Elizabethan Era England

History and facts

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This eBook covers all major aspects of Elizabethan era in England.
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1. Queen Elizabeth I Biography

Elizabeth I was born in 1533.

Queen Elizabeth I was a member of the famous Tudor dynasty in England.

Elizabeth was the second daughter born to Henry VIII from his second wife, Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth got her name from her two grandmothers, Elizabeth of York and Elizabeth Howard. Henry was however desperate for a son to succeed him. Anne was pregnant twice after the birth of Elizabeth but unfortunately both the times she had a miscarriage.

King Henry by this time was fed up with Anne as she failed to give him his heir. In order to get rid of her, Henry got Anne arrested on the basis of some falsely implanted charges. During the trial, these charges were proved and Anne was executed in the Tower of London in 1536.

After the death of her mother, Elizabeth was declared as an illegitimate child of Henry and thus lost her position as a legitimate heir to the throne, like her older half-sister Mary. Barely eleven days had passed since the death of Anne when Henry VIII married his third wife, Jane Seymour.

He married three more times.

Henry’s sixth and the last wife, Katharine Parr had the greatest impact on Elizabeth’s life. She was very fond of the Tudor siblings and would always want them to be around her.
It was Katharine who laid the foundation of education in Elizabeth’s life and made her realize the importance of education. She also appointed the best tutors like Roger Ascham for Elizabeth under whose guidance Elizabeth was able to command languages like Latin, Greek, French and even English.

Finally, in 1558, at the 25 years of age, she ascended the throne. Her coronation took place at the Westminster Abbey ad she was received with adulation and happiness by her subjects. Her leaning towards Protestantism was a huge favouring factor.

The period in which she ruled was the pinnacle of renaissance. Art, drama, poetry and literature gained much importance and patronage. She was herself very fond of masques and theatre. The theatres bore wings during her reign and boasted of playwrights like William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton.

Elizabeth was the last monarch belonging to the Tudor dynasty. With the death of Elizabeth I, ended the long ruled Tudor’s reign who had strived for so long for the betterment of England.

2. **Elizabethan Society and Daily Life**

This section covers various social aspects during Elizabethan era.

1.1 **Government**

It was a monarchy. During Elizabethan times, the Queen held supreme power according to law, heredity and the doctrine of divine right; she was the primary source of patronage and had the last word on all state policy.

Government was viewed as the monarch's private business and its success therefore depended greatly upon the ruler's strength of character and political acumen.
The Elizabethan administrative structure was highly centralized, with most actions centered on the Privy Council, which in turn was directly appointed by the monarch.

The Elizabethan era was full of odd laws and things that stemmed primarily from Queen Elizabeth I's ideals and customs.

For example, she was an extremely religious person and therefore, everyone else who lived in England was required by law to attend a church as well. There were several other similar laws that were put into place as well. This stems from the form of government that there is where everyone's outlooks are not taken into account when creating law.

The Elizabethan politics and general overview of the treatment of life was very brutal in comparison to today. In fact, if you were being charged with a severe crime, you may have to endure several types of torture. For example, one woman was killed when she was charged with going against the Church of England. A law that really would have no bearing in today's court.

While the above sounds like a very bad time for England, it actually was not. In fact, it was a very prosperous time. While many of the laws and things stemmed down from previous monarchs, Queen Elizabeth I did a good job of continuing on with many of the country's trade policies.
1.2 Daily Life of People

The Elizabethan period in England had a daily life based on social order:

- The monarch as the highest
- The nobility as second rank
- The gentry as third
- Merchants as fourth and
- Laborers as fifth

The queen was believed to be God's representation here on Earth.

The Elizabethans had a high regard for family in a community. They believed that families were role models for the community. They were standardized and followed a deep respect for the importance of hierarchy.

They had customary rulings for the behavior of children that were taken from Bible passages.

Despite the developing awareness of the significance of comfort in any household, daily life in England during the Elizabethan era was still very difficult for the majority of the subjects. The Westerners ate at least two day meals, which are dinner and supper.

The middle and low ranks ate vegetables and grains.

The nobility class ate sweet food and meats.

Generally, life expectancy reached until 42 years old, but of course the richer rank had lived years longer than that.
All the more Elizabethan problems with sickness and diseases were worsened by the town's low sanitary measures.

Elizabethan period was considered to be the period where parlor was introduced, which became a section for new entertainment. The recreation was based on team or blood sports and other activities for personal amusement. For the wealthier rank, hunting became their favorite leisure game.

For entertainment needs, either they went to the theatres or to church events.

Only the boys were allowed to attend formal education; girls were not pushed to do so. But both women and men during the Elizabethan period wore their collars very high, influenced by the Spanish fashion.

1.3 Crime and Punishment

During the reign of Elizabeth I, the most common means of Elizabethan era torture included:

- Stretching
- Burning
- Beating and
- Drowning (or at least suffocating the person with water).

Torture at that time was used to punish a person for his crimes, intimidate him and the group to which he belongs, to gather information, and/or obtain a confession.

During the Elizabethan era, treason was considered as the worst crime a person could ever commit. Consequently, it was at cases of high treason when torture was strictly and heavily employed.
Other heinous crimes - including robbery and manslaughter - also warranted the use of torture.

The degree of torture that was applied was in accordance with the degree of the crime. Reportedly, women suffered from torture only rarely and lords and high officials were exempted from the act.

Theft for stealing anything over 5 pence resulted in hanging.

Travelling during the Elizabethan era could be dangerous, money was necessary and a license, obtained from the Bailiff in the Guild Hall, was required by anyone who needed to travel around England. It was a crime to travel without a license.

