

28 Things you might not know about the Tudors

by Claire Ridgway

I thought I'd share with you some Tudor trivia today, some little-known and interesting facts about our favourite kings and queens.

1. **Edward VI wasn't very nice to a falcon on one occasion** - According to the imperial ambassador, in 1551, when he was 13 years old, Edward VI plucked a falcon that he kept in his personal chamber and tore it into 4 pieces "saying as he did so to his governors that he likened himself to the falcon, whom every one plucked; but that he would pluck them too, thereafter, and tear them in four parts". The ambassador hadn't witnessed the event, but had heard of it from people he trusted.
It seems, that it was Edward's frustration and anger at the way his council had opposed him that caused him to pluck his falcon and tear it into four parts. His council might oppose him, might 'pluck' him, but he would do worse to them, he would pluck them and tear them apart. Edward wanted to show them that he was the one in charge, he was king.
2. **Bishop John Aylmer had a tooth extracted to show a fearful Queen Elizabeth I that having a tooth extracted wasn't as bad as she feared.** Apparently, Elizabeth had been suffering with awful toothache day and night and couldn't sleep at all. Her physicians advised the removal of the tooth, but Elizabeth was afraid of the pain. John Strype records that "And now it seems it was that the Bishop of London being present, a man of high courage, persuaded her that the pain was not so much, and not at all to be dreaded; and to convince her thereof told her, she should have a sensible experiment of it in himself, though he were an old man, and had not many teeth to spare; and immediately bade the surgeon come and pull out one of his teeth, (perhaps a decayed one,) in her Majesty's presence. Which accordingly was done: and she was hereby encouraged to submit to the operation herself." Poor man though!
3. **Anne Boleyn was not a Protestant** – Anne Boleyn was a keen reformer, but she cannot be labelled a Protestant. She was influenced by the works of French reformers who were looking to reform the Catholic Church from within, and wanted the church to get back to the authority of scripture. She was a woman with a strong personal faith who believed in justification by faith by the grace of God, in poor relief, in the dissemination of the Bible in the vernacular, and in the reform of the Church, but she did not reject the miracle of the Eucharist.
4. **All of Henry VIII's wives, and Henry himself, were descended from King Edward III,** and ultimately King Edward I. Two of his wives were closely related – Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard were first cousins.
5. **Princes William and Harry, the Dukes of Cambridge and Sussex respectively, have Boleyn blood.** They are descended from Mary Boleyn twice over:
- through their father, Prince Charles, and his line from Catherine Carey daughter of Mary Boleyn

- and through their mother, the late Diana, Princess of Wales and her Spencer line from Henry Carey.

I'll give you a link for further reading on this - see

<https://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/how-prince-william-and-prince-harry-descend-from-mary-boleyn/>

