



The recent Hollywood epic: *Elizabeth – The Golden Age* (a sequel to the earlier *Elizabeth*) has inspired greater interest in this famous queen and the tumultuous times in which she lived. Numerous friends have asked just how much of these films are accurate history and how much is Hollywood fiction.

### England's Greatest Queen

There is no doubt that Elizabeth I was England's greatest queen. She came to the throne of a country deeply divided, economically bankrupt and devastated by the persecutions and oppression of her half sister Mary Tudor (the infamous *Bloody Mary* whose fanatical obsession to return England to Catholicism so spectacularly backfired.

#### *Bloody Mary*

condemned hundreds of prominent English Protestants to death by burning at the stake – including the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, the most famous Protestant theologians and preachers Bishops Ridley, Hooper and Latimer, the Bible translator John Rogers, and many others.)

### A True Golden Age

Under Queen Elizabeth's 45 years' reign England was united, strengthened, entrenched as a Protestant nation, prospered and flourished and it defeated the great military superpower of the age, Spain.



Under Elizabeth England experienced a renaissance of art, literature and architecture. Hers was an age of great men. During her reign William Shakespeare, perhaps one of the most famous writers of all times, began a 20 year career in the theatre during which he wrote 38 plays, containing more than a million words of beautiful poetry, that have been recited over and over by great actors throughout the centuries worldwide.

Great seamen and explorers, such as Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh, sailed the seas. The decisive victory over the Spanish Armada signaled the rise of the Protestant naval powers of England and Holland and the decline of the Catholic naval superpower of Spain. It was during the reign of Elizabeth that North America was first claimed for the Protestant cause with Sir Walter Raleigh's naming of Virginia after the virgin Queen of England and pioneering the first settlements there.

### **A Terrifying Upbringing**

Elizabeth was born in 1533 to a cold reception from her father King Henry VIII. He had wanted a male heir to carry on the Tudor line. Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn was condemned to death and beheaded on the scaffold for "*treason.*" Elizabeth was only two years old when her mother was executed. As a child Elizabeth experienced more sorrow, loneliness, bitterness and fear than any child should. From her earliest days the fear of sudden death was always with her. Her step mother Katherine Howard was also beheaded. She spent much of her early years in virtual imprisonment. However, she was surrounded with good tutors, plenty of books and the company of her young stepbrother Edward.

In 1547, when Henry VIII died, Edward VI then aged 9 ascended the throne. By Henry VIII's will Mary Tudor, daughter of Catherine of Aragon, stood next in line of succession after Edward.

After Mary, Elizabeth. However, in France, a menace to them all was Mary Stuart, granddaughter of Henry VIII's oldest sister, Margaret, wife of the Dauphin of France. Mary Stuart was also heir to the throne of Scotland. Being wedded to France, and a dedicated Roman Catholic, Mary Stuart (also known as Mary, Queen of Scots, posed a serious, clear and present danger to not only Elizabeth, but to the Reformation and all the people of England.

Edward VI's premature death in 1553 led to plots, intrigues and counter-plots. Edward VI, prior to his death, had changed the laws of succession in favour of his cousin Lady Jane Grey. Desperate to avoid the religious persecution that would surely come with his Catholic half-sister Mary, Edward had endeavored to ensure the dedicated Protestant Lady Jane Grey be the next monarch of England.

### ***Bloody Mary's* Reign of Terror**

Tragically, however, the courageous young Lady Jane Grey was betrayed and Mary, the first daughter of Henry VIII, became Queen of England. Like her mother Catherine of Aragon, Queen Mary was a fervent Catholic and determined to force England back to Catholicism. *Bloody Mary* began a relentless campaign against the Protestants. Her cousin, Lady Jane Grey, was beheaded. Prominent Reformers, Protestant Bishops and Bible translators were burned at the stake. For five tragic years Bloody Mary sought to bludgeon the people of England back to Rome.

### **The Spanish Connection**

Mary's marriage to Phillip II, a member of the powerful Hapsburg family and brother of Ferdinand, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, endangered not only the Protestant Reformation, but the very independence of England. Phillip II was soon to become King of Spain, and he was a fanatical enemy of Protestantism. Phillip II had made it known that his goal was to conquer the world for Spain and the Roman Church.

Phillip II became the husband of Mary and the King of England in 1554. In 1556 he became officially King of Spain. However, by God's grace, the marriage was fruitless and Mary died without having conceived a child.

### **The Counter Productive Counter Reformation**

The end result of Mary's attempts to return England to Catholicism were rather to convince the vast majority of Englishmen in the resolution and determination never again to succumb to such tyranny, superstition, and intolerance. By trying to exterminate the Reformation, *Bloody Mary* had only succeeded in entrenching it.