Punishment for every crime was harsh. For women-gossips, they were placed in a harsh cage called brank, wherein your head and arms were held by a sharpened metal band that exactly fitted into the mouth. Any tongue movement damaged the tongue.

Afterwards, the woman was paraded and whipped in the streets by an official.

Guilty robbers were handed down a death order. There was also another form of punishment called amputation saw. Harsher than the use of axe, the saw was much slower causing more pain to the criminal.

1.4 Elizabethan Culture and Traditions

Traditions are the very identity of a society. Customs and traditions played an important role in the life of people in Elizabethan times. People were expected to attend church every Sunday in order to remain aware about the customs and festivals according to the church calendar.
1.4.1 Elizabethan Era Music and Dance

Queen Elizabeth encouraged music and dancing amongst all of her subjects. She was a patron of all the arts and encouraged the work of Elizabethan composers and musicians.

1.4.1.1 Elizabethan Dances

Elizabethan dances enjoyed by the Upper Classes, Royalty and Nobility included the

- Cinque-pace
- Galliard
- Pavane
- Roundel
- Tordion
- the Volta

Elizabethan Music complemented the different forms of Elizabethan Dance.

Dancing in the Elizabethan era was considered "a wholesome recreation of the mind and also an exercise of the body". The emergence of different styles of music and new musical instruments combined with various experiments combining different instruments led to new dances being created.

Elizabethan dance varied according to the social class. The court dances enjoyed by royalty, nobility and the Upper classes were often imported from Italy, Spain or France.

Elizabethan dances differed between the Upper and Lower Classes. The Upper Classes enjoyed new types of music at court. They had a taste for new music and new dances.

Many courtiers travelled abroad and returned to the Elizabethan court with dances from Italy, Spain and France. These foreign influences were found in the development of new Elizabethan court dances and music.
These new dances had to be learnt and Dancing Masters were suitably employed.

These Elizabethan dances were highly sophisticated and stately with intricate steps and nuances, although the old favorite English country dances were still popular.

Many of the Court dances were performed as couples and the suggestive Elizabethan court dance called the Volt was the only dance which allowed the dancers to embrace closely. The form of entertainment called the Masque was popular with the Upper classes.

The lower classes enjoyed the more traditional country dances such as the

- Jig
- Morris Dancing or
- the Brand or
- the Brawle

These were closely associated with the customs and festivals celebrated in Elizabethan England.

1.4.1.2 Elizabethan Music

People during the Elizabethan era considered music as one significant part of their life. Their music is famous because of its classy and varied forms. In fact, theater became eminent during the time because it was always enhanced by music that would normally accompany the presentation.
Since it was always used in theater, it should project a sense of conversation to intensify the drama. It was classified into kinds which include:

1. Elizabethan court music
2. Elizabethan church music
3. Elizabethan town music
4. Elizabethan street music and
5. Elizabethan theater music

The most well known of all musical instruments in Elizabethan era, was the "virginal". It was made like a harpsichord, just rectangular in shape. Among strings, the lute was a common favorite. It is also an early form of the guitar.

Rebec and viol were two more stringed instruments. The viol was an ancestor of the violin. Viola da Gamba, a type of viol which was huge was laid on the knee and played.

Trumpets, flutes, trombones and clarions were the wind Elizabethan musical instruments. Crumhorn, Shawm, Fife and Hautboy were other Elizabethan musical instruments. The hautboy was an earlier kind of an oboe.

Keyed instruments included harpsichord, organ, spinet and virginal. Organ portative and harp consisted of some more Elizabethan musical instruments.

Elizabethan composers like William Byrd, Orlando Gibbons, John Dowland, Robert Johnson, Thomas Tallis, John Farmer and Thomas immortalized Elizabethan music and were the ones to witness and perform the birth of an organized orchestra.

1.5 Elizabethan Era Theatre

Theater in Elizabethan England was mainly divided into venues where the plays were performed; open air amphitheater, inn-yards and playhouses.
1.5.1 Inn-Yard Theaters

This was how the Elizabethan theater in England emerged. A possible root of the inn-yard theater were the so-called "strolling players" whose performing company moved from one village square or market place to another.

Inn-yards:

The Bull Inn
The Bell Savage
The Bell
The George Inn etc.

1.5.2 Open Air Amphitheater

This started with James Burbage in 1576 when he made the move to cast in iron the legitimacy of theater, its structure was patterned from Roman and Greek amphitheaters. Initially, what was staged in areas similar to this, like the town square, was the very popular form of entertainment called bull or bear baiting.

The stage mutated itself eventually to accommodate human theatricals but the construction of the very first amphitheaters and bull arenas were very similar.
Basically, what James Burbage wanted was to increase profits with this type of venue. Inn-yards can house 300 people while amphitheaters housed 3000.

**Amphitheaters:**

The Theatre, Finsbury Fields, Shoreditch, London  
Newington Butts, Southwark, Surrey  
The Curtain, Finsbury Fields, Shoreditch, London  
The Rose, Bankside, Surrey

**1.5.3 Playhouses**

It did not take long before indoor plays were produced. Their advent made it easier for the actors to cater to the nobility as the indoor setting provided comfort and luxury that this particular audience held highly.

The pay off of this luxury was that the price of the entrance fee was so steep; the common folk rarely had enough money to avail of this luxury theater.

Playhouses also allowed for the Elizabethan theater in England to continue during the winter months and in the evenings, using candlelight for lighting. As the stage was far intimate than the open stage, this allowed for more emphasis in the words of the play rather than the big, attention-grabbing effects.

