

The Elizabethan Age: The Catholic Threat

Early toleration:

The extent to which most of the population of England and Wales were either Catholic or _____ in 1558 has been down to debate. Many modern historians now argue that the majority of the population, especially those outside _____, were Catholic and not Protestant in 1559. This was precisely why _____ chose to proceed cautiously with her Religious Settlement, adopting a 'middle way' which selected features from both _____ and Protestant faiths, thereby avoiding the _____ of any of her subjects, regardless of faith.

Protestant Elizabeth Cautiously London Catholic Alienation

In the first decade of her reign, Elizabeth adopted an attitude of toleration towards Catholics and did not heavily impose her Protestant ideas. Several factors contribute to this early toleration:

- When trying to get the Religious Settlement of 1559 passed through Parliament, Elizabeth was shocked by the degree of opposition she met from powerful Catholic nobles.
- The fear of possible foreign intervention if she cracked down too harshly upon the Catholics.
- The fear of rebellion from powerful Catholic nobles within England and Wales.
- The realisation that the majority of the population were still Catholic at heart.

From the examples above, which do you think was the most significant reason why Elizabeth took a more tolerant approach to religion in the early stages?

Elizabeth took a tolerant approach up until the events during the late 1560's and 1570's caused her to abandon this policy in favour of a firmer policy of conformance. Elizabeth began to adopt a harsher policy towards those Catholics who demonstrated reluctance to follow her religious settlement because of the following:

- 1568 The arrival of Mary Queen of Scots in England
- 1569 The Rebellion of the Northern Earls
- 1570 The issue of a Papal Bull of Excommunication against Elizabeth
- 1571 The Ridolfi Plot
- 1574 The first arrival of seminary priests in England from Douai in Flanders
- 1580 The arrival of the first Jesuit priests into England
- 1583 The Throckmorton Plot
- 1586 The Babington Plot
- 1588 The Spanish Armada

Recusancy

The term recusant was used to describe individuals who rebelled against Elizabeth's Religious settlement. Recusants posed a direct challenge and in 1581 Elizabeth increased fines to £20 and made it a treasonable offence to attempt to convert people to Catholicism. She desired to stem the tide of seminary priests being smuggled into England and Wales from northern France after 1574.

- In 1568, William Allen set up a training college for Catholic priests at Douai in Flanders.
- Once trained, these new seminary priests were sent to England to re-establish the Catholic faith.
- 438 seminary priests were sent over.
- In 1585, Parliament ordered all such priests to leave the country or be put to death.
- 98 priests were sentenced to death.

Jesuits

Jesuits belonged to the 'Society of Jesus' which had been founded in 1540 with the aim of destroying Protestantism. They began to arrive in England in disguise in 1580. Swearing an oath of loyalty to the Pope, these priests were a threat to national security.

Government response to recusancy

The government passed several acts to curb recusancy.

- 1581 – two Acts which (a) increased fines against recusants and (b) made attempts to convert people to the Catholic faith a treasonable offence.
- 1585 – an Act ordered all Jesuit and seminary priests to leave the country or be killed; anybody found hiding a priest could be given a death sentence.
- 1593 – an Act banned large gatherings of Catholics and confined Catholics to a radius of five miles from their home.

Case of Edmund Campion

- Born in London, he crossed to Flanders to train as a seminary priest at Douai.
- He then joined the Jesuits.
- 1580 – he arrived in secret in southern England and preached in the homes of wealthy Catholic families in London.
- 1581 – he was arrested at Lyford, Berkshire and tortured in the Tower of London before being hanged for treason.

Task: On the next page, Construct a timeline for the period 1560 to 1600. Above the date line, mark on events which show a threat to the Religious Settlement from Catholics, and below the date line the government response to deal with the Catholic threat.

1560

1600

The arrival of Mary, Queen of Scots, in England, 1568

In May 1568, Mary, Queen of Scots, cousin to Elizabeth I, was forced to flee from Scotland across the border into northern England. She had experienced an eventful past.

Mary sent to France

- Born in 1542, daughter of James V of Scotland and his Catholic French wife, Mary of Guise.
- Her father died when she was a baby and her mother then acted as regent.
- 1548 – at age of 6, Mary was sent to be educated in Catholic France.
- Age of 15 – she married Prince Francis, eldest son of Henry II of France.
- 1559 – Francis became king of France, only to die in 1560.

