

Henry VIII and His Six Wives

Henry VIII
(1509-1547)



Catherine of Aragon (Catholic, married 1509): Gives birth to “Bloody Mary,” but her male children stillborn. When Pope refused to annul the marriage, Henry divorces and exiles Catherine in 1533, establishing the Anglican church as his own personal hierophancy.



Anne Boleyn (Protestant, married 1509): King Henry VIII had used Anne’s older sister Mary Boleyn as a mistress while married to Catherine of Aragon. Before marrying Henry, she conceived Elizabeth, who was third in line for the throne (after Edward VI and Bloody Mary). She was beheaded on trumped-up charges of adultery and the marriage annuled.



Jane Seymour (Protestant, married 1536, died 1537): Jane gave birth to Edward VI, who as Henry’s oldest legitimate male heir, would have inherited the throne had he lived. The traumatic labor weakened Jane, and she died two weeks after giving birth.



Anne of Cleves (Catholic, married 1540): Henry married Anne to secure an alliance with Germany. Anne proved rather plain in appearance and personality--favoring domestic tasks to the music, art, poetry, and culture so popular at court. Henry divorced her in 1540, sending her back to the continent when the political alliance was no longer convenient.



Katherine Howard (Protestant, married 1540): Pretty, vivacious, and fun-loving, Katherine was Anne Boleyn’s 19-year-old cousin. However, marriage to the now 49-year old, obese, and sickly Henry did not fit her temperament. After flirting with courtiers, she was beheaded for adultery in 1542.



Katherine Parr (Protestant, married 1543): She was a widow before marrying Henry. She was quiet, pious, and took up the task of educating her step-children. She outlived Henry and died in 1547 in childbirth.