

TUDORS AND REFORMATION

1485 TO 1603 A.D.

REIGN OF HENRY VII TUDOR TO DEATH OF ELIZABETH I

ERA SUMMARY – TUDORS AND REFORMATION

[Henry Tudor](#) was descended from John of Lancaster, but his claim to the throne was no greater than those of many other distant Plantagenet descendants. Soon after defeating Richard III at Bosworth fields, he married the daughter of the Yorkist king Edward IV in order to join the York and Lancaster houses into a single line. He then ruled with diplomacy and tried to avoid war and give England time to recover from the dislocations of the ruinous War of the Roses. Many doubted his claim, but few were willing to reopen the issue.

Henry VIII and the Break with Rome – Henry Tudor's son [Henry VIII](#) ascended to the throne in 1509 and ruled for 38 years. His reign coincided with the outbreak of the Protestant reformation in Europe, and during his reign that England became a Protestant country. England's conversion to Protestantism remains controversial because, although there were many sincere churchmen who favored reforms, the manner in which Henry VIII broke England's ties with the church of Rome was highly opportunistic. There were two issues which motivated Henry VIII to declare the Act of Supremacy. One was to remove any obstacles to his divorce from his wife of 20 years, Catherine of Aragon, so he could marry [Anne Boleyn](#). The second, just as important, was for an excuse to dissolve monasteries, an issue which his minister [Thomas Cromwell](#) had been pushing in spite of tremendous outcry from the poor who depended on the monasteries for their living. It was true that several of the monasteries were very wealthy and corrupt, but instead of reforming them, Henry VIII closed them, turned hundreds of their inmates out onto the streets, and sold their lands to his friends and nobles for cash. Once this great theft had transpired there was no turning back, for a great many of the nobles of England were in possession of valuable property that the Roman Church claimed as its own. Henry outlawed the Catholic church, and executed hundreds of people who opposed him. Most of those who were executed under Henry's reign, including both the Catholic [Saint Thomas More](#) and the Protestant Thomas Cromwell, did not suffer directly from persecution based on their beliefs, but were killed because they stood in the way of Henry's schemes.

Henry left three children by three different wives. His only son, [Edward VI](#), reigned for six years, but was under the sway of his uncles, the Dukes of Somerset and Northumberland. Both were Protestants who had benefited greatly from the dissolution of the monasteries and were primarily interested in consolidating their own power. Like Henry VIII, they persecuted Catholics based on political factors rather than ideology. When Edward VI fell ill, the Duke of Northumberland arranged for his young cousin [Lady Jane Grey](#) to assume the throne, since he believed she would be easier to control than [Mary Tudor](#), Edward's elder sister. However, most people believed that Mary had a better right to the throne and supported her claim, even though she was known to have Catholic sympathies.

Mary I – Mary Tudor was a sincere Catholic, and as soon as she came to the throne tried her best to mend the breach with the Church of Rome. By this time, however, Protestantism was fairly well established, especially among the aristocracy and the merchant class. Her greatest miscalculation was to take [Philip II](#), the most powerful Catholic monarch in Europe, for her husband. Even among devout Catholic Englishmen, Spain was feared and hated because they controlled all of the trade with the new world and were the world's predominant sea power. To make matters worse, her marriage was an unhappy one and did not produce an heir as Mary hoped. Mary is said to have put over three hundred people to death in her efforts to restore the faith, which is no more than her predecessors did. However, being a sincere Catholic instead of merely a cynical politician, she harassed some of the most able and articulate Protestant leaders for their heretical beliefs, which made her unpopular with those who genuinely sympathized with the Protestant cause.

