

Mary Tudor

How ‘bloody’ was ‘Bloody Mary’?



Mary Tudor replaced her half-brother Edward as Queen of England in 1553. She was the daughter of the Catholic Queen, Catherine of Aragon, and had herself been brought up as a Catholic.

At first, many people in Tudor England were pleased to have a Catholic rule their country once again. The changes Edward VI had made to the appearance of churches had upset many people. Most people preferred the ornate churches of the past, with their decorated walls, stained glass windows and beautiful plates and robes. They hoped Mary would restore things to the way they had been before her Protestant half-brother had got hold of them. They were also pleased to see the Tudor dynasty continue. Many still feared a return to the bitter fighting and uncertainty of the Wars of the Roses.

However, Mary made several bad decisions. Firstly, she married the Spanish king, Philip II. Although Spain was a very wealthy country, many people saw Philip as a foreigner who would rob the country of all its wealth and rule it from afar. Secondly, as soon as Mary became Queen, as expected she began to change churches back to the way they had been before her brother’s reign. However, the Protestants had grown in number and many of them occupied important positions in government and within the Church. The changes she made immediately caused problems.

A list of changes Mary made:

- The official religion of England was Catholicism once again
- The Pope was once more head of the Church in England
- Churches were returned to their appearance before the time of Edward VI
- Married priests were forced to leave their wives
- Services, Bibles and prayer books were in Latin again

Mary treated her opponents very harshly. For example, the sixteen-year-old Lady Jane Grey had been named by Edward as his successor (mostly because she was a Protestant). When Mary became Queen she promised to forgive Lady Jane, but promptly changed her mind and had her executed along with her husband and all her family. Protestants who

refused to convert back to Catholicism were treated even more harshly. Over 300 were burned at the stake as heretics (people who did not follow the official religion of the day), including the Archbishop of Canterbury. Many of those who were killed were ordinary people, who saw in Protestantism a new and simpler religion. The nickname 'Bloody Mary' began to be applied to the Queen. Many escaped execution by fleeing abroad, to Protestant countries like Holland or Switzerland.