Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Early Elizabethan England, 1558–88

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Elizabeth's accession and the religious settlement

- Elizabeth became queen in November 1558, aged 25. She faced problems: as an unmarried woman she was expected to marry; Catholics questioned whether she was legitimate; the Crown was short of money; religion divided the country; and France and Spain were threats (Mary, Queen of Scots was married to the heir to the French throne).
- The **religious settlement** (1559): the **Act of Supremacy** made Elizabeth Supreme Governor of the Church of England; the **Act of Uniformity** set out church services and the Book of Common Prayer, with fines for not attending; and the Royal Injunctions gave rules for worship. It was a 'middle way', keeping some Catholic features such as bishops and vestments.
- Challenges came from **Puritans** (for example, in the dispute over vestments), from Catholic nobles in the north, and from the Pope, who excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570.

Plots and revolts

- Mary, Queen of Scots fled to England in 1568. In the Revolt of the Northern Earls (1569), the Earls of Northumberland and Westmorland planned to marry Mary to the Duke of Norfolk and restore Catholicism; it failed.
- The Ridolfi (1571), Throckmorton (1583) and Babington (1586) plots followed. Walsingham's spies uncovered them, and Mary was executed at Fotheringhay Castle in February 1587.

Relations with Spain

- Rivalry grew over trade in the New World, English **privateers** such as Hawkins and Drake, and the Dutch revolt against Spain. In the **Treaty of Nonsuch** (1585), Elizabeth sent an army under the Earl of Leicester to help the Dutch rebels, which meant open war with Spain.
- Drake's raid on Cádiz (1587) destroyed Spanish ships and supplies. In 1588, Philip II's Armada was meant to link up with the Duke of Parma's army in the Netherlands and invade. It was defeated by fireships at Calais, the Battle of Gravelines, the weather and Spanish mistakes.

Elizabethan society and exploration

- Education: grammar schools for boys, and universities; wealthy girls were taught at home.
- Leisure: theatre, sports such as football, hunting and fencing, bear-baiting, and music.
- Poverty grew because of population growth, rising prices, enclosure for sheep farming, bad harvests and problems in the cloth trade. The Vagabonds Act (1572) punished vagabonds harshly but also created a local poor rate, and the Poor Relief Act (1576) made towns provide materials so the able-bodied poor could work.
- Exploration: Drake sailed around the world in the Golden Hind (1577–80). Raleigh's colony at Roanoke in Virginia (1585) failed.

Key terms

Religious settlement	Elizabeth's 1559 laws that set up the Church of England.
Act of Supremacy	The 1559 law making Elizabeth Supreme Governor of the Church of England.
Act of Uniformity	The 1559 law setting out how church services must be held.
Puritan	A strict Protestant who wanted to remove all Catholic features from the Church.
Recusant	A Catholic who refused to attend Church of England services.
Excommunication	Being expelled from the Catholic Church by the Pope.
Privateer	A privately owned ship, or its captain, licensed to attack enemy ships.
Treaty of Nonsuch	The 1585 agreement to send English troops to help the Dutch rebels.
Circumnavigation	Sailing all the way around the world.

Your notes

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. When did Elizabeth become queen?
2. What did the Act of Supremacy (1559) do?
3. What did the Act of Uniformity (1559) do?
4. Why did Puritans object to the religious settlement?
5. What was the Revolt of the Northern Earls (1569)?
6. What did the Treaty of Nonsuch (1585) do?
7. Who led the English army in the Netherlands from 1585?
8. What was Drake's raid on Cádiz (1587)?

Answers

1. 1558
2. Made Elizabeth Supreme Governor of the Church of England
3. Set out the form of church services and the Book of Common Prayer
4. It kept too many Catholic features
5. A Catholic rebellion aiming to marry Mary to the Duke of Norfolk
6. Sent English troops to help the Dutch rebels against Spain
7. The Earl of Leicester
8. An attack that destroyed Spanish ships and supplies

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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