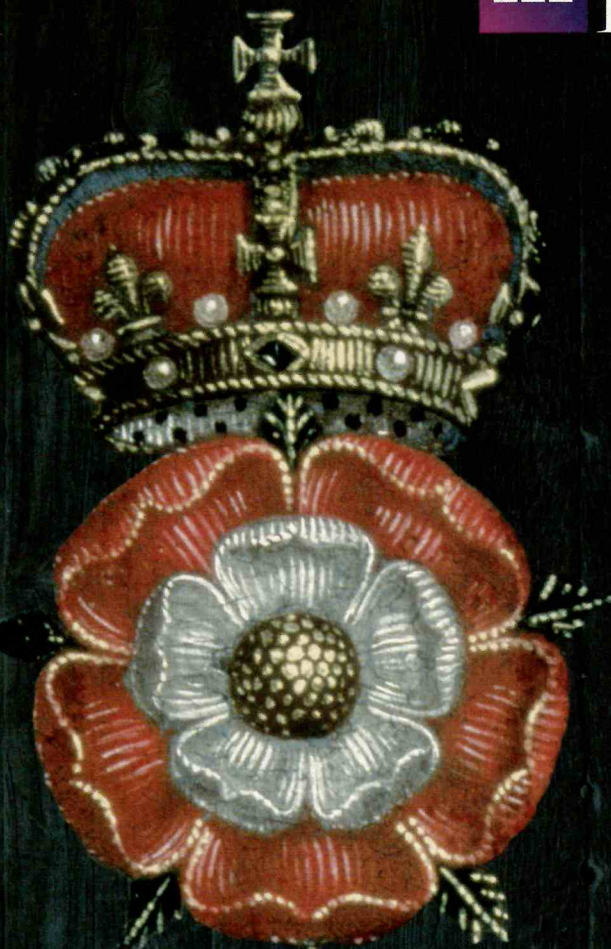


BBC

HiSTORY
MAGAZINE



THE
TUDORS
IN 50 MOMENTS

PART 2

In the second part of our history of the Tudor era, **Tracy Borman** chooses the key events from 1544-1603


HiSTORY
MAGAZINE

“Welcome to the second and final part of *The Tudors in 50 Moments*. Last month we began with the two Henrys and now we take the story on to the reigns of Edward VI and Mary I, before turning our attention to the dazzling era of Elizabeth I. As before, the 25 moments have been selected by Tudor historian Tracy Borman who is also a regular contributor to the magazine.

Please do get in touch to let us know your thoughts on these supplements. We may well be tackling different topics in this manner in future, so do keep an eye out for that. And of course we will continue to explore the fascinating Tudor era within the magazine as the year progresses.

Rob Attar
Editor



Missed part 1?

The first half of our *Tudors in 50 moments* was included in our Christmas 2014 edition. You can order that edition as a back issue by calling us on 0844 844 0250



Tracy Borman, the writer of *The Tudors in 50 Moments*, is a historian whose latest book is *Thomas Cromwell: The Untold Story of Henry VIII's Most Faithful Servant* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2014)

26 Spring 1544 The third Act of Succession is passed

The first and second Acts of Succession (1533 and 1536) had declared Henry VIII's eldest daughter, Mary, and her half-sister, Elizabeth, to be bastards. Elizabeth – just two years and eight months old at the time of the second act – had been quick to appreciate the change in her status, demanding of her servants: “How happs it yesterday Lady Princess and to-day but Lady Elsabeth?”

She and Mary had lived under the stigma of illegitimacy since the birth of their half-brother, Edward, in 1537, which had moved them further from the throne. But the benign influence of Henry's last wife, Katherine Parr, changed all of that.

Taking pity on the disinherited girls (Elizabeth in particular, with whom she shared a passion for Protestantism), Katherine persuaded her husband to invite them to court more often. It was almost certainly her influence that led the king to assent to the third Act of Succession in spring 1544, which acknowledged Mary and Elizabeth as heirs to the throne once more.

This transformed the status of both girls from illegitimate daughters to royal princesses. But no one could have expected that they would actually come into their inheritance: Edward was a strong, healthy boy with every prospect of a long life.

“No one expected that **Mary and Elizabeth** would actually come into their inheritance”



Lucas de Heere's allegory of the Tudor succession depicts Henry VIII with Elizabeth (right), Edward (kneeling) and Mary (with Philip II of Spain)



27 19 July 1544 Siege of Boulogne

Henry VIII's troops laid siege to Boulogne in July 1544, but just six years later the town was back in the hands of the French

For most of his reign, Henry played a complex game of diplomacy with the two great potentates of Europe: Francis I of France and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. But peace never lasted long, and in 1543 Henry was on the offensive yet again.

When he discovered Francis had helped fortify Scotland against England, Henry made an alliance with Charles V and agreed to invade France. In early 1544, an English force departed from Calais and marched

towards the coastal town of Boulogne, laying siege to it on 19 July.

Desperate to prove he was still a warrior king, Henry set out to join his troops a few weeks later. He arrived shortly after the French surrender on 13 September. But his triumph proved short-lived. The emperor promptly made a separate treaty with Francis I, and they agreed to unite their forces to reclaim Boulogne for the French.

