

# BBC Bitesize - GCSE History

## Elizabeth I - Episode 1: Elizabeth's journey to the throne

**Announcer:** BBC Sounds, music, radio, podcasts.

**Anouska:** Hello, and welcome to the Bitesize GCSE History podcast.

**Alice:** This is the series designed to help you tackle your History GCSE. I'm Alice Loxton, author and historian.

**Anouska:** And I'm Anouska Lewis, history podcaster.

**Alice:** We're here to help you dive a little deeper into Elizabeth I.

**Anouska:** Every episode, we'll explore the key events, people and concepts for your exam, as well as some exam skills. We'll be using actors to read historical sources and imagined conversations between historical figures.

**Alice:** And at the end of every episode we'll do a quick quiz to make sure you've caught all the key details.

**Anouska:** Oooh, I'm excited for that.

**Alice:** Me too.

**Anouska:** There's absolutely loads to get stuck into. The Elizabethan period was a busy time.

**Alice:** It sure was. And if you want to hear all the episodes in this podcast, and the other History series, make sure you download the BBC Sounds app. So, before we can get really stuck into Elizabeth I, we need to look at what led her to the throne. Her Dad was a pretty well known and powerful guy.

**Anouska:** Oh that guy... in the big sleeves... and the six wives.

**Alice:** That's the one - Henry VIII! His first wife was Katherine of Aragon and they had a daughter Mary in the year 1516. But at that time, like a lot of people, Henry believed it was unnatural for a woman to reign and so a male heir would be a stronger successor to his throne.

**Anouska:** So, a little bit of context here...in the previous century, England had been ravaged by a series of civil wars called The Wars of The Roses. So Henry really wanted the crown to be in good and stable hands when he died.

**Alice:** And he thought the key to this was having a male heir. So, the big question is - did Katherine have a son?

**Anouska:** Well, Katherine had six children, but only Mary, their daughter, survived. Henry wanted to find another wife to have a son with.

**Alice:** But in order to end his marriage to Katherine, Henry needed permission from the Catholic Pope to divorce her.

**Anouska:** He did indeed, but the Pope refused to give permission. So Henry did something pretty radical.

**Alice:** Yes...he broke with Rome, took over the Church in England, called himself the Supreme Head and granted himself a divorce.

**Anouska:** Problem solved I guess? So what happened next Alice?

**Alice:** Well, next, he marries Anne Boleyn. Together they have a daughter, Elizabeth.

**Anouska:** I bet Henry wasn't exactly happy about that.

**Alice:** Hmmm... not really....he still didn't have a son, which he desperately wanted. So, Anne had to go as well.

**Anouska:** Anne was accused of high treason and beheaded. Henry then married Jane Seymour and they had a son together, Edward.

**Alice:** So finally he got what he wanted, a son!

**Anouska:** When Henry VIII died, he became King, making him King Edward VI. But, Edward died after just six years on the throne. He was only 14.

**Alice:** He was replaced by his half sister Mary I, and when she died Elizabeth became Queen. The year was 1558 and Elizabeth was 25 years old.

**Anouska:** 25? That's basically my age! Being Queen now would be so hard, I can hardly do my own laundry.

**Alice:** I know, but Elizabeth was ready! She'd spent 25 years preparing and a lot of people saw Elizabeth's reign as a fresh start. She was young...

**Anouska:** ooooooh.

**Alice:** She was single...

**Anouska:** yaaaaaaas.

**Alice:** ...and unlike her half-sister Mary, who's mother was Spanish, both Elizabeth's parents were English. It was felt she'd be loyal to the English people, not to foreign powers.

**Anouska:** She was also really clever! Let's hear a primary source from Elizabeth's tutor, Roger Ascham, published in 1570. This is a real source read by an actor.

**Roger:** Apart from her abilities in Latin, Italian, French and Spanish, she also reads more Greek every day than some churchmen read Latin in a whole week. Most impressively, working within her own private chambers she has developed the same ability to learn, understand, speak and write that which only one or two university students could achieve in many years.

**Anouska:** Wow, pretty impressive... We can infer from that, that she was a well-educated monarch. And we know Elizabeth had some fans early on. But...not everyone was happy.

**Alice:** No they weren't. Many Catholics believed that her parent's marriage was illegal because Henry had divorced his first wife to marry her mum. So therefore they thought that Elizabeth was illegitimate and that she had no claim to the throne.

**Anouska:** That is not exactly ideal for her.

**Alice:** Going to cause a few problems certainly.

**Anouska:** Okay you might want to write this next bit down...grab a pen and a piece of paper... Elizabeth had been raised a Protestant. Her half-sister Mary I, who had been Queen before her, was extremely Catholic and had made England a Catholic country again.

**Alice:** And during Mary's reign, there were concerns that Elizabeth would be used as a figurehead for Protestant rebellions.

**Anouska:** So Elizabeth was imprisoned by her own sister before she became Queen herself.

**Alice:** So as you are beginning to see, religious tensions were a theme throughout this period and we'll talk a bit more about that in a later episode. But Anouska, what other problems faced Elizabeth once she became Queen?

**Anouska:** Well....some people were worried about her ability to rule because she was a woman.

**Alice:** The Christian religion taught that women should be under the authority of men. The word 'Queen' actually comes from the Anglo-Saxon 'wife of a King. So basically, women were only thought of in relation to men.

**Anouska:** Some people thought Elizabeth couldn't be a strong, effective monarch by herself, and would make England look weak.

