**Elizabethan era**

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| **Queen Elizabeth** | |
| **1558–1603**  [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/af/Darnley_stage_3.jpg/220px-Darnley_stage_3.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Darnley_stage_3.jpg) | |
| **Preceded by** | [Tudor period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tudor_period) |
| **Followed by** | [Stuart period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuart_period) ([Jacobean era](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobean_era" \o "Jacobean era)) |
| **Monarch** | [Queen Elizabeth I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_Elizabeth_I) |

The **Elizabethan era** was the epoch in English history of [Queen Elizabeth I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_I_of_England)'s reign (1558–1603). Historians often depict it as the [golden age](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Age_%28metaphor%29) in [English history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_England). The symbol of [Britannia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britannia) was first used in 1572 and often thereafter to mark the Elizabethan age as a renaissance that inspired national pride through classical ideals, international expansion, and naval triumph over the hated Spanish foe. In terms of the entire century, [the historian John Guy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Guy_%28historian%29) (1988) argues that "England was economically healthier, more expansive, and more optimistic under the [Tudors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tudor_dynasty)" than at any time in a thousand years.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#cite_note-1)

This "golden age"[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#cite_note-2) represented the apogee of the [English Renaissance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Renaissance) and saw the flowering of poetry, music and literature. The era is most famous for [theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_theatre), as [William Shakespeare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare) and many others composed plays that broke free of England's past style of theatre. It was an age of exploration and expansion abroad, while back at home, the [Protestant Reformation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestant_Reformation) became more acceptable to the people, most certainly after the [Spanish Armada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Armada) was repulsed. It was also the end of the period when England was a separate realm before its royal union with Scotland.

The Elizabethan Age is viewed so highly largely because of the periods before and after. It was a brief period of largely internal peace between the [English Reformation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Reformation) and the battles between Protestants and Catholics and the battles between [parliament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_of_England) and the monarchy that engulfed the seventeenth century. The Protestant/Catholic divide was settled, for a time, by the [Elizabethan Religious Settlement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_Religious_Settlement), and parliament was not yet strong enough to challenge royal absolutism.

England was also well-off compared to the other nations of Europe. The [Italian Renaissance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Renaissance) had come to an end under the weight of foreign domination of the peninsula. France was embroiled in its own religious battles that would only be settled in 1598 with the [Edict of Nantes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict_of_Nantes). In part because of this, but also because the English had been expelled from their last outposts on the continent, the centuries long conflict between France and England was largely suspended for most of Elizabeth's reign.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Britannia-Statue.jpg)The one great rival was Spain, with which England clashed both in Europe and the [Americas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americas) in skirmishes that exploded into the [Anglo-Spanish War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Spanish_War_%281585%29) of 1585–1604. An attempt by [Philip II of Spain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_II_of_Spain) to invade England with the [Spanish Armada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Armada) in 1588 was famously defeated, but the tide of war turned against England with an unsuccessful expedition to Portugal and the Azores, the [Drake-Norris Expedition of 1589](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Armada). Thereafter Spain provided some support for Irish Catholics in a debilitating [rebellion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerilla_warfare) against English rule, and Spanish naval and land forces inflicted a series of reversals against English offensives. This drained both the English Exchequer and economy that had been so carefully restored under Elizabeth's prudent guidance. English commercial and territorial expansion would be limited until the signing of the [Treaty of London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_London,_1604) the year following Elizabeth's death.

England during this period had a centralised, well-organised, and effective government, largely a result of the reforms of [Henry VII](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_VII_of_England) and [Henry VIII](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_VIII_of_England). Economically, the country began to benefit greatly from the new era of [trans-Atlantic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transatlantic_crossing) trade.