### **A Ruined Realm**

*Bloody Mary* ended her days in great agony, and fever and mental derangement. The death of *Bloody Mary*

on 17 November 1558 was an occasion of great public rejoicing in England. Elizabeth became the queen of a country ravaged by pestilence and sickened by the sight of countless grey-haired men of God being callously burned at the stake for "heresy."

During Mary's short five-year reign the country had been ruined. England's credit was destroyed. Her currency debased. Her people oppressed to the verge of revolution. Historians observed that the shouts of joy and cheers at Elizabeth's Coronation were more a celebration of the death of Mary than of the new queen, of whom the people at that time knew very little.

### **King Henry's Daughter**

It was 15 January 1559 when the Protestant Elizabeth Tudor was crowned Queen of England. Elizabeth was 25 years old. Historians wrote that there was "no doubt who her father was. A commanding carriage, auburn hair, eloquence of speech, a natural dignity proclaimed her King Henry's daughter. Other similarities were soon observed: High courage in moments of crisis, a fiery and imperious resolution when defied, and an almost inexhaustible fund of physical energy...She could speak six languages and was well read in Latin and Greek. As with her father and grandfather, a restless vitality led her..."

### **The Most Courted Woman in Europe**

Visitors to her court described her as tall, beautiful, young, brilliant, hard-headed, with red-gold, curly hair, pale face, shrewd blue eyes and long white hands. As the unmarried Queen of England, she became the main interest in diplomatic circles. Almost immediately the English court was filled with ambassadors and emissaries for half the kings and princes of Europe seeking to court her.

### **A Protestant Queen**

Queen Elizabeth ended the horror of the English counter-Reformation. Under *Bloody Mary* many Protestant clergy were either executed or forced to flee the country. Elizabeth firmly established Protestantism as the national Faith and ended the Catholic persecutions. It is notable that, although she herself had been imprisoned in the Tower of London and threatened with execution, she ended the religious persecutions without allowing retribution or revenge. She steadfastly resisted all attempts to punish Catholics, insisting that, unless they broke the laws of the realm, they were entitled to equal protection under the law.

### **A Rebirth of Freedom and Industry**

Elizabeth encouraged English enterprise and commerce, establishing a consistent legal code. Her reign was noted for the English Renaissance, an outpouring of poetry and drama, led by William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser and Christopher Marlowe. Their writings remain unsurpassed in English literary history. It was during Elizabeth's reign that England began to expand trade overseas and the Merchant Navy grew dramatically. Ship building boomed under Elizabeth.

She had the fiery red hair and bold spirit of her father King Henry VIII. She also possessed his fierce temper and determination to rule. The rule of Elizabeth I was marked by great achievements in the arts and sciences, by voyages of exploration to distant lands, and by unprecedented prosperity.

Initially, to redeem her country, Elizabeth set in place a stringent economy with heavy taxation to reclaim the nation's credit. She sold the Port of Calais for 500,000 Crowns and juggled the diplomatic hot potatoes of marriage proposals from Phillip of Spain, Archduke Charles of Austria, Henry of Anjou, and many others.

### **The Constant Threat of Assassination**

Throughout her 45-year reign Elizabeth had to deal with constant treachery and intrigues, involving over 60 conspiracies and attempts to assassinate her. Jesuit revolutionaries and assassins were sent from Spain to reconvert England, sowing the seeds of revolt and treason. Elizabeth showed an astounding ability to survive countless conspiracies and assassination attempts.

Living in such perilous times with so many international intrigues to assassinate her and to enforce the Catholic Inquisition back upon England, Elizabeth needed to establish an extensive

intelligence system which was ably controlled by her brilliant spy-master Francis Walsingham.

Privately she suffered the pain of betrayal, sorrow and loneliness, but she dealt with treason and threats to her life as calmly as she regarded the many suitors who sought her hand in marriage. Elizabeth had a genius for surrounding herself with the best possible advisors and for taking their advice. William Cecil, later Lord Burleigh, was her chief minister and remained true to her until his death 40 years later. William Cecil has been described by historians as: *“The perfect servant of a woman who preferred not to let her right hand know what her left was doing.”*

### **The Threat Posed by Mary Queen of Scots**

When Mary, Queen of Scots, fled from her defeat at Langside in 1568, and sought shelter and protection from her cousin Elizabeth, she was provided protection, but under an effective house arrest. During the 18 years of Mary’s imprisonment, she became the centre of innumerable plots and conspiracies to assassinate Elizabeth and usurp the throne. Mary Stuart imperiled Elizabeth and the Reformation in England. One assassin could bring down the government and bring back the Catholic Inquisition. Mary Stuart represented Spain, the vast Catholic international and the Guises of France.

