

Biography of Mary Queen of Scots



Mary, Queen of Scots is perhaps the best-known figure in Scotland's royal history. Her life provided tragedy and romance, more dramatic than any legend.

She was born in 1542 a week before her father, King James V of Scotland, died prematurely.

It was initially arranged for Mary to marry the English King Henry VIII's son Prince Edward; however, the Scots refused to ratify the agreement. None too pleased by this, Henry sought to change their mind through a show of force, a war between Scotland and England... the so called 'Rough Wooing'. In the middle of this, Mary was sent to France in 1548 to be the bride of the Dauphin, the young French prince, in order to secure a Catholic alliance against Protestant England. In 1561, after the Dauphin, still in his teens, died, Mary reluctantly returned to Scotland, a young and beautiful widow.

Scotland at this time was in the throes of the Reformation and a widening Protestant – Catholic split. A Protestant husband for Mary seemed the best chance for stability. Mary fell passionately in love with Henry, Lord Darnley, but it was not a success. Darnley was a weak man and soon became a drunkard as Mary ruled entirely alone and gave him no real authority in the country.

Darnley became jealous of Mary's secretary and favourite, David Riccio. He, together with others, murdered Riccio in front of Mary in Holyrood House. She was six months pregnant at the time.

Her son, the future King James VI of Scotland and I of England, was baptised in the Catholic faith in Stirling Castle. This caused alarm amongst the Protestants.

Lord Darnley, Mary's husband, later died in mysterious circumstances in Edinburgh, when the house he was lodging in was blown up one night in February 1567. His body was found in the garden of the house after the explosion, but he had been strangled!



Mary Stuart and Lord Darnley

Mary had now become attracted to James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, and rumours abounded at Court that she was pregnant by him. Bothwell was accused of Darnley's murder but was found not guilty. Shortly after he was acquitted, Mary and Bothwell were married. The Lords of Congregation did not approve of Mary's liaison with Bothwell and she was imprisoned in Leven Castle where she gave birth to still-born twins.

Bothwell meanwhile had bid Mary goodbye and fled to Dunbar. She never saw him again. He died in Denmark, insane, in 1578.

In May 1568 Mary escaped from Leven Castle. She gathered together a small army but was defeated at Langside by the Protestant faction. Mary then fled to England.

In England she became a political pawn in the hands of Queen Elizabeth I and was imprisoned for 19 years in various castles in England. Mary was found to be plotting against Elizabeth; letters in code, from her to others, were found and she was deemed guilty of treason.

She was taken to Fotheringhay Castle and executed in 1587. It is said that after her execution, when the executioner raised the head for the crowd to see, it fell and he was left holding only Mary's wig. Mary was initially buried at nearby Peterborough Cathedral.

Mary's son became James I of England and VI of Scotland after Elizabeth's death in 1603. Although James would have had no personal memories of his mother, in 1612 he had Mary's body exhumed from Peterborough and reburied in a place of honour at Westminster Abbey. At the same time, he rehoused Queen Elizabeth to a rather less prominent tomb nearby.



The abdication of Mary Queen of Scots in 1568

Number the statements in the order in which they are mentioned.

- ☐ • Mary returned to Scotland.
- ☐ • Lord Darnley murdered Mary's secretary.
- ☐ • King James V of Scotland died.
- ☐ • King Henry VIII of England waged war against Scotland.

- ☐ • Mary married the Dauphin.
- ☐ • Lord Darnley was strangled.
- ☐ • Scotland advocated the separation of Protestants and Catholics.
- ☐ • Mary was beheaded.
- ☐ • Mary married Bothwell.
- ☐ • Mary's son became King James VI of Scotland and I of England.
- ☐ • King James I of England had Elizabeth's body taken to a more prominent position.
- ☐ • Queen Elizabeth I had Mary imprisoned.
- ☐ • Bothwell was accused of Darnley's murder.
- ☐ • Mary's son had her reburied at Westminster Abbey.
- ☐ • The Dauphin died.
- ☐ • Everybody learnt that Mary wore a wig.
- ☐ • Mary's twins were born dead.
- ☐ • Queen Elizabeth I died.
- ☐ • Mary's son was baptized in the Catholic faith.
- ☐ • Mary plotted against Elizabeth.
- ☐ • Mary was to be married to Prince Edward.
- ☐ • Bothwell was acquitted of Darnley's murder.
- ☐ • Mary was charged with treason.



Mary with her son, later James I