24 The last years of Elizabeth

**RECAP**

**The political condition of England by 1603**

England had enjoyed broadly effective and successful government during most of Elizabeth’s reign. However, royal authority and the quality of administration declined during the 1590s, because of:

- diminishing talent following the death of Elizabeth’s long-standing ministers (Leicester 1588; Burghley 1598)
- increasing factional rivalry in government as younger courtiers sought power; the conflict between Essex and the Cecil faction – involving the Essex ‘rebellion’ of 1601 – illustrated the problems
- problems of an aging queen who could no longer control her courtiers as effectively as in the past
- anxieties over the succession
- economic problems.

By the time of her death, in 1603, Elizabeth was not as popular as she had been, and the prospect of a new king was welcomed.

**The economic condition of England by 1603**

England had enjoyed considerable economic growth during the 16th century, with the expansion of trade and industry.

By 1603 some of the structures that would contribute to England’s commercial domination within Europe in the 17th century had been established – e.g. trading companies to challenge Spanish/Portuguese/Dutch domination, and the beginnings of an interest in the Americas.

Domestic demand thrived. Cottage industries such as nail making, hosiery, soap manufacturing and brewing flourished, and total production rose substantially during Elizabeth’s reign.

Although inflation was a problem, the stability of the Elizabethan era did much to aid commercial prosperity.

**The state of society in England by 1603**

England remained socially divided, with huge differences in living standards between the wealthy few and the poor majority. Nevertheless, in contrast with many continental societies, the nobility were subject to taxation and for the majority of the time, most people could be fed. The lives of those at the lower end of society were still highly dependent on uncontrollable forces such as the weather, orders and taxation demands from central government and the localities, and the problems of wartime. However, many survived through thrift, multiple employments and hard work. There was only one subsistence crisis, in the 1590s. The distress of those years led to the reforms of the poor law enacted in 1598 and 1601; these limited the worst effects of poverty, at least for the deserving poor.

**The state of religion in England by 1603**

By the end of Elizabeth’s reign, there was a broad consensus surrounding the Church of England, which ensured a substantial degree of religious unity.
**Catholicism**

English Catholics divided between a majority who tried to be loyal to both Crown and faith and a minority who sought a Catholic succession.

**Popular Catholicism had declined**

**Church of England (Anglican Church)**

Most people could identify with/accept the Anglican Church.

Puritanism had faded; most Puritans had become assimilated within the mainstream Church.

Separatism had virtually disappeared.

**KEY CHRONOLOGY**

**Political developments 1563–1603**

- 1563 Statute of Artificers
- 1566 Vestiarian Controversy
- 1569–70 Northern Rebellion
- 1570 Pope Pius V excommunicates Elizabeth
- 1585 Start of Anglo-Spanish War
- 1588 Spanish Armada
- 1601 Poor Law
- 1601 Essex 'rebellion'
- 1603 Death of Elizabeth

**SUMMARY**

- By 1603, the glories associated with the earlier years of Elizabeth's reign had faded and faction-fighting and rebellion damaged her government.
- The reign had brought continued economic growth and some social improvement.
- Although Elizabeth's later years saw increased persecution of Catholics, the Elizabethan religious settlement came to be widely accepted and the Puritan threat had been contained.
**APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

To consider the success of Elizabeth I as Queen of England, review the Key Chronology of political developments given on page 122.

a Create 9 revision cards: on each card, write 1 political development, and points to explain the development and its significance. Write corresponding date(s) on the back. For example:

- **Front of the card**
  - Development:
  - What is it?
  - 
  - Significance:
  - 
- **Back of the card**
  - Date:
  - 

b Sort the 9 cards into a ‘diamond 9’, ranked by importance for the development of Elizabeth’s England.

c Re-sort the cards in chronological order to test your understanding. (You will be able to check this by turning them over.)