Elizabeth I and the Great Armada – During Mary's reign, her sister [Elizabeth I](#) was accused of a conspiracy against her and imprisoned. She was still being closely watched when news came that her sister had passed away and she was the Queen of England. She was only 24 at the time she became queen and her reign lasted over 45 years. Elizabeth was exceptionally politic in her manner of ruling, and although Protestant she sought to ease the religious strife of the times, and did not aggressively persecute Catholics. Whenever possible she tried to avoid direct conflict. She never married, but kept dozens of suitors on the line, presumably to gain favors. She signed a death warrant for her arch-rival, [Mary, Queen of Scots](#), but protested loudly when she was executed. It was often difficult to discern her true motives, but she lived in troublesome times, and her two-faced demeanor may well have been discreet diplomacy. For example, England's relationship with Spain was very



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poor for many years, but she managed to put off direct confrontation for nearly three decades by obfuscations and ambiguous promises. When the Spanish finally did invade, the entire country united against them. The defeat of the *Spanish Armada* was the decisive battle of the [Anglo Spanish Wars](#) and profoundly affected the perceived strength of England and Spain, both in Europe and in the New World.

The reign of Elizabeth is best known for her outstanding sea-men. [Sir Francis Drake](#), [Sir Martin Frobisher](#), Sir John Hawkins, and [Richard Grenville](#) were some of the men who made great names for themselves before, after, and during the Spanish Armada. It is also known for some of the literary greats of the time, including [Edmund Spenser](#), [Sir Philip Sidney](#), Ben Jonson and [William Shakespeare](#).

CHARACTERS – TUDORS AND REFORMATION

TUDOR MONARCHS

Henry VII	1457–1509	Descendent of John of Gaunt (a Lancaster) who fought Richard the Usurper for the throne.
Henry VIII	1491–1547	King of England famous for marrying and dispensing with six wives.
Anne Boleyn	1502–1536	Second wife of Henry VIII. Executed when she fell from grace.
Lady Jane Grey	1537–1554	Young noblewoman executed for involvement in conspiracies engineered by ambitious relatives.
Edward VI	1537–1553	Raised as a protestant, Edward's brief reign was controlled largely by his uncles, the Dukes of Somerset and Northumberland.
Mary I	1516–1558	Eldest daughter of Henry VIII. Tried to restore Catholicism to England.
Elizabeth I	1533–1603	Led England through tumultuous age of reformation and discovery. Reigned 45 years.
James V	1512–1542	Father of Mary Stuart. He was defeated in battle and died shortly after Mary was born.
Mary Stuart	1542–1587	Queen of Scotland. Deposed and exiled. Held captive and executed by Queen Elizabeth.

STATESMEN/MILITARY

Thomas Wolsey	1471–1530	Rose from humble beginnings to become Chancellor of England. Stalled on Henry VIII's divorce.
Thomas Cromwell	1489–1540	Minister under Henry VIII. who encouraged his divorce and helped dissolve the monasteries.
Saint Thomas More	1478–1543	Lord Chancellor under Henry VIII. Fired and later executed when he opposed Henry's divorce.
Margaret Roper	1501–1544	Daughter of Thomas More. Supported him throughout his ordeal.
Sir Philip Sidney	1554–1586	Favorite of Queen Elizabeth's court. Was a poet, soldier, courtier, and adventurer.
Robert Dudley	1532–1588	Favorite courtier of Queen Elizabeth. Granted many favors, but not much power.
William Cecil	1520–1598	Minister of Queen Elizabeth throughout her entire reign.
Earl of Essex	1566–1601	Favorite of Queen Elizabeth. Involved in a conspiracy and died in prison.

EXPLORATION

Sir Humphrey Gilbert	1537–1583	Sea-faring adventurer. Founded the first English colony in Canada.
Sir Martin Frobisher	1535–1594	Explored much of Canada in search of the Northwest Passage. Fought in the Armada.
Sir Francis Drake	1540–1596	Greatest sea adventurer. Sailed around the world, harassed Spanish ships. Fought in Armada.
John Davis	1550–1605	British explorer who sought the Northwest Passage through Canada.
Sir Walter Raleigh	1552–1618	Courtier of Queen Elizabeth. Explorer, mastermind of the Jamestown colony in Virginia.