**Playhouses:**

Paul's, St. Paul's Cathedral precinct,  
The Blackfriars,  
The Cockpit, Drury Lane, Westminster,
Whitehall Theatre,

Whitefriars

etc.

1.5.4 Elizabethan Theater Costume

The clothes worn during the Elizabethan era were more or less emulated on stage as theatre costumes, of course with a little more flash and inventiveness. Women as well as men were governed by strict laws which dictated what might be worn and what might not be worn.

However, Elizabethan theatre actors enjoyed certain artistic license in apparel owing to the insertion of a “Get Out” clause in the Sumptuary Law. Since women were forbidden to appear on stage and it was considered a taboo, the female parts of the play were also played by men.

In the Elizabethan era, the number of clothes one had to wear literally outweighed the weight of a person!

A woman’s costume included the inner garments, the clothes and the outer garments. The inner garments consisted of a singlet or chemise, corset, generally made of whalebone to pinch the waist so as to give an appearance of an incredible petite frame.

Then came stocking, pantaloons, and under skirt, a stomacher, which was a filler for the deep neck of a dress. It was usually intricately embroidered. And finally something called a forepart. The gowns, depending on the station of the person being portrayed was made of coarse cotton to silk and velvet.

Taffeta and brocade was also widely used. The dresses were full skirted and sleeved. The Elizabethan era was known for introducing the high stiff collars which is seen in many paintings of Queen Elizabeth. The sleeves were worn apart and the ensemble accessorized with shoes, capes, hats and reticules.
The men’s costume at the Elizabethan theatre was a shirt, stockings and as it turns out corsets! However, fewer men wore corsets in the Elizabethan era. The outer garments were britches, doublet which was a well fitted coat, sleeves separate, same stiff high collar and an overcoat. This was rounded off with a cape and hat. Cravats were also an integral part of the men’s attire.

The Elizabethan theatre costumes were colourful, vibrant and eye catching.

1.5.5 Elizabethan Plays and Playwrights

In Elizabethan era, the first real theatre was made. Plays that were written in the Elizabethan times graduated from just pastoral plays and biblical themes to a much richer content. The many genres of plays that were introduced enlivened the field of theatre and acting.

The plots of plays became more imaginative and convoluted. The themes ranged from romance, tragedy, comedy to mystery plays and revenge plays. Historical plays were also a great hit. Classicism took precedence over religion.

Some famous playwrights of Elizabethan plays were, first and foremost, William Shakespeare. Then came Christopher Marlowe, John Fletcher, Francis Beaumont, Thomas Kidd and Thomas Middleton.

Christopher Marlowe’s best include Doctor Faustus, The Jew of Malta and Edward II.

Greene was another good playwright who wrote Pandosto, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay.

Thomas Middleton’s best work is A game at chess.

The works of the most renowned playwright, William Shakespeare, include, Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, Macbeth, Midsummer Night’s Dream, The Comedy of Errors, Love’s Labour Lost, Taming of the Shrew, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Merchant of Venice, All’s well that ends well and several of England’s rulers’.
William Shakespeare, who is said to have moulded the world of drama, undoubtedly played an influential role in the development of Elizabethan plays and theatre. He wrote comedies, tragedies, historical documentaries and even tragic-comedies.

1.6 Arts, Architecture and Literature

These are some interesting facts about Elizabethan arts.

1.6.1.1 Art and architecture

Queen Elizabeth I's loved the arts and it showed. During her reign, paintings were dominated by portraiture and miniatures in particular. Elaborate textiles as well as embroidery were also prevalent in the decorative arts while sculpture found a place in architectural decoration and tombs.

Some of the most renowned Elizabethan England works of Art are the miniature paintings.

Elizabethan England decorative arts were dominated by silver works.

Intricate foliage designs as well as patterns were applied on to suits of armor and the textiles were embroidered with colorful silk and threads of pure gold and silver. In terms of art in architecture in Elizabethan England, it was all about a show of wealth as well as status.

Architecture worked towards a well-ordered symmetry. Home exteriors and interiors were decorated with elaborate reliefs, ornate chimneys, mullions and friezes. As mentioned beforehand, art during Elizabethan
England was a show or expression of power, status and wealth. Quite fitting, actually, everything was grandiose as its people were the same.

Generally, there are a few key features that you will note as being Elizabethan form of architecture. A lot of the style was taken from the Dutch and Italian Renaissance.

First, you will notice that there was a prominent architecture for very symmetrical layouts. In other words, often if you looked at the left side of a building, it frequently mirrored the right side if you were looking at it directly from the front.

Many of the homes built during the Elizabethan period featured a very long gallery. You would find the kitchen on one side, with the living area on the right. Between them would typically be a long gallery featuring very nice artwork of some of the most famous artists of this time period. This was a common theme among wealthy people’s homes.

The architecture is still considered to be one of the most prominent of its day and lasted for several eras after the Elizabethan period.

1.6.1.2 Literature

The renaissance during the Elizabethan era was quite significant to the country.

Literature had huge impact during the Elizabethan era. Many of the works are still studied around the world today.

People like William Shakespeare produced some of the plays and literature of all time, including Macbeth. Lower and upper class alike were enjoying the works on a regular basis in amphitheatres throughout England.

The style of the literature is what made it so revolutionary. Prior to this time,
speaking and entertaining based on highly controversial topics was really not allowed. However, this is why William Shakespeare and peoples work of this time was so popular.

If you look at the former plays and literature prior to the Elizabethan era you will notice that they were heavily religiously influenced. In fact, almost all of them had something to do with morality or mystery.

