

PETER BRAMLEY



HENRY VIII AND HIS SIX WIVES

A GUIDE TO HISTORIC TUDOR SITES



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For my mother, Dorothy

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PREFACE

The concept of this guide derives from the belief that the understanding and enjoyment of history can be enhanced by visiting the actual sites of key historical events, as well as the monuments and memorials to the people involved. Television documentaries on historical topics now routinely follow this approach, using on-location shots of appropriate sites. This guidebook is different because it focuses on one particular episode in English history – Henry VIII and his six wives.

I could not have completed the task of researching and writing this book without the help of my family. My daughter, Lucy, has produced the maps and family trees and helped me with the digital photography, and my wife Sheila has provided a challenging ear throughout. Many thanks are due to Rachel Howkins, with whom, as always, it has been a pleasure to work.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

The saga of Henry VIII and his six wives is amongst the best known in English history. No other king comes close to this number of wives – Edward III is next, with three. In his desperate twenty-eight year search for a male heir, Henry turned England upside down, and heralded the English Reformation.

Even after 500 years, a considerable number of historic sites survive from these dark, turbulent times and can help to reconstruct the events and personalities of the period. Such sites occur in the form of houses, castles, churches and cathedrals, monasteries, plaques, obelisks and church monuments. The objective of this guide is to introduce the reader to the best of these, by providing for each site:

- A short description of what there is to see.
- A brief account of any events in the Tudor period that occurred there, and/or a biography of the person(s) commemorated, covering their role in the dramas.
- Summary directions on how to find the site and other entry details. These directions are designed to complement modern road atlases.
- A broad-brush ‘star’ rating.

The guide covers those historic sites in England and Wales which I consider to be the most interesting and important. I have visited more than 200 sites over the last four years, selecting those to visit by consulting recent historical literature (see Bibliography), including the Pevsner and Arthur Macdonald county guides. My criteria for including sites in the guide are:

- There must be something memorable to see to act as a focus of interest. So, churches where someone is known to have been buried but where no memorial has survived have been excluded.
- The Tudor monarchs and their subjects were great builders and imposed themselves on both the urban and rural landscapes through houses of different designs in brick, stone and timber round the country. Examples of such properties are included, usually with a connection to our story.
- Last but not least, each site must be accessible or at least visible to the public.

I have visited all the sites included in this guide at least once. In order to provide the reader with background for their visit to the site, the guide includes a summary of the key dates of the period together with profiles of the main historical characters involved. The latter have been drawn from a number of sources, including the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Please note that the scope of this book is limited to Henry VIII and his six wives; it does not cover all aspects of Henry’s reign. Henry only visited the north of England once, when he travelled to York with Katherine Howard – the Tudor power base was in the south – so there are but nine sites to visit north of Sheffield. One final point: dates of birth were rarely recorded in Tudor times outside royalty.

where possible I have included best-guess estimates.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE WARS OF THE ROSES

The Tudor dynasty was very much a product of the Wars of the Roses – the series of battles between the rival Plantagenet houses of Lancaster and York, stretching over thirty years from 1455 to 1487, in three clear phases. The wars arose because the four sons of Henry IV (who had usurped the throne in 1399) produced between them only one male heir – the son of Henry V, who became Henry VI in 1422 on the premature death of his illustrious father.

Unfortunately, the young king had inherited his mother's mental instability so that, once his last uncle had died in 1447, the country descended into chaos as a vacuum developed at the centre of power. This ensured the loss of Normandy and Gascony and the end of the Hundred Years War, and allowed Richard, Duke of York to promote a rival claim to the throne, based on his descent from not only the fourth son of Edward III (the House of Lancaster was descended from the third son, John of Gaunt) but also through his mother, Anne Mortimer, from the second son Lionel, Duke of Clarence.

It was unclear in England at that time whether the throne could be inherited through a female. It had happened in the twelfth century, when Henry I's daughter Matilda had inherited, but that had led to a long civil war. Ever since then the Plantagenets had produced sons.

The first phase of the wars ended in 1461, when Edward, son of Richard, Duke of York, triumphed at the large scale and hard fought Battle of Towton, near York. Henry VI was not present at the battle and was driven into hiding, leaving the throne to Edward IV who was supported by Warwick the Kingmaker. The second phase, from 1469–71, involved Warwick changing sides, driving Edward into exile and restoring Henry VI who was, by now, a complete puppet. However, in 1471 Edward returned from exile and decisively beat and killed Warwick at the Battle of Barnet, and then defeated the Lancastrian forces at Tewkesbury. Henry VI was murdered in the Tower, and that should have been it.

England enjoyed twelve years of relative peace, until Edward IV died after a fishing trip, just before his fortieth birthday. This instigated the third and final phase of the wars. Edward IV was succeeded by his son, Edward V, who was still only 12 years old, with his uncle Richard, Duke of Gloucester acting as Lord Protector. Richard could not resist the temptation, and in the summer of 1483 split the Yorkist party, usurped the throne as Richard III, and imprisoned his two nephews in the Tower. They disappeared from view and were never seen again.

After Henry VI's murder in 1471, because of the small size of the Lancastrian royal family, there were no mainstream candidates for their claim to the throne (Henry VI's son, Edward, had been killed at Tewkesbury). However, an alternative did exist through the Beauforts. In the 1360s, John of Gaunt produced four illegitimate children with his established mistress, Katherine Swynford. As adults, the children were legitimated by Richard II and the Pope in 1396. From John, the eldest son, was descended John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset (1408–44), whose only child was Lady Margaret Beaufort – born in 1443.

Lady Margaret was, thus, a great heiress and was married, at 12 years of age, to Edmund Tudor, the

eldest son of Owen Tudor and Katherine of Valois (mother to Henry VI). Katherine was somewhat fun-loving and had become involved with Owen, her Groom of the Wardrobe. Edmund had a young brother, Jasper. Henry VI much favoured his half-brothers as his only living relatives. Edmund, keen to secure his wife's income, quickly ensured that Margaret was pregnant. In 1457 she gave birth to Henry at Pembroke Castle.

Henry was brought up by the Herberts in Raglan Castle, but by 1483 was safely in exile in Brittany with a small band of Lancastrian stalwarts. Through his paternal line, Henry had no claim to the throne at all and the Beaufort line was fraught because of the illegitimacy, and because Henry IV had specifically ruled out any Beaufort claim (although this was never ratified by Parliament). If there was a claim, then actually that rested with Lady Margaret, his mother. The accession of the Yorkist king had established that succession through the female line *could* occur, but England was not yet ready for a female ruler. Lady Margaret was more than happy to pass on her controversial claim to her son.

Now 26 years old, Henry was not, on the face of it, a strong candidate for the throne. He had lived in exile in France for over ten years, and was not well known in England. Few people of importance had even met him. He was tall, but somewhat reserved and had no military experience. However, there were still Lancastrian diehards in the country and Richard III's treatment of the princes in the Tower had alienated many Yorkist followers. What changed Henry Tudor's fortunes dramatically was the combination of Buckingham's revolt, in the autumn of 1483, and his promise at Christmas of that year to marry Edward IV's daughter, Elizabeth.

Much plotting between Lady Margaret Beaufort, Dowager Queen Elizabeth Woodville and the Duke of Buckingham had resulted in armed demonstrations by the gentry and some peers across the south of England, in support of the Tudor and Woodville factions. Buckingham's execution by Richard III in November 1483, left Henry Tudor as the de facto leader of this faction, with the promise of marriage to unite Tudor and Woodville. Although Richard's executions after the uprising were limited, many rebels fled to Tudor in France, and the Yorkist party was split again.

The Tudor drive for the throne was underway. Its eventual triumph at Bosworth owed much to the southern gentry backbone inherited originally from Edward IV, and to further clever intrigue and plotting by Lady Margaret, to the extent that, by Bosworth, Richard III could not count on the battlefield loyalty of much of his army.

THE TUDOR CLAIM TO THE THRONE

It has been calculated that, at the time of the Battle of Bosworth, there were twenty-nine other people with a better claim to the throne of England than Henry Tudor! His claim was obscure and flawed, but there were no other Lancastrian claimants. This was why it was essential for him to marry Elizabeth of York, who, with the disappearance of the princes in the Tower, was Prince Edward IV's heir.

However, in Parliament, he relied solely on a claim based on his victory at Bosworth, and from day one he played down any dependence on his wife's claim. Furthermore, he had only two blood relations – his uncle Jasper Tudor, whom he made Duke of Bedford but who had no children, and his mother Lady Margaret Beaufort, who continued to play such an important role behind the scenes for the next twenty years and more.

The Tudors, dynastically, were on a knife-edge from the beginning. Elizabeth, however, produced a boy, named Arthur, within eight months, and the couple had seven further children, of whom three survived, two girls and Prince Henry. The elder daughter, Margaret, became Queen of Scotland, s

that once Prince Arthur had died in 1502, the dynasty was back to square one, with Henry as the only male Tudor from 1509 until Edward's birth in 1537. This is why Henry VIII was so obsessed with male heir – there was absolutely no back-up.

Who could threaten them? The main Yorkist alternatives came from Princess Elizabeth Plantagenet, Edward IV's younger sister, who had married John de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk; Princess Katherine Plantagenet, Queen Elizabeth's younger sister who married William Courtenay, Earl of Devon; and from Edward Plantagenet, son of George, Duke of Clarence who was Edward IV's middle brother, and his sister, Margaret. Henry VII married her to a Tudor stalwart, Sir Richard Pole. They all, in various ways, demanded the attention of the two Henrys, and not many died in their beds.

RISE OF THE GENTRY

Edward IV developed a powerbase in southern England by directly retaining upwardly mobile gentry who were benefitting from the loosening of the traditional feudal ties between themselves and the nobility. He was supported throughout by some members of the peerage, but not in the same numbers as those who leaned towards the Lancastrians.

The Lancastrians were really the party of the 'clubbable' nobles, who fought together in the Hundred Years War and for whom the House of Lords was the focus of government. Edward IV appealed direct to the gentry and the burgesses in the City, who saw the House of Commons as the natural focus of government.

By the 1470s, the nobles had fought themselves to a standstill and the power of magnates, like the Nevilles, had been broken. The clever realignment of the Tudor political position between 1483 and 1485 ensured that Henry Tudor swept to power in 1485, having inherited Edward IV's southern gentry supporters as well. They found that they were not to be disappointed – if any one factor ensured the survival of the knife-edge Tudor dynasty, it was the continued overlooking of the established peerage and the promotion of men of talent from the ranks of the gentry and below, by both Henrys.

THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

Christianity had been around in England since St Augustin established his church at Canterbury in AD 675. It had been a force for stability and restraint in a violent society. The Norman Conquest brought the Church more fully back into the fold of Rome. It survived the challenges of Thomas Becket's dispute with Henry II, and the rise of Lollardy at the end of the fourteenth century.

Otherwise, the English Catholic Church in the early sixteenth century was considered amongst the most conservative in Europe. Luther's pronouncements in 1517 ignited the flame of church reform throughout Europe, and intellectuals and radicals began working on a programme of evangelical change.

Initially, progress in conservative England was slow because Henry VIII himself was a very traditional Catholic, and had written a tract opposing Luther. Henry died a Catholic, and was still burning Protestant heretics until the end. The whole of Henry's campaign to break with Rome was pursued for political reasons against the papacy, rather than for doctrinal reasons.

A small number of reforms undertaken by the Church of England in the 1530s did result in changes to the fabric of the religion. Otherwise, the change of the Church of England to Protestantism took place in the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I.



St George's Chapel, Windsor, founded by Edward IV. The Wars of the Roses were not all bad news.

In a similar vein, monasticism had been established by the Anglo-Saxons but was much enhanced by the Normans. By the thirteenth century, up to 40 per cent of the land area of England was owned by monasteries – a huge area. Many were big sheep farmers. However, by the fifteenth century they were becoming less well used and some of the smaller ones closed in the early 1500s. This massive accumulation of scarce resources under the Church's control must have been highly coveted by landowners.

