Essex’s Rebellion

In 1595, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, was appointed Privy Councillor. One group supported Essex, the other group supported William Cecil and his son Robert Cecil. Essex was ambitious but arrogant. He wanted more power and influence. Before this, he had been a favourite in the Privy Council. He had been awarded a monopoly on the sweet wine trade. He was a rival of Robert Cecil who was the son of William Cecil.

Essex had successfully led the forces which attacked the Spanish port Cadiz in 1596. When he returned, an argument ensued about Ireland, resulting in Elizabeth hitting him on the head after he turned his body away from her before going to draw his sword. He had to be restrained by fellow courtiers, and was placed under house arrest.

1599, he was made Lord of Ireland. He was sent to Ireland but failed to deal with the rebellion there, made a truce with the Irish rebel leader, completely against Elizabeth’ wishes and fell out of favour. He lost his sweet wine monopoly, and with it power and influence. This caused him problems due to his large debts. Because of his fall from favour, he gathered forces to lead a rebellion. He took four privy councillors hostage in February 1601. He marched with them to his house along with 200 supporters. His rival Robert Cecil labelled him a traitor, and many of his supporters deserted him and released the hostages. Essex was arrested along with his remaining supporters. He was executed in private on February 25th 1601. This was the final challenge to Elizabeth’s authority and it was defeated easily.