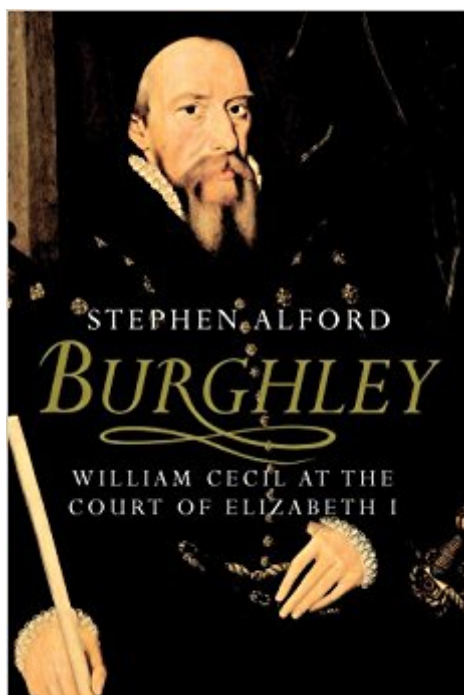


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Burghley: William Cecil At The Court Of Elizabeth I



Synopsis

William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520–1598), was the closest adviser to England's Queen Elizabeth I and—as this revealing and provocative biography shows—he was the driving force behind the Queen's reign for four decades. Cecil's impact on the development of the English state was deep and personal. A committed Protestant, he guided domestic and foreign affairs with the confidence of his religious conviction. Believing himself the divinely instigated protector of his monarch, he felt able to disobey her direct commands. He was uncompromising, obsessive, and supremely self-assured—a cunning politician as well as a consummate servant. This comprehensive biography gives proper weight to Cecil's formative years, his subtle navigation of the reigns of Edward VI and Mary I, his lifelong enmity with Mary Queen of Scots, and his obsession with family dynasty. It also provides a fresh account of Elizabeth I and her reign, uncovering limitations and concerns about invasions, succession, and conspiracy. Intimate, authoritative, and enormously readable, this book redefines our understanding of the Elizabethan period.

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Customer Reviews

I just finished reading Prof. Stephen Alford's tome, "Burghley: William Cecil at the Court of Elizabeth I," and I recommend it for serious 'Elizabethophiles' -- with one significant quibble. On p. 167, Alford argues that Cecil "singlehandedly" ran the secret service and intelligence gathering in the age of Elizabeth I. This is patently untrue, as Sir Francis Walsingham was Elizabeth's spymaster. However, in 2014, Alford corrected this egregious error by producing a splendid little book called "The

Watchers: a Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I," in which he corrects the record and gives Walsingham due credit. Alford's "Burghley" brims with quotable material, because he uses *primary* sources. So on p. 283, we have Elizabeth's response to Parliament's request that she execute Mary, Queen of Scots. Elizabeth says "[We] princes I tell you are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world....It behoveth us therefore to be careful that our proceedings be just and honourable." This sense that Renaissance people had of 'the world as a stage' did not originate with Shakespeare -- but he reflected the philosophy of his age with poetic vigour. Cecil was an avid reader, and one of the tutors he kept in his household was Lawrence Nowell. Nowell taught the (thoroughly nasty) Earl of Oxford, but in his spare time, he pored over and attempted to translate "the only surviving original manuscript of 'Beowulf' " (See p. 147). What a scintillating, shimmering household this must have been, with Burghley, his brilliant wife Mildred (nee Cooke), the young Earl of Essex (Robert Devereux), the brothers Bacon (Nicholas and Francis) and a host of Protestant intellectuals. So...

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