It did not fit to the custom of mystery plays that people were so used to seeing. Instead, people were shown a different side and topics that would interest them, even if they did not agree with it.

1.7 Elizabethan Era Sports

The games that the people of this era played are numerous. In fact games, the sports and entertainment was varied and helped people of the era relaxed a bit when work was over.

Often the games that people played included the element of gambling and this is one thing that added spice to the games.

Games of Elizabethan era can be grouped into major categories. These categories are the

Card games
Board games
Dice games
Sporting games and
the Children's games

Card games: Card games during those times are popular to all especially to those who love to gamble and play the game of chance. Some of the more popular card games of this era were the One and Thirty, the Ruff and Honors and the Maw.
The card game 'One and Thirty' was considered by many as the ancestor of the modern Blackjack that people play now.

When it comes to board games, Elizabethans are known to have played and popularized a number of these. Chess was the most popular board game during those times. Backgammon and 'Nine Men's Morris' are two examples of popular Elizabethan board games. The 'Alquerque' was a classic strategy game in the mold of what we know now as the checkers.

Elizabethans of this era was also known for their prowess on various sporting games. Archery was one popular sporting game. And the early ancestor of the modern-day badminton was also played by Elizabethans during this era. Other noteworthy Elizabethan England sporting games include billiards, bowls, early golf, Gameball, Hammer-Throwing, wrestling, tennis and a whole lot more.

Sports of the Elizabethan era weren't just for adults. Children have their own share of children games as well. The playing of marbles was popular, plus 'Blind Man's Buff'- a children's game that was played by adults as well and the Hopscotch.

### 1.8 Festivals, holidays and celebrations

The Feasts, Fairs and Festivals were all held at the same time of year giving Elizabethan people something to look forward to in their everyday Elizabethan lives.

Generally, they all loved the customs and festivals during Elizabethan period that were held each year.

Almost all of the Elizabethan Era Customs and festivals held each year were part of the church which they were required by law to attend. Since the Christian church celebrated many things throughout the year, it was a custom for all Elizabethans to celebrate these occasions.

Here are Customs & Festivals during an year:

**January**
Twelfth Night Religious festival and feasts celebrating the visit of the Wise Men, or Magi, following the birth of Jesus

February

St. Valentine’s day celebrating love - singing, dancing and pairing games

March

Easter was celebrated by the Mystery plays depicting the crucifixion

April

All Fool's Day. The Jesters took charge for the day and caused mayhem with jokes.

May

Summer festival celebrating May Day. A Queen of the May was chosen while villagers danced around the maypole

June

Midsummer Eve legends such as St George and the Dragon were relived. Bones were often burned leading to the term 'bonfire'. The summer Solstice was on June 23rd

July

Swithin's Day on 15th July.

August

Lammas Day was celebrated on August 2nd - The festival of the first wheat harvest of the year. Houses were sometimes decorated with garlands.

September
29th was when Michaelmas which celebrated the life of St Michael.

**October**

October 25th - St Crispin's Day. Bonfires and people acted as 'King Crispin'

**November**

All Souls Day or All Hallow's Day (Halloween). Revels were held and bonfires were lit.

**December** Christmas celebrations

### 3. Elizabethan Era Clothing

Clothing wasn't just merely an insignificant thing in the days of Elizabethan England. In fact it is quite significant that there is even a law related to it. These laws stated the colors as well as the type of clothing an individual was allowed to own and wear.

These laws were called 'Statutes of Apparel' and was enforced by the Queen herself in Greenwich on June 1574. The intent was to maintain social structure as well as to keep a firm restrain on the people's expenditure towards clothing.

Basically, Elizabethan Clothing was a part of the social order. It is also indicative of a particular person's status not only reflecting how wealthy or poor they are but also of their social reputation. For example, back then it is absurd for a peasant to copy more well off individuals through "luxurious" clothing which were only worn by upper classes.
The upper class of Elizabethan England wore elegant and luxurious clothing that were made of expensive velvet, exotic silk and satín.

The term Sumptuary law has been derived from the Latin words 'Sumptuariae leges' meaning the laws brought into force in order to systematize the habits of people in clothing, food, trade or business, to maintain social hierarchy, etc.

The Sumptuary laws were passed in 1571 during the Elizabethan period. As per this law, every person who is above six years was to wear a woolen cap on Sundays and holidays. As per this law, there had to be a strict dressing code for men. There was also a restriction on the fabrics and materials that were used for making the clothes.

Along with the restriction mentioned above, the men belonging to the upper classes of the society were allowed to spend only 100 pounds a year on their clothing.

1.9 Elizabethan Fashion

Fashion in England during the Elizabethan Age was considered a way of self-expression for all members of the social ranks.

For women, fashion was simple but made attractive. It covered the skin from the neck to the ankle. During this time, women worked hard to achieve a small waistline because gowns had a tight body piece to show off the tiny waistline. Details like ruffles were accentuated to the gowns to denote the high status of the woman-wearer in the society.
The gowns also had some sort of a puffy sleeve. Shoes were not important since they were covered by the long dresses. They also accentuated the clothing with big gold necklaces and a hood-like detail to cover the neck area.

There were changes in styles for men's fashion. The early part of the Elizabethan era had men sporting embroidered vest-looking and front-buttoned shirts with loose pants until the knee. The rich men wore finely-made-of-leather shoes, a flat silk or velvet hat, or a tall hat like a crown that was made of feathers of fabric.

