

Mary Tudor 1553-1558

(Mary I or "Bloody Mary")

Credit where credit is due - the vast bulk of the text in these notes comes from files downloaded from the History Department pages of the Feltonfleet School website. The Masked Historian may have made the odd change here and there.

- On the death of her brother Edward VI in 1553, Mary succeeded to the throne.
- She was the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon.
- During her reign she earned herself the name of 'Bloody Mary'.
- Her reign was dominated by four main events:

1. Wyatt's Rebellion 1554

2. The Spanish Marriage 1554

3. The Persecution of Protestants 1555-1558

4. The loss of Calais 1558

- Mary's childhood experiences, the treatment of her mother by Henry VIII, left her feeling very bitter towards Protestants.
- The combination of her father's divorce from her mother, the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Succession had made Mary illegitimate.
- She blamed the Protestant influences and particularly Archbishop Thomas Cranmer.
- She was a devout, sincere Roman Catholic.
- She wanted to **restore** the Roman **Catholic faith**.
- She wanted to **restore the Power of the Pope** in England (that is to make the Pope head of the Church in England and not the monarch.)

Why Did Mary Enjoy Popular Support On Her Accession?

- The **Protestant reforms** of made in the reign of Edward VI by Lord Protector Somerset, Archbishop Cranmer and the Duke of Northumberland, had been most **unpopular**.
- Mary was the daughter of Henry VIII, and had the **best claim to the throne**.
- The Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 had shown how the majority of English people thought.
- They may not have been great supporters of the Pope, but they were still Catholics in belief and even in 1536, they had wanted Mary legitimised, so that her claim to the throne could be recognised.

- Many people disagreed with the way **Lady Jane Grey** had been chosen as Queen by Northumberland and were **suspicious** about what really happened. It was thought that Edward had been bullied into choosing Lady Jane Grey. Edward was very sick and weak, and obviously vulnerable and open to pressure.
- Many wanted to turn back the clock to before the Break with Rome and restore the Catholic faith in England, although most people did not favour the restoration of the Pope's power, particularly when it called for taxes paid to the Pope.

How did Mary go about achieving her plan to bring back the Catholic faith?

- Roman Catholic **priests were released from prison** and many became her advisers.
- Among them were Bishop Bonner and Bishop Gardiner, both had been locked up under Edward's reign.
- **Laws were passed** to punish anyone who did not follow the Roman Catholic religion.
- **The new Protestant prayer books written by Archbishop Cranmer were banned** and all services were to be held in Latin.
- However, the English Bible was to remain.
- **Priests were not allowed to marry.** 2000 married priests had to separate from their families.
- Leading English Catholics declared that **transubstantiation was true.** This is where the Catholics believe that bread and wine change into the body and blood of Christ after they have been blessed at communion.
- **Churches were to be decorated** again with wall paintings, statues and stained glass windows. Music was reintroduced into the church service (the mass). However, this proved difficult, as much of the old had been destroyed.
- **Protestant bishops** were imprisoned in the **Tower.** (Cranmer included).
- However, she was unable to introduce a total restoration of the monasteries because Parliament refused to pass a law that would return land that had once belonged to the monasteries.
- Surprisingly enough, many members of Parliament had bought monastic land from Henry VIII! She was able to re-open a few monasteries such as Westminster Abbey.

Marriage to Philip of Spain.

- Mary was desperate to get married and produce a male heir.
- She was getting on in years and soon it would be too late.
- She spoke to her cousin, Charles V of Spain about suitable candidates. A list of eight (8) possible men was reduced to one and in 1554 Mary proposed marriage to Philip of Spain, a leading European Roman Catholic and heir to the Spanish throne.
- Mary herself was half Spanish and was besotted with the younger Philip.
- In her defence, a marriage to an English noble would have caused great resentment amongst other English nobles.
- The marriage to Philip of Spain proved unpopular because:
 1. People **feared** that England would come under the **direct control of Spain**. A Queen was viewed as weaker than a King. Some feared that Phillip would wield political power in England while Mary got on with the task of having children!
 2. The brutal way in which **the Spanish Inquisition had persecuted Protestants** horrified the English who feared a repeat in England. Thousands of Protestants had been burnt in Holland.
 3. England would be dragged into an **expensive and protracted war against France**, the great rival of Spain.
 4. English people did not want a return of Papal control. (Popery)
 5. Any resulting children would become heirs to the thrones of both England and Spain. The possibility was that the royal children may have been brought up in Spain and on Mary's death, England would have been ruled from Madrid instead of London. England would become just another province in Spain's already vast Empire.
 - Clearly, Parliament had their own worries about the marriage and they passed a law that prevented Philip taking the title 'King of England'. This insulted both Mary and Philip.

Wyatt's Rebellion, 1554.

- The unpopularity of the proposed marriage to Philip of Spain resulted in **Wyatt's Rebellion**.
- Sir Thomas Wyatt became the leader of the rebellion. (Protestant)
- The object was to **dethrone Mary** and replace her with Elizabeth her sister.
- The French Ambassador had made vague promises of military support for the rebellion.

- Elizabeth would then be married to Edward Courtenay, a member of an old noble family and a great-grandson of Edward IV.
- **Courtenay** himself **betrayed the plot** to Mary early in 1554.
- This forced the rebels' hand . They then had to act quicker than they would have wanted.
- The rebellion marched on London, from Kent with an army of 4000.
- They captured Rochester Castle and royal soldiers there joined the rebellion.
- Mary appealed to the people of London to remain loyal. They did! The citizens of London refused to open their gates.
- All boats had been taken and all bridges were closed.
- Wyatt's army deserted him and he was left with only 500 men.
- After a battle in which 100 men were killed, Sir Thomas Wyatt and the other leaders were captured in the "Bell Savage" inn.
- Wyatt was tortured for information about the rebellion and he was repeatedly questioned as to the involvement of Princess Elizabeth.
- Wyatt refused to implicate Elizabeth in the plot to dethrone Mary and he was executed. (hanged, drawn and quartered)
- **Lady Jane Grey, her husband Guilford Dudley and the Duke of Suffolk** followed shortly. They were now an unavoidable threat to Mary's security.
- Nearly **100 other rebels were hanged** in Kent and London.
- **Elizabeth** found herself **imprisoned** in the Tower of London, and Mary had to listen to many who suggested that Elizabeth should be executed too.
- There was insufficient evidence to implicate Elizabeth, although it has been suggested that Mary had written proof but Mary destroyed this proof deliberately.
- The plot seemed to make Mary even more determined in her plans to marry and Bishop Gardiner **married Mary and Philip** at Winchester in the summer of 1554.
- Mary followed this by the **restoration of full Papal power in England** when her cousin, Cardinal Reginald Pole arrived from Rome to become the Pope's representative in England. Pole had been an exile in Rome since the reign of Henry VIII.
- Cardinal Pole was to help Mary mastermind the revival of Catholicism in England. He later became Archbishop of Canterbury.
- Unfortunately, Pole had been in exile for 24 years and he was out of touch with peoples' feelings about Religion and the Papacy. All the **anti-papal laws**

passed by Henry VIII were repealed. The Pope was made Head of the Church in England.

Mary's Persecution of the Protestants 1555-1558.

