A detailed woodcut illustration from a 16th-century manuscript, likely a play. It depicts a stage scene with several characters. In the center, a man in a red ruff and a tall, pointed hat (possibly a fool or a clown) is gesturing towards a woman on the right. The woman has a donkey's head and is wearing a blue and yellow dress. Other figures are visible in the background and foreground, some in period clothing and others in more elaborate, possibly theatrical, costumes. The scene is set on a stage with a wooden backdrop.

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GCSE HISTORY

THE ELIZABETHAN AGE

1558–1603

R. Paul Evans



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CONTENTS

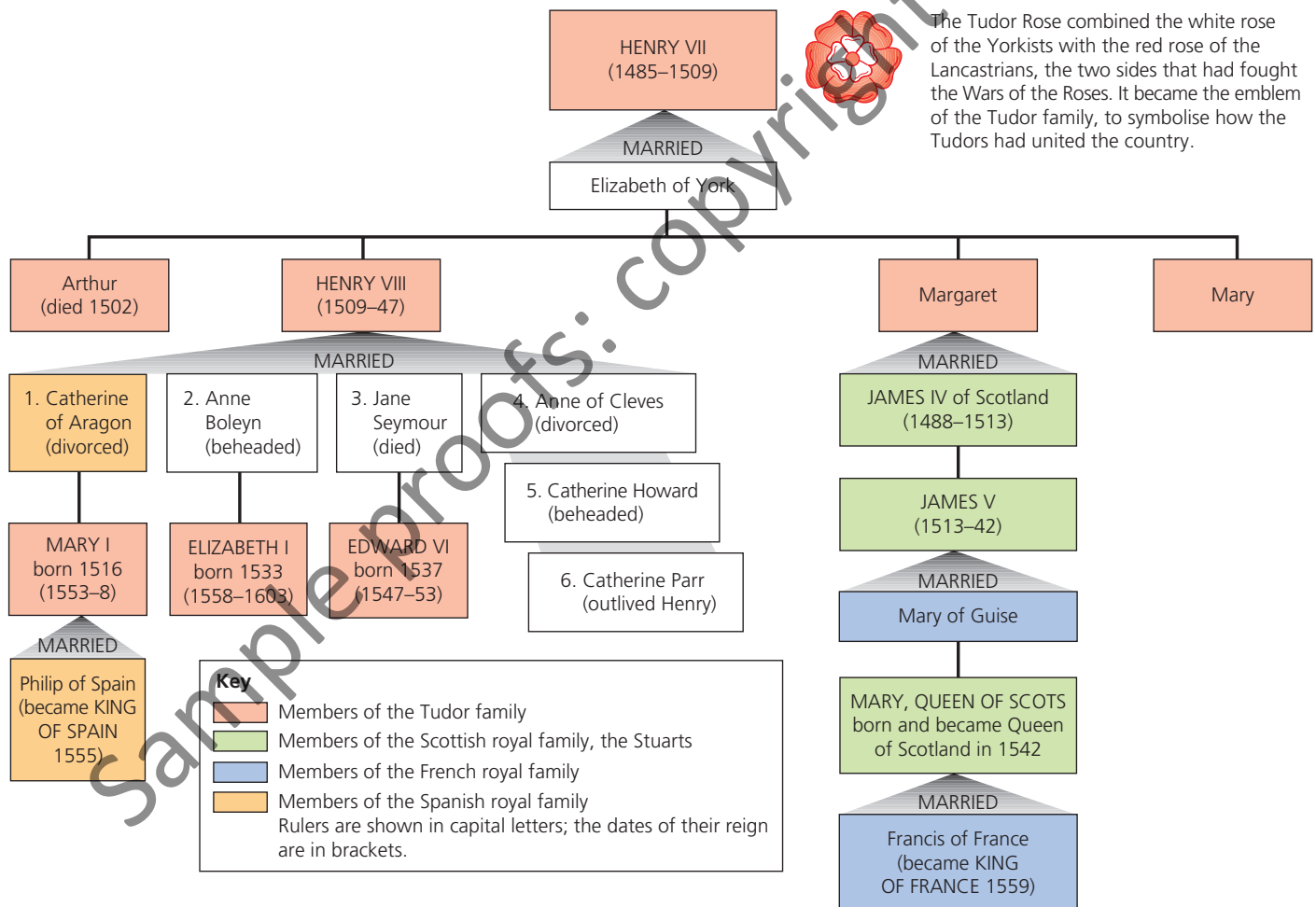
Introduction	2
1 Elizabethan government	4
2 Lifestyles of the rich and poor	19
3 Popular entertainment	38
4 The problem of religion	49
5 The Catholic threat	57
6 The Spanish Armada	71
7 The Puritan threat	84
Examination guidance	94
Glossary	102
Index	104
Acknowledgements	106

1 Elizabethan government

Key question: How successful was the government of Elizabeth I?

