



Henry VIII Bed Head 14.236

The historian Simon Thurley has described this bedhead as probably the most important single piece of furniture surviving from the Court of Henry VIII.

Bedhead made for the Marriage of Henry VIII and Anne of Cleves

Made in anticipation of the marriage between Henry VIII & Anne of Cleves in 1539.

Facing 3 panels. RHS – initials of Anne & Henry intertwined. + date - 1539

LHS – Henry's motto, 'Dieu et Mon Droit', 'God and My Right'.

Centre – a list of Henry's titles -----

Henry by the grace of God, King of England and France, Lord of Ireland, Defender of the Faith and under God the Chief and supreme Head of the Church of All England.

King of England and France, (despite only having Calais at the time. Claim to throne not given up until 1880s).

Lord of Ireland. Defender of The Faith – a title given to him by the Pope in 1521, for defending the Catholic faith in a booklet which he wrote with Thomas Moore and is now against. The book had defended the supremacy of the Pope against Protestant Reformation, particularly Martin Luther. He and his successors, including our own Queen, keep the title as defender of the Anglican faith.

You can still see it on our coins.

After the Dissolution of the monasteries and break with the Catholic church. Head of the Church of England – he now has his own church.

There is no doubting the main reason for this marriage.

Henry needed another son.

Following the death of Jane Seymour, Henry was encouraged by Thomas Cromwell to remarry as quickly as possible. Henry was never secure on his throne, particularly in his early years. He had a young son & heir, Edward, but realised the importance of having a 'spare'.

He, himself had been a spare. His elder brother, Arthur, had died leaving him to succeed. He had an heir but he needed a spare.

Daughters were fine to marry off – make alliances and gain substantial dowry. If you only had daughters, her husband would inherit and your line would end – no more Tudors.

Suitable partner? Henry had a checklist.

Holbien was sent to search throughout Protestant courts of Europe. Came back with miniature portraits. Mail order catalogue! Anne was not his first choice. Henry choose Christina of Denmark. She fitted his desires. Offer went out and refused. Christina was a widow of the Duke of Milan at 13. She was very strong willed and had a brave sense of humour. Her reply – 'I would be honoured to marry you if only I had two heads'.

She didn't want to lose her head! When it became clear that the marriage would not take place, Henry was devastated. He banned Court music for 2 weeks and kept a portrait of Christina for the rest of his life. There is a full sized portrait of Christina in the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Anne of Cleves was next in line. She was living in Germany with her brother, a member of the Protestant League & his wife. Not a very high station in life. Her brother would be a good ally. She readily agreed to the marriage, crossing the Channel during a storm in winter, around about New Year.

When Henry saw her he was very disappointed, reputedly referring to her as the 'Flanders mare'. Anne was neither lithe nor bonny and she was certainly not educated as far as Henry was concerned. She continued to wear European dress and spoke no English. He had only seen the miniature but had been encouraged by Cromwell to go for the marriage. This mistake on Cromwell's part, not only ending his career but eventually his life. The painting was said to more resemble her sister.

It was too late to stop the marriage. Three months later they were married. The day after the wedding, he is reported to have said, 'I left her as good a maid as I found her'.

Was this bedhead ever used? Who knows!

There are reports that they played Chess.

Anne was not well educated but not daft. She readily agreed to an Annulment. Wise woman. Saw the writing on the wall. Made a very good job of a poor/bad situation. Marriage had lasted less than 6 months. Catherine Howard, one of her Ladies-in-Waiting, had taken Henry's fancy.

She was young, pert, educated and healthy. They were married at Oatlands Palace 9 days later. See nearby fireplace.

Anne did very well out of her willingness to comply – Money/ sizable pension. Several stately houses and lands. Henry's life long friendship. The title of 'The King's Good Sister'. Outlived all the other wives. Friend to all of Henry's children. Called on for advice.

Lived till Elizabeth. Never caused any problems. Never seen as a threat.

Rode, with Elizabeth, behind Mary Tudor in Mary's coronation procession.

Died aged 41, probably of cancer. Born 22nd September 1515. Died 16th July 1557

Henry had a 53" waist at the time. Not much room for anyone else in the bed!

Mobile bed. Dismantled and carried from home to home.

One of only a handful of pieces of furniture that can be exactly dated and known to have belonged to Henry VIII.

Connection - In 1546, Henry VIII granted the manor of Costessey Hall to Anne of Cleves, although evidence suggests that she never actually resided there. This was eventually owned by Sir William Jermyingham, the medieval stained glass collector. Much of his collection was bought from John Christopher Hampp between 1803 – 1820. The estate was later sold by his son after his death in 1919. Burrell bought. See SG notes.

Sir William Burrell purchased the bedhead from John Hunt in 1938, almost 400 years later!

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