

THE **TUDORS** IN 50 MOMENTS

PART 1

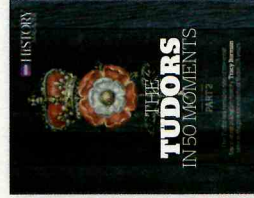
In the first part of our new history of the Tudor era, **Tracy Borman** selects the pivotal events from 1485-1543

From the bloody death of Richard III to the final bow of the Virgin Queen, the Tudor age encompassed just a little more than a century but contained many of English history's most dramatic events and colourful characters. Over the pages that follow, historian Tracy Borman chronicles the first half of the Tudor era, picking out 25 moments that encapsulate the years when first Henry VII and then Henry VIII sought to bend England to their will.

Many of the events narrated here form the backdrop to Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*, which is due to be shown on the BBC early in 2015. If you do happen to be watching then I hope you will find this a helpful companion to the series.

Rob Attar
Editor

Don't miss part 2, free with our January issue



In the concluding 25 moments, three more Tudor monarchs arrive on the throne where they face religious unrest, the threat of invasion and struggles for legitimacy.



Tracy Borman, the writer of *The Tudors in 50 Moments*, is a historian whose latest book is *Thomas Cromwell: The Untold Story of Henry VIII's Most Faithful Servant* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2014)

1 22 August 1485 Battle of Bosworth

The Tudor age began on a remote field in Leicestershire. The battle of Bosworth pitted the forces of the Yorkist king Richard III (below) against those of his Lancastrian challenger, Henry Tudor. Richard's reign had begun only two years before upon the death of his brother, Edward IV, who appointed him lord protector during the minority of his 12-year-old son and heir, Edward V. But Richard had soon declared Edward and his younger brother illegitimate and claimed the throne for himself. The two boys had disappeared in the Tower of London in the summer of 1483, and had almost certainly been put to death – at whose orders is still hotly debated.

The turbulence that followed presented Henry Tudor, who was waiting in the wings (or rather Brittany), with his chance. Although his claim to the throne was tenuous, he was one of the few surviving Lancastrian descendants and whipped up what support he could for an invasion. His forces were considerably outnumbered by those of the king, but Richard was undone by the treachery of the powerful Stanley brothers, who changed sides halfway through the fighting. He was hacked to death in the heat of the battle. Legend has it that his crown was found under a hawthorn bush and brought to Henry Tudor, who was proclaimed king.

“His claim to the throne was tenuous, but Henry was one of the few surviving Lancastrian descendants”



ABOVE: A silver boar badge found in the vicinity of the battle of Bosworth



LEFT: The king who lost his life at the battle, Richard III

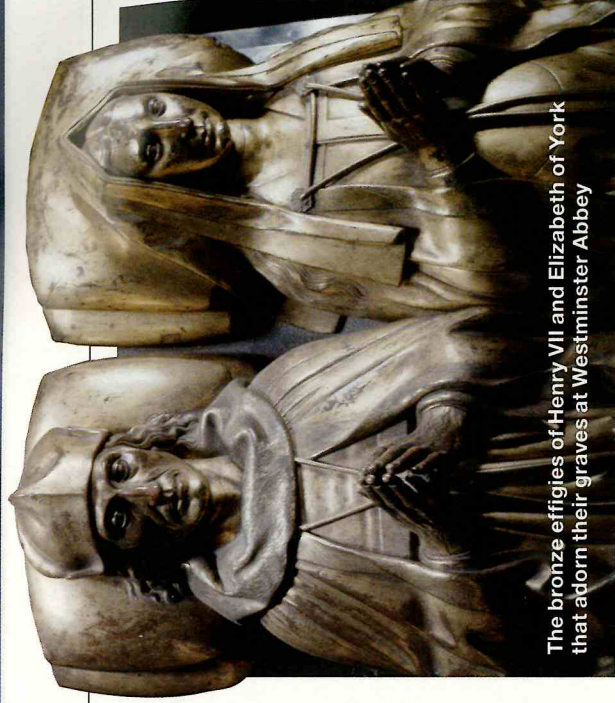
18 January 1486

2 Henry VII marries Elizabeth of York

Henry Tudor may have triumphed at Bosworth, but his hold on the throne was by no means secure. Many of his subjects saw him as a usurper and there were other claimants with arguably stronger blood claims than his. Henry's own claim was on the side of his indomitable mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort. She was the great-granddaughter of John of Gaunt, fourth son of Edward III, and his third wife (and long-standing mistress) Katherine Swynford. But Katherine had given birth to Henry's great-grandfather when

she was still John's mistress, so Henry's claim was through an illegitimate line. It was something of which he was painfully aware and it would make him increasingly paranoid about rival claimants, particularly those of Yorkist descent.

Henry therefore decided to boost the legitimacy of the new Tudor dynasty by marrying a bride of that house. And chief among the candidates was Elizabeth of York, the eldest daughter of Edward IV. Elizabeth's beauty and royal blood had attracted other suitors in the past – perhaps



The bronze effigies of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York that adorn their graves at Westminster Abbey

including her own uncle, Richard III, who was rumoured to have planned to marry her shortly before Bosworth. Elizabeth proved an excellent choice for his Tudor rival. Just

eight months after the wedding, she gave birth to a son, Arthur. Six more children followed, three of whom survived into adulthood. The Tudor dynasty had been established.

