

# The House of Tudors

## (1485-1603)

**Henry VII (1485-1509):** having defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field, gained parliamentary approval and married a member of his rival family (Elizabeth of York), Henry was crowned king. He took part in diplomatic negotiations to secure his position, making agreements both at home and abroad, before instituting a reform of government, increasing royal administrative control and improving the royal finances. On his death, he left a stable kingdom and a wealthy monarchy. Henry VII believed trade and business were good for the country, while war was not and he understood earlier than everyone that England's future would depend on international trade. For this reason he built ships for a merchant fleet. He fought hard politically to establish himself and his family against the doubters and bring England together behind him. He has to go down as a major success, but one totally overshadowed by his son and grandchildren.

**Henry VIII (1509-1547):** the most famous English monarch of all, Henry VIII is best known for his six wives, the result of a desperate drive to produce healthy male heirs to carry the Tudor dynasty forward. Another consequence of this need was **the English Reformation**, as Henry split the English Church away from the Pope and Catholicism in order to divorce. The Reformation's roots were both political and religious. Henry VIII, incensed by Pope Clement VII's refusal to grant him an annulment of his marriage with Catherine of Aragon, repudiated papal authority and in 1534 established **the Anglican Church** with the king as the supreme head. In spite of its political implications, the reorganization of the church permitted the beginning of religious change in England, which included the preparation of a liturgy in English and the Book of Common Prayer. However, Henry's break with The Catholic Church was more of a political and financial decision than a religious one. Henry himself had been a true Catholic believer, having been named by the Pope FIDEI DEFENSOR, for his belief in the Catholic faith. But his desire to divorce and become Head of the Church of England in order to gain more power over the church possessions was greater than his initial faith, which prompted his break with the Catholic Church.

Once he became Head of the Church by the Act of Supremacy (1534), together with his chief minister Thomas Cromwell, he made a survey of the Church properties and closed down 500 monasteries between 1536-1539, in order to confiscate their wealth. Henry's reign also saw the emergence of the Royal Navy as a powerful force, changes in government which bound the monarch tighter to parliament, and perhaps the apogee of personal rule in England. When he died, he left behind his sixth wife, Catherine Parr and his three children: Mary (daughter of Catherine of Aragon), Elizabeth (daughter of Anne Boleyn) and Edward, his only surviving son from his wife Jane Seymour.

**Edward VI (1547-1553):** the son which Henry VIII much desired, Edward inherited the throne as a boy and died only six years later, his reign having been dominated by two ruling councilors, Edward Seymour and John Dudley. They carried on the Protestant Reformation and introduced a new prayer book in 1552.

**Lady Jane Grey (1553):** the great tragic figure of the Tudor era. Thanks to the machinations of John Dudley, Edward VI was initially succeeded by Lady Jane Grey, fifteen-year-old great-granddaughter of Henry VII and devout Protestant. However, Mary, although Catholic, had far greater support, and Lady Jane's supporters swiftly changed their allegiances. She was executed in 1554, having done little personally beyond being used by others as a figurehead.

**Mary I (1553-1558):** was the first queen to rule England in her own right. A pawn of potential marriage alliances in her youth, although none came to fruition, she was also declared illegitimate when her father, Henry VIII, divorced her mother Catherine, and was only later brought back into the succession. On taking the throne, Mary took part in an unpopular marriage to Philip II of Spain and returned England to the Catholic faith. Her actions in bringing back the heresy laws and executing 300 Protestants earned her the nickname Bloody Mary. But Mary's life isn't just a tale of religious killing. She was desperate for an heir, resulting in a false but very advanced pregnancy, and as a woman fighting to rule a nation, broke the barriers Elizabeth later walked through.

**Elizabeth I (1558-1603):** Henry VIII's youngest daughter, Elizabeth was one of the nation's most highly regarded monarchs. Elizabeth returned the country to the Protestant faith, fought wars against Spain and Spanish-backed forces to protect England and other Protestant nations, and cultivated a powerful image of herself as a virgin queen wedded to her nation. The most important achievements of her reign were:

- She encouraged merchant expansion. Spain was England's major trade rival also became its worst enemy. When Spain came to control The Netherlands, England supported the latter, defeating the famous Spanish fleet Armada in 1588.

- She encouraged settlers to form colonies in The New World. Sir Walter Raleigh established the colony of Virginia. During her reign, slave trade to the colonies was initiated.
- She established “charters” – companies to which she granted the right to do all business in a trade or in a region, in return for shares of the profit: The East India Company (spices), The Levant Company (trade with The Ottoman Empire), The Africa Company (slaves).


When Elizabeth I died, she was the last of the Tudor monarchs. She was followed by James Stuart from Scotland, the first of **the Stuart dynasty** and a descendant of Henry VIII’s eldest sister, Margaret.

**STUDENT ACTIVITY CORNER**

1. Which are the most important events and moment in this period? With your pair, complete the following table, like in the example:

When?	What?
325 BC	<i>Pytheas, a Greek sailor, sailed to the British Isles.</i>

**CASE STUDY: FAMOUS PEOPLE AND EVENTS**

 In pairs/small groups, do some research about the following important people/events in the period and present your conclusions to the class.

**HENRY VIII – What is he famous for?**

**ELIZABETH I – The Virgin Queen**