### **Jesuit Intrigues**

In 1580 the Jesuits Edward Campion and Robert Persons infiltrated England to plan an uprising. An army of Spanish and Italian “volunteers” bearing papal banners, invaded Ireland. In 1583 a Catholic plot was uncovered that involved great English noblemen along with Phillip II of Spain, Mary Stuart and a Spanish plan for invasion. Elizabeth expelled the Spanish ambassador and continued English support for the Dutch Freedom Fighters seeking to throw off the oppression of Spain. At that time Holland was a colony of Spain.

### **Parliament Intervenes**

When Mary, Queen of Scots, was finally placed on trial at Fotheringay Castle, Elizabeth sought to stop the proceedings. Parliament intervened and insisted that Mary Stuart continued to be tried for treason. When the court found Mary guilty of plotting the assassination of Elizabeth and the overthrow of religious freedom in England, Elizabeth refused to sign the death warrant. However, ultimately, under the pressure of Parliament, she was compelled on 7 February, 1587, to sign the sentence of the court.

### **Phillip Launches the Armada**

Mary Stuart was beheaded 12 February, 1587. Mary's execution was seized upon by Phillip II of Spain to arouse the Catholic world to a Crusade against Protestant England. It was English gold and support that bolstered the anti-Catholic cause in Scotland and Netherlands. With Phillip having conquered Portugal and expanded Spain's Atlantic power, he ordered his admirals to assemble an Armada which could crush the Protestants in England once and for all.

By May 1588 Phillip had prepared a fleet consisting of 130 ships, 2,400 cannon, and over 30,000 men. This was the greatest naval force the world had yet seen. And it was called "*The Invincible Armada.*"

The plan was for the Armada to sail up the English Channel, pick up troops from the Spanish Netherlands under the Duke of Parma and escorting his invasion barges across the Channel to conquer England. Queen Elizabeth ordered the entire nation to pray for God's intervention and protection against the invading Armada.

### **What was at Stake**

Had the Spanish Armada succeeded, today's world would be unrecognizable. Spain was the Catholic superpower. England led the Protestant cause. All Europe feared Spain. It had overwhelmed all of its adversaries – even the Turk. Had the Armada succeeded the whole subsequent history of England and Scotland would have been changed. There would have been no Protestant North America and no Anglo-Saxon civilization. It would have made Spain the unrivaled world superpower and Spanish the world's language.

### **One of the Greatest Speeches Ever Made**



An English army of almost 20,000 men were assembled at Tilbury to appose the anticipated 30,000 men in the Spanish Armada. In addition to this a further 15,000 Spanish troops under the brutal Duke of Parma were to be ferried across the Channel in barges.

Queen Elizabeth addressed her soldiers at Tilbury with these words: *"I am come amongst you, as you see, resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live or die amongst you all, to lay down for my God, and for my Kingdom, and for my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust. I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a King of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain or any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which, rather than any dishonor should grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field."*

## The Royal Navy

The Royal Navy had been under the control of Sir John Hawkins since 1573. He had rebuilt and reorganized the Navy that had survived from the days of Henry VIII. The castles which had towered above the galleon decks had been cut down. The keels were deepened. Designs concentrated on sea worthiness and speed. Most significantly of all, Hawkins had installed heavier long-range guns. Knowing that he could not out-produce the Spanish in terms of the size and number of galleons, Hawkins was determined to batter the enemy from a distance with the superior range of his cannon. The Spanish Armada carried many cannon (2,400) but these were really only suitable for close-range salvos before grappling and boarding enemy vessels for hand-to-hand combat.

To oppose the Armada's 130 ships, Hawkins had 34 vessels, carrying 6,000 men. His commanders were Lord Howard and Sir Francis Drake. (It was Sir Francis Drake's famous raid on the Spanish Armada in port at Cardiz in 1587 which had delayed the sailing of the Armada by destroying a large quantity of ships and stores. This was described as "*the singeing of the King of Spain's beard!*")

## The Spanish Armada

The Armada finally left Tagus on 20 May. It was afflicted by severe storms. Two of their 1,000 ton ships lost their masts. They had to put in to refit at Carunna and could not sail again until 12 July.

An Intelligence Report of 21 July from Howard to Walsingham reported sighting 120 sail vessels including galleys "*and many ships of great burden.*" Beacons were lit all across England to alert the population to the danger. Church bells rang. Special services were held to pray for God's protection.

## Engaging the Enemy

The English engaged the Armada in a four-hour battle, pounding away with their long range guns, but staying out of range of the Armada's cannon. There was a further engagement on 23 July, and then off the Isle of Wight on 25 July. The guns of the English ships raked the decks of the galleons killing many of the crew and soldiers.

