



Press Release

19 March 2003

400th Anniversary of Virgin Queen's Death Commemorated at The Public Record Office

Queen Elizabeth I died in Richmond 400 years ago next week. The once vivacious Queen had been suffering from a combination of insomnia and rheumatism and in her final hour would accept no medical assistance. Her death in Richmond Palace on the **24 March 1603** was a turning point in the country's rule. Her successor, James VI of Scotland, became James I – the first monarch of the United Kingdom.

The Public Record Office (PRO) in Kew, which contains the main official archive on the life and reign of Elizabeth I, is holding a series of events to commemorate the life of this world-renowned monarch. A fascinating free exhibition of letters, portraits and maps relating to the monarch will be held in the PRO Museum from Saturday 8 March to Wednesday 11 June. Visitors can come and examine the records and find out about the woman behind the icon. Was she a Virgin Queen and Defender of the Faith or Protestant tyrant? Come to the exhibition and decide for yourself.

Documents at the PRO record Elizabeth's life in minute detail. They show her personal response to her arrest for treason and imprisonment in the Tower of London, threats to her life and realm, the prospect of marriage, as well as the daily grind of governing England, Wales and Ireland for 45 years. Personal documents range from letters to her family and her favourites, to her own Latin translations of Boethius, Horace and Plutarch, the work of her sixties. Portraits at the PRO, commissioned each year to decorate the plea rolls of the Court of Queen's Bench, show the queen developing from a young woman known to the court officials, to an icon far above them.

To mark the anniversary, a new PRO book is published on 24 March featuring many colour illustrations of the original documents. *Elizabeth I – The Golden Reign of Gloriana* tells the story of Elizabeth's life using historical documents whose highlights include: Queen Elizabeth's

pleas to her sister, Queen Mary, just before she went to the Tower; her evasive response to the pressure for her to marry; and her fury at Mary Queen of Scots' marriage to a possible murderer.

Benjamin Wooley, the best-selling biographer, will also give a talk about John Dee, Queen Elizabeth's astrologer, on Thursday 5 June at 7pm. Dee cast horoscopes for Elizabeth and even selected the day for her coronation. The lecture will explore the life and achievements of one of the most fascinating figures of the Elizabethan court, a man who had expertise in a range of fields from astrology to navigation. The event will last approximately one hour. Tickets are £5, concessions £4.

Visitors can gain free access to the Elizabeth I documents and to millions of other intriguing records at the PRO by visiting Kew and Islington, or by visiting the website at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

(ends)

Notes for Editors:

- The Public Record Office, the national archive of England, Wales and the United Kingdom, will combine with the Historical Manuscripts Commission on 2 April 2003 to become The National Archives.
- Web address:
To 1 April: www.pro.gov.uk ; From 2 April: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
- The PRO is open to the public to carry out research 6 days a week. It holds over 8 million documents spanning 1000 years, including sources for family history research.
- If you have any enquiries about these events or would like digital images please contact the Interpretation team tel: 020 83925202 or e-mail events@nationalarchives.gov.uk
- If you have any enquiries about the book, *Elizabeth I - The Golden Reign of Gloriana*, by David Loades published by the Public Record Office, please contact 020 8392 5271 or email nora.talty-nangle@nationalarchives.gov.uk
- General press enquiries should be addressed to press@nationalarchives.gov.uk or telephone 020 8392 5277.