Henry returned to England at the end of

September, leaving the dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk in charge of holding the town. But they disobeyed his orders and withdrew most of the troops to Calais.

The remaining English forces managed to withhold the French bombardment for several years, but it was an expensive and largely futile campaign. In 1550 a treaty was signed that finally returned Boulogne to the French, by which time both Henry VIII and Francis I were dead.

28 1546 Katherine Parr narrowly avoids arrest

Katherine Parr's passion for the 'new faith' became ever more pronounced during her marriage to Henry as his sixth and final wife. Gathering around her like-minded women (including her stepdaughter Elizabeth), she would spend hours debating the finer points of reform and even wrote some religious treatises herself. In doing so, she made some dangerous enemies among the religious conservatives at court, notably Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester.

When the king confided in him that he resented his wife's outspokenness on matters of religion, Gardiner seized his chance. He and his faction gathered enough evidence of Katherine's heresy to secure a warrant for her arrest. By chance, the queen heard of this before the men could reach her and immediately took to her bed, claiming that she was

mortally ill. When the king rushed to see her, she cleverly told him that she was sick with fear that she had displeased him and proceeded to give a skilfully submissive defence of her actions, pleading that she was "a simple poor woman so much inferior in all respects of nature to you".

Katherine had literally talked herself out of trouble. Henry was instantly mollified and railed against Gardiner for daring to question his wife's loyalty. The queen knew, though, that it had been a close-run thing. She had narrowly escaped with her life and would not risk it again.

Katherine Parr was a passionate follower of the Protestant faith



29 19 January 1547 The Earl of Surrey is executed

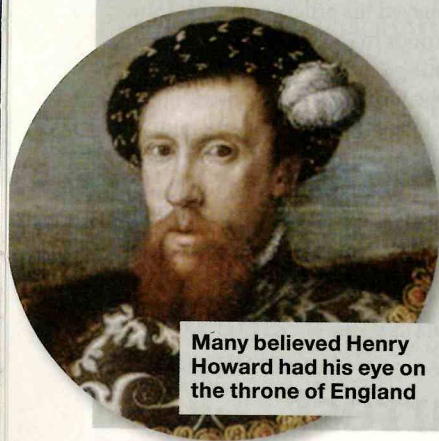
Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey was the eldest son of an old stalwart of Henry VIII's court, Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk. A gifted poet, Surrey was also highly volatile and a notorious drunk, whom the king called a "foolish, proud boy".

Surrey made a dangerous enemy of the late queen Jane Seymour's brother, Edward, who was a dominant force at court. Edward played on the ageing king's increasing paranoia, convincing him that

the Howards were plotting to place Surrey on the throne when Henry died. The fact that Surrey had displayed royal arms on his coat of arms was evidence enough for the king, who ordered his arrest and that of his father, Norfolk.

Both were found guilty of high treason and sentenced to death. But Surrey hatched a daring plan to escape from the Tower of London, where he and his father awaited their death. This involved squeezing through the shaft that ran from the latrine into the river below.

He almost succeeded, but guards raised the alarm when they saw his empty bed and found him making his way down the shaft. The hapless earl was executed on 19 January 1547. The king's own death nine days later won Norfolk a stay of execution, and he was pardoned by Henry's daughter Mary when she became queen in 1553.



Many believed Henry Howard had his eye on the throne of England

30 28 January 1547 Henry VIII dies

In his later years, Henry was increasingly incapacitated by an old jousting wound in his leg, which had turned ulcerous. As a result, he had long since lost his sporting prowess and his girth had expanded at an alarming rate. When he became king, he had boasted a trim 32in waist; by the end of his reign it had expanded to a colossal 52ins.

A sketch taken by the Antwerp artist Cornelis Massys at the end of Henry's life shows him as a grotesque figure. His beady eyes and tiny, pursed mouth are almost lost in the layers of flesh that surround them. He appears to have no neck, and his enormous frame extends beyond the reaches of the canvas. A contemporary chronicler corroborated this portrait: "The king was so stout that such a man has never been seen. Three of the biggest men that could be found could get inside his doublet."



Cornelis Massys' "grotesque figure" of Henry VIII

Henry's obesity hastened his death, at the age of 55, on 28 January 1547, in the palace of Whitehall. He was buried next to his beloved third wife, Jane Seymour, at Windsor Castle and was succeeded by their nine-year-old son, Edward VI, under the protectorship of Jane's brother Edward.

"By the end of his reign, Henry's waist had expanded to a colossal 52 inches"

31 January 1549 The first Act of Uniformity is passed

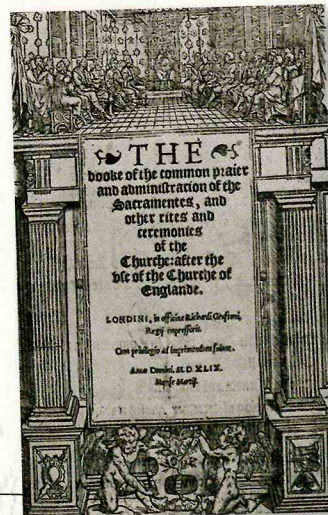
Although still very young, by the time of his accession, Edward VI was already strongly committed to the reformist faith. He and his half-sister Elizabeth had been tutored by men known to be sympathetic to the new Protestant teachings that were gaining ground across Europe.