Introduction: Elizabeth's life before she became queen

When Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558 she was the fifth Tudor monarch to reign. The Tudor dynasty had been established by Elizabeth's grandfather, Henry Tudor, who had come to the throne in 1485 following his victory over Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth, the battle that ended the **Wars of the Roses**. As Henry VII, he ruled until his death in 1509 when he was succeeded by his son, Henry VIII, who in turn was succeeded by his son, Edward VI, followed by his two daughters, Mary and Elizabeth (see Figure 1.1).



▲ Figure 1.1: The Tudor family tree

Henry VIII and his wives

Henry VIII is famous for having been married six times, the driving force behind these marriages being a desperate attempt to secure a male heir to the throne. By his first marriage to a Spanish princess, Catherine of Aragon, he had one daughter, Mary. In 1527 Henry fell in love with Anne Boleyn, a young noblewoman. In order to marry her he needed to divorce Catherine. Henry therefore petitioned the Pope, as head of the Roman Catholic Church, to grant him a divorce. This was refused. In 1533 when unmarried Anne became pregnant, Henry decided to break away from the Roman Catholic Church and create a new Church of England with himself as head. This enabled him to grant himself a divorce and marry Anne.

On 7 September 1533 Anne gave birth to a daughter. She was called Elizabeth after Henry's mother, Elizabeth of York. In 1536 Anne gave birth to a second child, a boy, but he died at birth. When Henry found out that Anne was very friendly with some of the male courtiers he sent her to the Tower of London and dissolved the marriage. After an investigation she was declared guilty of adultery and **treason** and Henry ordered her execution. Following the death of her mother, Elizabeth, aged just two, was declared **illegitimate**. This meant she now had no claim to the throne.

In 1537 Henry married Jane Seymour, his third wife. In October of that year she gave birth to a son, named Edward, but Jane did not long survive the birth, dying a few days later. Henry was to marry a further three times, his sixth wife being Catherine Parr, the daughter of Sir Thomas Parr, a wealthy nobleman from the north of England.

Having spent most of her life being moved from house to house, Elizabeth, now aged ten, went to live with her father and his new queen, Catherine, together with her half-brother Edward. Both children were brought up as **Protestants**.

Edward VI

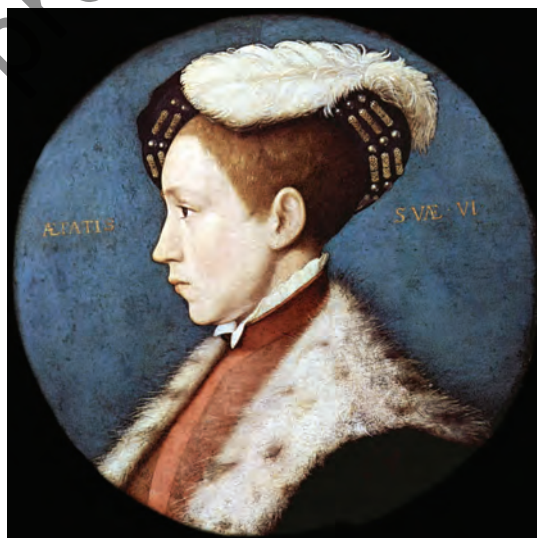
In 1547 Henry died and was succeeded by his nine-year-old son who became King Edward VI. As Edward was too young to rule alone his advisers made the important decisions, which included making the Church of England more Protestant. This worried some loyal Catholics. Elizabeth, now aged fifteen, was living with her Protestant step-mother, Catherine Parr, but when Catherine died a year later, in 1548, the young princess found herself alone.

Mary I

In 1553 Edward, who had always been a sickly child, died at the age of just fifteen. The throne now passed to his elder half-sister, Mary, who was a strict Roman Catholic. Queen Mary I soon began to undo the religious changes made during Edward's reign and made the Catholic religion the main faith of the country. Protestants who refused to convert to the Catholic faith were punished and some prominent protestors were burnt at the stake. They included Archbishop Cranmer and the Protestant bishops Latimer and Ridley. In 1554 Mary announced that she planned to marry her cousin, King Philip II of Spain, one of the strongest Catholic rulers of Europe. She also began the **Marian Persecution**, which forced people to keep the Roman Catholic faith or face severe penalties. Her actions quickly became very unpopular with many Protestants.



▲ Henry VIII, painted by a follower of Hans Holbein the Younger in the sixteenth century



▲ Edward VI, painted by Hans Holbein, 1543



▲ Mary I, painted by Master John, c.1554

Interpretation 1: J. E. Neale, an historian who specialised in Tudor history, writing in his biography, *Queen Elizabeth*, published in 1934

Mary had no doubts about Elizabeth's involvement in the plot, and if this could be proved there was small hope of mercy. Wyatt and others were examined and re-examined for evidence to convict her. It was discovered that Wyatt had twice written to her and received answers, but they were verbal only and amounted to nothing. They may not even have been hers, for some of her servants had been involved in the conspiracy, and there is no saying what use they had made of her name.

