

ELIZABETH

The Virgin Queen and
the Men who Loved Her



*A Series of Biographical Sketches
from the Elizabethan Court*

ROBERT STEPHEN PARRY

To Ruby

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Hark!
The echoing air a triumph sings,
And all around,
Pleased cupids clap their wings.

from 'The Fairy Queen' by Henry Purcell

Preface

It was as a young man some good few years ago, whilst attending a residential retreat in what was then the remote and peaceful countryside of Northamptonshire, that I experienced, along with a number of other history students of various ages and backgrounds, a set of most unusual lectures. Fortunately, being at the time proficient in Pitman shorthand, I was able to take down much of what was said almost verbatim, and it is from these notes, embellished a little by my own recollections that I have been able to reassemble the narrative that I present to you here.

The location was a fine old Elizabethan building, a combination of half-timbered walls and brickwork, with a gatehouse of octagonal turrets at the top of a long drive - all set in parkland of some 50 acres. We were told that long ago there had been an even more ancient structure in the grounds, and the ruins of what appeared to be an abbey or monastery, its arches and stones fallen and scattered, could be detected whenever one chose to take the air and wander of an evening. I have to say, however, that the house itself with its warren of rooms and narrow passages was not in the greatest state of repair either. And the lectures, presented by a Dr Dejon from the university of Louvain, were obviously intended to contribute to a much-needed fund for restoration.

I arrived on what was a Friday afternoon in a somewhat cynical state of mind because although I had been interested in English history for many years the name of the gentleman I had come to listen to was unknown to me. And yet, as I hope you will agree, the lectures were presented with an air of such charm and authority that none of us present that weekend would surely have ever forgotten the experience.

On the face of it, the subject matter was nothing out of the ordinary. Following an introduction on the first evening, most of the subsequent lecture over the course of the weekend focused attention on one of Elizabeth I's favoured courtiers,

providing a vivid, albeit brief biographical summary - to be followed on each occasion by the awarding of what I can only describe as a kind of Michelin Guide star rating for the gentlemen themselves. And as if that were not already bizarre enough, this in turn would be followed by a short story, a scene from the Elizabethan court - or as Dr Dejon himself described it, a 'vignette.' These stories were so cogent that one might almost have concluded, had one not known better, that the man must surely have been there at the time and witnessed what he described. It was not only amusing, but on more than one occasion, as I recall, a little unsettling as well.

Thus the weekend passed in a haze of half-glimpsed visions of historical and dramatic reconstruction, a strange hybrid between fact and fiction. And with these, and the addition of stories related to us around the evening fireside by the owners of the property, tales of ghostly hauntings and apparitions peculiar to the building such as the figure of a Tudor gentleman who would descend the stairs into the kitchens from time to time, a head tucked under his arm, or of the 'grey lady' who could be seen hastening as if in fear through the gardens after midnight, we would all retire to our beds and barely sleep a wink. The next day the process would be repeated, until the evening of Sunday when we were set free to return to the normal world.

It is only now, looking back at it from a distance in time of some decades that I appreciate how very special an event it was. And thus I would like to invite you to come with me now and experience for yourself what I experienced, back in time to that old manor house with its low timbered ceilings and panelled walls - and which, alas, we can now only visit in our imaginations because the building has sadly long since been demolished and the grounds swallowed up by urban sprawl - while the family who once owned it has, I understand, emigrated overseas. I have chosen, therefore, not to embarrass them any further by naming them in these pages, nor the home they would surely have cherished so dearly. I for one look back on that weekend with much fondness and not a little

fascination. Although no major feats of scholarship were accomplished at the time, the words delivered by Dr Dejon and set down here for your entertainment really were quite magical. And if something of that magic can be conveyed to you in these pages ... well, I will consider myself to have been well rewarded for my pains.

First Evening

Arrival and Welcome

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to see you have all arrived safely. I hope your accommodation is to your satisfaction and that you are as thrilled as I am to be here in this enchanting and remote outpost in the English countryside. It promises to be an exciting weekend. And really, how could it be otherwise - because we are here to explore a unique period of English history, and in particular the extraordinary and ingenious individual that presided over its achievements, Queen Elizabeth I of England.

