

---

In 1558 Mary died and her sister Elizabeth Tudor became queen. The new queen faced many problems. She was short of money. England was threatened by Scotland, France and Spain. Elizabeth was a Protestant but she tried to make the Church of England acceptable to Catholics, who were only charged a small fine if they did not go to the services.

---

The theatre was very popular in Elizabeth's reign. Religious plays which had been popular in the Middle Ages were banned, so new plays were written. These were performed in theatres, rather than, as they had been in the past, on wagons that travelled from town to town.

In 1576, the first theatre – the *Theatre* – was built in London so that actors could perform their plays on the same stage all year round. It was so successful that soon other theatres, like the *Fortune*, the *Swan* and the *Globe*, were built.

The Globe theatre, opened in 1599, was the place where William Shakespeare once acted. His plays are still performed all over the world and he is probably the most famous playwright who ever lived.

In Tudor times, all the women's parts were played by boys. Often a bag of animal's blood was hidden under the actors' costumes to make stabbings and deaths look more real.

---

Mary Queen of Scots was a rival to Elizabeth. Mary was Elizabeth's cousin and would become queen if Elizabeth died without having any children. Mary fled to England to seek Elizabeth's protection after a rebellion of the Scottish lords in 1568.

Mary was also a Catholic and many Catholics felt that she should be queen instead of Elizabeth. For nineteen years Mary was imprisoned in various English castles. Foolishly, she became involved in Catholic plots against Elizabeth. When proof of Mary's plotting was given to the Queen, she sadly signed Mary's death warrant. Mary was executed at Fotheringhay Castle in 1587.

---

In 1492, Columbus discovered America for the King of Spain. The Spanish conquered the Aztecs and Incas who lived there, and took their land and wealth. Spanish treasure fleets, loaded with gold and silver, sailed across the Atlantic to land their cargoes in Spain. Spain became the richest country in Europe.

Sir Francis Drake became the first English sea captain to sail round the world. He attacked Spanish ports in America and stole over £1,500,000 of gold. The Spanish called him 'el draco' – the dragon.

Encouraged by Elizabeth, who wanted a share of the loot, English captains, nicknamed 'sea dogs', began to attack the slow Spanish galleons and steal the treasure they carried. To the Spanish king, Philip II, the sea dogs were little better than pirates. To the English, they became heroes.

The English ships were smaller but faster than the clumsy Spanish galleons. The sea dogs pounded the galleons with their cannon until they surrendered.

---

King Philip II of Spain grew more and more angry with Elizabeth because she encouraged her sea dogs to attack Spanish ships. She was also helping the Dutch Protestant rebels who were fighting against Spain.

Philip was a strong Catholic and he wanted England to be a Catholic country. He plotted to put Mary Queen of Scots on the throne of England but she was executed in 1587. The following year, Philip decided to take action and sent a great fleet, or armada, of 130 ships carrying 30,000 soldiers and sailors to invade England.

Beacon fires were lit across England to spread the news of the Armada's arrival. In spite of English attacks in the Channel, the Spanish fleet reached Calais safely. The English sent fireships into the Spanish fleet and it scattered in panic. A great storm blew up, driving the Spanish ships northwards. They had to sail right round Scotland. Many were wrecked and less than half of the Spanish ships managed to limp back to Spain. The Armada had failed.

---

On Thursday, 24th March 1603, a hush fell over London. Good Queen Bess had died, aged nearly seventy. Elizabeth had never married, and she had no children to follow her. She was the last Tudor ruler.

Few of her subjects remembered what it was like to be ruled by a king. She had shown that a woman could rule as well as any man. Though she had become less popular in later years, her reign had been one of the most glorious in English history.

As soon as Elizabeth died, a messenger galloped north to tell King James VI of Scotland, the son of Mary Queen of Scots, that he was to be crowned James I of England. He was the first of a new family of rulers – the Stuarts.