The period 1485–1603 is called the Tudor period in English history. The five English monarchs of that period came from the Tudor family. It was a time of enormous change in England.

Religion

Before King Henry VIII, England was a Catholic country. Henry wanted to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and marry Anne Boleyn, but the Pope didn’t permit it. So, in 1534, Henry changed the religion in England. England became a Protestant country. The Pope didn’t have any power over Protestant countries, so Henry got his divorce. There were lots of Catholic monasteries in England at that time. They were very rich. Henry closed the monasteries, and took their treasures and their land. Today there are ruins of abbeys and monasteries in many parts of England.

Glossary

Pope: Papa
Treasures: tesori, ricchezze
Land: terra
Ruins: rovine
Abbeys: abbazie

1. Why did Henry VIII change England’s religion?
2. What did he do to Catholic monasteries in England?
Exploration

During the reign of Elizabeth I, the navy was very important. It defended England in a war with Spain. Elizabeth also paid her navy captains to discover new territories, new products and treasure. Sir Walter Raleigh was one of these explorers. He sailed to America in 1578 and claimed land there. People called Elizabeth ‘The Virgin Queen’, and Raleigh named a part of America, Virginia, in her honour! He brought home gold and other presents from his expeditions. He also brought potatoes and tobacco to England for the first time. But Raleigh wasn’t popular after the Tudor period: in 1618, the new monarch executed him!

Glossary

navy  
marina

claimed  
reclamò, rivendicò

executed  
giustiziò

3 What food did Walter Raleigh bring to England for the first time?
4 How did he die?
Culture

Art, architecture, music and literature were all important in the Tudor period. The theatre was very popular with rich and poor people. There were lots of theatres in London. The Globe, next to the River Thames, was one of the most popular. William Shakespeare was an actor and a writer there. Elizabeth I loved the theatre and gave a lot of money to artists and writers. She was a fan of Shakespeare and she often watched his plays. Shakespeare was rich and famous when he died in 1616. A lot of people think that he is the best writer of all time.

5 What was the name of Shakespeare’s theatre?
6 Which Tudor monarch helped Shakespeare?