**Alice:** Hang on a sec... Mary I had come before her so weren't people used to a female ruler?

**Anouska:** You're right, but things didn't exactly go very well for Mary. England was pretty unstable and as a consequence, people associated poor ruling with female rulers. So with that in mind, some Members of Parliament wanted Elizabeth to get married and produce an heir.

**Alice:** Ok, well let's hear from Elizabeth I herself on this one. This is what she had to say to Parliament in 1566. It's read by an actor.

**Elizabeth:** At present it is not convenient; nor never shall be without some peril unto you and certain danger unto me.

**Anouska:** So, although Queen Elizabeth was single, she was clearly not ready to mingle.

**Alice:** No she wasn't. She was very clear that this was her private business and she would only marry when and if it was convenient.

**Anouska:** She was basically telling Parliament to back off and stop asking her about marriage, which I think is fair enough.

**Alice:** Me too. Elizabeth is the only English queen who never married and that's why she earned the name 'The Virgin Queen'. She never shared exactly why she didn't want to marry but some historians think it was to protect England's security; if she had a foreign husband, perhaps a King from France or Spain, he would then have power in England.

**Anouska:** Equally, if Elizabeth were to marry an English nobleman, it could cause arguments amongst the rest of England's nobility.

**Alice:** Hmm... I can see why that could be tricky.

**Anouska:** But... that doesn't mean she was short of admirers.

**Alice:** Absolutely not, she had plenty of men lining up for a chance to marry her...from English noblemen to foreign royalty.

**Anouska:** And by not choosing anyone, she kept her options open. If they all thought they had a chance, she could even play countries off against each other.

**Alice:** Clever, now let's whistle through her potential suitors. It might be a good idea to grab a notebook and write these ones down.

**Anouska:** Welcome to Keen for a Queen! It's the brand new dating show where noblemen and foreign royalty fight for a chance to marry The English Queen!

**Alice:** Bachelor number 1 is entering the castle. It's the very dashing, the very charming Robert Dudley!

**Anouska:** Woo.

**Alice:** Robert Dudley, The Earl of Leicester is an ambitious, good looking guy and there are rumours that he and Elizabeth are in love, but there's a catch... he's already married.

**Anouska:** Booo.

**Alice:** And scandal strikes when his wife is found dead.

**Anouska:** Did he do it?

**Alice:** Well people suspect he might have, so that he could be with Elizabeth. But that's not the kind of attention the Queen wants and so she pulls away from him to protect her reputation.

**Anouska:** Next up, we have Bachelor number 2, King Philip of Spain!

**Alice:** The guy with a lovely moustache... and what's more... he's a King!

**Anouska:** A King for a Queen...What could go wrong?

**Alice:** Well there is a slight hitch... first up, he's a Catholic, but secondly he's been married before.

**Anouska:** Okay, who was he married to?

**Alice:** Well...it was actually Mary I, Elizabeth's sister.

**Anouska:** Her sister!

**Alice:** Her sister. So it's no surprise people thought that this was a bit of a dodgy option and politically it was a problem too. MPs were not a fan. They didn't want to encourage any

more religious tensions by having a Catholic King in England, and they didn't want Spain to have influence within England's government. So, Elizabeth played hard to get, she kept him waiting and then cautiously rejected his offer.

**Anouska:** Finally getting down on one knee it's Bachelor number 3.

**Alice:** Francis Duke of Alencon was the heir to the French throne. Elizabeth strung him along for nearly a decade but there were positives to marrying him.

**Anouska:** Well yes, she'd have influence in France, but Francis was Catholic, and it was too risky to have French influence in England. So they never ended up tying the knot.

**Alice:** A string of rejected proposals later, and Elizabeth had made it clear she would never marry. If you'd like to get to know Elizabeth's suitors, or see what they looked like make sure to head to the BBC Bitesize website.

**Alice:** OK Anouska, shall we finish up with a quiz?

**Anouska:** Yes, let's do it. Feel free to grab a pen to write down your answers.

**Alice:** First question. Who broke with Rome and took control of the Church in England? The answer is Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII. He did this to grant himself permission to divorce his first wife, Katherine of Aragon.

**Anouska:** Next question. Elizabeth had two siblings who ruled before her, who were they? It's her half brother Edward VI and her half sister Mary I. Edward died young, and Mary imprisoned Elizabeth for her Protestant beliefs.

**Alice:** Hmmm... lovely sisterly behaviour... Okay, next one. What is Elizabeth's nickname... a little hint, it has something to do with her decision around marriage. The answer is The Virgin Queen. Elizabeth decided not to marry and she didn't have any children, so that's where that name comes from.

**Anouska:** Last question. Which King's proposal did Elizabeth reject? It was King Phillip of Spain. Remember Phillip was married to Elizabeth's half sister Mary before she died and he was keen to marry Elizabeth too, buuuut... she wasn't interested.

**Alice:** Thank you for listening to episode one of the Bitesize History podcast and for joining us as we explored Elizabeth's journey to the throne.

**Anouska:** There's lots more information on the BBC Bitesize website and you can listen to the rest of the episodes on BBC Sounds.

**Alice:** Next time, we'll be looking at Elizabeth I's government and meeting some of the key members of her Royal Court.

**Anouska:** And because you've listened to this entire episode, you are now part of our Lizzie Legends crew.

**Alice:** Yes, we are all Lizzie Legends here. See you next time!

**Anouska:** Bye.