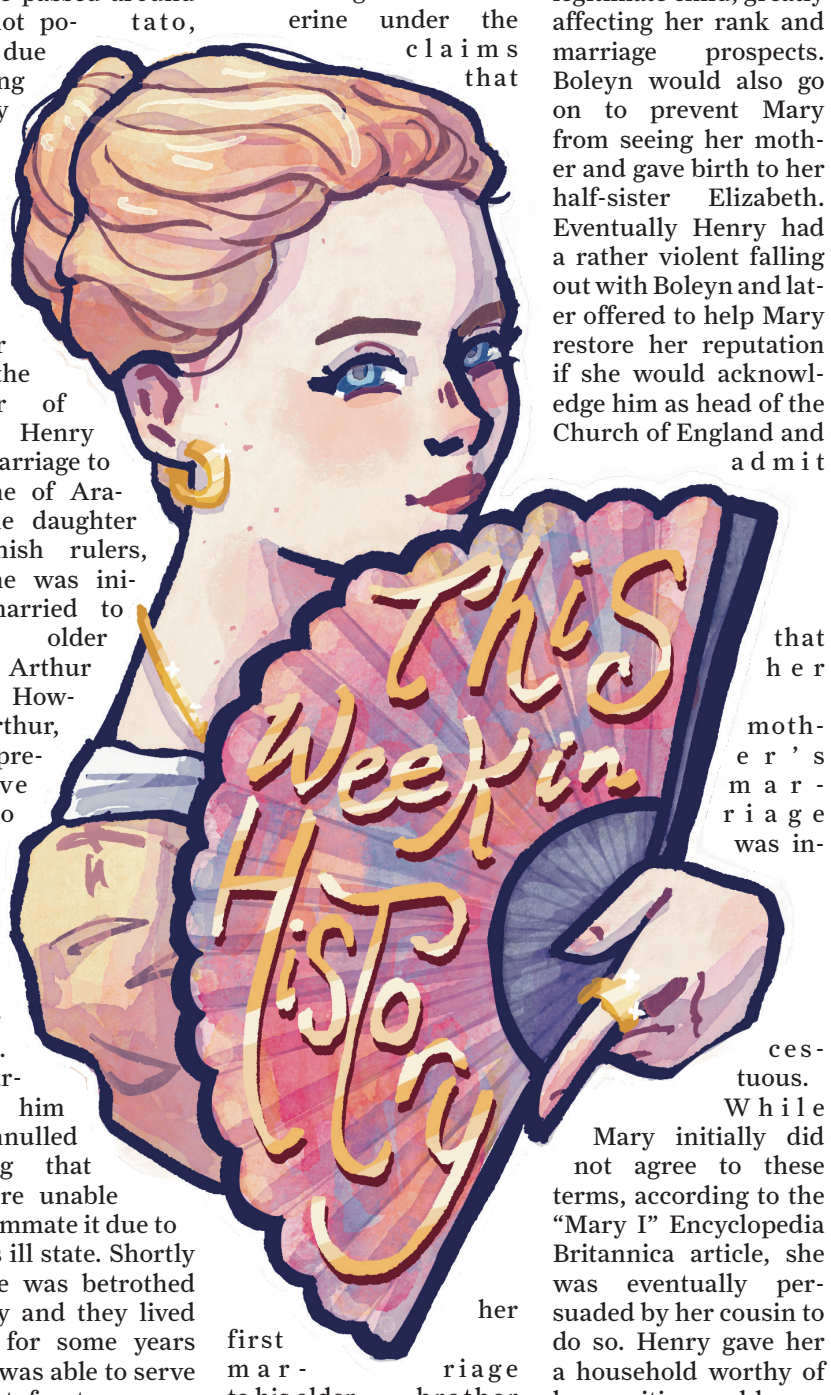
THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

Mary Tudor and her ascension to "Bloody Mary"

LOGO BY COLBI LORANGER, ASSOCIATE ARTIST EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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On Nov. 17, 1558, Queen Mary I of England passed away at St. James Palace. A few days later her half-sister Elizabeth, the daughter of King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, was proclaimed queen, bringing in the Elizabethan Age. But how did we get here? Over the years, the throne of England would be passed around like a hot potato, largely due to King Henry VIII's penchant for wives.