THE REIGN OF HENRY VII

In January 1486, after a delay to obtain a papal dispensation, Henry Tudor was married to Elizabeth of York in Westminster Abbey and the rival factions of Lancaster and York were finally united. Tudor withstood the expected Yorkist backlash at the Battle of Stoke (near Newark) in 1487, where John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln, was killed. He dealt with the later Perkin Warbeck conspiracy, and a number of other plots, even including Sir William Stanley, the hero of Bosworth.

By the late 1490s, the dynasty was safely established. Henry proved a cautious but shrewd king, perhaps the greatest 'accountant' king since Henry I. He built on the policies of his father-in-law Edward IV, and left the public finances in a very sound state. However, when state ceremony was needed, Henry was very willing to make the money available.



Charming tomb brass at Coughton.



Tudor chimneys at Rotherfield Greys.

Henry's success financially meant that he was able to reward his followers in the House of Commons by not calling Parliaments very often, and not imposing too many taxes – such a contrast to the bad old days of Henry VI and the disastrous Normandy project in the 1430s and 1440s.

In the area of foreign policy, Henry was surprisingly bold. In 1489, only three years after his triumph at Bosworth (which had been bankrolled and supported on the ground by France), Henry allied himself with the newly emergent Spain, through a marriage alliance between his son, Arthur, and Catherine of Aragon, the youngest daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. It was this unusual move which set the framework for much of our story. Ahead of the wedding, the Spanish

monarchs became concerned about the number of rival claimants to the English throne. In 1499, one of the most prominent, Edward, Earl of Warwick (who was the son of Clarence, Edward IV's brother) was executed on a trumped-up charge, despite being mentally feeble.

Arthur and Catherine were married in St Paul's Cathedral in November 1501, aged 15 and 16 years respectively. In midwinter, they travelled up to Ludlow where the prince was based but, in April 1502, Arthur died of sweating sickness. Further tragedy hit the royal family in 1503, when Elizabeth of York died after giving birth in an attempt to 'replace' Arthur with a new baby. Quite soon afterwards, the king's thoughts turned back to his Spanish alliance and he arranged for a papal dispensation to be obtained so that Catherine could marry Prince Henry, Arthur's younger brother. Such a marriage was against canon law and the teachings of Leviticus. The dispensation was obtained, but the new marriage negotiations stalled.

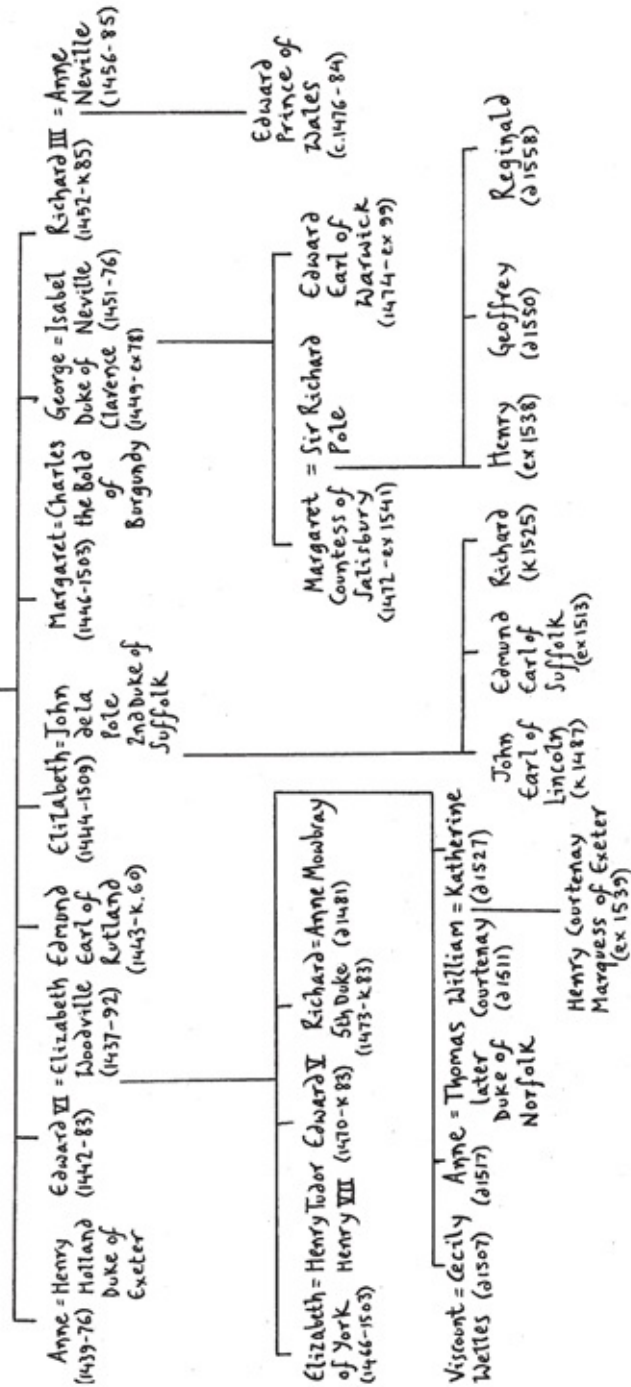
Twenty-five years later, the King's Great Matter – Henry VIII's need to annul his own marriage to Catherine – revolved around whether Arthur and Catherine had actually consummated their short marriage.



Yorkist emblem in Worcester Cathedral.

THE HOUSE OF YORK

Richard = Cecily Neville
3rd Duke (1411 - K. 60)



KEY DATES

- 1485 August** Battle of Bosworth, where Henry Tudor gains the throne of England.
- December** Birth of Catherine of Aragon, to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain.
- 1486 January** Marriage of Henry Tudor and Elizabeth of York.
- September** Birth of Prince Arthur, to Elizabeth of York.
- 1489 March** Treaty of Medina Campo, in which Arthur and Catherine of Aragon are betrothed.
- 1491 June** Birth of Prince Henry, to Elizabeth of York.
- 1501** Birth of Anne Boleyn, to Sir Thomas and Elizabeth Boleyn.
- November** Prince Arthur and Catherine of Aragon married at St Paul's.
- 1502 April** Death of Prince Arthur at Ludlow.
- 1503 June** Catherine of Aragon betrothed to Prince Henry.
- 1505 June** Prince Henry repudiates betrothal.
- 1508** Jane Seymour is born to Sir John and Margery Seymour.
- 1509 April** Death of Henry VII; accession of Henry VIII.

