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Princess Elizabeth was living at Hatfield House, in Hertfordshire, on the day she learned that her half-sister, Queen Mary I, had died. Henry VIII's younger daughter would now become Queen of England. This image depicts the old palace, at Hatfield, and its ever-beautiful gardens. Photo copyright, Enduring Gardener, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new visitors with the [Enduring Gardener](#) website.

Life for Princess Elizabeth was difficult during her sister's reign. Imprisoned in the Tower of London, for a period of time, she feared for her life. Although she professed undying devotion to Mary, who named Elizabeth as her successor shortly before her death, the sisters were never close.

Elizabeth spent most of her childhood at Hatfield House, her beloved home in Hertfordshire. She was there, in the fall of 1558, when courtiers from London (about twenty miles away) called on her.

It is said Elizabeth was sitting under an oak tree, on the 17th of November, when her visitors bowed and told her she was now Queen. History records that when she learned the news, Elizabeth sank to her knees and, in Latin, said:

This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Elizabeth's trusted friend, William Cecil, was with her on that day. He would remain her most important advisor until his death, forty years later. And it would be his family, and the Cecil name, which would thereafter be attached to Hatfield House.

Three days later, on November 20th, Elizabeth assembled her councilors in Hatfield's Great Hall. The twenty-five-year-old woman spoke first to William Cecil:

I give you this charge, that you shall be of my Privy Council and content yourself to take pains for me and my realm. This judgement I have of you that you will not be corrupted by any manner of gift, and that you will be faithful to the state, and that without respect of my private will, you will give me that counsel that you think best, and if you shall know anything necessary to be declared to me of secrecy, you shall show it to myself only. And assure yourself I will not fail to keep taciturnity therein, and therefore herewith I charge you. (Elizabeth Regina, First Speech, National Archives, London.)

The councilors assembled at Hatfield would have included Mary's advisors. Using good judgment, Elizabeth addressed *them* as well as her own councilors:

My lords, the law of nature moves me to sorrow for my sister; the burden that is fallen upon me makes me amazed, and yet, considering I am God's creature, ordained to obey His appointment, I will thereto yield, desiring from the bottom of my heart that I may have assistance of His grace to be the minister of His heavenly will in this office now committed to me.

And as I am but one body naturally considered [that is, the ruler as a person], though by His permission a body politic to govern [that is, the ruler as a monarch], so I shall desire you all, my lords ... to be assistant to me, that I with my ruling and you with your service may make a good account to Almighty God and leave some comfort to our posterity on earth ... my meaning is to require of you all nothing more but faithful hearts in such service as from time to time shall be in your powers toward the preservation of me and this commonwealth.

Then, to those she was about to send packing, words of caution:

And they which I shall not appoint, let them not think the same for any disability in them, but for that I do consider a multitude does make rather discord and confusion than good counsel. And of my goodwill you shall not doubt, using yourselves as appertains to good and loving subjects.

Put differently, Elizabeth was now in charge. And even though she was a woman, she intended to control the affairs of state in a manner which she deemed best.

Two months later, Elizabeth Tudor was crowned Queen on the 15th of January, 1559. She would reign nearly forty-five years.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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Media Stream

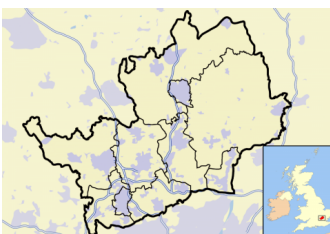


Hatfield House - Elizabeth's Childhood Home

Image online, courtesy essentialtravelguide.com website.

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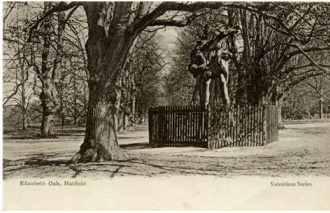


Map Pinpointing Hertfordshire

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Elizabeth's Oak Tree

Image online, courtesy the hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk website.

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William Cecil - Elizabeth's Most Trusted Friend and Advisor

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Front View of Hatfield House

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Panoramic View of Hatfield House

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The Great Hall of Hatfield House

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Coronation Portrait of Queen Elizabeth

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ELIZABETH BECOMES QUEEN

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Accession of Elizabeth I

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Original broadcast, 1971. DVD released, October 16, 2001.

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Elizabeth I - Coronation at Westminster Abbey

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