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Introduction

In 1517, the papal nuncio, Francesco Chieregato, arrived at the court of Henry VIII and was stunned by its magnificence. 'The wealth and civilisation of the world are here,' he marvelled, 'and those who call the English barbarians appear to me to render themselves such. I here perceive very elegant manners, extreme decorum and great politeness, and amongst other things there is this invincible King, whose acquirements and qualities are so many and excellent, that I consider him to excel all who ever wore a crown.'

Coming from a Venetian imbued with the culture of the Italian Renaissance, this was praise indeed, and a reminder of what Henry VIII achieved during the first decade of his reign. Today, we need such a reminder, because the splendours of Henry's court are long vanished, and it requires a great leap of the imagination to reconstruct the reality from what few remains there are.

Henry VIII succeeded to the throne in 1509, to great acclaim. He had all the virtues expected of a Renaissance prince. Yet by the time he died in 1547, he had acquired the reputation of a tyrant whose hands were soaked in the blood of the many he had executed – among them two of his six wives. Because he married so many times, he has gone down in history as a veritable Bluebeard. Over the centuries, the truth about the King has become blurred by his legend, which culminated in Charles Laughton's caricature of him in the 1930s film, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. Thanks to this, Henry still lives in the popular imagination as a man who thought of nothing but chasing the ladies, and who threw chicken bones over his shoulder as he presided over court feasts in the great hall.

The reality, of course, was strikingly different. As a rule, Henry did not dine in the great halls of his palaces, and his table manners were highly refined, as was the code of etiquette followed at his court. He was in fact a most fastidious man, and – for his time – unusually obsessed

with hygiene. As for his pursuit of the ladies, there is plenty of evidence, but most of it fragmentary, for Henry was also far more discreet and prudish than we have been led to believe. These are just superficial examples of how the truth about historical figures can become distorted.

Fortunately, scholars during the last few decades have undertaken a vast amount of research on Henry VIII and his court, and it is now clear that many of our earlier perceptions of both must be revised. Henry was a complex personality of many talents, and there is so much surviving source material for his reign that we know even the most intimate details of his personal life. Furthermore, this man of exquisite taste and a grand sense of majesty established the most magnificent court ever seen in England. No English sovereign ever owned as many houses as Henry VIII, or spent so lavishly on a lifestyle deliberately calculated to enhance his own prestige. Few monarchs have been surrounded by so many talented and charismatic personalities as Henry was. And few have ever been so controversial.

My aim in this book has been to draw together a multitude of strands of research in order to develop a picture of the real Henry VIII, his personal life throughout his reign, the court he created and the people who influenced and served him. Hitherto, studies of the Henrician court have concentrated on household organisation, art and culture or courtier factions. I aim to paint a far broader canvas, which incorporates all these themes and much more, and sets the life and reign of the King, for the first time ever, against a realistic portrayal of his court.

In an age of personal monarchy the court was at the hub of royal government, but this is not a political history of the reign: my brief has been to record the events that help build up a picture of the life and ethos of the King and the court. Henry VIII's wives naturally played a large part in the life of that court, but, having already written a book about them, I have taken care to avoid too much repetition: where events were dealt with in detail in that former book, they are touched upon briefly here, and only where relevant. I have also taken the opportunity to revise some of my conclusions in *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* in the light of recent research.

Although this book is presented in a largely chronological format, the first third is largely devoted to setting the scene and describing the court and the royal palaces. This is a necessary prologue to the account of the King's life and reign that follows, for without it much of the context of events would be blurred. However, the book is not just a descriptive account of Henry's court and reign, but is packed with anecdotal evidence intended to illuminate this most colourful period of English history and the larger-than-life character who dominated it.

I have also attempted to describe and analyse the cultural and social

development of the English court, and to this end have included every aspect of court life: the ceremonial and pageantry, state occasions, entertainments, sports, poetry and drama, art, music, religious observances, sexual and political intrigues, banquets and feasts, dress, transport, household organisation and administration, finance, hygiene and even pets!

The Tudor court, however, was primarily the place where a host of persons, great and lowly, gathered about the King; therefore one of my chief aims has been to weave the lives of queens, princes, princesses, lords, ladies, privy councillors, knights, gentlemen, artists, craftsmen and servants into the rich tapestry of court life, intrigue and vicious faction fights.

In the notes and references at the end of the book, I have given details of the surviving buildings and artefacts connected with Henry VIII and his court. Where monetary values are quoted in the text, the modern equivalent (which is approximately three hundred times the sum quoted) is given in brackets – with some surprising results. We should contrast the vast sums spent on clothes and royal meals, for example, with the meagre salaries paid to artists such as Hans Holbein.

Finally, a note about capital letters, which I have used for titles of household departments and officers but usually not for the names of rooms within the royal palaces. Thus, the department that provided for the King's personal needs is referred to as the Privy Chamber, while the lodgings he occupied are called the privy chamber. Similarly, the Chapel Royal was the religious establishment of the court, whereas the chapel royal was a place of worship.

I hope that this book will convey to those who read it the same pleasure and sense of affinity with its subject that it afforded me whilst I was researching and writing it, and that they will be able to make that great leap of imagination across the centuries and arrive at a very lively understanding of the subject, and that, for them, Henry VIII and his court will come to life.

Alison Weir,
Carshalton, Surrey,
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I

'A Most Accomplished Prince'

On 21 April 1509, the corpse of King Henry VII, ravaged by tuberculosis, was laid in state in the chapel at Richmond Palace, whence it would shortly be taken to Westminster Abbey for burial. Few mourned that King's passing, for although he had brought peace and firm government to England and established the usurping Tudor dynasty firmly on the throne, he had been regarded as a miser and an extortionist.

The contrast between the dead King and his son and heir could not have been greater. The seventeen-year-old Henry VIII was proclaimed King on 24 April,[1] which – most apt for a prince who embodied all the knightly virtues – was also the day after St George's Day. The rejoicings that greeted Henry's accession were ecstatic and unprecedented, for it was believed that he would usher in 'a golden world'.[2]

William Blount, Lord Mountjoy, a courtier, expressed the national mood in a letter to his fellow humanist, the renowned Desiderius Erasmus:

> I have no fear but when you heard that our prince, now Henry the Eighth, whom we may well call our Octavius, had succeeded to his father's throne, all your melancholy left you at once. What may you not promise yourself from a prince with whose extraordinary and almost divine character you are acquainted? When you know what a hero he now shows himself, how wisely he behaves, what a lover he is of justice and goodness, what affection he bears to the learned, I will venture to swear you will need no wings to make you fly to behold this new and auspicious star!
>
> If you could see how here all the world is rejoicing in the possession of so great a prince, how his life is all their desire, you could not contain your tears for sheer joy. The heavens laugh, the

> earth exults . . . Avarice is expelled from the country, extortion is put down, liberality scatters riches with a bountiful hand. Yet our King does not desire gold, gems or precious metals, but virtue, glory, immortality![3]

To his contemporaries, Henry VIII was the embodiment of kingship. Thomas More's coronation eulogy states that 'among a thousand noble companions, the King stands out the tallest, and his strength fits his majestic body. There is fiery power in his eyes, beauty in his face, and the colour of twin roses in his cheeks.'[4] Other evidence proves that this was not just mere flattery. Henry's skeleton, discovered in 1813, was six feet two inches in length. He was certainly of strong and muscular build: the Spanish ambassador reported in 1507 that 'his limbs are of a gigantic size'.[5] In youth, he was slim and broad-shouldered: his armour of 1512 has a waist measurement of thirty-two inches, while that of 1514 measures thirty-five, with a forty-two-inch chest.

Several sources testify to Henry's fair skin, among them the poet John Skelton, who called him 'Adonis, of fresh colour'. His hair, strands of which still adhered to his skull in 1813, was auburn, and he wore it combed short and straight in the French fashion. For many years he remained clean-shaven. In visage, the young King resembled his handsome grandfather, Edward IV,[6] with his broad face, small, close-set, penetrating eyes and small, sensual mouth; Henry, however, had a high-bridged nose. He was, wrote a Venetian envoy in 1516, 'the handsomest prince ever seen',[7] an opinion in which most contemporaries concurred.

The young Henry enjoyed robust good health, and was a man of great energy and drive. He had a low boredom threshold and was 'never still or quiet'.[8] His physician, Dr John Chamber, described him as 'cheerful and gamesome',[9] for he was quick to laugh and enjoyed a jest. One Venetian called him 'prudent, sage and free from every vice',[10] and indeed it seemed so in 1509, for Henry was idealistic, open-handed, liberal and genial. Complacency, self-indulgence and vanity appeared to be his worst sins – he was an unabashed show-off and shamelessly solicited the flattery of others. He was also highly strung, emotional and suggestible. Only as he grew older did the suspicious and crafty streaks in his nature become more pronounced; nor were his wilfulness, arrogance, ruthlessness, selfishness and brutality yet apparent, for they were masked by an irresistible charm and affable manner.

Kings were expected to be masterful, proud, self-confident and courageous – and Henry had all these qualities in abundance, along with a massive ego and a passionate zest for life. He combined the Renaissance ideal of the man of many talents with the qualities of the mediaeval chivalric heroes whom he so much admired. He was 'simple

and candid by nature',[11] and used no worse oath than 'By St George!' A man of impulsive enthusiasms, he could be often naive.

Decision-making did not come easily to Henry – it was his habit 'to sleep and dream upon the matter and give an answer in the morning'[12] – but once his mind was made up he always judged himself, as the Lord's Anointed, to be in the right. Then, 'if an angel was to descend from Heaven, he would not be able to persuade him to the contrary'.[13] Cardinal Wolsey was later to warn, 'Be well advised what ye put in his head, for ye shall never pull it out again.'[14]

Few could resist Henry's charisma. 'The King has a way of making every man feel that he is enjoying his special favour,' wrote Thomas More.[15] Erasmus called Henry 'the man most full of heart'.[16] He would often put his arm around a man's shoulder to put him at his ease, although he 'could not abide to have any man stare in his face when he talked with them'.[17] There are many examples of his kindness to others, as will be seen. Yet the King also had a spectacular and unpredictable temper, and in a rage could be terrifying indeed. He was also very jealous of his honour, both as King and as a knight, and had the tenderest yet most flexible of consciences. His contemporaries thought him extraordinarily virtuous, a lover of goodness, truth and justice – just as he was always to see himself.

Because the young King was not quite eighteen, his father's mother, the venerable Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby, acted as regent during the first ten weeks of the reign. Lady Margaret had exercised considerable influence over the upbringing of her grandson, since it had been she, and not Henry's mother, Elizabeth of York, who had been in charge of the domestic arrangements in Henry VII's household. And it was she who had been entrusted with perfecting Edward IV's series of ordinances for the regulation of the royal household;[18] the procedures she established would continue to be enforced throughout Henry VIII's reign and beyond, and they covered, amongst other things, the rules to be observed in the royal nurseries.

The Lady Margaret was now a frail, nun-like widow of sixty-six, renowned for her piety, learning and charitable works, yet her influence was formidable. She had been an inveterate intriguer during the Wars of the Roses, and had outlived four husbands. After the King, she held more lands than anyone else in the kingdom. Henry VII, born when she was only thirteen, was her only child, and she had been utterly devoted to him. That devotion extended to her grandchildren, whose education she probably supervised. For this she was admirably qualified, being a generous benefactor of scholarship and the foundress of Christ's College and St John's College at Cambridge. A patron of William Caxton, she was both a lover of books and a true intellectual. She was also an ascetic,

wearing a severe widow's barbe up to her chin and a hair shirt beneath her black robes, and her rigorous religious regime represented the harsher aspects of mediaeval piety. From her, the Prince inherited his undoubted intellectual abilities and a conventional approach to religious observance.

Henry had been born on 28 June 1491, and was created Duke of York at the age of three. His seventeenth-century biographer, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, who had access to sources lost to us, claimed that Henry VII intended this second son to enter the Church, and had him educated accordingly; certainly Henry was pious and very well grounded in theology. Yet on the death of his elder brother, Arthur, in 1502, he became Prince of Wales and heir to the throne. The death of his mother, Elizabeth of York, in 1503, seems to have affected him deeply: in 1507, having learned of the death of Duke Philip of Burgundy, he confided to Erasmus that 'never, since the death of my dearest mother, hath there come to me more hateful intelligence . . . It seemed to tear open again the wound to which time had brought insensibility'.[19]

Henry was very well educated in the classical, humanist fashion; Thomas More later asked, 'What may we not expect from a king who has been nourished on philosophy and the Nine Muses?' The poet John Skelton was the Prince's tutor for a time, as was William Hone, of whom little is known.