On 28 July the Spanish Armada anchored in the English Channel near Calais. As the English Navy lay upwind from the Spanish, they determined to set adrift 8 fire-ships, filled with explosives, to drift into the crowded Spanish fleet at anchor. As the Spanish crews awoke to see these flaming ships drifting towards their anchored Armada, they panicked. Spanish captains cut their cables, and made for the open sea. Many collisions followed. The surviving ships of the Armada headed eastwards to Gravelines expecting to link up with Parma's troops and barges, ready to be escorted for the invasion of England. But the tides and winds were against them, and they found no sign of Parma's troops in Dunkirk harbour.

At this point the Royal Navy caught up with the Spaniards, and a long and desperate fight raged for eight hours. Howard's men sank or damaged many of the Spanish ships and drove others onto the banks. The English reported that at this point they had completely exhausted their ammunition, otherwise scarcely a Spanish ship would have escaped.

### **The Devastated Armada**

The remnants of the defeated Armada now fled northwards seeking to sail around the north of Scotland in order to reach Spain. They faced mountainous seas and racing tides. Westerly winds drove two of the galleons to wreck upon the coast of Norway. Ships that had been shattered by the English cannonades were now struck by storms. Another 17 ships were wrecked on the coast of Britain. Most of the once mighty Armada were lost before the battered survivors finally reached Spanish ports in October.

### **God Blew and They Were Scattered**

Incredibly, the English had not lost a single ship, and scarcely 100 men in the ferocious engagements against the Spanish Armada. Though limited in supplies and ships, the tactics of Hawkins, and his admirals Howard and Drake, had been crowned with success. A medal struck to commemorate the victory bears the inscription: "*Afflavit Deus et dissipantur*" (God blew and they were scattered.)



## Answers to Prayer

While churches throughout England were holding extraordinary prayer meetings, devastating storms had wrecked the Spanish plans. The Duke of Parma's invasion barges from Holland were prevented from linking up with the Armada by Dutch action. The English tactic of setting fire ships amongst the huge Spanish galleons created confusion. Courageous action by the English seamen and continuing storms decimated and broke up the Spanish Armada. Most of what was left of Phillip's fleet was devastated by more storms off the coast of Scotland and Ireland. Only a miserable remnant of the once proud Armada limped back into the Ports of Spain. 51 Spanish ships and 20,000 men had been lost. The greatest superpower at the time had suffered a crippling blow. The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 marked a great watershed in history. It signaled the decline of Catholic Spain and Portugal and the rise of Protestant England and Holland.

## A Victory for the Protestant Reformation

Before 1588 the world powers were Spain and Portugal. These Roman Catholic empires dominated the seas and the overseas possessions of Europe. Only after the English defeated the Spanish Armada did the possibility arise of Protestant missionaries crossing the seas. As the Dutch and British grew in military and naval strength, they were able to challenge the Catholic dominance of the seas and the new continents. Foreign missions now became a distinct possibility. Had the Spanish Armada not been defeated, Protestantism could have been extinguished in England and Holland. And then the whole future of North America would have been far different with Catholicism dominating instead of the Protestant Pilgrims.

The victory of Protestant England and Protestant Holland against Catholic Spain was absolutely essential for the founding of the United States of America and of the Republic of South Africa.

By the grace of God, the destruction of the Spanish Armada in 1588 saved the Protestant Reformation in England from Spanish invasion, oppression and the Inquisition.

## Defeating Spain

The policy of Elizabeth's government continued to be to distract the enemy in every quarter of the world. This was accomplished by subsidizing Protestant resistance in the Netherlands and in France and by attacking the forces and allies of Spain throughout the world. The expeditions to Cadiz, to the Azores, to the Caribbean, and many other campaigns, were accomplished with very slender resources. At that time the total revenues of the Crown barely exceeded £300,000

a year. The cost of defeating the Armada was calculated to have amounted to £160,000. An expeditionary force to the Netherlands, to help the Dutch in their fight for freedom against the Spanish, cost £126,000 one year. Therefore, raiding Spanish ships not only denied the enemy resources which would have been used to threaten Protestant causes in Europe, and even the independence of England, but was much needed in order to finance the defence of the Realm and assistance to the Huguenots in France and the Dutch in the low countries.

### A Magnificent Heritage



Under Queen Elizabeth England flourished spiritually, militarily and economically. The Elizabethan years saw some of the greatest soldiers, explorers, scientists, philosophers and poets ever produced. Under Elizabeth Parliament had flourished and the Protestant Reformation had become entrenched in the Church of England and through the Puritan movement.

Elizabeth was the last of the Tudor monarchs. For over 100 years the Tudors had guided the country through tumultuous times and changes. With the death of Queen Elizabeth, 24 March 1603, the Tudor Dynasty ended and the crown now passed to an alien Scottish line, the Stuarts. The co-operation between the Crown and Parliament, that the Tudors had nourished, would come to a fretful close. The new kings would repeatedly clash with the Protestant majority of the country and with their Parliamentary representatives. This would lead to the Civil War, the execution of Charles I and the triumph of Parliament over the monarchy.

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