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Episode #032

The Wives of King Henry VIII

March 3, 2020



[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English, the show where you can learn fascinating things about the world while improving your English.

[00:00:16] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about King Henry the Eighth of England and his six wives.

[00:00:26] He's probably the most [notorious](#)¹ of all of the British [monarchs](#)², and today we are going to learn about exactly why that is.

[00:00:36] Before we get right into it, this is just your usual reminder for those of you listening to this podcast on Spotify, iVoox, Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your

¹ famous for something bad

² kings or queens



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podcasts that you can get the transcript and key vocabulary and bonus podcasts over on the website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:00:56] The transcript also comes in lovely new animating form, so that's a bit like subtitles, and also in PDF form.

[00:01:03] So do check that out if you haven't done so already.

[00:01:07] You can find out more at leonardoenglish.com/subscribe.

[00:01:13] Okay, then, Henry the Eighth and his wives.

[00:01:16] Now you may know a little bit about Henry the Eighth, or maybe you know nothing.

[00:01:23] If you have heard of him, you probably imagine a huge [greasy](#)³ fat man who had a [fondness](#)⁴ for [executing](#)⁵ his wives.

[00:01:33] Henry the Eighth was King of England from 1509 until his death in 1547.

[00:01:40] His 36-year rule saw England [break ties](#)⁶ with the Catholic church and two of his wives lose their heads.

³ covered with or full of fat or oil

⁴ a liking

⁵ killing someone as a legal punishment

⁶ finish a relationship, break up with



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[00:01:52] Today we are going to tell the story of exactly how that happened.

[00:01:57] So let's start with wife number one, Catherine of Aragon.

[00:02:04] When Henry became King in 1509 he was only 17 years old.

[00:02:10] Within six weeks he had married Catherine of Aragon, who was the daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain.

[00:02:20] Catherine was also the [widow](#)⁷ of Henry's older brother Arthur, who had died seven years before.

[00:02:30] Henry was very fond of Catherine.

[00:02:32] It was said that he loved her dearly and she fell pregnant several times.

[00:02:38] However, she failed to produce a son, the [all-important](#)⁸ male [heir](#)⁹, and the only child to survive from Henry and Catherine's marriage was a daughter, Mary, who was born in February, 1516.

⁷ a woman whose husband or wife has died and who has not married again

⁸ extremely important

⁹ a person who will legally receive money, property, or a title from another person, especially an older member of the same family, when that other person dies



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[00:02:57] Henry was pretty obsessed with producing a son and his [eyes soon started wandering¹⁰](#) towards other women who he hoped would be able to provide him with the [all-important](#), much desired, male [heir](#).

[00:03:15] He became particularly [fond¹¹](#) of one of his Queens [ladies in waiting¹²](#) - so a [lady-in-waiting](#) is a sort of fancy personal assistant - and the [lady-in-waiting](#) that [he had eyes for¹³](#) was called Anne Boleyn.

[00:03:33] However, Henry couldn't marry another woman, he was already married, and divorce was illegal in the eyes of the Catholic church.

[00:03:43] One of the only ways in which a marriage could be [undone¹⁴](#) was if it could be proved that the marriage was not valid in the first place.

[00:03:54] So Henry claimed that his marriage to Catherine was [invalid¹⁵](#) because she had previously [consummated¹⁶](#) her marriage with her ex husband - so [consummated](#)

¹⁰ this means that Henry soon started looking for other relationships

¹¹ to like someone or something very much; to like doing something

¹² women whose job is to help a queen or other woman of high social position

¹³ that he wanted to start a relationship with

¹⁴ restored back to its previous state

¹⁵ not legally acceptable

¹⁶ to make a marriage or romantic relationship complete by having sex



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means basically that they had had sex - despite Catherine [assuring](#)¹⁷ him that they hadn't.

[00:04:14] Long story short, the Pope refused to [annul](#)¹⁸ the marriage and Henry, instead of just deciding that that was fair enough and he should just continue his marriage with Catherine, he [broke all ties](#) with the Catholic church, made himself head of the newly formed Church of England, divorced Catherine, and married Anne Boleyn.

