

How Did Henry VIII Have 6 Wives?

As I'm sure you all know, Henry VIII had 6 wives, but why did he have 6 wives? And more importantly, how did he manage to make any lady marry him after beheading his second wife? As Christina of Denmark said when Henry went on the search for his 4th wife, "If I had two heads, I would happily put one at the disposal of the King of England".

Henry VIII never expected to be King. His elder brother Arthur was heir to the English throne and his elder sister Margaret was promised to the heir of the Scottish throne. Henry was assured that all chances of him becoming King of any country were slim, and so he was trained to become a member of the Church. Arthur then died after famously marrying the Spanish Princess Catherine of Aragon, leaving Henry with his newfound position as heir to the British throne. He made it his mission to marry the beautiful Princess Catherine.

After being engaged for eight years, they finally married in 1509. Henry would later claim the marriage should not have happened, going against the Papal approval he had earlier fought so hard for. This meant that the Pope had to permit Catherine to marry Henry, as she was first Arthur's wife, though they both claimed that the marriage was never true in the eyes of God as they did not have relations. This was so important because the Bible said in the Book of Leviticus that you should not marry your brother's wife. Still, Henry decided that the Pope did not have the authority to grant a dispensation for the marriage after all.

Henry's reasoning for this? Catherine and he never produced a male heir due to miscarriages and stillbirths, but they had a daughter named Mary in 1515. At the time, a girl could not be an heir. Although Henry said this was as good as being childless for a King, reports did say he cared for his daughter immeasurably. This was shown when he allowed an older Mary to regain the title of Princess, which he had stripped away from her when he divorced Catherine.

So how did Anne Boleyn come to marry the King? Well, it was her sister Mary that first caught the King's eye. She became his mistress in the late 1510s, though most suppose this was in 1519 onwards when his first mistress, Bessie Blount, and Catherine were both pregnant. Bessie would later give birth to a son mere weeks after Catherine had a stillbirth, only adding to poor Catherine's plight. Henry acknowledged the child, naming him Henry Fitzroy, meaning "son of the King", ennobled him as Duke of Richmond, and placed him behind Mary in the line of succession.

However, this would not be the first of Henry's children to be born out of wedlock. Many say that Mary Boleyn's two children, Catherine and Henry Carey, were sired by the King, but they did take the last name of Mary's first husband as customary at the time. Regardless, Mary and Anne's uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, decided to try to further the

position of the Howards, as the Boleyns were Howards from their mother's side, by attempting to put Anne on the throne of England.

Reports are conflicting as to whether she was a willing participant in this. Some say after she caught the King's eye, she refused his advances and retreated to the family home of Heaver Castle in a desperate attempt to thwart him. Others say this was a tactical retreat to avoid becoming one of Henry's mistresses.

After six years of keeping Henry at bay until he could divorce Catherine, known as his Great Matter, and after three years of being Queen, Anne was found guilty of several crimes, including adultery and witchcraft, and sentenced to death. Henry blamed Anne for the lack of male heirs despite the healthy birth of their daughter Elizabeth.

Additionally, he thought her guilty of Catherine's poisoning and the illnesses of Henry Fitzroy and Mary. She was also accused of incest with her brother George Boleyn, Lord Rochford, the Esquire of the Body, with the evidence supplied by his wife Jane Boleyn. This was supposedly after being promised her life by the Duke of Norfolk, who again had sensed the King growing tired of his wife and was distancing himself accordingly. Catherine Carey was with her aunt at the execution block before retreating to the countryside with her mother and she would not return until Anne of Cleves was on the throne.

Jane Seymour was then married to King Henry 10 days following Anne's execution. He was immediately taken to her quiet nature after they met on his summer progress. Now, I'm sure you're wondering why Jane's family was keen on the match. Put simply, it wasn't their life on the line, and the Seymours and Howards had a longstanding rivalry over who was the most powerful family in England. Although the King didn't have a male heir, he was now free to divorce and marry as he pleased. Everything depended on whose family the heir would belong to.

Jane did end up giving birth to Edward in 1537 but died shortly after, leaving the King reportedly heartbroken and desolate for a long time. He ended up waiting almost 2 years before finding another wife, the longest gap by far. Some say this is purely because he genuinely loved Jane and was grieving her loss, others that he simply had no need for one after Edward was born.

Others speculate that there was a wife between the 3rd and 4th, but Henry managed to remove her from existence, the same way he almost erased Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard because he wanted to forget them after charging them both with adultery. We will never be sure but up till now historians have found many possibilities for this fabled 7th wife, but all have since been discarded.