June Marriage of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon; coronation of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon.
Death of Lady Margaret Beaufort.

- 1510 January** Stillborn daughter delivered to Queen Catherine.
August Execution of Dudley and Empson.
- 1511 January** Birth of Prince Henry, to Queen Catherine.
February Death of Prince Henry.
- 1512** Birth of Katherine Parr, to Sir Thomas and Maud.
- 1513 June** Queen Catherine appointed regent while Henry VIII invades France.
August Henry wins Battle of the Spurs in northern France.
September Earl of Surrey routs Scots at Battle of Flodden.
October Stillborn son delivered to Queen Catherine.
- 1514** 'Bessie' Blount first linked to Henry VIII.
November Birth of son to Queen Catherine; dies the same day.
- 1515 September** Birth of Anne of Cleves, daughter of the Duke of Cleves in Düsseldorf.
Wolsey takes over from Archbishop Warham as Lord Chancellor.
- 1516 January** Death of King Ferdinand of Spain, Catherine of Aragon's father.
February Birth of Princess Mary, to Queen Catherine.
- 1517** Outbreak of sweating sickness.
- 1518 November** Birth of a daughter, to Queen Catherine – she dies soon after.
- 1519 February** Election of Charles V of Spain, Catherine of Aragon's nephew (Holy Roman Emperor).
June Birth of Henry Fitzroy, to 'Bessie' Blount (Henry's only acknowledged bastard).
- 1520 June** The Field of the Cloth of Gold meeting between Henry VIII and Francis I of France.
- 1521 May** Execution of the Duke of Buckingham.
- 1524** Queen Catherine has passed the age for having children; birth of Katherine Howard to Lord Edmund and Joyce Howard.
- 1526 February** Henry begins to court Anne Boleyn.
- 1527 May** Sack of Rome by army of Charles V; ecclesiastical court set up at Westminster to annul Henry and Catherine's marriage.
- 1528 September** Cardinal Campeggio arrives in England to judge the annulment with Wolsey.
- 1529 July** Campeggio adjourns the case indefinitely to Rome.
October Wolsey falls from power.
- 1530 November** Death of Wolsey.
- 1531 February** Henry recognised as Supreme Head of the Church of England by Reformation Parliament.
July Queen Catherine banished from court.
- 1532 September** Anne Boleyn made Lady Marquess of Pembroke.
- 1533 January** Henry and Anne marry secretly.
May Cranmer declares marriage between Henry and Queen Catherine to be unlawful; a few days later Cranmer declares marriage of Henry and Anne Boleyn to be lawful and valid.
June Coronation of Anne Boleyn.
September Birth of Princess Elizabeth, to Queen Anne Boleyn.
- 1534 March** Act of Succession passed by Parliament giving succession to children of Anne Boleyn.
Summer Stillborn baby to Queen Anne Boleyn.
- 1535 January** Thomas Cromwell appointed king's vice regent.
June Stillborn baby to Queen Anne.
Summer Royal progress to West Country, including Wulfhall.
- 1536 January** Death of Catherine of Aragon. Birth of stillborn son to Queen Anne Boleyn.
February Dissolution of smaller monasteries.
May Anne Boleyn arrested and escorted to the Tower; trial and execution of Anne; marriage of Henry and Jane Seymour.
June Parliament passes another Act of Succession, handing the succession to the children of Jane Seymour and the king.
Princess Mary submits to the king.
October Pilgrimage of Grace breaks out in the north.
- 1537 October** Birth of Prince Edward, to Jane Seymour; death of Jane Seymour.
- 1539 January** Execution of the Marquess of Exeter and other members of the conservative faction.
December Anne of Cleves arrives in England.

- 1540 January** Marriage of Henry to Anne of Cleves.
~~**April** Henry begins to court Katherine Howard.~~

July Marriage of Henry and Anne of Cleves annulled; execution of Thomas Cromwell; marriage of Henry and Katherine Howard.
- 1541 November** Cranmer informs the king of Queen Katherine's indiscretions.
- 1542 February** Parliament passes Act of Attainder against Queen Katherine – she is executed.
- 1543 July** Marriage of Henry and Katherine Parr.
- 1544 Summer** Queen Katherine acts as regent while Henry invades France.
- 1547 January** Execution of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey; death of Henry VIII; accession of Edward VI; Edward Seymour becomes Lord Protector.
April Katherine Parr marries Thomas Seymour.
- 1548 September** Death of Katherine Parr after childbirth.
- 1549** Protector Somerset deposed and John Dudley seizes power and becomes Duke of Northumberland.
- 1553 July** Death of Edward VI.
Nine-day reign of Lady Jane Grey.
Accession of Queen Mary I.
- 1554 July** Marriage of Mary I to Philip II of Spain.
- 1557 July** Death of Dowager Queen Anne of Cleves.
- 1558 November** Death of Queen Mary I.
Accession of Queen Elizabeth I.
- 1603 March** Death of Queen Elizabeth I.

THE MAIN CHARACTERS

HENRY VIII AND HIS WIVES

HENRY VIII (1491–1547, king from 1509) was the second son of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. His elder brother, Prince Arthur, died in 1502. As a boy, Henry was highly intelligent and academically well-educated and precocious. He spent most of his time in the company of his sisters and his mother at **Eltham Palace**, whilst Arthur was despatched to **Ludlow** in 1492.