Later on, they were dressed in cloaks held by a crucifix and chain with fine stockings in silk, and bonnets or hats with a plume on the side. Like women's clothing, men's clothes were detailed with inconvenient ruffles, too. It was inconvenient because these ruffles were stiff and about eight inches in width.

Similarly, the ruffles also revealed the status of men in the society. The gems attached to the clothing were also heavy. Boys and girls also wore dresses of the same styles. Dressing was regarded as an art form that is why Elizabethan people took time and effort to dress themselves.
Aside from clothing, hair was also an important factor in Elizabethan fashion in England. They made all efforts to wear their hair in fabulous styles and at the same time put joy and pride on themselves for this.

Fashion was considered an important lifestyle in the Elizabethan era. Fashion represented social status of men and women and gave them a sense of pride.

4. Famous Elizabethans

Here are some of the famous Elizabethan people.

1.10 William Shakespeare

He was an English poet and playwright and was regarded as the greatest writer in the English language. He is even known as the 'national poet' of England and the 'Bard of Avon'.

1.10.1 When was Shakespeare born?

The real date on which William Shakespeare was born is a mystery but is it is a known fact that he was born in the year 1564 as the third child to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. It is believed that William studied in King's New School in Standford.

1.10.2 Shakespeare’s Family

Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway when he was just 18 years old and they together had three children.

It is not known as to when exactly Shakespeare took to writing his plays but from the records of the performances of his plays show that it was sometime during 1585 and 1592 that he rose to great heights as an actor, writer and a part-owner of a playing company in London.
This period is also referred to as the 'Lost years' in Shakespeare's life. Shakespeare between 1589 and 1613 had produced most of his known work. The early plays written by Shakespeare mostly were comedy and history. Till 1608, he primarily wrote about tragedies and plays like Hamlet, King Lear and Macbeth are considered to be the finest work in the English language.

It was also believed that Shakespeare had acted in some of his plays like 'As You Like It' and 'Hamlet', where he was ghost of Hamlet's father.

Credit is to be given to Shakespeare to introduce the concept of romance as part of tragedy. Until his play Romeo and Juliet, romance was not a common phenomenon during that time.

Shakespeare dealt with many aspects like comedy, histories, tragedy, poems. The following are some examples of these categories:

1) Comedy:
   As You Like It
   All's Well That Ends Well
   The Comedy of Errors
   The Merchant of Venice
   Twelveth Night
   The Winter's Tale
   etc.

2) Tragedies:
   Romeo and Juliet
   Hamlet
   Othello
   King Lear
   Titus
   Andronicus
Macbeth
etc.

3) Histories:

King John
Henry IV - Part I & II
Henry V and VIII
Henry VI - Part I, II, III
Richard II, III

4) Poems:

Shakespeare's Sonnets
Venus and Adonis
A Lover's Complaint
etc.

5) Lost Plays:

Love's Labour's Won
Cardenio

6) Apocrypha:

The Birth of Merlin
Arden of Faversham
Locrine
The London Prodigal
The Puritan
A yorkshire Tragedy etc.

1.10.3 Death of Shakespeare:

The cause of Shakespeare's death is still unclear but it is believed that he died of a fever in 1616. The world might have lost this eminent
personality a long time back but he still lives on in our hearts through his glorious works.

1.11 Sir Francis Drake

Sir Francis Drake (1540 - 1596) was an Explorer, Pirate and Politician of the Elizabeth era. He was born in Tavistock, Devon in 1540.

Throughout his life Sir Francis Drake became a thorn in the eye of the Spanish forces. He led the forces at his disposal, plundering Spanish ships and ports at will. There was a point when the Spanish feared him and King Philip II even announced a reward on his head.

However if the Spanish will truly remember him, it will be for the defeat of the Spanish Armada inflicted by British Fleets in 1588. Drake was the second in command (vice-admiral) of the British Fleet that repulsed the Spanish Armada. Drake was also said to be the one who rounded fleeing Spanish ships after the sea battle. He was known to the Spanish as "El Draque"

1.11.1 Circumnavigation of the Earth

In 1577 Queen Elizabeth I commissioned Drake's expedition around the world. On 15th November 1577, Drake and his crew set out from Plymouth. There onwards the crew faced bad weather, Enemy ships and Mutiny from a crew member called Thomas Doughtry, to eventually reach Sierra Leone in July 1580.

Drake died in 1596 of Dysentery and Fever.

1.12 Sir Walter Raleigh

Sir Walter Raleigh was a famous pirate during Elizabethan Era. He was born either in 1552 or 1554 as the youngest son to a Protestant family settled in Devon, England. There is very little information about his life before he became a pirate, but he was known to have lived in Ireland for some duration.
Sir Walter Raleigh came back to England from Ireland in 1581 and progressed quickly in Queen Elizabeth I's favor and in 1585 was awarded knighthood. He participated in the colonization of Virginia by England. He is known to have secretly married Elizabeth Throckmorton.

He was awarded a huge estate in Ireland for his role in the conspiracy. He became the Governor of Jersey but there is ambiguity about the exact year. Some believe it to be 1585 where there are other data which state that he became the Governor somewhere around 1600-1603.

In 1603, after the demise of Queen Elizabeth I, Walter was arrested for his role in the Main Plot against King James I. In 1616, Raleigh was released to lead a second expedition to search for El Dorado. The expedition was a failure, and Raleigh also defied the king's instructions by attacking the Spanish. On his return to England, the death sentence was reinstated and Raleigh's execution took place on 29 October 1618.