[00:04:40] So this brings us on to wife number two, Anne Boleyn.

[00:04:45] Henry had previously had an [affair](#)¹⁹ with Anne's sister, Mary, which I guess isn't necessarily a good way to start off a relationship.

[00:04:56] In any case, within nine months of getting married Anne Boleyn gave birth to a child.

[00:05:04] However, the child was a girl, Elizabeth.

[00:05:07] The long-awaited male heir was still [eluding](#)²⁰ him.

¹⁷ to tell someone confidently that something is true, especially so that they do not worry

¹⁸ to officially announce that something such as a law, agreement, or marriage no longer exists

¹⁹ a sexual relationship, especially a secret one

²⁰ if something that you want eludes you, you do not succeed in achieving it



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[00:05:13] Anne also fell pregnant several times after that, but had a series of [miscarriages](#)²¹ and [stillborn](#)²² children.

[00:05:22] And as you might have [gathered](#)²³ or guessed by now, Henry wasn't the most loyal of kings or the most loyal of men, and he started having more [affairs](#).

[00:05:36] When Anne [cottoned on](#)²⁴ to this, when she realised what was going on, she got very angry with him and instead of just saying, "yup sorry, that was me. I apologise for that", he accused her of [adultery](#)²⁵, he accused her of having an [affair](#), and also of [treason](#)²⁶.

[00:05:58] And if there was one thing that you didn't want to do, it was to [get on the wrong side](#)²⁷ of Henry the Eighth, to make him angry.

[00:06:07] And Anne Boleyn got on the wrong side of Henry the Eighth.

²¹ an early, unintentional end to a pregnancy when the baby is born too early and dies because it has not developed enough

²² born dead

²³ understood

²⁴ begun to understand something

²⁵ sex between a married man or woman and someone he or she is not married to

²⁶ (the crime of) showing no loyalty to your country, especially by helping its enemies or trying to defeat its government

²⁷ to upset or anger someone



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[00:06:11] Just three years after they were married, Henry had her [beheaded](#)²⁸, [executed](#) in the Tower of London.

[00:06:21] And only days after Anne's head was separated from her body, Henry took his third wife, Jane Seymour.

[00:06:31] Most historians actually believe that Henry and Jane had been having an [affair](#) while Henry was still married to Anne Boleyn and that actually it was Jane who had pushed Henry to [execute](#) Anne Boleyn, her love rival.

[00:06:50] In any case, they were married for just over a year before Jane gave birth to a son, Henry's third child and his first male [heir](#).

[00:07:01] Finally, the long awaited male [heir](#) had arrived for the King.

[00:07:05] Unfortunately, due to problems during childbirth, Jane died 12 days later.

[00:07:12] Henry was apparently [distraught](#)²⁹, incredibly upset, and Jane is actually the only one of Henry's wives to be buried beside him.

[00:07:23] Henry stayed a [bachelor](#)³⁰, at least from a marriage point of view, for the two years after Jane's death.

[00:07:31] But then it was on to wife number four.

²⁸ to cut off someone's head, especially as a punishment

²⁹ extremely worried, nervous, or upset

³⁰ a man who is not married



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[00:07:35] One of his advisors had suggested that he [sought](#)³¹ a European [alliance](#)³², or European partnership, and had suggested that he marry one of the two daughters of the Duke of Cleves in Germany.

[00:07:52] Henry agreed to this, but he asked for their pictures so he could choose which one of the daughters to marry.

[00:08:00] So a kind of 16th century version of Tinder, but if Henry the Eighth swipes right on you, you seem to have a 33% chance of losing your head.

[00:08:14] Anyway, he decided that Anne of Cleves was the more attractive of the daughters, and he agreed to marry her.

[00:08:22] But when she arrived in England, Henry saw her in real life, [in the flesh](#)³³, and he was [furious](#)³⁴, saying that she wasn't nearly as attractive as the woman in the picture.

[00:08:36] He tried to stop the wedding from going ahead, from happening, but he wasn't able to - the arrangements had already gone too far.