Although he had spearheaded the English Reformation, Henry VIII had been a faithful Catholic at heart, only tolerating the radical new

ideas when it served his interests to do so – notably in securing a divorce from his first wife.

But Edward was determined to introduce a full-scale Protestant reformation into England. He immediately issued a set of injunctions to the church which provided a blueprint for reform. Then, at the beginning of 1549, the first Act of Uniformity was passed. This established the Book of Common Prayer as the only legal form of worship in England.

Largely the work of Thomas



Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, the book not only provided an English-language translation of the Latin liturgical books, but set down – for the first time – a consistent form of worship for all the king's subjects. It was nothing if not controversial: it was passed by the House of Lords with a majority of just two votes, and sparked riots later that year.

Edward's religious reforms included the introduction of the Book of Common Prayer

32 22 January 1552 The Duke of Somerset is executed

The turbulence that so often accompanies the succession of a minor soon dominated Edward's court. A deadly rivalry sprang up between the lord protector, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset and John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland. Seymour's position was rendered increasingly unstable by the behaviour of his volatile and ambitious brother Thomas, who recklessly attempted to get physical possession of the king in January 1549.

Breaking into Edward's privy garden at Westminster, pistol in hand, Thomas tried to gain access to the king's bedroom but was bitten by the boy's pet spaniel. Without thinking, he shot the dog dead, which prompted a furore as the royal guard rushed forward, thinking an assassin was in the palace.

Thomas was arrested and taken to the Tower. He was found guilty of treason and his own brother was obliged to

sign the death warrant, which was carried out on 20 March.

The Duke of Somerset survived for three more years, though, and was even allowed back into the privy council. But when he was discovered plotting against his rival, Dudley, the new de facto leader of government, he was rearrested and executed.

Somerset's young nephew, the king, noted with cold detachment in his diary: "The Duke of Somerset had his head cut off upon Tower Hill between eight and nine o'clock in the morning."

"Thomas tried to gain access to the king's bedroom but was bitten by the boy's pet spaniel"



Edward Seymour is executed after being found guilty of plotting against the king, in this 16th-century woodcut



33 6 July 1553 Edward VI dies

In the spring of 1553, the 15-year-old king suddenly fell ill. An apparently minor chest infection had turned into something altogether more serious, and within weeks it was clear the boy was dying.

Anxious to prevent the accession of Edward's staunchly Roman Catholic sister, Mary, Dudley orchestrated a coup by marrying his youngest son, Guildford, to Lady Jane Grey, the great-niece of Henry VIII, and placing her on the throne.

On 8 July, two days after Edward's death, Jane (then aged 16 or 17 at most) was proclaimed queen and entered the Tower of London with great ceremony – and reluctance. She would reign for just nine days.

For all her dogmatism,

Mary was a true Tudor princess and wasted no time in rallying thousands of subjects to her cause. Soon, the council turned its coat and declared for her. On 19 July, Mary was proclaimed queen, to the great rejoicing of Londoners.

Jane and her husband were convicted for treason in November, but the new queen bore them no ill-will and it was rumoured she would pardon them. A series of uprisings at the beginning of 1554 changed all of that.

Mary reluctantly acknowledged that Jane was too dangerous a threat to be allowed to live. She was led to her execution on 12 February, having watched the headless body of her husband, Guildford Dudley, being carried back from Tower Hill.

34 January 1554 Wyatt's Rebellion

In stark contrast to her half-sister, Elizabeth, Mary was resolved from the start of her reign to marry as quickly as possible. But her choice was deeply unpopular among her xenophobic subjects: the Catholic king of Spain, Philip II.

Shortly after their marriage settlement was agreed in January 1554, Sir Thomas Wyatt (son of the famous poet) raised an army of 3,000 rebels and marched towards London from Kent with the stated aim of deposing Mary and replacing her with Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was almost certainly innocent of any involvement in the plot, but Wyatt claimed he had written to her of his plans. Mary was taking no chances: having

defeated the rebels – Wyatt would soon be executed – she had her sister brought to the Tower.

As she slowly mounted the steps, Elizabeth suddenly stopped and exclaimed: "Oh Lord! I never thought to have come in here as a prisoner; and I pray you all, good friends and fellows, bear me witness, that I come in no traitor, but as true woman to the queen's majesty as any is now living."

Subjected to interrogation by Mary's ministers, Elizabeth defended herself so stoically they were eventually forced to concede defeat and she was released on 19 May – 18 years to the day since her mother, Anne Boleyn, had been executed in the fortress.



Thomas Wyatt was vehemently opposed to Mary's Spanish marriage.

"3,000 rebels marched towards London with the stated aim of deposing Mary"

35 4 February 1555 The first Protestant martyr is burned

Upon her accession, Mary had made it clear that her most urgent priority was to return England to the papal fold. Driven on by an evangelising zeal, she ordered increasingly drastic measures in order to achieve this, not flinching from burning those subjects who persisted in their 'heretical' beliefs.

