Who was Mary, Queen of Scots?

Mary was Elizabeth I’s cousin. Mary had been brought up as a strict Catholic. Her father, James V of Scotland, died when she was one. At such a young age, the Scottish lords found it difficult to respect her and, by 1548, Mary was sent to France for her own safety. She was married to Francis, the son of Henry II, but was widowed at the age of 17 and returned to Scotland to be queen aged 18 in 1561. She married her cousin Darnley and had a child, James. Mary’s subsequent and unpopular marriage to Earl Bothwell caused an uprising in which she was forced to give up her throne for her son. She fled to England for safety but spent 19 years in prison there until her death.

Why was Mary a threat?

Mary, Queen of Scots, threatened the relative religious stability that Elizabeth had established in which personal religious beliefs were private and tolerated so long as one was loyal to the Crown. As a Catholic, Mary might become a focus for all the Catholics who existed in England and a leader for them. In 1570, she received backing of the Pope.

There were some who believed that the marriage between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn had been illegal. Catholics certainly did not recognise Henry’s divorce from the Catholic Catherine of Aragon and there were rumours that Henry had married Anne before his divorce had actually come through. Therefore, if the marriage was illegal, Elizabeth was illegitimate and had no right to the throne. If Elizabeth had no right to the throne, the nearest legal heir to the English throne was Mary, Queen of Scots. Though most people would have not supported this, it could have acted as an incentive for the Catholics in England to rebel against Elizabeth and put Mary onto the throne.

Anglo-Spanish Relations

Elizabeth

What were the causes of the Spanish Armada?

In retaliation for Elizabeth’s military support for the Netherlands and the execution of the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots, Phillip planned an expedition to invade England to overthrow the Protestant regime of Elizabeth and end English attacks on Spanish trade and settlements in the New World. The King was supported by Pope Sixtus V, who treated the invasion as a crusade, with the promise of a subsidy should the Armada make land.

The Spanish Armada was flawed by a raid on Cadiz, led by Francis Drake in April 1587, had captured or destroyed some thirty ships and great quantities of supplies, setting preparations back by a year. Philip’s plan that the Duke of Parma would then follow with a large army from the Low Countries crossing the English Channel was flawed as it prevented any possibility of surprise and result incurred, and advised Philip to postpone or abandon it. The Armada's appointed commander was the highly experienced Álvaro de Bazán, Marquis of Santa Cruz, but he died in February 1588, and the Duke of Medina Sidonia, a high-born courtier, took his place. While a competent soldier and distinguished administrator, Medina Sidonia had no naval experience. He wrote to Philip expressing grave doubts about the planned campaign but this was prevented from reaching the King by courtiers on the grounds that God would ensure the Armada’s success.