

Six Queens

An illustrated guide to the iconic queens of Henry VIII



Lydia Monks

With a foreword by Tudor historian
Suzannah Lipscomb

*For Ava, Scarlett, Johnny
and Chadwick*



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Foreword by Suzannah Lipscomb

Being a historian is like being a detective – a detective who investigates the past. But, just like detectives, we don't always have all the evidence we would like to have. When we're exploring the lives of people who lived before the internet, before photography, even before newspapers, we largely rely on hand-written documents from the time.

These were all written for a purpose. A foreign diplomat might write about a visit to the English court. Someone else might note the London gossip for a friend living out of town. Or the document might be the record of a new law. The information had to be important enough to be written down in the first place, and it had to seem important enough in later years to be kept. Eventually, these documents ended up in what became known as archives.

In the sixteenth century, when Henry VIII and his queens lived, power was largely in the hands of men. That means that many of the documents that made it into the archives tell the story of how those men got and held onto power. They say far less about women. That means that we especially don't have all the evidence we would like to have when it comes to women's lives – even women as famous as Henry VIII's queens.

For example, it only became the law that churches had to record births and deaths in 1538. As all Henry's queens were born before then, we don't know the exact date that five out of six of them were born. We don't have official records of their birthdays. This is because the birth of a girl was simply not thought important enough to write down on any piece of paper worth keeping.

For two of Henry VIII's queens, we're not even sure which year they were born. The best guess is that Anne Boleyn was born in 1501. We can calculate that because we know her brother's birthday (the births of boys were generally recorded), we know when her younger sister got married, and we have a letter Anne wrote in 1513 in which she has quite adult handwriting. If you don't think that's very good evidence to figure out her birthday, you'd be right!

Historians know that Katherine Howard was born between 1518 and 1527. Her birthday matters a lot. She married Henry VIII in 1540 when he was 49. Was she 22 years old or was she just 13? To figure out her birthday more precisely, we must bear in mind the age of her mother, that Katherine was the fifth of six children, and when she was mentioned in someone's will (meaning that she must have been born by the time the will was written!). Our best guess is that she was born around 1523 or 1524, making her 16 or 17 years old when she married the king – but we don't know for sure.

The other thing that we lack when it comes to Henry VIII's queens is information about their feelings. Mostly, the documents tell us what other people said about them. None of the queens left diaries giving us their thoughts. Even their surviving letters are quite formal. So much of what we really want to know about their lives (what was it like to be married to Henry VIII?), we just can't know.

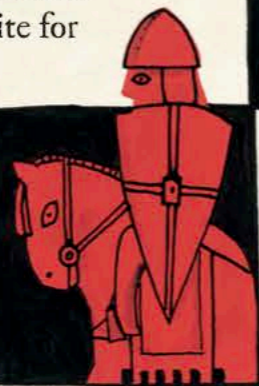
Like detectives, we can, however, piece together clues. The book you are holding contains all the best deductions that historians have made so far from the available evidence.

But I haven't yet told you the most exciting thing about being a historian. Just as a detective might use DNA to figure out that one person is innocent of a murder, and another guilty, sometimes we find new evidence that changes what we know about the facts. It is still possible to discover new information about Henry VIII's queens. Maybe one day you'll be the person to find it.



The Tudor Takeover

In the 15th century, two rival families, the Yorks and the Lancasters, were fighting over who had the right to rule England. This period in history (1455–1485) is now known as the Wars of the Roses, because both families' emblems were roses: white for the Yorks, and red for the Lancasters.



In 1485, Henry Tudor returned with an army to challenge the Yorkist king, Richard III. They fought a bloody battle at Bosworth. The king was killed, and Henry took his crown, becoming Henry VII.



Surrounded by bitter enemies, the new King Henry tried to soothe them by marrying the niece of the murdered king, Elizabeth of York. To symbolise the new unity between the two families, the red and white roses became one, known as the Tudor rose.



In 1471, a Yorkist army attacked the ruling Lancastrian army. They won and killed the king, replacing him with their own king, Edward IV.



Henry's reign was not as peaceful as he'd hoped. He found himself continually under attack from his own countrymen, and from abroad. He looked to secure his position by aligning himself with the most powerful royal family in the world: King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain.

The two royal families agreed that they would be united by the marriage of their children, Arthur and Katherine. Henry thought the Spanish princess would be the answer to all his problems. She brought with her vast wealth, as well as the power of her parents.

14-year-old Henry Tudor (the father of Henry VIII) was the last remaining Lancastrian boy entitled to inherit the crown. All his male relatives had been murdered by Yorkist supporters. Henry fled for his life to France, where he stayed for 14 years.



Henry's kingdom's future depended on a young girl from Spain . . .





