

The Elizabethan Era

The Elizabethan Era took place from 1558 to 1603 and is considered by many historians to be the golden age in English History. During this era England experienced peace and prosperity while the arts flourished. The time period is named after Queen Elizabeth I who ruled England during this time.

English Renaissance Theatre

The Elizabethan Era is perhaps most famous for its theatre and the works of William Shakespeare. English Renaissance theatre began with the opening of "The Red Lion" theatre in 1567. Many more permanent theatres opened in London over the next several years including the Curtain Theatre in 1577 and the famous Globe Theatre in 1599.

The period produced some of the world's great playwrights including Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. Today Shakespeare is considered the greatest writer of the English language. Popular genres of theatre included the history play, the tragedy, and the comedy.

Other Arts

Theatre wasn't the only form of art to flourish during the Elizabethan Era. Other arts such as music and painting were popular during the time. The era produced important composers such as William Byrd and John Dowland. England also began to produce some of its own talented painters such as Nicholas Hilliard and Queen Elizabeth's personal artist George Gower.

Navigation and Exploration

The Elizabethan Era saw the rise of the English navy with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. It also saw many improvements in navigation which were highlighted when Sir Francis Drake successfully circumnavigated the globe. Other famous English explorers included Sir Walter Raleigh who established the Virginia Colony and Sir Humphrey Gilbert who discovered Newfoundland.

Clothing and Fashion

Clothing and fashion played an important role among nobles and the wealthy during this period. There were actually laws that said who could wear what types of clothes. For example, only members of the royal family could wear clothing trimmed with ermine fur. The nobles wore very fancy clothes made from silk and velvet. They used bright colors and had large ruffles on their wrists and collars.

Government

The government in England during this era was complicated and was made up of three different bodies: the monarch, the Privy Council, and the Parliament.

The monarch was Queen Elizabeth. She was very powerful and determined most of the laws of the land, but she did have to get approval from Parliament to implement taxes. The Privy Council was made up of the queen's closest advisors. They would make recommendations and give her advice. When Elizabeth first became queen there were 50 members of the Privy Council. She reduced this over time until there were only 11 members by 1597.

Parliament had two groups. One group was called the House of Lords and was made up of nobles and high ranking church officials such as bishops. The other group was the House of Commons which was made up of commoners.

Interesting Facts about the Elizabethan Era

- The Royal Exchange, the first stock exchange in England, was established by Thomas Gresham in 1565.
- Queen Elizabeth was a Protestant and was constantly in danger of being assassinated by Catholics who wanted to replace her with Mary, Queen of Scots.
- Coaches became a very popular mode of transportation in England with the wealthy and nobles during this time.
- Queen Elizabeth never married nor had children. She said she was married to her country.
- English poetry flourished including the sonnet. Famous poets included Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare.