

Lecture seven: The Tudor House 1485-1603

1. Henry VII (1485-1509)

Henry Tudor, son of Edmund Tudor, from the house of Lancaster, was originally from Wales. In the war of the roses, he fought King Richard III (from York) and defeated his army, and killed him at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. It is said that he found the crown of Richard III on the battlefield and took it and crowned himself. A year later, he married Elizabeth of York, the daughter of King Edward IV (brother of King Richard III), and ended the war between these two branches of the royal family of England.

To establish his power confidently, he deprived the great feudal lords of their right to maintain armed men. His reign witnessed stability and firm royal authority.

2. Henry VIII and the Church of England

Henry VIII (1509-1547) was the son of Henry VII. He began his reign by fighting France and Scotland and could subdue the latter. In 1521, he received from the Pope, the title of 'Fidei Defensor', for writing a treatise in which he defended Catholicism. However, six years later, he asked the Pope for permission to divorce his first of six wives, Catherine of Aragon. The Pope refused and Henry broke all religious relations with the Catholic Pope in Rome and declared himself the sole head of the Church in England in 1534. To do this he was encouraged by his Bishop Thomas Cranmer. He abolished the monasteries, confiscated their goods, and persecuted the papists. The Catholic humanist, Thomas More, was executed in 1535. This event is known as the reformation by which the official religion of England became Protestantism, instead of Catholicism. Thus, England became independent from Rome in religious matters. The Pope could no longer appoint the archbishops and other clergies from Rome and control England through them. The reign of Henry the VIII coincided with a great cultural and intellectual event in Europe and, of course, in England which was the Renaissance.

3. Edward VI

After the death of Henry VIII, it was the turn for his son King Edward VI (1547-1553) to rule England. Under this king, parliament passed the act of uniformity, which emphasized the Protestant character of the Anglican liturgy and made obligatory the use of the Book of Common Prayer written by Bishop Thomas Cranmer.

4. Mary Tudor and the Catholic revenge

Mary I or Mary Tudor (1553-1558), daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, was a passionate Roman Catholic. In 1554, she married the future Philip II of Spain and re-established the Papal authority in England. The Protestants were persecuted and she burned more than 300 of them in three years. Bishop Cranmer was burnt alive in 1556. Under the reign of Mary I, the French recaptured Calais, which had been under English rule for 211 years.

5. Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603)

After the death of Mary Tudor, Queen Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, ascended the throne.

She, first of all, re-established the Protestant Church of England, because Mary Tudor had banished Protestantism and re-established Catholicism before her. So, under Elizabeth I, Protestantism became again the official religion of England. However, she followed a policy of toleration towards her Catholic subjects and did not persecute them. This did not please the Puritans, who were extremist Protestants. The Puritans had succeeded Lollardism as a religious movement.

To protect herself against Scotland which was always trying to ally with France against England, she deposed her cousin Mary Stuart, the Queen of Scots. Mary of Scots was the only daughter of King James V of Scotland and her French mother Mary of Guise. However, she inherited Tudor's blood through her grandmother Margaret, the sister of Henry VIII. Because she was supposed to become Queen of England after the death of Elizabeth I, Catholic France and Spain were plotting to make her Queen of England to control England. King Philip II of Spain had even started to plot with Mary Stuart and others to assassinate Elizabeth I. That was the reason why Elizabeth deposed her and imprisoned her in the Tower of London and finally executed her for treason in 1587.

Above all, she made England a great maritime power and challenged the Spanish American Empire. An attempted Spanish invasion of England under Philip II led to the defeat of the Spanish invincible Armada in 1588. Now, England became the mistress of the seas and started to establish a colonial empire overseas. Sir Walter Raleigh established Virginia in North America and named it after the Virgin Queen. The merchant middle class became very rich from the slave trade. The East India Company was founded in 1600. It was in her reign that Modern England was born. There was also a great blossoming of literature in her time. William Shakespeare was the best fruit of her late Renaissance age.

Elizabeth I, the last Tudor monarch, died in 1603 and was succeeded by James Stuart, the son of Mary, Queen of Scots. He was already King James VI of Scotland when he became King James I of England.

With James I, a new royal family began in England, which was the Stuart dynasty that ruled England from 1603 to 1714. The Stuart monarchs were James I, Charles I, Charles II, James II, William and Mary, and Queen Anne.