Skelton may have owed his appointment to Margaret Beaufort, for he was a Cambridge man, a Latin classicist in holy orders. He had been appointed poet laureate by the universities of Cambridge, Oxford and Louvain, and was described by Erasmus as 'that incomparable light and ornament of British letters'. He had probably been Henry's first teacher, for he claimed

> The honour of England I learned to spell,
> In dignity royal at that doth excel . . .
> I gave him drink of the sugared well
> Of Helicon's waters crystalline,
> Acquainting him with the Muses nine.

He probably also taught Henry to read, and to write in a rounded, Italianate hand. Skelton was a colourful and eccentric character, an indifferent poet who wrote scurrilous, vitriolic satires such as 'The Bouche of Court', which targeted the corrupt courtiers in Henry VII's household. Unlike most court versifiers, Skelton wrote in English, not the customary French or Latin. He was conceited, quarrelsome and often ribald – he took a cruel pleasure in exposing ladies of the court as

whores, and was obsessed with young girls – yet at the same time he set himself up as a champion of morality. Not surprisingly, he made many enemies.

Skelton may have been in post by the time Henry was three, for, in a poem he composed to mark the boy's creation as Duke of York, he referred to him as 'a brilliant pupil'. Around 1501, Skelton wrote a rather pessimistic Latin treatise, *Speculum Principis* – 'The Mirror of a Prince', for the edification of his charge; he urged him never to relinquish power to his inferiors, and to 'choose a wife for yourself, prize her always and uniquely'. In 1502, Skelton spent a short spell in prison for a minor misdemeanour, which effectively terminated his royal duties; upon his release he was appointed rector of Diss in Norfolk, but around 1511 he was dismissed for living with a concubine. Thereafter he lived at Westminster, where he would write his most vituperative and famous poems.

Along with Skelton, Prince Arthur's former tutor, the poet Bernard André, may have taught Henry Latin, and Giles d'Ewes was perhaps his French master. The Prince showed a flair for languages at an early age. By the time he became King he was fluent in 'French, English and Latin, and understands Italian well';[20] in 1515, Venetian envoys conversed with Henry VIII 'in good Latin and French, which he speaks very well indeed'.[21] Henry customarily used Latin when speaking to ambassadors. He later acquired some Spanish, probably from his first wife, Katherine of Aragon. In 1519, he began studying Greek with the humanist Richard Croke, but soon gave it up, possibly for lack of time.

Henry showed early on that he had inherited the family aptitude for music, and in 1498 his father bought him a lute, although no details of his tuition survive. He was also given instruction in 'all such convenient sports and exercises as behoveth his estate to have experience in',[22] and that included the gentlemanly skills of riding, jousting, tennis, archery and hunting.

In 1499, when Henry was eight, Thomas More took Erasmus to visit the royal children at Eltham Palace, which resulted in the Prince corresponding in Latin with Erasmus. The Dutch humanist suspected that Henry's tutors were helping him with the letters, and was later amazed to discover from Lord Mountjoy that they were all his own work. He later flattered himself that Henry's style emulated his own because he had read Erasmus' books when young.[23]

Erasmus, who was by no means a sycophant, was to call Henry VIII 'a universal genius. He has never neglected his studies'. As King, he would continue those studies, taking Cardinal Wolsey's advice to read the works of Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas and the Church Fathers. He saw himself as a scholar and humanist, and desired to be recognised as such by

learned men. His interest was genuine, and is attested to by the numerous annotations in his own hand in the margins of his surviving books. For Henry, learning was a great source of enjoyment, a journey of discovery for a mind avid for new information. He was extraordinarily well read for a layman, and had wide interests. He also had some ability as a writer – his letters to the Vatican were exhibited as some of the most elegantly written ever received there – and as a speaker, his eloquence was 'worthy of a great orator rather than a king'.[24]

Henry had a sharp eye for detail and an encyclopaedic memory. 'There was no necessary kind of knowledge from a king's degree to a carter's, but he had an honest sight of it.'[25] He had a quick mind, superb organisational skills and a formidable intellect. He possessed, wrote Erasmus, 'a lively mentality which reached for the stars, and he was able beyond measure to bring to perfection whichever task he undertook'.[26] 'The King's Majesty has more learning than any English monarch possessed before him,'[27] Thomas More claimed, with some truth. 'He is in every respect a most accomplished prince,' commented one Venetian,[28] while another declared him to be 'so gifted and adorned with mental accomplishments of every sort that we believe him to have few equals in the world'.[29] Princes were routinely eulogised by commentators and ambassadors at this period, but the unanimous praises heaped on Henry VIII – sometimes expressed in private letters – undoubtedly contain a high degree of sincerity.

Beyond his academic interests, Henry was creative and inventive, loved novelties, and enjoyed experimenting with mechanics and technology. He designed weapons and fortifications, and took an active interest in building plans. He also had 'a remarkable docility for mathematics'[30] and was 'learned in all sciences';[31] the cupboards in his privy lodgings contained various scientific instruments.[32]

Henry had a passion for astronomy. The reformer Philip Melanchthon called him 'most learned, especially in the study of the movement of the heavens'.[33] Henry's astrolabe, bearing his crowned coat of arms and made by a Norman, Sébastien le Senay, is in the British Museum. As king, he would appoint as his chaplain the Oxford astronomer and mathematician, John Robyns, who dedicated his treatise on comets to his master. The two men enjoyed many a discussion on astronomy. In 1540, Peter Apianus, a professor of mathematics from Ingolstadt, presented to Henry VIII his treatise *Astronicum Caesareum* on astronomy and navigation.[34]

Henry's interest in maps is well documented, and it prepared the ground for the eventual mapping of England in the late sixteenth century. The King owned many maps, most of them rolled up in cupboards and drawers in his chambers and libraries, as well as map-

making tools, 'a globe of paper' and 'a map made like a screen',[35] indicating that he himself was something of a cartographer. Elaborate maps hung on the walls of the royal palaces and were used in court entertainments or for political strategy. In 1527, a Venetian map-maker, Girolamo Verrazano, presented the King with a world map which was later hung in his gallery at Whitehall, along with thirty-four other maps, and there were maps of England, Scotland, Wales and Normandy in the gallery at Hampton Court.[36]

Later in the reign the defence of the realm was a major preoccupation, and the King commissioned a plan of Dover from Sir Richard Lee, surveyor of Calais,[37] as well as a map of the English coastline from the Dieppe mariner John Rotz, who was appointed royal hydrographer in 1542. The atlas he produced, *The Book of Idrography*, was dedicated to Henry. Henry also employed a French cosmographer, Jean Mallard, who produced a book containing one of the first circular maps of the world.[38]

Henry emerged from his education as 'a prodigy of precocious scholarship'.[39] But by 1508, for reasons that are not clear, the autocratic Henry VII was keeping his son under such strict supervision that he might have been a young girl.[40] Unlike his late brother, the Prince was given no royal responsibilities, nor, it seems, much training in the arts and duties of kingship, apart from some sound schooling in history from the King himself.[41] He was not permitted to leave the palace unless it was by a private door into the park, and then only in the company of specially appointed persons. No one dared approach him or speak to him. He spent most of his time in a room that led off the King's bedchamber, and appeared 'so subjected that he does not speak a word except in response to what the King asks him'.[42]

It may be that, having lost his three other sons, Henry VII was overly concerned for the health and safety of his surviving heir. Another theory is that he was well aware of the Prince's capabilities, and did not trust him; he is said to have been 'beset by the fear that his son might during his lifetime obtain too much power'.[43] The Prince's cousin, Reginald Pole, later claimed that Henry VII hated his son, 'having no affection or fancy unto him'.[44] Once, in 1508, the King quarrelled so violently with young Henry that it appeared 'as if he sought to kill him'.[45]

Perhaps Henry VII was all too aware of the boy's weaknesses, for he ensured that 'all the talk in his presence was of virtue, honour, cunning, wisdom and deeds of worship, of nothing that shall move him to vice'.[46] Nor did the Prince have any opportunity of indulging in licentious behaviour: the chances are that he retained his virginity until he married.

Henry's tutelage did not last much longer. In 1509, the King died, and this untried youth came into his own.

2
'The Triumphal Coronation'

A king's first duty was to marry for political advantage and produce a son and heir. Henry VIII chose to marry his brother's widow, Katherine of Aragon, to whom he had been betrothed since 1503. Six years his senior, she was the daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, sovereigns of a united Spain, yet Henry VII had treated her most shabbily during her widowhood, keeping her in penury and refusing to allow her marriage to Prince Henry to take place.

There were two reasons for this: the death of Queen Isabella in 1504 had relegated Katherine to the status of a mere princess of Aragon, and Henry felt that other, more advantageous marriage alliances might be found; more importantly, although the Pope had granted a dispensation for the match with Prince Henry, canon law forbade a man to marry his brother's widow. In this case, however, Katherine had sworn that her union with Prince Arthur had never been consummated. Nevertheless, Henry VII had not been satisfied that the marriage would be lawful. His son, however, chose to ignore his reservations.

Like Henry, Katherine had received a classical education from humanist tutors, among them Peter Martyr. She was as familiar with the works of ancient Rome as with those of St Augustine and St Jerome. Erasmus called her 'a rare and fine advocate' of humanist learning, and recorded that she 'loved good literature, which she had studied with success since childhood'; Henry VIII would often read with her, and allowed her the freedom of his libraries. Katherine was especially well read in the Scriptures: Erasmus told the King, 'Your wife spends that time in reading the sacred volume that other princesses occupy in cards and dice.' Her missal, dated 1527, may still be seen in the chapel at Leeds Castle, Kent.

An expert Latinist – her letters to Prince Arthur were described as worthy of Cicero himself – Katherine also spoke fluent French and had

no trouble learning English, although she never lost her Spanish accent, as is apparent from the phonetic spelling in her letters, where Hampton Court becomes 'Antoncurt' and Greenwich 'Granuche'.

Erasmus thought Katherine 'miraculously learned for a woman'.[1] She was highly intelligent and a perfect intellectual match for Henry VIII; in fact, Erasmus considered her a better scholar than Henry. He was therefore very upset when, in 1516, she censured his Greek New Testament, translated from the Latin Vulgate of St Jerome.

'Why does Erasmus correct Jerome? Is he wiser than Jerome?' she asked.[2] She was much more impressed by his book *The Institution of Marriage* (1526), which she commissioned. 'Her Majesty the Queen correctly regards it as being of supreme importance,' commented Thomas More.

Katherine was small of stature and plump; her bearing was regal and dignified. Unlike most Spaniards, she had a fair and 'very beautiful'[3] complexion, grey eyes and auburn hair 'of a very great length, beautiful and goodly to behold'.[4] In her youth she was described as 'the most beautiful creature in the world',[5] with 'a pretty and most healthy colour in her face'.[6] A portrait of a demure, round-faced girl by Miguel Sittow, dating from 1505 and now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, is almost certainly of Katherine: the sitter's collar links the initial K with her pomegranate badge.

Katherine had learned patience and discretion during her troubled youth. Henry VIII was to call her 'a woman of most gentleness, of most humility and buxomness [amiability]',[7] whilst a Flemish envoy thought her 'a lady of lively, kind and gracious disposition';[8] she 'always had a smile on her countenance',[9] even in adversity. Of a more serene and serious cast of mind than Henry, she was a woman of firm moral convictions, 'as religious and virtuous as words can express',[10] yet at the same time stubborn and uncompromising. Her outward submissiveness and graciousness concealed a resolute will and single-minded tenacity. Her great integrity, kindness and shrewdness inspired devoted friendship and loyalty in many. She was, as Erasmus declared, 'a brilliant example of her sex'.

Katherine's piety was deep-seated and orthodox, and probably had a considerable influence on the religious life of the court during the first half of Henry's reign. She spent hours at her devotions, kneeling without a cushion[11] in her oratory before a Spanish crucifix and statues of St Catherine with her wheel and St Margaret with a crown and cross.[12] The Queen studied the Office of the Blessed Virgin daily, and after dinner it was her custom to read aloud from pious works to her ladies. She rose at midnight to say Matins and again at dawn to hear Mass, and fasted every Friday and Saturday, on the vigils of saints' days

and during Lent. Luis Caroz, King Ferdinand's ambassador during the early years of Henry's reign, claimed that all this fasting led to Katherine suffering from irregular periods,[13] and it almost certainly had an effect on her obstetric history.

