**Sir Walter Raleigh.**

**His background.**

He was born in 1552, during a time when his father leased Hayes Barton from the Duke family of Otterton. He was half brother to [Sir Humphrey](http://www.nps.gov/fora/gilbert.htm) and Sir John Gilbert, from his mother's first marriage. He had a brother, Carew, and sister, Margaret.

The spelling used in those days was rather erratic and thus "Raleigh" is just one of the (over 40) ways in which his surname was written. He used numerous of these spellings, with "Rawleigh", "Ralegh" and "Rawley" being more often used than the currently accepted version. His name was pronounced "raw lie" and it is said he is never known to have used the modern "Raleigh" spelling.

He is known to have attended church in East Budleigh. The nearby sea-side town of [Budleigh Salterton](http://www.devon.gov.uk/econeuro/tourism/visitor/towns/budlei-a.html) is the setting for the painting ["The boyhood of Raleigh"](http://www.tate.org.uk/coll/cchtm/n01691_c.htm) by Millais (on show at the Tate Gallery, although from May 20th. to September 30th., 2000 it will be in an exhibition about Raleigh at the [Fairlynch Museum](http://www.devon.gov.uk/eal/museums/edevon/fairlynch.htm), Budleigh Salterton). Since it was painted in 1870 it's not surprising that the wall still exists.

He was quite tall (six foot) considering that the average height was lower then than now. He is said to have retained his strong Devonshire accent during all his time at Court. In those days a regional accent was not such a disadvantage as it has been of late.

During his early life, from 1553 to 1558, Queen Mary I was on the throne. This was a time when the Roman Catholic church was in favour. Although a large part of the population had previously become Protestants, those who were most open about it were persecuted. To quote from the ["Five English Reformers"](http://members.wbs.net/homepages/j/o/h/johnowen/burned.htm) by J.C. Ryle in 1890 *"Mary was not called "Bloody Mary" without reason.....during the last four years of Queen Mary's reign no less than 288 persons were burnt at the stake for their adhesion to the Protestant faith".*  
Raleigh's parents knew one woman, called [Agnes Prest](http://www.devon.gov.uk/tourism/gif/exeter/pic00003.jpg), who was martyred at Exeter.  
His father narrowly escaped being killed by taking refuge in a church tower.  
Riots were common, with one at Exeter illustrated [here.](http://www.devon.gov.uk/library/locstudy/1549exe.html)  
It is understandable that Raleigh grew up with a hatred of the Catholic Church and, when Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558, he was open to express it.

In 1581, after seeing action on a number of occasions, he became a favourite of Queen Elizabeth the first. There is little to confirm the famous story of how he spread his cloak across a puddle so that the Queen could walk over it, except for the cloak included in his coat of arms.

He became Captain of the Guard and his part in foiling the "Babington" conspiracy ended up with him owning a 42,000 acre estate in Ireland. The "Babington" conspiracy was aimed at replacing Queen Elizabeth with Mary, Queen of Scots. Since she was implicated in it, this led to Mary's execution.

Raleigh replaced the chimneys of his Youghal home, with some more like those at his birthplace, Hayes Barton.

In 1585 he was made Governor of Jersey. While there, he built "[Elizabeth Castle](http://www.jerseyheritagetrust.org/museums/elizabeth/history.html)" on a rocky islet, in the 1590s.  
Other records say he was Governor there between 1600 and 1603 and merely arranged an extension to, and renaming of, the castle. There is [another page](http://www.jerseyheritagetrust.org/fazers/I%20name%20this%20Castle.htm) available with information prepared by local children.

See my separate page on [Raleigh's attempts at the colonisation of America](http://www.britishexplorers.com/woodbury/raleigh1.html) which took place at this time.

**Missing the Armada.**

Raleigh arranged for the construction of one of the ships involved in fighting the Armada. "The Ark Royal" weighed 800 tons and was completed in 1587. It had four masts and a normal crew of 270. The Treasury was very short of money to finance a fleet to fight the Armada. Thus Raleigh donated the ship in exchange for an I.O.U. of £5,000. The "Ark Royal" was chosen to lead the English fleet against the [Armada](http://www.starnet.demon.co.uk/hawkins/pah/chap4.html) in 1588. It was rebuilt in 1608 and renamed "Anne Royal". It was finally sunk due to an accident, in 1636.  
My thanks to Richard Griffin for the picture on the right. Click on it for a larger version (187 Kbytes).  
There have been four further Ark Royals since then. The following links have details of the versions -