

Catherine of Aragon



Catherine of Aragon was Queen of England and the first wife of Henry VIII. She is remembered as a strong-willed, religious woman who was very popular with the people.

Early Life

Catherine was born in Castile, Spain on 16th December 1485. She was the daughter of Isabela I, Queen of Castile, and Ferdinand II, King of Aragon. She was given a good education and had a strong religious upbringing. She could read and write in both Spanish and Latin and was able to speak French and Greek.

Life in England

Catherine travelled to London at 15 years of age and met her future husband, Prince Arthur - heir to the English throne, on 4th November 1501. They married ten days later. Sadly, Arthur died of the sweating sickness on 2nd April 1502, leaving Catherine a widow at 16 years old.

After the English King Henry VII died, his younger son was crowned King Henry VIII. Henry decided to marry Catherine himself and they were married on 11th June 1509. Catherine was crowned Queen of England a couple of weeks later and was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd.

Queen of England

Catherine was a popular queen. She was seen to be kind and generous as well as strong-willed. In an era where men held all the power, Catherine was able to express her views and be heard amongst them. She impressed even her enemies with her intelligence.

Catherine fell pregnant seven times during her marriage to Henry. Sadly, only one child survived past infancy: a daughter, Mary. Henry was desperate for a son to carry on his legacy and grew impatient with Catherine not fulfilling this desire.

Did You Know...?

Catherine was baptised 'Catalina' but was known as 'Catherine' in England. Her name is sometimes also spelled 'Katherine' or 'Katharine'.

The Reformation

In 1525, Henry met and fell in love with Anne Boleyn, one of Catherine's ladies-in-waiting. Catherine was now believed to be too old to have any more children so Henry decided that he would divorce Catherine and make Anne his new queen. The Catholic Church did not allow divorce so Henry had to ask the Pope to annul the marriage. The Pope refused, supporting Catherine as Henry's rightful wife.



Henry, having been refused his divorce, decided to break away from the Catholic Church in Rome and create the Church of England, of which he would be the head. Therefore, he could get his divorce without needing permission from the Pope and could marry Anne. This was known as the **Reformation**.

Catherine was ordered to stop calling herself queen and instead use the title 'Dowager Princess of Wales'. Catherine refused to accept the divorce as it had not been granted by the Pope and continued to call herself Queen of England for the rest of her life.

Later Life and Death

In the winter of 1531, Catherine was ordered by Henry to move away to a new home. She spent the rest of her life keeping to only one room except to pray - receiving few visitors and being forbidden from seeing or writing to her daughter.

In December 1535, Catherine fell ill and she wrote to Henry asking for him to be a good father to their daughter. On 7th January 1536, Catherine died aged 50, of what is now believed to have been cancer. News of Catherine's death sent widespread mourning across England and Europe as, despite the divorce, she had remained a popular figure with the people.

Catherine was buried in Peterborough Cathedral and had an elaborate ceremony appropriate for her position as Dowager Princess of Wales.



Catherine of Aragon Questions

1. What was the title of Catherine's mother? Tick one.

- Queen of England
- Queen of Spain
- Queen of Aragon
- Queen of Castile

2. Fill in the missing words.

She could read and write in both _____ and _____ and was able to speak _____ and _____.

3. What illness did Prince Arthur die from?

4. What name was Catherine baptised with?

5. Number these events in Catherine's life in the order in which they happened. One has been done for you.

- Catherine marries King Henry VIII
- Catherine moved away from Henry to a new home.
- Catherine travels to London.
- Catherine had a daughter, Mary.
- 1 Catherine was born in Castile, Spain.

6. In your own words, explain what the Reformation was.

7. Do you think Catherine had a happy life? Why do you think this?

8. If Catherine had given Henry the son he desired, how do you think that would have changed events? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

9. At the start of the text, it says that Catherine is remembered as being 'strong-willed'. What evidence in the text is there to support this fact?