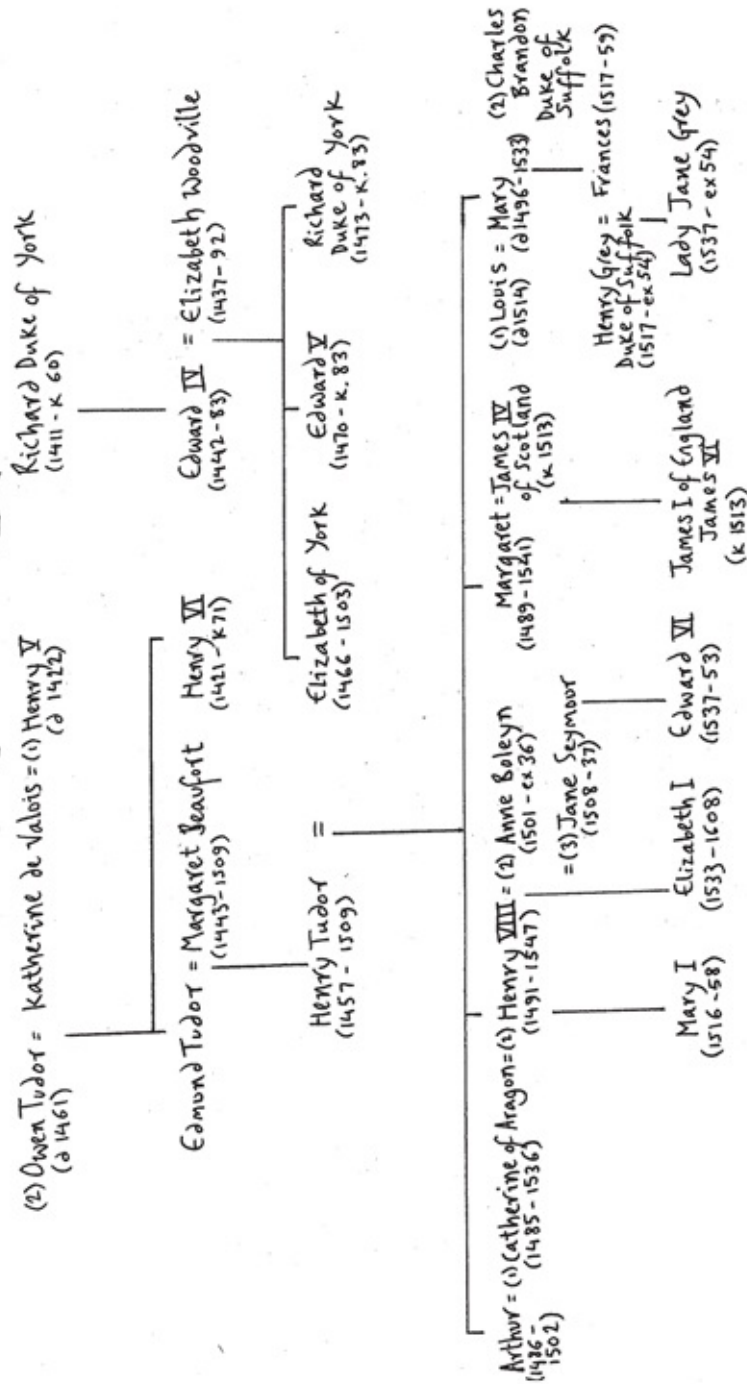
Henry adored Queen Elizabeth, and is said to have been inconsolable when she died in 1503. It has been said that she was the only person he truly loved. As he entered his teenage years he grew to be multi-talented – he composed music, danced and sang extremely well and loved to discourse on religion. He also became very tall for Tudor times, at 6ft 2in, which gave him a natural royal bearing. He retained a high voice.

In the later years of Henry VII's reign, father and son failed to get on, with the result that Henry had little or no experience of government when his father died. Incredibly, he still managed to hit the ground running as king – he announced himself by quickly marrying Catherine of Aragon and famously arresting, and finally executing, Dudley and Empson for financial extortion crimes during his father's reign.

However, for the next few years of his reign his personal achievements were limited. He was naïve in his dealings with his father-in-law, Ferdinand of Spain, which resulted in disappointing military expeditions overseas. In fact, if you look at two of the key roles of a medieval monarch, internal law and order and the defence of the realm, his record is patchy.

There was certainly no reoccurrence of the Wars of the Roses (the big Tudor selling point), but on the other hand, the Pilgrimage of Grace, organised in the north in 1536, was one of the most serious threats to the Crown during the Middle Ages. It was, nevertheless, ruthlessly suppressed by the Duke of Norfolk and Suffolk.

THE TUDORS



Henry's record on the defence of the realm and on overseas military expeditions is little better. The French fleet briefly landed on the Isle of Wight in 1546, but were driven away after the Battle of the Solent. Henry spent extravagantly on military expeditions, but gained little of any significance. In truth, he was no war leader like his illustrious predecessors, Edward III and Henry V, or even his grandfather, Edward IV. He led from the rear, not from the front as they had.

Henry was an obsessive – he was obsessed with hunting, as were so many of the ruling classes; as a young man he was obsessed with jousting, and spent hours jousting with his favourites like Charles Brandon in this dangerous sport. He was good at it, although he was sometimes allowed to win simply because he liked to win at everything he did.

Another obsession was the building of palaces. Henry owned more of these than any other monarch before or since, even though they were mainly confined to the Home Counties. This obsession proved very expensive, but led to architectural delights such as **Nonsuch Palace**. Another, **Hampton Court** was originally built by Cardinal Wolsey but much modified by Henry.

However, this obsessive nature came to England's rescue. The third key accountability for

medieval monarch was to provide a male heir who would be likely to reach adulthood before inheriting the throne. There had not been a female monarch in England since Queen Matilda in the twelfth century, whose reign had led to twenty years of civil war. The demise of the Tudor royal family from 1502, and the marriage of Henry's sister, Margaret, to the King of Scotland, meant that on Henry VIII's accession there were only three surviving members of the family in England: Henry's 13-year-old sister, Mary, plus Henry and his new queen Catherine of Aragon. Henry's nearest male relative was Henry Courtenay, Earl of Devon, a somewhat lacklustre performer whose mother, Katherine, was Elizabeth of York's younger sister.

England needed a male heir quickly, because the new king's premature death would be likely to reopen the Wars of the Roses. Queen Catherine produced one for Henry as early as 1511 and he was named Henry, but died after fifty-two days. It would take another twenty-six years, and two more wives, to finally achieve the goal when Jane Seymour gave birth to Prince Edward in 1537.