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Using the information on pages 5–8 construct a time line covering the period from 1533 to 1603.
 - a) Mark the key events in Elizabeth's life up to November 1558.
 - b) As you advance through the chapters of this book you can add extra events to this timeline.
- 2 Study Source A. What image of Elizabeth do you think the artist is trying to portray?

Practice question

Study Interpretation 1. How far do you agree with the interpretation the Elizabeth had little connection to the Wyatt Plot? (For guidance, see pages 100–1.)

Elizabeth's position under Mary

As a Protestant, this was a difficult time for Elizabeth, especially after the outbreak of a Protestant rebellion in 1554 led by Sir Thomas Wyatt. Elizabeth was suspected of being involved in the plot and Mary ordered her arrest and imprisonment in the Tower of London. She was charged with treason, the punishment for which was death.

As there was not enough evidence to link Elizabeth with the Wyatt Plot she was released from the Tower and moved to Woodstock House in Oxfordshire where she was closely watched. She was later moved to Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, where she was advised by Sir William Cecil. It was there, on 17 November 1558, that she was brought the news that Mary had died and she was now queen of England and Wales. She was 25 years of age.



▲ **Source A:** A portrait of princess Elizabeth as a young girl, painted in 1545. She is shown holding her Protestant prayer book

The coronation and popularity of Elizabeth

The death of Queen Mary was greeted with a sense of relief by many, especially Protestants. During the short reign of 'Bloody Mary', the Marian Persecution had resulted in over 300 Protestants being put to death because they refused to change their religion. They included Archbishop Cranmer and the Protestant Bishops Latimer and Ridley. Many people now hoped that Elizabeth would prove to be a more just and popular monarch.

Elizabeth's coronation

Elizabeth's coronation was deliberately designed to be a splendid and colourful event to show off the power of the new monarch, with ceremonies lasting several days. On 12 January 1559 Elizabeth travelled from Whitehall to the Tower in a ceremonial barge along the Thames. Two days later she undertook a triumphal coronation procession through the streets of central London (see Source B). At intervals in the coronation procession pageants were performed and musical instruments played.

The coronation itself took place in Westminster Abbey on Sunday 15 January. Elizabeth was crowned and anointed by Owen Oglethorpe, the Catholic Bishop of Carlisle, and she came out of the Abbey to the sound of loud instruments and cheers from the crowd. Dressed in her full state regalia which included the sceptre and orb (see Source C), she walked the short distance to Westminster Hall for a state banquet.



▲ **Source C:** Portrait of Elizabeth painted in 1559 showing her dressed in her coronation robes, patterned with Tudor roses



▲ **Source B:** A contemporary drawing showing Elizabeth's coronation procession in 1559

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain why Elizabeth wanted her coronation to be a 'splendid and colourful' event.
- 2 Use Source B and your own knowledge to describe Elizabeth's coronation.

Practice question

What can be learnt from Sources B and C about Elizabeth's coronation? (For guidance, see pages 94–95.)

Elizabeth's popularity

Elizabeth received a good education and by the time of her coronation she could converse in Greek, Latin, French and Italian. She was well read, particularly in the arts and literature. She loved dancing, riding and music, and was keen on archery and needlework. She also studied **theology**, favoured the Bible in English and was keen to avoid the religious divides that had dominated the reigns of her half-brother and half-sister.

It was said that her quick temper was a characteristic she inherited from her father, and her unwillingness to spend money copied the miserliness of her grandfather, Henry VII. However, inheriting a nation in debt, Elizabeth had little choice but to control the purse strings wisely, and with the help of her advisers on the **Privy Council** (see page 11), she managed to balance the nation's finances.

One item she did spend lavishly on was her appearance, taking great pride in her clothes, which were adorned in

fine jewels and ornaments. She realised the importance of projecting an image of majesty and power, and this pride in her appearance remained with her throughout her long reign.

The use of portraits

One method through which Elizabeth could project her image of royal authority was through portraits. Elizabeth had many official portraits painted during her reign but as she grew older the images became less and less accurate in showing what the queen actually looked like. After catching smallpox in 1562 the queen's face was left badly scarred, prompting her to paint her face with white powder. By the 1590s her thinning hair caused her to wear a wig and her teeth had turned black. Yet her portraits did not show this and they were used as a means of **propaganda**, creating an image of a monarch who was ageless, strong and powerful; a wise and successful ruler. To show their loyalty many nobles displayed portraits of the queen in their great houses.

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Use Source D and your own knowledge to show how portraits were used to project an image of royal authority.
- 2 Why did Elizabeth consider royal progresses to be important?

Source D: The Pelican Portrait, painted by Nicholas Hilliard in 1574. c.1575. It is named after the pelican brooch that she is wearing on her bodice. According to legend the mother pelican pecks at her own breast and feeds her young on her own blood so that they might live. This image therefore shows Elizabeth as the mother of her people, ready to sacrifice her life to protect them.