*The National Armada memorial in* [*Plymouth*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plymouth) *using the Britannia image to celebrate the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 (William Charles May, sculptor, 1888)*

* [1 Romance and reality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Romance_and_reality) *Contents:*
* [2 Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Government)
  + [2.1 Plots, intrigues and conspiracies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Plots.2C_intrigues_and_conspiracies)
  + [2.2 Royal Navy and defeat of the Armada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Royal_Navy_and_defeat_of_the_Armada)
  + [2.3 Colonising the New World](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Colonising_the_New_World)
* [3 Distinctions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Distinctions)
* [4 Religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Religion)
* [5 Science, technology and exploration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Science.2C_technology_and_exploration)
* [6 Education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Education)
* [7 Gender](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Gender)
  + [7.1 Marriage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Marriage)
* [8 Food](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Food)
* [9 High culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#High_culture)
  + [9.1 Theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Theatre)
  + [9.2 Music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Music)
  + [9.3 Fine arts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Fine_arts)
* [10 Popular culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Popular_culture)
  + [10.1 Sports and entertainment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Sports_and_entertainment)
  + [10.2 Festivals, holidays and celebrations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#Festivals.2C_holidays_and_celebrations)

**Romance and reality**

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Elizabeth_succession_allegory.jpg)

***Elizabeth ushers in Peace and Plenty.*** *Detail from The Family of Henry VIII: An Allegory of the Tudor Succession, c. 1572, attributed to* [*Lucas de Heere*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucas_de_Heere)*.*

The [Victorian era](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_era) and the early 20th century idealised the Elizabethan era. The [*Encyclopædia Britannica*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica) maintains that "The long reign of Elizabeth I, 1558–1603, was England's Golden Age...'[Merry England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merry_England),' in love with life, expressed itself in music and literature, in architecture and in adventurous seafaring." This idealising tendency was shared by Britain and an Anglophilic America. In popular culture, the image of those adventurous Elizabethan seafarers was embodied in the films of [Errol Flynn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Errol_Flynn)

In response and reaction to this hyperbole, modern historians and biographers have tended to take a more dispassionate view of the Tudor period.  
 **Government**

Elizabethan England was not particularly successful in a military sense during the period, but it avoided major defeats and built up a powerful navy. On balance, it can be said that Elizabeth provided the country with a long period of general if not total peace and generally increasing prosperity. Having inherited a virtually bankrupt state from previous reigns, her frugal policies restored fiscal responsibility. Her fiscal restraint cleared the regime of debt by 1574, and ten years later the Crown enjoyed a surplus of £300,000. Economically, [Sir Thomas Gresham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Thomas_Gresham)'s founding of the [Royal Exchange](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Exchange_%28London%29) (1565), the first stock exchange in England and one of the earliest in Europe, proved to be a development of the first importance, for the economic development of England and soon for the world as a whole. With taxes lower than other European countries of the period, the economy expanded; though the wealth was distributed with wild unevenness, there was clearly more wealth to go around at the end of Elizabeth's reign than at the beginning. This general peace and prosperity allowed the attractive developments that "Golden Age" advocates have stressed.

**Plots, intrigues and conspiracies**

The Elizabethan Age was also an age of plots and conspiracies, frequently political in nature and often involving the highest levels of Elizabethan society. High officials in Madrid, Paris and Rome sought to kill Elizabeth, a Protestant, and replace her with [Mary, Queen of Scots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary,_Queen_of_Scots), a Catholic. That would be a prelude to the religious recovery of England for Catholicism. In 1570, the [Ridolfi plot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ridolfi_plot) was thwarted. In 1584, the [Throckmorton Plot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Throckmorton) was discovered, after Francis Throckmorton confessed his involvement in a plot to overthrow the Queen and restore the Catholic Church in England. Another major [conspiracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_%28political%29) was the [Babington Plot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babington_Plot) – the event which most directly led to Mary's execution, the discovery of which involved a [double agent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Double_agent) [Gilbert Gifford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilbert_Gifford) acting under the direction of [Francis Walsingham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Walsingham), the Queen's highly effective spy master.