The Queen confessed her sins every week, and received the Eucharist on Sundays. Over the years, she made several pilgrimages to Our Lady of Walsingham, Our Lady of Caversham and other shrines,[14] and had a special devotion to the Franciscans. In later years, she wore the rough serge habit of the Third (Lay) Order of St Francis under her royal robes.[15] For the present, however, she was a young woman delighted with the sudden change in her fortunes and happily anticipating the future.

In June 1509, the young King brought Katherine to Greenwich Palace, where they were to be married. Royal connections with Greenwich went back to the eleventh century, but the Thames-side palace, five miles down the river from London, had been built after 1433 by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, brother of Henry V, who had named it Bella Court; he also built a tower in Greenwich Park, on the site of the present Royal Observatory. Bella Court had been remodelled and luxuriously refurbished after 1447 for Henry VI's queen, Margaret of Anjou, who renamed it Placentia or Pleasaunce, and stocked the surrounding park with deer.

Between 1498 and 1504,[16] Henry VII, probably inspired by reports of the palaces of the Dukes of Burgundy at Princenhof and Ghent, virtually rebuilt Placentia around three great courtyards.[17] He had the river frontage with its bay windows refaced in Burgundian-style red brick,[18] and changed the palace's name once more, to Greenwich. It was thereafter one of the chief and most splendid residences of the Tudor dynasty, and the scene of many important historical events. Excavations have shown that the palace stood on the site of the present Royal Naval College, and that the royal apartments overlooked the river. All around were beautiful gardens with fountains, lawns, flowers and orchards.[19]

The design of Greenwich Palace was revolutionary. It had no moat, and although the royal apartments were stacked one above the other in a five-storey donjon or keep, in the traditional castellar manner, there were no fortifications. This, like the Burgundian palaces, was first and foremost a domestic residence, and its design was to be repeated in many great houses of the early Tudor period.[20]

The donjon was situated between a chapel to the east and the privy kitchen to the west. Although there are several external views of the palace, notably those executed by Anthony van Wyngaerde in the 1550s, we know very little about what the interior looked like. The

complex included a great hall, with its roof timbers painted yellow ochre, a great chamber and a range of domestic offices.[21] Henry's closet overlooking the Thames had murals depicting the life of St John.[22]

Henry VIII loved Greenwich; it was his birthplace, and during the first half of his reign he spent more time there than at any other palace. Here he could hunt and hawk in the two-hundred-acre park, or watch his ships being built at the dockyards he established at nearby Woolwich and Deptford in 1513. London was easily accessible by barge. The King spent lavishly on improving the palace, and in the 1530s the antiquarian John Leland wrote

> Lo! with what lustre shines this wished-for place,
> Which, star-like, might the heavenly mansions grace.
> What painted roofs! What windows charm the eye!
> What turrets, rivals of the starry sky![23]

In 1478, Edward IV had established at Greenwich a community of the Observant Friars of St Francis; Henry VII later built a similar friary beside his palace at Richmond. Henry VIII, like Katherine of Aragon, was deeply attached to the Observants 'for their strict adherence to poverty, their sincerity, charity and devotion'.[24] During the first half of the reign, the Order would benefit from royal patronage and provide several chaplains for the King and Queen, and their conventual church at Greenwich, built after 1482 and linked to the royal lodgings by a gallery,[25] was a favourite place of prayer for Katherine, who wished one day to be buried there.

It was at Greenwich, in the Queen's closet, that Henry and Katherine were quietly married on 11 June 1509, with William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, officiating. There were no public celebrations, nor does the traditional ceremony of putting the bride and groom to bed seem to have been observed. When Katherine had married Prince Arthur in 1501, the ceremonial laid down by Margaret Beaufort was followed: the bed was prepared and sprinkled with holy water before the bride was led away from the wedding feast by her ladies, undressed, veiled, and 'reverently' laid in bed. Her young husband, 'in his shirt, with a gown cast about him',[26] had then been escorted by his gentlemen and a host of merry courtiers into the bedchamber, to the sound of shawms, viols and tabors. Then the music ceased, to allow the bishops to bless the bed and pray that the marriage might be fruitful, and only then were the young couple left alone, with some wine and spices to fortify them.[27] This is the only recorded instance of an English royal couple being publicly bedded together in the sixteenth century.

The Queen Consort's duties were to produce heirs to the throne,

engage in charitable works, and act as a helpmeet to her husband and as a civilising influence over his court. She was not expected to play a political role, although most of Henry VIII's wives did, even if it was merely to secure the advancement of their families and supporters.

Until 1514, Katherine acted as an unofficial ambassador for King Ferdinand, and Henry respected her political judgement; but then her father tricked him, as we shall see, and he never again valued her advice as highly. Her influence was always greatest in the domestic sphere, overseeing the management of the royal household, administering her estates, presiding over the councils held by her chief officers, and attending to the charitable works that won her the love of the English people. Nor was she above sewing her husband's shirts, living up to her motto, 'Humble and loyal'.

Katherine's badges, the pomegranate of Granada and the arrow-sheaf of Aragon, were soon seen everywhere in the royal palaces, entwined with Tudor roses, crowns and portcullises. A queen was expected to dress the part, and Katherine always appeared sumptuously attired, often with her hair falling loose over her shoulders – a fashion permitted only to unmarried girls and queens – or adorned with a Venetian cap. It was she who introduced into England the Spanish farthingale, a petticoat of linen or canvas stiffened with ever-increasing hoops of cane, whalebone or steel into a bell shape. This was worn under the gown and kirtle, and remained fashionable throughout the sixteenth century.

Katherine's badges also adorned many items in her vast collection of jewellery, which included the official jewels handed down from one English queen consort to the next. Like many people, she believed that some jewels had supernatural powers: one of her rings was said to cure fits. She owned a pomander with a dial in it – probably an early watch – as well as very costly ropes of pearls with jewelled crucifixes and pendants of St George, and exquisite brooches with pendant pearls for her corsage.

Katherine shared Henry's enthusiasm for hunting and elaborate court entertainments, as well as his intellectual interests. She loved music, dancing, engaging in stimulating conversation and watching tournaments; the King always sported her favours when he jousted. In true courtly tradition, he wrote poems and songs for her:

> As the holly groweth green
> And never changeth hue,
> So I am, e'er hath been
> Unto my lady true.[28]

Henry was fond of telling people that 'he loved true where he did

marry'.[29] He wrote to Katherine's father, 'If I were still free, I would choose her for wife before all others.'[30] In Elizabeth of York's missal, which he gave to his wife, he inscribed the words, 'I am yours, Henry R., for ever.' After the midday meal he was usually to be found in the Queen's apartments, discussing politics, theology or books, receiving visitors, or just 'taking his pleasure as usual with the Queen'.[31] Often he took his supper there, and he always joined Katherine for Vespers. His chief desire was to please her.

Katherine adored him. She referred to him variously as 'Your Grace', 'my husband' or even 'my Henry'. Soon after her marriage, her confessor described her as being in 'the greatest gaiety and contentment that ever there was'.[32] All that was needed to complete the royal couple's happiness and secure the succession was a son.

Henry VIII inherited a great fortune from his careful father, which has been estimated at £1,250,000 (£375 million). His kingdom, 'this fertile and plentiful realm of England, at that time flourished in all abundance of wealth and riches, and grace and plenty reigned within this realm',[33] which, under Tudor rule, had come to enjoy the benefits of peace after thirty years of dynastic struggles.

Plans were soon in hand for the new King's coronation, which was to be the first of the many displays of magnificent pageantry that would characterise Henry's reign. Stocks of the scarlet, white and green fabrics required for kitting out the entire court ran out, and the Keeper of the Great Wardrobe had to send to Flanders for further supplies. Tailors, embroiderers and goldsmiths could hardly keep pace with the demand.[34]

On 21 June 1509 King and court moved to the Tower of London, where sovereigns traditionally stayed before being crowned. The Tower proper, or central keep – it became known as the White Tower in 1234, when it was whitewashed – had been built to defend London by William the Conqueror around 1080. The royal apartments had then occupied the upper floors of the keep. Successive kings had built further towers and a ring of outer fortifications, and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries every monarch from Henry III to Richard II had helped to create a lavishly appointed palace.

Henry III built a great hall and chambers on the east side of the inner ward between the White Tower and the Wakefield and Lanthorn Towers. The great hall had a steeply pitched timber roof, tall windows and stone pillars (it was crumbling into ruin by the late sixteenth century). Edward I had constructed the original royal watergate beneath St Thomas's Tower, which has been called Traitors' Gate since the sixteenth century. By then, the court was using the gate built by Edward

III near the Cradle Tower. The Wardrobe Tower was used from mediaeval times to store royal robes and hangings.

The Tower had been a favourite residence of Edward IV, who divided Henry III's great chamber into an audience chamber, privy chamber and bedchamber. Henry VII added a gallery to the Cradle Tower, and converted the Lanthorn Tower into a royal lodging with a bedchamber and a privy closet; Henry VIII would have a Renaissance-style altar in here, 'wrought round about the edges with antique'.[35] These rooms were later hung with tapestries depicting Antiochus, King of Syria, which are said to have been the work of Katherine of Aragon, Katherine Parr and Mary I. Henry VII also built a tower to house a library next to the King's Tower, in which was the bedchamber used by Henry VIII and from which projected a gallery traversing the garden below.[36]

For centuries the Tower had housed a royal menagerie – in the sixteenth century lions were actually kept in the Lion Tower – the royal armouries, the royal mint and the royal treasure. Until 1661, the crown jewels were housed at Westminster Abbey, not at the Tower.

Although it had not yet acquired a sinister reputation, the Tower held unhappy associations for Henry. His mother had died in childbirth there, and her brothers, the Princes in the Tower, were widely reputed to have been murdered in the fortress by Richard III. Henry would rarely visit the Tower, although he carried out works there – it was he who added the decorative caps on the White Tower and who first had ordnance placed along the Tower wharf. As a royal residence, the Tower was old-fashioned, cold, damp and malodorous: its moat was now a squalid refuse dump. Nevertheless, Henry had had the royal lodgings refurbished for his coronation, and they were now gaily hung with cloths of red, green and white – the last two being the Tudor colours.

On 22 June, the King, in a ceremony instituted by Henry IV at his coronation in 1399, dubbed twenty-six new Knights of the Bath,[37] many of whom were his closest friends and attended upon him in his privy chamber. All had been purified in the requisite ritual baths, served the King at dinner, and kept vigil throughout the night in the Norman Chapel of St John in the White Tower, the earliest-surviving royal chapel. Prior to the Reformation, it boasted brilliant wall-paintings, stained-glass windows and a colourful rood screen; all had disappeared by 1550.

The next day, 23 June, saw London rejoicing as the King and Queen went in a glittering procession through Cheapside, Temple Bar and the Strand to Westminster Palace. London was still a walled, mediaeval city, although its suburbs were rapidly sprawling out beyond the walls: along

the Strand, for example, were to be found the great houses of the nobility, with gardens leading down to the river. The city's skyline was dominated by the spires of the Gothic cathedral of St Paul and eighty other churches. London was prosperous, lively and very congested, due to its narrow streets and crammed-in, jettied buildings; most citizens, therefore, used the Thames as the main thoroughfare.

In honour of the coronation, buildings along the processional route were hung with tapestries, and free wine flowed from the conduits. Henry rode beneath a canopy borne by the barons of the Cinque Ports, with his heralds going before him; he was resplendent in a doublet of gold embroidered with precious stones beneath a robe of crimson velvet furred with ermine; across his shoulder was slung a baldrick of rubies. Katherine, in embroidered white satin and ermine, followed in a litter hung with white silk and golden ribbons. Her ladies, in blue velvet, rode behind on matching palfreys.[38] Henry's grandmother, Margaret Beaufort, watching from a window in Cheapside, wept for joy, overcome by the occasion.

In the late afternoon, the King and Queen arrived at the Palace of Westminster, which had been the seat of royal government and the monarch's chief London residence since the eleventh century. The palace was a sprawling complex of mediaeval stone and timber buildings that covered six acres; much of it had been rebuilt in the thirteenth century by Henry III, although the magnificent Westminster Hall had been erected by William Rufus in 1097–9; its impressive hammerbeam roof was installed by Richard II in 1394. The law courts of King's Bench, Chancery and Common Pleas sat here during the legal term, while the House of Lords met in the great hall – called the White Hall or Chamber – of the palace itself. There was therefore limited space for large-scale court ceremonials.

