

Elizabeth I

Queen of England



*Elizabeth I's Coronation Portrait
by an unknown artist*

Born: 7 September 1533
Greenwich Palace

Became Queen: 17 November 1558

Coronation: 15 January 1559
Westminster Abbey

Died: 24 March 1603
Richmond Palace

Buried: 28 April 1603
Westminster Abbey

On January 15, 1559, Elizabeth I was crowned Queen by Owen Oglethorpe, bishop of Carlisle at Westminster Abbey¹, a little less than two months after the death of Mary I². The total cost of the celebrations, excluding the coronation banquet was £16,741, which according to one calculation would equal about £3.5 million today. Like her predecessors, Elizabeth knew the importance of a good show, especially for a new monarch who needed to re-affirm her right to her crown.

Three days earlier, Elizabeth resided at the Tower of London³ and on the 14th made the procession to Westminster. Along the way were various displays and pageants for Elizabeth's entertainment. On the night of the 14th, she spent the night at the Palace of Westminster, which was just a short walking distance from the Westminster Abbey. The next day, the 15th, Elizabeth walked in procession to the Abbey for the coronation on the date chosen by Dr. John Dee⁴, who besides being a mathematician and Greek scholar, was also an astrologer. For

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the procession, Elizabeth walked on a blue carpet that ran from the palace to the abbey, which was torn up by souvenir seekers after the Queen walked passed. The ceremony of the coronation was much as it had been for Elizabeth's predecessors, but with a few significant alterations to the religious aspects of the service. The coronation mass now included readings in English and Latin for the Epistle and Gospel and she retreated to a curtained area in St. Edward's Chapel during the elevation of the host. After the coronation, Elizabeth walked from the Abbey to Westminster Hall for the traditional coronation banquet, a custom that ended with the coronation of George IV in 1821.

When Elizabeth took the throne, she was immediately descended upon by suitors. However, as we all know, she never married. One of the most obvious questions would be "why?". Some theorize that because of the way her father treated his wives, Elizabeth was disgusted by the idea of marriage. The more romantic feel it was because she couldn't marry the man that she really loved, Robert Dudley⁵. When Elizabeth became Queen, Dudley was married, and then his wife Amy⁶ died under mysterious circumstances a few years later. Although Robert Dudley was cleared of any wrong-doing in the matter, Elizabeth could not marry him because of the scandal that would no doubt arise. Or perhaps she never married because of a combination of reasons. Regardless, Elizabeth never married, but managed to successfully play her suitors off of one another for about 25 years, gaining alliances and wealth from gifts on the possibility of marriage. The one serious contender for her hand was Francis, Duke of Alençon⁷ of France, but negotiations eventually failed.

The later years of Elizabeth's reign are sometimes referred to as a Golden Age. During this time, England and Elizabeth faced several major trials. First, Elizabeth had to deal with the growing threat of Mary Queen of Scots⁸, who had a strong and legitimate (especially in the eyes of Catholics) claim to the throne of England. When Mary fled her country in the 1560s, she was taken into house arrest in England, where she had expected the protection of her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth however knew Mary was a threat. Eventually, a plot serious enough arose in Mary's name, and Elizabeth sign her death warrant. Mary was executed in 1587, on February 8th, at Fortheringhay.

Also, the greatest military threat to Elizabeth's reign came a year later, when the Armada from Spain sailed toward the tiny island nation. England prevailed and was on its way towards becoming the supreme naval power that it was in the 1600 and 1700s. This was also near the time that Robert Dudley died. Elizabeth kept the last letter he sent her in her desk, with "His Last Letter" written on it. In the final years of her reign Elizabeth faced the challenges of increasing Puritan influence and the rebellion of Robert Devereux⁹, the Earl of Essex.

Elizabeth died on March 24, 1603 at Richmond Palace¹⁰ and was succeeded by James I¹¹ (James VI of Scotland), the son of Mary, Queen of Scots. The Tudor dynasty ended and passed to the Stuarts.

According to Henry VIII's will, the next heirs after Henry VIII's own children were those remaining daughters of Frances Brandon¹², daughter of Henry VIII's sister Mary Tudor and her husband Charles Brandon¹³. Frances' first daughter was Jane Grey, who was executed in the reign of Mary I after briefly holding the throne for 9 days after the death of Edward VI. Jane had two sisters, Catherine¹⁴ and Mary Grey¹⁵ and early in Elizabeth's reign it appeared that Catherine would be, at least legally, the next in line to the throne. However, Catherine married Edward Seymour¹⁶ (son of the Edward Seymour, the Lord Protector¹⁷ from Edward VI's reign) in secret without the Queen's permission and her marriage was declared invalid in 1561, making her children illegitimate. Catherine herself died in 1568, so was not a question in the succession in 1603, but she had two sons: Edward and Thomas, who were still alive at the time.

After the children of Catherine Grey would have been the heirs of Mary Grey, but although she married, she is not known to have produced any heirs and she herself died in 1578, long before Elizabeth.

After the heirs of Frances Brandon would come the heirs of Frances' younger sister, Eleanor Brandon. Eleanor married Henry Clifford, the Earl of Cumberland and had a daughter, Margaret. Margaret died a few years before Elizabeth I, but she had a son, William, who was alive and therefore another potential legal heir of Elizabeth I's throne, and one without the questions of legitimacy that surrounded Catherine Grey's sons.

The children of Margaret Tudor¹⁸, wife of James IV¹⁹ of Scotland were not mentioned as part of the succession since they were born in a foreign country. But, since they were the heirs of an older daughter of Henry VII²⁰, going by the usual hereditary rules they would have a stronger claim to the English throne than the descendants of Henry VII's younger daughter Mary. In the first few decades of Elizabeth's reign, the primary claimant to Elizabeth's crown through this line was Mary Queen of Scots. Since she was Catholic, she was a rallying point for those who wished to see someone from the old faith on the English throne.

After the death of James IV, Margaret Tudor married Archibald Douglas, and they had a daughter named Margaret²¹, who married Matthew Stuart, the Earl of Lennox. Margaret Douglas had two sons, Henry Lord Darnley²² and Charles, who later inherited his father's title. In 1565, the two lines of descent from Margaret Tudor were united when Mary Queen of Scots was married to Henry Lord Darnley. Two years later Mary bore a son James, the future James VI of

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Scotland. Margaret Douglas' second son, Charles married Elizabeth Cavendish and had one child, a daughter, Arabella Stuart²³.

By the time Elizabeth was in the final days of her life, it seemed a foregone conclusion that the crown would go to James VI of Scotland. Secret behind-the-scenes dealings with members of Elizabeth's government paved the way for his succession. However, it is still not known for sure whether or not Elizabeth actually named James as her heir on her deathbed. It is possible that Elizabeth never formally named James her heir in writing because she remembered the events surrounding her sister's death and how the people abandoned Mary in favor of Elizabeth in Mary's final weeks. It is generally said that when asked who she wanted to succeed her, Elizabeth made a hand sign indicating James, since she was no longer able to speak. Regardless of whether or not she actually indicated James, it was the King of Scotland who succeeded Elizabeth, peacefully, although there were several others with claims to the English throne as we've gone through above. In 1603, the kingdoms of Scotland and England were finally united under one crown.

Links:

1. <http://tudorhistory.org/places/westabbey/index.html>
2. <http://tudorhistory.org/mary/>
3. <http://tudorhistory.org/places/tower/index.html>
4. <http://tudorhistory.org/people/dee/>
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