In order to succeed, Henry had had to turn England upside down and overcome every possible obstacle. He was able to draw on not only his obsessiveness but also his utter ruthlessness and cruelty, his love of conspiracy (inherited no doubt from his grandmother, Lady Margaret Beaufort) and his incredible love of detail – he was a micro-manager. Yes, he had the right skill set for this task.

When, around 1520, Henry's conscience began to tell him that he should not have married his brother's wife, there were two main obstacles to obtaining an annulment of their marriage from the Pope. Firstly, a papal dispensation had been issued in 1504 which specifically allowed Henry to marry Catherine of Aragon, his brother's widow. Secondly, in 1519, Charles V of Spain (Catherine's nephew), was elected, through her sister, to Holy Roman Emperor.

From 1527, Charles put his considerable diplomatic and military resources behind Catherine's cause. In that year, to make matters worse, Charles' military successes over the French in Italy meant that, in effect, he had Pope Clement as a prisoner. This combination of circumstances proved insurmountable for Henry, and led directly to the break with Rome in 1531, the establishment of the Church of England, early 'Protestant' reforms and the Dissolution of the Monasteries – the biggest change in land ownership in England since the Norman Conquest.

The massive legislative programme that constituted Henry's major legacy as sovereign stemmed from his need to secure a male heir – the 'King's Great Matter' as it became known. Henry unscrupulously used Wolsey and then Cromwell to implement these actions, but kept well abreast of the detail. Perhaps surprisingly, Henry remained very much a traditional Catholic on a personal level. In the late 1530s, he actually slowed the pace of religious reform by issuing the 'Six Articles'. The English Reformation proper had to wait until the reign of his son, Edward VI, a decade or so later.

The Dissolution provided Henry with a one-off opportunity to enhance the loyalty of his aristocratic subjects (who also served as members in one or other of the Houses of Parliament) to the new religious order and to the Tudor dynasty. He was able to sell off or grant the lands confiscated from the monasteries to the gentry and the nobility. A large number of these subjects became tied in to the new order because to go back would entail much personal loss. At least from 1536, Henry is revealed as a 'man with a consistent plan'. Although personally conservative in his religion, he steadily built up the number of religious reformers on his council; in particular, Edward Seymour, Queen Jane's brother (and therefore Edward VI's uncle), whom Henry nominated to lead the council during Edward's minority.

Also favoured was John Dudley, son of Edmund, who had been executed by Henry at the beginning of his reign. Henry also chose as his sixth wife Katherine Parr, who favoured religious reform. With her help, the king also ensured that Prince Edward's tutors were of a reforming bent, so that the prince

grew into a reformer himself, if a rather serious-minded one. It was no coincidence that the religious environment in Edward VI's reign was proto-Protestant. From 1538, Henry also took steps to ensure that the conservative faction at court was kept in check. The Poles and the Courtenays were destroyed in the late 1530s and, right at the end of his reign, Henry moved against his one-time supporters, the Howards. By 1547, therefore, the reformers dominated the council and his young son's reign looked secure.



Henry went on pilgrimage to Little Walsingham in 1511.

However, even Henry VIII could not control events after his own death! Disastrously, Seymour and Dudley fell out in 1549, with the outsider Dudley proving the more accomplished political operator. Seymour was executed. In 1553 Henry's dream was shattered when Edward VI died, aged only 15 years, unmarried and without issue. Dudley vacillated, which let in the Catholic Mary I, whom Henry had consistently rejected as heir.

A return to Rome looked on the cards and, even worse, the marriage of Mary I to King Philip of Spain, which might result in the founding of an Anglo-Spanish dynasty. All Henry's efforts would have been in vain, but Mary was not able to have children. This left the way open for her sister Elizabeth, to be made queen and to finish the job begun in her father's reign and create a Protestant state. This is surely one of the most moving episodes in English history; the daughter of Anne Boleyn, executed for adultery in 1536, bides her time, accedes to the throne and then is able to ensure just the long-term religious settlement with which her mother would have been delighted. The double irony being that Henry himself did not favour female rulers.

Another controversial element of the King's Great Matter revolves around Henry's sexual potency, or rather lack of it. Modern historians frequently question it, but of course evidence is scarce. Why did it take him twenty-eight years to produce a male heir who survived infancy? In these matters he was certainly an intensely private man and conducted his affairs under a veil of secrecy. However, Catherine of Aragon was pregnant six times before they stopped sleeping together, whilst Anne Boleyn may have been pregnant four times in less than four years. So, maybe there was no problem there?

However, there was a period of fourteen years, from the birth of the illegitimate Henry Fitzroy

1519 to that of Princess Elizabeth in 1533, during which time he appears to have made no one pregnant, unless he was the father of Mary Boleyn's children in the mid-1520s (Henry never acknowledged them). This long hiatus was driven by Catherine's opposition to annulment, and was to have the disastrous consequence that Edward VI was only 9 years old when Henry died. Furthermore, after Jane Seymour's death in 1537 there is no further evidence of pregnancy with any of his final three wives, certainly not Anne of Cleves! And yet Henry really needed a back-up for Prince Edward, the lack of which was to lead to the collapse of his dream. So, we seem to have sporadic impotence, perhaps?

The only telling evidence that there was a problem for Henry comes from the revelation made by George Boleyn, at his trial for adultery with his sister in 1536. George was asked to confirm, otherwise, to the court that a written statement on the subject of Henry's lack of virility was true. Instead, he chose to read it out, virtually guaranteeing his own execution. The statement claimed that Anne had told George's wife, Jane Rochford, that Henry 'was no good in bed with women and that he had neither potency nor force'.