Rarely has the intrigue and drama of a woman's life been so vividly illustrated as in her story - and nowhere do we perceive this more clearly than in the lives of the men she knew, including:

- Elizabeth's heart-breaking relationship with her father, Henry VIII, who beheaded her own mother when Elizabeth was not yet three years old.
- Her childhood sweetheart Robert Dudley, a man his enemies believed murdered his wife in order to make himself available.
- Her life-long friendships with William Cecil, her faithful counsellor whom she was said to have nursed during his final days.
- John Dee, the amazing magician and visionary who worked tirelessly behind the scenes on her behalf.
- Right up to the infatuation in her later years with Robert Devereux, the over-confident and foolhardy Earl of Essex who betrayed her trust and paid the ultimate price.

The old world of Tudor and Elizabethan England

continues to exert a magnetism upon our modern age which is as difficult to explain, as it is impossible to deny. It is almost as if we were looking back at our childhood when we study those times, recollecting with wonder our own golden age of innocence and frivolity. So remote from our times, it is a world populated by larger than life players upon a stage of glorious extremes. In the lives and circumstances of the Elizabethans, we see flashes of romance and adventure unparalleled at almost any other time. Bedazzled by their deeds and their courage and swagger, we find in the words of their poets echoes of our most cherished fantasies; in the pictures left by their artists we discover fashions and deportment seen only in our dreams; and in the spectacle of their blood sports and the punishment of their traitors glimpses from our worst nightmares.

Although the stories and exploits of the men of the Elizabethan court, and their attempts to woo their Virgin Queen have been told many times, we can always learn from them by considering their meanings for us in a modern context. The pleasures and pains of romance have altered very little over time; and in the loves and losses of Elizabeth Tudor we hear an echo of much of what we today would understand about the politics of courtship - for the story of this remarkable woman who reigned as Queen from 1558 to her death in 1603, is an inspiration to anyone who has ever loved and lost, or to anyone, male or female, who has ever attempted to reconcile the responsibilities of public office with the need for genuine intimacy. It is also a salutary lesson for us men folk and to all would-be suitors of powerful women, because as far as we know, no one ever succeeded entirely in the quest to win Elizabeth's favour. She never surrendered to any man, neither on the field of conflict or in the bedchamber. And it was always abundantly clear who was in charge at court.

'There shall be but one mistress here, and no master!' she is reputed to have declared angrily to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester on one occasion - perhaps just one of many other rebukes that history has sadly not recorded for us. Elizabeth

was every inch the Queen, and every inch the equal of any King on earth, and she knew it. These and countless other qualities are what commend the lady to us today. And if it's true that a monarch represents the archetype of a man or woman, then by the same token, their joys and sorrows, triumphs and defeats must represent the emotions that we all of us experience in our own lives, as well. By our study of them we come to understand ourselves more fully. Such is the eternal value of history.

Before we begin, just a quick note on the structure of these lectures in which we will take the facts as we know them concerning Elizabeth's relationships with her men but also place these alongside a series of short 'vignettes,' fictional sketches designed to take us just a little further to those places where academic historians do not normally venture. These you will find are invariably embellished with more than a little wayward idealism - because I admit to being heavily biased in my admiration of the Elizabethan age and its lasting legacy.

We will start tomorrow morning with a look at the life of Elizabeth in an historical context, after which we will commence straight away upon the first of our biographical sketches of the men themselves, examining the two that I believe were the most significant for Elizabeth as a princess, namely her father, King Henry VIII and Thomas Seymour - men who, each in their own way, proved damaging and whose example might well have shaped Elizabeth's idea of manhood and presented it in a far from favourable light. Following this we turn our attention to an examination of just what might have been required to become a successful courtier in Elizabethan times, the qualities that got you noticed. And thereafter, we will move on to a more substantial series of presentations devoted to each of the men that figured strongly in Elizabeth's later life as Queen, men to whom I believe she would have felt some form of emotional attachment and also men who would have admired and, in some cases, almost certainly loved her as well - including a totally frivolous 5-star Tudor Rose rating in judgement of their various

accomplishments, which I hope might make you smile.

The gentlemen themselves are presented roughly in chronological order, though inevitably some of them will overlap with others. Life is never simple. And for Elizabeth, as you shall see, it was far from so.