**ASSESS THE VALIDITY OF THIS VIEW**

‘The economy of England was in a much stronger position in 1603 than it had been in 1558.’ Assess the validity of this view.

a Completing the change and continuity chart below will help you to assess the degree to which the economy was strengthened (or otherwise) between these dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Situation in 1558</th>
<th>Situation in 1603</th>
<th>Positive changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trade and commerce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Continuity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Situation in 1558</th>
<th>Situation in 1603</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trade and commerce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Negative changes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Situation in 1558</th>
<th>Situation in 1603</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b Use your diagram to help you to decide whether the economy got stronger, stayed the same, or worsened.

c Write a conclusion to this essay, offering a judgement on the view given.
There were two reigns of Elizabeth I, each with distinctive features. Her ‘first’ reign ended about 1585, with the dispatch of an English force to the Netherlands. This reversal of the queen’s non-interventionist policy was followed by the trial and execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, and the outbreak of war with Spain and the French Catholic League.

Mary’s execution resolved one political and constitutional crisis but caused another. The costs and casualties of the resulting war was high and England was often threatened with conquest. The crown’s poverty and the competition for patronage kindled factionalism and sparked Essex’s attempted coup. The turmoil created by rising prices and bad harvests caused resistance to the crown’s fiscal and military demands. This triggered an authoritarian reaction with an obsession on state security and fear of religious nonconformity. There was also a change of personnel between Elizabeth’s ‘first’ and ‘second’ court with the deaths between 1588 and 1590 of four key men – Leicester, Warwick, Mildmay and Walsingham.

Adapted from John Guy, *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, 1991

**REVISION SKILLS**

Now that you have completed your revision of *The Tudors: England 1485–1603*, you should extend and add to the revision activities suggested in this guide to encompass the whole of the content. These are:

- Key Question cards (Chapter 1).
- Revision chart of change and continuity – adapt the general subject headings to each monarch’s period, e.g. ‘Society in the reign of …’ instead of ‘English society at the end of the 15th century’ (Chapter 6).
- Revision chart to show the state of the country in 1553, 1558 and 1603 (Chapter 8).
- Colour coded thematic timeline (Chapter 16).
REVIEW

On these Exam Practice pages, you will find a sample student answer for an A Level extracts question. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the answer? Read the answer and the corresponding Examiner Tips carefully. Think about how you could apply this advice in order to improve your own answers to questions like this one.

Using your understanding of the historical context, assess how convincing the arguments in these three extracts are in relation to Elizabeth I’s rule in England.

30 marks

EXTRACT A

Elizabeth brought real dramatic talent to the role of Virgin Queen and freed herself from some of the restrictions of her sex. But the production in which she starred ran for 45 years: she had no understudy and she had to appear in every show; it was a constant strain. Her performances were not flawless; she disliked her part in her early years when she hoped to marry Dudley; she was bored with it in 1579 when she thought of marrying Alençon, and she could not quite carry it off in her last decade. She lost confidence in the interpretation of the part in 1585 and allowed her leading man to persuade her into a more aggressive version for foreign audiences. But hers was an award-winning performance. The metaphor of drama is an appropriate one for Elizabeth's reign, for her power was an illusion. She projected an image of herself which brought stability and prestige to her country.

Adapted from Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 1988

EXTRACT B

It is easy to be taken in by Elizabeth's love of theatricality. Elizabeth's political aims and style of government were more complex than her image makers and admirers have admitted. In addition, her popularity with her subjects can no longer be taken for granted, especially during the last decade of her reign. Nonetheless her achievement as a ruler should not be underestimated. Despite enormous difficulties and several major crises, she survived as monarch with her Protestant religious settlement intact, while her realm was preserved from successful invasion and the civil wars which afflicted her neighbours, Scotland, France and the Netherlands. Fifteen years of warfare created stresses certainly but not the financial collapse or large scale political unrest which often came in the wake of war. The stability and security which England enjoyed owed much to Elizabeth's firm but flexible leadership, and her conservative and relatively cautious policies.

