

BBC Bitesize - GCSE History

Elizabeth I - Episode 6: The issue of Mary Queen of Scots

Announcer: BBC Sounds, music, radio, podcasts.

Anouska: Hiya! You're listening to the Bitesize GCSE History podcast.

Alice: In this series, we go over the key facts and exam skills for your History GCSE on Elizabeth I.

Anouska: I'm Anouska Lewis.

Alice: and I'm Alice Loxton. So far we've spent a lot of time getting to know one very special lady, haven't we?

Anouska: We have indeed, we've been talking all things Queen Elizabeth I. But now...there's a new girl in town.

Alice: This episode is all about Mary, Queen of Scots and to tell the story we're using actors to read out historical sources from the time as well as fictional imagined conversations between historical figures.

Anouska: There's so much to get into. But first, let's set the scene. Waaaaay back in episode 1 we talked about Elizabeth's decision not to marry or have children.

Alice: One of the big disadvantages was that she didn't have an heir and this generated uncertainty over who would inherit the throne.

Anouska: If you need to catch up on that episode, or any others, don't worry. Pause this one and come back later.

Alice: In an earlier episode we also talked about the religious tensions. England was officially a Protestant country but Elizabeth came up with The Religious Settlement, her middle way.

Anouska: Puritans were angry that this allowed too many Catholic traditions, and Catholics were angry because they couldn't practise their religion freely.

Alice: Some of these people were so angry they took action. There were four major Catholic plots, all of which wanted to remove Elizabeth as Queen, and replace her with a Catholic queen - Mary Queen of Scots.

Anouska: We're going to cover each of these plots, but first, there's an important question we need to ask.

Both: Who was Mary Queen of Scots?

Anouska: Grab a pen and paper here and make some notes - there's quite a lot of names to remember.

Alice: Mary was Elizabeth's cousin, not to be confused with Mary I who was Elizabeth's sister.

Anouska: Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth both descended from Henry VII, the former King of England.

Alice: This all meant that if Elizabeth didn't have any children of her own, Mary, who was a Catholic, would be next in line to the English throne.

Anouska: Wwwwait, I think we're getting a little ahead of ourselves here.

Alice: OK, let's rewind a bit.

Anouska: Mary became Queen of Scotland when her father, James V, died. The United Kingdom, as we know it today, didn't exist then. Scotland was separate and had its own monarchy.

Alice: Mary became Queen in 1542 when she was just six days old. So she was an infant queen.

Anouska: But it wasn't smooth sailing for her. She was married to Francis II, the King of France.

Alice: When he died in 1561, she returned to Scotland.

Anouska: She then married Lord Darnley in 1565 but their marriage was an unhappy one. He treated Mary poorly and was even involved in the murder of her secretary, whom he was jealous of.

Alice: So in 1567, when Darnley was murdered, people thought Mary was responsible.

Anouska: She was forced to abdicate, and she was replaced by her son, James, who was just a baby.

Alice: So there's a lot going on there. Feel free to rewind that section if you need to hear it again. There's also some really useful pages on the BBC Bitesize website just head to the GCSE History content.

Anouska: Mary was forced to leave Scotland. But where could she go? Let's hear what she might have been thinking. This isn't a real source, it's fiction and it's voiced by an actor.

Mary: I can't stay here, it's too dangerous. I must escape. The most logical place for me to go is England. My cousin Elizabeth is there and she can understand more than anyone the struggles of being a female ruler.

Alice: So when Mary arrived in England in 1568 she wasn't met with a particularly warm welcome.

Anouska: No, she posed a real threat to Elizabeth. Some Catholics wanted Mary to replace her as Queen so she could restore the Catholic church in England. In the end Elizabeth decided to let Mary stay in England. But that didn't mean that she could just go about life as usual.

Alice: Definitely not. She was kept as a royal prisoner. She might have been treated with respect, she was a queen after all, but essentially she was in prison.

Anouska: So Mary had arrived in England in 1568 and the first of these four major Catholic plots against Elizabeth took place in the following year, 1569. The first one was called 'The Northern Earls' Revolt.

Alice: The Northern Earls were a powerful group of Catholic nobles from Northern England. And they weren't the biggest fans of Elizabeth for quite a few reasons.

Anouska: So when Mary Queen of Scots arrived, they were ready to rebel. Their plan was to break Mary out of jail and put her on the throne.