### 1.13 Christopher Marlowe

Christopher Marlowe was an English dramatist and is considered the father of English tragedy. He was the eldest son of a shoemaker at Canterbury and was born in that city on the 6th of February 1564.
1.14 Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus was a navigator, explorer and a colonist. He can be considered an early explorer who helped further explorations during the Elizabethan era – the age of exploration.

He was born in 1451 in Genoa, Italy. His father, Domenico Colombo was a wool weaver by profession. Christopher had very little educational training and would help his father along with his younger sibling, Bartholomew in weaving.

Though he did not have any formal training in reading and writing, much of it was acquired by him on his expeditions.

Christopher began his career in the year 1473. In 1476, he was one of the members who had participated to help carry cargo from Genoa to the northern Europe.

In 1485, Christopher had put forward his plans before John II, King of Portugal asking him three ships for his voyage into the Atlantic for searching a western route to the Orient and to return back.

The three ships used by Christopher were Santa Maria, Nina and Pinta. There is no information about the ships taken by Christopher for expedition.

It was on 3rd August, 1492 that Christopher set out on his First Voyage. The first halt was at Canary Islands, owned by Castile.

He started from San Sebastian de la Gomera. Rodrigo de Triana (Juan Rodriguez Bermejo) a sailor on Pinta, was the one to see the land first. On reaching the island, Christopher named it San Salvador, Bahamas, as it is known today. Coasts of Cuba and Hispaniola were also explored by Christopher.
Christopher Columbus died at the age of 55 years in 1506. Christopher is always remembered as the man who ‘discovered’ America.

Christopher was not exactly looking for America when he landed there. He was out to search for a shorter route to reach the Far East where there were valuable spices and silks. He landed in the Bahamas and named it San Salvador thinking that he landed near the Spice Islands near India and therefore named the people he saw there as Indians.

Even at the time of his death Christopher was under the impression that he had found a new route to the Far East.

The expedition made by Christopher may not have landed him in the place where he wanted to be but these voyages proved to be an essential source of inspiration for the later on explorers. In Spain, 12th October is celebrated as the anniversary of Christopher’s 1492 landing on the American soil. In American states, except Canada, 2nd Monday of October is regarded as his landing day in America.

5. Royal Navy and defeat of the Armada

Background about Armada:

The Spanish Armada or Grande y Felicisima Armanda as it is called in Spanish, was the famous Spanish ship that had sailed from Spain under the control of Duke of Mnedina Sidonia in July 1588 with the intention of conquering England and thus upsetting the successful reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

The reason for the birth of Spanish Armada was the fact that Philip II of Spain with Elizabeth I ruled England till his wife Mary was killed in 1558 on the Queen's orders. Elizabeth I of England and Mary, Queen of Scots, were half sisters.

After his wife's death, Philip II decided to avenge her death and began to plot a scheme to attack England and uproot the Queens rule. His attack and capture of England would also mean that the British will not be able to invade the Spanish assets in the New World.
The commander appointed to lead the Armada was Santa Cruz, but he died in before the Armada would sail and Medina Sidonia took charge of the ship. Thus, under the command of Medina Sidonia, the ship sailed through the seas with 22 warships of the Navy and 108 converted merchant ships.

On 28th May 1588, the Armada started from Spain and sailed towards the English Channel. On the same day Queen Elizabeth's ambassador, Dr Valentine Dale made peace agreements with Parma's representatives. However, on 16th July, the agreements were set aside. The English ships were at Plymouth watching the movements of Spain.

At this point, the English ships were more in number than the Spanish ships while the Spanish ships had more gun power. The Spanish Armada had set out late into the sea than expected owing to the bad weather conditions. It was in July that the Armada was visible near St Michael's Mount in Cornwall. The next night of the Armada coming within sight, English ships attacked.

In this attack, two of the Spanish ships, Rosario and San Salvador had to be abandoned owing to the damage caused to them. This benefited the English as they seized the ships and took possession of the gunpowder left by the Spanish.

The battle of Gravelines was fought near the port of Gravelines which was easily accessible to Spain. By this time the English were well informed about the Armada and its short comings. The English ships bombarded the Spanish Armada and other small ships with gunpowder thus causing them losses.

After this attack, it was decided that the ships would go back to Spain so they travelled from the Atlantic, passed Ireland. The ships while on their way back got caught in storm which destroyed many of the ships. The ones, who had managed to survive the storm, took shelter in Scotland. On their returning home, it was soon discovered that around 50 ships had been lost or destroyed.
By August, the Spanish troops were battling with hunger, thirst and they all were exhausted. Medina was forced to think of some way to reach Spain as they were no longer in the position to hold ground against the English ships. It was in September 1588 that the Armada reached the North Atlantic via Scotland and Ireland.

It was believed that more than half the men that had started their journey on the Armada never returned home.

The victory of England over Spain is very famous event in the English history since England was successful in defeating a powerful country like Spain. Sir Francis Drake was regarded as a hero for his role in the Spanish Armada. In Spain, he was looked upon as a pirate.

6. Religion during Elizabethan era

When Elizabeth I ascended to the throne in 1558, Catholics and Protestants wrangled for political power in England.

Elizabeth's first act as the Queen was restoring Protestantism as the official religion. She did, however, firmly believe that people should be allowed to practice the Catholic religion without fear so long they kept their religion private and were prepared to attend their parish churches.

It also became a vital issue affecting her right as a queen as the validity of the marriage of her mother Anne Boleyn and her father; Henry VII was being threatened by the Roman Catholics. This thus inclined Elizabeth to Protestantism.