6. In late 1541, an investigation was launched into **rumours that Anne of Cleves, Henry VIII's fourth wife, had given birth to "a fair boy" and that her son had been fathered by the king.** Of course, Anne hadn't had a baby, but it was important for the king's council to investigate. Those spreading the rumour were taken into custody.
7. Following the death of Henry VIII in January 1547, **Archbishop Thomas Cranmer showed his grief for his master, the king, by growing a beard** which was also a symbol of his rejection of the old church and its ideas.
I have another beard story for you. Following the Treaty of London in 1518, Henry VIII was due to visit France to meet with Francis I, but had to postpone his visit. To prove to Francis I that he was still serious about meeting, he swore that he wouldn't shave until after they had met again. Francis thought this was such a good idea that he agreed to do the same. However, Henry's wife Catherine hated his beard and eventually persuaded him to shave.
8. **Henry VIII did not have six wives** (well, according to him!) - We say that Henry VIII had six wives, but due to his annulments which rendered three of his marriages null and void, he was technically only legally married three times: Jane Seymour, Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr. Although, I'm sure that he would also have seen his marriage to Catherine Howard as invalid due to her previous sexual relationship with Francis Dereham.
9. **The Tudors were keen on astrology.** Hilary M Carey, in the journal article "Henry VII's Book of Astrology and the Tudor Renaissance", explains that "astrology formed an integral part of the Renaissance world view" and we know that it was associated at the time with medicine and mathematics. Elizabeth I chose her coronation date of 15th January 1559 based on an astrological chart drawn up by John Dee, the famous mathematician, astronomer, astrologer and scholar, who chose the date as the most auspicious in the date range he was able to choose from.
10. **Lady Margaret Beaufort, who is known as the matriarch of the Tudor dynasty, was only 13 and a widow when she gave birth to Henry VII.** She had married Henry's father, Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, at the age of 12.
11. **Anne Boleyn did NOT introduce the French hood into England.** Catherine of Aragon wore a French hood in the early part of Henry's reign and Mary Tudor, Queen of France, is pictured wearing one in the painting of her and Charles Brandon c.1516. Anne also did NOT shun the English gable hood. She is depicted as wearing a gable hood in the 1534 medal and she also wore one to her execution in May 1536.
12. **Henry VIII wore spectacles,** or eye glasses – The inventory taken after his death in 1547 lists 44 pairs of spectacles, and we know from accounts that in 1545 he purchased ten pairs for 3shilling and 4pence.
But what were these spectacles? Well, from what I've read about the history of spectacles and eyeglasses, these were either handheld or they rested on the bridge of the nose, rather

than having arms that fit over the ears.

He also owned magnifying glasses “to lay upon a book”.

13. **Elizabeth of York, queen consort of Henry VII, died on her birthday** – She had been born on 11 February 1466 and she died on 11 February 1503, on her 37th birthday, nine days after giving birth to a daughter, Katherine, who only lived a few days after her birth.
14. **Henry VIII opposed his sister Margaret Tudor's quest for an annulment** of her second marriage to Archibald Douglas, 6th Earl of Angus. The marriage was finally annulled in 1527. It seems rather hypocritical, doesn't it?
15. **Henry VIII wasn't always the huge tyrant that springs to mind.** He started his reign as the ideal Renaissance prince – good-looking, athletic, intelligent, charming, generous and a lover of the arts. Chronicler Edward Hall wrote: “The features of his body, his goodly personage, his amiable visage, princely countenance, with the noble qualities of his royal estate, to every man known, needs no rehearsal, considering that, for lack of cunning, I cannot express the gifts of grace and of nature that God endowed him with all.”

The Venetian ambassador said of him: “the handsomest potentate I ever set eyes on; above the usual height, with an extremely fine calf to his leg, his complexion fair and bright, with auburn hair, combed straight and short in the French fashion, and a round face so very beautiful that it would become a pretty woman, his throat was rather long and thick.”

According to his armour, in 1514, when he was around 23, he had a waist of about 34.7 inches and a chest measurement of 41.7 inches. In 1520, his Field of Cloth of Gold armour shows that he had a 36.1in waist and 41.8in chest. However, fastforward 20 years and he had a waist of 51 and a chest of 54.5 – quite a difference.

It's easy to forget the fun-loving romantic king who loved pageants and surprising his wife, Catherine of Aragon, by dressing up as Robin Hood. Although he obviously always had a brutal streak, since he had Empson and Dudley executed in 1510.

16. **Henry VIII was a composer and musician** - We know that he owned 78 flutes, 76 recorders, 10 trombones, 14 trumpets, 5 bagpipes amongst other things, and he was accomplished at the lute, organ and virginals, and could also sing well. Although it is now believed that he did not write Greensleeves, the Henry VIII songbook of 1518, which is now found in the British Library and which consists of 100 secular compositions by Tudor composers, includes 33 compositions by Henry VIII – 20 songs and 13 instrumental pieces. Henry's composition “Pastyme with Good Company” was very popular, becoming a national hit and spreading around Europe.
17. **Henry VIII's eldest daughter, the future Mary I, was also an accomplished musician.** In 1520, at the age of 4, she played the virginals to an audience who were “greatly marvelled and rejoiced the same, her young and tender age considered”.
18. **Mary, daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, orchestrated a coup d'etat in July 1553,** proclaiming herself queen following her brother Edward VI's death, rallying support and forces, and successfully taking the throne from Queen Jane, or Lady Jane Grey, who, although known as the 9 Days Queen was actually queen for 13 days.

