

Raleigh400 - 6th Form Event: Documents Guide

Walter Raleigh – Living in Interesting Times

- The way he is remembered now is shrouded in myth and legend.
- This ensures that it can be difficult to find the real man, because his memory has been shaped by different factors which occurred after his death.
- The main point is that our ability to accurately reconstruct Raleigh's life is made difficult by the myriad ways his memory was constructed following his death, as such narratives have had a powerful influence over later interpretations of his career.
- He was born into the Devon gentry in the 1550s – he was not a commoner, rather this was a tool of disparagement employed by later royalists, even if some contemporaries did comment on the speed of his rise in Elizabeth's court.
- It is true that he lacked wider family relationships at court (such as others might use to elevate themselves, in the traditional way of noble networks), and so he relied more directly on Elizabeth's patronage than others, but he was far from an upstart – he was also related to an adventurer with links to the Earl of Leicester
- Yet, the exact relationship between Raleigh and Elizabeth is hard to trace, as it is largely viewed through poetry (which can be seen to be more personal than it really is – rather it follows certain formulaic forms).
- Much is also anecdote/myth – for example his laying of his cloak over a puddle for the Queen, which is recorded by only one, later author, and its inclusion in his text had a clear purpose of demonstrating how courtiers should be dedicated to their monarchs.
- On the other hand, the relationship between Raleigh and James I is seen as one of mutual dislike – it is possible that he joined a rebellion against the king, though equally this could be a fiction created to legitimise his execution.

Britannia Rules the Waves

- Raleigh's memory and reputation came at an important moment for the creation of a British Empire: thus, he now became a trail blazer for Britain's global and imperial aims. He was seen as a figure who preceded global consumption and saw Britain use its naval superiority to extend its power over the world, especially against the machinations of Spain.
- Key to note here is how historical myths/stories can evolve around figures who did (or are seen to have done) big things.
- Raleigh was now a swashbuckling, ambitious man, who courted the favour of the City and the crown – a privateer with Global ambitions. In this, he was one of many, as interest in the New World grew in competition with other European powers.
- Part of this identity honed in on English naval strength, and the use of privateering expeditions to fund settlements in the New World (because few wished to risk their own resources on this) – this peaked for Raleigh in 1585 when he was knighted and given permission to fund an expedition to the Americas. He did so through financial aid brought by William Sanderson, an Elizabethan entrepreneur who specialised in such expeditions (and was part of the Fishmongers' Guild), married Raleigh's daughter, and had an interest in geographical/navigational knowledge.
- Raleigh ended up greatly indebted to Sanderson – to a staggering degree: this shows the role of Livery men, but also the huge financial risks such ventures entailed.
- This latter point is demonstrated in the failure of Raleigh's Virginia colony, which he never visited, as war with Spain diverted resources and at this point efforts at colonisation focused on short term gains, rather than the realities of infrastructure required when setting up long-term settlements.

Raleigh and the Drapers

- Raleigh's involvement with the Drapers was also important.
- The Drapers controlled the sale and production of cloth, while they were also linked to merchant adventurers. Their biggest ties were to Antwerp (where the cloth was processed/sold) until the collapse of that market in the 1550s.
- After this point they began to diversify, with members looking to expand into north-western Europe (Germany) but also Russia. This might be disrupted by warfare, such as the Anglo-Spanish war.
- This diversification meant a move away from just cloth, becoming more general in trades. Thus, they sought to tap into markets in Russia but also to reach China (via the Americas) – thus we see members of the Drapers joining the company of Merchant Adventurers from the 1560s onwards
- Trade also grew with Scandinavia and the Levant, as well as Iberia, North Africa (Barbary coast) and the West Indies – so they established a very diverse profile in response to Antwerp's collapse, even this needs to be understood not as a singular, company-wide effort, rather the activities of its members.
- We also see involvement in colonialization activities, such as in Virginia and Ulster – with the former linked to an earlier effort to set up a settlement at Chesapeake Bay by Raleigh (1580s). In 1606, members of the Drapers involved in establishing colonies in Plymouth and Jamestown, Virginia, with Draper funds diverted to support these. The initial attempts failed, but later ones (which the Drapers very involved with) were attempted until 1624, at which point the charter allowing the colony was revoked due to problems with the Native Americans and the Spanish (at which point the Crown took over control).
- The Ulster plantation was more successful, as surplus London population sent there, and again the Drapers were very involved. However, returns were slow to come and the setting up of these colonies had long-term cultural and political implications.
- Key to note that the Drapers were always outward-looking, and they were willing (if not always as willingly as other times) to invest in the activities of their members in order to make gains in the increasingly global networks of trade and exploration.
- Outlines how the Irish colonies were established through the seizing of lands from rebellious Irish lords, especially Catholic ones, and then settlers were brought over to create new settlements and structures.
- However, the City's investment had to be extracted quite vigorously: even if the potential dividends were massive, these were still risky ventures.
- The Drapers also had to pay into the defence and captures of certain ports through loans to the crown (so it's expensive business).
- In the end, the investment in colonial ventures was seen as more of an ideological one of spreading English power than an economic one, hence the companies had to be induced into joining with a mixture of mercantile opportunities and notions of civic good. It was also tied into growing 'global' markets, through selling luxury goods on the international stage – as companies more interested in commodities than lands.
- Involvement in the plantations also linked to London's overcrowding – resettlement of the urban poor (a common theme of colonialism) through settlements founded and build by the companies, but also the production of food stuffs that could alleviate shortages within the city (thus the civic duty).
- Key to note that the Drapers were outward-looking.