Day One

1 ~ Elizabeth - a Brief History

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I do hope the screeching of the foxes did not keep you awake last night, nor the noises in the cellar which I am assured have a perfectly rational explanation.

I would like to commence our first day with a short history of the main events in Elizabeth's life, something that will enable us to put all that follows into context. There are already several excellent biographies available on Elizabeth Tudor, both as princess and as queen, and the story itself might already be familiar to you. What follows, therefore, will be a very succinct summary, just sufficient to provide a little background for those who are new to the subject - though by cramming even the headlines of this extraordinary woman's story into such a small space, one does rather feel it is bursting at the seams. Never mind - here are the main events in the life of Elizabeth, the phenomenon who gave her name to England's Golden Age.

1533, Elizabeth was born at Greenwich Palace on 7th September - the first and only child of Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn. At the time, relations between her mother and father were good, but with the continued absence of a male heir to Henry's throne, Anne gradually began to fall out of favour, and in 1536 she was arrested and shortly after executed on various trumped-up charges of adultery and treason. In truth it is widely believed that Henry simply wished to remarry. Elizabeth at the time was not yet three years old, so would have remembered little about her mother. Anne Boleyn's influence on her daughter and on the course of English history, however, was profound.

1543. Elizabeth might have begun to experience something approaching a normal family life for perhaps the first time when her father's sixth and final wife, Catherine Parr endeavoured to gather the royal children together as often as possible under one roof with their father at court.

1547 Henry VIII died and his son Edward succeeded to the throne at the tender age of just nine years. Elizabeth herself was invited to live with the Queen Dowager Catherine Parr at Chelsea, but scandal erupted when it became known that Catherine's husband, Thomas Seymour, was engaging in inappropriate behaviour with Elizabeth. There were rumours of a pregnancy, strenuously denied by Elizabeth herself.

1549. Thomas Seymour was executed for treason - on a separate matter to his behaviour with the Princess - but Elizabeth had to be questioned and members of her household were arrested.

1553. Elizabeth's half-brother the young King Edward VI died at 15 years of age. Lady Jane Grey was proclaimed Queen on tenuous grounds, but Mary Tudor, Elizabeth's half-sister, contested the claim and successfully overcame those responsible. Under the Catholic Queen Mary, Elizabeth's religious preferences as a Protestant were often challenged.

1554. In the aftermath of Wyatt's rebellion (an attempt to unseat Queen Mary and thwart her plans to marry a foreign husband), Elizabeth, who was by this time next in line for the throne, was imprisoned by the Queen in the Tower of London. When released it was only to be taken to house arrest at Woodstock in Oxfordshire for a further lengthy period until eventually being exonerated - and upon which she was allowed to return to her own home at Hatfield.

1558. Upon the death of Queen Mary, Elizabeth succeeded to the throne. Her coronation, the time and date for which was

determined by her astrologer John Dee, took place in January the following year. Shortly after this, the Privy Council and much of the nation turned their attention to the matter of finding a suitable husband for their new queen. Elizabeth, however, was reported to be romantically involved with Robert Dudley. Even more disturbing for those who would have preferred Elizabeth to have followed the conventional route, when Parliament entered its plea for her to marry, Elizabeth's reply was as follows: 'I have already joined myself in marriage to an husband, namely the Kingdom of England ... and to me it shall be a full satisfaction, both for the memorial of my name, and for my Glory also, if when I shall let my last breath, it be ingraven upon my marble tomb "Here lieth Elizabeth, which reigned a virgin and died a virgin."'"

1560. Robert Dudley's wife, Amy, died suddenly at her home. Foul play was suspected, especially by enemies of Dudley himself. The tragedy put a stop to any plans Elizabeth and he might have had for their future. But marriage was a topic that would not be laid to rest so easily. During subsequent years and decades, Elizabeth managed to play one suitor against another in ways that were politically advantageous to England, but never surrendered entirely to any proposal. The cult of the Virgin Queen was developed.

1562. The Privy Council was thrown into panic when Elizabeth contracted smallpox. Fearing death she called for Robert Dudley to assume the responsibilities of governance.