The royal apartments, which had been refurbished by Edward IV and Henry VII, still bore signs of the faded splendour of a bygone age. Like his father, Henry VIII used as his bedchamber Henry III's vast Painted Chamber, which measured eighty-six by twenty-six feet. Above the King's bed was a thirteenth-century mural in red, blue, silver and gold portraying the coronation of St Edward the Confessor, and on the adjacent walls were vivid depictions of Old Testament battles. Being so close to the river, the palace was damp and difficult to heat; tapestry hung over the doors to keep out the draughts. Beggars thronged the rubbish-strewn forecourt with its clock tower and fountain. Yet Henry spent much time here in the first years of his reign.

Throughout the night before their coronation, the King and Queen kept vigil in the Chapel of St Stephen, founded by King Stephen in the twelfth century; Edward III had remodelled it in the

fourteenth century and commissioned murals of himself and his large family.

On Midsummer's Day, Sunday 24 June, Henry and Katherine, wearing royal robes of crimson and preceded by the nobility in furred gowns of scarlet, walked to Westminster Abbey along a carpet of striped cloth strewn with herbs and flowers.[39] As soon as the King disappeared into the Abbey, the crowds ripped the carpet to pieces for souvenirs.[40]

'This day consecrates a young man who is the everlasting glory of our age,' exulted Thomas More. 'This day is the end of our slavery, the fount of our liberty, the beginning of joy. Now the people, liberated, run before their king with bright faces'.[41]

After being acclaimed by the peers, Henry swore his coronation oath and was anointed with holy oil. He was then consecrated by Archbishop Warham with the crown of St Edward the Confessor.[42] The choir burst into *Te Deum Laudamus* as the newly consecrated monarch was led by thirty-eight bishops to his throne to receive the homage of his chief subjects.

Chief among the choristers that day was Dr Robert Fairfax, who was to become renowned as 'the prime musician of the nation'.[43] A Cambridge graduate, he was the first man to take a degree in music at Oxford. Henry had heard of his fame as organist and choirmaster of St Albans Abbey, and had already persuaded him to become a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal. Fairfax was to write grand polyphonic masses and motets for the Chapel, as well as delightful secular ballads for the court. The King paid him only £9.2s.6d. (£2,737) a year, less than a royal gardener would earn, but he was handsomely rewarded each New Year's Day for composing anthems and copying out music.

In a much shorter ceremony, the Queen was crowned with a heavy gold diadem set with sapphires, rubies and pearls.[44] When the royal couple emerged from the Abbey, the King was wearing his lighter 'imperial' or arched crown and a purple velvet robe lined with ermine; as the crowds cheered, the organ and trumpets were sounding, drums thundering and bells pealing to signify that Henry VIII 'had been gloriously crowned to the comfort of all the land'.[45]

After the coronation, the King and Queen led the great procession back to Westminster Hall for the coronation banquet, which was to be 'greater than any Caesar had known'.[46] When all were seated a fanfare sounded, and the Duke of Buckingham and the Earl of Shrewsbury rode into the hall on horseback to herald the arrival of the 'sumptuous, fine and delicate meats [in] plentiful abundance'.[47] When the second course was finished, the King's Champion, Sir Robert Dymmocke, paraded up and down the hall on his courser before throwing down his gauntlet with the customary challenge to anyone who dared contest the King's

title. Henry rewarded him with a gold cup. After the banquet, 'a tournament was held which lasted until midnight'.[48]

The celebrations continued for several days.

> To further enhance the triumphal coronation, jousts and tourneys were held in the grounds of the palace of Westminster. For the comfort of the royal spectators, a pavilion was constructed, covered with tapestries and hung with rich Arras cloth. And nearby there was a curious fountain over which was built a sort of castle with an imperial crown on top and battlements of roses and gilded pomegranates. Its walls were painted white [with] green lozenges, each containing a rose, a pomegranate, a quiver of arrows or the letters H and K, all gilded.
>
> The shields of arms of the jousters also appeared on the walls, and on certain days red, white and claret wine ran from the mouths of the castle's gargoyles. The organisers of these jousts were Lord Thomas Howard, heir to the Earl of Surrey, Admiral Sir Edward Howard, his brother, Lord Richard Grey, Sir Edmund Howard, Sir Thomas Knyvet and Charles Brandon esquire. The trumpets sounded and the fresh young gallants and noblemen took the field. All the participants were magnificently attired.[49]

The challengers, wearing plumed gold helmets and calling themselves the Knights of Diana, included Edward Neville, Edward Guildford and John Pechy, while the defenders were the Knights of Pallas. Charles Brandon distinguished himself at barriers against a huge German challenger, 'when he so pummelled the German about the head' that his nose bled and he was led away defeated.[50] On the next day, in honour of Diana, the goddess of the hunt, deer were hunted and slaughtered in a miniature park and castle which had been created in the tiltyard, and their bloody carcasses, hung on poles, presented to the Queen and the ladies.[51]

The festivities were brought to an end by the death of Margaret Beaufort on 29 June, the day after the King attained his majority; at the last, she urged him to take as his mentor the austere and devout John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester – her confessor, fellow humanist and associate in her educational projects. Fisher, who had enjoyed a distinguished academic career and had a reputation for being 'the most holy and learned prelate in Christendom',[52] was a man of firm principle and deep sincerity, who wore a hair shirt beneath his clerical robes, slept on hard straw matting, scourged himself regularly and ate mainly bread and pottage. His patroness felt he was the right man to guide a young and inexperienced king, being no flatterer as bishops often were; but there is no evidence that Henry paid much attention to him.

The King ordered the church bells to toll for six days to mark the Lady Margaret's passing. Bishop Fisher paid tribute to her virtues in an oration preached at her funeral at Westminster Abbey, and Erasmus, a friend of Fisher, wrote her epitaph.

Having attained his majority, Henry VIII now began ruling his kingdom.

3
'A Prince of Splendour and Generosity'

In 1509, with remarkable prescience, a Venetian wrote of Henry VIII: 'for the future, the whole world will talk of him'.[1] In an age when monarchs ruled as well as reigned, a king's personality could have a profound effect upon the land he governed, and few sovereigns have left such an indelible imprint on national institutions and the national consciousness as Henry. He inspired in his contemporaries 'a pleasant and terrible reverence'.[2]

Sovereigns in the sixteenth century were perceived as semi-divine beings; the King was not just a normal man but also the Lord's Anointed, His deputy on earth, and called 'by divine right' to hold dominion over his subjects. Since mediaeval times, the King had been seen as two bodies in one: a mortal entity and 'the King's person', representing unending royal authority; monarchs therefore referred to themselves in the plural form as 'we'. A king was thus set apart from his people,[3] and invested with an insight into the subtle mysteries of state denied mere mortals. 'Kings of England,' Henry told his judges, 'never had any superior but God.'[4]

So sacrosanct was the institution of monarchy that it was seen as near sacrilege for a subject to question or criticise the acts of his sovereign. 'Princes ought to be obeyed by the commandment of God; yea, and to be obeyed without question,' wrote Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester.[5] A king was entitled to expect the same devotion and obedience from his people as he himself rendered to God, for there was a presumption that the King's law was God's law.[6] The royal prerogative was the will of God working through the will of the King, and the King could do no wrong. This explains why treason was regarded as the most serious of crimes, and why it was punished so harshly.

The normal penalty for treason was hanging, disembowelling and quartering, although the King usually commuted the sentence to

beheading for peers of the realm. Traitors, as Henry declared, had to be punished severely 'for the example and terror of others'.[7] In 1541, the King angrily censured his Councillors for not committing to the Tower some felons who had robbed Windsor Castle, 'as though you made no difference between the enterprise of robbing His Majesty and the attempting of the same towards any mean subject'.[8] The thieves were forthwith sent to the Tower.

Since he governed 'by the grace of God', the King bore a weighty moral responsibility towards his subjects, of which Henry VIII was well aware, 'being in the room that I am in'.[9] Henry saw God as his ally; early on, he told a Venetian ambassador that no one kept faith in the world save him, 'and therefore God Almighty, who knows this, prospers my affairs'.[10] Kings were guaranteed a special place in Heaven, and were therefore expected to set a good example. The King's chief duties, enshrined in his coronation oath, were to defend his realm, uphold the Church and administer justice fairly. He was also the fount of honour, and, in times of war, the military leader of his armies.

Although they were not strictly speaking absolute monarchs, the Tudor sovereigns bore the entire responsibility for the government of the kingdom. Parliament, the Privy Council, the officers of state, judges, sheriffs and mayors all exercised authority in the King's name. Royal power was therefore the unifying force within the realm.

The Tudors elevated the English monarchy to unprecedented heights while extending the royal authority. Their prestige was enhanced by the increasingly elaborate ceremonial that attended every aspect of their highly public lives, as well as by pageantry and symbolism, calculated to enhance the royal image. The development of royal palaces and progresses constituted just two aspects of this policy: a king needed to be visible, and to be in touch with his subjects, and also to impress them and foreigners with a display of magnificence. Henry VIII was the first English king to adopt the style 'Your Majesty', rather than the traditional 'Your Grace' or 'Your Highness'; foreign ambassadors were addressing him as such before 1520. Like other European sovereigns, Henry was influenced by humanist teachings on sovereignty, which emphasised strong, centralised rule, dynastic continuity and the consolidation of royal power. 'The Prince is the life, the head and the authority of all things that be done in England,' wrote Sir Thomas Smith.[11] More than a century before Louis XIV, the King was seen as the embodiment of the state.[12]

At the foundation of the Tudor monarchy was the concept of princely magnificence. The outward show of power and status, displayed by both King and court, was extremely important in an age of widespread illiteracy, and also in a culture that valued the trappings of rank; and it

had the advantages of impressing foreigners and attracting talented and able men to the royal service. Magnificence, or majestas, was calculated to dazzle the beholder; it could create an illusion of wealth and power that might belie the reality, and was therefore very effective as a propaganda tool.

Mediaeval monarchs had certainly understood the value of outward display, but it was not until the reign of Edward IV (1461–83) that the promotion of princely magnificence became official policy and the focus of Edward's household ordinances. Edward IV had 'the most splendid court that could be found in all Christendom'.[13]

Edward and his successors were merely emulating the fifteenth-century Valois Dukes of Burgundy, who had created the cult of magnificence and set standards in taste, ceremonial and culture for the rest of Europe. The Burgundian Dukes impressed the service of architects, artists, musicians and scholars, and in so doing enhanced their own prestige. By Henry VIII's reign, the court of Burgundy was no more,[14] but its influence was everywhere to be seen. The Italian writer, Baldassare Castiglione, in his book *The Courtier*, stated that the perfect ruler 'should be a prince of splendour and generosity, giving freely to everyone. He should hold magnificent banquets, festivals, games and public shows'.

Henry VIII exemplified this ideal. His court was the most magnificent in English history. Henry was rich enough to lavish extravagant sums of money on his palaces, clothes, entertainments and lifestyle, and on the open-handed hospitality that was expected of a great prince. He was determined from the first to outshine his European rivals, the King of France and the Emperor, each of whom had at least four times the resources he did. By clever bluffing, he managed to achieve this aim. And Henry himself embodied the virtues of magnificence. This big, impressive man had a natural authority and assurance. He looked and acted like a king.

Henry made the most of his opportunities. He had a genius for choosing talented men to serve him, notably Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell. But whilst Henry delegated much of his power to these ministers and left them to work out the details of his policies, he remained very much in control, and kept his own counsel. 'If my cap knew my counsel, I would throw it in the fire,' he once said.[15] It was indisputably he who directed the course of his reign. If any dared cross him, he threatened, 'there was no head in his kingdom so noble but he would make it fly'.[16] Court factions might seek to influence the King, for he was not averse to intrigue, but he was not so suggestible as to let them utterly usurp his prerogative. He never forgot that his was the ultimate authority.

Many historians have claimed that Henry grew more ruthless and bloodthirsty only as he got older, yet in 1510 he coolly executed his father's hated ministers, Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, in the interests of political expediency, and similarly eliminated the Earl of Suffolk in 1513. The Elizabethan antiquarian John Stow claimed that during his reign he executed seventy thousand people, although this is certainly a gross exaggeration. It proves, however, that Henry had gained a reputation for cruelty by the end of his life, and it is true that he did not scruple to remove, often by savage means, those who opposed him.