Raleigh in Ireland

- Important also to note that attempts to colonise Ireland served as a template for the Americas.
- Even though settlement was predicated on the confiscation of Irish lords' lands, the broader Irish attitude to the foundation of the plantations varied, with some fairly ambivalent to it, and the extent to which we see large scale migration into Ireland is hard to trace, for the Irish seem to have been very involved in the plantations.
- Indeed, it proved hard to attract settlers, meaning many of those who populated the plantations were Irish.
- English war tactics used to quell opposition were particularly violent, using scorched earth policies as well as massacres (at times heightened by religious divides) – this had a particularly strong impact on the Irish rural populace, causing famine and death.
- Raleigh's specific involvement is shrouded in myth – he is viewed as brave, cunning, but also violent (e.g. he ambushed an Irish force and executed them). Often this is couched in traditional terms of performative masculinity, but it is likely that he was involved in the execution of a large body of captured papal troops and Irish supporters, which seems to have numbered in the hundreds.
- Despite his efforts to promote migration, Raleigh's own plantation struggled to attract settlers, for the lands were too fragmented and an Irish rebellion forced many English to flee. Thus, by 1602 he sold up to an Irish Earl and Raleigh moved on to other ventures.
- However, his interest in Ireland needs to be linked more broadly into global efforts – a step towards the Atlantic world and the Americas – which he hoped to fund in this way. Raleigh can thus be seen travelling around using his skills and experience in different areas to benefit his career (so entrepreneurial).
- Sense also that these activities would bring civilising/modernising process to the Irish through the urbanisation of the island, even if the reality was that security remained a big problem. Important also to note that attitudes towards the Irish were much like those deployed against the Native Americans.
- Yet, the differences between the two zones are important – one was about religious stability, the other primarily for economic profit.

El Dorado

- In 1595, Raleigh set out to find El Dorado, the fabled lost city of Gold in the Orinoco Basin (modern-day Guyana and Venezuela).
- He had heard accounts of this from the Spanish, and using William Sanderson's funds once more (which eventually caused a rift between the two men), he set out. He began by seizing Trinidad from the Spanish, before travelling up the Orinoco River, again conflicting with the Spanish and also befriending the Pemon tribe.
- He failed to find the city, though, and returned home empty-handed, though he published a book, *Discovery of Guiana*, designed to raise funds from the City for subsequent ventures by promoting the potential returns.
- By now, though, he had fallen out of favour, as his relationship to James I was hostile. After becoming embroiled in a plot against the king, he was imprisoned in the Tower in 1602 until 1617.
- Upon his release, he again set out to find El Dorado, but after again skirmishing with the Spanish (with whom James now sought peace), Raleigh was again imprisoned and this time was executed for treason (for not abiding by demand to not attack the Spanish). He was executed in Westminster in October 1618.

Raleigh – 400 Years On

- His legacy is multifaceted.
- He is part of England's national story due to his closeness to Elizabeth, his role in colonisation, and his popularisation of the myth of El Dorado.
- Yet, much of what we 'know' is fantasy and deliberately fashioned myths, meaning we need to read accounts of his life and, most importantly, those sources which are in his own words, with caution and care, not at face value. Indeed, from this emerges a different man.
- He was less the swashbuckling, romantic adventurer (ideas shaped by later imperial ideals), rather he was a man of letters who used his skills to situate himself at the heart of Elizabethan political life. He was also an entrepreneur, albeit not in the modern sense: rather, he pursued wealth relentlessly across various theatres, using personal alliances (not the commercial mechanisms of the City and the Livery Companies) to fund activities and investing much of his own income.
- One key lesson is to consider the ways in which men like Raleigh can teach us of the need for ethical actions in the modern global world, of avoiding oppression and not acting with only thought for profit.

Plantation of Derry

- Looks to establish a new plantation in Derry to be run by the City of London – the involvement of the Crown shows how important it is seen that this be undertaken
- Need to induce them to take part in this through lands, attractive rates of tax/rent, descriptions of all of the rich produce that might be found there – suggests apprehension on behalf of the City
- Calls on the City to consider it from a charitable perspective – the resources extracted from Derry will help to feed the poor and thus ensure they're able to fulfil their civic duties
- We can see how many ways that the Derry Plantation would be beneficial – food, animal products, ship-building materials, tools, fishing/hunting rights, pearls etc. – so vast economic potential.
- Emphasis on the defensibility of these sites (which shows the potential fragility of the region)
- Plus, it notes how (i.e. in fishing) it would allow London to compete with/surpass the Dutch, Spanish, Bristol.
- Demonstrates the shipping/trading networks of the Irish Sea (through to Scotland and the rest of Ireland) and the Atlantic (through to Spain and even Newfoundland).