1568. This marks the time of one of the most significant events of the Elizabethan era which would have far-reaching repercussions. Elizabeth's cousin Mary who was the Catholic Queen in Scotland had been deposed by various hostile factions and, in danger of her life, fled south of the border to England. But Mary's hopes of receiving support from Elizabeth were to be dashed. Being Catholic and also by this time having a child and heir of her own, Mary was seen by the

Privy Council as a threat. And her escape from captivity and persecution in Scotland only led to further captivity here in England - where she was kept under confinement in various castles and houses in the north until her tragic execution 18 years later.

1569. Elizabeth faced insurrection, 'The Rising of the North' when prominent Catholic families took up arms against her. It came to nothing, and the leaders were executed for treason. Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk was also imprisoned by Elizabeth in this year for plotting to marry Mary Queen of Scots who, as we have seen, had a legitimate claim to the English throne herself.

1570. Due to her increasing difficulties with English recusants, and what was perceived as her harsh treatment of her cousin Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth was excommunicated by the Pope. This in effect gave immunity in the eyes of the Church to any would-be rebel or assassin to remove Elizabeth from power. The majority of Catholics in England were loyal subjects, but thereafter they were faced with a dilemma: a choice between country and faith; between their queen and the Church of Rome.

The unfortunate and often deep-seated divisions between those of Protestant and Catholic persuasions were not begun at this time, but for the remainder of Elizabeth's reign, and despite her best efforts, they became an increasingly important and divisive issue - and one, moreover, which would rumble on in one way or another for centuries to come. Elizabeth would, I am sure, have been dismayed by these developments - she who once declared that she had no wish to 'open windows into men's souls' and, a little later in her life 'There is but one Lord, Jesus Christ. One faith. All else is a dispute over trifles.'

1571 France, although largely a Catholic country, was being seen as a potentially valuable ally against the imperial

ambitions of Spain. To this end, marriage negotiations took place between Elizabeth and Henry, Duke of Anjou. Politically expedient. But it came to nothing.

1572 The dreadful St Bartholomew's Day massacre of Protestants in Paris caused widespread fear and consternation in England and a deeper mistrust of Catholic sympathisers at home.

1579. The visit to England and courtship of Elizabeth by Francois, Duke of Anjou began. Although Elizabeth seems to have been enamoured, and regarded his presence as something more than just the usual political power game, ultimately the Privy Council resolved that a marriage between them should not take place. This was due to religious differences; because Francois's mother Catherine de Medici had been implicated in the St. Bartholomew's Day slaughter; and also because of widespread popular opposition at home.

The 1570's were expansive and exciting years in which the Elizabethans began to think seriously in terms of establishing an overseas empire. Increased trade and commerce were features of an outward looking and self-confident nation, and there were also the spectacular voyages of Francis Drake - who circumnavigated the globe and was knighted by Elizabeth in 1581.

1581-82. A rekindling of the courtship with the Duke of Anjou. He visited again and was made much of. But ultimately the concerns of her own people and the welfare of the country conspired to outweigh Elizabeth's personal feelings. This courtship was widely regarded as Elizabeth's final opportunity (and at 48 years of age it had always been an outside chance, anyway) of a matrimony that might produce heirs.

1585. Escalating tensions in the Netherlands urged Elizabeth's government to dispatch troops to aid Protestant Dutch rebels

who were desperately fighting the occupation of their country by the armies of King Philip of Spain. Robert Dudley led the campaigns along with other prominent English nobles such as Sir Philip Sydney.

1587. In the aftermath of various Catholic-inspired plots against the throne, Elizabeth was compelled by circumstances to take the unpalatable step of agreeing to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. Opinions differ as to whether this was necessary or even just; and upon learning of the execution Elizabeth promptly claimed she had not wanted it to proceed at all.

1588. King Philip II of Spain sent an armada of ships as part of a bid to invade England - the intention being to topple Elizabeth and restore the Catholic Church. The Spanish fleet was defeated due to a combination of clever English seamanship and inclement weather, and Elizabeth's popularity would arguably never be as great again as in the days and weeks following this victory. Her famous Tilbury speech, rousing the troops to defence of the realm has become part of English folk legend. Sadly, also in this year, Elizabeth's closest companion Robert Dudley died unexpectedly.

1599. Elizabeth's favourite, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, attempted an uprising against her in London. Elizabeth stripped him of all titles. His execution followed in 1601.