16 June 1487

3 Battle of Stoke Field

Henry VII's paranoia about rival claimants grew stronger as his reign progressed – with good reason. The 30 years leading up to his accession had seen the crown change hands numerous times, and there was no reason to suspect that this latest king would survive any longer than the one he had usurped. The first serious challenge to Henry's authority came in 1487 in the form of the

10-year-old pretender, Lambert Simnel. Struck by the boy's resemblance to the sons of Edward IV, Simnel's tutor, Richard Simons, decided to turn kingmaker. At first he planned to masquerade Simnel as Richard, Duke of York, the younger of the two princes who had disappeared in the Tower. But when he heard rumours that the princes had been murdered,

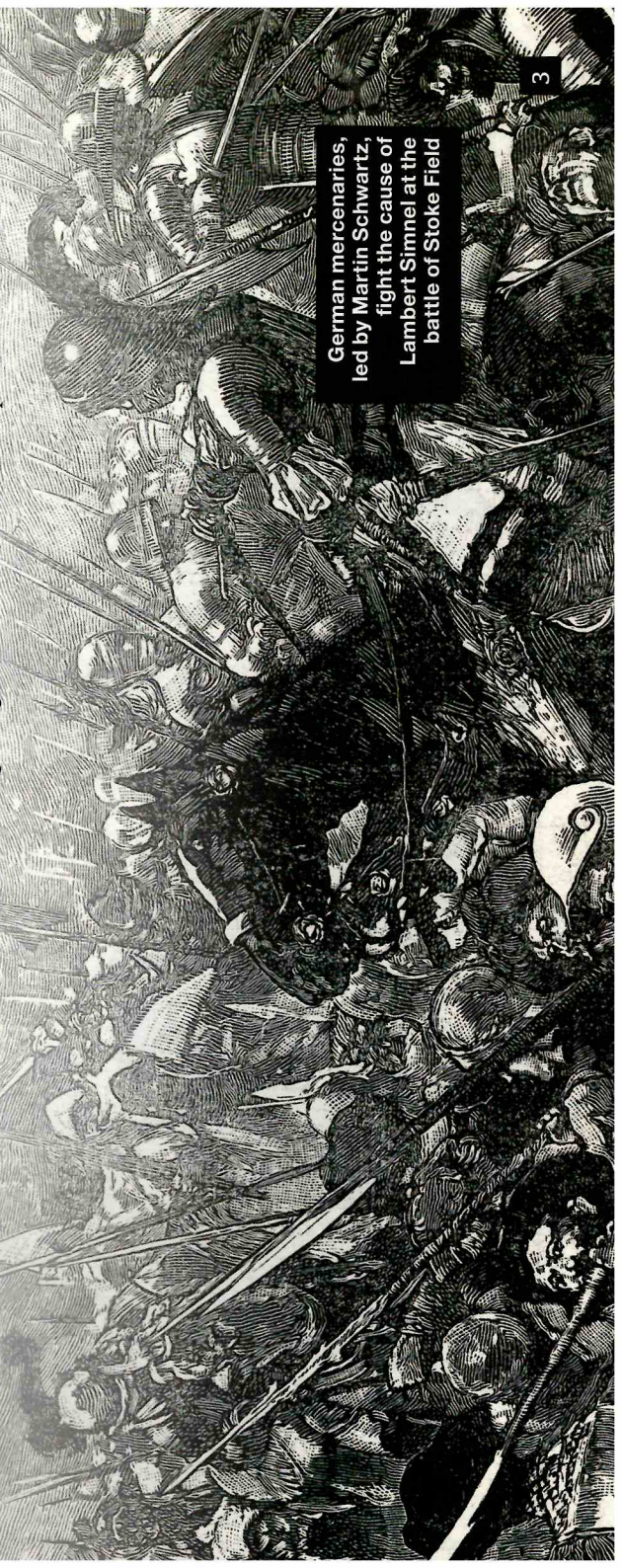
he switched the boy's identity to Edward, Earl of Warwick, son of Edward IV's brother George, Duke of Clarence.

Henry VII had taken the precaution of confining Warwick to the Tower, but Simons spread the rumour that he had escaped.

Gaining support from those sympathetic to the House of York, he took the boy to Ireland and began to gather an invasion force.

Bolstered by 2,000 Flemish, German and Swiss mercenaries sent over by Warwick's aunt, Margaret of York, Simnel's army

landed in Lancashire on 5 June 1487. They were defeated by the king's forces at Stoke Field 11 days later in what is commonly regarded as the last battle of the Wars of the Roses. Henry pardoned Simnel and made him a spit-turner in his kitchens.



German mercenaries, led by Martin Schwartz, fight the cause of Lambert Simnel at the battle of Stoke Field

28 June 1491

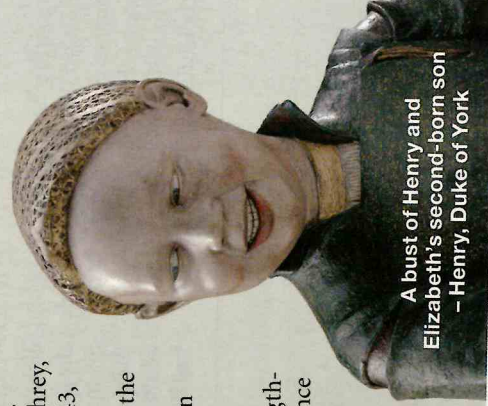
4 Henry VIII is born

By 1491, Henry VII had reason to feel more secure on his throne. He had seen off the early threats to his authority, and his marriage to Elizabeth of York – which, somewhat against the odds, had grown into something of a love match – had yielded a male heir and a daughter, Margaret. Now, Elizabeth was pregnant again and, in June, she entered her confinement at the Palace of Placentia in Greenwich.

