

Henry VIII's six wives

1. Catherine of Aragon

Born in 1485, Catherine was the daughter of the Spanish King Ferdinand. She was highly educated, and prepared as a young girl to make an important marriage. She wrote in Latin and spoke French. Her passion was literature. She was married to Arthur in 1501, when she was 15 and he was 14. Arthur died soon after and, in 1509, she married Arthur's brother, Henry VIII, who was then 18. She only had one daughter, Mary, in 1516. Although Henry eventually divorced her, he had genuinely loved her during the early years of their marriage.



4. Anne of Cleves

Henry married Anne in 1540. To sneak a look at her when she first arrived in England, Henry disguised himself, and she took no notice of him – she was more interested in watching the bull-baiting outside the window! Henry did not find her attractive and called her 'the Flanders Mare'. He only married her for political reasons, and the marriage was over within months, though they remained friends. He made sure Anne had a substantial income and she lived in style for the rest of her days.



2. Anne Boleyn

Henry's relationship with Anne started in 1527, when she was a lady-in-waiting to Catherine of Aragon. She had great charm, beautiful deportment, was well-mannered, witty and attractive. Many people disliked her because they had been fond of Catherine of Aragon, and they tried to persuade Henry not to divorce Catherine or marry Anne, but he did both. Anne was coronated in 1533, and gave birth to Elizabeth a few months later. Anne was beheaded in 1536.



5. Catherine Howard

In 1540 Henry married Catherine, who was the 19-year-old niece of the Duke of Norfolk. She was very attractive but had no responsibility, was indiscreet and was not faithful to Henry. Henry, who was 30 years older than Catherine, hugely overweight and with ulcers on his legs, made Catherine pay the ultimate price by having her executed in 1542, though he had showered her with jewels at the start of their marriage.



3. Jane Seymour

Jane was Anne Boleyn's lady-in-waiting. She had fair hair and became known as the 'English Rose'. She was popular, perhaps because England was so glad that the trouble with Anne was over. Henry had been interested in Jane since 1534, as he liked ladies who were small, with child-like faces. Within days of Anne's execution (in 1536) Henry married Jane. She gave birth to a son, Edward, on 12 October 1537, but only 12 days later she died. Henry wanted to be buried beside her when he died.



6. Catherine Parr

In 1543 the king married Catherine Parr, who was a 31-year-old widow. She was very devout and had scripture classes and sermons in her chamber. She outlived Henry, who died in 1547 aged 55, and acted as his nursemaid in his final years. She was also a good stepmother to his children. She later married Thomas Seymour, but she died in childbirth in 1548.