The [Essex Rebellion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essex_Rebellion) of 1601 has a dramatic element as just before the uprising, supporters of the Earl of Essex, among them Charles and Joscelyn Percy (younger brothers of the [Earl of Northumberland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Percy,_9th_Earl_of_Northumberland)), paid for a performance of [Richard II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_II_%28play%29) at the [Globe Theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globe_Theatre), apparently with the goal of stirring public ill will towards the monarchy. It was reported at the trial of Essex by [Chamberlain's Men](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Chamberlain%27s_Men) actor [Augustine Phillips](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_Phillips), the conspirators paid the company forty [shillings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shilling) "above the ordinary" (i. e., above their usual rate) to stage the play, which the players felt was too old and "out of use" to attract a large audience.In the [Bye Plot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bye_Plot) of 1603, two Catholic priests planned to kidnap King James and hold him in the Tower of London until he agreed to be more tolerant towards Catholics. Most dramatic was the 1605 [Gunpowder Plot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gunpowder_Plot) to blow up the House of Lords during the State Opening of Parliament. It was discovered in time with eight conspirators executed, including [Guy Fawkes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_Fawkes), who became the iconic evil traitor in English lore. **Royal Navy and defeat of the Armada**

*The Spanish Armada fighting the English navy at the* [*Battle of Gravelines*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naval_battle_of_Gravelines) *in 1588.*

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Invincible_Armada.jpg)While Henry VIII had launched the [Royal Navy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Navy), Edward and Mary had ignored it and it was little more than a system of coastal defense. Elizabeth made naval strength a high priority. She risked war with Spain by supporting the "[Sea Dogs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_Dogs)," such as [John Hawkins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hawkins_%28naval_commander%29) and [Francis Drake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Drake), who preyed on the Spanish merchant ships carrying gold and silver from the New World. The Navy yards were leaders in technical innovation, and the captains devised new tactics. Parker (1996) argues that the full-rigged ship was one of the greatest technological advances of the century and permanently transformed naval warfare. In 1573 English shipwrights introduced designs, first demonstrated in the "Dreadnaught," that allowed the ships to sail faster and maneuver better and permitted heavier guns. Whereas before warships had tried to grapple with each other so that soldiers could board the enemy ship, now they stood off and fired broadsides that would sink the enemy vessel. When Spain finally decided to invade and conquer England it was a fiasco. Superior English ships and seamanship foiled the invasion and led to the destruction of the [Spanish Armada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Armada) in 1588, marking the high point of Elizabeth's reign. Technically, the Armada failed because Spain's over-complex strategy required coordination between the invasion fleet and the Spanish army on shore. Also, the poor design of the Spanish cannons meant they were much slower in reloading in a close-range battle. Spain and France still had stronger fleets, but England was catching up.

Parker has speculated on the dire consequences if the Spanish had landed their invasion army in 1588. He argues that the Spanish army was larger, more experienced, better-equipped, more confident, and had better financing. The English defenses, on the other hand, were thin and outdated; England had too few soldiers and they were at best only partially trained. Spain had chosen England's weakest link and probably could have captured London in a week. Parker adds that a Catholic uprising in the north and in Ireland could have brought total defeat.  
  
  
  
  
**Colonising the New World**

The discoveries of Christopher Columbus electrified all of western Europe, especially maritime powers like England. King Henry VII commissioned [John Cabot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cabot) to lead a voyage to find a northern route to the [Spice Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maluku_Islands) of Asia; this began the search for the [North West Passage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_West_Passage). Cabot sailed in 1497 and reached [Newfoundland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newfoundland_%28island%29). He led another voyage to the Americas the following year, but nothing was heard of him or his ships again.

In 1562 Elizabeth sent [privateers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Privateer) [Hawkins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hawkins_%28naval_commander%29) and [Drake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Drake) to seize booty from Spanish and Portuguese ships off the coast of [West Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Africa). When the [Anglo-Spanish Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Spanish_War_%281585%29) intensified after 1585, Elizabeth approved further raids against Spanish ports in the Americas and against shipping returning to Europe with treasure. Meanwhile, the influential writers [Richard Hakluyt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Hakluyt) and [John Dee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dee) were beginning to press for the establishment of England's own overseas empire. Spain was well established in the Americas, while Portugal, in union with Spain from 1580, had an ambitious global empire in Africa, Asia and South America. France was exploring the North America. England was stimulated to create its own colonies, with an emphasis on the [West Indies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Indies) rather than in North America.

