

## **Tudor Kings:**

**Henry VII:** Henry married the daughter of Edward IV, uniting the houses of York and Lancaster and thereby ending the War of the Roses. Henry was a descendent of Edward III on his mother's side; he was the son of Owen Tudor, the second husband of Henry V's widow. Thus, his claim to the throne was spurious, at best. In an attempt to strengthen his claim, he named his first son Arthur. This son was married to Katherine of Aragon in a politically strategic move, but Arthur was sickly and died soon after the marriage. Thus, Henry's second son, Henry VIII, ascended to the throne.

**Henry VIII:** Sturdy, popular, and handsome, Henry was perfectly suited to be king, much more so than his sickly older brother. Despite initial opposition from his father and from the church, Henry insisted on marrying his brother's widow, Catherine of Aragon. Henry is famous for breaking with the Catholic church and instigating the Church of England (the English reformation), but he is best known for his marriage to six wives.

**1. Catherine of Aragon:** Henry went to great lengths to marry his brother's widow, requiring a papal dispensation and causing much controversy. He was married to Catherine for twenty years. Her failure to produce a male heir (she had one healthy daughter, Mary) led to Henry's growing dissatisfaction with her. He caused once again a stir in the church by reversing his earlier claim that this marriage was not incestuous (as it was originally deemed by the church). Wanting to get rid of Catherine, he now argued that, in fact, the marriage was never legitimate because Catherine had been his brother's wife. Catherine insisted that Arthur had been too sickly to consummate the marriage (though Arthur apparently had bragged the morning after the marriage that he had 'been in Spain' the previous evening. Nonetheless, Henry persisted in his demands for a divorce, casting aside Catherine and their young daughter Mary.

**2. Anne Boleyn:** Despite the fact that she was described as no great beauty and marred with birthmarks (and an extra fingernail on one hand), Henry was smitten with Anne Boleyn to the point that some accused her of using witchcraft to charm the king. Her older sister had been Henry's concubine, but Anne insisted on more, refusing the advances of the king until he had secured a divorce from Catherine. Henry did so, married Anne, and begot on her a daughter named Elizabeth. However, Henry soon grew tired of Anne's demanding ways. Her inability to produce a male heir (she miscarried one male child) caused Henry's eye to wander and eventually led him to seek a way out of this marriage. His close advisor, Thomas Cromwell, began to seek out men who claimed to have had adulterous relationships with Anne. These men included Anne's own brother (probably framed by his own wife), a court musician, and the poet Thomas Wyatt, who was released from prison before the others, including Anne herself, were publically executed. Wyatt likely watched the executions of the accused lovers from the Tower. **3. Jane Seymour:** When Henry heard the gunfire that signaled Anne had been successfully executed, he jumped on his horse and rode for Wolfe Hall, where Anne's lady-in-waiting lay in waiting for Henry. She became his third wife and delivered a living male child, Edward, when she was about thirty years old. This child was greatly celebrated, to such an extent that Jane made herself ill, for she had not allowed herself ample time to recover from childbirth. She died when her son was several days old. She is the only of Henry's wives who is

buried beside him. **4. Anne of Cleves:** This was a political marriage for Henry. He agreed to marry Anne sight unseen based on a portrait (apparently a very flattering one) commissioned by the famous artist Holbein. When Anne arrived, Henry was horrified that she did not live up to this picture, calling her a Dutch cow and claiming, upon first sight of her, "I like her not." This cow was set out to pasture. Henry went through with the marriage but then divorced Anne, who actually lived the rest of her life in England on good terms with Henry, who called her 'his good sister.'

**5. Catherine Howard:** This was a love match for Henry, as well as a clear sign of a mid-life crisis. When he married the beautiful Catherine, she was only eighteen and he was forty-nine, fat, and suffering from a gangrenous (and often very stinky) wound on his shin. Catherine had a lax upbringing and apparently had a number of lovers in her youth. She stupidly found positions in court for some of these young men and apparently continued to sleep with them after her marriage to Henry. Henry was devastated to learn of her adultery and called for her beheading. Bravely, she asked the chopping block to be brought to her room before the execution so she could practice placing her head on it. This same block was used to execute Anne Boleyn.

**6. Catherine Parr:** Catherine had already been twice widowed when she agreed to marry Henry (which she did with reluctance, realizing the fates of his past wives).

She proved a good and patient wife, and a good nurse to Henry, whose gangrenous wound worsened. She had some close calls when she tried to speak her mind, but seemed to have a grip on marriage to Henry and outlasted him. Henry died, syphilitic and obese, leaving behind three children. Catherine remarried, this time to Thomas Seymour, to whom she had been earlier engaged. Unfortunately, he had an eye for Katherine's teen-aged daughter, Elizabeth. When she found them in an embrace, Katherine miscarried and soon after died.

**Edward VI:** The sickly son of Henry VIII, Edward VI died young yet made an impact during his short reign. Specifically, the staunchly protestant young king detested Catholicism. He died of tuberculosis when he was only fifteen. He would have died twice had he known his Catholic stepsister would succeed him

**Mary:** Henry VIII's daughter by Catherine of Aragon had been neglected and overlooked by her father most of her life. She was unhappily married to Philip of Spain, who showed very little interest in her. She came to be called "Bloody Mary" for her persecution of protestants.

**Elizabeth:** No one imagined that Henry's daughter by Anne Boleyn would make it to the throne and become one of the greatest of monarchs. Elizabeth was highly intelligent and diplomatic, surviving the reigns of her protestant half-brother and then her Catholic half-sister, Elizabeth herself managed to appease both camps. Under her reign, literature flourished and the kingdom expanded. She represents the spirit of an age when such important figures as Shakespeare, Sir Walter Raleigh, Francis Drake, and Sir Philip Sidney were at their peaks, among others.