Mary returns to Scotland

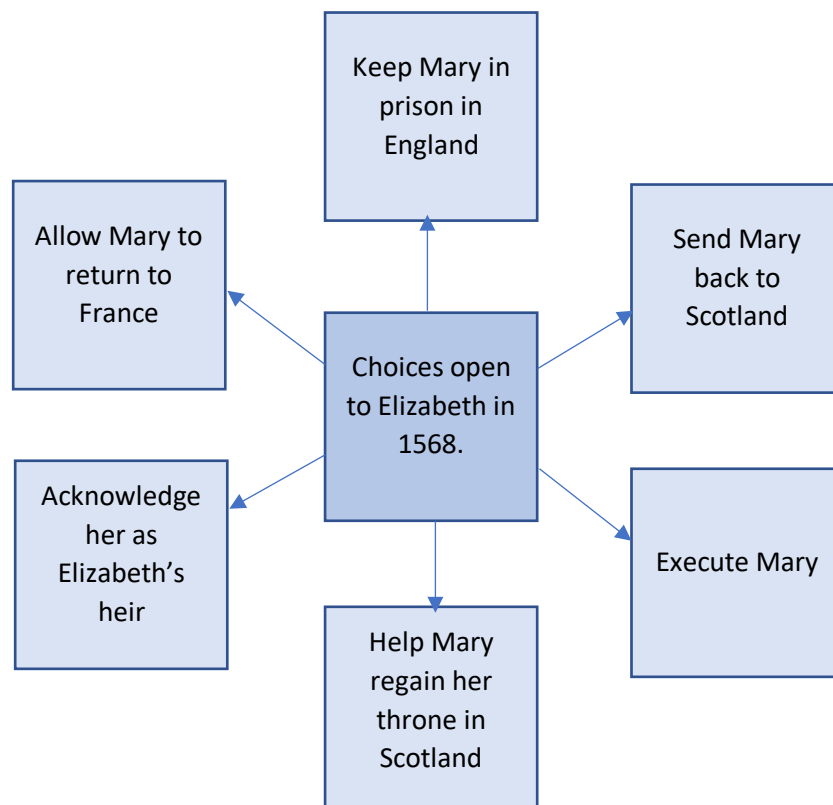
- 1561 – Mary married Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley.
- 1566 – Mary gave birth to a son, the future James VI of Scotland.
- March 1566 – Darnley, believing Mary to be too familiar with her Italian secretary, David Rizzio, stabbed him to death.

Mary and Bothwell

- Mary then became friendly with James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell.
- In 1567, Darnley became ill with smallpox and Mary brought him to Kirk O'Field, a large house in Edinburgh.
- On the night of 9 February 1567, the house was blown up (Mary was at a wedding); Darnley's body was found strangled in the garden.
- Bothwell was accused of the murder but was found not guilty at his trial.
- Mary soon afterwards married Bothwell.
- The Protestant Lords now rebelled against Mary; she was imprisoned in Loch Leven castle.
- July 1567 – she was forced to abdicate in favour of her Protestant son.

Mary arrives in England

In May 1568, Mary escaped and fled across the border into England. Elizabeth had several choices open to her and decided to hold Mary captive. Over the next two decades Mary remained a problem for Elizabeth, becoming the centre of Catholic plots to unsettle the Protestant queen.



Task: Explain how each of the following factors shaped the life of Mary, Queen of Scots:

France:

Lord Darnley:

Early of Bothwell:

Escape to England:

Rebellion of the Northern Earls, 1569

This was the first in a series of Catholic plots to replace Elizabeth as queen with Mary.

Causes

- The arrival of Mary in 1568 gave hope to many English Catholics.
- Two powerful Catholic lords, Charles Neville, Earl of Westmoreland and Thomas Percy, Earl of Northumberland, planned to depose Elizabeth and marry Mary to Northumberland's brother-in-law, Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk.
- Elizabeth's spies found out about the marriage and Norfolk was sent to the Tower; the other two earls avoided capture and started a rebellion.

Events

- In November 1569, a force of 4,600 men marched south through Durham to Bramham Moor.
- Plans to besiege York were abandoned and the forces retreated north.
- The two earls fled across the border into Scotland.

Why did it fail?

- Poor planning and leadership – the rebel army retreated once it heard the royal army was heading towards them.
- Lack of foreign support – the foreign help that was promised by De Spes, the Spanish ambassador, failed to aid the rebellion.
- Popularity of Elizabeth –
- no enthusiasm to replace Elizabeth as England's Queen.

Task: From the examples above, which do you think was the main reason why the rebellion of the Northern Earls failed? Make a case for your judgement.

Aftermath

- Northumberland was captured and handed over to Elizabeth, tried for treason and beheaded.
- Westmoreland managed to escape to Flanders where he soon after died in poverty.
- The Duke of Norfolk was released from prison.
- Over 800 rebels, mostly commoners living in the north, were executed.

Task: “The rebellion of the Northern Earls had little chance of ever being successful”.

Use your knowledge of this event to identify evidence to support this statement.

The excommunication of Elizabeth, 1570

In February 1570, Pope Pius V issued a Papal Bull *Regnans in Excelsis* which excommunicated Elizabeth. It called upon all Catholics to remove Elizabeth from the throne and it released them from their oath of allegiance to the crown. It was a serious threat to Elizabeth. Parliament responded by issuing a new Treason Act in 1571 which:

- made it treasonable to declare that Elizabeth was not the lawful queen
- made it treasonable to publish any Papal Bull
- confiscated the property of Catholics who had fled abroad and did not return within twelve months.

Excommunication definition – Where a person is excluded from the communion of believers, the rites or sacraments of a church, and the rights of church membership.

Source A: An extract from the Papal Bull issued by Pope Pius V in February 1570 which excommunicated Elizabeth.

Elizabeth... the pretended queen of England... having seized on the having seized on the kingdom, and monstrously usurped the place of Supreme Head of the Church in all England, and the chief authority and jurisdiction thereof, hath again reduced the said kingdom into a miserable and ruinous condition, which was so lately reclaimed to the Catholic faith and a thriving condition [during reign of Mary I] ... declare Elizabeth as being an heretic and favourer of heretics ... to have incurred the sentence of excommunication and to be cut off from the unity of the body of Christ. And moreover we do declare her to be deprived of her pretended title to the kingdom aforesaid and we do command and charge all and every noblemen, subjects, people and others aforesaid, that they presume not to obey her or her orders and laws.

Task: To what extent does this source accurately reflect the threat Elizabeth posed by the Catholics?