

Queen Elizabeth I – Episode 1 - The Virgin Queen

Alice: Hello, and welcome to the Bitesize GCSE History podcast. I'm Alice Loxton, author and historian.

Anouska: I'm Anouska Lewis, history podcaster. And we're here to help you dive a little deeper into Elizabeth I, with the help of some very special guests.

Alice: That's right, and for more videos on Elizabeth I and other GCSE content, make sure to subscribe to the Bitesize YouTube channel.

Anouska: We've also popped some links in the description to related content. Check that out too. So, let's set the scene a little.

Alice: The year is 1558, and Elizabeth I has just become queen. But she faces a few problems early on. One is religion. She's Protestant and tensions between Catholics and Protestants have been ongoing since her father, Henry VIII, was king.

Anouska: As well as that, some people are worried about her ability to rule. Tell us why, Alice.

Alice: Well, the Christian religion of that time 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 defined 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: So, with that in mind, some Members of Parliament wanted Elizabeth to get married and produce an heir. She was the last surviving member of her family, so having a child would ensure she continued the Tudor dynasty.

Anouska: Why don't we hear from Elizabeth herself. The year is 1566 and we've just got word that Elizabeth is making a speech to Parliament about her marital status. Let's hear what she has to say.

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. Elizabeth was very clear that this was her private business and she would only marry when and if it was convenient to her.

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

Anouska: She never shared exactly why she didn't want to marry but some historians think it was to protect England's security.

Alice: Yes well if she had a foreign husband, perhaps a king from France or Spain, he would then have power in England and his power could potentially surpass her own.

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

Alice: Well I can see why that could be tricky.

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

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

Anouska: And by not choosing anyone, she retained her power. If they all thought that they had a chance, she could even play countries against each other.

Alice: Very clever.

Alice: Now, let's imagine if we could invite Elizabeth I herself to join us on our Bitesize History podcast.

Anouska: Joining us on the pod today, from her very royal palace, we're delighted to welcome Queen Elizabeth I.

Alice: Hi, I'm not sure if we can quite hear you there actually.

Anouska: Elizabeth, I think you're on mute.

Alice: I think it's the button at the bottom.

Elizabeth: Can you hear me now?

Alice: That's it.

Elizabeth: My first podcast. How exciting.

Anouska: How are you doing Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Well, rather stressed to be honest. I'm getting a lot of questions about producing an heir.

Alice: Well Elizabeth, we've heard about that, and we've come up with a way which might help. This is 'Keen for a Queen'. And we're going to go through your potential suitors and hear what you think about them.

Elizabeth: Ooh yippee!

Alice: And for those watching, it might be a good idea to grab a notebook and make some notes here.

Anouska: Bachelor number 1 is the very dashing, the very charming, Robert Dudley.

Elizabeth: Ah, Robbie!

Alice: Now Robert Dudley is The Earl of Leicester. He's an ambitious, good-looking guy and there are actually rumours that you two are in love.

Elizabeth: Well yes Alice, but he's already married. And there is a scandal in my court when his wife is found dead. People suspect Robert had killed her so that we could be together. And that is just not the kind of attention that I need. My reputation always comes first, so we cannot be together. Next!

Anouska: Bachelor number two is King Philip of Spain.

Elizabeth: Yes Philip. He has got a lovely moustache, and he is a King which is perfect!

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

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

Anouska: Okay, but who was he married to?

Elizabeth: Uhum. He was married to Mary I, my sister.

Anouska: Your sister?

Alice: Her sister. So, it's no surprise people think this is a bit of a dodgy option and politically it's a problem too. MPs are not a fan. They don't want to encourage any more religious tensions by having a Catholic king in England, and they don't want Spain to have influence within England's government.

Elizabeth: Exactly. So I reject his marriage offer. Anyone else?

Anouska: Finally getting down on one knee, it's the heir to the French throne, Francis Duke of Alençon.

Alice: And you actually did string him along for nearly a decade didn't you Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Well yes. There are lots of positives to marrying him. For example, I would have influence in France. But he's Catholic and it's far too risky to have French influence here in England.

Anouska: It's not looking good Elizabeth.

Elizabeth: I guess I remain the Virgin Queen. Tarrah!

Alice: Oh I think we've lost her there.

Anouska: Bye.

Alice: Well there we have it. A string of rejected proposals later, and Elizabeth had made it clear she would never marry.