

Queen Elizabeth Slept Here; Gloriana's East Anglian Progress 1578

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Wendy had taught history at a secondary school before becoming a director at Sulgrave Manor where Henry VIII had once stayed. She is now a lecturer with WEA. In the Elizabethan Age the countryside was a quiet place, so the impact of the noise of horses and carts approaching in vast numbers would have been immense. The colours of the costumes would have been a spectacle.

A Progress was an opportunity for the monarch to meet and greet the people. This is still done by Elizabeth II and it was her predecessor Elizabeth I who invented the walkabout. Elizabeth I never went further west than Somerset or further north than Stafford. Essex was the most visited county. The number of nights away from London for each county is given in brackets. 1st Essex (67), 2nd Kent (55), 3rd Hampshire (55), 4th Surrey (49), 15th Suffolk (13), 17th Norfolk (9) and 19th Cambridgeshire (7).

The Progress of 1578 was well documented. There were various reasons making the journey.

1. To allow palaces to be cleaned. At court there were over 1,000 people. In the summer, when Progresses took place, the moats and rivers would stink. About a dozen Royal palaces along the Thames were used most of the year.
2. To avoid the plague. In 1563 over 20,000 people died in London. The plague returned in 1578-79, 1582, 1592-93 and 1603. Those fleeing the city took the plague with them. Before Elizabeth visited, towns and villages had to confirm they were clear and during the Progress officials went ahead to check and the itinerary could be changed if necessary.
3. To be seen. People outside of court did not know what the queen looked like. She wanted to impress them with her wealth and to reassure the people that she was still alive and that the country was not at war.
4. To see and investigate. The queen was receiving reports from her staff about the state of the country, covering subjects such as the quality of the harvest. She could check the accuracy of these reports.
5. Tie the regions to the centre. A Progress was an opportunity for her courtiers to build up networks. In order to get a top job in a county, the recommendation of some-one at court was necessary. At the top of the network was the Duke of Norfolk, who was executed for treason, allowing the network to fall apart. The Progress to East Anglia took place a few years later and Elizabeth was able to see the state of the network and whether those involved were loyal.
6. To hunt.

7. The enjoy herself. Many of the entertainments laid on were symbolic in some way.

Much had to be decided when preparing for a Progress.

1. When. Progresses took place in summer, between June and September.
2. Where. This would depend on where there were families well connected at Court. Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex were the powerhouses of the economy through wool.
3. How to travel.
4. The route. The route had to provide accommodation fit for the Queen and have room for courtiers, her household, Privy Councillors, administrators and clerks and all their servants. This amounted to several hundred people plus their baggage and equipment. Early maps did not show roads, as people rode across open country.
5. How long it would last.
6. Special needs.
7. How it would be organised.
8. Cost.

The organisers were able to use past experience. The Queen had previously spent a total of four months on Essex and a week in Suffolk. She had never been to Norfolk. Advice would come from people who knew the region to be visited. It had to be possible to get from one overnight stop to another in one day, including a lunch stop.

In advance of a Progress, a party went out to inspect the route, and check out possible accommodation. Later, house owners were informed of the visit by harbingers and purveyors sorted out the food supply, fixing the price. The Gentlemen Ushers went into each house and made it ready. The queen's own curtains and bed hangings were hung. Because this had to be done at each house, two teams were involved, leapfrogging each other.

The East Anglian Progress involved 200-300 carts and 1,200-1,800 horses. Leaving from Havering, the Progress went to Latton, Standon, Audley End, Keddington, Melford, Bury, Euston, Kenninghall, Bracon Ash, Norwich, Kimberley, Wood Rising, Thetford, Hengrave, Chippenham, Kirtling, Horseheath, Ashdon, Thaxted, Little Hadham, Sawbridgeworth, Abbess Roding, Theydon Bois and Chigwell. Two nights were spent at Keddington. The Queen and Lord Burghley, with their households stayed at the hall, but the Earl of Leicester was nearby at Blunts Hall. Others were billeted out to surrounding minor manors. The business of Government continued and there was a much to-ing and fro-ing between houses. There was no set length of time for a Progress but this one lasted for 2 months.

Special needs of everyone involved had to be catered for. Meals and accommodation was according to status. The status groups were the Queen and her immediate household, the Privy Council, Administrators

and Clerks and then the servants. The lowest level people ate where they worked. Middle range people ate in the hall and the top level ate in the chamber. All meals were served from a communal kitchen. To accommodate everyone, tents were put up as well as temporary structures such as kitchens. Some house owners erected permanent buildings. Hosts were only expected to provide an empty, clean house. Everything needed was provided by the Royal Household. The Queen did not expect anyone to contribute more than could afford. Only those who overspent became bankrupt.

The accounts for Kirtling have survived, listing all the food, wine and ale. The French Ambassador attended the dinner so a special meal was provided, served by the local gentry. The cost to the Duke of Norfolk for the 3 days was £762, about £114,300 today.

Hosts included Privy Councillors such as the Earl of Leicester, senior peers such as the Earl of Surrey, senior office holders, merchants, minor gentry and towns such as Bury and Norwich. When visiting Thaxted, the Queen stayed at Horham Hall from the 7th to the 11th September. The owner of the hall was Sir John Cutts, a member of the new gentry.

At this point, Wendy ran out of time and had to stop. She had enough material prepared for another half hour, and I could have listened to her for that time as I found the talk interesting.