

Henry viii assignment

[History](#)



Spanish descent, she was a strict Catholic and by all accounts a determined and formidable woman. For example, she took a leading role in politics, acting as regent while Henry was absent in France, and even played an important role in one of the most decisive English victories of the reign when her strategy helped beat the Scots at the Battle of Flodden in 1513. Perhaps, however, she was too strong a woman for Henry to handle, for he ultimately decided to be rid of her. Most of all, Henry desperately needed a male heir, and sadly all but one of Catherine's children had been stillborn.

In fact, the King came to believe that this was God's punishment for marrying the woman who had once been his dead brother's wife. At first Henry tried to persuade the Pope to annul the marriage on grounds of illegality. Eventually, he took the radical step of formally breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church and making himself head of the new Church of England; promptly getting his newly appointed archbishop, Thomas Cranmer, to annul the marriage. There does, though, seem to have been a further, if not ulterior motive for Henry's actions.

Just five days later, Henry got Cranmer to endorse his marriage to his mistress Anne Boleyn. Anne Boleyn was of lesser birth than Catherine; indeed she had been the Queen's lady-in-waiting. Anne was something of a court beauty, but cleverly manipulated her way into Henry's wedding bed by playing hard to get. Anne was in no way as clever, politically, as her predecessor, but she knew precisely how to play the part of First Lady. She fully supported the new Church of England, dressed and behaved impeccably at court, and was considered by some to be the perfect queen.

The modern British historian Eric Ives, in his influential biography *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, actually describes her as “ the most influential and important queen consort England has ever had. ” In my opinion at least, her importance is not so much what she did but what she did not do. In other words, she never once spoke out against the new and controversial Anglican Church. Henry seems to have married Anne for genuine reasons of love, or perhaps we should say lust. There was certainly no real political advantage to the coupling. But therein lay Anne’s ultimate fate.

By 1536, the King fell in love with another lady-in-waiting, Jane Seymour, whose father had been a low-ranking official, a mere knight. Although it has been said that Henry merely lusted after Anne, most historians agree that in Jane’s case he truly fell in love with her. She was very different to Anne; whereas the Boleyn queen was beguiling, vivacious, and – let’s face it – sexy, the Seymour girl was quiet and retiring. In many ways she was like the twentieth-century Princess Diana, finding it an uneasy process to fill the role of center stage.

Getting rid of Anne by annulling the marriage was this time not an option for Henry, so he resorted to what most historians agree were trumped-up charges of treason, adultery, incest, and witchcraft. After a swift show trial, Anne Boleyn was beheaded on 19 May 1536 – and just the following day Henry married Jane. Jane was the first and only one of Henry’s wives to bear him a son to survive, clearly intensifying his love and adoration for her. When she died of complications following the childbirth 24 October 1537, Henry was devastated and had her uniquely buried in what was to be his own tomb.

Henry was now on the lookout for a new wife. This time his advisors suggested a political marriage to form a closer alliance with the protestant German states. The German aristocrat Anne of Cleves was considered most suitable, but Henry insisted on knowing what she looked like before agreeing. He dispatched the court portrait artist Hans Holbein to paint a picture of Anne; when Henry saw it, he was sufficiently impressed and agreed to the wedding. Unfortunately for Anne, Holbein was a great flatterer when it came to portrait painting and the young woman was a complete disappointment to Henry.

In fact, although the couple were wed on 6 January 1540, the marriage was never consummated and Henry had no problem having it annulled within six months. It was actually a blessing in disguise that Henry never fancied her; it saved him having to have her head chopped off on some spurious charge or other. In fact, after the marriage was annulled Anne received a generous settlement of wealth and estates. If any of Henry VIII's wives could be said to have been a "head in the basket" just waiting to happen, it was his fifth wife, Catherine Howard.

Yet another lady-in-waiting – yes, there does seem to be a pattern emerging here – Catherine was the court beauty. At only sixteen she was already known as something of a flirt amongst the courtiers. Obviously, Henry fell for her but – given her reputation – it is something of a mystery why he should have chosen her to be his queen. Perhaps it was that he thought her young age would make her most suitable for bearing children. Conversely, this should have made her an unsuitable candidate: how would he know that her children were really his?

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The most likely answer is that Henry was beginning to lose his wits. He was only 49, but years of good living had left him with a plethora of diseases, one of which may have been McLeod syndrome that can cause brain damage. Anyway, 28 July 1540, less than three weeks after his marriage with Anne had ended, he married Catherine Howard. Various well-meaning courtiers advised the young girl to change her ways, but she evidently took no notice. She blatantly had various affairs, in particular with the King's favorite courtier Thomas Culpeper.

Apparently she carried on with Culpeper right under Henry's nose as she thought him too brain muddled to notice. Unfortunately, the King's chief advisor Thomas Cranmer had all his senses intact, and when Henry was informed he flew into a rage and, on 13 February 1542, Catherine kept her inevitable appointment with the axe. By contrast with his other wives, Henry's last spouse was more his nursemaid than lover. Henry was by this time suffering greatly from a number of ailments: morbid obesity, and chiefly septicemia caused by a long-festering wound to his leg.

Catherine Parr, who had already been widowed twice, was a friend of Henry's daughter Princess Mary, and as such came to the King's attention. She was a learned scholar who, unusually for a woman of the time, actually wrote three books. As such Henry entrusted the education of all his children to Catherine. After the couple married in 1543, when Catherine was 31, she appears to have been devoted and attentive wife to the much older and infirmed Henry. This must have taken some doing as it is said that his festering wounds could be smelt from the other end of the palace.