[Martin Frobisher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Frobisher) landed at [Frobisher Bay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frobisher_Bay) on [Baffin Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baffin_Island) in August 1576; He returned in 1577, claiming it in Queen Elizabeth's name, and in a third voyage tried but failed to found a settlement in Frobisher Bay.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:1590_or_later_Marcus_Gheeraerts,_Sir_Francis_Drake_Buckland_Abbey,_Devon.jpg)

*Sir Francis Drake*

From 1577 to 1580, [Sir Francis Drake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Drake) circumnavigated the globe. Combined with his daring raids against the Spanish and his great victory over them at [Cadiz in 1587](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_C%C3%A1diz_%281587%29), he became a famous hero—his exploits are still celebrated—but England did not follow up on his claims. In 1583, [Humphrey Gilbert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humphrey_Gilbert) sailed to Newfoundland, taking possession of the harbour of [St John's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._John%27s,_Newfoundland) together with all land within two hundred [leagues](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_%28unit%29) to the north and south of it.

In 1584, the queen granted [Sir Walter Raleigh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Raleigh) a charter for the colonisation of [Virginia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Colony); it was named in her honour. Raleigh and Elizabeth sought both immediate riches and a base for privateers to raid the Spanish treasure fleets. Raleigh sent others to found the [Roanoke Colony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roanoke_Colony); it remains a mystery why the settlers all disappeared. In 1600, the queen chartered the [East India Company](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_India_Company). It established trading posts, which in later centuries evolved into [British India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_India), on the coasts of what is now India and [Bangladesh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh). Larger scale colonisation began shortly after Elizabeth's death.

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Distinctions**

England in this era had some positive aspects that set it apart from contemporaneous continental European societies. Torture was rare, since the English legal system reserved torture only for capital crimes like treason—though forms of corporal punishment, some of them extreme, were practised. The persecution of witches began in 1563, and hundreds were executed, although there was nothing like the frenzy on the Continent Mary had tried her hand at an aggressive anti-Protestant Inquisition and was hated for it; it was not to be repeated.[[30]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#cite_note-30)

**Religion**

It was an age of intense religious passions, which Elizabeth managed to tone down in contrast to previous and succeeding eras of religious violence.

Elizabeth said "I have no desire to make windows into mens' souls". Her desire to moderate the religious persecutions of previous Tudor reigns — the persecution of Catholics under Edward VI, and of Protestants under Mary I — appears to have had a moderating effect on English society. Elizabeth reinstated the Protestant bible and English Mass, yet for a number of years refrained from persecuting Catholics.

In 1570, [Pope Pius V](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Pius_V) declared Elizabeth a heretic who was not the legitimate Queen and her subjects no longer owed her obedience. The pope sent Jesuits and seminarians to secretly evangelize and support Catholics. After several plots to overthrow her, Catholic clergy were mostly considered to be traitors, and were pursued aggressively in England. Often priests were tortured or executed after capture unless they cooperated with the English authorities. People who publicly supported Catholicism were excluded from the professions; sometimes fined or imprisoned.

**Science, technology and exploration**

[*Francis Bacon*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Bacon)*, pioneer of modern scientific thought.*

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:British_-_Francis_Bacon_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)Lacking a dominant genius or a formal structure for research (the following century had both Sir [Isaac Newton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Newton) and the [Royal Society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Society)), the Elizabethan era nonetheless saw significant scientific progress. The astronomers [Thomas Digges](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Digges) and [Thomas Harriot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Harriot) made important contributions; [William Gilbert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Gilbert_%28astronomer%29) 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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dee_%28mathematician%29) 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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Drake) circumnavigated the globe between 1577 and 1581, and [Martin Frobisher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Frobisher) explored the [Arctic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctic). The first attempt at English settlement of the eastern seaboard of North America occurred in this era—the abortive colony at [Roanoke Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roanoke_Island) in 1587.

