

Knowledge Organiser: Elizabethan England, c1568-1603

(6) Mary, Queen of Scots

Mary, Queen of Scots: a profile

- Mary, Queen of Scots, was Elizabeth's cousin. Her grandmother was Henry VIII's sister.
- Mary was a Catholic and posed a threat to Elizabeth. She became Queen of Scotland at only 8 days old and married the heir to the French throne in 1558. She was briefly queen of two countries.
- As Elizabeth had no children, Mary was also heir to the throne of England and some believed she was the rightful queen.
- After her husband's death, she returned to Scotland but became increasingly unpopular. Scotland had become increasingly Protestant in her absence.
- In 1567, having been accused of the murder of her second husband, Lord Darnley, Mary was forced to abdicate and fled to England. Her young son, James, was crowned King of Scotland in her place.



Key terms

Abdicate	To give up the throne.
Regicide	Killing of a monarch.
Martyr	Someone who dies for his or her religious beliefs.

Exam question:

1. Write an account of the ways in which the Babington Plot affected Elizabeth's policy towards Mary, Queen of Scots. (8 marks)
2. Explain what was important about the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, for Elizabethan England. (8 marks)

Key questions

Why was Mary, Queen of Scots, a threat to peace?

- Many English Protestants reacted to Mary's arrival in England with shock and fear. They saw a potential Catholic queen and a possible return to the horrors of Mary I's reign.
- Parliament saw Mary as a threat to security. A number of Elizabeth's advisors in the Privy Council immediately called for Mary's execution but Elizabeth was hesitant.
- Mary was moved around the country as Elizabeth's prisoner for 19 years. She was treated well.
- There is not much evidence to suggest that Mary was directly involved in many plots to overthrow Elizabeth but it is clear that she was an inspiration to Catholic plotters and rebels.

What was the Babington Plot?

- In 1586, a rich young Catholic, named Anthony Babington planned to kill Elizabeth, rescue Mary and place her on the throne.
- Babington needed to know if Mary supported his plan. He managed to get Mary's servants to hide coded messages within beer barrels. The messages reached Mary and she replied, giving her backing.
- However, the servants were spies for Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's spymaster. The original message and Mary's reply were decoded and taken straight to Elizabeth.
- With such clear evidence, Elizabeth had little choice but to act. Although still hesitant, she ordered that Mary should go on trial for treason.

Historic environment: Hardwick Hall

- Mary, Queen of Scots spent time imprisoned under the care of the Earl of Shrewsbury. He was the fourth husband of Bess of Hardwick,
- The Earl of Shrewsbury had to pay for her house arrest in the various places she was consigned to.
- Hardwick Hall offers visitors a glimpse of the life that Mary would have experienced.



Elizabeth's treatment of Mary, Queen of Scots

The trial

- In October 1586, Mary was put on trial before a court of 36 noblemen including Sir Francis Walsingham and Sir William Cecil, two of Elizabeth's closest advisors.
- Mary defended herself strongly. She criticised the fact that she had not been allowed to see evidence against her and claimed that as she was not English, she could not be guilty of treason.
- She was found guilty and sentenced to death on 25 October.

The execution

- Elizabeth was reluctant to sign Mary's death warrant. She feared that executing a fellow monarch (regicide) might inspire her enemies, or that Mary's son James might want revenge.
- She even told the French ambassador that she had been in tears over the 'unfortunate affair'.
- She was also concerned about the reaction of the Catholic powers: France and Spain.
- Despite this, she signed the death warrant on 1 February 1587.
- Mary was executed, in private, seven days later. The Earls of Shrewsbury and Kent were the official witnesses.
- Elizabeth was said to have been angry about the execution and had the privy councillor who delivered the death warrant briefly executed.

The impact

- Without Mary, Catholics had no clear alternative monarch. The new heir to the English throne was Mary's son James - a Protestant.
- Even in death, Mary remained an important figure. Many saw her as a martyr to her faith and her execution as proof that Elizabeth was a wicked heretic.
- Elizabeth's concern about the reaction abroad was unwarranted. There was outrage but no action from France and Spain. King James of Scotland accepted Elizabeth's apology for the death of his mother.

Name: