

Queen Mary I

Queen Mary I of England, also known as Mary Tudor, was the first independently reigning English queen and one of the five monarchs from the famous Tudor dynasty.

Early Life

Mary was born on 18th February 1516 in the Palace of Placentia, Greenwich. She was the daughter of King Henry VIII and his first wife, Catherine of Aragon and the only one of their children to survive past infancy.

Mary was a very intelligent child and was able to speak, read and write in many languages including Latin and her mother's native language, Spanish. She was also fiercely religious like her mother and followed the Catholic faith.

Her happy childhood soon took a drastic turn when her father decided to divorce her mother as he was desperate for a male heir which Catherine had not given him. Mary was declared illegitimate, became known as 'The Lady Mary' rather than 'Princess Mary' and sent away to the Welsh borders.

In 1533, Mary was given a place in the household of Princess Elizabeth, her half-sister. She was forbidden from seeing or writing to her mother as she would not accept her father's new wife, Anne Boleyn, as queen. Her refusal to accept Anne hurt her relationship with her father, and did not speak with him for three years.

In 1536, Anne fell out of favour with Henry and was beheaded. Soon after, Henry married his third wife, Jane, who tried to make peace between Mary and her father. Mary submitted to the king's request to recognise him as the head of the church and was reconciled with her father.

Over the next decade, Mary saw her father marry another three times after Jane died in childbirth. His final wife, Catherine Parr, persuaded the king to reinstate Mary and Elizabeth to the line of succession in 1544.

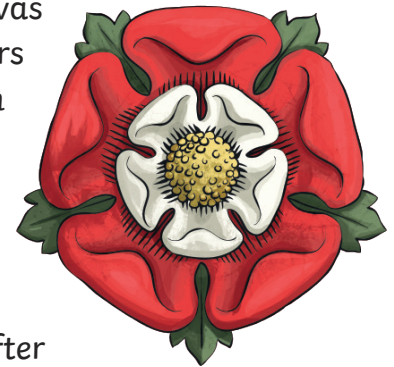
In 1547, Henry died and Mary's half-brother Edward acceded the throne. During his reign, Mary spent most of her time away from court as she disagreed with religious reforms that had been passed by the new king.

Accession to the Throne

On 6th July 1553, Edward fell ill and died at the age of 15. He did not want the crown to go to Mary as he feared she would return England to the Catholic



faith. Instead, he named his 16-year-old cousin, Lady Jane Grey, as his heir under the suggestion of his advisors and she was proclaimed queen on 10th July. Mary and her supporters were furious and rode into London, removed Jane from the throne after only nine days as queen and locked her in the Tower of London.



Mary soon set about releasing any of her Catholic supporters from their imprisonment. She was officially crowned Queen of England on 1st October 1553. After initially sparing Lady Jane's life, Mary soon realised that she would always be a threat to her crown and Jane was executed along with many of her conspirators.

Marriage

After her coronation, Mary soon set about finding a suitable husband. At this time, she was around 37 years of age and was desperate for an heir to prevent her Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth, becoming queen. It was suggested to her that she marry Prince Philip of Spain. The marriage was soon agreed. Parliament then wrote 'Queen Mary's Marriage Act' which set out terms that meant that while Philip would be titled 'King of England', he would not be able to act without Mary's consent. Although annoyed by this, Philip agreed and the couple were married on 25th July 1554. Philip spent much of his time away from Mary after being crowned King of Spain in January 1556.

Bloody Mary

During Mary's reign, anyone who didn't follow the Catholic faith was branded a heretic, imprisoned and was in danger of being executed. Hundreds of Protestants were burnt at the stake and many others chose to be exiled rather than face punishment. Mary's relentless pursuit of heretics and sending them to their deaths led to her becoming known as 'Bloody Mary'.

Later Life and Death

On several occasions, Mary believed herself to be pregnant but it turned out to be false. In 1557, Mary thought herself finally pregnant and wrote a will saying that if she were to die in childbirth, her husband would be regent to their child. However, no child ever arrived and Mary's health began to deteriorate.

In May 1558, Mary became very ill and was forced to name Elizabeth as her heir. She died on 17th November 1558 at the age of 42 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.