

The wives of henry viii



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The Six Wives of Henry VIII To six wives was wedded. One died, one survived. Two divorced, two beheaded.

Like so many children's rhymes, the singsong innocence conceals a brutal reality. As a husband and as a ruler, Henry could be cruel. His private appetites could dictate international policy, most famously when the drive to divorce his first wife caused England's break with the Catholic Church. As contended by Antonia Frasier in her book *The Wives of Henry VIII*, there is not much that connects each of his six wives, except for that they were all cruelly treated by Henry and were unwilling victims of his tyranny. Catherine of Aragon was the well-educated daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. As an infant she was engaged to the prince of England and she married Henry's older brother, Arthur, in 1501.

She was 16 years old, and he was just a few months younger. When Arthur died, she married the new heir to the throne, Prince Henry. She was able to marry him because she denied that she had ever slept with Prince Arthur in the months of their marriage. Whether or not that was true, we will never know. It became the subject of much speculation 20 years later.

Catherine had been raised to rule, and she did it well. When Henry went fought the French, and James IV of Scotland invaded England, she crushed James's army and sent his cloak to Henry as a victory souvenir. But she produced just one daughter, Mary, and when her lady in waiting, the delectable Anne Boleyn, caught Henry's eye, the 20-year marriage was over. The supposed reason for the divorce: Catherine had been married to Henry's brother and therefore he had been living in sin.

God punished him by not giving him a son. How Catherine fought the divorce is fascinating and upsetting. One could say she was tortured – separated from her daughter and forced to live in smaller and smaller houses. She was deprived of everything to subdue her.

When she finally died, alone and abandoned, King Henry, Anne Boleyn and his court celebrated by having a large feast and wearing the traditional celebration colour yellow. These scenes are very well depicted in the documentary series, *The Wives of Henry VIII*, of which there is one documentary per wife. Anne was clever and charming. At that time, if one could catch the king's eye they would likely become his mistress, which meant riches for her family until the king grew bored of her. Anne was not content with this fate.

Once she had enticed the king, she withheld sleeping with him until he promised to make her queen, and made it clear that he was willing to break with Rome. According to tudorhistory.org, Anne was a very witty, intelligent, passionate and temperamental. Henry had found this enticing for the eight years before their marriage, but was disenchanted by it later. But her downfall was that Anne had promised the king a son, the one thing Catherine did not do.

In 10 years Anne produced just one daughter, Elizabeth. Now it was her sweetly demure lady in waiting, Jane Seymour, who he wanted. Coached by Catholics who hoped to bring England back to Rome, Jane withheld her favours, claiming that her religion forbade it. Henry ordered his counsellors

to find proof of Anne's infidelities and Anne was beheaded for adultery and incest with four men and her brother.

Again, no one is sure whether the accusations were true. However it is the belief of historian Alison Weir, stated in her book *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, that Henry would have done anything to be rid of her and when no evidence turned up, it was manufactured. Jane was the model queen: she was innocent, pure and chaste. Jane's real security was that she bore Henry a son, the Prince Edward. However like many women of the time, she died a few days after the prince's birth.

After Jane came the deluge. Henry was now grossly fat and middle-aged, and a questionable catch. One candidate said she would need two heads to marry him; another said that her neck was too small. A minor princess, Anne of Cleves, was found. But she didn't attract Henry and was quickly divorced and sent to another palace. As reward for accepting the king's divorce, she was given much wealth and the title "The King's Sister."

" Henry was having what we would call today a midlife crisis. At 49, Henry married the beautiful 19 year old Catherine Howard. Catherine's family was eager to see her on the throne – she was more eager to enjoy herself. Two lovers were eventually arrested, and Catherine followed her cousin, Anne Boleyn, to the scaffold. Unlike Anne, she was young and flighty and probably did commit the adultery she was accused of.

Catherine Parr seems the most mature and emotionally grounded of his wives. Twice widowed when she came to court at 32, she loved another man but had little choice once the king proposed. She was generous and

intellectual. She engaged Henry in fervent theological discussions, so vehement that she barely escaped being arrested as a heretic.

Fortunately for her, Henry died not long later. And that is the story of the wives of Henry VIII. It is the sad truth that while Henry was a great, influential and important ruler, he will always be firstly remembered as the man with six wives, and the first to publicly execute a queen. Bibliography Eakins, Lara E. “ The Six Wives of Henry VIII.

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