Alice: They were led by Charles Neville and Thomas Percy who gathered an army of over 4,000 men.

Anouska: The Duke of Norfolk was also involved. He wasn't a Northerner, but he was the highest ranking Catholic noble in England, he was also Elizabeth's cousin.

Alice: Now he was crucial to the plan, because as well as putting Mary on the throne, she was going to marry the Duke of Norfolk. This would give her a more solid link to the English nobility.

Anouska: Oooh drama, how did Elizabeth react?

Alice: Well, she was not happy. But, she quickly made a plan. She was very decisive and sent an army of her own.

Anouska: In contrast, the Northern Earls had a pretty poor plan and most of the rebels retreated when they heard that thousands of soldiers were coming their way.

Alice: In the end, Elizabeth executed over 800 of them. It was a warning to other rebels. 'This is what will happen if you ever try to overthrow me.'

Anouska: That is terrifying. The Duke of Norfolk was imprisoned, but we'll be seeing him again.

Alice: And this was not the end of Catholic plots against Elizabeth. It's now 1571 and Roberto Ridolfi, an Italian Catholic banker, is hatching a plan.

Anouska: Ridolfi wanted English Catholics to overthrow Elizabeth, and for Mary to marry The Duke of Norfolk, who we met earlier, so that England could return to Catholicism.

Alice: He was backed by King Phillip II of Spain as well as Mary Queen of Scots herself.

Anouska: Wait, Mary was in on it?

Alice: Apparently, she was. But it was never proved so they couldn't take any action against her other than making her imprisonment more severe.

Anouska: When Elizabeth's advisor, William Cecil, uncovered the plot, Ridolfi was thrown out of England and the Duke of Norfolk was executed.

Alice: Make sure to keep writing down some notes, there's a couple more plots to discuss. Fast forward please!

Anouska: OK, now it's 1583, 12 years after the Ridolfi plot.

Alice: Enter, Francis Throckmorton. He's a young Catholic man and he's got a cunning plan. For the French army to invade England and replace Elizabeth with... any guesses?

Anouska: I'm gonna go for Mary Queen of Scots?

Alice: Correct. This one is known as the Throckmorton plot.

Anouska: What happened with this one then?

Alice: Well, another of Elizabeth's advisors, Francis Walsingham, heard rumours of this plan. Walsingham actually had a network of spies who were tracking the plots and when this one

was discovered, Throckmorton was arrested and executed. But Elizabeth still needed to do something about Mary. She continued to be at the centre of plots against her.

Anouska: So Mary was moved to Tutbury Castle in Staffordshire. She was held in isolation, she was guarded, and she was no longer allowed visitors.

Alice: Another one?

Anouska: One more...keep going.

Anouska: OK, we've made it to 1586 and the plot which leads to Mary's downfall, the Babington plot.

Alice: Sir Anthony Babington was an English gentleman who planned to rescue Mary and murder Elizabeth.

Anouska: However, coded letters were discovered between Babington and Mary. The letters described his plan which included six other men and Mary was replying.

Alice: So let's hear a section from The Gallows Letter, this is a real letter which Mary wrote to Babington from her cell. It's voiced by an actor.

Mary: Set the six gentlemen to work. But if you fail, Elizabeth will catch me again, enclose me forever in some hole, from which I should never escape, if not even worse.

Anouska: This was the proof Walsingham, Elizabeth's advisor, needed to show once and for all that Mary was guilty.

Alice: Babington was arrested and whilst being tortured, confessed to the plot. He was executed alongside six other plotters.

Anouska: Mary was ultimately found guilty of treason and executed on the 8th February 1587. The executioner held up her severed head and shouted "God save the Queen." Right, that was quite a lot of information. Let's test ourselves – it's Quiz Time. Number 1. Was Mary Queen of Scots Elizabeth's sister or her cousin? She was Elizabeth's cousin. Mary I was her sister.

Alice: Next question. Which was the first major Catholic plot against Elizabeth? The answer is the Northern Earls revolt. It ended with 800 rebels executed and a decisive victory for Elizabeth. And which plot ultimately led to Mary Queen of Scots' execution? It was the Babington Plot. Mary was put on trial and found guilty. She was eventually executed.

Anouska: Thank you for listening to another episode of the Bitesize History podcast. Next time we're exploring troubles abroad.

Alice: Yep there'll be lots to cover in that one. See you next time.

Anouska: Bye Lizzie Legends!