Originally built by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, in 1443, it remained one of the principal royal palaces for the next two centuries.

The birth of a second son was the cause of great rejoicing for the king, who always had an eye to strengthening his dynasty. The prince was christened Henry and later made Duke of York. He received an excellent education, becoming fluent in Latin and

French, and showed a natural aptitude for sports. He spent a great deal of his childhood with his mother at Eltham Palace, and was devastated when she died in February 1503. Given that he had an elder brother, Henry was not expected to be king and it is possible that he was intended for the church – a career that this boisterous young prince was quite unsuited for.



A bust of Henry and Elizabeth's second-born son – Henry, Duke of York

23 November 1499

5 The last pretender is executed

Little is known of the early life of Perkin Warbeck (pictured right), although – according to his later confession – he was born in Tournai and began his training as a merchant in Antwerp and other key trading cities in the Netherlands. In 1490, at the age of about 16, he travelled to Burgundy and first made the claim that he was Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York, the younger son of Edward IV.

Burgundy was a centre for Yorkist sympathisers. Its regent, Margaret, was the sister of Edward IV and willing to support anyone who challenged Henry Tudor's rule. On 3 July 1495, Warbeck landed at Deal in Kent with a small army provided by Margaret. He was swiftly defeated by Henry's forces and fled first to Ireland and then Scotland, where he found



favour with James IV, who promised to help him invade England. This came to nothing, and Warbeck was on the run once more. In September 1497, he landed near Land's

End and found ready support among the Cornishmen who had recently rebelled against Henry's rule. Having been declared Richard IV on Bodmin Moor, he and his army of 6,000 men marched eastwards towards London. But Warbeck was captured at Beaulieu Abbey in Hampshire.

Although Henry initially showed clemency towards the imposter, even welcoming him to court, Warbeck posed too great a danger to remain at liberty. He was confined to the Tower of London alongside Edward, Earl of Warwick, and the two were executed in November 1499.

14 November 1501

6 Prince Arthur marries Catherine of Aragon

Henry VII had ambitious marriage plans for his eldest son and heir, Arthur, Prince of Wales. He knew that securing a bride of sufficient stature would not only further legitimise his dynasty, but provide England with a much-needed international ally. The lady upon whom he had set his sights was Catherine, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. Allying with these powerful Catholic monarchs would greatly strengthen Henry's hand against England's traditional enemy, France, so he pursued

negotiations with vigour. The Treaty of Medina del Campo was duly signed on 27 March 1489, pledging Arthur and Catherine (then aged two and three) to be married when they came of age.

The Spanish princess eventually arrived in England in October 1501; she and Arthur were married the following month and took up residence at Ludlow Castle in the Welsh

Marches. But Arthur's health soon began to fail and, on 2 April 1502, he died, aged just 15. His parents were devastated upon hearing the news – a contemporary account records how the weeping king and queen comforted each other in their grief. Meanwhile, England had a new heir: Henry, Duke of York.



Arthur, Prince of Wales, wouldn't live to see his 16th birthday, leaving Catherine of Aragon, his bride of just four months, a teenage widow



The union of James and Margaret would ultimately lead to the Stuarts inheriting the English throne

7 8 August 1503 Margaret Tudor marries James IV of Scotland

The eldest daughter of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, Margaret was born in 1489. Although it was sons that counted in royal families, daughters were useful for forging alliances; even before her sixth birthday, Henry had made plans for Margaret's marriage. Greatly troubled by the King of Scots' support for Perkin Warbeck, Henry resolved to tempt him into an alliance by offering his eldest daughter in marriage. A truce was concluded in 1497, but it wasn't until January 1502 that the marriage treaty was finally agreed. Some of Henry's councillors were against the match, arguing that it would give the Stuarts a claim to the English throne. But Henry

retorted: "I foresee that our realm would suffer no harm, since England would not be absorbed by Scotland, but rather Scotland by England." The marriage was completed by proxy a year later at Richmond Palace and, in August 1503, Margaret arrived in Scotland. The wedding ceremony between the 'thistle and the rose' was conducted soon after.

Just as Henry's councillors had predicted, it gave the Scottish rulers a claim to the English throne, although it was one that they would have to wait a while to capitalise upon. A century after the marriage, one of Margaret and James's descendants would take the English throne.

21 April 1509

8 Death of Henry VII; accession of Henry VIII

The death of his wife and eldest son had plunged Henry VII into a deep melancholy from which he never fully recovered. Increasingly paranoid and miserly, he had failed to win over the English people, but had succeeded in establishing a relatively stable new dynasty – as well as a much healthier treasury. This was the legacy that he passed on to his

17-year-old heir, Henry, upon his death at Richmond Palace in April 1509.

"For the future, the whole world will talk of him,"

remarked the Venetian ambassador with remarkable foresight upon the accession of Henry VIII. Everyone was full of praise for this ebullient, charismatic, intelligent and

pleasure-loving new king – a true Renaissance prince, and the antithesis of his father in almost every possible way.

