GCSE History: revision notes

Elizabethan England, c1568–1603

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Elizabeth's court and Parliament

- Elizabeth I reigned from 1558 to 1603. She never married, which caused worries about who would succeed her.
- She ruled through the **Privy Council**, with advisers such as William Cecil (Lord Burghley) and Sir Francis Walsingham, her spymaster. She used **patronage** (giving out jobs and rewards) and her image, through portraits and royal **progresses**, to keep control.
- Parliament met rarely, mainly to grant taxes. There were clashes over marriage, the succession, religion and monopolies; her 'Golden Speech' (1601) won back support.
- Her former favourite, the Earl of Essex, led a rebellion in 1601 and was executed.

Life in Elizabethan England

- The gentry grew richer and built fine houses, such as Hardwick Hall, to show their wealth. More boys went to grammar schools.
- Poverty grew because of population growth, rising prices, enclosure of land and bad harvests. The 1601 **Poor Law** made each parish look after its own poor, paid for by a local poor rate, and treated the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor differently.
- Theatre flourished in purpose-built playhouses, such as the Theatre (1576) and the Globe (1599), with plays by Shakespeare. **Puritans** opposed the theatre.
- Exploration: Francis Drake sailed around the world (1577–80). Walter Raleigh's attempts to found a colony at Roanoke, in Virginia (1585–87), failed.

Religion and Mary, Queen of Scots

- The religious settlement (1559) made England Protestant but kept some Catholic features, a 'middle way'.

Your notes

- Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth's Catholic cousin, fled to England in 1568 and became the focus of Catholic plots: the Revolt of the Northern Earls (1569), the Ridolfi Plot (1571), the Throckmorton Plot (1583) and the Babington Plot (1586). The Pope excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570. Mary was executed in February 1587.
- Catholic priests (Jesuits and seminary priests) were hunted down, and **recusants** (Catholics who didn't attend church) were fined. **Puritans** who wanted further reform were also controlled.

Conflict with Spain

- Causes: religion, trade rivalry, English **privateers** such as Drake attacking Spanish treasure ships, English help for the Dutch rebels (the Treaty of Nonsuch, 1585) and Mary's execution.
- Drake's raid on Cádiz (1587) delayed the **Armada**.
- The Spanish **Armada** (1588) of about 130 ships was defeated: English fireships at Calais broke its crescent formation, the English attacked at the Battle of Gravelines, and storms wrecked many ships as they sailed home around Scotland and Ireland. The victory boosted Elizabeth's reputation.

Key terms

Privy Council	Elizabeth's group of senior advisers.
Patronage	Giving jobs, land or rewards in return for loyalty.
Progress	A royal tour, which let people see the queen.
Recusant	A Catholic who refused to attend Church of England services.
Puritan	A strict Protestant who wanted to remove all Catholic features from the Church.
Vagabond	A homeless, wandering beggar.
Poor Law	A law setting out how the poor should be helped and paid for.
Armada	The Spanish fleet sent to invade England in 1588.
Privateer	A privately owned ship, or its captain, allowed to attack enemy ships.
Excommunication	Being expelled from the Catholic Church by the Pope.

Quick questions

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

1. When did Elizabeth I reign?
2. Who was Elizabeth's spymaster?
3. What was the Privy Council?

Your notes

4. When did Mary, Queen of Scots flee to England?
5. Which plot of 1586 led to Mary's execution?
6. When was Mary, Queen of Scots executed?
7. What did the 1601 Poor Law do?
8. Which theatre was built in 1599?

Answers

1. 1558–1603
2. Sir Francis Walsingham
3. Elizabeth's group of senior advisers
4. 1568
5. The Babington Plot
6. 1587
7. Made each parish responsible for its poor, paid for by a poor rate
8. The Globe

What to do next

Practise 13 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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Your notes