Adapted from Susan Doran, ‘Elizabeth I’, *The Historian* (No. 54), 1997

EXTRACT C

In the making of the cult, images and presentation were as important as policies and patronage. Elizabeth certainly capitalised on all the qualities commonly attributed to her sex and the court was the natural setting for the cult of Gloriana with its conspicuous displays in the queen’s honour. The queen was also always anxious to reach out to the nation at large, hence the royal progresses. It is certainly true that many contemporaries equated the monarch’s fame with the emergent English nation. After the triumph over the Armada, Elizabeth I became enshrined in the myths of the Virgin Queen and Gloriana, as the symbol of England’s greatness. However, there is more to the successes of Elizabethan England than Elizabeth’s leadership. Moreover, England in 1603 still had unresolved constitutional problems between queen and Parliament and grave economic difficulties with over 40 per cent of the population living below subsistence level. The queen’s subjects had suffered unrelied taxation for two decades, so the Elizabethan age ended for many in despair and disillusionment.

Adapted from John McGurk, *The Tudor Monarchies 1485–1603*, 2010
Sample student answer

**Extract A** argues that the queen relied on drama during her rule in England. It claims that her image brought ‘stability and prestige’ to the country despite occasions when she failed to live up to her role. Certainly, Elizabeth relied on image, as shown by the mass manufacture of her portrait as the Virgin Queen, and her ability to make effective speeches was shown at Tilbury before the Armada and by the Golden Speech in the previously disastrous last Parliament of 1601. However, Elizabethan rule depended on more than this. Walsingham prevented many Catholic plots against her. Her armed forces were successful against the Spanish and the Irish rebels at the end of her reign. The extract is persuasive and illustrates the argument with evidence, but it is limited because it overlooks other elements which gave the country stability and prestige.

**Extract B** argues that stability and security came from Elizabeth’s ‘firm but flexible leadership’ and her ‘cautious policies’. It has some balance, admitting her loss of popularity in her later years, especially among the Essex faction and those hard pressed by taxation paying heavy taxes on monopolies. It is true that the last fifteen years of warfare exacerbated her problems. However, these were due to a decline in her leadership and the dominance of the Privy Council which implemented the death warrant for Mary, Queen of Scots and pushed Elizabeth into war with the Dutch. So, while this extract is well supported by evidence, it provides only a limited explanation of circumstances by the end of her reign.

**Extract C** takes a negative view of Elizabeth’s reign. It paints a gloomy picture of England by 1603, pointing out the economic and constitutional problems that she left at the end of her reign which left many in despair. However, the extract is convincing because it talks about how the image of Gloriana became a symbol of England’s greatness, which was certainly the case in, for example, the paintings produced to glorify England’s victory against the Armada. It suggests images and presentation were as important as policies, which may be an exaggeration but which is corroborated by knowledge of Elizabeth’s popularity in her earlier years. The decline in image would therefore seem to account for the deterioration in her rule after the Armada.

**EXAMINER TIP**
This identifies (at least in part) the interpretation in the extract and applies some contextual own knowledge to consider its strengths and limitations. However, it is slim in relation to the content of the extract and the limitations are purely seen in terms of what is omitted. There is also no overall judgement given.

**EXAMINER TIP**
This paragraph misses some key points in the interpretation and focuses only on the comments relating to the later years of Elizabeth’s reign. It offers some own knowledge to support and criticise but, again, much is left unsaid and undeveloped.

**EXAMINER TIP**
This shows some understanding of the interpretation of Extract C but the application of contextual knowledge is limited, and there is no explicit criticism of the view given.
OVERALL COMMENT

This answer shows some awareness of how to respond to the question and some understanding of what each extract has to say. However, it is very limited in development. The overall interpretation of each extract is not succinctly defined at the beginning of each evaluation so it is not always clear that the whole extract has been properly understood. There should also have been reference to sub-arguments and interpretations. Still more importantly, very little contextual own knowledge has been used to assess the strengths and limitations of the extracts in relation to the question. This answer would therefore be placed in Level 3.

OVER TO YOU

Take 5 minutes to read and plan your answer and 50 minutes to write it. Then review your answer using the following checklist. Have you:

☐ Identified the overall interpretation of each extract at the beginning of each evaluation?
☐ Identified sub-arguments and interpretations?
☐ Referred explicitly to the detail in the extracts?
☐ Applied your own knowledge to support and to criticise interpretations?
☐ Given a clear judgement on how convincing the argument is at the end of each of the three evaluations?

Now check Chapters 17–24, especially Chapter 23. Are the details in your answer factually accurate? Have you missed any issues you should have raised?