Royal progresses

Another method used by the queen to court popularity was to undertake regular royal progresses, touring the countryside, staying in the houses of her nobles and receiving free accommodation, food, drink and entertainment. These annual royal progresses took place during the summer months when travelling was easier and involved visits to houses in the south-east and the midlands. Elizabeth never ventured as far as northern England, the south-west or Wales. For about 10 weeks each year the whole Court went on tour. It was a propaganda exercise, the chief purpose being to ensure that Elizabeth was seen by her subjects. To a noble it was a great privilege to receive her majesty, but it was also a very costly experience, since the queen travelled with an army of advisers, officials, servants and guards, all of whom had to be accommodated, fed and entertained for however long Elizabeth decided to stay. The host was also expected to present the queen with expensive gifts. This was one method by which Elizabeth was seen by her subjects and it also served to keep a watchful eye over the powerful noble families.

Source F: One of Elizabeth's royal progress journeys in 1568 described by an eye-witness

She was received with great applause and signs of joy ... At which she was extremely pleased ... She ordered her carriage sometimes to be taken where the crowd seemed thickest and stood up and thanked the people.

Practice questions

- 1 What can be learnt from Sources E and F about royal progresses? (For guidance, see pages 94–95.)
- 2 Explain the connections between TWO of the following that are to do with Elizabeth's popularity:
 - royal portraits
 - royal progresses
 - her character
 - her appearance. (For guidance, see page 99.)



▲ **Source E:** A painting, dated 1601, showing Elizabeth on one of her annual royal progresses

Interpretation 2: An evaluation of Elizabeth's control over the Royal Court made by the writer Barbara Mervyn who was commissioned to write the book *The Reign of Elizabeth: England 1558–1603*, published in 2001

Elizabeth can be credited with maintaining a politically stable central government by creating a Court where she exercised control by awarding offices and favours. In this way she could control rival factions.

Source G: A comment upon Elizabeth's method of ruling made in the 1630s by Sir Robert Naunton who had previously been a member of the queen's court

She ruled much by factions and parties, which she made, upheld and weakened as her own great judgement advised.

The Royal Court

The Royal Court was the centre of all political power during the Elizabethan period. The main residence of the queen was Whitehall Palace in London where she had her **ladies-in-waiting** and servants living with her, together with her chief advisers and government officials. All these people made up the Royal Court and they travelled with the queen when she went on her progresses. Having her **courtiers** close by enabled Elizabeth to consult, seek advice and challenge her councillors, as well as keeping an eye on their activities and check upon their rivalries. Among her chief courtiers were William Cecil, Sir Christopher Hatton, Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Walsingham and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, many of whom also served the queen as Privy Councillors (see pages 12–13).

The queen exercised her power and maintained the loyalty of her ministers and officials through the granting of **patronage**. Ambitious nobles would try to get access to the queen's court in the hope of being noticed by Elizabeth and possibly being granted an important position in central or local government. Elizabeth quickly realised the importance of using the system of royal patronage to her advantage. Knowing that the queen had the power to make or break them kept her nobles loyal and supportive. For the ambitious courtiers everything depended upon keeping the continued support of the queen.

Factions in the Royal Court

By operating such a system of patronage, Elizabeth naturally generated rivalry between her courtiers and this resulted in the development of court factions. Until the 1590s, when her advancing years and the loss of many of her older ministers began to have an impact, Elizabeth was generally successful in playing off one faction against the other, using her ultimate power of dismissal to control and check her courtiers and Privy Councillors.

One of the chief rivalries in the earlier part of Elizabeth's reign was between two of her most important advisers, William Cecil and Robert Dudley. Cecil was hard working and cautious in decision making, particularly when it came to managing government expenditure. This meant he was reluctant to let the country get involved in costly wars on the continent. This was in contrast to the bolder approach of Dudley, who favoured intervention in the wars in Europe. They also contrasted in their religious views, Cecil being a moderate Protestant, whereas Dudley was a **Puritan**. (For differences between Protestants and Puritans, see page 49.) Other courtiers were dragged into such rivalries and were sometimes forced to support one faction against another.

Practice question

Study Interpretation 2. How far do you agree with this interpretation that Elizabeth maintained control over her ministers through awarding offices and favours? (For guidance, see pages 100–1.)

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Copy out and complete this table using the information in this section together with your own knowledge of this topic.

	How did Elizabeth use this feature to maintain control and authority over her councillors and advisers?
The Royal Court	
The use of patronage	
The development of factions	

- 2 What information does Source G provide about Elizabeth's method of ruling?
- 3 Explain why rival factions emerged round William Cecil and Robert Dudley.

The Privy Council and councillors

One of the most important means by which the country was governed during Elizabeth's reign was through the Privy Council. This was a body of advisers and ministers, appointed by the queen, to help her rule. Privy Councillors were chosen from members of the noble and gentry classes, and occasionally archbishops. Within the first few months of becoming queen, Elizabeth had appointed nineteen men to her Privy Council and, to help provide some continuity, over one-half had been members of the Privy Council of Mary I, such as Sir Thomas Cheney and Sir William Petre.