ARTS/SCIENCE/RELIGION

William Shakespeare	1564–1611	Greatest dramatist in the history of the English language.
Edmund Spenser	1552–1599	Elizabethan era poet. Wrote <i>The Fairy Queen</i> .
John Knox	1533–1603	Religious leader in Scotland who embraced Calvinism, founder of Presbyterian Church.
Thomas Cranmer	1489–1556	Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII. Broke with Rome. Founded Anglican Church.

TIMELINE – TUDORS AND REFORMATION

- 1486** [Henry Tudor](#) defeats Richard III at *Bosworth Field* and marries Elizabeth of York.
- 1492** [Christopher Columbus](#) discovers America.
- 1497** [John Cabot](#) sails for England, explores North America.
- 1517** [Martin Luther](#) incites wide-spread rebellion against the Church of Rome.
- 1534** Act of Supremacy—[Henry VIII](#) breaks ties with the Church of Rome.
- 1535** Execution of [Saint Thomas More](#) for failing to acknowledge Henry VIII's divorce.
- 1536** Execution of [Anne Boleyn](#), the second wife of Henry VIII.
- 1540** Dissolution of the monasteries enriches the Protestant gentry.
- 1549** [Prayer Book Rebellion](#) results in a massacre of rebels opposed to the new liturgy.
- 1553** [Lady Jane Grey](#) [attempts to Usurp the Throne](#) at the death of [Edward VI](#).
- 1553-58** Reign of [Mary I](#). Failed attempt to return England to the Catholic faith.
- 1558-1603** Reign of [Elizabeth I](#).
- 1569** [Northern Rising](#), a Catholic attempt to depose Elizabeth, is put down harshly.
- 1577-80** [Sir Francis Drake](#) circumnavigates the globe.
- 1584** Founding of the 'Lost Colony' at Roanoke. First British colony in America.
- 1587** Execution of [Mary Stuart](#), Elizabeth's rival for the throne.
- 1588** English sailors defeat the [Spanish Armada](#) dealing a blow to Spanish naval supremacy.
- 1591** [Edmund Spenser](#) publishes the *Faerie Queen*.
- 1594-1603** [Tyrone Rebellion](#) in Ireland delivers Ulster to English rule.

RECOMMENDED READING – TUDORS AND REFORMATION

CORE READING ASSIGNMENTS

- Guerber - [The Story of the English](#) [Two Pretenders](#) to [Death of Elizabeth](#) (17)
Marshall - [Our Island Story](#) [The Make-Believe Prince](#) to [The Queen's Favourite](#) (14)
Synge - [The Tudors and the Stuarts](#) [Four Hundred Years Ago](#) to [England's Greatness](#) (11)

SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Harding - [The Story of England](#) [The Separation from Rome](#) to [England under Elizabeth](#) (4)
Church - [Stories From English History, Part Second](#) [True or False?](#) to [Sir Walter Raleigh](#) (11)
Morris - [Historical Tales: English](#) [The White Rose of England](#) to [The Story of Arabella Stuart](#) (3)
Wilmot-Buxton - [A Book of English Martyrs](#) *(entire book)*
Tappan - [In the Days of Queen Elizabeth](#) *entire book*
Nesbit - [Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare](#) *entire book*
Antony - [The Angelical Cardinal—Reginald Pole](#) *entire book*
Abbott - [Queen Elizabeth](#) *entire book*
Abbott - [Mary Queen of Scots](#) *entire book*
Marshall - [English Literature for Boys and Girls](#) [How a Poet Comforted a Girl](#) to [Raleigh—"History"](#) (17)

EASY READING SELECTIONS

- Cambridge Press - [Cambridge Historical Reader◆Primary](#) [The Battle of Flodden](#) to [The Little 'Revenge'](#) (4)
Haaren - [Famous Men of Modern Times](#) [Cardinal Wolsey](#) to [Sir Walter Raleigh](#) (3)
Skae - [Stories from English History](#) [Singeing the King's Beard](#) (1)
Duncan - [The Story of Sir Walter Raleigh](#) *entire book*
Elton - [The Story of Sir Francis Drake](#) *entire book*
Lang - [The Faerie Queen](#) *entire book*