While Elizabethan England is not thought of as an age of technological innovation, some progress did occur. In 1564 Guilliam Boonen came from the [Netherlands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands) to be Queen Elizabeth's first [coach-builder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coach-builder) —thus introducing the new European invention of the spring-suspension coach to England, as a replacement for the litters and carts of an earlier transportation mode. Coaches quickly became as fashionable as sports cars in a later century; social critics, especially [Puritan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puritan) commentators, noted the "diverse great ladies" who rode "up and down the countryside" in their new coaches.

**Education**

Education would begin at home, where children were taught the basic etiquette of proper manners and respecting others.[]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age#cite_note-Pearson-34) It was necessary for boys to attend [grammar school](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammar_school_%28United_Kingdom%29), but girls were rarely allowed in any place of education other than petty schools, and then only with a restricted curriculum. Petty schools were for all children aged from 5 to 7 years of age. Only the most wealthy people allowed their daughters to be taught, and only at home. During this time, endowed schooling became available. This meant that even boys of very poor families were able to attend school if they were not needed to work at home, but only in a few localities were funds available to provide support as well as the necessary education scholarship. Boys from families of nobility would often be taught at home by a private tutor.

**Gender**

*The Procession Picture, c. 1600, showing Elizabeth I borne along by her courtiers.*

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Elizabeth_I,_Procession_Portrait..jpg)While the Tudor era presents an abundance of material on the women of the nobility—especially royal wives and queens—historians have recovered scant documentation about the average lives of women. There has, however, been extensive statistical analysis of demographic and population data which includes women, especially in their childbearing roles.

The role of women in society was, for the historical era, relatively unconstrained; Spanish and Italian visitors to England commented regularly, and sometimes caustically, on the freedom that women enjoyed in England, in contrast to their home cultures. England had more well-educated upper class women than was common anywhere in Europe.

The Queen's [marital status](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_I_of_England#Marriage_question) was a major political and diplomatic topic. It also entered into the popular culture. Elizabeth's unmarried status inspired a cult of virginity. In poetry and portraiture, she was depicted as a virgin or a goddess or both, not as a normal woman.Elizabeth made a virtue of her virginity: in 1559, she told the Commons, "And, in the end, this shall be for me sufficient, that a marble stone shall declare that a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin". Public tributes to the Virgin by 1578 acted as a coded assertion of opposition to the queen's marriage negotiations with the Duc d'Alençon.

In contrast to her father's emphasis on masculinity and physical prowess, Elizabeth emphasized the maternalism theme, saying often that she was married to her kingdom and subjects. She explained "I keep the good will of all my husbands — my good people — for if they did not rest assured of some special love towards them, they would not readily yield me such good obedience," and promised in 1563 they would never have a more natural mother than she. Coch (1996) argues that her figurative motherhood played a central role in her complex self-representation, shaping and legitimating the personal rule of a divinely appointed female prince.

**Marriage**

Over ninety percent of English women (and adults, in general) entered [marriage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage) at the end of the [1500s](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sixteenth_century) and beginning of the [1600s](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventeenth_century), at an average age of about [25–26 years for the bride](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_European_marriage_pattern) and 27–28 years for the groom. Among the [nobility](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobility) and [gentry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gentry), the average was around 19-21 for brides and 24-26 for grooms. Many city and townswomen married for the first time in their thirties and forties []](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_age" \l "cite_note-49) and it was not unusual for orphaned young women to delay marriage until the late twenties or early thirties to help support their younger siblings, and roughly a fourth of all English brides were pregnant at their weddings.