The Council met regularly, generally two or three times a week during the early part of Elizabeth's reign, but more frequently later in the reign and during occasions when it was necessary to deal with a specific issue. One such occasion occurred in 1562 when the queen's life was threatened by catching **smallpox** and the Council had to discuss possible **succession** issues. Another crisis followed Mary Queen of Scot's flight from Scotland to England in 1568, raising concerns over a possible Catholic plot to replace Elizabeth with her Catholic cousin (see page 61).

Elizabeth seldom attended Council meetings and she was not compelled to accept the advice that the Council offered her, although she seldom disregarded it completely. The council had a number of main functions and its duties were carried out by individual Privy Councillors (see Figure 1.2).

Interpretation 3: A view of the role of the Privy Council given by the historian John Warren in his book *Elizabeth I: Meeting the Challenge: England 1541–1603*, published in 2001

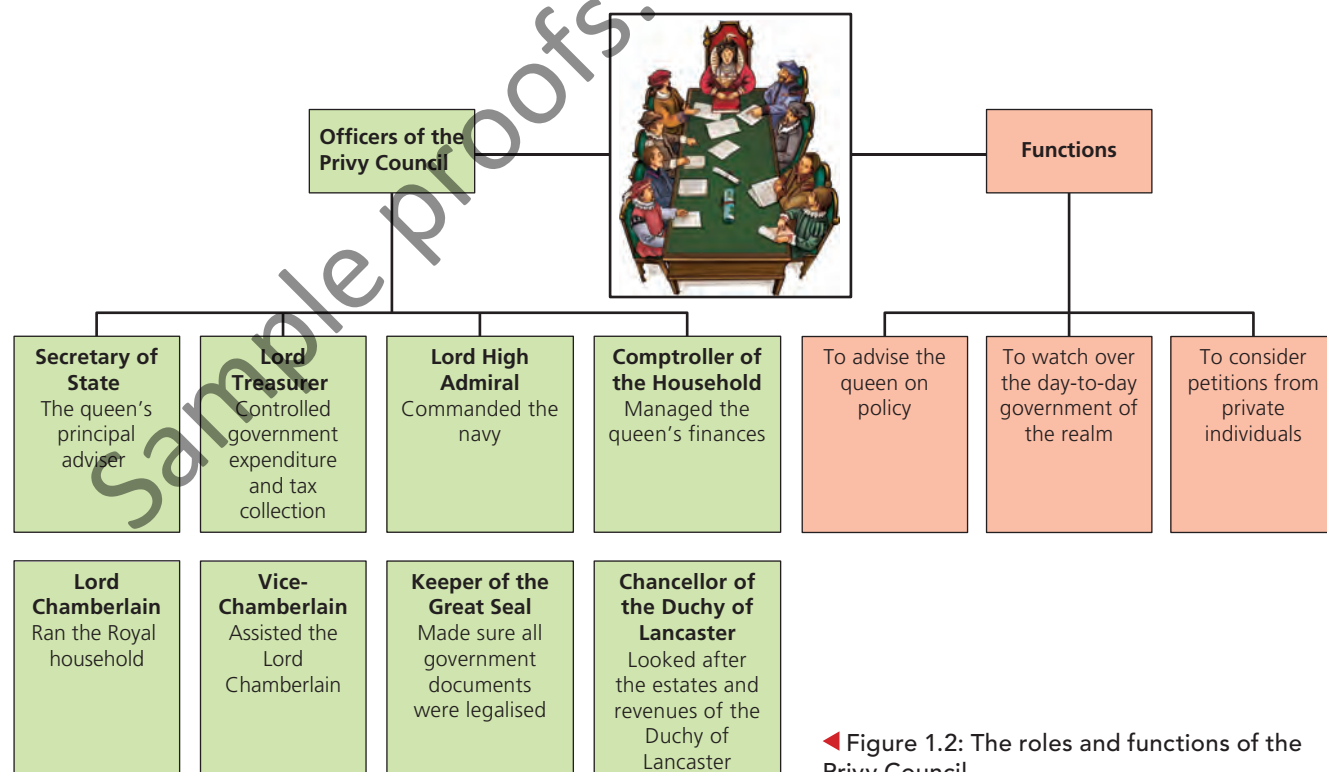
Its main functions were to advise the Queen, to administer the realm and to implement decisions taken by the Queen and Council. Since its leading Councillors headed departments of state, and were responsible for the royal finances, courts of law and national security, it is not surprising that they exercised considerable influence. ... However, the Council was neither a unified nor an unchanging body. Although there was much continuity among some key office holders, factional rivalry may have lessened its importance.

ACTIVITY

How important was the Privy Council to Elizabeth in governing the country?

