

Elizabethan England

Elizabeth I reigned over England for 45 years. During that time, she inspired a dynamic national spirit in her subjects. She restored the people's faith in the monarchy, and generated a climate of self-confidence that brought about an unprecedented period of prosperity. English seafarers during the Elizabethan era made the country a great maritime trading power. The queen had a great interest in the arts and was generous with her support, making the Elizabethan age one of the greatest cultural explosions in English history. Because of her interest in education, 142 new schools were founded during her reign, and the number of students at Oxford and Cambridge increased by 50%. By the end of the Elizabethan era, most of the gentry and merchant class were literate, and nearly half the small landholders. Without this spread of literacy, one of the greatest periods in English literature, which produced poets like Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, and playwrights like Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, would never have occurred.

A royal procession
Elizabeth is attended by her
courtiers and ladies.



Elizabeth I



An energetic dance at the court of Elizabeth I



Elizabeth I played the lute
and the virginals.

The Reformation

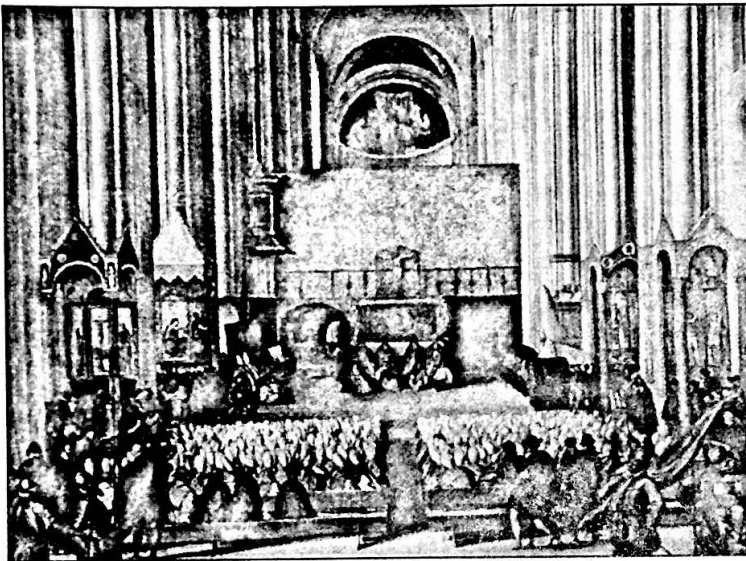


Lucas Cranach, *Martin Luther*

Cranach's portrait seems to show Luther's spiritual struggles in his face.

One of the most momentous events of the 1500s was the revolution that took place in the Roman Catholic Church. This revolution, which became known as the Reformation, ended the supremacy of the Pope in Rome and resulted in the birth of Protestantism, a new form of Christianity. The Church had been deeply involved in the politics of Western Europe, and many distrusted its participation in political intrigues and power struggles. Many clergy were no longer remaining true to their vows of chastity and poverty. What upset people most, though, was the scandal over the sale of indulgences. Instead of fasting, going on a pilgrimage or being flogged, sinners could be forgiven for their sins by purchasing indulgences. Often it appeared that someone could buy the spiritual benefit of forgiveness without ever in fact repenting.

Martin Luther, a German monk and professor of theology, touched off the fire that became the Reformation when he objected to the sale of indulgences to pay for the reconstruction of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. On October 31, 1517, he posted his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church, Wittenberg. He believed that people did not need to earn God's love by performing good works, going on pilgrimages and buying indulgences. He said that the only authority was the Bible, not the Pope. Luther merely intended to reform the existing Church, but when the pope excommunicated him, Luther formed a parallel Church. Because there were so many more educated people outside the Church who could understand his arguments, his ideas spread all over northern Europe.



In response to the Reformation, the Catholic Church established the Council of Trent, which met over an 18-year period to discuss reforms, revitalize the Church and fight Protestantism.

Other branches of Protestantism were begun. The teachings of French lawyer John Calvin were widely accepted in Switzerland and Scotland. In England, the Reformation was more political than religious. Henry VIII wanted to divorce his first wife and remarry in order to get a male heir. When the Pope refused him, Henry renounced the Pope's authority and established the Church of England, with himself as the head. His reforms included the creation of a liturgy in English and dissolving the monasteries. To this day, the head of the Church of England is the reigning monarch.

Voyages of discovery

In the late fifteenth and sixteenth century, Europeans began to explore uncharted areas of the globe in search of the route to China and the riches of the East. The explorers themselves were undoubtedly inspired by a spirit of adventure and scientific curiosity, but those who funded their explorations had rather different motivations. The voyages were either underwritten by kings and queens who wanted to expand their country's influence and fill their coffers in the process, or by merchant groups who wanted to find new sources of trade goods and further their business interests. No matter what the motivation, however, these explorations brought many changes to the nations that spawned them.

The most famous of all the explorers was Christopher Columbus, who sailed west from Spain into unknown territory, discovering San Salvador, Cuba and Hispaniola in what is now called the West Indies. But there were others as well. Portugal was one of the major exploring nations. In 1497, Vasco da Gama sailed down the west coast of Africa, around the southern tip and up to India, where he traded for spices and precious gems. Within 20 years, the Portuguese had sailed all the way to China.