This portrait captures the later personality of Henry better than any other. (British Museum)

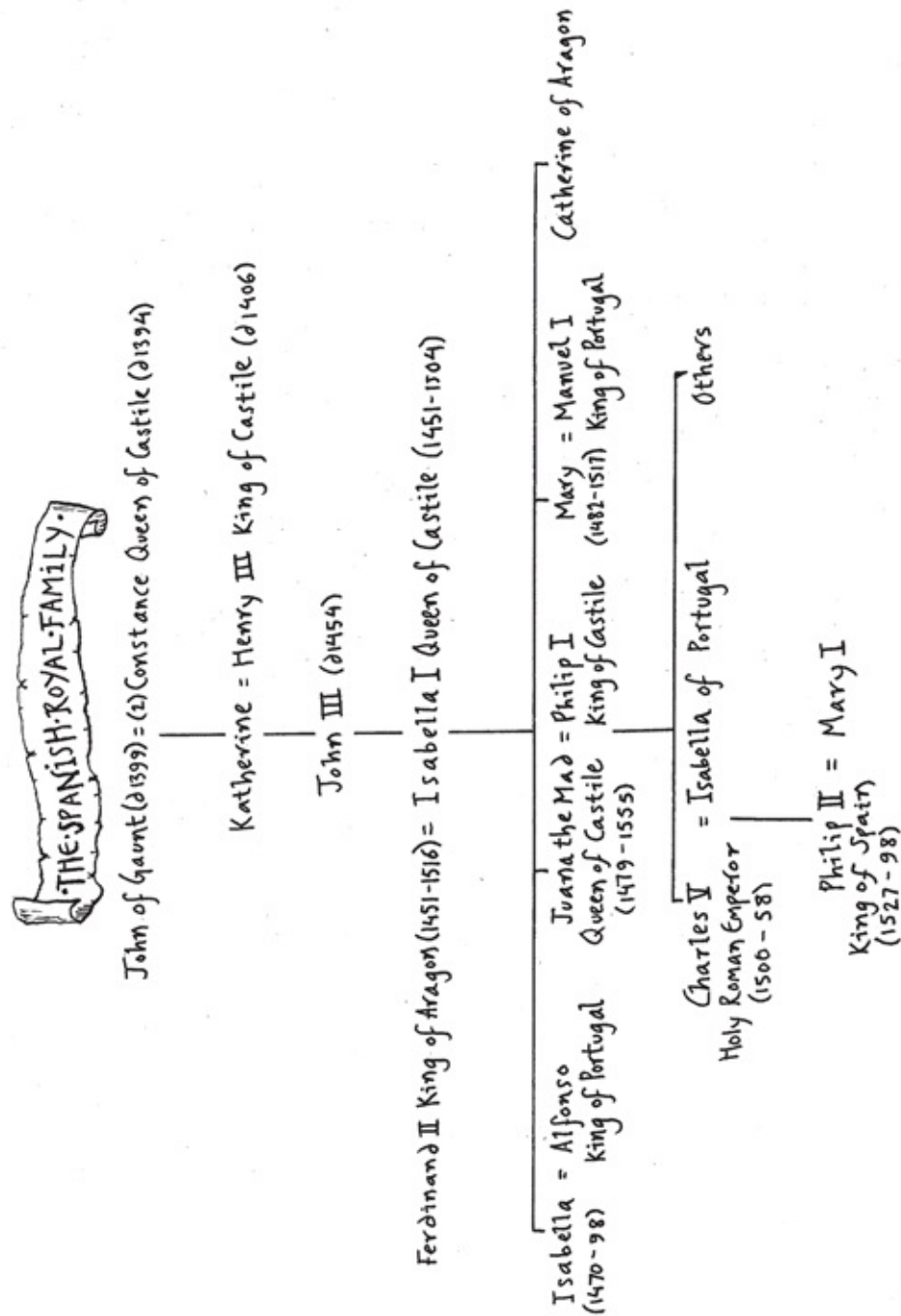
Henry was utterly ruthless and brutal in his pursuit of the Great Matter, but was he a tyrant? He was too clever for there to be a simple answer to this question. It is important to recognise that, throughout his reign, Henry received strong backing from Parliament for most of the controversial measures he instigated, especially in the 1520s and 1530s. At least in the south of the country, he was very popular with the gentry and the middle classes. So much so that in July 1536, just after Anne Boleyn's execution, Parliament passed a statute which enabled him to issue proclamations which would have the same force of law as an Act of Parliament – a power which has never been granted to any other king or prime minister in England before or since. Parliament was, in effect, giving him tyrannical powers!

CATHERINE OF ARAGON (1485–1536) was the first wife of Henry VIII, and queen for twenty-four years until her marriage was annulled in 1533. She had previously been married to Prince Arthur, Henry's elder brother, in 1501, but was widowed only five months later. Catherine was the youngest of the five surviving children of King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile. Isabella was monarch in her own right so their marriage, in 1469, brought together the key parts of Spain for the first time.

They were both extremely vigorous rulers – Isabella even campaigned during pregnancy. The

expelled the Moors from Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in Spain; they sponsored Columbus expedition; they instigated the Spanish Inquisition; and in between, they found the time to produce a male heir and four daughters, who were to be used to advance the cause of the New Spain in Europe. (Their splendid tomb survives in the Alhambra Palace in Granada.)

Soon after Catherine's birth, Ferdinand proposed a marriage alliance with anti-French overtones between her and Prince Arthur, Henry VII's first born. Surprisingly perhaps, Henry signed the Treaty of Medina del Campo in 1489, ratifying the match. This despite the fact that France had supported him in exile before Bosworth, and provided troops and military support on the day. From a military point of view, the alliance was to achieve very little and was to lead indirectly, forty years later, to seismic changes in England and to the Armada invasion, 100 years after.



Isabella oversaw her daughter's education and gave her a good grounding in Latin. She was intelligent and well-read, but no linguist – she struggled early on in England to learn the language. She grew into a pretty and plump young woman with red-gold hair and perhaps the colouring of her

maternal great-grandmother, Katherine, daughter of John of Gaunt (after whom she was named). Although possessing a degree of reserve, Catherine was tenacious and single-minded and very proud. She had strong principles, and was conventionally pious to a degree which deepened as her travails with Henry VIII increased. On the other hand, she had a natural kindness which she used to good effect to make friends amongst her English household and the nobility.

After Prince Arthur's untimely death early in 1502, Henry VII moved quickly to obtain the papal dispensation necessary to allow the young Prince Henry to marry Arthur's widow, Catherine. The dispensation did recognise that Arthur and Catherine had consummated their marriage. However, negotiations with Ferdinand and Isabella dragged on and stalled. Nonetheless Catherine stayed put in England – she was obviously determined to get her prize.