- Mary wanted to **stamp out the Protestant** faith in England.
- Protestants were given the opportunity to "**turn or burn**" if they recanted (said that they were wrong to be Protestant) their faith then they might be spared death.
- **Cardinal Pole** appears to be the power behind all the burnings and seems to have persuaded a reluctant Mary that this was the only way to deal with heretic Protestants.
- The persecutions did not start immediately after Mary came to the throne.
- During the years 1555-1558 it was claimed that **270 Protestants** were burnt at the stake for their faith.
- 100 of these were clergymen and 80 were women.
- Most of these burnings took place in the south of the country, especially around London and the south eastern counties.
- The first to be burnt was John Rogers the author of Henry VIII's *Great English Bible*.
- Others included Bishop Hooper at Gloucester and the Oxford Martyrs, Latimer, Ridley and later Cranmer.
- Before Latimer was burnt at Oxford he turned round to Ridley and said, "**Be of good comfort. Play the man, Master Ridley, and we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out.**"
- Before he was burnt, Cranmer was beginning to change his mind and signed a recantation of his faith.
- However, as he was burning he thrust his hand into the burning flames as if to punish the hand.
- The bravery of the persecuted impressed the English people many of whom were as yet undecided about the right faith.
- Here, they saw people prepared to die for their faith.
- Mary's treatment of Protestants had the effect of strengthening the Protestant faith in England not weakening it.
- Mary's fanaticism was worrying the people.
- Religious tolerance was an unknown concept to Mary.

- Stories such as the one concerning the woman who gave birth before being burnt at the stake, and the fact that they threw her baby onto the fire to burn with her, did little for the Catholic revival in England.
- Even Simon Renard, the Spanish ambassador, wrote to Philip expressing his concern at the public reaction to the burnings.
- He asked Philip of Spain to intervene because Renard feared there was going to be a rebellion.
- A hatred of Mary, Philip and the Pope began to develop.

From 1554, everything started to go wrong for Mary culminating with the Loss of Calais to the French in 1558. Morale was dropping throughout the country.

The Loss of Calais

- In 1558, England became involved in a war with France and during the war England's last continental possession, the Port of Calais, was captured.
- The war was very unpopular in England.
- Although Calais was now of little importance and was expensive to maintain its loss was a blow to English pride and further damaged Mary's now rapidly dwindling popularity.
- The loss of Calais was to badly affect the English wool trade. This was not popular among England's merchants.

Death and Conclusion

- Mary died later that year leaving no heir to succeed her.
- The throne passed to her Protestant sister Elizabeth.
- The intolerance and programme of persecution of Protestants under Mary's rule probably did more to damage the Catholic cause than good and strengthened the Protestant Reformation in England.
- On the day of her death (and coincidentally that of Cardinal Pole), the citizens of London celebrated and called the day '**Hope Wednesday**'.
- The policy of 'turn or burn' died with them.
- At Mary Tudor's funeral the Bishop of Winchester lamented that 'the wolves (Protestants) be coming out of Geneva and other places of Germany and have sent their books before, full of pestilent doctrines, blasphemy and heresy to infect the people.' Clearly, the Bishop of Winchester was no great supporter of Protestantism!

Does Mary Deserve the Title 'Bloody Mary'?

She has earned the nickname 'Bloody Mary'. Whether she deserves this is debatable. Is there evidence or mitigating circumstances that could lessen the charge levelled against her?

- From the start of her reign Mary was ill and often lonely. She had had a difficult life. This combination made her very vulnerable.
- She appears to have dislike brutality. She pardoned 400 rebels after Wyatt's Rebellion.
- It has been suggested that Mary had written evidence of Elizabeth's involvement in Wyatt's rebellion, but that Mary destroyed this evidence, thus sparing her half-sister from execution. There was no love lost between the two sisters in the early days, but if this story is true it shows a very different side to Mary's nature.
- She allowed over 800 Protestant to emigrate to Europe.
- She was surrounded by Catholics like Cardinal Pole and Bishop Gardiner, who themselves had suffered under the Henry VIII and Edward VI. Did they want to get back at Protestants? The persecutions didn't start until 1555, when Pole arrived.
- Cardinal Pole believed that the only way a protestant could be saved was for them to be burnt at the stake. Again he appears to have influenced Mary. Today we see the burnings as barbaric, but the Catholic Church at that time taught that burning was the only way to cleanse the soul of a heretic (religious criminal). If the soul was not cleansed then it could not enter heaven. So, in a rather odd way, the burnings were there to help heretics (Protestants) get into heaven.
- If Mary was so barbaric why did the bulk of persecutions not start until 1555? Surely someone with so much apparent resentment and hate would have acted earlier.
- In 1555, Mary thought that she was pregnant. This turned out to be false hope as it turned out to be a symptom of her illness (which may have been "Dropsy"- swellings of the abdomen caused by the body retaining water. This is a symptom of heart disease. Some medical historians suggest that the swelling was caused by cancer of the bowel)
- At the same time, Philip returned to Spain to rule his empire. Mary was desperately unhappy.
- At this stage her attitude to Protestants appears to have changed. Is it possible that Cardinal Pole persuaded Mary that her childless marriage was a punishment from God for allowing the Protestant heresy in England to go