**Food**

England's food supply was plentiful throughout most of the reign; there were no famines. Bad harvests caused distress, but they were usually localized. The most widespread came in 1555–57 and 1596–98. In the towns the price of staples was fixed by law; in hard times the size of the loaf of bread sold by the baker was smaller.

The poor consumed a diet largely of bread, cheese, milk, and beer, with small portions of meat, fish and vegetables, and occasionally some fruit. Potatoes were just arriving at the end of the period, and became increasingly important. The typical poor farmer sold his best products on the market, keeping the cheap food for the family. Stale bread could be used to make bread puddings, and bread crumbs served to thicken soups, stews, and sauces. At a somewhat higher social level families ate an enormous variety of meats, especially beef, mutton, veal, lamb, and pork, as well as chickens, and ducks. The holiday goose was a special treat. Many rural folk and some townspeople tended a small garden which produced vegetables such as asparagus, cucumbers, spinach, lettuce, beans, cabbage, carrots, leeks, and peas, as well as medicinal and flavoring herbs. Some grew their own apricots, grapes, berries, apples, pears, plums, currants, and cherries. Families without a garden could trade with their neighbors to obtain vegetables and fruits at low cost.

England was exposed to new foods (such as the [potato](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potato) imported from South America), and developed new tastes during the era. The more prosperous enjoyed a wide variety of food and drink, including exotic new drinks such as tea, coffee, and chocolate. French and Italian chefs appeared in the country houses and palaces bringing new standards of food preparation and taste. For example, the English developed a taste for acidic foods—such as oranges for the upper class—and started to use vinegar heavily. The gentry paid increasing attention to their gardens, with new fruits, vegetables and herbs; pasta, pastries, and dried mustard balls first appeared on the table. The apricot was a special treat at fancy banquets. Roast beef remained a staple for those who could afford it. The rest ate a great deal of bread and fish. Every class had a taste for beer and rum.

At the rich end of the scale the manor houses and palaces were awash with large, elaborately prepared meals, usually for many people and often accompanied by entertainment. The upper classes often celebrated religious festivals, weddings, alliances and the whims of the king or queen. Feasts were commonly used to commemorate the "procession" of the crowned heads of state in the summer months, when the king or queen would travel through a circuit of other nobles' lands both to avoid the plague season of London, and alleviate the royal coffers, often drained through the winter to provide for the needs of the royal family and court. This would include a few days or even a week of feasting in each noble's home, who depending on his or her production and display of fashion, generosity and entertainment, could have his way made in court and elevate his or her status for months or even years.

Special courses after a feast or dinner which often involved a special room or outdoor gazebo (sometimes known as a folly) with a central table set with dainties of "medicinal" value to help with digestion. These would include wafers, comfits of sugar-spun anise or other spices, jellies and marmalades (a firmer variety than we are used to, these would be more similar to our gelatin jigglers), candied fruits, spiced nuts and other such niceties. These would be eaten while standing and drinking warm, spiced wines (known as hypocras) or other drinks known to aid in digestion. One must remember that sugar in the Middle Ages or Early Modern Period was often considered medicinal, and used heavily in such things. This was not a course of pleasure, though it could be as everything was a treat, but one of healthful eating and abetting the digestive capabilities of the body. It also, of course, allowed those standing to show off their gorgeous new clothes and the holders of the dinner and banquet to show off the wealth of their estate, what with having a special room just for banqueting.

**High culture**

**Theatre**

*[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Southwark_reconstructed_globe.jpg)A reconstruction of the* [*Globe Theatre*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globe_Theatre) *in London, originally built in 1599 and used by Shakespeare*

With [William Shakespeare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare) at his peak, as well as [Christopher Marlowe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Marlowe) and many other playwrights, actors and theatres constantly busy, the high culture of the Elizabethan Renaissance was best expressed in its theatre. Historical topics were especially popular, not to mention the usual comedies and tragedies.