On Henry VII's death in 1509, however, the new king moved rapidly and Henry VIII and Catherine were married in June by Archbishop Warham at Greenwich – she was almost six years older than Henry. Their joint coronation followed later the same month. Catherine quickly became a very effective queen consort, her intelligence, beauty and love of pageantry ensuring her popularity with the crowds, especially with women.

In the early years there was also demonstrable mutual affection between the royal couple. Queen Catherine was a successful regent in 1513, during Henry's expedition to France; she seems to have had real substance. However, as far as Henry was concerned, she made mistakes during the reign in three crucial areas. Firstly, she still managed to put the interests of her father, Ferdinand of Spain, on an equal footing with or even above those of England. She regularly encouraged Henry to ally with Ferdinand and to model himself on her father. Oddly, early on in the reign she wrote to her father referring to England and Wales as 'these kingdoms of your Highness' – slip of the pen, or revelation of a cunning Spanish plan, which nearly worked when Mary I came to the throne? However, in 1516 Ferdinand double-crossed Henry by doing a secret deal with the French. On top of that, the Holy Roman Emperor rejected Henry's sister, Mary, as a match for Archduke Charles. Henry took the insult badly and blamed Ferdinand and Catherine. He upbraided her 'ficiously' and announced that henceforth, he would rule England without her.

Secondly, after the stupendous victory at Flodden in 1513, Catherine had written to Henry in France, '... the great victory that our Lord hath sent to your subjects in your absence. To my thinking this battle hath been more than you should win all the crown of France.' Not the tone that a man like Henry wanted to hear – tactless or what?

But the most important mistake Catherine made, of course, was to fail to produce a male heir for Henry. When Lady Margaret Beaufort died, six days after Henry's coronation, there were only two other members of the Tudor Royal House alive – Henry's elder sister, Margaret, who was Queen of Scotland, and his unmarried younger sister, Mary. However, there were still a number of rival male claimants (actually with a technically better claim) from the House of York. If the Tudor dynasty was to continue, it was vital that a male heir was produced.

Actually Catherine and Henry did try – Catherine had six full-term pregnancies between 1510 and 1518, three of each sex. One daughter was stillborn; one daughter and one son died the same day; two sons lived a short while, particularly little Henry born on New Year's Day 1511 who lived for fifty-two days. Had this boy lived this book would be very short! In 1516 Princess Mary was born, the only surviving child (see **Westminster Abbey**).

From the second pregnancy onwards Henry took mistresses, despite Catherine's attempts to dissuade him. This was not unusual for kings at the time. There is a long list of his suspected mistresses, but actually Henry was very discreet with his affairs. There are only three which are

proven – Lady Anne Hastings, sister of the Duke of Buckingham, whom we know about because the duke was very put out and had rows with Sir William Compton (Henry's manservant), and with the king himself, although there is some ambiguity over who actually slept with Lady Anne (see **Stol Poges**); Bessie Blount, with whom Henry started an affair in 1514 and who gave birth to a boy in 1519, which Henry acknowledged as his own and named Henry Fitzroy (see **South Kyme** and **Framlingham**); and finally in 1536, Henry admitted to an affair with Mary Boleyn, Anne's elder sister (see Henry Carey in **Westminster Abbey**).

Curiously, as early as 1514, rumours began to circulate in Rome that Henry intended to put aside his wife because she could not produce children, and then marry a daughter of the French Duke of Bourbon. Sometime after 1521, Henry first confided to his almoner (or confessor), Bishop John Langland of Lincoln, his doubts about the validity of his marriage. He was 'troubled in his conscience every time he read the passage in the Bible from Leviticus which stated that 'if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless'. His lack of a male heir was God's way of punishing him for his incestuous marriage to his brother's widow. The whole affair became known as the 'King's Great Matter'.

From 1524, he ceased to sleep with Catherine who, soon after, reached the menopause. However, he did not raise the topic of annulment with her until June 1527, a month after Wolsey, as papal legate had convened a special ecclesiastical court to consider the king's request for an annulment of his marriage to her. She was overcome with grief at the news. However, she soon recovered and embarked on a campaign of unflagging opposition to Henry's proposals.

Catherine was greatly aided by the news of the sack of Rome, in May 1527, by the forces of Charles V, the Imperial Emperor, and of the virtual imprisonment of Pope Clement. Charles was the son of Catherine's sister, Juana 'the Mad', and was also King of Spain. He was able to ensure that the Pope fully looked after her interests, whilst she identified with her nephew Charles' interests in the same way she had done with her father, Ferdinand. The whole process dragged on until a papal legate, Campeggio, arrived in London in the autumn of 1528. He came from the Pope with a suggestion that Catherine should retire to a nunnery, allowing Henry to remarry and produce male heirs. Henry was keen on this idea, but Catherine rejected it out of hand.

Her determination to oppose Henry extended to lodging an appeal with the Pope against the case being tried in England, on the basis that every subject's loyalty to his sovereign prevented objectivity in the proceedings. The case was heard in May 1529 in the Black Friars, by Campeggio and Wolsey, but postponed indefinitely in July. Eventually Henry was summoned to appear before a papal court in Rome at the end of 1530. This was a step too far for the king and triggered the break with Rome. In February 1531 he stood in Parliament and demanded that the Church of England recognise him as its 'sole protector and supreme head'.

Throughout all these events, Catherine and Henry had occasionally spent time together but, not surprisingly, had often argued. In mid-July 1531, they had been at Windsor together when Henry rode away without telling Catherine. They were not to meet again. Henry sent her to 'The More' near Hatfield, a house which had been Wolsey's, and banned her from court. In May 1532, she was moved again to the **Bishop's Palace at Hatfield**, and then to Enfield. By now, Catherine's communication with the outside world was heavily restricted and Cromwell's spies were watching her. In February 1533, she was moved again to Ampthill in Bedfordshire, even further from London.

Since the king had married Anne Boleyn in January, Catherine was instructed that, henceforth, she must be addressed only as Dowager Princess of Wales, her title after Prince Arthur had died, not as Queen. She absolutely refused to accept this change. When Lord Mountjoy arrived in July 1533,

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