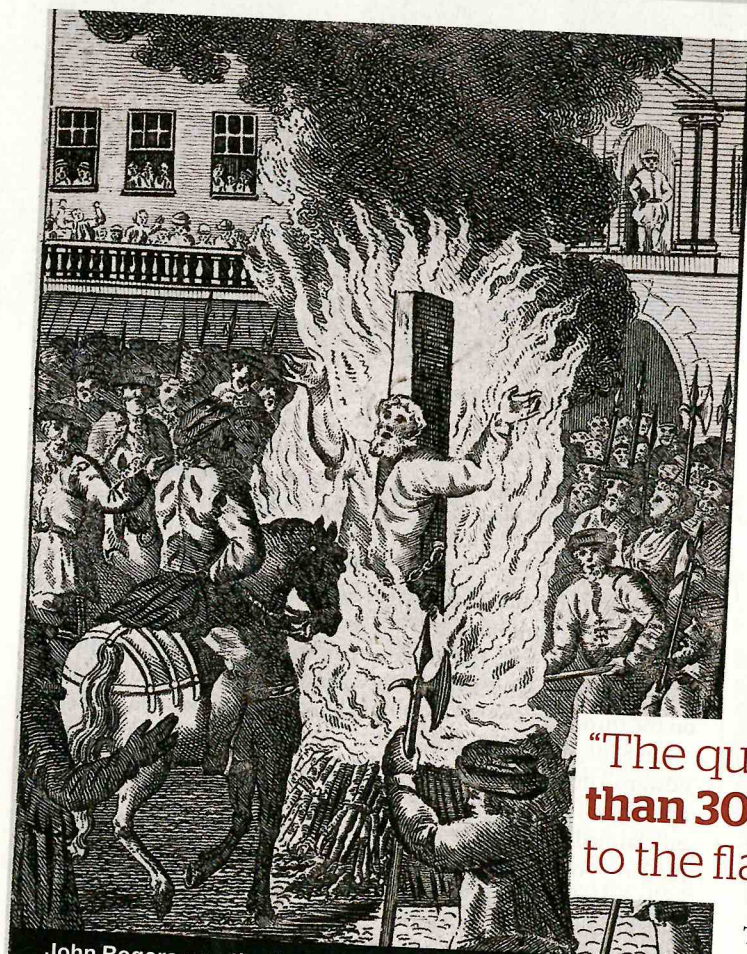
The first Protestant martyr was John Rogers, who went to the flames on 4 February 1555. Rogers had spent time in Antwerp, where he had met the influential reformer William

Rogers soon befriended other leading reformers and proceeded to evangelise about their teachings when he returned to England in 1548. This won him great favour with Edward VI, but he alienated Mary as soon as she succeeded to the throne by preaching about the "true doctrine taught in King Edward's days", and warning his hearers against "pestilent popery, idolatry and superstition".

During the next three years, the fiercely dogmatic queen sent more than 300 Protestants to the flames in her quest to re-establish Catholicism's supremacy in England. Most prominent among them were Thomas Cranmer, former archbishop of Canterbury, and the bishops Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley. Many more Protestants might have followed if it had not been for 'Bloody' Mary's early death after just five years as queen.

Tyndale, whose teachings so inspired him that he immediately abandoned the Roman Catholic faith.

"The queen sent more than 300 Protestants to the flames"



John Rogers was the first of more than 300 Protestants to be burned alive for their religious beliefs

36 17 November 1558 Mary I dies

Mary (pictured right) had never enjoyed good health, and it deteriorated rapidly after she became queen. Desperate to conceive an heir, she suffered the humiliation of two phantom pregnancies during which she displayed all the symptoms of an expectant mother. But her swollen stomach may have been due to a cancerous tumour.

Early in 1558, as Mary persisted in believing that she would soon be delivered of an heir, it was obvious to everyone else that she was dying. By 28 October, wracked with pain, she finally acknowledged that there would be no "fruit of her body", and confirmed that the crown would pass to Elizabeth. She begged her half-sister to uphold the Roman Catholic faith, but the knowledge of how unlikely Elizabeth was to honour this request tormented Mary until her last breath.

Upon hearing that Mary was dead and that she was now queen, Elizabeth proclaimed: "My Lordes, the law of nature moveth me to sorrowe for my sister: The burdaine that is fallen uppon me maketh me amazed." When Elizabeth was proclaimed queen in the City of London, there was great rejoicing. All across the capital, church bells were rung and at night bonfires were lit, around which thousands of people gathered to drink and make merry.

The brief, brutal reign of Mary Tudor was over: now the nation's hopes rested upon her beautiful and charismatic successor.



37 1559 The Act of Uniformity

Elizabeth I once famously declared that she had no wish to “make windows into men’s souls”, and this became immediately apparent during her first parliament.

