

Bloody Queen Mary?

In 1553 Edward VI died. His sister Mary became queen. She was a devout Catholic, who believed that unless the Roman Catholic Church was brought back no one in England would be able to go to Heaven. Was it possible to bring Catholicism back? Read through this list of factors which would affect whether Mary could succeed:

- Protestantism had only been the official religion of England for six years. Before that, England had been a Catholic country for centuries. Many people would be glad to go back to familiar Catholic ideas.
- Henry VIII had already closed all the monasteries and sold their lands to rich and important people. Mary would have to take all this land back.
- There were many Protestants in England. They hated the Pope and Catholicism.
- Mary was 37, was not married and had no children. Her sister Elizabeth was next in line to the throne. She was a Protestant.
- Four hundred of the most important Protestant leaders fled to Europe in 1553.
- When Mary became queen, Protestants had tried to replace her. They received no support.

1. Which of these points suggest that Mary had a good chance of bringing back Catholicism?
2. Which suggest that Mary did not stand much chance of bringing back Catholicism?
3. On balance, how good do you think Mary's chances were?

Mary's methods

In 1554 Mary married the Catholic King Philip II of Spain. This provoked a rebellion in Kent. The rebels almost captured London, but were eventually defeated.

Between 1555 and 1558 Mary had 284 Protestants burned to death. She was hoping that this would persuade other Protestants to return to Catholicism.

SOURCE 1 Simon Renard, a Catholic, was the Spanish Ambassador in London. He wrote this letter to King Philip after watching the first Protestant being burnt at the stake in 1555

"A certain Rogers was burned publicly yesterday. Some of the onlookers wept, others prayed to God to give him strength to bear the pain, others gathered the ashes and the bones and wrapped them in paper to preserve them, others threatened the bishops. I think it would be wise not to be too firm against Protestants, otherwise I foresee that the people may cause a revolt. The lady Elizabeth has her supporters, and there are Englishmen who do not love foreigners."

SOURCE 2 The execution of Latimer and Ridley, two Protestant bishops who refused to become Catholics



Once Mary had decided to bring back Catholicism she had to decide how to do it. She could:

- reform and improve the Catholic Church so that many people would want to be Catholics again
- get the support of a powerful Catholic country. Spain was the most powerful Catholic country in Europe
- force people to become Catholics by persecuting Protestants.

4. Which methods would you recommend Mary to use?

SOURCE 3 From John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, about the burning of Latimer and Ridley

"So they came to the stake. Dr Ridley, entering the place first, looked towards Heaven. Then, seeing Mr Latimer, with a cheerful look he ran and embraced him, saying, 'Be of good heart, brother, for God will either ease the fury of the flame, or else strengthen us to endure it.'"

He then went to the stake and, kneeling down, prayed with great fervour, while Mr Latimer stood by, kneeling and praying also. Dr Ridley gave presents of small things to men standing near, many of whom were weeping strongly. Happy was he who could get the smallest rag to remember this good man by. Then the blacksmith took a chain of iron and placed it about both their waists and then knocked in the staple."

Dr Ridley's brother brought him a bag of gunpowder and tied it about his neck. His brother did the same to Mr Latimer.

They then brought a lighted faggot and laid it at Dr Ridley's feet. Upon which Mr Latimer said, 'Be of good comfort, Mr Ridley, we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust never shall be put out.'"

Mr Latimer cried out, 'Father of Heaven, receive my soul', and soon died with seeming little pain. But Dr Ridley, due to the bad arrangement of the fire (the faggots being green and piled so high, that the flames were kept down by the green wood), laboured in much pain until one of the bystanders pulled the faggots with a hook. Where Ridley saw the fire flame up, he leaned himself to that side. As soon as the fire touched the gunpowder he was seen to stir no more. The dreadful sight filled almost every eye with tears."

1. What evidence can you find in Source 3 that the author was a Protestant?
2. Do you think that Source 2 shows the same event as that described in Source 3?
3. Do you think it is from the same book as Source 3?
4. Look back at the three possible methods for bringing back Catholicism. Which of the three methods described did Mary use? Which did she not use?

Bloody Mary?

During her reign many people thought Mary was succeeding in bringing back Catholicism. However, the way we see Mary's reign today has been influenced by Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. This was published by a Protestant in Elizabeth's reign. It treats the people burned as heroes and tells us that the executions were unpopular. It assumes that everyone was against Mary. Above all else, it makes Mary out to be 'Bloody Mary'. Is any of this true?

To answer the question we need to try to look at the events as seen during Mary's reign – not after.

We must be careful not to judge people in the past by our standards today. In the sixteenth century people were used to HERETICS being burned:

- Henry VII burned ten in 24 years
- Henry VIII burned 81 in 38 years
- Edward VI burned two in six years
- Mary burned 284 in five years
- Elizabeth burned five in 45 years.

If we look only at these facts, we might think Mary deserved her nickname. However, if we look at other facts about executions under the Tudors we might change our minds.

SOURCE 4 Where Protestants were burned



- Every year between 17 and 54 people were hanged in Essex for small-scale theft.
- After the Northern Rebellion in Elizabeth's reign over 300 people were hanged.

1. Look at Source 4. Do you think people all around the country would have thought that Mary was 'Bloody Mary'? Explain why.
2. Do you agree with Foxe that Mary deserves to be called 'Bloody Mary'?