Practice question

Study Interpretation 3. How far would you agree with this interpretation that factional rivalry within the Privy Council (see pages 12–13) may have lessened its importance? (For guidance, see pages 100–101.)



◀ Figure 1.2: The roles and functions of the Privy Council

Important Privy Councillors during Elizabeth's reign

Sir William Cecil (1520–98, created Lord Burghley in 1571)

A moderate Protestant, Cecil had been a Privy Councillor during the reign of Edward VI and during Mary's reign he was appointed by Princess Elizabeth to look after her affairs. Upon becoming queen in 1558 Elizabeth appointed Cecil her secretary of state. As her principal adviser, it was Cecil who managed the meetings of parliament (see page 16) and he served as the link between the monarch and parliament. In 1572 he was appointed lord treasurer and was placed in charge of government finances. He served Elizabeth as a loyal adviser and office holder for over 40 years until his death in 1598.



Robert Dudley (1537–88, created Earl of Leicester in 1564)

A Puritan, Dudley had been a close childhood friend of Elizabeth's. During Mary's reign he had fought against the French and in 1558 entered the new queen's Royal Court; he was appointed to the Privy Council in 1562. His close friendship with Elizabeth gave rise to rumours of an affair between them. In 1564 Elizabeth appointed him Earl of Leicester and in 1585 he was made commander of the army and sent to the Netherlands. Failing to get along with his generals he returned to England, where he soon after died in 1588. He did not get on with Cecil and was his rival as adviser to the queen.



Sir Christopher Hatton (1540–91)

A moderate Protestant, Hatton was appointed vice-chamberlain of the household and a member of the Privy Council in 1557. He entered Elizabeth's court in 1561 and became responsible for organising the queen's progresses. In 1587 he was given the post of lord chancellor, a position he held until his death in 1591.



▲ **Source H:** Part of the instructions given by Elizabeth to William Cecil when she appointed him a Privy Councillor in November 1558

I have this judgement of you, that you will not be corrupted with any gift, you will be faithful to the state, and without respect of my private will, you will give me the best advice; if you know anything to be declared to me in secret, you will tell only me and I will keep it confidential.



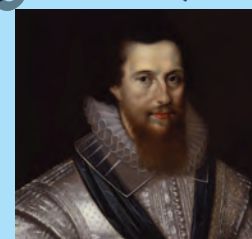
Sir Francis Walsingham (1532–90, knighted in 1577)

A devout Puritan, Walsingham was well-educated, having attended the universities of Cambridge and Padua, in Italy. In 1568 he began working for the government and in 1570, because of his command of European languages, he was appointed **ambassador** to Paris. In 1573 he was made secretary of state with special responsibility for foreign affairs. He was placed in charge of Elizabeth's **secret service** and organised a network of government spies placed all over Europe. In 1586 he uncovered a plot to murder Elizabeth that involved her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots (see page 64).



Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex (1567–1601)

A Puritan, Essex first entered the royal court in 1584 and was appointed a Privy Councillor in 1593. He gained military knowledge fighting in France, Spain and the Netherlands. Elizabeth later put him in command of attacks on Spain and Ireland. He often quarrelled with Elizabeth and in 1601 was executed for treason due to his involvement in a plot to dismiss some of the queen's councillors.



Robert Cecil (1563–1612)

A Protestant, Robert was the younger son of William Cecil, Lord Burghley. With the help of his father's influence, he took over Walsingham's duties after his death in 1590. He was appointed to the Privy Council in 1591. He became responsible for supervising the arrangements for the succession of James VI of Scotland as king following the death of Elizabeth in 1603.



ACTIVITIES

- Copy out and complete the table below using the information on pages 12–13 together with your own knowledge of this topic.

	Title	Religion	Date when appointed to the Privy Council	Position(s) held within the Privy Council	Example of work undertaken while a Privy Councillor
William Cecil					
Robert Dudley					
Christopher Hatton					
Francis Walsingham					
Robert Devereux					
Robert Cecil					

- Using your completed table explain how important Privy Councillors were in helping Elizabeth govern England.
- Study Source H. What qualities did Elizabeth expect to see in her Privy Councillors?

Practice question

Why was William Cecil, Lord Burghley, significant during the reign of Elizabeth? (For guidance, see page 98.)

Local government

During the sixteenth century, travel and communications were slow. It could take many days for messages from London to reach distant parts of the realm. The queen did not travel too far from London and she therefore had to rely upon a trusted body of officials to ensure that her rule was respected and that law and order was maintained. Without such officials Elizabeth would not have been able to rule the country effectively.

The lord lieutenant

Chief among these royal officials was the lord lieutenant, a post held by a wealthy landowner who was also often a Privy Councillor. One was appointed for each county and they kept the queen informed about what was happening in their area. They were in charge of the **local militia**, supervised the work of **justices of the peace** (JPs) and reported upon local events to the Privy Council. The title carried considerable prestige, as did the office of deputy lieutenant, a post created in the 1560s to share the workload.

