



HENRY VIII & HIS SIX WIVES

Complete Historical Reference Guide (1491-1547)

HENRY VIII - THE KING

BASIC INFO

Born: June 28, 1491, Greenwich Palace

Died: January 28, 1547 (age 55)

Reign: 1509-1547 (38 years)

Parents: Henry VII & Elizabeth of York

FAMILY & EARLY LIFE

Siblings: Arthur (d. 1502), Margaret, Mary

Education: Tutored by finest scholars; fluent in Latin, French, Spanish; studied theology, music, poetry

Skills: Accomplished musician, athlete, dancer, composer

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

6'2" tall, athletic in youth, became obese (400+ lbs) in later years; red-gold hair, blue eyes

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Founded Church of England (1534)
- Established Royal Navy as major force
- Dissolved Catholic monasteries
- Commissioned military innovations
- Built magnificent palaces (Hampton Court)

PERSONALITY

Charismatic but volatile; scholarly yet brutal; obsessed with male succession; increasingly paranoid and tyrannical with age

MARRIAGE SUMMARY

6 Wives	3 Children
2 Executions	2 Annulments

FAMOUS RHYME

*"Divorced, beheaded, died;
Divorced, beheaded, survived"*

1. CATHERINE OF ARAGON

Born: Dec 16, 1485, Spain | **Died:** Jan 7, 1536 (**50**)

Married: 1509-1533 (24 years) | **Children:** **Mary I**

BACKGROUND

Parents: Isabella I & Ferdinand II of Spain

Education: Classical education, multiple languages, deeply religious

Previous Marriage: Arthur, Henry's brother (1501-1502)

THE GREAT MATTER

Henry sought annulment claiming marriage to brother's widow was cursed by God (Leviticus). Catherine insisted her first marriage was never consummated. Pope refused annulment, leading to English Reformation.

TRAGIC END

Banished to Kimbolton Castle, never saw daughter Mary again. Died in exile, possibly poisoned. Signed final letter "Catherine the Queen."

3. JANE SEYMOUR

Born: ~1508 | **Died:** Oct 24, 1537 (**~29**)

Married: 1536-1537 (17 months) | **Children:** **Edward VI**

BACKGROUND

Parents: Sir John Seymour & Margery Wentworth

Education: Basic education for noble daughter; needlework, household management

Personality: Quiet, submissive, traditional - opposite of Anne Boleyn

THE FAVORITE WIFE

Married Henry day after Anne's execution. Only wife to give him surviving male heir. Henry considered her his "true" wife, was buried beside her. Died of puerperal sepsis 12 days after Edward's birth.

ACHIEVEMENT

Reconciled Henry with daughters Mary and Elizabeth. Her son Edward VI became king at age 9, ruling through regents until his death at 15.

5. CATHERINE HOWARD

Born: ~1523 | **Executed:** Feb 13, 1542 (**~19**)

Married: 1540-1542 (20 months) | **Children:** None

BACKGROUND

Parents: Lord Edmund Howard & Joyce Culpeper

Family: Anne Boleyn's first cousin, Duke of Norfolk's niece

Education: Minimal education, raised in grandmother's household

YOUTHFUL INDISCRETIONS

Possible sexual relationships before marriage with Henry Manox (music teacher) and Francis Dereham. During marriage, secret meetings with Thomas Culpeper. Accused of adultery and concealing her past. Executed for treason - possibly never understood the charges.

TRAGIC YOUTH

Youngest wife, possibly virgin when married Henry (age 49). Her motto: "No other will but his." Parliament passed law making it treason for unchaste woman to marry the king without declaring her past.

2. ANNE BOLEYN

Born: ~1501-1507 | **Executed:** May 19, 1536 (**~29-35**)

Married: 1533-1536 (3 years) | **Children:** **Elizabeth I**

BACKGROUND

Parents: Thomas Boleyn & Elizabeth Howard

Education: French court (1513-1521), sophisticated, witty, educated

Court Role: Lady-in-waiting to Catherine, captured Henry's attention ~1526

THE COURTSHIP & DOWNFALL

7-year pursuit by Henry. Refused to be mistress, demanded marriage. Failed to produce male heir. Accused of adultery with 5 men including her brother. Likely fabricated charges to free Henry for new marriage.

LEGACY

Mother of Elizabeth I, England's greatest queen. Her execution shocked Europe. Wore yellow to Catherine's funeral - sign of joy or mourning?

4. ANNE OF CLEVES

Born: Sep 22, 1515 | **Died:** Jul 16, 1557 (**41**)

Married: Jan-Jul 1540 (6 months) | **Children:** None

BACKGROUND

Parents: John III, Duke of Cleves & Maria of Jülich-Berg

Education: Limited formal education, could read/write German, skilled in needlework

Political Alliance: Marriage arranged to ally with Protestant German states

THE FLANDERS MARE

Henry called her "Flanders Mare" - disappointed by her appearance vs. Holbein portrait. Marriage never consummated. Annulled on grounds of non-consummation and her alleged pre-contract with Francis of Lorraine.

SMART SURVIVOR

Wisely agreed to annulment, received generous settlement including Richmond Palace. Became Henry's "beloved sister," outlived him by 10 years. Only wife to survive both marriage and Henry.

6. CATHERINE PARR

Born: Aug 1512 | **Died:** Sep 5, 1548 (**36**)

Married: 1543-1547 (4 years) | **Children:** Mary Seymour (w/ Thomas)

BACKGROUND

Parents: Sir Thomas Parr & Maud Green

Education: Exceptional education, fluent in Latin, French, Italian

Previous: Widow twice before Henry (Lord Borough, Lord Latimer)

THE SCHOLARLY SURVIVOR

First English queen to publish books under her own name. Nearly arrested for heresy due to Protestant views - saved herself through submission to Henry. Nursed aging, increasingly ill Henry.

FINAL CHAPTER

Reunited Henry with daughters. After Henry's death, married Thomas Seymour (Jane's brother). Died in childbirth age 36. Her daughter Mary disappeared from history as infant.

We strive for historical accuracy but may make mistakes from time to time. All errors are ours.

References: Starkey, D. "Six Wives" (2003); Weir, A. "The Six Wives of Henry VIII" (1991); Fraser, A. "The Wives of Henry VIII" (1992); Ives, E. "The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn" (2004); National Archives; British History Online