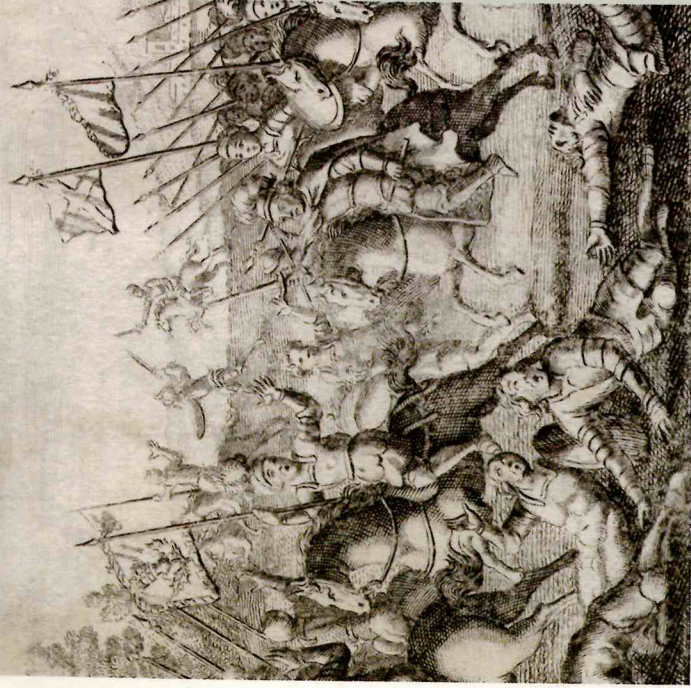
Henry had inherited the charm, charisma and good looks of his mother's family, the House of York. Affable, quick-witted, idealistic and hugely generous, he was "the man most full of heart," according to Erasmus. As if to distance himself from the old king, one of Henry's first acts was to have his father's

despised ministers, Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, arrested and executed for high treason. He also took his late brother's widow, Catherine of Aragon, as his bride – this would have far-reaching consequences in the years ahead.



His later life was marked by tragedy, but Henry VII did manage to secure the Tudor dynasty

Fought between England and Scotland in Northumberland, the battle of Flodden was fierce and bloody – and saw the demise of James IV of Scotland



9 September 1513 Battle of Flodden

The treaty signed by Henry VII and James IV in 1502 was hardly one of ‘perpetual peace’, as it claimed to be. The long-standing hostilities had resumed soon afterwards and, in 1513, they spilled out into open conflict. James declared war on England to honour the Auld Alliance with France by diverting Henry VIII’s troops away from their campaign against the French king Louis XII. Henry had already antagonised James by claiming to be overlord of Scotland and, in late August 1513, the Scottish king gathered his troops and marched south towards England.

He encountered the English force, under the command of the Earl of Surrey, near the village of

Branxton (rather than Flodden, from which the battle takes its name) in Northumberland. What followed was the largest clash of arms ever between England and Scotland – and one of the most fiercely contested battles in history. “The battle was cruel, none spared other, and the king himself fought valiantly,” stated one contemporary chronicler.

James paid a high price for his bravery: he was mortally wounded by an arrow as he was advancing upon Surrey. His wife, Margaret, was appointed the formal guardian of their infant son (by now James V), and initially given powers of regency, although these were withdrawn when she remarried.

10 24 December 1515 Wolsey is appointed lord chancellor

Thomas Wolsey’s rise to power was thanks to his own political guile and the young king’s obvious preference for pleasurable pursuits over the business of government. Having served Henry’s father, Wolsey rapidly proved his worth to the new king. His servant, George Cavendish, observed how he “daily attendyd upon the kyng in the Court beyng in his especyall grace & favour”. His ecclesiastical appointments – notably as archbishop of York and cardinal – were swiftly followed by political ones. Towards the end of 1515, Henry raised him to the position of lord chancellor.

Not long after, Erasmus, who spent some considerable time at Henry’s court, described Wolsey as governing “more really than the king himself”. The fact that Wolsey was merely the son of a butcher made his rise to prominence a bitter pill to swallow for the blue-blooded

members of Henry’s council and he soon had a coterie of dangerous enemies. But Wolsey cared little for that and his ambition knew no bounds. In the same year that he was made lord chancellor, he set about building a magnificent new palace for himself – Hampton Court – which he filled with priceless furnishings and works of art, together with a household of more than 400 staff. Soon, envious courtiers were whispering that Wolsey’s magnificence was beginning to eclipse that of his royal master.

“Wolsey was the **son of a butcher** – a bitter pill for Henry’s blue-blooded council”



As Henry VIII’s closest confidant, Wolsey lived a life of power, influence and no small amount of luxury

11 18 February 1516 Birth of the future Mary I

Although the early years of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon's marriage were happy and harmonious, a string of stillbirths and miscarriages had started to put a strain on their relationship. The joy that accompanied the birth of a son on New Year's Day 1511 proved short-lived: the little prince died just seven weeks later. The birth of a healthy princess, christened Mary (pictured here later in life), in February 1516 eased relations between Henry and Catherine. Even though she was not the hoped-for son, she could still be useful in the international marriage market and, more importantly, she was proof that Catherine could bear healthy children.

But Mary would be the only surviving child from the marriage, and Henry became increasingly convinced that he had displeased God by taking his late brother's widow as a bride. For the first few years of her life, though, Mary was a source of delight to her parents. A pretty and precocious child, she entertained a visiting French delegation with a performance on the virginals when she was just four and a half years old. She would grow to be particularly close to her mother, with whom she shared a devout Roman Catholic faith and a love of all things Spanish. By contrast, her relationship with her father became increasingly strained.