**Music**

Travelling musicians were in great demand at Court, in churches, at country houses, and at local festivals. Important composers included [William Byrd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Byrd) (1543–1623), [John Dowland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Dowland) (1563–1626) [Thomas Campion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Campion) (1567–1620), and [Robert Johnson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Johnson_%28English_composer%29) (c. 1583–c. 1634). The composers were commissioned by church and Court, and deployed two main styles, [madrigal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madrigal_%28music%29) and [ayre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_%28music%29). The popular culture showed a strong interest in folk songs and ballads (folk songs that tell a story). It became the fashion in the late 19th century to collect and sing the old songs.

**Fine arts**

It has often been said that the Renaissance came late to England, in contrast to Italy and the other states of continental Europe; the fine arts in England during the Tudor and Stuart eras were dominated by foreign and imported talent—from [Hans Holbein the Younger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Holbein_the_Younger) under Henry VIII to [Anthony van Dyck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_van_Dyck) under Charles I. Yet within this general trend, a native school of painting was developing. In Elizabeth's reign, [Nicholas Hilliard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_Hilliard), the Queen's "limner and goldsmith," is the most widely recognized figure in this native development; but [George Gower](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Gower) has begun to attract greater notice and appreciation as knowledge of him and his art and career has improved.

**Popular culture**

**Sports and entertainment**

There were many different types of Elizabethan sports and entertainment:

Fairs

The Annual Summer [Fair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fair) and other seasonal fairs such as May Day were often bawdy affairs.

Plays

Started as plays enacted in town squares followed by the actors using the courtyards of taverns or inns (referred to as Inn-yards) followed by the first theatres (great open air amphitheatres and then the introduction of indoor theatres called Playhouses.)

Miracle Plays

Re-enactments of stories from the Bible. These are derived from the ancient Briton custom of [Mystery Plays](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mystery_Play), in which stories and fables were enacted to teach lessons or educate about life in general. [Miracle plays](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracle_play) included stories from all ecclesiastic literature, from the Bible to the everyday psaltery or prayerbook. They influenced Shakespeare.

Festivals

were popular seasonal entertainmentsJousts / Tournaments

A series of tilted matches warriors on horseback. They raced racing toward each other in full armor trying to use their lance to knock the other off his horse. It was a violent sport--[King Henry II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_II_of_France) of France was killed in a tournament in 1559, as were many lesser men. [King Henry VIII](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_VIII_of_England) was a champion; he finally retired from the lists after a hard fall left him unconscious for hours.

Games and Sports

Sports and games which included archery, bowling, cards, dice, hammer-throwing, quarter-staff contests, [troco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troco), [quoits](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quoits), [skittles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skittles_%28sport%29), wrestling and [mob football](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mob_football).

Card Games

Cards appeared in Spain and Italy about 1370, but they probably came from Egypt. They began to spread throughout Europe and came into England around 1460. By the time of Elizabeth’s reign, gambling was a common sport. Cards were not played only by the upper class. Many of the lower classes had access to playing cards. The card suits tended to change over time. The first Italian and Spanish decks had the same suits: Swords, Batons/ Clubs, Cups, and Coins. The suits often changed from country to country. England probably followed the Latin version, initially using cards imported from Spain but later relying on more convenient supplies from France. Most of the decks that have survived use the French Suit: Spades, Hearts, Clubs, and Diamonds. Yet even before Elizabeth had begun to reign, the number of cards had been standardized to 52 cards per deck. Interestingly, the lowest court subject in England was called the “knave.” The lowest court card was therefore called the knave until later when the term “Jack” became more common. Popular card games during the Elizabethan Rule: Maw, One and Thirty, Bone-ace. (These are all games for small group players.) Ruff and Honors (This one is a team game.)

Animal sports included [bear](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bear_baiting) and [bull baiting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bull_baiting), [dog fighting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dog_fighting) and [cock fighting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cock_fighting).

Hunting

sport followed by the nobility often using packs of dogs and hounds. They hunted a variety of animals.

Hawking

sport followed by the nobility with hawks (otherwise known as [falconry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falconry)).