

Who Was Sir Walter Raleigh?

Sir Walter Raleigh was an English explorer, soldier and writer. At age 17, he fought with the French Huguenots and later studied at Oxford. He became a favourite of Queen Elizabeth after serving in her army in Ireland. He was knighted in 1585, and within two years became Captain of the Queen's Guard. Between 1584 and 1589, he helped establish a colony near Roanoke Island (present-day North Carolina), which he named Virginia. Accused of treason by King James I, Sir Walter Raleigh was imprisoned and eventually put to death.



When Was Sir Walter Raleigh Born?

Historians believe Walter Raleigh was born in 1552, or possibly 1554, and grew up in a farmhouse near the village of East Budleigh in Devon.

Early Life

The youngest of five sons born to Catherine Champermowne, his father, Walter Raleigh, was his mother's second husband. Like young Raleigh, his relatives, Sir Richard Grenville and Sir Humphry Gilbert were prominent during the reigns of [Elizabeth I](#) and James I. Raised as a devout Protestant, Raleigh's family faced persecution under Queen [Mary I](#), a Catholic, and as a result, young Raleigh developed a life-long hatred for Roman Catholicism.

Sir Walter Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth I

Between 1579 and 1583, Raleigh fought in the service of Queen Elizabeth I in Ireland. Tall, handsome and superbly self-confident, Raleigh rose rapidly at Elizabeth I's court upon his return and quickly became a favourite. She rewarded him with a large estate in Ireland, monopolies, trade privileges, a knighthood and the right to colonize North America. In 1586, he was appointed captain of the Queen's Guard, his highest office at court. Extravagant in his dress and conduct, the legend that he spread his expensive cloak over a puddle for the Queen has never been documented, but many historians believe him capable of such a gesture.

What Did Sir Walter Raleigh Discover?

An early supporter of colonizing North America, Raleigh sought to establish a colony. Between 1585 and 1588, he invested in a number of expeditions across the Atlantic, attempting to establish a colony near Roanoke, on the coast of what is now North Carolina, and name it "Virginia" in honour of the virgin queen, Elizabeth.

Potatoes and Tobacco

Delays, quarrels, disorganisation and hostile Native Americans forced some of the colonists to eventually return to England. However, they brought with them potatoes and tobacco, two things unknown in Europe at the time. A second voyage was sent in 1590, only to find no trace of the colony. The settlement is now remembered as the "Lost Colony of Roanoke Island."