

## Queen Mary I (1516–58), reigned 1553–58

### Queen of England and Ireland



Fig. 1 Queen Mary I, oil on panel, c.1590s-c.1610 (NPG 4980(16))  
© National Portrait Gallery

Born at Greenwich Palace on 18 February 1516, Mary was the daughter of King Henry VIII (1491–1547) and his first wife, Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536). Mary initially refused to give up her status as a princess following her parents' divorce, despite the fact she was formally declared illegitimate in 1534 and removed from the line of succession. She remained loyal to the Roman Catholic faith but after the death of her mother and the execution of Anne Boleyn in 1536, Mary was forced to accept her father's position as supreme head of the Church in England.

In 1543 Henry VIII once again recognised Mary in the line of succession, although she was still officially illegitimate. Following the death of Henry's son Edward VI in 1553, Mary was the legal heir presumptive. Edward, however, had named his Protestant cousin, Lady Jane Grey, as his successor and she was proclaimed queen on his death, reigning for nine days. With the help of her supporters Mary succeeded in deposing Jane and triumphantly entered London on 3 August. She was crowned on 1 October, becoming the first woman to rule England in her own right.

As queen, Mary validated her parents' marriage and re-established papal power. In 1554 she married the Catholic Philip of Spain, the son of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and king of Spain from 1556. Her decision to marry Philip was unpopular and was the cause of a rebellion led by Thomas Wyatt in 1554. In 1557 it drew England into a war with France in which Calais was lost, the last English possession in France.

Fearful of Protestant uprising, Mary executed large numbers of religious dissenters including the Protestant clerics Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley (1555) and the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer (1556), earning her the sobriquet 'Bloody Mary'.

### Mary's appearance

A portrait of Mary as a princess by an artist known as Master John, painted in 1544, is now in the National Portrait Gallery (Fig. 2).



Fig 2 Queen Mary I by Master John, oil on panel, 1544 (NPG 428)  
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As queen, Mary sat for her portrait to two artists: Antonis Mor (1516–1575/6) and Hans Eworth (active 1540–74). Their paintings provide the two basic facial types that were reproduced for the rest of her reign and beyond. A small-scale portrait in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery (Fig. 3) is one of five versions by Eworth painted from life. The work is signed with Eworth's monogram 'HE' in the top left corner and dated 1554. The large-scale prime version is now at the Society of Antiquaries, London.



Fig.3 Queen Mary I by Hans Eworth, oil on panel, 1554 (NPG 4861)  
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Fig.4 Queen Mary I by Anthonis Mor, oil on panel, 1544  
© Madrid: El Museo Nacional del Prado

Three signed versions of Mary's portrait by Anthonis Mor survive today and this portrait type was also widely reproduced throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The original paintings survive in the Prado, Madrid (Fig. 4), in the collection of the Marquess of Northampton and in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. In addition to the numerous surviving portraits, there are also several contemporary written descriptions of Mary's appearance:

In 1541 Marillac, the French ambassador, described her as being 'of middle stature, and is in face like her father, especially about the mouth ... To judge by portraits, her neck is like her mother's. With a fresh complexion she looks not past eighteen or twenty, although she is twenty-four. Her beauty if mediocre...'

In 1554 the Venetian Ambassador Giacomo Soranzo, wrote: 'She is of low stature, with a red and white complexion, and very thin; her eyes are white and large, and her hair reddish; her face is round, with a nose rather low and wide; and were not her age on the decline she might be called handsome rather than the contrary.'

And in 1557, another Venetian Ambassador, Giovanni Michieli, described her as "... low rather than of middling stature, but, although short, she has not personal defect in her limbs, nor is any part of her body deformed. She is of spare and delicate frame, quite unlike her father, who was tall and stout; nor does she resemble her mother, who, if not tall, was nevertheless bulky. Her face is well formed, as shown by her features and lineaments, and as seen by her portraits. When younger she was considered, not merely tolerably handsome, but of beauty exceeding mediocrity."

## The portrait at Montacute

The portrait of Mary (Fig. 1) currently on display at Montacute House is from the 'Hornby Castle' set of kings and queens, now in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery. Painted in the late 1590s or early 1600s the set was previously owned by the Duke of Leeds and hung at Hornby Castle, his Yorkshire seat. Portrait sets of this kind became popular in England in the second half of the sixteenth century and were often displayed in the 'long galleries' of the country homes of the nobility and gentry. The portraits of the early monarchs were largely fictional but the portraits of the Tudors were copied from life portraits. This image of Mary is based on the types established by Hans Eworth and Anthonis Mor in 1554 (Figs. 3 and 4).