



HISTORY MYSTERIES

Did Bloody Mary deserve her nickname?

Stone Age	Bronze Age	Iron Age	Romans	Anglo-Saxons	Medieval	Tudors	Stuarts	English Commonwealth	Stuarts (again)	Georgians	Victorians	Edwardians	World War I	Inter-War Period	World War II	Cold War	Modern
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The Tudor family came to power in England in 1485 following the conclusion of the Wars of the Roses. Henry VII brought a period of stability and peace to England. His son, Henry VIII, is probably best known for his six wives and for founding the Church of England, so that he could get a divorce from his first wife, who was a **Catholic**. Following Henry VIII's death in 1547, his son Edward VI took the throne. Sadly, Edward was a sickly lad and died after just six years as king.

There were three contenders to the throne after Edward died: his Catholic half-sister Mary, his **Protestant** half-sister Elizabeth and his cousin, Lady Jane Grey. Not wanting a Catholic to rule, Edward declared that neither of his half-sisters should **succeed** him. Since Lady Jane Grey had just married, Edward thought she might soon produce a male **heir**, and named her as his **successor** shortly before she died. However, Mary had other ideas and had Jane **executed** after nine days as queen.

Mary I became Queen of England in 1553. She was a strict Catholic and married to the Catholic King Philip II of Spain. Mary died in 1558, but not before earning herself the nickname 'Bloody Mary'. But why was she given such an unflattering nickname, and did she even deserve it?

Source A

Because all the candidates for **succession** were female and without children, King Edward VI named Lady Jane Grey and her male heirs as his successors. Nine days after Jane's accession Edward's plan was foiled. Mary gathered enough support to ride to London, laid claim to the throne and had Jane executed.

Queen Mary always put principles first and enforced a campaign of harsh **persecution** for those who would not conform to Catholicism. During her reign some 300 people were burned at the stake and another 100 died in prison for being '**heretics**', earning her the name of 'Bloody Mary'.

From Royal Museums Greenwich website: <https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/becoming-queen-elizabeth-i>

Source B

First, it's important to understand that **heresy** was considered by all of early modern Europe to be a huge problem in politics that had to be dealt with so as not to poison society at large. All over Europe, the punishment for heresy was not only death but also the total destruction of the heretic's corpse to prevent the use of their body parts for relics. Therefore, most heretics were burned and their ashes thrown into the river and Mary's choice of burning was completely standard practice for the period.

<https://www.history.com/news/queen-mary-i-bloody-mary-reformation>

Source C

Monarch	Years Reigned	Estimated number of executions
Henry VIII	37	57,000-72,000
Mary I	5	300
Elizabeth I	44	At least 600

Source D

Illustration in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* showing the execution of the first Protestant **martyr** of Mary I's reign

Source E

'[The **proclamation** of Mary becoming Queen was met] with song, and organs playing, and all the bells ringing through London, bonfires, and tables in every street, and wine and beer and ale, and every street full of bonfires, and there was money cast a-way.'

Extract from 'The Diary of Henry Machyn: Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London (1550-1563)'

Source F

Mary initially wanted to be **lenient** to her subjects and allowed a number of high-profile Protestants to leave the country. She asked to have Reginald Cardinal Pole return to England and run the Church. In November 1554, he came to Mary's court as an official Papal envoy. He shared Mary's dream to reassert the Pope's authority over England. Although Mary wanted to be lenient at first, she and Pole started burning Protestants as heretics under the heresy laws. She started burning heretics at the urging of her husband and Pole and not of her own accord.

From 'The Reign of Mary I' by Beth Bynum



What do YOU think?

Glossary

Catholic – a branch of the Christian religion; Catholics believe you must go to church and speak to God through priests

Protestant – another branch of the Christian religion; unlike Catholics, Protestants do not believe you have to go to church to find God

successor/succeed – to become king or queen after someone else

heir – the person who has the right to someone's title or property after their death

executed – killed by the state

persecute – continually treating a particular group of people badly

heresy/heretic – having ideas that are different to what religion or law teaches

martyr – someone who dies rather than give up their beliefs

proclamation – announcing something to the public

lenient – not strict with the rules

Further Reading:

The Tudors: Kings, Queens, Scribes and Ferrets! By Marcia Williams

Eyewitness: Tudor (DK)

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the Tudors but Were Afraid to Ask by Terry Breverton

The Tudors by Jane Bingham

BBC Bitesize Pages on the Tudors: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zbn2p9q#zwcfrmn>