BathAbbey

Queen Elizabeth I

The monastery attached to Bath Abbey was closed in 1539 by King Henry VIII and by 1572, the Abbey was in such a bad state that church services had to be held outdoors in the market place.

Queen Elizabeth I (who was on the throne from 1558 to 1603) gave her permission for the Abbey to become the main parish church in Bath. This meant that money could be raised to repair it.

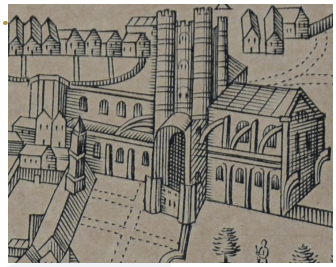
The Queen knew how damaged the Abbey was. She wrote: "the whole of the church is falling down — even the chancel [where the clergymen and choir sat] is ruinous".

All the metal including the church bells, plus the glass in the windows had been taken and sold when the monastery was closed. There was no roof left so there was no protection from the weather. Stone blocks had been taken for other buildings.

This stone angel was carved high up on a wall in the Abbey. The letters ER stand for Elizabeth Regina (which means Queen in Latin). It was put on display in a wreck of a building that had grass growing up amongst the tombs. Perhaps it was put there to show that, now the Queen had given her support, the church would definitely be restored.

LIZABETH by the grace of God Queene of Englande, Fraunce, and Ireland, defendour of the faythe, &c. To all and singular Archbyshops, Byshops, Deanes, Archdeacons, & other Officials perfons Vicares, Curates, Mynifters, and to all other fpirituall perfons whatfoeuer they be, and alfo to all & fingular Juftices of peace, Maiors, Shirriffes, Bayliffes, Conftables, Pedbaiughes, Churchwardens, Tythyngmen, and all other our Officers minifters & fubiectes, to whō theſe preſentes ſhal come, greeting. Wheras vor lōde humble fute made vnto vs by diuers of our Nobilitie, and many others of great credite, & ſpecially of the moſt humble deſire and zealous fute of the Maior & Citizens of our Citie of Bathe, haue giuen licence to newe builde and erect one Church, vpon the foundations of the late Abbey Church of the late diſſolued Monaſtery of Bathe, for the encouping of ſuch of the Nobilitie, and other our ſubiectes as reſort or ſhall from tyme to tyme haue occaſions to reſiote to that Citie, there to haue conuenient place to heare Sermons, and other diuine ſeruice, which cannot conueniently be in any other Church within our ſayd Citie, for the ſmalneſs of the townes buildinges of the ſame. And therefore for lacke of conuenient townes in the now Churches within our ſayd Citie, the Sermons haue bin made in the open market place there, beyng not mete nor conuenient for ſuch pur-

Some repair work did then take place, but much more money was needed. So, in 1573, Queen Elizabeth signed a proclamation. This was an order to people all over the country to make donations to the Abbey for 7 years.



The Queen visited Bath in 1574 for a service to celebrate the reopening of the building, although it still wasn't completely finished. If you look closely, this picture from about that time shows some of the roof still missing. The Queen's visit would have been very grand and expensive. She brought lots of people with her and records show that she usually travelled with 300 carts full of household items including furniture, curtains, clothes and food. It took many more years, but the new Abbey was finally finished by about 1617, nearly 80 years after Henry VIII's decision to close the monastery.

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Activity ideas

1. Important documents were often decorated with illuminated letters. Leaves, patterns, faces and other details were added, sometimes using silver and gold ink. Use these examples to help you design your own letter below.
2. Imagine you are a Queen or King writing a proclamation (an order to your subjects) to raise money for a good cause. What cause will you choose? Why is it important to you? You can write your proclamation below, with an illuminated letter at the top if you like.
3. Records show that Queen Elizabeth's visit to Bath cost £373. Use this website to find out approximately how much money that would be today: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter

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