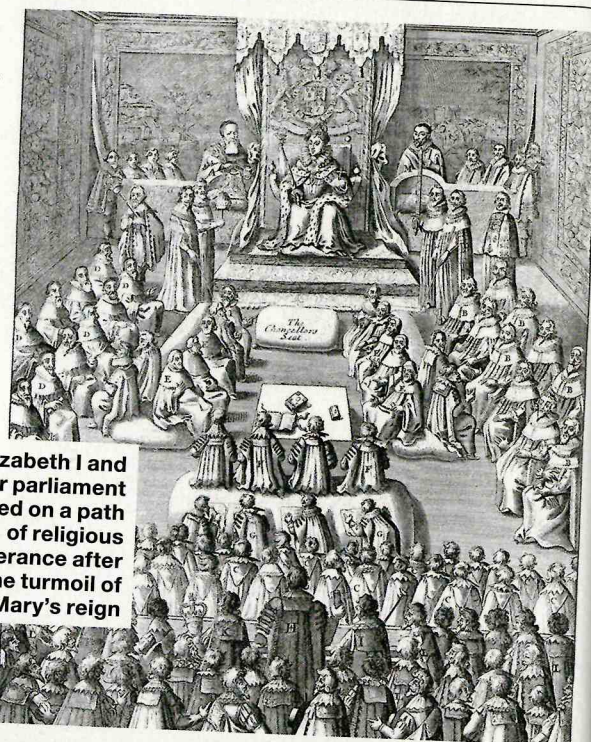
The most pressing issue of the new reign was to provide clarity on the vexed question of religion. Elizabeth had witnessed first-hand her late sister’s disastrously dogmatic religious policy, which had torn the country in two and created a dangerous groundswell of opposition to the monarchy.

Although she was inclined to the Protestant faith, Elizabeth had no intention of trying to impose it upon her subjects in the same way that Mary had with

Roman Catholicism.

The keynote of her religious settlement, which was expressed in the Act of Uniformity of 1559, was moderation. This reinstated the English Book of Common Prayer that had been introduced by Edward VI in 1549, and set down that all of Elizabeth’s subjects must attend church at least once a week or be fined 12 pence – a considerable sum for the poor.

Meanwhile, Matthew Parker was appointed archbishop of Canterbury. He shared the queen’s vision for a single, united Church of England; it was thanks to his influence that the Anglican theology began to take shape.



Elizabeth I and her parliament settled on a path of religious tolerance after the turmoil of Mary’s reign



38 May 1568 Mary, Queen of Scots flees to England

From the earliest days of her reign, Elizabeth had been plagued by rival claimants to the throne. Chief among them was Mary, Queen of Scots. Nine years younger than Elizabeth and widely acclaimed for her beauty, Mary had a strong blood line to the English throne. And as a Catholic, she also rapidly became a figurehead for all of those opposed to the ‘heretical’ English queen.

That Elizabeth resented her charismatic cousin on a personal as well as a political level there can be no doubt. She quizzed her Scottish ambassador as much about Mary’s appearance as about affairs of state. On one occasion, she demanded to know whether Mary was taller than her, and when the beleaguered ambassador reluctantly acceded, Elizabeth snapped: “Then she is too high!”

Her jealousy increased when, in June 1566, Mary gave birth to a son, James. But things soon began to unravel for the Scottish queen. Always one to rule with the heart rather than the head, she formed a passionate attachment to Lord Bothwell, the chief suspect in the murder of her husband, Lord Darnley.

Forced out of Scotland by a coup, Mary unwisely chose to throw herself on the mercy of Elizabeth, who had sent her messages of support. But when Mary arrived in England in May 1568, Elizabeth wasted no time in making the Scottish queen her prisoner.



Mary, Queen of Scots had a blood claim to the English throne – a fact her cousin, Elizabeth I, couldn’t afford to overlook



Thomas Howard planned to seize the English throne. Instead, he ended up going to the block

39 Summer 1571 The Ridolfi Plot is revealed

As Elizabeth's reign progressed, the number of plots against her increased. Most were Catholic conspiracies, aimed at placing Mary, Queen of Scots on the English throne.

In 1571, the most serious plot yet was discovered. At its heart was the dangerously ambitious Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk, who planned to marry the captive Queen of Scots and with her seize the English throne.

In early 1571, Mary wrote to the papal agent, Roberto Ridolfi, urging him to solicit help from the pope, Philip II and the Duke of Alva. Mary criticised her cousin for feigning a "willingness to entertain the suggestion of my liberation, to amuse herself at my expense", and accused her of

having been "many a time... on the point of compassing my death".

This was treasonous enough, but there was still more evidence: Mary had embroidered a cushion for the Duke of Norfolk with a design that showed a hand clipping off a barren vine so that the fruitful vine might flourish. The message was clear: she, the fertile Queen of Scots, should supplant her childless cousin.

When Elizabeth heard of the plot, she reportedly flew into a "ferocious rage". Norfolk was executed the following year, but Mary – "that devilish woman" – was allowed to live... for now.

"Mary urged Ridolfi to **solicit help** from the pope, Philip II and the Duke of Alva"

40 1575 Robert Dudley proposes to Elizabeth

Although famous for being the 'Virgin Queen', Elizabeth enjoyed an intimate relationship with Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

Friends since childhood, they had rapidly developed a relationship that many said went beyond the niceties of court gallantry. The pair acted more like lovers, even in public, as they shared intimate conversations and spent many hours together hunting, dancing and enjoying other courtly pastimes.

Rumours abounded that the pair would marry, particularly after Dudley's first wife, Amy Robsart, was found dead at their home in Oxfordshire. But for all her flirtatiousness, Elizabeth showed no inclination to marry Dudley – or anyone else.

