

How did trade expand in the Elizabethan era?

Enquiry: Why was the world 'opening up' to Elizabeth I and her people?

Ms Apps



The Tudors and Trade

Van Eyck's portrait was painted just before the Tudors came to power. The lady in the image is showing off her wealth by wearing a green dress made of English woolen cloth. England's wealth had relied on the cloth trade since the reign of Elizabeth I's grandfather Henry VII. The **enclosure** of land to supply demand for sheep's wool had for decades caused hardship and poverty. The Tudors had tried with little success to deal with this issue by putting a tax on sheep.



The Tudors tried to deal with the issues caused by relying too heavily on the cloth trade by looking to expand trade in other areas. Merchants and explorers looked for new products to trade and new places to trade with.

In the reign of Elizabeth I's father, Henry VIII, explorers had travelled to Newfoundland (where they found lots of fish), West Africa (returning with pepper and ivory which they called elephant's teeth), the Canary Islands and the Azores. In the reign of Edward VI, Elizabeth's brother, trading connections were established with Moscow in Russia.



Joint-Stock Companies under Elizabeth I

Whilst some attempts had been made to establish new areas to trade with under the previous Tudor monarchs, the true birth of trade around the world began under Elizabeth I.

This increase in trade was pushed by the development of the joint-stock company. These companies were often backed with money from high-ranking Elizabethan **courtiers**. In 1592 the Levant Company was established to trade for luxury goods like cotton, wine, silk and currants with the **Ottoman Empire** (in the area of modern day Turkey). In 1585 the Barbary Company was given royal backing to trade English cloth and weapons for sugar with Sultan Ahmad al-Mansur's Morocco. Elizabeth also gave royal permission for the East India Company to be established in 1600 to trade for the luxury goods of silk and spices in Asia.



Privateering and Exploration

The Elizabethan **Privateers** tried to raid Spanish shipping around the Spanish Empire in the Caribbean and central and south America. They also attempted to secretly trade with the Spanish colonists in this area. In 1562 Sir John Hawkins sailed to Guinea on the coast of West Africa. Here Hawkins kidnapped between 300 - 500 people before trying to sell them into enslavement in the Spanish colonies. This failed when the Spanish colonists refused to trade with Hawkins because he was English.

Another **Privateer** who tried to break into the 'New World' was Sir Walter Raleigh. He received funding from Elizabeth I and Francis Walsingham to set up a **colony** and trading post in north America at Roanoke.



Eventually the Roanoke colony failed. The failure was caused by a combination of poor luck, poor organisation and the disruption to supply routes. However, the colony did provide the first contact between the English and the Native Americans. The first English images of America came from this failed mission.

Whilst the Elizabethans failed to **colonise** America, James I would finish what Elizabeth had started. Jamestown, Virginia was established in 1607, four years after the death of Elizabeth. The first settlers of Jamestown (including the famous Captain John Smith) were convinced they'd find a land dripping with gold and abundant in resources and food.



Glossary

Colonise - Take over an area outside of your country.

Colony - An area settled by people from another country, often involving force.

Courtiers - Important, wealthy Elizabethans who lived with Elizabeth in her palaces.

Enclosure - The placing of hedges or fences around areas of land everyone had previously used to make large sheep farms.

Ottoman Empire - A large Empire near to modern day Turkey ruled by Sultan Murad III.

Privateer - Similar to a pirate but had the backing of the Queen.



Comprehension Questions

1. Why was it important for the Elizabethans to move beyond the cloth trade?
2. Where had the Tudors begun to trade before the reign of Elizabeth?
3. What is a joint-stock company?
4. What items did the Elizabethans want from the Ottoman Empire and Morocco?
5. Challenge: Were the Elizabethan attempts to trade and explore the 'New World' of the Caribbean and America successful?

