

# MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS: FACT SHEET FOR TEACHERS



Mary, Queen of Scots is one of the most famous figures in history. Her life was full of drama – from becoming queen at just six days old to her execution at the age of 44. Plots, bloodshed, abdication, high politics, religious strife, romance and rivalry, Mary was a renaissance monarch who was affected by and contributed to a momentous period of upheaval and uncertainty in the British Isles.

**The Palace of Holyroodhouse was one of her most important homes, with many of the most significant events of her reign taking place within its walls.**

## WHY WAS MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS SO IMPORTANT?

- She was Queen of Scots from 6 days old, and when she was an adult she became the first woman to rule Scotland in her own right.
- Mary was an international monarch – she was married to the King of France and was briefly Queen there, and she also had a strong claim to the throne of England too.
- Mary's claim to the English throne was regarded as illegitimate by many Protestants, but supported by many Catholics.
- In the early years of her personal rule, Mary was an effective ruler, governing Scotland well and building her reputation.
- She was one of the only women in the world to lead her troops into battle.
- She governed Scotland during a period of great division when two different forms of Christianity were rivals – Protestantism and Catholicism. Mary was Catholic but accepted that Scotland was officially Protestant – some people consider this an early example of religious toleration.
- Mary secured the legitimate succession to the throne by having a son. This was hugely important as it would ensure peace.
- Mary's son James would go on to unite the crowns of Scotland and England, and every British monarch since can trace their blood back to Mary.

## WHO'S WHO?

**JAMES V** – Mary, Queen of Scots' father. He built the great tower which still survives at the Palace of Holyroodhouse.

**MARY OF GUISE** – Mary, Queen of Scots' mother. She was French and became the regent (effectively the ruler) when Mary was a child and living in France.

**FRANCIS II** – Mary, Queen of Scots' first husband. Mary married him in 1558 when he was the Dauphin, heir to the French throne. After they married Mary gave him the title of King of Scots. He died in 1560, a year after he became King of France.

**JOHN KNOX** – a Protestant preacher who helped lead the Scottish Reformation and who was a fierce opponent of Mary because she was a Catholic and a woman ruler.

**HENRY, LORD DARNLEY** – Darnley was a cousin of Mary's and he became her second husband. He wanted to be King, and although Mary gave him the title, she did not allow him more power than her. He was vain, jealous and could be violent. In 1567 he was murdered in a garden less than a mile from Holyroodhouse.

**JAMES, EARL OF BOTHWELL** – Mary's third husband. He had supported Mary but was thought to have been involved in the murder of Darnley; when Mary married him it was very unpopular. Before they married, Mary created him Duke of Orkney in Holyrood Abbey, and she married him in the Palace of Holyroodhouse in 1567.

**ELIZABETH I** – Queen of England. Many Catholics in England did not consider Elizabeth to be the legitimate Queen – she was a Protestant and the daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth and Mary were both friends and rivals; after keeping Mary under house arrest for 19 years, Elizabeth ultimately signed a warrant for Mary's execution.

**WILLIAM CECIL** – he was Elizabeth I's secretary and he disliked and feared Mary. He advised Elizabeth to execute Mary after finding out that she had been involved in a plot against Elizabeth.

**JAMES VI AND I** – Mary's son with her second husband Henry. When Mary was forced to abdicate James became King of Scots when he was just X year old. When Elizabeth I died in 1603, he became King of England and Ireland as James I, although he was still James VI of Scots.

## KEY DATES

8 DECEMBER 1542

Mary is born. Her parents are James V and Mary of Guise

14 DECEMBER 1542

James dies and Mary becomes Queen

9 SEPTEMBER 1543

Mary is crowned at Stirling Castle

7 AUGUST 1548

Mary is taken to France

24 APRIL 1558

Mary marries the heir to the French throne, Francis

10 JULY 1559

Francis becomes King Francis II of France and Mary his Queen Consort – she is now a Queen twice over

5 DECEMBER 1560

Francis II dies

19 AUGUST 1561

Mary returns to Scotland

29 JULY 1565

Mary marries her cousin Henry, Lord Darnley at Holyrood

9 MARCH 1566

Plotters, accompanied by Lord Darnley, murder Mary's secretary in her apartments at Holyrood

19 JUNE 1566

Mary gives birth to a son, James

10 FEBRUARY 1567

Darnley is murdered

15 MAY 1567

Mary marries the Earl of Bothwell at Holyrood

24 JULY 1567

Mary is forced to abdicate the throne

16 MAY 1568

Mary flees to England seeking safety and support; she is later held under house arrest for 20 years

8 FEBRUARY 1587

Mary is executed

## MARY'S HOLYROOD

The Palace of Holyroodhouse has some of the best preserved buildings and interiors associated with Mary, Queen of Scots anywhere in the country. If Mary were here today, what would she recognise?

- The huge tower built by her father which contains: Mary's Bedchamber where she spent her most private moments, her Outer Chamber where she met advisors and guests, her Supper Room where she had both happy and tragic times, and her personal Closet for dressing. The tower also contains the Lord Darnley's Bedchamber.
- She would recognise paintings, jewellery and even embroideries done by her.
- Mary might recognise the gateway to her Privy Garden – the garden is long lost, but the gateway survives (although it has been moved to from its original location).
- Her Bathhouse – this was not actually where she would have bathed, but rather a lodge in which she would have had picnics when walking in the gardens! Today it can only be viewed from outside.
- Abbey Strand – the large building at the Palace's entrance provided courtiers' lodgings for Mary and her son James VI.
- The remains of Holyrood Abbey – although it has lost its roof, Mary would still recognise the mighty west front of the abbey.

## EXPLORE THE TREASURES

Download images, watch short films about Mary's embroideries and the Darnley Jewel, and find out more about some of the paintings and objects associated with Mary, Queen of Scots which are in the Royal Collection: <https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes/trails/mary-queen-of-scots-1542-1587>

## FAMILY TREE

The Tudors and Stuarts family tree shows how these two famous royal dynasties were connected, and how Mary had a claim to the English throne.