12 7-24 June 1520 The Field of the Cloth of Gold

Henry VIII and Francis I, king of France, were natural rivals. Close in age, they were both lauded for their good looks, sporting prowess and cultural accomplishments, and had established magnificent courts. But on the surface, they were careful to maintain the impression of cordiality. To this end, they had signed a treaty in 1514 and, six years later, it was decided that the two kings should meet to “increase their bonds of friendship”.

The event, which was organised by the Francophile Cardinal Wolsey and took place near Calais in June 1520, was one of the most ostentatious ever seen. This was an opportunity not just for a political rapprochement, but for each

king to try to outshine the other. A dazzling array of fireworks, feasts and tournaments was staged, costing Henry and Francis millions in modern-day money. The tents, clothes and other fabrics displayed so much cloth of gold that it gave the meeting its name. The English king triumphed with an enormous temporary palace (covering an area of 10,000 square metres and erected by 6,000 men sent ahead for the purpose) and a wine fountain, but his French rival outwitted him in the field of combat.

Their natural competitiveness ensured that the meeting actually worsened, rather than cemented, their relationship. Within a short time, they were at war again.



Anne Boleyn's dark eyes apparently “invited conversation”

13 Early 1522 Anne Boleyn arrives at court

In 1522 the ambitious politician and diplomat Thomas Boleyn secured a place for the younger of his two daughters, Anne, in

Catherine of Aragon's household. Having taken up her appointment, Anne swiftly established herself as one of the leading ladies of the court. What set her apart was her style and sophistication, both of which had been honed to perfection during her service at the French court. Although she had strikingly dark eyes which “invited conversation”, Anne was no great beauty. The Venetian ambassador was clearly bemused by Henry VIII's later fascination with her. “Madam Anne is not one of the handsomest women in the world,” he wrote. “She is of

middling stature, swarthy complexion, long neck, wide mouth, bosom not much raised.”

The early relationship between Henry and Anne showed little of the intensity that it would later develop. Indeed, Anne had been at court for four years by the time there was any hint of romance. This was very different to Henry's previous infidelities; Anne proved to be the most unyielding of mistresses. She persistently held out against the king's increasingly fervent advances, insisting that while she might love him in spirit, she could not love him in body unless they were married. It was an extraordinarily audacious ploy. She would not be a mistress; she would be queen.



“A dazzling array of fireworks, feasts and tournaments”: Henry VIII and Francis I try to outdo each other at the Field of the Cloth of Gold

14 31 October 1529 Exit Wolsey, enter Cromwell

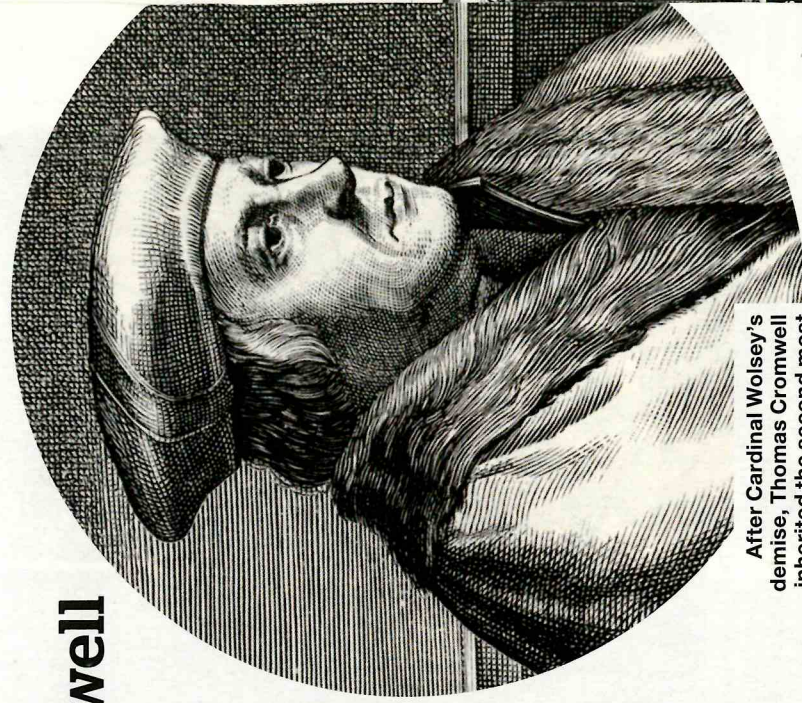
When Henry’s VIII’s chief adviser Cardinal Wolsey fell from grace in October 1529 for failing to gain his master an annulment from Catherine of Aragon, it was expected that his favourite servant, Thomas Cromwell, would fall with him. Cromwell feared this himself and wept bitter tears of regret. But he soon rallied, pronouncing that he would go to the court and “make or marre”.

Acting as an intermediary between his fallen master and the king had all the makings of a thankless task, but Cromwell turned it to his advantage with spectacular success. Henry was quick to appreciate the skill of this self-trained lawyer and soon put it to his own use. Within days of his arrival, Cromwell had secured a seat in parliament and he was appointed a member of the council the following year. Far from being overawed by such a meteoric rise, he was outspoken and persuasive in his opinions, much to the annoyance of his higher-born colleagues. The similarity between this new kid on the block and the man whom he had

effectively replaced could not have been lost on the king. Wolsey and Cromwell shared more than their humble birth: both were highly intelligent, ambitious, audacious and extraordinarily industrious.

But Henry had had his fingers burnt with the cardinal and was not about to entrust another adviser with as much power as he had enjoyed. Cromwell would have to work hard to gain his trust.

