The Spanish Armada

Spain officially declared war on England in 1585. Three years later (1588) the Spanish armada, a large group of warships, was sent to England to invade, with the help of some soldiers in France.

Causes of the Spanish Armada:

* The Netherlands – Protestant revolt against Catholic controlled Spain, Elizabeth helped the Protestant rebels. Elizabeth chose faith over the alliance between Spain and England, stabbing her allies in the back.
* Trading – Spain banned England from trading in Antwerp (the trading capitol of the World). In response to this, English ships looked for new places to trade. They started trading with the new world (N. America). This was illegal, as they were doing this without Spain’s permission.
* Pirating – English ships started attacking Spanish merchant and treasure ships carrying resources from the new world to Spain. Elizabeth knew about this, and encouraged it, knighting some of the captains. Some of the stolen products included: gold, silver, silks, spices, coins, wine and jewels.
* Religious – England was a Protestant country, whereas Spain was a Catholic country. Spain has also been involved in the plots to overthrow Elizabeth (see [Catholic Plots](Catholic%20Plots.docx))

Timeline:

* 1585 (Preparing for War) – Spain started building ships for the Armada.
* 1587 (Singeing of the King’s beard) – Elizabeth sent Drake to “delay the Armada”. He went to Cadiz (in Portugal) where they were building the ships and destroyed many of them. Drake also raided some nearby treasure ships.
* July 1588 (Armada Sighted) – When the Armada was sighted, English ships were sent from Plymouth. The Armada was sailing in a crescent formation, with the vulnerable cargo ships towards the centre. The few attacks from the English navy were not able to deal much damage.
* July 1588 (English Fireships) – The Armada anchored at Calais, waiting for the Spanish army. However, the army was delayed, and poor communication meant that the Armada didn’t know this. In the night, 8 English fireships were sent to disrupt the formation. The Spanish panicked, and many cut their anchors in order to escape.
* July 1588 (Battle of Gravelines) – After the fireships, the Armada regrouped at Spain, however the weather prevented them from continuing. The English fleet attacked and sunk 5 ships. The Armada was forced to sail away from France and around England and Scotland in order to escape.

Why did the Armada Fail?

* Poor Spanish leadership
* Bad weather (wind)
* Strong English leadership
* Bad communication between the Armada and the Spanish Army
* Bad Spanish tactics
* Large Spanish ships (could keep up with the small English ships)