The sheriff

Each county had a sheriff and they were chiefly concerned with legal affairs, such as appointing and swearing in juries, delivering prisoners to court and helping with the collection of taxes. The post of sheriff had medieval origins but by the sixteenth century the position had declined in its importance and many responsibilities had been passed on to other officials, such as the lord lieutenant and JPs.

Justices of the peace

The real work of maintaining law and order at the local level fell upon the shoulders of the JPs. They numbered between 30 and 60 per county and they were usually wealthy country gentlemen. They were unpaid but did their job because they viewed it as their duty and also because it gave them power and status within their community. During Elizabeth's reign their workload increased significantly. As well as sitting as justices in the quarter session courts, which dealt with administering justice for minor crimes, they were given the additional tasks of overseeing the maintenance of the highways and administering poor law relief to the unemployed (see Figure 1.3). They were supported by junior officials such as the parish constable and the overseer of the poor.

Source 1: Examples of the work of JPs taken from the records of the Quarter Session Courts held in the West-Riding of Yorkshire during 1597–98

It is ordered that no brewers in this area shall brew any ale or beer to be sold at a greater price than a penny per quart, unless they have a special licence from a Justice of the Peace. The highway leading from Leeds to Wikebrigg is in great decay to the great hindrance of all her Majesty's subjects who travel that way. Therefore the Justices here present do order every person occupying land in Leeds to send labourers to repair the highway before August 25.



▲ Figure 1.3: The duties of a justice of the peace

Lesser officers

The maintenance of law and order depended upon community self-policing directed by the JP. To help with the day-to-day policing duties the JP appointed a number of lesser officials.

The parish constable and night watchman

The parish constable was appointed from among the tradesmen or husbandmen (farmers) living in the area. They were expected to hold the unpaid post for 1 year and were given a range of duties under the close supervision of the JP (see Figure 1.4). In the towns they were helped in their duties by the night watchman who patrolled the streets at night looking out for criminals.



The overseer of the poor

To help administer relief to the poor, JPs appointed an overseer of the poor whose job it was to organise and collect a local tax (called the poor rate), from everyone in the parish, and distribute this money to those most in need of support and charity. This job increased in importance during Elizabeth's reign as the number of unemployed also increased.

Without this body of mostly unpaid amateur officials local government would not have been able to operate effectively during Elizabethan times.

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Explain the differences between the roles and responsibilities of the justice of the peace and the parish constable.
- 2 'Without a body of mostly unpaid officials local government could not have operated effectively during Elizabethan times.' How far do you agree with this statement?
- 3 How useful is Source I to an historian studying the work of JPs during this period?

Practice question

Explain the connections between TWO of the following that are to do with local government during Elizabethan times.

- lord lieutenant
- justice of the peace
- parish constable
- overseer of the poor.

(For guidance, see page 99.)

The role of parliament

ACTIVITIES

Use the information in Table 1.1 to help answer the following questions.

- 1 What was the most popular reason for the calling of a parliament during Elizabeth's reign?
- 2 What were the main problems faced by Elizabeth's government?
- 3 What evidence is there to suggest that wars were expensive?

During Elizabeth's reign parliament was a much less powerful body than it is today. It met only when the queen called it and it ceased to meet when she told it to close down. During Elizabeth's long reign there were just ten parliaments which met on thirteen occasions, and for 26 years there were no sessions of parliament at all. The main motive for calling parliament was usually financial, Elizabeth needed parliament to grant money from taxes to pay for the running of or defence of the country (see Table 1.1).

Parliament was made up of two bodies:

- the House of Lords: a non-elected body of about 100 lords, bishops and judges
- the House of Commons: contained about 450 members of parliament (MPs) who were elected by wealthy landowners; its members were mostly gentlemen, burgesses (merchants) and some lawyers; there were two MPs from each county and two from each important town within the county.

Elizabeth called parliament only when she needed to and this was usually because:

- she was short of money and only parliament had the power to raise money through taxes and hand over revenue to the Crown
- she needed to pass Acts of Parliament
- she desired the support and advice of her MPs and lords on important issues.

Parliament	Dates of sessions	Reasons for calling parliament
1559	25 January – 8 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To discuss the Religious Settlement which set up the Protestant Church • To grant taxes
1563–67	12 January – 10 April 1563 30 September 1566 – 2 January 1567	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To discuss a rebellion in Scotland • To grant taxes • To decide whether to support a Protestant rebellion in France • To grant additional taxes
1571	2 April – 29 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To decide what to do with Mary, Queen of Scots, who had fled from Scotland to England in 1568 • To grant taxes
1572–82	8 May – 30 June 1572 8 February – 15 March 1576 16 January – 18 March 1581	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To pass laws to deal with Catholic plots against Elizabeth • To grant taxes
1584–85	23 November 1584 – 29 March 1585	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To pass laws to deal with plots against the queen • To grant taxes
1586–87	29 October 1586 – 23 March 1587	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To pass laws against Catholics • To grant taxes
1589	4 February – 29 March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To discuss the war against Spain • To grant double taxes
1593	19 February – 10 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To discuss the war in Ireland • To grant triple taxes
1597–98	24 October 1597 – 9 February 1598	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To discuss the war in Ireland • To grant triple taxes
1601	27 October – 19 December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consider the succession • To grant triple taxes