“Far from being overawed by his meteoric rise, Cromwell was both outspoken and persuasive”



After Cardinal Wolsey’s demise, Thomas Cromwell inherited the second most powerful position in the land

15 25 January 1533 Henry marries Anne Boleyn

In late 1532, Anne Boleyn finally submitted to Henry's advances and became his mistress. The gamble seemed to have paid off: Eustace Chapuys, the Holy Roman empire's ambassador to England, noted with some disgust that "the king cannot leave her for an hour". By December, Anne was pregnant. Her royal lover and his ministers now had to act fast if the baby was to be born legitimate. On 25 January 1533, Henry married Anne in his private chapel at Westminster. The ceremony was conducted in great secrecy, for the divorce from Catherine of Aragon had not yet been secured. Convinced that the child Anne carried was a son, the king immediately ordered

Cromwell to legitimise their union. The very day after the wedding, parliament was recalled to pass the necessary legislation. The divorce was finally confirmed on 23 May, and Anne was crowned on 1 June.

But the child that was born to Anne on 7 September was not the expected son and heir. It was a girl. Henry was devastated. He had overturned the entire religious and political life of England in order to marry Anne, on the promise that she would give him the prince upon which the stability of his realm depended. Little did he know that this "useless girl", Elizabeth, would go on to become the longest-reigning of all the Tudor monarchs.



Henry's lengthy pursuit of Anne finally ended in marriage



This illustration portrays Henry VIII resting his feet on the prostrate Pope Clement VII

16 November 1534 First Act of Supremacy

In November 1534, during one of the most revolutionary parliaments of the Tudor age, the Act of Supremacy was passed. This legislation is often seen as the beginning of the English Reformation, although the foundations had been laid during the previous five years. It declared Henry VIII to be supreme head of the Church of England and rejected all "foreign authority".

At a stroke, this ended centuries of papal jurisdiction over the religious life of England. The initial inspiration for this seismic shift had been the king's desire for a divorce from Catherine of Aragon: when the pope refused to grant it, Henry's ministers concluded that the

only option was to reject his authority. But the wording of the act made it clear that there were more revolutionary changes to come. It stipulated that Henry and his heirs "shall have full power and authority from time to time to visit, repress, redress, reform, order, correct, restrain, and amend all such errors, heresies, abuses, offences, contempts, and enormities, whatsoever they be". This gave Cromwell carte blanche to undertake a thoroughgoing reformation of the English church, but its revolutionary tendrils would reach even further than that. By the end of his ascendancy, the entire government of the realm had been overhauled by his reforms.

17 21 January 1535 The Dissolution of the Monasteries

On 21 January 1535, Henry appointed Cromwell viceregent in spirituals, or 'vicar-general'. This gave him considerable new powers over the church and he wasted no time in dispatching commissioners across the country to assess the state of each religious house. With typical attention to detail, he even investigated a few himself. Eustace Chapuys reported: "Wherever the King goes, Cromwell, who accompanies him, goes about visiting the abbeyes in the neighbourhood, taking inventories of their lands and revenues."

Motivated as much by tales of widespread corruption as by the prospect of seizing their immense wealth and landholdings, Cromwell began a programme of systematic dissolution which would see the

closure and demolition of hundreds of monasteries. At the same time, he organised a series of executions to make an example of those who refused to recognise Henry's supremacy. Principal among his victims were Bishop John Fisher and Sir Thomas More, both of whom had been thrown in the Tower for refusing to sign the oath of supremacy.

When Fisher and More resisted intense pressure from Cromwell to conform, they went to the block. His favour with the king now seemed unassailable. The Venetian ambassador scathingly remarked that although "this Cromwell was a person of low origin and condition, he is now Secretary of State, the King's prime minister, and has supreme authority".

The Cellarium at
Fountains Abbey,
one of the many
monasteries
dissolved by Henry

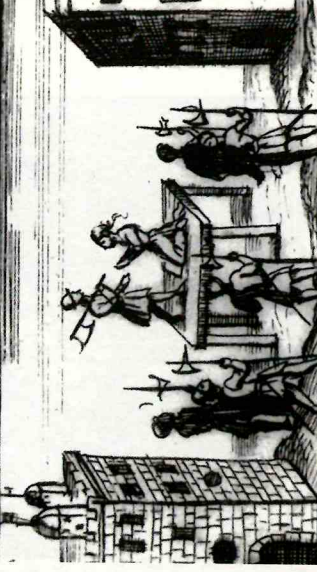
18 19 May 1536 Anne Boleyn is executed

Although Henry VIII had pursued Anne Boleyn relentlessly for seven long years, shaking England to its core in the process, once won, she had proved a disappointment. Her high-handed and 'unqueenly' manner made her dangerously unpopular and sparked frequent rows with her husband. Most damning of all her 'sins', though, was her failure to produce the longed-for Tudor prince. When she miscarried a male foetus on the day of Catherine of Aragon's funeral in January 1536, things began to unravel rapidly. "This king has not spoken 10 times to the Concubine... when formerly he could not leave her for an hour," reported a gleeful Chapuys in February.

Worse still, for Anne, was the fact that her royal husband had already found a new favourite to replace her: the virtuous and rather insipid Jane Seymour. Henry wanted rid of Anne and there was only one man who could fix it: the same man who had arranged the marriage in the first place. Cromwell was swift to act. He gathered 'evidence' (flimsy at best) of her adultery with not one but five men, including her own brother. It was one of the most brutal plots in history, resulting in the beheading not only of the queen, but of all her alleged lovers.