Other explorers followed Columbus to the New World. Spain expanded its influence in the Americas with Juan Ponce de León's explorations in Florida and the Yucatan, Hernán Cortés' destruction of the Aztec empire in Mexico, and Francisco Pizarro's victory over the Incas of Peru. An expedition led by Fernand de Magellan, the Portuguese-born Spanish explorer and navigator, was the first to sail completely around the world. By the middle of the sixteenth century, Spain was immensely rich and controlled the West Indies, Cuba, Florida, Mexico, Central America, much of South America, and the Philippines.

Portugal and Spain were the leaders, but other countries too sent adventurers on voyages of discovery. John Cabot sailed to Labrador, Newfoundland and New England for the English in 1497. In 1534 and 1535, French explorer Jacques Cartier made two trips to North America for Francis I. He sailed around Newfoundland and into the Gulf of the St. Lawrence on the first trip, and explored the St. Lawrence River as far as present-day Montreal on the second, thus laying the basis for the French Empire in North America. English explorers included Sir Francis Drake, who circumnavigated the globe between 1578 and 1580, and Sir Walter Raleigh, who tried in 1585 to establish a colony on Roanoke Island in what is now North Carolina. The English East India company was set up in 1600 to establish a spice and silk trade with the Orient.



Fernand de Magellan
Magellan died before completing his voyage around the world, but one of his ships continued westward until it reached Spain, thus proving that the world is round.

No contemporary portraits were ever made of Columbus, so all the pictures we have of him are done from the imagination.



A picture of Columbus' ships, the *Niña*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria*



Jacques Cartier was in search of the Northwest passage to the Pacific when he explored the St. Lawrence River.



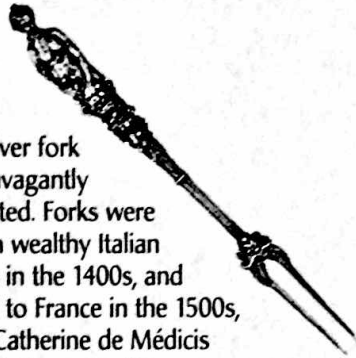
This map made in 1553 shows how well charted the Atlantic coasts of Africa and Central and South America were.

How the upper classes lived



The Pitti Palace in Florence

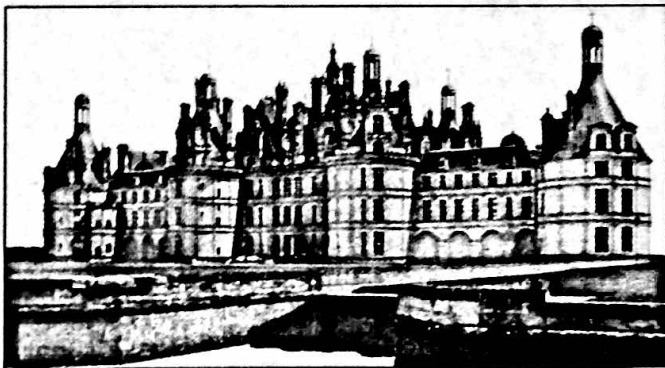
It was built for the Pitti family, but later purchased by the Medici. They were responsible for the extensive landscaping, and the Boboli gardens behind the palace.



This silver fork is extravagantly decorated. Forks were used in wealthy Italian homes in the 1400s, and spread to France in the 1500s, when Catherine de Médicis married Henry II of France.

With the increase in commerce, trade and production of goods that came during the Renaissance, there were a growing number of wealthy people who could enjoy the kind of lifestyle that had previously been only within reach of the nobility. This was particularly true in Italy. In addition to the powerful families running the various city states, there were also rich merchants and traders. These people were primarily urban and a palace in the city suited their needs perfectly. Often occupying a whole block, these palaces might be built in a square around a central courtyard. The lower level could house offices, shops and warehouses in addition to the stables, and the windows were often small and barred against attackers. The living space was on the second and third floors, which had larger windows with shutters that could be closed against the weather and civil disturbances. The palace concept spread from Italy throughout Europe. In France, the idea was combined with the mediaeval castle to produce the country *château*.

Wealthy Italians also needed an escape from the city in the heat of the summer, so the idea of a villa in the country became popular. The villa might be in the country on an estate that could provide produce for the house in town, growing wheat for bread, olives for oil, and grapes for wine. Or it might just be a suburban villa, a quiet place for a weekend retreat.

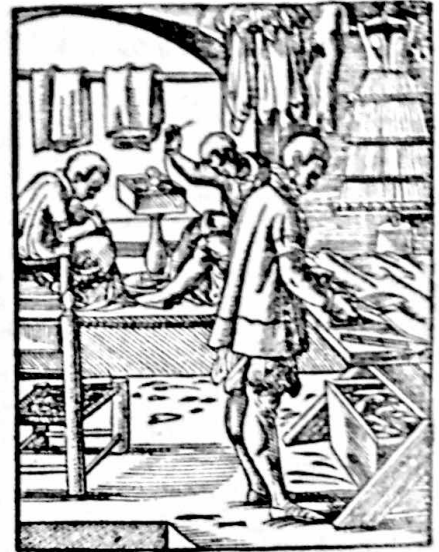


The *château* of Chambord combines the idea of a castle with the concept of the Italian palace.