³¹ looked for

³² a group of countries, political parties, or people who have agreed to work together because of shared interests or aims

³³ in real life, and not on TV, in a film, in a picture, etc.

³⁴ extremely angry



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[00:08:46] Reluctantly, he married Anne and [nicknamed](#)³⁵ her "his ugly wife".

[00:08:53] And the marriage wasn't to last for long.

[00:08:55] He requested a divorce and they were separated six months later, although it was said that they actually remained on pretty friendly [terms](#)³⁶ even after being separated.

[00:09:08] I guess Anne didn't want to argue with Henry on this one, as she had seen what had happened to his previous wife named Anne.

[00:09:17] If you've [lost track](#)³⁷ of how many wives we're on now, I wouldn't blame you.

[00:09:22] This is Anne, Anne of Cleves.

[00:09:24] This was number four.

[00:09:27] Almost immediately after the [annulment](#)³⁸, the cancellation, of his marriage to Anne of Cleves, he married Catherine Howard, who was a beautiful 16 year old - yes, I did say 16 year old - who was also a cousin of Henry's second wife, Anne Boleyn.

³⁵ an informal name for someone or something, especially a name that you are called by your friends or family, usually based on your real name or your character

³⁶ the conditions that are part of an agreement or arrangement, or the features of an activity or idea

³⁷ to no longer know what is happening, or not to remember something

³⁸ see 'annul'



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[00:09:50] By the time that Henry married Catherine, he was an [overweight](#)³⁹ 49 year old.

[00:09:57] And he was [obsessed](#)⁴⁰ with his new young bride, calling her his "rose without a [thorn](#)⁴¹."

[00:10:03] So far so good, the King was in love, but there were [rumours](#) that Catherine was [unfaithful](#)⁴², that she was having an [affair](#) with another man from [court](#)⁴³.

[00:10:17] These rumours did seem to have quite a lot of truth behind them, and Catherine obviously hadn't learned rule number one of being married to Henry the Eighth: don't annoy him, don't [get on his wrong side](#) .

[00:10:33] Unfortunately, the rumours were too much for Henry to handle, and 18 months after they were married, Catherine was [beheaded](#), her head chopped off, in exactly the same place as her cousin in the Tower of London.

[00:10:50] So that was wife number five.

³⁹ fat

⁴⁰ unable to stop thinking about something; too interested in or worried about something

⁴¹ a small, sharp pointed growth on the stem of a plant

⁴² having a sexual relationship or experience with a person who is not your husband, wife, or usual sexual partner

⁴³ the official home of a queen or king



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[00:10:52] One might have thought that Henry would have decided, okay, I'm not having that much luck with marriage.

[00:11:00] I think I'll just leave it there.

[00:11:03] But you'd be mistaken.

[00:11:05] A year and a half after wife number five was executed, he took wife number six.

[00:11:13] But this time he wasn't looking for excitement or love.

[00:11:16] He was looking for a companion.

[00:11:19] Someone to [nurse⁴⁴](#) him as he grew old.

[00:11:23] And he [settled on⁴⁵](#) Catherine Parr.

[00:11:25] Another Catherine, but this time, one that was a little more mature and a little more [faithful](#).

[00:11:34] For Catherine Parr, things did actually go pretty well.

⁴⁴ (verb) to care for a person or an animal while they are ill

⁴⁵ if your husband, wife, or partner is faithful, he or she does not have a sexual relationship with anyone else



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[00:11:38] She became a trusted [confidant](#)⁴⁶ of Henry's and had a large influence on his [court](#).

[00:11:45] And most importantly, she managed to escape [execution](#), actually [outliving](#)⁴⁷ Henry by a year after his death in 1547.

[00:11:56] So if you need a reminder, because I certainly think I would need a reminder, we had wife number one Catherine of Aragon, divorced.

[00:12:07] Wife number two, Anne Boleyn, [executed](#).

[00:12:11] Wife number three, Jane Seymour, died after complications from childbirth.

[00:12:18] Wife number four Anne of Cleves, separated after being considered to ugly.

[00:12:24] Wife number five, Catherine Howard, [executed](#).