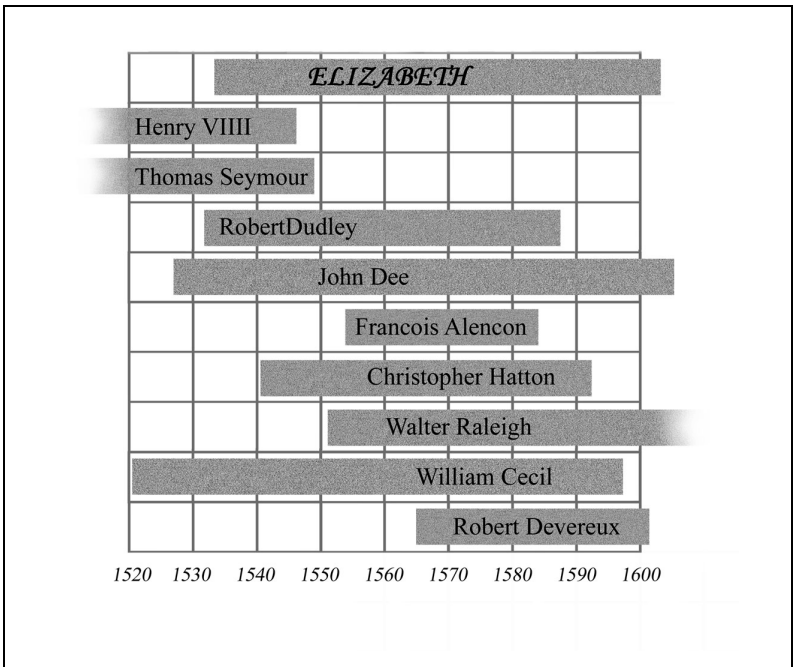
1603. On 24th March and in her 70th year, Queen Elizabeth died at Richmond Palace. She was succeeded by her cousin James VI of Scotland (the son of the executed Mary Queen of Scots).

And so ended the life of the woman who is still regarded as one of England's best-loved and favourite monarchs. She ruled the nation with constancy, dedication and energy for nigh on 45 years, and the peace and stability she brought proved a

fertile ground for the true flowering of the English Renaissance, a time of exploration, adventure and creative genius. There is much to celebrate in the life and times of England's Virgin Queen, and it is little wonder that so many wanted to gain her love, sacrificed so much in the pursuit of it and, as we shall see, in certain cases perished in the attempt.

2 ~ Graphic - the Relationships Over Time

The years shared between Elizabeth and her men are indicated here as a timeline, helping to put all the various relationships into perspective.



If you would like a larger-scale version of this table for downloading or printing [CLICK HERE](#)

It might also be helpful to consider the dates in Elizabeth's life when each of the gentlemen would have first come to her attention - though in many instances within the 'small world' of Elizabethan nobility these dates could almost certainly be adjusted unofficially and brought forward in time.

- According to what is known, Seymour came into her life round about the year 1547 when Elizabeth was 14.
- Robert Dudley would have been present since childhood - say around the 1540's.
- William Cecil is recorded as being surveyor of her estates as early as 1550 when Elizabeth was 17 years of age.
- John Dee was at court in 1552 as tutor when Elizabeth was 19.
- Christopher Hatton would have appeared about 1564, with Elizabeth then aged 31.
- Alençon first came to England in 1579 when she was 46. His final visit was in 1582.
- Walter Raleigh came along in 1581 when she was 48.
- Robert Devereux around 1586 when Elizabeth was 53.

As you can see, many of her most interesting and controversial liaisons came when Elizabeth was already a woman of some maturity. As for the times when these relationships concluded or faded away - the fact is they usually didn't. With the exception of Alençon, Elizabeth's friendships tended to go the distance. They were steadfast and ended only with the death of one or the other.

In the following pages you will meet with men who had many of the qualities that Elizabeth admired, and even one or two who probably had them all. Unfortunately, most of them also had flaws to their characters, and these ultimately prevented them from attaining the ultimate prize: to win the hand of their Queen. Elizabeth was far from an easy catch, as you will see. Discerning, perceptive and very circumspect when it came to choosing her associates, she was even more so

when choosing her amours. For Elizabeth, only the best could ever do, and even the best would ultimately fail.

End of Sample