This did not stop him from trying, though. In 1575, Dudley staged a spectacular series of entertainments for the queen

at his Warwickshire home, Kenilworth Castle, as a last-ditch attempt to persuade Elizabeth to marry him. But while she revelled in his attentions and at times seemed to be giving serious consideration to his proposal, Elizabeth remained tantalisingly out of reach.

Frustrated, Leicester turned his attentions to the beautiful and vivacious Lettice Knollys, whom he secretly married in 1578. When Elizabeth found out, she was incandescent with rage, boxing Lettice's ears and screaming that "as but one sun lightened the Earth, she would have but one queen in England".

"For all her flirtatiousness, Elizabeth showed **no inclination** to marry Dudley"



Robert Dudley pulled out all the stops to woo his queen, but to no avail

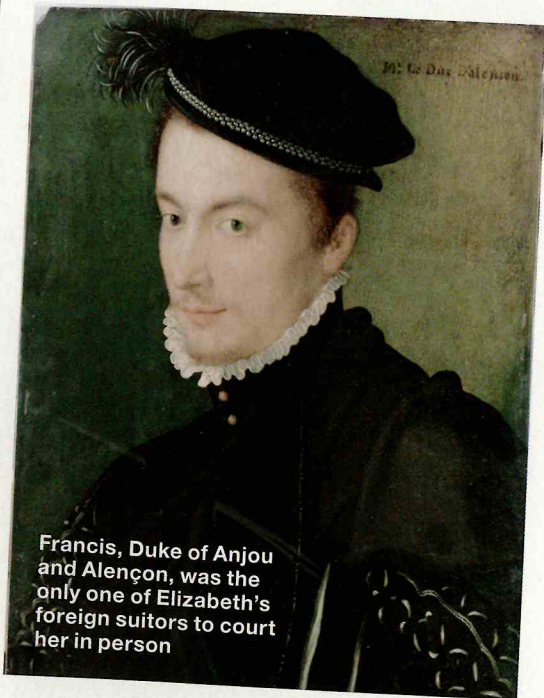
41 1579 The Duke of Anjou courts Elizabeth

For the first 20 years of her reign, Elizabeth faced intense pressure from her councillors to marry and beget an heir. Although she flirted with several home-grown and foreign suitors, in reality she had no intention of ceding her power to a husband, famously declaring: "I will have but one mistress here, and no master."

Elizabeth seems to have harboured a deep psychological fear of marriage, which is perhaps not surprising given the fate of her mother and stepmothers – not to mention her half-sister, Mary. But she appreciated the diplomatic necessity of at least pretending to consider the proposals of the various foreign princes who courted her.

Principal among these was Francis, Duke of Anjou and Alençon. Some 21 years Elizabeth's junior, Anjou arrived in England in 1579, becoming the only foreign suitor to court the English queen in person.

Elizabeth, still smarting from Robert Dudley's betrayal, welcomed Anjou with every courtesy and the pair struck up a flirtatious relationship. The queen nicknamed the young duke her 'frog' and conducted many private audiences with him. When he left the English court in 1581 with nothing more than "fair promises", Elizabeth penned an apparently regretful poem *On Monsieur's Departure*.



Francis, Duke of Anjou and Alençon, was the only one of Elizabeth's foreign suitors to court her in person



Sir Francis Drake was one of the greatest explorers of the Elizabethan period, as this 1595 world map, which depicts the routes travelled by Drake and fellow English explorer Thomas Cavendish, shows

42 1580 Sir Francis Drake

The Elizabethan age witnessed greater overseas exploration than ever before. One of its most celebrated adventurers was Francis Drake, a highly skilled sailor, navigator, privateer and politician. In 1577, he embarked upon what was termed a 'voyage of discovery', which was in fact an ambitious raiding voyage that marked the beginning of England's challenge to Spanish global domination.

The queen heartily – but secretly – approved of the enterprise and gave it her financial backing, as did several leading members of her court, including Robert Dudley, Christopher Hatton and Francis Walsingham.

Their investment brought rich returns. By 1580, Drake had achieved considerably more than a modest 'voyage of discovery': he had circumnavigated the globe – the first Englishman to do so. Along the way, he and the crew of his famous galleon, the *Golden Hind*, had looted scores of



43¹⁵⁸⁵ Walter Raleigh finds 'Virginia'

The other great Elizabethan adventurer was the charismatic Sir Walter Raleigh. A multi-talented courtier, politician, soldier, sailor, philosopher, historian and poet, he was one of the best-known men in England and a great favourite of the queen.

Although 21 years Elizabeth's junior, he paid court to her like a lover, showering her with romantic poems and letters, all praising her beauty. Ever the gallant, he treated his royal mistress like a precious jewel and went out of his way to fulfil her every desire. According to popular legend, on one occasion, he threw down his cloak over a "plashy place", so that the queen might walk over it without getting her feet wet.

But his ultimate compliment to Elizabeth came from his overseas ventures. Raleigh had for some time organised and financed exploration in North America, with the aim of generating huge wealth by mining gold and increasing trade (notably in tobacco, which he insisted was a cure for coughs).

