earls feared civil war and loss of power and wealth under a future Protestant monarch.

The key players in the Northern Rebellion

The rebels of 1569–70

Thomas Percy, Earl of Northumberland – a major Catholic northern landowner

Ann Percy, the wife of Thomas Percy

Charles Neville, Earl of Westmorland – a major Catholic northern landowner

Mary Queen of Scots

Jane Neville, the wife of Charles Neville and the Duke of Norfolk's sister

Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, a senior noble who was raised as a Protestant, with family links to the old, northern Catholic families. He planned to marry Mary Queen of Scots – Elizabeth's Catholic cousin with a claim to the English throne, who posed a significant threat to Elizabeth.

The marriage plan

- Mary would marry the Duke of Norfolk, depose (remove) Elizabeth and become queen herself. She told the Spanish Ambassador in 1569 that she 'shall be Queen of England in three months' and that 'Mass shall be said all over the country'.
- Robert Dudley told Elizabeth of the plan, leading to Norfolk's arrest and imprisonment in the Tower.

Progress of the revolt

- Northumberland and Westmorland, with their wives' support, continued with the revolt. They took control of Durham Cathedral, celebrating Mass there, as well as in other northern churches, and began to move south.
- Elizabeth moved Mary to Coventry, to stop her escaping to join the rebels.
- Though the rebels captured Hartlepool, support from Spain never arrived.

Why did the revolt fail?

- Support from Spain never arrived.
- Many northern landowners, especially those in Lancashire and Cheshire, remained loyal to Elizabeth.
- Many landowners did not want to risk losing wealth gained from the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII by backing a failed revolt.

The revolt's significance

- Mary was not directly involved but the revolt showed that she could not be trusted – and she remained in prison.
- The pope excommunicated Elizabeth and called on Catholics to depose her, encouraging more plots.
- England's Catholics could not be trusted so the government took harsh steps against them.
- Elizabeth's control over the north of England was strengthened.

Those involved in the plot suffered different fates. Thomas Percy was executed, while Charles Neville fled abroad. The Duke of Norfolk was imprisoned and later pardoned.

Now try this

In no more than two paragraphs, explain why the Northern Rebellion threatened Elizabeth's position as monarch in 1569.

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Elizabeth's excommunication

Elizabeth's excommunication in 1570 was a turning point because it established that Catholics were a threat both to Elizabeth and her religious settlement.

Why were Catholics seen as a threat?

- **Catholics owed their allegiance to the pope** rather than the queen, and were therefore seen as disloyal to Elizabeth.
- **Religious wars in Europe** and the massacre of Protestants, especially in France and the Spanish Netherlands, caused many Protestants to worry they would be treated similarly if Catholicism were restored in England. People had not forgotten Mary I's brutal treatment of Protestants (many were burned alive).
- **Catholics were active in plots and rebellions** against Elizabeth, both in England (the Northern Rebellion) and Ireland (Desmond Rebellions of 1569–1573 and 1579–1583).



John Rogers, a Protestant, being burned alive at the stake during Mary I's reign. This image, from *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (published 1563), convinced many Protestants, especially Puritans, that Catholics were a threat.

The Catholic threat was greatest in the 1570s and 1580s when there were a number of plots and conspiracies against Elizabeth.

The papal bull of excommunication, 1570

- *Regnans in Excelsis* (meaning 'reigning on high') was a papal bull issued by Pope Pius V on 25 February 1570.
- It declared Elizabeth a **heretic** (someone who openly disagrees with approved Church teachings), calling her 'the pretended Queen of England and the servant of crime'.
- It released all Elizabeth's subjects from allegiance (loyalty) to her – they no longer had to obey their queen.
- Pope Gregory VIII suspended the bull in 1580 but Pope Sixtus V renewed it in 1588.



Pope Pius V issued the papal bull that excommunicated Elizabeth I.

The consequences of the papal bull

It encouraged Catholic states, such as France and Spain, to believe they could make war on England and support plots to overthrow Elizabeth as monarch.

The papal bull was a turning point because:

English treatment of Catholics became more severe.

It encouraged further plots against Elizabeth centred on Mary Queen of Scots.

Why things got worse for Catholics

After 1570, Elizabeth's government began to pass laws reducing the rights of Catholics:

- The Mass (a Catholic service) was banned.
- Devotional items such as rosary beads were treated with suspicion.
- **Recusants** were fined heavily.
- Catholic priests were arrested and were often tortured before being executed.

Catholics were now seen as the 'enemy within' and were closely monitored. For example, Francis Walsingham intercepted their correspondence to uncover plots against Elizabeth.

A **recusant** was a Catholic who refused to attend Church of England services on the grounds they were heretical (against the true teachings of the Catholic Church).

Now try this

In **one** paragraph, explain why Catholics were treated more harshly after the papal bull of 1570.