Henry had an eye for detail. 'He wants to have his feet in a thousand shoes,' commented a Milanese envoy.[17] Little escaped his scrutiny. His encyclopaedic knowledge was an advantage when it came to briefing ambassadors or intervening in disputes, and since knowledge gave a king an advantage, he made sure he was kept up-to-date on events. When told by French envoys that ten thousand Swiss troops had been killed at the Battle of Marignano in 1515, the King replied that that was remarkable, since only ten thousand soldiers had fought in the battle.[18]

Henry had international ambitions, and was determined to play a prominent role in Europe. He was 'rich, ferocious and greedy for glory',[19] desiring nothing more than to display his knightly skills at the head of an army and win honour and renown for himself by reopening the Hundred Years War and winning back the lands his predecessors had lost in France, which Henry believed to be his by right. 'The new King is magnificent, liberal, and a great enemy of the French,' commented a Venetian ambassador in 1509.[20] At this time, Ferdinand of Aragon was Henry's ally, but time would prove Ferdinand untrustworthy.

Henry's hatred of the French festered. In 1510, learning that his Councillors had written in his name to Louis XII offering friendship and peace, he shouted, 'Who wrote this letter? I ask peace of the King of France, who dare not look me in the face, still less make war on me?' Then he stormed out of the room and proceeded to insult the French ambassador by inviting him to watch a tournament but making sure he had nowhere to sit. Eventually a cushion was provided, and the envoy had to watch the King displaying his martial prowess.[21]

Henry was a focus for the growing nationalism of his people, and he enjoyed an instinctive rapport with many of his subjects. 'Love for the King is universal with all who see him, as His Highness does not seem a person of this world but one descended from Heaven,' observed a Venetian.[22] In 1513, another Italian wrote, 'He is very popular with his own people, and indeed with all, for his qualities.'[23] Henry's hearty charm and affability won him golden opinions, although he was never referred to as Bluff King Hal in his lifetime. Erasmus found him to be 'more of a companion than a king'.

Henry revelled in his popularity; he was a consummate showman who understood the value of being accessible to his subjects, and who made sure, in his early years, that he had a highly visible profile. The public were allowed into his palaces to watch tournaments, processions or the great court entertainments, and it was not unheard of for Henry to go into London in disguise to mingle among them. And of course a large number of his subjects saw him when he went on progress.

Many of those subjects brought the King gifts in the expectation of a reward; indeed, such largesse, or tipping, was expected of a monarch. Lots of the offerings were humble, such as herbs, green peas or live foxes, and many were foodstuffs such as orange pies, fruit, pheasants, salmon or baked lampreys, which were known to be one of his favourite foods. The King gave 6d. to a gardener who gave him a drink of water, £1 (£300) to a priest who preached before him, a total of £4.17s.4d. (£1,230) to divers poor people who brought him 'capons, hens, books of wax and other trifles', and £2 (£600) to a man who won a wager by eating a whole buck at one sitting.[24] Wherever he went, the poor waited for his charity, and he would patiently listen to their tales of woe: one William Kebet had lost his job and was 'fallen in poverty and decay' – Henry succoured him with £5 (£1,500) on one occasion and £4 (£1,200) on another. He donated £5 to another man 'like to be lost', £3.6s. (£990) to a needy father of thirteen, and a further sum of money so that a poor woman could redeem her husband from debtors' prison. He also gave funds to his jester 'for his surgery when sick in London', and to his Groom, Thomas, 'to relieve him in his sickness'.[25]

Henry VIII's popularity did not wane with time, and it survived his reforms and his cruelties: his subjects generally revered him as a great king who had England's interests at heart.

4
'This Magnificent, Excellent and Triumphant Court'

The court was not just the palace where the King resided but also the people and the household that surrounded him. It was at the centre of affairs, and revolved around the man who was the fount of all power, honours and patronage.

The fifteenth century had witnessed a steady decline in the court's prestige; the weak Henry VI had failed to maintain 'a worshipful and great household',[1] and there was consequently less honour and status in being attached to the royal service.

Henry's successor, Edward IV, had visited the court of Burgundy, with which England enjoyed good trading and political links, and from about 1471 he modelled his court along Burgundian lines, as did other Western European rulers. The unprecedented splendour of the great banquets and tournaments at the English court reflected the practice in Burgundy, where the cult of chivalry had enjoyed a revival. It was in imitation of the Toison d'Or, or Golden Fleece, an order of knighthood founded by Duke Philip the Good in 1430, that Edward IV and his successors revived the Order of the Garter, with its chivalric association with St George, England's patron saint. Entertainments, sports and etiquette at the English court all began to follow the highly refined Burgundian pattern, and the King became a lavish patron of the arts. All was designed to emphasise the authority and magnificence of the sovereign, and it brought about a resurgence of the importance of the court itself.

This new perception of the court and of the royal status heralded changes in the constitution of the royal household, which would be designed not just for the display of magnificence but also for the needs of monarchs who had an increasing desire for privacy.

Although Henry VII had a reputation for parsimony, he understood the value of display: like Edward IV, he built fine palaces and spent vast

sums on dazzling occasions and entertainments, and although he was no great patron of the arts like Edward IV or Henry VIII, his court was never dull. 'He knew well how to maintain his royal majesty and all that appertains to kingship,' wrote the Italian historian Polydore Vergil.

Henry VIII's court was the most 'magnificent, excellent and triumphant'[2] in English history. First and foremost the King's house, it also became the political and cultural hub of the nation, a seat of government, a sophisticated arts centre and a meeting place of scholars, all in a setting of unprecedented splendour. As the focus of society at large, the court set the fashion in every aspect of English life. It was also a military academy for the noble elite, who could be called upon to defend the realm at any time, and many of its pleasures had a martial content.

At first, Burgundian influence prevailed at Henry's court. Henry VII had owned examples of Italian art and sculpture, but only in the field of scholarship, in which the rediscovery and study of the classical literature of ancient Greece and Rome was known as the 'New Learning', had the Italian Renaissance made any impact in England. But during the first decade of Henry VIII's reign, Renaissance influence began to appear in architecture, decoration, art and other fields. It was Henry who first realised how valuable the sophisticated culture of Italy could be to a king who wanted to be at the forefront of European affairs, and how useful it could be in enhancing his majestas.

The court was the place to be for those who desired royal favour and high office. It was the natural habitat of the nobles, whose ancient right it was to attend upon the King, and it also attracted 'new men', who had made it to the top through wealth or mere ability. In fact, anyone who was smartly dressed, appeared to have some legitimate business or had cash for bribes could gain entry to the court. There were consequently many hangers-on and people who had no right to be there.

These 'strangers' were a constant problem; many courtiers brought with them more servants, relatives and friends than was permitted, and there were also constant edicts against 'rascal boys', who hung about in the hope of receiving tips for errands and messages, and who seem to have posed a particular problem. In addition, 'vagabonds and vile persons' could be aggressive in their demands for work, robbing and intimidating household servants, and trying to pass on stolen goods.[3] When the court moved on, these delinquents would squat in the empty palaces and generally make a nuisance of themselves.

In 1526, the Eltham Ordinances specifically forbade anyone to 'bring to court any boy or rascal';[4] in 1533, 'all vagabonds and other idle persons which follow the court' were given a day to get out,[5] while in 1543, orders were given that no one was to keep any page or boy

contrary to the King's ordinances.[6] Strangers were not only a security risk, but they also appropriated food and lodgings to which they were not entitled, thus placing a further strain on overstretched household resources. But it proved impossible to control the problem, because the Serjeant Porter, who manned the palace gates, had a staff of only five Yeomen and two Grooms.[7]

Most people who visited the court came in search of employment, preferment, land, privileges or the patronage of some influential personage. The status and prestige of courtiers depended largely upon nearness to the King. Those close to Henry were therefore in a position to advance the fortunes of less fortunate petitioners, and so extend what was termed 'good lordship' to them. Petitioners could themselves become patrons of those even further from the throne, and thus was formed a complicated web of clientage. Such patronage could be a highly lucrative business, for every favour had its price.

Sometimes, petitioners might be fortunate enough to present their pleas to the King himself at his 'coming forth' from his apartments, or when he was about to go hunting, when he was said to be especially receptive to requests. Although Henry knew that those who came to court were 'desirous both of spoil and glory',[8] he could be prodigiously open-handed, and successive ministers had a tough job curbing his impulsive generosity.

For Henry VIII, the ideal courtier was one who, whatever his rank, offered good service and congenial companionship. Both frequently led to preferment and honours. Personal service and usefulness to the monarch were the chief requirements of a Renaissance courtier and could confer great power and influence, since such courtiers had the King's ear and controlled access to him. Such personal service was often combined with political responsibility, since those who helped the King govern were often among his intimates. However, it was not Henry's policy to delegate responsibility to a courtier who lacked the ability to bear it, however good a friend he might be.

As a result of his constantly changing enthusiasms and shifts of policy, Henry's court was often divided by fluctuating courtier factions dedicated to promoting themselves and their ideas. Unable to confront or oppose the King directly, they used the politics of persuasion to achieve their aims. Charles de Marillac, the French ambassador, wrote in 1540: 'The subjects take example from the Prince, and the ministers seek only to undo each other to gain credit; and under colour of their master's good, each attends his own. For all the fine words of which they are full, they will act only as necessity and interest compel them.'[9]

Henry's successive marriages brought to prominence families of a particular political or religious persuasion, such as the Boleyns, the

Seymours, the Howards and the Parrs. Generally, courtiers in favour could attract parties of supporters. These factions, however, were rarely stable, shifting in composition and opinions, and their existence depended on the current situation or on whoever was chief minister. Nevertheless, they were an essential part of the political process in Tudor times.

In 1528, Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtier* was published in Italy, enshrining the virtues and qualities of the ideal courtier. Modelled upon Cicero's orator, he would be eloquent, learned, well informed and thus able to influence and manipulate his ruler. He also had to be the embodiment of chivalry and courtesy, a lover of the arts, and expert in martial exercises and sports. The book was based on the ideals of antiquity, and it enjoyed huge popularity, even in remote England, where its influence upon the court was felt almost immediately.

But the ideal was much removed from the realities of courtier life. Sir Thomas More believed that a courtier had no choice but to compromise his moral principles and his honesty in order to survive, a view echoed by the poet Sir Thomas Wyatt, who, while he recognised why people were attracted to the court, cynically wrote of men greedy for gold, buying friends and selling women, betraying friendships for profit and pretending to be virtuous.[10]

At court, wrote Sir Francis Bryan, there was 'overplus malice and displeasures',[11] while Marillac loathed 'the tainted air of the court'.[12] 'Every man,' warned John Husee, Lady Lisle's agent, should 'beware the flattering of the court'; Queen Jane Seymour would ask him to deter his mistress from sending her daughters to a place that was 'full of pride, envy, indignation, mocking, scorning and derision'.[13] The superficial life of outward courtesy, frivolity, luxury and idle pastimes masked deep-seated frustrations, resentment, vicious intrigue, treachery and backbiting. Most courtiers were motivated by greed, which led to intense competition and rivalry.

Life at court could also be routine and boring. There was much waiting and hanging about, and every distraction was welcome. A large number of young men of a military bent unable to find an outlet for their energy and aggression could have caused problems, but Henry ensured that they were provided with many opportunities for sport and feats of arms and a succession of entertaining diversions.

There was great formality at Henry's court, but it was also chaotic, wasteful and hugely expensive to maintain. Continual efforts were made to improve the efficiency of the royal household, with only varying success, yet given the numbers of people present at court at any one time, its administrators managed rather well. In winter it was not unheard of for between a thousand and fifteen hundred persons to be in

residence, of whom only about a hundred had access to the King; up to a thousand might be in service in the royal household. Numbers fluctuated depending on the season or the occasion. In the summer, when many courtiers were away at their estates, the court numbered perhaps eight hundred people.

There were probably less than one hundred women at court. Many were the wives and daughters of courtiers, and waited on the Queen. Others visited with their husbands, often for ceremonial occasions. Women enjoyed no formal political role at court, although several did involve themselves in politics and intrigues, as will be seen.

Upon marriage, Henry had assigned to Katherine a household of 160 persons, many of whom were female. She had eight ladies in waiting. Two, Elizabeth, Lady Fitzwalter, and Anne, Lady Hastings, were the sisters of England's premier peer, the Duke of Buckingham. They served alongside the Countesses of Suffolk, Oxford, Surrey, Shrewsbury, Essex and Derby. By 1517, some of these ladies had been replaced by the Countess of Salisbury, Lady Guildford, Lady Maud Parr and Lady Elizabeth Howard, wife of Sir Thomas Boleyn.[14] Sir Thomas' brother, Sir Edward, and his wife Anne, would also join the Queen's household in the 1520s.

Katherine was also attended by thirty maids of honour, among them the Ladies Dacre, Scrope, Percy, Ferrers and Bergavenny (who was Buckingham's daughter, Mary Stafford) – their names a roll-call of the mediaeval peerage. Most of their husbands served in the King's household, creating an intricate network of family ties amongst the chief courtiers.