Elizabeth did not allow her favourite to risk such hazardous voyages himself, so the first one, in 1584, was commanded by members of his household. The following year, Raleigh sent a party of colonists to found a settlement on the east coast of North America. They landed in North Carolina, which Raleigh named Virginia in honour of his royal mistress, the Virgin Queen.



The 1585 voyage to North Carolina, funded by Raleigh, saw the founding of the settlement of Virginia

circumnavigates the globe

Spanish ships and ports, and the treasures that they brought back swelled the royal coffers considerably.

Anxious to avoid war with Spain, Elizabeth played down Drake's achievement in public, but in private she was delighted, and rewarded him with £10,000 and a knighthood.

Drake's capture of treasure ships belonging to the most powerful monarch in the world made him a national hero and transformed England into a force to be reckoned with.

"By 1580, Drake had achieved **considerably more** than a modest 'voyage of discovery'"

44 ^{10 August 1585} The Treaty of Nonsuch

Among the vast domains of Philip II of Spain were the 17 provinces of the Low Countries. The area was a flourishing centre of trade and brought great riches to the Spanish king. But it was also a centre of Protestantism, and the increasing religious tensions between the Dutch and their Roman Catholic overlord spilled out into open revolt in the 1560s, resulting in the seven northern provinces breaking away from Spanish rule and establishing themselves as an independent territory.

The proximity of the southern (Spanish) provinces to England's coastline had always constituted a threat to Elizabeth, and in 1584 Philip II laid siege to the key port of Antwerp, part of the northern provinces. In the same year, he signed the Treaty of Joinville with the Catholic League – a powerful body of Roman Catholic leaders committed to eradicating Protestantism altogether.

Elizabeth hated embroiling England in foreign wars, but Philip's actions were too aggressive to be ignored. So, at Nonsuch, she made an alliance with the independent Dutch provinces, pledging 6,400 foot soldiers, 1,000 cavalry and 600,000 florins a year to support the revolt. To Philip II, it was a declaration of war. Three years later he would wreak his vengeance.



Mary, Queen of Scots kneels before her executioner in this contemporary woodcut

45 ^{8 February 1587} Mary, Queen of Scots is executed

For as long as she remained a prisoner on English soil, Mary Stuart was the focus of plots and rebellions against Elizabeth. She had always carefully avoided being implicated in any of them, but by 1586, after 18 years of captivity, she had started to lose patience.

Elizabeth's spymaster, Francis Walsingham, sensed her desperation and lay a trap. He had discovered a plot led by Anthony Babington that aimed to assassinate Elizabeth and place Mary on the throne, and intercepted letters between Mary and the conspirators. This was

evidence enough to condemn her, and Mary was sentenced to death. But Elizabeth flinched from signing her death warrant. If she executed an anointed queen, then it would give tacit permission for someone to do the same to her. Eventually, under extreme pressure from her council, she put her signature to the document. It was carried out before the notoriously fickle queen could change her mind, and Mary was executed at Fotheringhay Castle. No sooner had this been done than Elizabeth furiously upbraided her councillors, screaming that Mary's execution was "a thing she never commanded or intended".

It was all an act: anxious about the reprisals from Catholic Europe, Elizabeth was desperately trying to distance herself from all blame for Mary's death. But she was fooling no one and would soon pay the consequences.

"Elizabeth tried to distance herself from all blame for Mary's death"



Philip II's aggressive foreign policy created tension between England and Spain



The c1588 *Armada Portrait* was painted to commemorate the most famous conflict of Elizabeth's reign

46 August 1588 The Armada is scattered

If Elizabeth had hoped that by putting Mary to death, she had extinguished her most dangerous rival for good, then she was mistaken. Her cousin had made sure that in the eyes of the world she died a martyr, not a traitor.

Mary had called upon the Catholic powers to avenge her death and, the very next year, the greatest of them took her at

her word. In May 1588, Philip II launched his Armada against England. Of course, it was not entirely due to Mary, but her death had given Philip the excuse he needed finally to destroy this troublesome heretical queen whose privateers never ceased plundering his treasure ships. It was the greatest threat that Elizabeth

had faced in her reign – and that England had faced since the Norman invasion more than 500 years before.

Philip gathered 150 ships laden with 30,000 men – the largest fleet ever seen in Europe – and set sail for England. The Armada was soon spotted off the coast of Cornwall, and Sir Francis Drake, who command-

ed the English navy, ordered his men to attack it as it sailed along the English Channel.

After a series of skirmishes, the English fleet rallied for a final, decisive attack near Gravelines in the Spanish Netherlands. Philip II's 'invincible' Armada was scattered. It was Elizabeth I's finest hour.

47 1599 The Globe Theatre opens

There were no purpose-built theatres in London until 1576, when the actor-manager James Burbage built the Theatre in Shoreditch. In the 1580s, it welcomed its most famous member in the form of the talented young playwright and actor, William Shakespeare, who joined the company, known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

Born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564, Shakespeare became a father at the age of just 19. What first brought him to London is not certain, but he rapidly established a name for himself as a writer, with such early works as *Henry VI*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Comedy of Errors*.

Shakespeare's genius for wordplay, dramatic dialogue and characterisation was unprecedented, and the fact that he was also an actor gave him an edge over other notable playwrights of the age, such as Christopher Marlowe.