Mary Tudor was the daughter of King Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. The daughter of Spanish rulers, Catherine was initially married to Henry's older brother Arthur in 1501. However, Arthur, the presumptive heir to the English throne, passed away only a year later. Her marriage to him was annulled assuming that they were unable to consummate it due to Arthur's ill state. Shortly after she was betrothed to Henry and they lived happily for some years and she was able to serve as regent for two years while he campaigned in France, according to an article from Encyclopedia Britannica.

However, their marriage became strained due to her struggles with producing a male heir. Catherine had six children, but Mary was the only one who survived to adulthood. It was under these circumstances that Henry met Anne Boleyn, his second wife. Henry sought an annulment of his marriage with Catherine under the claims that her first marriage to his older brother was indeed consummated. The Pope was unwilling to grant this due to complex political relations at the time and this decision eventually brought Protestantism to England.

In order to marry Boelyn, Henry formed and appointed himself head of the Church of England and divorced Catherine. Unfortunately for Mary Tudor, with her father's divorce she became an illegitimate child, greatly affecting her rank and marriage prospects. Boleyn would also go on to prevent Mary from seeing her mother and gave birth to her half-sister Elizabeth. Eventually Henry had a rather violent falling out with Boleyn and later offered to help Mary restore her reputation if she would acknowledge him as head of the Church of England and admit that her mother's marriage was incestuous.

While Mary initially did not agree to these terms, according to the "Mary I" Encyclopedia Britannica article, she was eventually persuaded by her cousin to do so. Henry gave her a household worthy of her position and began looking into marriage prospects.



Mary Tudor is portrayed in an early portrait of her at the age of 28. The portrait is currently housed in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PICRYL



Mary Tudor making her entrance into London as Queen Mary I to claim the English throne. She ascended to the throne in August of 1553 after Edward VI's death.

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Henry went on to have a few other marriages with only one producing a male heir, Edward VI. Despite her "illegitimacy" Mary was determined to be in line for the throne following Edward. At the age of nine her brother ascended to the throne, ruling until he died at the age of 15.

What followed was a bit of a mess, as Lady Jane Grey would actually ascend to the throne for a few days as a political puppet. She was later deposed by Mary and was executed at the age of 17 for treason. Which I would argue was a rather inauspicious start to Mary's reign.

One of Mary's main goals as the Queen of England was to bring Catholicism back to England. Throughout her father and brother's reign, she remained a devout Catholic and felt a sense of divine purpose in returning England to Rome and the Vatican. This would also lead to some unfortunate enemies, many noblemen who gained wealth from Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries were concerned that they would lose their fortune with the return of Catholicism. Additionally, she would go on to marry King Phillip II of Spain, which resulted in a Protestant insurrection.

This eventually earned her the title of "Bloody Mary," as she put an end to the insurrection and executed hundreds of "heretics" in a violent, public manner. As a result, she rapidly lost public approval, and matters only worsened when she was unable to produce an heir.

Mary married Philip II at the age of 38, and while it is not unheard of for women to become pregnant at that age, her biological clock was ticking, and she was quite desperate for an heir. She knew her ability to produce an heir would be integral to England remaining a Catholic country.

What resulted was a series of false pregnancies, a condition now known as pseudocyesis, where the body manifests almost all the symptoms of pregnancy but carries no fetus. Due to the lack of medical techniques that are currently available in today's age, only time would tell whether the pregnancy was false. When it came to be that Mary was not indeed pregnant, she was devastated by the news.

It is also hypothesized that Mary might have had ovarian cancer, which may have caused the symptoms of false pregnancy that she experienced. She was known to have extremely painful and irregular menstrual cycles, according to the article, "The Queen's quickening: The phantom pregnancies of Mary I" by Eve Elliot. She would die shortly after her last false pregnancy, with some scholars believing it was due to cancer.

At the end of the day, I can feel some sympathy for Mary. Despite her actions, which led to her title of "Bloody Mary," her life was incredibly unstable after her mother's divorce from Henry VIII, and she truly felt that what she was doing by executing Protestants was right. From the record of her behavior around her false pregnancies, it is clear that she desperately wanted a child, and a part of me hopes that, even with her deeds as a ruler, she was able to find some peace in the end.