Anna of Cleves or Anne of Cleves, the second sister of the Duke of Cleves, was picked from the province of the same name in Germany. Cleves was a protestant province,

which was said to have been significant when choosing a new German wife as opposed to an English one. England needed allies against Catholic Spain and France, something they found in Anne of Cleves.

Anne came over to England without speaking a word of English. However, she endeavored to learn quickly, making fast friends with most of the court, and gaining a reputation for being friendly and regal. The first of her problems came with her first encounter with the King, at Rochester. An older man dressed in lower-class clothes, whom a group of men accompanied, approached Anne and her ladies-in-waiting. The man, wearing something akin to what you would expect a Robin Hood costume to look like, attempted to kiss Anne, but was quickly turned down. The problem was he was the King of England, who was known by those who knew the English court to dress up as different plays and act them out with his chosen Queen or mistress. This was the first time Henry had been refused by any woman and he was deeply offended. It had been long since he attempted this after his youth with someone unfamiliar with his custom.

Anne didn't stand a chance, especially since Henry distributed a portrait of himself from when he was much younger, and this was when Anne and Henry first clashed. Yet it wasn't because her portrait was untrue to her likeness as all say; most report her as quite pretty and the portrait accurate.

The King then spent much time trying to avoid marriage by saying that an old betrothal of Anne's was never annulled, though he did marry her. He then caught the eye of Katherine Howard.

Katherine Howard was one of Anne's ladies in waiting. Though Katherine was only 14, the Duke of Norfolk once again made a ploy to put one of his nieces in the line of the King, simultaneous with the return of Catherine Carey to court. Though the Seymours retained their high positions because of Edward being related to them, everyone knew that the line of succession could be altered at will (as proven by Henry moving his daughters and illegitimate children around on it every so often), so by having a Howard Queen or even mistress could benefit all the Howards. Jane Boleyn, Anne Boleyn's sister-in-law and one of Anne of Cleves's ladies, was also supposedly there to watch over Katherine Howard and help further her position.

It was clear that Anne of Cleves had to be removed from power. Henry realized that he had to divorce her to be free to marry Katherine. It was alright to do this now as the Spanish-French alliance fell through, so there was no need for a Protestant ally. Anne was approached with the offer to admit to being precontracted to marry another, which would dissolve her marriage with Henry.

Having seen what happened to Anne Boleyn and Catherine of Aragon, she took the offer and therefore technically in the eyes of British law was never married to the King.

She became known as the King's Beloved Sister, second only to the Queen and on par with the Princesses. This decision saved Anne's life and later it is said that she advocated for the rights of the young princesses and had a good relationship with Henry as they conversed on different intellectual subjects as honorary siblings.

Katherine Howard, though being 15, officially married Henry. She was said to have had an informal marriage with Francis Dereham before he went to Ireland, which would have commenced before she was even 10. Katherine later had relations with her music teacher Henry Manno, who was around 30 at the time of the affair, and eventually Thomas Culpepper. Even presently, it is not uncommon now for children to make believe weddings in primary school, but for this, Katherine would pay for with her life.

Thomas Culpepper was a favourite of the King and as such he took this betrayal to heart, executing all the men Katherine supposedly had affairs, past or present, with before executing Katherine herself. What makes this an even greater tragedy is that had Katherine not denied the marriage with Dereham being legal to defend herself, she wouldn't have been married to the King, and therefore she wouldn't have died for the affairs.

She faced death bravely considering she was the same age as a modern high school student, asking for the block to be brought to her room in the tower so that she may practise laying her head on it. When she uttered her last words, she admitted her love for Culpepper and showed the world the true nature of Henry the Eighth if any doubts were remaining. She said, "I die a Queen, but I would rather die the wife of a Culpepper".

Catherine Parr was already twice divorced when the King asked for her hand. Though she was in love with another during this time, she would only remarry later in 1543 after Henry's death. Catherine survived Henry's reign of terror as he would only live until 1547.

His son Edward came to the throne at age nine, only to die at fifteen. Three Queens of England died to give Henry his male heir and, in the end, it was all for nothing, for it was his daughters who came to be known as the most influential rulers of England.

To summarise, Henry VIII had 6 wives purely because people, mostly men, wanted power. It is unclear how much of the power plays were driven by women because even if they were, we would never know because they were given no voice. Though I will admit, for their memories to have survived when one of the most powerful men in the world wanted them gone from existence is truly commendable.