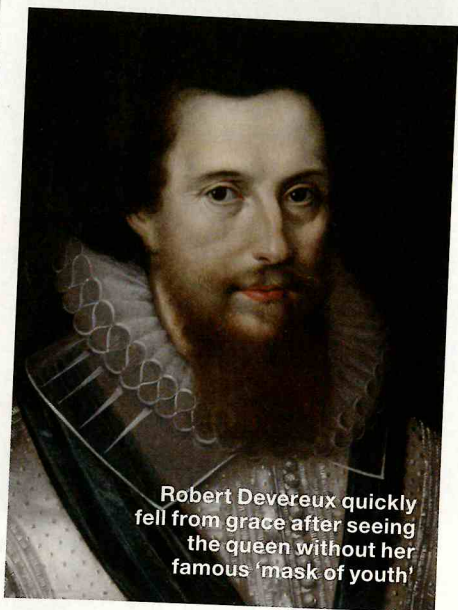
In 1598, the Lord Chamberlain's Men leased a plot near the Rose, a rival theatre in Southwark, and the following year built the Globe out of the timbers of their previous playhouse, the Theatre. The quality of Shakespeare's plays and Elizabeth I's love of theatre (which made it respectable for the first time) ensured the Globe was packed with spectators every night for the next 14 years.



Today's reconstructed Globe is sited just metres from the original building

In 1613, during a performance of *Henry VIII*, wadding from a stage cannon ignited the thatched roof and the theatre burned down in less than two hours.

It was rebuilt and remained the home of Shakespeare's plays until the closure of all theatres by Oliver Cromwell's Puritan regime in 1642.



Robert Devereux quickly fell from grace after seeing the queen without her famous 'mask of youth'

48 February 1601 The Essex Rebellion

Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex was Elizabeth's last great favourite. Some 30 years younger than the queen, he played the game of courtly love to perfection. Before long he was the queen's closest confidant and enjoyed many promotions as a result. But in 1599 he overreached himself by defying her express command to quell a rebellion in Ireland and instead returned home in disgrace, having concluded a humiliating truce. Desperate to regain her favour, he burst unannounced into her bedchamber early one morning and found his royal mistress without her makeup, wig and other adornments with which she attempted to keep the 'mask of youth' in place.

Elizabeth was furious and refused to listen to his excuses. Scorning the queen as "crooked in her mind as she is in her carcass", Essex gathered together a body of supporters, including his close friend Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, and launched a desperate, badly organised revolt against Elizabeth and her council. This soon ended in ignominious defeat, and Essex and Southampton were conveyed to the Tower, along with many of their followers. A verdict of treason was swiftly passed, and Essex was beheaded at the Tower on 25 February.

49 30 November 1601 The last Tudor parliament

The business to be considered at the parliament that opened on 11 September 1601 was mundane enough: recent economic issues had raised some pricing concerns that needed to be addressed. But the speech Elizabeth gave when she attended on 30 November has secured its place in history.

To the astonishment of the 141 members of the House of Commons who were present that day, Elizabeth revealed that it would be her last parliament. She was determined to go out with a bang. Her ensuing speech was the most beautifully crafted and moving expression of love for her country that she had ever given – greater even than her famous Armada speech of 1588.

She told the hushed assembly: "I do assure you there is no prince that loves his subjects better, or whose love can countervail our love. There is no jewel, be it of never so rich a price, which I set before this jewel: I mean


your love... And though you have had, as you may have, many princes more mighty and more wise sitting in this seat, yet you never had nor shall have, any that will be more careful and loving."

The 'Golden Speech', as it became known, was printed and reprinted numerous times. Ironically, its name derives from a version published during Oliver Cromwell's interregnum, which was inscribed: "This speech ought to be set in letters of gold."

"Her speech was the most **beautifully crafted and moving** expression of love for her country"



Elizabeth I is the picture of power in this image from 1579, and the Virgin Queen was determined to go out on a high



The ageing Elizabeth, shown in a painting dating from 1610, may have hastened her own death. Her demise brought an end to the age of the Tudors

50 24 March 1603 Elizabeth I dies

Although in her later years Elizabeth started to lose her grip on the affairs of the court, she enjoyed good health almost until the end of her life. She still rode in the hunt, enjoyed her accustomed long walks “as if she had been only 18 years old”, and danced energetically until well into her sixties. But even this formidable lady could

not defy time forever.

In January 1603, the queen left the court in Whitehall and moved to Richmond Palace, her “warm box”, to which she could “best trust her sickly old age”. Once there, she slipped into a steady decline and it soon became clear that it would be her final illness. Elizabeth, too, realised this and – ever mistress

of her fate – apparently resolved to hasten her end. Her attendants looked on in despair as day after day the queen turned food and drink away, “holding her finger almost continually in her mouth, with her eyes open and fixed upon the ground, where she sat on cushions without rising or resting herself, and was greatly emaciated by

her long watching and fasting”.

Finally, in the early hours of 24 March, the queen breathed her last, relinquishing her hold on life “easily like a ripe apple from the tree”. The throne passed to James VI of Scotland, the son of her old rival, Mary, Queen of Scots. The brilliant, dazzling, incomparable Tudor age was at an end.