Come 1559, the Parliament was called to create a new Church of England as Elizabeth cut off the ties with the Roman Catholic Church through the Reformation Bill. The Second House of the Parliament resisted most of the contents of this bill, which appointed Elizabeth as the Governor of the Church of England. When Parliament session resumed, two new bills were entered.
1.15 Act of Supremacy

This bill, in a few words, gives full authority of the Church of England to the reigning monarch, overpowering the Pope in Rome. Elizabeth also declared an Oath of Supremacy, instructing those in church office to swear acknowledge the monarch as head of both Church and state. This bill was passed without much difficulty.

1.16 Act of Uniformity

This bill passed the House of Commons with flying colors but it only passed by 3 points in the House of Lords. This bill made it a mandate to go to Church every Sundays and holidays, with a twelve pence fine for those who failed to do so. Edward IV's prayer books were also molded into one new Book of Common Prayer. The Act of Uniformity had a relatively vague text so as to accommodate both Catholic and Protestant practices.

7. Science and Technology

The Elizabethan era was a period of great advances in world of

   Exploration
   Medicine, and the
   Study of the universe.

The period brought great advances in medical science, namely in the study of human anatomy and developments in dissection and surgical operations.

Inventions of the period include the

   Graphite pencil
   The modern calendar
   Time bomb
   Wind-powered sawmill, and
   The thermoscope.
Galileo Galilei's thermoscope indicated temperature differences and was the predecessor to the thermometer.

During the Elizabethan era, Galileo also invented the hydrostatic balance, an instrument that could weigh objects in water such that their density could be calculated. In 1602, Galileo began work on a telescope modeled after one made by Hans Lippershey.

The astronomers Thomas Digges and Thomas Harriot made important contributions; William Gilbert published his seminal study of magnetism, De Magnete, in 1600.

Substantial advancements were made in the fields of cartography and surveying. The eccentric but influential John Dee also merits mention. Much of this scientific and technological progress related to the practical skill of navigation.

English achievements in exploration were noteworthy in the Elizabethan era.

Sir Francis Drake circumnavigated the globe between 1577 and 1581, and Martin Frobisher explored the Arctic. The first attempt at English settlement of the eastern seaboard of North America occurred in this era - the abortive colony at Roanoke Island in 1587.

While Elizabethan England is not thought of as an age of technological innovation, some progress did occur.

The era also made marks in technological innovation. This was the era when the first spring-suspension coach was crafted and used and replaced the litters and the carts. The coaches then became fashionable and became the sports car of the next century.

8. Elizabethan Children Education

For most children, education would begin at home, where they were taught the basic etiquettes and proper manners. Other basic principles
of childhood included respecting their mother and father, asking their parents blessing, rising early in the morning and saying their prayers.

All children, from 5 to 7 years, attended 'Petty Schools' where lessons and general education were conducted. These Petty schools were usually run, for a small fee, by a local, well educated tutor or governess in their own house, and were also referred to as 'Dame Schools'.

At the 'Petty School' or 'Dame School' children's education would consist of being taught to read and write English and learning the catechism, which was an Elizabethan book detailing the details of the Christian Faith.

Curriculum, also, included the correct behavior at the table such as eating small morsels, chewing properly, using a knife and using a napkin. Children would also be taught their 'place' in society which included where they should sit at the table.

It was necessary for boys, from the age of 7 to 14, to attend grammar school, but girls were rarely allowed in the institutions. Only very wealthy people allowed their daughters to be taught, but only at home and with a restricted curriculum.

During this time, endowed schooling was available in a few localities, where funds were sufficient to provide support as well as the necessary education scholarship.

This meant that even the boys of very poor families were able to attend school if they were not needed to work at home. Life at school, and childhood in general, was quite strict. Punishments were fierce and corporal punishments, like beating and caning, were not an uncommon occurrence.

After completion of grammar school, most boys were generally expected to start working. Those who wanted to learn trades or crafts attached themselves to established traders or craftsmen as apprentices. Some even apprenticed as the curators of the clergy.
For the privileged few, further education, in the form of universities, was available. Various types of faculties were provided at the universities, like Philosophy, Theology, Literature, Arts, Sciences and Law.

In addition to a University education, the privileged classes would also travel the major cities of Europe, to study cultures, local arts and architecture and customs and traditions. Travelling was difficult, and needed both money and time. So, only the nobility followed this course of learning. Most were content with the education at their disposal.

Back in the days of old Elizabethan England, little boys are often dressed in skirts, which were called "doublets" back then, similar to what his sister wore. But between the ages of 3 and 7 he gets his first pair of breech hose or breeches, but this depends on the assessment of his nurse and parents.

Breeching was an event celebrated with a party; it is a time when the young boy becomes a young man. There were many beliefs for children during the Elizabethan era in England. Like their belief an infant must be wrapped in swaddling bands during the first 6 to 12 months of its life, this is because they believed that letting them use their limbs was unhealthy.

The children included in poor social class were given apprenticeships which were often paid for the parish church.

The parish expects to benefit from this child when they have learned the skill. Boys were often apprenticed by their master until they reach 24 years old. On the other hand, the girls who were lucky to get an apprenticeship would often work with the mistress who took her under her wing until she reaches the age of 21.

The simple rule here is male primogeniture (the system of inheritance or succession by the firstborn, specifically the eldest son.).

Even if the eldest child is a girl, the oldest son still gets everything. A bit unfair, yes, but that's how things were back then. Although there
have been occasions, though very rare, when a title and land was passed onto a female in the family line.

The schools were mainly for grammar education and were subdivided into two - the public and the private. The public schools for grammar were raised from monetary assistance of the noble or rich patrons and were intended for both the poor and rich boys; girls were not allowed in here.

On the other hand, the private schools for grammar were charging school fees to parents of the boys. Each of the grammar schools had their students learn both Latin and Greek. Bible reading and monetary contribution to schools were believed by English Protestants to be significant and a moral obligation.

Education in England in Elizabethan times was more available but yet limited to the males. Plus, the fact that education was dependent on the social ranking of the person. Illiteracy was common to laborers; merchants were of course more educated than them.

9. **Elizabethan Food**

The food and the presentation of it that was served and consumed during the time of Elizabethan England can be viewed as varied, and the variations of the food was due to differentiation in social standing and wealth.

Meat was the primary food consumed by most people that are considered to be part of the wealthy and privileged class. But meat wasn't just the type of food consumed by people during those times. Agricultural products were also widely consumed, thanks partly to the introduction of agricultural techniques during those times. Food during the Elizabethan England was not an issue for most people.

The population during those times resorted to the planting of fruit trees that helped boost food production. The era also saw the improvement of food security due to the introduction of food supplies from the New World.
The food that was served during the era was no simple food. Their food was marked with great detail and was always presented with elegance. This was especially true for the food that was usually prepared for the wealthy and the nobility class. The taste of the food served during those times is as important if compared to the overall look of the food.

People who lived during this era treasured their food and used different methods in order to make the presentation of the food over the top. For example, Elizabethans of this era domesticated peacocks not just for the meat of the poultry but also for its feathers. The feathers that can be harvested from the peacocks are used to decorate the foods that are usually served during banquets.

Meat was the most popular food for people of the Elizabethan era. And the meat was usually sold at large markets, and the other food supplies were sourced from small markets. Meat, fishes and poultry during those times are cooked in varied ways as well. Some of the more common methods employed by Elizabethans was spit roasting, baking, boiling, smoking, salting or thru frying.

The smoking of the meat was popular, and was intended in order to preserve the food. Though there are a number of cooking variations that were employed during those times, the people of Elizabethan England mostly preferred cooking that was conducted over open flame.

Elizabethan England food and dishes are usually prepared with the use of a number of different kitchen utensils. Pots, pans, skillets and cauldrons are examples of utensils used in the kitchen. Food preparation was made possible with the use of ladles, knives and scissors. Baking trays crafted from hardened pastry was used for baking.

To complete their meal, Elizabethans also had their own versions of drinks. People of this era were known to patronize wine and ale. And the choices of drinks also revealed the social status and the standing of the person. For example, the person of higher class drank both, while the other person of lower class drank ale.
Aside from these two drinks, it was also the time of an alcoholic drink called mead. Mead was drunk by people of all classes and this particular drink was concocted using honey as its main ingredient.

**Vegetables** used were beans, turnips, greens, parsnips, carrots, cabbage, colewart, beetroot, salsify, artichokes, asparagus, peas, salads, lettuce, onions, leeks, pumpkins, melon, cucumbers, skirret, horseradish, gourds, olives, potatoes, yams.

**Herbs:** chervil, young sow thistle, corn salad, leaves of clary, spotted cowslip.

**Bread:** wheat, white, rye, barley. In times of dearth, bread made of horse-corn, peas, beans, oats, tares, lentils, acorns.

**Fruits:** oranges, cherries, raspberries, strawberries, mulberries, peaches, apricots, cornels, currants, raisins, lemons, gooseberry, plums, pears, apples, grapes.

**Sweets:** custard, jellies, eringoes, comfits, suckets, codinac, marmalade, cakes, pastries, sugar bread, gingerbread, flan, seed cake, pudding, mincepies, sugar, honey.

**Drinks:** stale ale, spirits, milk, buttermilk, whey. Tea and coffee were unknown until well into the 1600s.

Death of Elizabeth and her Legacy

Queen Elizabeth I throughout her 44 years of ruling was regarded as the powerful and efficient ruler that England ever had. Elizabeth continued to carry out her duties till 1602-1603. By this time, Elizabeth had gotten old and was tired both emotionally and physically.

At about the winter time, Elizabeth had fallen sick after she took a walk in the cold winter air and had even complained of a sore throat.
She was thus restricted to the comfort of her bed and did not allow her administrators to call for a doctor. It was assumed by her contemporaries that Queen Elizabeth would fight her ailment.

But she did not as she suffering from old age, tiredness and most importantly loneliness. After some days of lying in the bed, she could only communicate through gestures as speaking would cause her pain. All those around the Queen had not doubt that these were the final few days of the Queen.

The fact that Queen Elizabeth was unmarried, and was also known as the Virgin Queen, brought the question of her successor in the forefront in the midst of her reclining condition. She had never clearly stated the name of the person to whom she wanted to make her successor.

Queen Elizabeth died in her sleep in the wee hours of 24th March, 1603. It is interesting that the last monarch of the Tudor dynasty died on the same day as her father and her sister.

Queen's funeral took place on 28th April, 1603 after King James I had been crowned the throne. The entire England was in grief because of the Queen's death. With James I coming to power, Scotland and England were united as one nation in 1603.

Thus ended the beautiful era of Queen Elizabeth I, who rose to power and became the Queen despite all odds.
10. **Resources for further reading**

More about England and its history:


Ancient History:


http://www.TheIndianHistory.org/ - [Indian History](http://www.TheIndianHistory.org/)


More History Related Sites:

http://www.OttomanEmpireHistory.com/ - [Ottoman Empire History](http://www.OttomanEmpireHistory.com/)


English used in this book is mostly ‘English’ English.

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