"Her high-handed
manner sparked
frequent rows
with her husband"

The Beheading of Qq: Anne Buller.

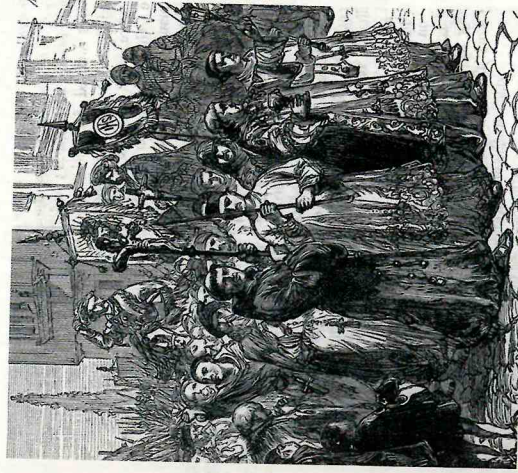


Found guilty of flimsy charges, Anne Boleyn kneels on the scaffold in readiness for her execution

19 October 1536 Pilgrimage of Grace

On 1 October 1536 Thomas Kendall, vicar of Louth in Lincolnshire, used his weekly sermon to speak out against the royal commissioners who were expected in the town the following day. It was rumoured that these men were planning to raid all of the local churches, as well as the monasteries, seizing their treasures and laying waste to their adornments. The rumours spread like wildfire and, within days, almost all of northern Lincolnshire was up in arms. Henry VIII's religious reforms had swiftly sparked widespread resentment among his subjects – and this was the first open expression of their fury.

The uprisings, which became known collectively as the Pilgrimage of Grace, spread rapidly across the northern counties, winning support from nobility and commoners alike. They constituted the greatest threat to Henry's authority that he had faced during his 27 years on the throne. Although he was inclined to clemency at first, when fresh revolts continued to break out during the early months of 1537, he took swift and brutal action. All the ringleaders were executed, including the most influential: Robert Aske, a one-eyed Yorkshire lawyer, who was hanged from the walls of Clifford's Tower in York as a grim warning to the inhabitants of that rebellious city. For all his bluster, though, Henry's confidence in the Reformation had been badly shaken.



The Pilgrimage of Grace was brutally suppressed by Henry VIII, who had the ringleaders executed



Henry's joy at Edward's birth was tempered by Jane Seymour's death just 12 days later

20 October 1537 Birth of Edward VI

Henry VIII had married his third wife just 11 days after the execution of his second. Jane Seymour had proved a welcome contrast to Anne Boleyn. Meek and compliant, she was likely to give the king little trouble as a wife. What he hoped she *would* give him was a son. In May 1537, it was announced at court that the new queen was pregnant. Henry was transported with joy, convinced that this time God would grant him a boy. A mass was held to celebrate later that month.

Jane's pregnancy progressed without incident and, in the middle of September, she began her confinement at Hampton Court. The king and his courtiers waited anxiously for news as Jane's labour dragged on for two days and three nights. Finally, at about two o'clock on the morning of 12 October, the child was born. It was a boy.

Henry's long struggle for a son and heir was over at last. There was great rejoicing throughout the court and beyond. England had a male heir; her troubles would surely now be over. But Jane never recovered from the long and tortuous birth. She died, possibly of puerperal fever, some 12 days later. The grief-stricken king lamented: "Divine Providence has mingled my joy with the bitterness of the death of her who brought me to this happiness."

"England had a male heir; her troubles would surely now be over"

1539 21 Every parish is given an English Bible

One of the greatest legacies of the English Reformation was to provide every parish church in the country with a copy of the Bible in English. This gave the king's subjects direct access to the word of God for the first time in history. The move was masterminded by Thomas Cromwell, whose reforming drive was motivated by personal piety, not just a desire to swell the royal coffers. So committed was he to the project that he had contributed £400 of his own money to bring it to fruition.

In 1538, he ordered that “one book of the whole Bible of the largest volume in English” should be set up in every church, so “that every man having free access to it by reading of the same may both

be the more apt to understand the declaration of it at the preacher's mouth, and also the more able to teach and instruct his wife, children and family at home”. The task of distributing copies of the ‘Great Bible’, translated by Miles Coverdale, to all 8,500 parishes in the country was a gargantuan one. It took several false starts before it was finally achieved.

“Cromwell was so committed to the project that he contributed **£400 of his own money** to it”



The title page of the 'Great Bible' shows Henry VIII distributing copies of this first English translation



Henry VIII believed that Holbein's portrait of Anne of Cleves was misleading

6 January 1540 22 Henry VIII marries Anne of Cleves

Within weeks of the death of the king's third wife, Jane Seymour, the search was on for a successor. With no obvious home-grown candidate, the net had to be cast further afield. Anne, daughter of the Duke of Cleves, soon became the lead contender. Her father had expelled papal authority from his realm and was therefore a natural ally for the English king.

But Henry's ambassadors admitted they had heard “no great praise either of her personage or of her beauty”, so Henry demanded that Holbein be dispatched to Cleves to paint Anne's likeness. The result was flattering enough to convince him that she would make a pleasant wife and the marriage treaty was duly signed.

But when Henry met Anne upon her arrival in England in December 1539, he was bitterly disappointed. “I like her not! I like her not!” he shouted at a dismayed Cromwell, and ordered him to find a way out of the marriage.

