

THE SIX WIVES of HENRY VIII



PITKIN

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'Divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived'

– the rhyme tells the fate of Henry VIII's six wives. Henry was passionately in love with all but one of his wives, but it wasn't love that drove him to marry so many times. It was his desperate desire to provide a male heir for the throne of England, for in Tudor times it was generally agreed that only a male could provide strong government.

Even in Tudor times, however, Henry's behaviour appalled the courts of Europe and we can only marvel at the courage of Catherine Parr, his sixth wife, in agreeing to marry the obese, evil-tempered, ulcerous old man. This hideous picture of Henry is in sharp contrast to the young king, who was described in 1519 by a Venetian ambassador as 'The handsomest monarch I ever set eyes upon: above the usual height ... with a round face so very beautiful it would become a pretty woman.'

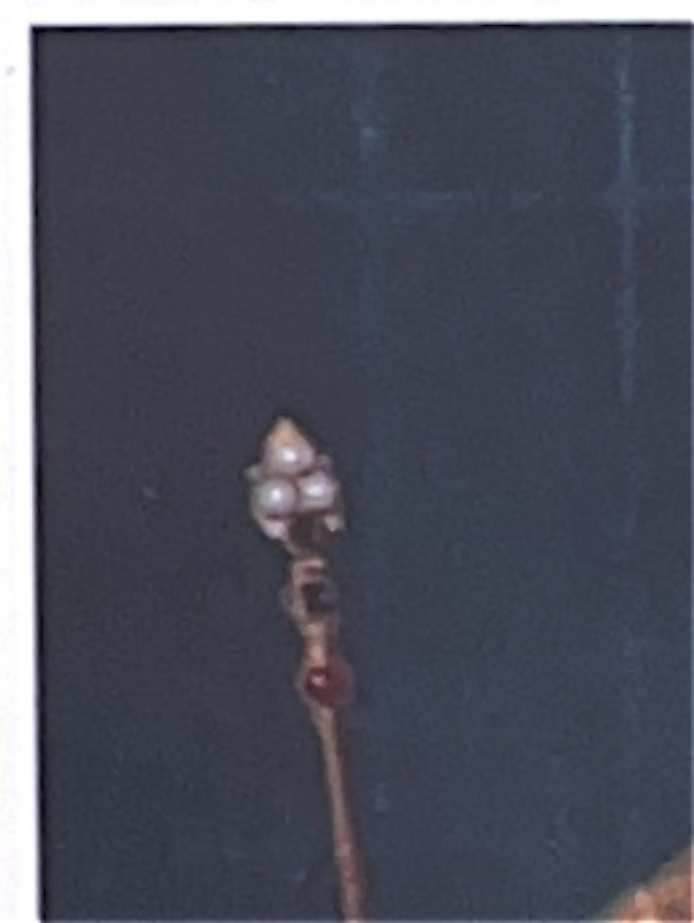
It was with this man that Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon, fell in love.

ALTHOUGH PRINCE EDWARD WAS ONLY NINE when Henry died, Henry was content that he had provided England with a king to follow him. Edward VI's reign was short-lived, however, and all three of Henry's legitimate children reigned.

Henry left a nation divided into Catholics and Protestants, a division that dominated the reigns of all his children. When Edward, a Protestant, died of tuberculosis in 1553, he was, despite plots to prevent it, eventually succeeded by Mary. Having endured religious persecution herself she did not hesitate to inflict it on others in her determination to make England Catholic again. In 1554 Mary married Philip, son of the king of Spain.

She was then 38 years old, but to prevent the country falling into the Protestant hands of her sister Elizabeth, Mary, like Henry, was desperate for the birth of an heir. She even thought that she was pregnant twice, but each time her hopes proved false. Philip was not enamoured of his wife and spent most of his time out of the country, leaving Mary to die alone in 1558.

Philip did not dispute Elizabeth's succession to the English throne, assuming that he would now marry her and so retain his power. Elizabeth, however, did not marry Philip, and, in spite of pleas from her ministers, did not marry anyone. She frequently entered diplomatic negotiations for marriage but always added impossible conditions at the last moment. People said she enjoyed power too much to share it, but it seemed at times that she genuinely tried to marry but could not bring herself to do so. Perhaps the traumas of her childhood were too great for her to overcome. So none of Henry's heirs produced an heir, and at Elizabeth's death in 1603 the Tudors' crown passed to the Scottish king, James Stuart.





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DEATH OF HENRY

The artist has shown Henry on his deathbed pointing to his son Edward as his successor. In fact Edward was not present when his father died, but the painting shows Henry's intentions, which he made clear in his will.



HENRY WITH HIS HEIRS

*The future King Edward
kneels beside Henry VIII.*

*Painted by a Protestant, this
picture depicts Queen Mary
and King Philip bringing in
war and Queen Elizabeth
bringing in peace and plenty.*



QUEEN ELIZABETH

Elizabeth was a popular queen who said of herself that although she was a woman she had 'the heart and stomach of a king'. During her long reign of 45 years England became powerful and prosperous.