19. **Jane Seymour is known for her craving for quails** when she was pregnant with Edward VI. Lady Lisle sent her quails to enjoy in July 1537, when she was trying to get one of her daughters a position as a maid of honour in her household. However, it also appears that she craved cucumber as the Lady Mary, Henry VIII's daughter by Catherine of Aragon, sent her stepmother both quails and cucumbers from her own garden.
20. **Henry VIII was nearly drowned in 1525** when he was hawking near Hitchin in Hertfordshire. The king attempted to pole vault a ditch half-full of muddy water, when the pole broke and he fell headfirst into some mud. A footman named John Moody saved him.
21. **Elizabeth used to give nicknames to her favourites** and those she trusted – William Cecil was her “spirit”, Robert Dudley was her “eyes”, Sir Francis Walsingham was her “moor”, the Earl of Oxford her “boar”, François, Duke of Alençon, her “frog” and Sir Christopher Hatton her “mouton”.
22. **Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots, never actually met**, although they did correspond by letter. In 1567, after the murder of Lord Darnley, Mary's second husband, Elizabeth warned Mary to distance herself from events and wrote “I treat you as my daughter, and assure you that if I had one, I could wish for her nothing better than I desire for you... the one for whom one wishes the greatest good that may be possible in this world.” When Mary failed to answer, Elizabeth wrote again “For the love of God, Madame, use such sincerity and prudence in this matter [the hearing], which touches you so nearly, that all the world may feel justified in believing you innocent of so enormous a crime, which, if you were not, would be good cause for degrading you from the rank of princess, and bringing upon you the scorn of the vulgar.” Of course, Mary ended up being executed as a traitor after Elizabeth signed her death warrant in 1587.
23. **Mary I had her half-sister, Elizabeth, the future Elizabeth I, imprisoned in the Tower of London for two months in 1554** after Elizabeth was implicated in Wyatt's rebellion. Thomas Wyatt went to his death denying Elizabeth's participation and Elizabeth proclaimed her innocence. Elizabeth was released from the Tower on 19th May 1554, the 18th anniversary of her mother Queen Anne Boleyn's execution. She wasn't free though, she was kept under house arrest at Woodstock until April 1555.
24. **There is no evidence that Edward VI was a sickly child and frail boy-king.** He suffered from a quartan fever, probably malaria, in 1541, at the age of 4 but wasn't ill again until 1552 when he contracted both measles and smallpox. It is thought that this double bout of illness suppressed his immune system and led to him dying of what is thought to have been tuberculosis in July 1553.
25. **In 1551, Edward VI passed a law stating that everyone had to walk to church on Christmas Day.**
26. **Tudor laws still affect England today** – A few years ago, we purchased a property in Leeds and had to take out special insurance to protect ourselves from chancel repair liability, i.e. the fact that by law, we could be forced by law to contribute towards the cost of repair of the chancel in the local parish church. If the local church chose to enact a law from Henry VIII's time, we could be liable for that repair – interesting!

27. **Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII were married for nearly 24 years.** They married in 1509 and their marriage was annulled in 1533.
28. **You could get into trouble if you didn't wear woollen caps!** In 1571, in the reign of Elizabeth I, an act was passed that stated that every man and boy over the age of 6 had to wear "one cap of wool knit, thicked and dressed in England" on Sundays and holy days, and that all citizens' wives must wear "white knit caps of woollen yarn. There would be fines for those who didn't. This was to help support the English wool trade.