But the treaty was binding; it was with extreme reluctance that Henry was obliged to “put his neck in the yoke” and marry Anne on 6 January 1540. He found his bride so repugnant that he was unable to consummate the union. This at least made it easier to secure an annulment, which Henry succeeded in doing just six months later on the grounds that Anne had been betrothed to someone else before their marriage.

23 28 July 1540 Cromwell goes to the block

In a move that sent shockwaves across the court, Henry VIII's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, was arrested at a meeting of the Privy Council on 10 June 1540. His fall from grace had been spectacular, even in a court renowned for its swift turns of fortune: just two months earlier, the king had shown Cromwell great favour by making him Earl of Essex. The coup was almost certainly engineered by the minister's arch rivals, Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk and Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, who had long sought his destruction.

A bill of attainder was passed on 29 June. This claimed that the base-born minister had plotted to make himself more powerful than the king in all matters – political as well as religious – and had thus committed high treason, for which Cromwell was condemned to die. It went on to list a host of trumped-up charges, the most outlandish being that he had plotted to marry the king's eldest daughter, Mary. A beleaguered Cromwell wrote a long and impassioned letter to his royal master from the Tower, begging for “mercy mercy mercy”. His plea fell on deaf ears and, on 28 July, Cromwell was beheaded with three blows of the bungling executioner's axe. Within a few short months, Henry was bemoaning the death of “the most faithful servant he had ever had”.

Cromwell's downfall was very swift and left Henry to later regret the plot against his close confidant

ALAMY



13 February 1542

24 Catherine Howard is executed

Henry VIII married his fifth wife on the very same day as Cromwell's execution. Catherine was only about 16 years old, making her the king's junior by more than 30 years. A lady-in-waiting to Anne of Cleves, Catherine had quickly beguiled the king with her seductive charms. But the new queen's past did not bear scrutiny. Her first sexual liaison was with her music teacher when she may have been as young as 12 and it had been followed by a relationship with her kinsman, Francis Dereham.

None of this was known to Henry, who prized chastity in his brides. Neither was he aware that, not long after the wedding, Catherine began an illicit affair with Thomas Culpepper, a

gentleman of the privy chamber. When their affair was discovered, an investigation was launched into the queen's conduct. Her previous indiscretions soon came to light.

Confronted with the evidence, Catherine confessed on 8 November 1541. Her affair with Culpepper had been testified to by her lady-in-waiting, Jane Rochford, as well as by a love letter that Catherine had written to him, which she had signed:

"Yours, as long as life endures." Meanwhile, Dereham, she said, had used her "in such sort as a man doth use his wife many and sundry times". Heartbroken and humiliated, Henry had no hesitation in sending her to the block.

"Not long after the wedding, **Catherine began an illicit affair** with

Thomas Culpepper, a gentleman of the privy chamber"

Catherine's previous and ongoing indiscretions made her the second wife of Henry to go to the scaffold

12 July 1543

25 Henry marries Katherine Parr

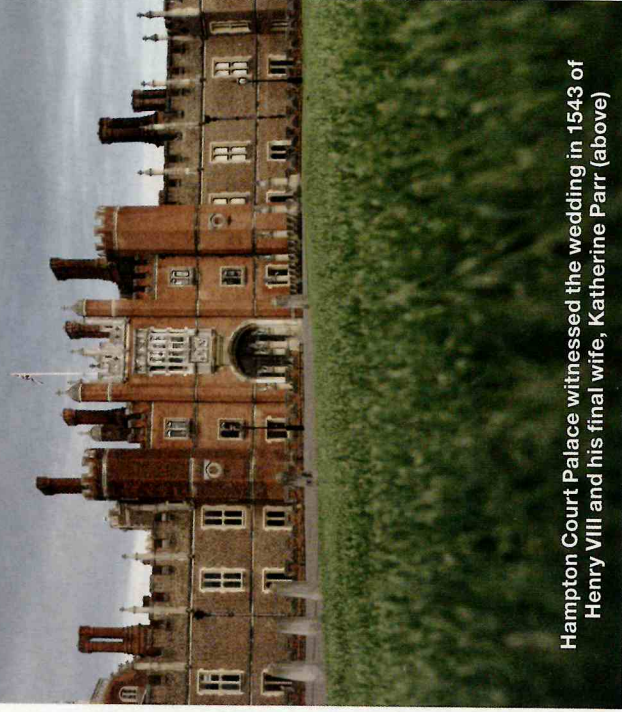
Henry spent a year licking his wounds after the humiliating betrayal of his flighty young fifth wife before yet again turning his thoughts to marriage. The lady he set his sights on was something of a contrast to his previous wives.

The twice-widowed Katherine Parr joined the household of the king's eldest daughter, Mary, in February 1543. At 31 years of age, Katherine was a comely, if not exactly beautiful woman. In contrast to her direct predecessor, she was highly intelligent and articulate, with strong religious principles of a reformist nature.

Despite Henry's terrible track record (not to mention his increasing age and

girth), being the wife of the king was still an attractive prospect, but Katherine was far from flattered by his attentions. In fact, she loved another: the handsome but reckless Thomas Seymour, brother of the late Queen Jane. Sensing a rival, the king found an excuse to send him away from court.

Katherine remained reluctant but eventually put her own desires aside and consented to be the sixth wife of this much-married monarch. The wedding took place on 12 July 1543 in the queen's private apartments at Hampton Court Palace. There were just 18 guests.



Hampton Court Palace witnessed the wedding in 1543 of Henry VIII and his final wife, Katherine Parr (above)