



BRIT POLITICS Fact Sheet – Mary Queen of Scots

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Timeline

- 1542 Birth of Mary Stuart
- 1542 Death of James V
- 1543 Treaty of Greenwich
- 1543 Mary Stuart crowned Queen, 9 September
- 1544 Beginning of Rough Wooing
- 1547 Battle of Pinkie Cleugh, 10 September
- 1548 Mary Queen of Scots sails to France
- 1554 Marie de Guise appointed Regent in Scotland
- 1558 Marriage to Dauphin Francis, 24 April
- 1558 Death of Queen Mary I of England
- 1558 Elizabeth crowned Queen of England
- 1559 Death of King Henri II of France
- 1559 Mary becomes Queen Consort of France
- 1560 Death of Marie de Guise
- 1560 Treaty of Edinburgh
- 1560 Death of King Francis II of France
- 1561 Mary Queen of Scots returns to Scotland
- 1565 Marriage to Lord Darnley, 29 July
- 1566 Murder of David Rizzio, 9 March
- 1566 Birth of James VI, 19 June
- 1567 Murder of Lord Darnley, 10 February
- 1567 Ainslie Tavern Bond
- 1567 Marriage to the Earl of Bothwell, 15 May
- 1567 Mary surrenders to the Lords of the Congregation at Carberry Hill, 15 June
- 1567 Mary imprisoned in Lochleven Castle
- 1567 Mary forced to abdicate
- 1568 Mary escapes Lochleven Castle, 2 May
- 1568 Battle of Langside, 13 May
- 1568 Mary arrives in England, 16 May
- 1569 Conference of York-Westminster concludes its inquiry
- 1586 Babington Plot
- 1586 Trial of Mary Queen of Scots
- 1586 Sentenced to death, 25 October
- 1587 Queen Elizabeth I signs Mary's death warrant, 1 February
- 1587 Mary Queen of Scots executed, 8 February



Early Life in Scotland

Mary Stuart was born in December 1542 at Linlithgow Palace, West Lothian. Her mother was a French Catholic noblewoman, Marie de Guise. Mary's father was the Scottish King, James V. When she was just six days old, James V died. As the only surviving legitimate child of King James V, Mary became Queen of Scotland.

The Protestant James Hamilton, Earl of Arran acted as Regent. Hamilton negotiated peace with England and signed the Treaty of Greenwich in July 1543. It was agreed that Mary would marry Prince Edward, son of Henry VIII and future King Edward VI of England. Marie de Guise was opposed to this arrangement and went with her daughter to Stirling Castle. The Catholics within the Scottish nobility wanted to keep the Auld Alliance with France rather than ally with England.

Mary was crowned Queen at Stirling Castle in September 1543.

Soon afterwards the Scottish Parliament repudiated the Treaty of Greenwich. Henry VIII retaliated by launching a military campaign against the Scots. It became known as the Rough Wooing. Henry VIII ordered 'put all to fire and sword' for their 'falsehood' and 'disloyalty'. Henry VIII was trying to coerce the Scots into accepting the marriage agreement.

Although Henry VIII died in January 1547, the military campaign against Scotland continued during the reign of Edward VI. At the Battle of Pinkie Cleugh, 10 September 1547, the Scottish forces were heavily defeated by the English. The English Army remained to occupy the Scottish Borders.

The Scots appealed to France for help. In return for French military assistance Mary was betrothed to Francis, the son of the French King Henri II. Francis was known as the Dauphin as he was heir to the French Crown. He was four years old.

In August 1548, the five-year-old Mary Queen of Scots sailed with the French fleet from Dumbarton Castle.

The French Court

Mary had sailed from Scotland with her own Court. This included her four ladies-in-waiting, known as the Four Marys (or Four Maries): Lady Mary Fleming, Mary Beaton, Mary Livingstone and Mary Seaton.

Mary was brought up at the French Court with the children of King Henri II. A large part of her childhood was spent at Chateau de Chambord. Mary enjoyed the outdoors, particularly horse riding and falconry. She was also well educated. As well as speaking Scots, Mary also learnt French, Spanish, Italian, Greek and Latin. Mary had an enthusiasm for poetry and prose and would write her own poems. She was also accomplished at embroidery.



Mary was graceful and tall, growing to almost six-foot, with auburn hair and pale skin. She was clever and quick-witted.

On 24 April 1558 the fifteen-year-old Mary Queen of Scots married Francis at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The Dauphin, who was fourteen years old, was now the King Consort of Scotland. This marriage had the potential to unite both countries, as their descendants would rule both France and Scotland. Prior to the wedding, Mary had also signed an agreement that should she die childless, Scotland and her claim to the English throne would pass to the French Crown.

In November 1558 Queen Mary I of England died. Mary Tudor's successor was her half-sister, the Protestant Elizabeth I. Elizabeth was considered by many Catholics to be illegitimate. Henry VIII's divorce from his first wife Catherine of Aragon was never given Papal approval. To the Catholics in Europe, this made his marriage to Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth's mother, illegal. Mary Queen of Scots as the granddaughter of Margaret Tudor, elder sister of Henry VIII, was seen as the rightful claimant to the English throne. Mary's royal coat of arms was re-designed to include the arms of England as well as Scotland and France.

In 1559 King Henri II died of injuries sustained in a jousting tournament. Francis became King of France and Mary Queen Consort. Francis' reign was short. He had always been a sickly child and in December 1560 died of an ear infection. Marie de Guise, Mary's mother, had died of dropsy earlier that same year.

Mary was no longer the Queen of France. King Francis' younger brother Charles inherited the throne. His mother, Catherine de Medici, became Regent.

The seventeen-year-old Mary decided to return to Scotland.

Protestant Scotland

Marie de Guise had governed Scotland as Regent from 1554. As a Frenchwoman, the Scottish nobility distrusted Marie. They also objected to French nobles being put into positions of power at Court instead of themselves. Marie de Guise tried to suppress the Protestant religion in favour of Catholicism.

The Lords of the Congregation were a group of Scottish nobles who wanted to create a Protestant Scotland, free of French influence. In May 1559 John Knox returned to Scotland to spread the Protestant faith. The Lords raised an army called the Army of the Congregation. Having occupied Perth, they attacked churches as they marched on Edinburgh. The Lords received financial and military support from Queen Elizabeth I. Marie de Guise called upon France to assist her own army. After the death of Marie a peace treaty was signed. The French and English armies left Scotland. Mary Queen of Scots, however, refused to ratify the Treaty of Edinburgh, the terms of which also recognised Elizabeth as the rightful ruler of England.



In August 1560 the Lords of the Congregation called the Reformation Parliament. Scotland was to be a Protestant nation. All formal ties with the Pope were severed. Catholic Mass was banned.

Return to Scotland

In August 1561, Mary Queen of Scots landed at Leith. Mary received a warm welcome from the crowds in Edinburgh. However, the Scottish people still had their concerns. Mary was a Roman Catholic who had been brought up at the French Court. They were worried that Mary might try to restore the Catholic Church in Scotland. The ruling nobles thought they might lose their positions of power and the wealth that came with it. Rivalries between the Scottish nobles would have a significant impact on Mary's reign.

At first, Mary's rule was successful. She chose to govern using Scottish nobles, rather than French ones. Mary tried to be moderate in religious matters and tolerated the Protestant Kirk. Her main advisors were James Stuart, Earl of Moray and William Maitland of Lethington.

Moray was the illegitimate half-brother of Mary Queen of Scots. He was also a member of the Lords of the Congregation. Moray negotiated for Mary to be allowed to hear Mass in private, even though it had been publically banned. This allowed Mary to continue in her Roman Catholic faith. Protestant reformer John Knox led a large group of protestors to Holyrood to stop Mary hearing Mass. Knox would be one of her most vociferous opponents.

Marriage to Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley

Mary Queen of Scots needed to remarry to provide an heir to the Scottish throne.

Mary chose to marry her cousin Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley. Darnley was also a grandchild of Margaret Tudor. He would help strengthen Mary's and their children's claim to the English throne. Darnley's father was the Scottish Earl of Lennox. His mother was Lady Margaret Douglas. Lennox was pro-English and had fled to England after the Rough Wooing. Darnley had been born in Yorkshire. They were an ambitious family and Darnley had claims to both the Scottish and English Crowns.

Mary Queen of Scots and Lord Darnley were married on 29 July 1565 in the Palace of Holyrood House. It was a Catholic service, although Darnley left while Mary stayed in the Chapel to hear Mass.

The Earl of Moray and other leading nobles rose in rebellion against Mary's marriage to Darnley. The Chaseabout Raid ended with Moray seeking refuge in England.

Darnley was young, tall and handsome and appeared to share a lot of common interests with Mary. Within a few months of their marriage Darnley showed his real character.



Darnley was spoilt, jealous and arrogant. He would rather spend his time drinking in taverns than helping Mary govern Scotland. Darnley tried to gain more royal authority, yet despite his persistent asking, Mary refused to grant Darnley the Crown Matrimonial. This would have entitled him to rule as a joint Sovereign rather than as a King Consort. He would also be able to rule as King in his own right in the event of Mary's death. Darnley's behaviour angered many of the Scottish nobles, he was very unpopular. Mary and Darnley's marriage broke down and Mary turned to her close friends and advisors for support.

On 9 March 1566 Mary's Italian personal secretary David Rizzio was viciously stabbed to death at the Palace of Holyrood House. Darnley held Mary, who was six months pregnant at the time, back as armed Protestant nobles murdered Rizzio.

On 19 June 1566 Mary gave birth to a son, James, at Edinburgh Castle. Darnley was summoned to acknowledge the child as his.

In December 1566 James was baptized at Stirling Castle. Darnley did not attend the ceremony. James' godparents included Queen Elizabeth I, although she did not travel in person but sent a representative.

Darnley went to stay in Glasgow where he fell ill with smallpox (although it could also have been symptoms of syphilis). He was later visited by Mary and persuaded to return to Edinburgh. On 10 February 1567 at about 2am there was a large explosion at the house in Kirk O'Fields where Darnley was staying. The twenty-one year old Darnley and a servant were found dead in a garden. They did not have any marks from the explosion on them and had most likely been suffocated or strangled.

James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell was implicated in the murder. He was acquitted after a brief trial. Following the breakdown of her marriage, Bothwell had become a close confidant of Mary. A propaganda campaign was launched against Mary and Bothwell. Posters were put up in which Mary was depicted as a mermaid, the symbol for a prostitute. Rumours were spread that Mary had plotted with Bothwell to murder Darnley.

Marriage to James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell

Bothwell was a loyal supporter of Mary Queen of Scots and had made enemies among the Protestant Lords. Within days of his trial, Bothwell had several nobles sign the Ainslie Tavern Bond, giving their approval for him to marry Mary.

Bothwell and his men abducted Mary Queen of Scots, there were rumours that she had gone willingly, and took her to Dunbar Castle. Bothwell had his marriage to Lady Jean Gordon annulled. On 15 May 1567, three months after the death of Darnley, Bothwell married Mary Queen of Scots in a Protestant service at Holyrood.



Mary's marriage to Bothwell was a political disaster. The Protestant Lords, including her half-brother the Earl of Moray, rose up against her. Mary and Bothwell fled Edinburgh to raise their own army.

On 15 June 1567 the two armies met at Carberry Hill near Edinburgh. The two sides negotiated and eventually Mary agreed to surrender to the Protestant Lords. Mary was taken back to Edinburgh before being imprisoned in Lochleven Castle.

The Earl of Bothwell escaped and fled Scotland for Scandinavia. He was captured and imprisoned in Dragsholm Castle by the King of Denmark. Bothwell is said to have spent the rest of his life chained to a stone pillar. He went insane and died in April 1578.

Imprisonment in Scotland

Lochleven Castle was on an island in the middle of the Loch. Mary was imprisoned in the tower house. Shortly after her arrival, it is believed that Mary miscarried twins. In July 1567 Mary was forced to abdicate. Her 13 month old son James was crowned James VI of Scotland in a Protestant ceremony at Stirling. Mary's illegitimate half-brother, the Earl of Moray would rule as Regent.

The Scottish nobles were divided. Not all supported Moray's rule as Regent. On 2 May 1568 Mary escaped from Lochleven with the help of George Douglas and Lord Seton. Mary rallied her supporters and raised an army. They met Moray's army at Langside, near Glasgow, on 13 May. Mary's army was defeated and she fled to the Solway Firth. Instead of sailing for France, Mary chose to seek support from her cousin Queen Elizabeth I. On 16 May 1568, Mary Queen of Scots landed at Workington in the north of England.

Imprisonment in England

Queen Elizabeth and her ministers decided to hold an inquiry into Mary's alleged role in the death of her husband Lord Darnley. The Earl of Moray presented the Casket Letters as evidence of Mary's guilt. These unsigned letters were said to have been written by Mary to Lord Bothwell. They appeared to show that Mary was complicit in the plot to murder Lord Darnley. Mary declared them to be forgeries.

Mary put Elizabeth in a difficult position. Mary was her cousin and a Sovereign, but she was also a Roman Catholic with a strong claim to the English throne. The Conference of Westminster found that there wasn't enough evidence to prove Mary's guilt in Darnley's death. Neither had it been proved that the Lords of the Congregation had unjustly rebelled against Mary. Moray would return to Scotland and rule as Regent. Mary was to remain in England, effectively as a prisoner.



Mary still had supporters in Scotland, which was in a state of civil war. The Scottish nobles had split into two factions, the Queen's Party and the King's Party. The Earl of Moray was shot dead in January 1570 while riding through Linlithgow. The Earl of Lennox, Lord Darnley's father, was made Regent in his place. He was killed when the Queen's Party attacked Stirling in September 1571.

For almost nineteen years Mary was moved from castle to castle and kept under surveillance. While imprisoned, Mary was the focus of several Roman Catholic plots to remove Elizabeth from the throne. Elizabeth's ministers did not think England or the Queen was safe while Mary still lived. Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's spymaster, used the Babington Plot to entrap Mary Queen of Scots.

Trial and Execution of Mary Queen of Scots

Mary Queen of Scots was arrested in August 1586. In October Mary was put on trial at Fotheringhay Castle. The letters obtained during the Babington Plot were used as evidence that Mary was complicit in conspiring to assassinate Queen Elizabeth. Mary protested her innocence, claiming also that she could not be guilty of treason as she was not an English subject.

Mary was found guilty and sentenced to death by beheading. Queen Elizabeth delayed signing her death warrant until 1 February 1587.

Despite being held captive in England for nineteen years, Mary Queen of Scots and Queen Elizabeth never met in person.

'In My End Is My Beginning'

Mary Queen of Scots was executed in the great hall of Fotheringhay Castle on 8 February 1587. She was forty-four years old.

At her execution, Mary wore a black dress with a red under-gown. In the Roman Catholic faith, red was symbolic of martyrdom.

Mary was buried in Peterborough Cathedral. Her son, King James VI of Scotland, I of England had her body disinterred and re-buried in King Henry VII's Chapel in Westminster Abbey.