unpunished? She wouldn't have been the first Tudor monarch to worry about God's attitude towards a particular matter!

- Many of the accounts of the persecutions make it clear that the burnings took longer than expected. There is evidence to suggest that the faggots used were often damp and therefore burned slower. Also, the gunpowder placed around their necks was often damp and therefore death was delayed. A cynic might say this was deliberate.
- John Foxe in his 'Book of English Martyrs' claims that nearly 300 were burnt at the stake. Further investigation reveals that he occasionally counts the same person twice. Was this a mistake or deliberate? After all Foxe was a Protestant sympathiser and his book was excellent propaganda. It is thought that many of the martyrs who Foxe recorded were in fact Lollards who had been arrested, tried and sentenced to death during the reign of Edward VI. The backlog of executions had carried on into Mary Tudor's reign.
- Was Mary aware of the extent of the persecutions? Clearly she would have known about the high profile personalities such as Cranmer, but what about the other less important people? Was Mary kept in the dark by her ministers?
- At this time religious tolerance was not something that was common practice for any religious belief. Most religions believed that it was their duty to save souls by burning rather than allow someone to carry on committing heresy.
- Times were violent. In Henry VIII's reign hundreds had found themselves on the block, many of them without fair trials or on trumped up charges. To Mary's credit the Protestants were given a reasonably fair trial, offered the opportunity to recant their faith, (turn or burn) and in many cases avoided the stake. Cranmer was one exception, and ironically it was Cranmer who had persuaded Henry VIII not to execute Mary Tudor when she had at first refused to sign the Act of Supremacy.
- Only about 300 were burnt in England during her reign. In Holland over 1000 were being burnt every year. Were Charles V or Philip of Spain after him labelled 'Bloody'?
- There were now many wealthy landowners who has benefited greatly from the dissolution of the monasteries. They did not want the return of Catholicism, as it would possibly mean the restoration of the monasteries, which would in turn mean that the landowners might lose their lands back to the Church. This smacks of personal motivation rather than religious.

- For the great majority it was the marriage to Philip that turned people against Mary.
- Indeed it has been argued that Mary and her ministers would have got away with the burnings and the return of Catholicism in England had the marriage not gone ahead.
- Like so many characters in history who have been portrayed in a bad light, (King John, Richard III) when one looks closely at Mary Tudor's case there is certainly enough evidence to cast doubt on her acquired reputation.
- Mary's poor reputation also suffered further from her bad press (Fox's Book of Martyrs) and this clearly made it difficult for Catholicism to return to England with any significance.
- If she was aware of the true number of persecutions and they were motivated by her own feelings towards the Protestants, then the reputation would be deserved.
- Yes, she did suffer badly as a child and clearly and rightly felt enormous hatred towards the Protestants and in particular certain individuals (Cranmer in particular).
- However, if she was aware of this, it would be difficult to see the sheer extent of the persecutions as justifiable, particularly when one looks at the cross section of people burnt at the stake.
- In five years, Mary and her ministers had managed to turn Protestantism from being associated with church robbery, destruction and anarchy to being linked to virtue, honesty and loyal English resistance to a half foreign monarchy. Mary I's actions did more to advance the Protestant faith in England than her father's ever did!