The other maids of honour included Gertrude Blount, daughter of Lord Mountjoy, and Maria de Salinas, who had come with Katherine from Spain. The daughter of a Castilian nobleman and a former maid of honour to Katherine's mother Queen Isabella, Maria selflessly had shared the tribulations of Katherine's penurious widowhood, shelving her hopes of making a good marriage, and was the lady closest to her, 'whom she loves more than any other mortal'.[15] Maria had also earned the esteem of Henry VIII, who named one of his ships in her honour. Her sister Iñez, who was married to a Spaniard then resident in England, may also have been one of Katherine's attendants. Jane Popincourt, a Frenchwoman, was another maid of honour, who had once served Elizabeth of York and, since 1500, had attended upon Henry's sister Mary. Anne Luke, the King's former nurse, was one of Katherine's chamberwomen.

The Spanish ambassador Luis Caroz dismissed the ladies of the Queen's household as 'rather simple',[16] but her damsels were

'handsome, and make a sumptuous appearance'.[17] Katherine set high standards for her household, but she was a kind mistress and her servants invariably became devoted to her.

The chief officers of the Queen's household were naturally men. At its head was her Chamberlain, the ageing Thomas Butler, Earl of Ormonde, a veteran of the Wars of the Roses. His post was a virtual sinecure, since most of his duties were carried out by Sir Robert Poyntz, who was later appointed the Queen's Chancellor.[18] Sir Thomas Bryan, the Vice-Chamberlain, would later be replaced by Sir Edward Baynton, who would hold this office under all the King's subsequent wives. Katherine had her own Steward and Keeper of her Privy Purse; Griffin Richards, her Clerk of the Signet, had formerly worked for Margaret Beaufort.[19]

There were only eight Spaniards in the Queen's household, among them her secretary, John de Scutea, her apothecary and her physicians, the humanist Ferdinand de Vittoria and Miguel de la Sá. Most of her original Spanish servants had now returned to Spain.

Two devout Englishmen, Father William Forrest and the Observant John Forest, were among Katherine's chaplains. Her confessor (since 1508) was a Castilian Franciscan, Fray Diego Fernandez. By virtue of his position and his mesmeric, forceful personality, he was said to wield more influence over the Queen than anyone else. Because he was also insufferably proud and a manipulative intriguer, he was much vilified by those who feared his hold over his mistress, notably successive Spanish ambassadors, who even expressed fears – before her marriage – that he was her lover. What they really resented was the friar's advice to the Queen to 'forget Spain and gain the love of the English'.[20] But there was no denying the fact that the friar was a notorious womaniser who behaved 'scandalously, in an extreme manner'.[21] Even Henry VII had warned Katherine against him, using 'strong words',[22] but she refused to believe anything bad of Fray Diego. That she was never his lover is borne out by her sworn oath in 1529 that she had come to the King 'a true maid, without touch of man'.[23] Nor would Henry VIII have allowed her to retain the friar if he had believed the gossip. Yet Fray Diego would continue to cause trouble for some years to come.

Many of those at court had to be housed and fed. It was the Lord Chamberlain's responsibility to decide who was entitled to lodgings, meals and 'bouche of court' – a daily allowance of bread, wine, beer, candles and firewood. The rations were allocated according to rank and the season of the year. This privilege was generally extended to the courtiers closest to the King, the great nobles, the chief officers of the household and important servants. Those who were not entitled to it received just their wages or fees.

Numbers at court were swelled by the servants whom the courtiers were allowed to bring with them, in recognition of their status. Each was allowed a number appropriate to his rank: a duke or archbishop might have twelve servants, the Lord Chamberlain ten, and a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber four, while Serjeants and Clerks were permitted just one each. The Serjeant Porter was ordered to forbid entry to any surplus servants,[24] although there is ample evidence that the rules were bent.

The royal palaces were designed to accommodate large numbers of courtiers and servants, and whole ranges were given over to courtier lodgings, as in the Base Court at Hampton Court, which could house forty courtiers,[25] and the Green Court at Knole. Servants usually slept in rooms above their departments. The entitlements to lodgings were laid down in the Household Ordinances, and were the responsibility of the Lord Steward, but in smaller houses it was often a case of first come, first served. Only about a hundred courtiers were entitled to permanent rooms at court, most of them Councillors, peers and the chief officers – in short, all those on whom the King relied for advice and efficient service; the Duke of Norfolk, for example, had lodgings in nine of the King's palaces. When he was not at court, no one else could use them.

The gentlemen attendant upon the King were also entitled to lodgings at court, although when on duty they would sleep in the privy chamber, on call should their master need them.[26] Some important courtiers and officers were given houses within or near the palace precincts, while Cardinal Wolsey was even allowed to stay at Eltham Palace and Thomas Cromwell sometimes had the use of St James's Palace.[27] Other courtiers had homes near the palaces: at Greenwich, several courtiers owned houses in the town,[28] and many nobles had mansions in the Strand, near to Westminster and Whitehall.

Courtier lodgings were of two types: double lodgings had two rooms, each with a fireplace and a garderobe, while single lodgings had just one room with a fireplace. Their occupants were obliged to use the public latrines. All lodgings were meant to accommodate a courtier and his or her servants, so space was very limited. The most desirable lodgings, however small, were those nearest the King's apartments.[29]

While the Office of the King's Works would take care of repairs and maintenance, each courtier was responsible for furnishing his lodging and keeping it clean. Occasionally, the King would help: Henry provided his cousin the Marquess of Exeter with a pallet from the Royal Wardrobe of the Beds and ordered the Office of Works to make him two stools.[30] When, in 1534, Lord Rochford wanted mullioned windows in his lodgings, the King paid to have them installed.[31]

Aspiring courtiers who had not been allocated lodgings had to ask the

King's permission to come to court. The giving or withholding of such permission was a fair indicator of whether or not the supplicant was in favour. The termination of a courtier's right to lodgings was usually an ominous sign; if he was allowed to remain in attendance upon the King, he could face the ruinous cost of paying for accommodation near the court. Banishment from the King's presence was calamitous in the extreme, and meant utter social disgrace: Sir Ralph Sadler told Thomas Cromwell that compulsory absence from court would mar a man's fortunes for ever.[32]

The Comptroller of the Household allocated stabling for courtiers' horses and beds for their retainers: twenty-four horses and nine beds were allowed for a duke or archbishop, three horses and two beds for a chaplain.[33]

To begin with, courtiers were allowed to bring dogs with them, but they caused such a nuisance that in 1526 the Eltham Ordinances banned all dogs except ladies' lap-dogs from the precincts of the court; if courtiers did obtain the King's permission to bring their pets with them, they had to keep them in the kennels provided so that the palace 'may be sweet, wholesome, clean and well-furnished, as to a prince's house and state doth appertain'.[34] Ladies were also allowed singing birds. Other animals, too, were kept as pets: Cardinal Wolsey had a cat, while in 1539 the King was offered 'two musk cats, two little monkeys and a marmoset'.[35] Katherine of Aragon owned a pet monkey, and appears with it in a miniature by Lucas Horenbout.

Henry VIII kept canaries and nightingales in ornamental birdcages hanging in the windows at Hampton Court; he also kept ferrets, although he forbade other courtiers to do so.[36] His favourite pets were his dogs, especially beagles, spaniels and greyhounds; the latter were considered a particularly noble breed.[37] Over the years the King sent hundreds of such dogs, all 'garnished with a good iron collar', as gifts to the Emperor and the King of France.[38] Henry's own dogs wore decorative collars of velvet – only permitted to royal dogs – and kid, with or without torettes (spikes) of silver and gold; some were adorned with pearls or the King's arms and his portcullis and rose badges; his dogs' coats were of white silk,[39] and they had their fur regularly rubbed down with 'hair cloth'.[40] Sixty-five dog leashes were found in Henry's closets after his death.[41] Pet dogs were fed bread, not meat, to discourage them from developing hunting instincts. Two of Henry's dogs, Cut and Ball, were prone to getting lost, and he paid out the huge sum of nearly 15s. (about £225 today) in rewards to those who brought them back.[42]

Henry VIII's court was never as licentious as the court of Francis I of France. By comparison with his French rival, Henry appeared a paragon

of virtue, although he was simply far more discreet and, unlike Francis, he sometimes married his mistresses. The fact that Nicholas Wotton, Henry's ambassador in Paris, was so shocked by the behaviour at the French court is proof that much higher standards prevailed at the English court.

The English were not squeamish about sexual matters – in fact, they were frank, outspoken and 'somewhat licentious in their disposition'.[43] Erasmus commented on the fact that the women always kissed a man on the lips when they greeted him, a custom he found delightful. In a court where women were very much in the minority, and most of the men were away from home, some sexual dalliance was inevitable. Yet the King would not permit any open display of wanton behaviour; he commanded his Knight Harbinger to banish lewd women from his household,[44] and foreigners were often impressed by the relative circumspection and dignity of his courtiers. Drunkenness, however, was common.

A double standard certainly prevailed. While fornication and adultery could never tarnish a man's honour – and many noblemen had complicated private lives – women were expected to be above reproach. Some considered the ladies of the English court to be of easy virtue. In 1536, Eustache Chapuys, the imperial ambassador, was sceptical about Jane Seymour's much vaunted chastity: 'You may imagine whether, being an Englishwoman and having been long at court, she would not hold it a sin to be still a maid.'[45] That same year, when the King's niece, the Lady Margaret Douglas, was caught in an illicit love affair with Lord Thomas Howard, an observer commented that it would not have been surprising if she had slept with him, 'seeing the number of domestic examples she has seen and sees daily'.[46]

Foreigners did not rate the court ladies highly: the French Admiral Bonnivet, preparing for an embassy to England, told his gentlemen to 'warm up those cold ladies of England'.[47] In 1520, a Mantuan ambassador wrote disparagingly of the looks and attire of the ladies of Henry's court, and asserted that they drank too much.

The twin cults of chivalry and courtly love, which underpinned court life at this time, often acted as a brake on the passions that could flourish in the hothouse atmosphere of the court. The preferred reading matter of the nobility was works of chivalry and romance, which had proliferated since the invention of printing, and the code enshrined in them governed all forms of social behaviour and infiltrated every aspect of court life, from pageants to the decoration of palaces. Technological advances in warfare meant that the cult of chivalry was in its last flowering, but that was not apparent in 1509.

Henry VIII himself, although a typical Renaissance prince, was

passionately committed to the principles of the mediaeval knightly code, and expected his courtiers to be so too. He was fascinated by the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, although it was not until the Reformation that he impressed his imagined descent from Arthur into the service of justifying his definition of England as an empire.

Henry's view of himself as a knight errant had a profound effect upon his treatment of women. Since the twelfth century, the art of courtly love had governed social interaction between aristocratic men and women, and it had enjoyed a revival at the court of Burgundy. A knight was permitted to pay his addresses to a lady who was usually above him in rank and perhaps married – in theory, unattainable. In the elaborate courtship dance that followed, she would be the mistress – not usually in the physical sense – and he the unswervingly devoted servant. He would wear her favour in the tournament, compose verses in her honour, ply her with gifts imbued with symbolic meaning, or engage in conversations rich with witty innuendo. Word-play between lovers was very popular at the Tudor court, with each adopting ciphers comprised of initial letters. When Henry VIII wrote to Anne Boleyn, he often ended his letters with a cipher, enclosing her initials within a heart. Jewellery in the form of ciphers was common.

Simple courtly games such as Blind Man's Buff, Post and Pillar, Prisoner's Base, shuttlecock and fortune-telling had a hidden code of their own in the game of courtly love, while love itself was a common theme in court entertainments, poetry and songs; every St Valentine's Eve, each lady of the court would hold a lottery to choose a partner for the next day, and he was supposed to buy her a gift. Being in love was the fashion, but it was a world away from the realities of the marriage market.

Real affection was not always involved in courtly love, for it was sometimes the lady's favour and kindness, expressed through profitable patronage, that the knight sought to attain. Although physical fulfilment was not its prime object, courtly love was often the occasion for adultery. Henry VIII's courtships were conducted according to its rules, but the King was a man like any other and governed by sexual imperatives.

Katherine of Aragon exerted a civilising influence upon the social life of the court. Her presence pre-empted any vulgar behaviour. She expected her ladies to behave as decorously as she did, forbade any vain amusements in her household,[48] and admitted to her circle members of the older nobility, who provided a counterbalance to the high-spirited young men of the King's entourage. Together with the King, she worked hard to create the semblance, if not the reality, of a virtuous environment.

