

# Elizabeth I and Her War with Spain

## Why did Elizabeth I quarrel with Spain?

Spain was the richest and most powerful European country in the Middle of the 16th Century. King Philip ruled not only Spain but also the Netherlands, Sicily, Naples, Milan, Sardinia. Spain also had colonies in Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America and Peru. In 1580, he became King of Portugal.

Compared to Spain, England was a small, poor and unimportant island. However, both countries had shared a friendship and a common hate and suspicion for France.

Henry VIII had married Catherine of Aragon. Philip had been married to Mary I, and after her death, Philip had proposed marriage to Elizabeth in 1554/5.

Why then did England and Spain go to war in 1585?

### 1. Religious Differences

- **Philip II was a devout Catholic** and saw it his duty to protect the Catholic faith.
- The Reformation has divided Europe between the Protestant and Catholic faiths.
- Philip also felt threatened by the growth of Islamic religion and believed that a united Catholic Europe was the only way to stop the Islamic spread.
- Elizabeth was Protestant but was tolerant of other beliefs. However, there were many English Catholics who wanted her out of the way and replaced by Philip or Mary Queen of Scots.
- There were to a number of attempts to assassinate Elizabeth, but all failed and Mary was eventually executed in 1587 after being implicated in one of the plots. The Spanish ambassador was also found to have been involved in some way.
- There were also attempts by Irish Catholics supported by the Pope and Philip to undermine Elizabeth's position. In England, the Jesuits secretly trained priests.
- Meanwhile the Pope was doing his utmost to destabilise Elizabeth's position and in 1570 he issued a Papal Bull (Bulla = seal) which stated "Peers, subjects and People of the Kingdom are freed from their oath of loyalty to Elizabeth and all manner of duty and obedience. They shall not dare to obey her, or any other laws, directions or commands."
- Elizabeth retaliated by increasing the fine for failure to attend a Church of

England service from 5p a week to £5 a week. The fine for going to a Roman Catholic service was £60. Some Catholic priests were tortured and some like Edmund Campion were executed.

- The Protestant faith was growing rapidly **in the Netherlands** and Philip wanted to stamp it out. Eighteen Thousand (18,000) Dutch Protestants had been arrested and over 1000 were burnt to death. English Protestants urged Elizabeth to help in the Netherlands, but she realised the danger on a head-on conflict with Spain. However, many of the Protestants who fled the Netherlands fled to safety in England. Elizabeth delayed her decision until in 1584, William the Silent, the Leader of the Dutch Protestant was assassinated. In 1585, she signed an alliance, agreed to become the protector of the Dutch Protestants and a small force was sent under the command of the Earl of Leicester. England and Spain were in a state of undeclared war. This was of limited success.

## 2. Trading Rivalry

The Spanish regarded themselves as 'Masters of the Seas'. In 1577-80, Francis Drake had sailed around the World. In his travels, he attacked Spanish ships and ports in the Caribbean and South America. Drake returned to England with his ships laden with gold and silver. Encouraged by Drake's success other English sea captains carried on after Drake's example. It did little to harm Philip's enormous wealth but it was a dent to his pride and reputation. Philip complained but Elizabeth said that she had no control over the English sea captains.

## Outline of the War 1585-1603

- The war in The Netherlands was indecisive and eventually Leicester fell out with the Protestant leaders and returned home in 1587.
- By 1585, Philip of Spain had seized all English ships in Spanish ports.
- Elizabeth gave backing to Drake's plan to seize Philip's treasure fleet as it sailed from America to Spain, and having done that to plunder Spanish ports in the Caribbean. Unfortunately, he missed the treasure ships but ransacked the important Cape Verde Islands and carried out a very successful raid in the West Indies. Many Spanish galleons were sunk
- After the death of Mary Queen of Scots, Philip decided to invade England with an Armada. See separate notes.

## **The War at Sea 1589-1603**

- With the failure of the Armada Elizabeth thought it time to try her luck. A counter-Armada was sent to Spain to **1.** Destroy the surviving Spanish ships. **2.** To place Don Antonio on the Portuguese throne. **3.** To pick up as much booty as possible.
- The Counter-Armada failed. **a)** an attack on Corunna failed and wasted valuable time and munitions **b)** There was no support in Portugal **c)** Drake made a mess of attack on Lisbon.
- Philip changed his tactics. His treasure ships were now escorted to Spain by a convoy of warships. English pickings dropped.
- English expedition to the Caribbean in 1595 failed. Both Drake and Hawkins killed.
- In 1596, another expedition set off for Cadiz. Essex and Lord Howard attacked and ransacked a well-defended port, but the booty was limited much to Elizabeth's annoyance.
- In 1597, Elizabeth ordered another expedition to capture Philip's treasure ships in the Azores. As with Drake, Essex and Lord Howard missed the treasure ships and went home empty handed.
- Elizabeth now refused to finance any more ventures at sea.

## **War in the Netherlands 1587-1603**

- No one was really a match for the Duke of Parma. Only when he was side-tracked with the Armada or fighting in France did the Dutch and their allies make any real advances.
- Parma died in 1592 and gradually the Spanish were driven out of Northern Netherlands.

## **War in France 1589-1603**

- In 1589, Henry III of France was assassinated. The Huguenot (Protestant) Henry of Navarre was crowned Henry IV. Philip refused to recognise him as King.
- In 1590, Philip invaded Brittany. Elizabeth sent a force under 'Black' John Norris and it stayed there for six years. She sent further forces to assist Henry.
- Henry changed religion and gained the support of the whole French people and the hated Spanish were driven out of France.

## **War in Ireland 1595-1603**

- Hugh O'Neil, Earl of Tyrone rebelled in 1595.
- Elizabeth sent forces over under John Norris. Norris died and was replaced by

Sir Henry Bagenal who was then defeated at Yellow Forge. This was the only major defeat in Elizabeth's reign.

- Elizabeth sent over more forces under the command Essex.
- Tyrone delayed his actions waited for reinforcement from Philip II. However, Essex made a truce with Tyrone and then returned to England. Elizabeth had spent a lot of money and she was furious. Charles Blount was sent back to finish of the job. The Spanish garrison was captured and Tyrone fled to the mountains where he was eventually starved into submission late in 1603.
- Elizabeth was the first monarch to rule all Ireland. However it had cost lots of money and the country remained Catholic and very loyal to the Pope.
- The Irish were treated savagely, persecuted for their religion and had their lands confiscated. All this did was to create bitterness towards the new Protestant settlers brought in by Elizabeth and her successors. This is very much the cause of today's problems.

### **Success or Failure?**

- Elizabeth I carried out wars in Ireland, France and Netherlands despite having very little money.
- She maintained a well-equipped fleet.
- Soldiers were regularly paid.
- Ventures were paid for by investors who got a share of the booty along with Elizabeth I.
- She ignored pleas to always attack Spanish treasure ships, preferring to protect England.
- England was independent and could now be classed as a 'Sovereign Nation State'. Her father's dream had been achieved.
- England's Anglican Church was secure from Catholic interference.
- Spain remained a major power, but Europe regarded both Elizabeth's and England's achievements little short of remarkable.