▲ Table 1.1: Elizabethan parliaments, 1559–1601

Freedom of speech

The queen appointed the Speaker of the House of Commons and decided what topics were to be debated. While MPs had in theory freedom of speech to allow them to discuss what they wanted, Elizabeth made it clear that certain topics such as foreign policy and religion were issues to be discussed by the Privy Council not parliament. When in 1571 MPs asked the queen to consider marriage she told them that they had no right to discuss issues that were personal to her. She was furious when, in 1587, parliament discussed changes to the Church of England. She demanded MPs stop discussing the issue and ordered the arrest of five MPs. In such instances Elizabeth was prepared to limit freedom of speech within parliament.

Taxation and finance

During the Tudor period monarchs were expected to pay for the cost of running the country from their own finances. This income came from rents from the royal estates and property, and from customs duties on exports and imports. Tudor monarchs often found themselves short of money and when this was the case they had to ask parliament to grant them additional funds from taxes. Only parliament had the power to raise money through taxation. The situation was made worse during Elizabeth's reign because of high **inflation**, which caused prices to rise, and the country's involvement in costly foreign wars, such as the conflict with Philip II and Spain (see page 72).

When Elizabeth became queen in 1558 she inherited a government heavily in debt. The debt from Queen Mary's reign stood at the high figure of £227,000 and in an attempt to balance the books Elizabeth worked with one of her chief ministers, William Cecil, to begin a programme of economic savings. Court salaries were capped and the spending on the royal household was cut. By imposing a variety of savings the **Marian debt** was paid off, but the Crown was still short of money and parliament had to be recalled periodically to release funds.

The burden of local taxation increased sharply during Elizabeth's reign. The sheriff was responsible for collecting the taxes locally and this money was used to fund poor relief, which became an increasing problem during the late sixteenth century (see page 30). Money was also needed to pay for the maintenance of roads and bridges, the upkeep of all fortifications and the local militia.

Source J: The Lord Keeper's reply to a petition from Parliament for freedom of speech, 1593

For freedom of speech her Majesty commands me to say that no man should be afraid to say yes or no to bills. But he is not there to speak of all things that come into his mind or to suggest new religions and governments. She said that no monarch fit to rule would allow anything so stupid.



QUEEN ELIZABETH IN PARLIAMENT
A. L. Chancellor B. Marquis C. Earl D. Bishop E. Judges F. Masters of Chancery G. Clerks H. Speaker of Commons
I. Black Rod K. Sergeant at Arms L. Members of the Commons M. S. Francis Walsingham Secretary of State

Source K: A contemporary print showing Queen Elizabeth sitting in the House of Lords, with MPs from the House of Commons also present

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Use Source K and your own knowledge to explain the function of parliament during this period.
- 2 'The power to release funds from taxes gave parliament power over the monarch.' How far do you agree with this statement?

Practice question

To what extent does Source J accurately reflect the view that MPs did not have total freedom of speech? (For guidance, see page 96.)

Conclusion: How successful was the government of Elizabeth I?

The Tudor system of government was personal and was based upon the monarch. A strong monarch ensured strong government. For much of her reign Elizabeth was that strong monarch, particularly during the 1570s and 1580s, when she ruled at the height of her powers and was served by an able body of Privy Councillors and advisers within the Royal Court. Her popularity also helped to ensure loyalty and obedience from her officials.

Central government was most effective when Elizabeth used her power of patronage to keep her ambitious councillors, advisers and nobles in check. She grew skilful in handling difficult nobles and her volatile temper was often enough to ensure her officials did what was expected of them. She maintained a relatively firm control of her parliaments and exercised her power of calling and dismissing parliament to her advantage.

At the local level Elizabeth's control was dependent upon the operations of a loyal body of unpaid amateur officials in the form of the lord lieutenant and his deputy, justices of the peace, the parish constable and other officials such as the overseers of the poor. Without the co-operation of these officials working in the queen's name in the provinces the decisions made by central government could not have been carried out. As long as these officials performed their duties effectively then law and order was maintained. At this level government worked well during Elizabeth's reign, despite an ever increasing workload for many of these officers.

Summary question

Now that you have completed this chapter, use the knowledge you have acquired to answer the following synoptic question.

'Elizabeth was a popular monarch who exercised firm control in governing the country.' How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you might like to consider the following factors:

- 1 the popularity of the queen
- 2 the Royal Court
- 3 the Privy Council
- 4 parliament
- 5 and any other relevant factors you can think of.