5
'A Perfect Builder of Pleasant Palaces'

The setting for magnificence was the royal palaces, which were often built on a large scale and deliberately designed or refurbished with a view to emphasising the majesty and power of the sovereign, since any house where the King took up residence became, for the duration of his visit, the seat of government. The royal palaces also provided a suitable backdrop for court ceremonials and space for entertaining and lodging large numbers of people.[1]

Henry VIII was to own more houses than any other English monarch. Most were in London and the Home Counties, while the most important palaces were situated on the banks of the River Thames so as to facilitate easy access by barge to London and Westminster. Many of the other houses were located near the royal parks or chases.

Unfortunately, little remains today to testify to the sheer splendour of these Tudor palaces. The most extensive remains are at Hampton Court, where some of Henry VIII's state rooms and service quarters survive, but even these have been remodelled over the centuries. During the last few years, however, detailed archaeological surveys of some of the palaces have been made, along with several comprehensive studies of the King's building accounts, with the result that far more is known than hitherto about these vanished residences.

In the sixteenth century, there were two kinds of royal house: the 'greater houses', which were the most magnificent and where 'hall was kept', meaning that the whole court could be accommodated, and its servants fed in the great hall; and the 'lesser houses', with smaller capacity, which were often used as progress houses or hunting lodges. Sometimes the King would set up court in one of the greater houses and then retreat with a few companions and servants to a nearby lesser house in search of greater privacy.

From his predecessors, Henry inherited seven greater houses:

Westminster Palace, the Tower of London, Greenwich Palace, Richmond Palace, Eltham Palace, Woodstock Palace and Windsor Castle.

He also inherited seventeen lesser houses. The only one in London was Baynard's Castle. In Oxfordshire there were four houses: two hunting lodges, Beckley Manor at Otmoor, and Langley Manor at Shipton-under-Wychwood, once owned by Warwick the Kingmaker, which Henry VII had rebuilt and often visited;[2] Minster Lovell Hall, confiscated from the Lovell family in 1485, but never used by Henry VIII;[3] and Ewelme, which had been the property of the de la Pole Dukes of Suffolk prior to the last Duke's attainder. In Surrey were Woking Palace and the manors of Wimbledon[4] and Byfleet, the latter once part of the duchy of Cornwall. Collyweston, Northamptonshire, had been a favourite residence of Margaret Beaufort, while Ditton, Buckinghamshire, was to become a nursery palace for Henry's daughter Mary. In Windsor Great Park was Windsor Manor,[5] and in Windsor Forest was Easthampstead Park, a house favoured by Katherine of Aragon and often used by Henry as a hunting lodge.[6] Hanworth in Middlesex was later greatly embellished and assigned in turn to Anne Boleyn and Katherine Parr. In Essex, on the border of Epping Forest, was a small hunting lodge at Wanstead, which Henry renovated before 1515;[7] and not far away was Havering, a dower house of the queens of England, now assigned to Queen Katherine. The King's House at Lyndhurst, Hampshire, was not used by any of the Tudor monarchs, but designated the headquarters of the Warden of the New Forest. Lastly, Tickenhill Manor at Bewdley, Worcestershire, was where Prince Arthur and Katherine of Aragon had spent much of their short married life.

Henry VIII's inheritance also included fourteen mediaeval castles. Berkhamsted Castle in Buckinghamshire had not been used since the death in 1495 of Henry's great-grandmother, Cecily Neville, Duchess of York, and was falling into ruin.[8] Rochester Castle in Kent dated from Norman times, but when the King stayed in the city en route for Dover, he preferred to stay at nearby Rochester Priory. Also in Kent was Leeds Castle, another dower house of the queens of England, and Dover, Castle, fortified and refurbished by Edward IV, and boasting luxurious royal apartments decorated with painted royal leopards and fleurs-de-lys; Henry VIII stayed here several times. Higham Ferrers Castle, Northamptonshire, had been owned by the Dukes of Lancaster, but Henry VIII pulled it down in 1533 and used its stones to embellish Kimbolton, whither Katherine of Aragon had been banished. Also in Northamptonshire was Fotheringhay Castle, a former stronghold of the House of York, but now decaying. At Hertford was a Norman castle which Henry VIII would renovate as a residence for his children,

believing that the air there was healthy – something he was very fussy about.[9] Warwick Castle, built in the thirteenth century, was – and still is – a massive fortress;[10] Henry never stayed there, but he had the fortifications strengthened. Four miles to the north was Kenilworth Castle, extensively rebuilt in the fourteenth century by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster; Henry V had built there a 'pretty banqueting house of timber' in a moated garden,[11] which Henry VIII demolished, replacing it with a timber 'pleasaunce' in the Base Court.[12] Nothing remains of this today. Ludgershall Castle in Wiltshire dated from the twelfth century, but the King maintained only a small hunting lodge there. The towering fortress of Ludlow in Shropshire served as the administrative centre for the government of Wales; Prince Arthur had died there in 1502. Likewise, fourteenth-century Sheriff Hutton Castle in Yorkshire was the administrative centre for the North of England.[13] Also in Yorkshire was Pontefract Castle, dating from the twelfth century, where Richard II had been murdered in 1400.[14] Much of Sudeley Castle, Gloucestershire, dated from the fifteenth century, when it had been embellished by Richard III.[15]

Henry VIII showed little interest in most of these castles; they were old-fashioned, inconvenient, and largely redundant. He preferred his newer, unfortified residences, with their emphasis on comfort and style.

Henry also owned the remains of the old palace of the Plantagenets at Clarendon, Wiltshire, which was never used by any of the Tudors and was in ruins by the reign of Elizabeth. Another mediaeval palace was that of the Black Prince at Kennington, two miles south of London Bridge. Katherine of Aragon had briefly stayed there in 1501, but the palace was demolished in 1531, and its stones used to build Whitehall. Finally, there were the ruins of the Savoy Palace on the Strand, once a fabulous residence owned by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, but burned down by the mob in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and never rebuilt. Henry VII had left funds for the building of a hospital on the site, but his plans were never carried out. The Savoy Chapel, like Westminster Abbey a royal peculiar, was completed in 1517, but has since been rebuilt.

Henry VIII was 'a perfect builder of pleasant palaces',[16] 'the only phoenix of his time for fine and curious masonry'.[17] Such palaces 'as he erected (for he was nothing inferior in this trade to Hadrian the Emperor and Justinian the Lawgiver) excell all the rest that he found standing in this realm; they are a perpetual precedent unto those that come after. Certes, masonry did never better flourish in England than in his time'.[18]

Henry was very interested in architecture and open to new ideas. There were no architects as such in those days, and most property

owners designed their own houses with help from surveyors, master masons and 'masters of the works'.[19] Henry appointed an Italian, John of Padua, to be deviser of his buildings at a wage of 2s. (£30) a day, but it is clear that he was just one of many experts who had a hand in designing the palaces. The names of several other master craftsmen employed by the King are recorded; they were provided with drawing offices at all the main royal building sites, notably Greenwich, Whitehall and Hampton Court.[20] Henry could draw up his own very competent building plans, keeping such plans as well as drawing instruments – scissors, compasses, drawing irons and a steel pen – in his closet at Greenwich,[21] and he would often ask for plans or reports while a house was being built.[22] Sometimes he would visit a site to inspect work in progress, and he was active in managing the workforce. Any workman, be he carpenter, mason, plumber or labourer, could be impressed to work for the King at any time, even if he was engaged upon another project.

The King was a demanding employer. He was impatient to see his houses finished, and often insisted that the men worked through the night by candle-light in order to keep to the punishing schedule he set. He had canvas tents erected over the scaffolding so that work could continue during bad weather.[23] Once, at midnight, he provided beer, bread and cheese to labourers standing deep in mud, digging foundations in wet weather.[24]

During the second half of his reign Henry was to embark on an extravagant programme of building and acquiring property: some of his houses came via Acts of Attainder (which confiscated a traitor's property), exchange or the Dissolution of the Monasteries, while most he purchased. When he died he owned over seventy residences, on which he had spent over £170,000 (£51 million).[25] A huge share of this money had paid for repairs and maintenance.[26]

Henry's houses were built essentially in the English late Perpendicular style with Burgundian-influenced embellishments, such as the use of brick or terracotta. Before long, the impact of the Italian Renaissance would manifest itself in 'antique' ornamental motifs. The chief distinguishing features of the Tudor palace were the multi-storeyed gatehouse with crenellated turrets, bay windows with stone mullions, and tall chimney-pots. Most were constructed on a courtyard, or multi-court, plan, like the Burgundian palaces. Glass was still mainly to be seen only in well-to-do homes and in churches: the proliferation of windows with decorated and stained glass in the King's houses proclaimed his wealth and exalted status.

Every palace was lavishly adorned with the royal arms, heraldic badges, initials, mottoes and other emblems, executed in stone, terracotta, glass

and paint in the manner of the period: on the exterior these were to be seen above doorways, on walls and weather-vanes, and in windows. This was the great age of decorated glass; hardly any survives from Henry's palaces, but the evidence suggests that figural glass was restricted to the chapels and that heraldic glass was used for the other rooms.

These motifs were a recurrent theme in interior decoration also, and appeared on jewellery, plate, furniture, fabrics and servants' liveries. Heraldry was an international code, fully understood by the upper classes – Henry VIII was an expert in this field – and in an age when many people could not read, such powerful symbolism proclaimed triumphantly to the world the identity of a house's owner; in the case of the King, it served as architectural propaganda emphasising his ancient lineage and reinforcing the royal image and authority in the minds of his subjects. During this period, it became fashionable for the upper classes to proclaim their loyalty to the monarch by decorating their own houses with the royal arms and emblems, often in anticipation or commemoration of a royal visit. However, given Henry VIII's frequent marriages, these decorations often had to be changed.

The masons who built the Tudor palaces were English, but many of the craftsmen who adorned them were Flemings – or 'Doche' (Dutch), as they were known – who usually worked as glaziers, and Italians, who were responsible chiefly for sculptural decoration. Foreign craftsmen were greatly resented; they were not allowed to join the English craft guilds, and three Acts were passed in Henry's reign limiting their activities. Members of the royal House were specifically exempted from observing these restrictions, so the King was free to employ whom he liked.

The royal palaces were built to a set plan that changed during the course of Henry VIII's reign in order to meet the King's increasing desire for privacy and his conviction that familiarity bred contempt. Until the fourteenth century, kings had lived, eaten and slept in the great hall and chamber; life had been communal with little concept of privacy. Throughout the fifteenth century, however, these arrangements had gradually changed, as had the design of royal palaces in order to accommodate the changes, and it was now the custom for the King to act out his public role in a series of increasingly elaborate state rooms yet be able to retreat into smaller, more intimate rooms to eat and sleep or enjoy some privacy in the company of his wife or his favoured gentlemen. Even here, however, he was never alone, and his most intimate functions were attended to by his gentlemen. For other courtiers, and to a greater extent for household servants, privacy was an elusive luxury or non-existent.

The King and Queen had separate sets of apartments, often a mirror image of each other, which were known as the King's Side and the Queen's Side. Each included a presence (or audience) chamber, a privy chamber, a bedchamber, and usually further private chambers. Early in the reign, following the Burgundian precedent copied by Edward IV and Henry VII, these lodgings were stacked one above the other in a central donjon. The King's apartments were often built on the south side of the palace, which enjoyed more sunshine.

The King's state apartments consisted of a sequence of three rooms: two outward chambers – the great watching chamber or guard room, and the presence chamber – and one inward chamber, the privy chamber. The outward chambers were public, the inner private. To begin with, these state rooms were accessed from the great hall, and/or approached by a processional or ceremonial stair, and entry to them depended on how much in favour a courtier was with the King. Only the most favoured ever got as far as the privy chamber.

The great hall, although built to impress and sometimes used for large-scale entertainments, served first and foremost as a dining room for the household servants, who ate at trestle tables which were taken down after use. Only during the early years of his reign did the King feast here, at the great festivals of the year. By Tudor times, thanks to the increasing desire of monarchs and nobles for privacy, the great hall was declining rapidly in importance; Henry VIII's magnificent hall at Hampton Court was the last one built in England.

