

Wealth in Elizabethan England

Story

Create a title for each paragraph.

The article below examines the story of

Summarise each paragraph in 1 or 2 bullet points.

Elizabethan England is remembered as a time of prosperity and wealth, when England went through a 'golden age'. The wealthiest in society were members of the **nobility** and **gentry**. The nobility inherited their wealth, land and titles such as Duke, Earl and Sir. Sometimes members of the gentry were granted titles by the Queen (such as Sir Francis Drake, who was knighted for his successful and fruitful circumnavigation of the globe). Some members of the gentry were actually wealthier than members of the nobility, but still remained beneath them socially.

It was commonplace for the wealthy of Elizabethan England to show off their wealth. Women wore rich coloured dresses with bodices that gave them wide shoulders and tiny waists. This was finished off with a ruff, which was an exaggerated collar fashionable in Elizabethan England. Men also wore ruffs, accompanied by breeches made of silk and stockings. Your social status determined what styles and colours you could wear, according to the **Sumptuary Laws**.

The gentry began building large manor houses as a way to display their wealth. These houses included long galleries filled with tapestries, coats of arms, large gardens to entertain guests and large windows. Hardwick Hall, built by Bess of Hardwick was said to be "more glass than wall". These houses were built in the new renaissance style and were used to impress the queen as she toured England during **progresses**.

The wealthy in society benefitted from the 'golden age' of Elizabethan England and showed their wealth widely. However this level of prosperity was reserved for those at the very top; only 5% of the population enjoyed this privilege. The vast majority of those in Elizabethan England were peasants or merchants and were required to work for a living.

Source



Depiction of wealthy Elizabethan fashion.



Hardwick Hall, built in 1597 by Elizabeth Countess of Shrewsbury..

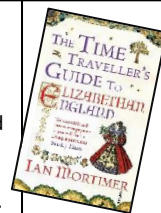
"On the table was placed a centre-piece, which represented a green lawn, surrounded with large peacocks' feathers and green branches, to which were tied violets and other sweet-smelling flowers. In the middle of this lawn a fortress was placed, covered with silver. This was hollow, and formed a sort of cage, in which several live birds were shut up, their tufts and feet being gilt. On its tower, which was gilt, three banners were placed, one bearing the arms of the count, the two others those of Mesdemoiselles de Châteaubrun and de Villequier, in whose honour the feast was given."

A description of an Elizabethan banquet, 1577 from Holinshed's Chronicles

Scholarship

"Rich and powerful as the nobility are, it is the gentry who run England. [...] You begin to get a sense of the gentry's position when you compare their total wealth with that of the nobility. Barons, earl and other lords (the nobility) have a combined wealth of "220,000 in 1600. The income of the gentry is at least ten times as much, if not twenty times. And wealth is not the limit of their influence [...] In the words of Sir Walter Raleigh "The gentry are garrisons of good order throughout the realm."

Ian Mortimer, 'The Time Traveller's Guide to Elizabethan England.'



"Observers became conscious in the later years of Elizabeth, of an alteration in the balance of social forces. [...] It's theme was the changing composition, at once erosion and reconstruction, of the upper strata of the social pyramid."

Tawney also wrote that this period saw a rise in the educated gentry, who used the House of Commons to air their political views. Their rise in power was accompanied by a decline in the power of the old aristocracy.

R.H. Tawney, 'The Rise of the Gentry 1558-1640' (1941)

Task 1

Read through the **story** of the wealthy in Elizabethan society. For each paragraph, you need to create a 'title' on one side, and a short summary (two bullet points maximum) on the other.

Task 2

Look at **source** A, B, and C. In your book, write a short description of the message of each source. Then answer the question "**how did the wealthy in Elizabethan England display their wealth?**"

Task 3

Read through the **scholarship** about the wealth in Elizabethan England. Highlight what you think are the three most important sentences. In your book, answer the question "**How do historians think link wealth with power in Elizabethan England?**"