Humphrey Gilbert Encyclopedia Article

Humphrey Gilbert

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1539?-1583

British navigator and explorer who played a significant role in early British colonization, setting up the first British colony in North America in 1583 at St. John's, Newfoundland. After an early career in the military, Sir Gilbert (knighted in 1570 for his military achievements), a half-brother of Sir Walter Raleigh (1552?-1618), was the first to petition Queen Elizabeth I of England for exploration seeking a Northwest Passage to the Orient. As a result, in 1578 he was granted a royal charter for the privileges of exploration and colonization in North America. After an unsuccessful first voyage, a second expedition in 1583 reached Newfoundland, where Gilbert founded the first English colony in America. On the return voyage, the ship carrying the explorer was lost at sea north of the Azores in the Atlantic.