Renaissance homes were rather sparsely furnished by our standards, primarily with chests, tables and benches. Only the wealthy could afford glass windows, which were made from small panes held together with lead. In the fifteenth century, Venetian glass makers developed a clear glass, which they then silvered to make mirrors. For the first time ever, people could see what they really looked like. Mirrors also helped to improve lighting, by reflecting the light produced by candles and oil lamps. Another innovation was the table fork, which was introduced from the East. In the Middle Ages, people ate with a knife and their fingers; now beautifully decorated forks were being used in upper-class homes.

How the poorer people lived

Peasants and the urban poor were not much better off in the Renaissance than they were in the Middle Ages. In fact, the poor city dwellers might not be as well off as the country people, because they were often in dwellings that were crowded and unsanitary, without even clean country air to breathe. However, in some respects their situation was better: they were not tied to one piece of land and one landowner, they had opportunities other than farming and it was possible to make a little money. A young boy could be apprenticed to a craftsman and be trained as a leather worker, glassmaker or weaver, for example, working his way up to becoming a salaried journeyman, and perhaps even a master, able to take on apprentices himself.



This picture of a tailor's shop shows three workmen. The one standing at the table is undoubtedly the most experienced one of the three, because no one without a lot of training would have been allowed to do anything as risky as cutting the cloth.



These peasants are taking a lunch break while one of their number continues to cut grain in the background.

This painting shows an idealized version of the peasant's life. These workers are happily engaged in picking grapes and crushing them to begin the process of making wine. Every one, rich and poor, drank great quantities of wine—it was safer to drink than the water.

Renaissance dress

Clothing styles typical of the Renaissance began in the late fifteenth century in Italy, of course, and then spread to the rest of Europe. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the Germans and the Flemish were the trend setters, and after 1550, Spain had the primary influence.

The Italian style for men in the early Renaissance involved a white silk or linen shirt, with frills at the neck and wrists. Over this, they wore a short tunic and tight fitting hose. Older men wore a long gown over top, with a decorative lining that showed when the edges were turned back. Women's dresses had a low, square-cut neckline that emphasized the bust, which might be made more modest with a covering of transparent fabric. Sleeves were large, and the skirts fell in folds to the ground.

By the 1520s, the German fashion for slashings had become all the rage. The top layer of a garment was slashed to allow the colour of the fabric beneath to show through. Men wore a longer tunic, called a doublet, which opened in the front to display a prominent codpiece. Women's figures were constrained by boned bodices. They also wore farthingales, underskirts with hoops of whalebone that held the dress out from the body. Fashionable headdresses were hoods attached to jewelled metal frames, worn over caps that almost completely concealed the hair.



A portrait of Lucrecia Panciatichi, 1550-60, by Bronzino



This dress shows the effect of a boned bodice. The skirt and the sleeves are both slashed.



Jane Seymour, the third wife of Henry VIII. Notice her headdress.

This grouping of men in different outfits shows the range of possibilities for men in the early Renaissance.



Renaissance dress

In the last half of the sixteenth century, fashions for both men and women of wealth became more extreme and very luxurious. Fabrics were encrusted with jewels and embroidery, with lots of patterns. Spain was extremely rich as a result of the explorations in the New World, and styles from Spain were in vogue all over Europe. Men's doublets were now fitted to the waist and buttoned down the front. They wore what were called trunk hose, which were mid-thigh-length breeches gathered into waist and thigh bands. Capes of various lengths were worn.

Women's fashions got even more uncomfortable in the last half of the century. The boned bodice evolved into a tight corset and the farthingale became wider. The French introduced the wheel farthingale, which was drum-shaped. Dresses also called for stomachers, stiff, padded V-shaped panels which reached down well below the waist. Ruffs became fashionable for both sexes. They were made from a band of fabric that tied around the neck. Another strip of material was sewn to the band in ruffles. When starch was introduced after 1565, the ruffs became larger, because the starch helped them to stay stiff.

The poorer people wore clothes that were simpler and made of ordinary, easily available materials, like rough wools. The basic shapes were similar to the clothing of the wealthy classes, but there was nothing luxurious about them.



Both mother and child are wearing ruffs here.



The Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol is wearing slashed trunk hose with an elaborate padded cod-piece and a short doublet.

Sir Walter Raleigh and his son

Notice how the boy is dressed in a similar style to his father.



This gentleman has a slashed doublet and a short Spanish cape.



This portrait of the Infante Isabelle Claire Eugénie of Spain shows her dress with a stomacher and a skirt held out with a bell-shaped farthingale.

This rather fanciful portrait of Elizabeth I shows her wearing a dress with a wheel farthingale.