Katherine of Aragon

1485-1536
"Humble and loyal"

The Spanish princess who was born to be Queen



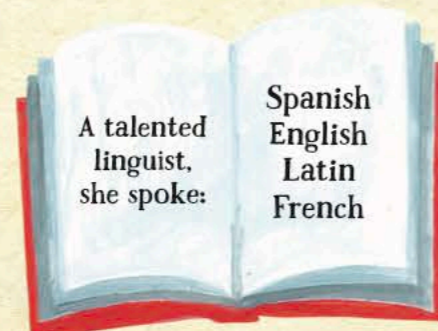
Born on 16th December, 1485, in Castile, Spain



The daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain



Married Prince Arthur in 1501



A talented linguist, she spoke:
Spanish
English
Latin
French



WIDOWED AT 16



The first female ambassador in Europe: appointed by King Ferdinand as his ambassador to England in 1507



A devout Catholic

Katherine had one surviving daughter: Mary, future Queen of England

Katherine and Henry's marriage lasted 24 years - longer than all the rest combined - but to Katherine, marriage was for life

Married 17-year-old Henry in June 1509, aged 23

Died aged 50 in 1536





A fairytale future

Katherine had known all her life that she would marry a prince and become Queen of England. Her fairytale future had long been planned by her parents, the King and Queen of Spain. They had brought her up to be the perfect queen, surrounded by luxury. Their palace, the Alhambra, was the envy of the world, with hot and cold running water (unusual in Europe then!) and gardens filled with citrus trees and trickling fountains.



Top of the class

Katherine had her very own tutor, who taught her history, literature, religion and languages. This was rare for a time when girls from wealthy families were usually only taught skills that would make them ideal wives: dancing, embroidery and music. Katherine excelled at these too, and she also had the inspiration of her mother, Queen Isabella, who was known for leading in war alongside her husband, King Ferdinand.

Wedding bells

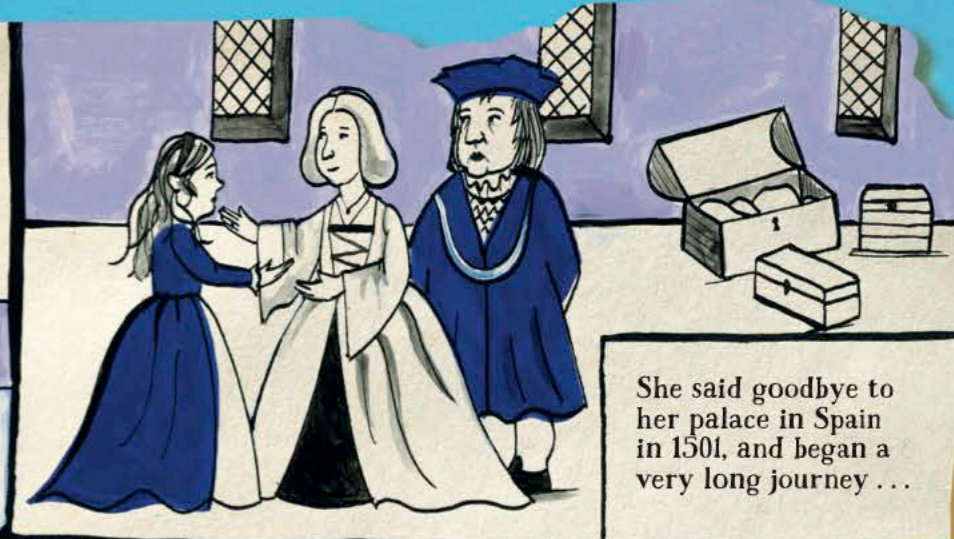
At 15, it was felt that Katherine was ready to be married. Royal and noble girls often married very young in Tudor times, partly because people didn't live nearly as long as they do now, due to illness and a lack of effective medicine. Giving birth was especially dangerous and cut short many women's lives. Katherine's ambitious parents had arranged a very important marriage for their talented daughter. She was to marry the King of England's son and heir, Prince Arthur.

MARRIAGE WAS DIFFERENT IN TUDOR TIMES

Royal Tudor marriages were a business deal between families, with benefits on both sides. Wealthy girls would bring a dowry to the marriage. This might be money, jewellery and gold which would all be given to their husband after the wedding. Katherine's dowry was as much money as the English government's income for a whole year! In exchange, the bride might receive a title and become part of a powerful family, in Katherine's case: the Queen of England. If the couple actually liked each other, that was a bonus!



Fifteen-year-old Katherine was ready to put her years of queenly preparation to the test.



She said goodbye to her palace in Spain in 1501, and began a very long journey ...



After travelling across Spain, Katherine set sail for her new life in England.



But the journey didn't go to plan. There was a terrible storm in the Bay of Biscay and they had to return to Spain to repair the boat.



Eventually, after a harrowing four-month journey, Katherine arrived on the English shore ...



... to be married to a boy she had never met.