[00:12:28] And wife number six, Catherine Parr, survived.

[00:12:33] So is there a moral to this story?

[00:12:37] Well, I'm not too sure, perhaps you can see one that I can't.

[00:12:40] I guess the moral at the time was "if Henry the Eighth wants to marry you, you should think very carefully before you say yes".

⁴⁶ a person you trust and share your feelings and secrets with

⁴⁷ to live or exist longer than someone or something



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[00:12:51] Henry the Eighth was evidently a [ruthless](#)⁴⁸ individual.

[00:12:56] And being his wife was a very [thankless](#)⁴⁹ task.

[00:13:02] Okay that is it for Henry the Eighth and his wives.

[00:13:07] I hope that this has been an interesting introduction to one of Britain's most famous kings, and of course his mostly unfortunate waves.

[00:13:17] As a reminder, you can get the transcript and key vocabulary for the podcast over on the website, which is [Leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com).

[00:13:24] The transcript is now nice and animating, so that's a bit like subtitles, but actually cooler because you can press on a word and your browser will give you the definition, which I, for one, thing is pretty neat.

[00:13:38] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:13:42] I'm Alastair Budge and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

⁴⁸ not thinking or worrying about any pain caused to others ; cruel

⁴⁹ a thankless job is difficult or unpleasant, and people do not thank you for it



Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Notorious	famous for something bad
Monarchs	kings or queens
Greasy	covered with or full of fat or oil
Fondness	a liking
Executing	killing someone as a legal punishment
Break ties	finish a relationship, break up with
Widow	a woman whose husband or wife has died and who has not married again
All-important	extremely important
Heir	a person who will legally receive money, property, or a title from another person, especially an older member of the same family, when that other person dies
Eyes soon started wandering	this means that Henry started looking for other relationships
Fond	to like someone or something very much; to like doing something



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Lady in waiting	women whose job is to help a queen or other woman of high social position
He had eyes for	that he wanted to start a relationship with
Undone	restored back to its previous state
Invalid	not legally acceptable
Consummated	to make a marriage or romantic relationship complete by having sex
Assuring	to tell someone confidently that something is true, especially so that they do not worry
Annul	to officially announce that something such as a law, agreement, or marriage no longer exists
Affair	a sexual relationship, especially a secret one
Eluding	if something that you want eludes you, you do not succeed in achieving it
Miscarriages	an early, unintentional end to a pregnancy when the baby is born too early and dies because it has not developed enough
Stillborn	born dead



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Gathered	understood
Cottoned on	begun to understand something
Adultery	sex between a married man or woman and someone he or she is not married to
Treason	(the crime of) showing no loyalty to your country, especially by helping its enemies or trying to defeat its government
Get on the wrong side	to upset or anger someone
Beheaded	to cut off someone's head, especially as a punishment
Distraught	extremely worried, nervous, or upset
Bachelor	a man who is not married
Sought	looked for
Alliance	a group of countries, political parties, or people who have agreed to work together because of shared interests or aims
In the flesh	in real life, and not on TV, in a film, in a picture, etc.
Furious	extremely angry
Nicknamed	an informal name for someone or something, especially a name that you are called by your friends or family, usually based on your



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real name or your character

Terms

the conditions that are part of an agreement or arrangement, or the features of an activity or idea

Lose track

to no longer know what is happening, or not to remember something

Annulment

see 'annul'

Overweight

fat

Obsessed

unable to stop thinking about something; too interested in or worried about something

Thorn

a small, sharp pointed growth on the stem of a plant

Unfaithful

having a sexual relationship or experience with a person who is not your husband, wife, or usual sexual partner

Court

the official home of a queen or king

Nurse

(verb) to care for a person or an animal while they are ill

Settled on

to care for a person or an animal while they are ill

Faithful

if your husband, wife, or partner is faithful, he or she does not have a sexual relationship with anyone else



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Confidant

a person you trust and share your feelings and secrets with

Outliving

to live or exist longer than someone or something

Ruthless

not thinking or worrying about any pain caused to others ; cruel

Thankless

a thankless job is difficult or unpleasant, and people do not thank you for it

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

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