English Monarchs

Henry VIII

Born in 1491
Ascended in 1509
Died in 1547, aged 56
Reigned for 38 years
Married to Catherine of Aragon bearing 1 son and 1 daughter
Then to Anne Boleyn bearing 1 daughter
Then to Jane Seymour bearing 1 son
Then to Anne of Cleves
Then to Catherine Howard
Finally to Catherine Parr

Many Kings took mistresses but Henry VIII took wives. He had six in total and it is for this that he is most remembered. He was the first king to be divorced when he divorced his first wife, Catherine of Aragon in 1509. This led to him being excommunicated by the pope.

In the following year, the act of supremacy was passed putting Henry VIII as head of the Church of England and out of the Catholic Church. His chief minister and advisor, Thomas More, was executed because he refused to lose his Catholic faith and accept the Act.

Henry started the dissolution of the monasteries and took all the Church's wealth and land, which helped fuel his atrocious habits. He also tried to execute his previous cardinal, Wolsey, but he died prematurely in prison.

Henry was known for his summary executions that numbered at least 17,000 by the end of his reign, although the real figure may be more than double that. Henry was devious in his politics too: he consolidated his alliance with France by refusing to join the Holy Alliance against them in war. The agreement was made loudly public with the Field of the Cloth of Gold meeting. Francis I of France met Henry VIII near Calais and both kings took the chance to show the depth of their culture and taste by displaying fine fabrics, furnishings, and coloured hangings of their realm. They then staged huge jousting tournaments and banquets.

Meanwhile, Henry's daughter, Princess Mary, was arranging to be married

to the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, to make an alliance between the two countries. Later Henry invaded France but failed to get very far: the realm was lost to Charles's army and France was captured.

Henry finally died of ill health at 56 due to his excessive eating and drinking habits, which were paid for with crown's money.

Henry's six wives in order were: Catherine of Aragon (divorced), Anne Boleyn (beheaded), Jane Seymour (died), Anne of Cleves (divorced), Catherine Howard (beheaded) and Catherine Parr who survived him. Unlucky with children, he left his throne to the young, weak Edward VI who was only thirteen years old.