The great watching chamber, or guard room, often led off the great hall. In this room, hung with tapestries and furnished with buffets laden with gold plate, the Yeomen of the Guard stood on duty. Any courtier or servant was allowed to frequent this room, which also functioned as a venue for court entertainments or ceremonies, as a dining room for the nobility, Councillors, ambassadors and chief officers of the household,[27] and as an antechamber for those awaiting an audience with the monarch. There was often a pages' chamber attached to the great watching chamber, where courtiers could put on robes of estate before proceeding to the presence chamber to be ennobled by the King. At night, pages and Esquires of the Chamber slept on the floor of the watching chamber on straw pallets.

A door led from the great watching chamber into the presence chamber, or what we would now call the throne room. It was dominated by a great chair of estate on a dais, surmounted by a rich canopy of estate, which faced the door; no one 'of whatsoever degree' might 'come nigh the King's chair nor stand under the cloth of estate'.[28] This was the room where the sovereign held court, received ambassadors and dined in state. When he was not present, courtiers

might frequent the room, but had to doff their caps and bow to the empty throne as they passed. The presence chamber was often the most richly furnished and decorated room in the palace, and certainly the most formal and ceremonial of the state rooms. As Henry's reign progressed, more and more people were permitted access to it, and it consequently declined in importance. As a result, its functions would in time shift to the privy chamber.

The privy chamber, the King's inner sanctum, was separated by a short passage from the presence chamber. Here he conducted his private life, usually took his meals, worked on state business, or relaxed. Access to this room and those behind it was strictly controlled: only the members of the Privy Chamber department and the King's Councillors had right of entry. Others had to wait for an invitation.

The privy chamber was usually a medium-sized room lavishly furnished with vivid tapestries, floor carpets and a chair of estate. In the privy chamber at Greenwich there were also

> a breakfast table of walnut tree, a round table covered with black velvet, a square table, a cupboard of wainscot, three joined forms with three stools, a table and a pair of trestles, a clock, a painted table,[29] a standing glass of steel, a branch of flowers wrought upon wire, three comb cases of bone, four little coffers for jewels, a chair of joined work, one pair of regals[30] with a case, one pair of tables of bone and wood[31] in a case of leather, a pair of gridirons, a fire shovel and a fire fork.[32]

The Privy Chamber was one of the two power centres of the court (the other being the Privy Council). Its staff were the King's intimates; they were his chosen companions and performed every personal service for him, so they were in a strong position to influence political affairs and act as Henry's chief advisers.

Beyond the privy chamber was usually a small complex of inner chambers or privy lodgings which varied in size and number, depending on the dimensions of the palace. Often lined with timber linenfold panelling and therefore somewhat dark, they included at least one bedchamber, a garderobe or 'stool chamber', a 'withdrawing room', a 'raying' or robing chamber, a closet or oratory, and perhaps a study, library or bathroom. These rooms later became known as the 'secret lodgings',[33] and they were usually linked by a privy stair or gallery to the Queen's apartments. The only courtier officially allowed entry to the privy lodgings was the Groom of the Stool, who was head of the Privy Chamber department.

Henry VIII's formal bedchamber contained his massive bed of estate,

but he normally slept in a second bedchamber beyond it. At Greenwich and Hampton Court he had a third bedchamber, on the Queen's Side. Each of his bedchambers had a garderobe leading off it, and some also had a study next door. Comparatively little is known about Henry's bedchambers because of the high degree of privacy he achieved.

Most privy lodgings had at least one closet. Closets were used either for storage or for business, or they were fitted out as oratories where the King could perform his private devotions; such a closet at Hampton Court had a painted altarpiece,[34] while the King's 'privy closet' there was used as a study and furnished with cupboards, tables, boxes, chests and a clock.[35] In other closets, curios and objets d'art were displayed in glass cabinets. At Greenwich, one closet had coffers and chests crammed with such items.[36] Closets might also serve as libraries in the lesser houses.

Henry took a keen interest in planning the gardens around his palaces and stocking them with rare and beautiful plants.[37] There were fewer varieties of flowers in England then; roses were naturally a particular favourite, and the damask rose is said to have been introduced into the country by Thomas Linacre, Henry's physician.[38] Among other flowers to be found were lilies, violets, primroses, gilliflowers, columbines, lavender and daffodils, as well as a large variety of herbs which were used in cooking and for medicines. None of the Tudor royal gardens survive, but we know they were formal in design and initially mediaeval in style. The King's privy gardens were usually accessible from his privy lodgings by a private stair, and they were screened by high walls and locked to all but members of the Privy Chamber.[39]

Some gardens had lawns, others symmetrically placed flowerbeds edged with low railings or trellises and divided by a network of paths. Situated at intervals were striped poles bearing sculptures of the King's heraldic beasts; there might be a sundial[40] or trees shaped by topiary. Such a garden may be seen in the background of the portrait of Henry VIII and his family, now at Hampton Court; the setting is Whitehall Palace. One feature of the period was the 'knot garden', with square beds edged with tiles, bricks or box and containing shrubs and flowers shaped into interwoven geometrical patterns, or 'knots'. Henry VII had built such a garden at Richmond with 'royal knots, alleyed and herbed',[41] and thus set a fashion.

In many of his gardens Henry VIII built banqueting houses, as well as fountains, and arbours of brick, stone, branches or trellis, set against the wall. During his reign French Renaissance influence began to manifest itself in the royal gardens, since the King had imported most of his gardeners from France. Soon, Renaissance features such as statues, columns, spheres and urns would be introduced;[42] Renaissance gardens

were designed to please the senses and tease the intellect, so many of their decorative features had symbolic meanings. One of Henry's chief pleasures was to walk in his gardens, and in the summer he often transacted business there with favoured ministers.

Many of Henry's palaces were sketched by Anthony van Wyngaerde in the 1540s and 1550s; some were later the subjects of paintings by various artists. Although some of these pictures are now known not to be entirely accurate, they contain a wealth of detail and provide a unique visual record of these long-vanished buildings.

6
'The King's House'

Inside his palaces, Henry VIII lived in unprecedented splendour. The Tudor age was one in which outward show counted for a great deal: if you had wealth, you flaunted it. The interior decor of the period was rich, vivid, even gaudy: the walls, ceilings, tapestries and furnishings of the King's apartments gleamed with gold and bright colours; everything that could be gilded, or shot through with gold thread, was so adorned. Next in importance came silver, then baser metals. The decoration of a room was determined by its status. Everything in the King's inward and outward chambers was carefully co-ordinated to delight the eye and create a magnificent setting.

Henry VIII was determined to be at the forefront of fashion, and as the reign progressed and Renaissance influence grew stronger, the interior decoration of the palaces became increasingly European in style. After January 1516, when the term is first mentioned,[1] 'antique' decoration began to proliferate.[2] 'Antique work' was supposed to derive from the classical art and sculpture of ancient Greece and Rome, but it had a sixteenth-century quality all of its own, and it has been suggested that the word 'antique' (or 'antick', as it was often spelt) should read 'antic', because the style was whimsical and sometimes mischievous in concept.[3]

Henry VIII decorated his palaces and banqueting houses with antique ornament and motifs; such decoration was perhaps out of place in mediaeval buildings, where it sat side by side with heraldic emblems and mottoes, yet it lent Henrician interiors a Renaissance patina and rendered them unique.

One of the most popular types of antique work was 'grotesque' decoration. It derived from first-century paintings discovered in the 1490s in the grottoes (Italian, *grottesco*) on the sites of the Golden House of Nero and the baths of Titus in Rome. Grotesque decoration was

highly mannerist, extravagant and often absurd: it took the form of painted or carved borders, friezes, panels and pilasters featuring human figures, flora and fauna, weapons, masks and plates, arranged in a formal yet fantastic composition around a spinal candelabrum.[4] Such work often featured elaborate gilding. The craze for grotesque decoration reached France before 1510, but it was not until the 1520s and 1530s that it became common in Henry VIII's palaces.

The ceilings in Henry's palaces were normally flat and featured moulded fretwork with pendants; some were lavishly gilded and embellished with battens and bosses bearing colourful badges and heraldic devices. Sometimes the ground between the battens was painted or filled in with painted leather-mâché panels, as in the so-called Wolsey Closet at Hampton Court. The Whitehall family group painting mentioned in the last chapter features a battened ceiling in the antique style. Ceilings in large rooms such as halls and kitchens sometimes had exposed timbers.[5]

The walls inside the palaces were mainly of plastered brick; in utilitarian rooms they were painted, while those in important chambers were often clad with the linenfold panelling so characteristic of the age, although it is clear that more elaborate and ornate panelling, often embellished with grotesque motifs, adorned the royal apartments, as may be seen in the Whitehall family group painting. A few rooms had murals or painted grotesque work at the centre of their decorative schemes. Grotesque work also ornamented the pillars flanking the thrones in some of Henry's presence chambers.[6] Many rooms had moulded friezes and cornices. At Hampton Court there was a frieze of putti in the King's Long Gallery; some fragments are still extant.[7]

Most important rooms were hung with tapestry or fabrics, the richest being reserved for the royal apartments. Henry's sets of Italian silk hangings were amongst his most priceless possessions, while at Hampton Court he had hangings of cloth of gold and velvet embroidered with royal emblems.[8] Some hangings were fringed, some lined: they were either hung taut or in folds.

Henry VIII owned over two thousand tapestries,[9] of which about four hundred had been inherited from his father; some were extremely valuable. The display of tapestries denoted great wealth, since they were made of costly silk and wool thread dipped in expensive dyes, and each one took a team of skilled weavers three years to complete. In 1528, the King paid £1,500 (about £450,000 today) for one ten-panel set of tapestries depicting *The Life of King David*.

Twenty-eight of Henry's tapestries survive at Hampton Court. They include the ten-panel set portraying *The Story of Abraham*, which was

commissioned by Henry in the 1530s or 40s for the great hall – where it still hangs today; this set, the most expensive in his collection and woven entirely of silk and silver-gilt thread, came from Brussels and is thought to have been based on paintings or designs by the Flemish master, Bernard van Orley. Other sets, including the three panels of the *Seven Deadly Sins* and the four panels of *The Triumph of Petrarch*, had been originally owned by Cardinal Wolsey. Henry VIII also owned four sets of tapestries portraying the story of Esther, and others entitled *The Story of Youth* and *The Seven Ages*, as well as several showing hunting scenes.[10] Armorial tapestries were popular: a Flemish tapestry bearing the arms of Henry VIII is at Hever Castle.

Many early-sixteenth-century tapestries were Flemish; they were usually fashioned by master weavers and combined new classical trends with traditional chivalric themes. In 1515, however, the Italian artist Raphael set a new trend when he designed a set of tapestries, *The Acts of the Apostles*, for Pope Leo X. What was novel about them was the minute detail in Raphael's cartoons, which left no scope for improvisation by the master weavers. Unfortunately, enthusiastic patrons, anxious to follow this new method, often commissioned artists of a lesser calibre than Raphael, with the result that tapestry design deteriorated during the sixteenth century. Henry VIII managed to acquire a set of tapestries copied from Raphael's designs for the Pope, which he probably hung at Windsor Castle.[11]

Before 1542, the King commissioned for his new lodgings at Whitehall Palace another set of outstanding Brussels tapestries on a classical theme, *The Triumph of the Gods*; only two panels survive of the original seven – *The Labours of Hercules*, and *The Triumph of Bacchus*, which may be seen in William III's presence chamber at Hampton Court. Such tapestries, with their Italian mannerist designs, complemented the antique decor in the palace rooms.

Tapestries were frequently changed around, the best being displayed on state occasions; when not in use, they were stored in huge presses: one at Greenwich was fifty-five feet long.[12] The Master of the King's Great Wardrobe was responsible for their maintenance and repair. Tapestries were rubbed clean with bread, then the crumbs brushed away. They were usually hung from hooks and eyes, or nailed to battens attached to the walls.

Painted cloths, which were much cheaper than tapestries, were sometimes hung on the walls of rooms of lesser status.

Window frames and mullions were usually whitewashed, and the window bars painted red or black, as at Hampton Court.[13] Mottoes or heraldic decorations were sometimes carved or painted on the sills or in a border around the window. The windows of the King's inward

chambers were hung with curtains or blinds, often both,[14] and sometimes with tapestries or carpets. His curtains were chiefly of satin or silk stiffened with buckram; one pair was 'of purple, white and black satin paned together'.[15] The curtains were hung from gilded rings over fixed rods, while tall poles were used for drawing curtains at high windows.[16]

Miniatures in Henry VIII's Psalter,[17] which dates from around 1540, show Italian Renaissance interiors with marbled walls, columns and arched doorways and gaily tiled floors. One picture features a classically styled bed with a blue and gold tester, or canopy, and drapes. It has been suggested that these rooms are the invention of a fanciful artist, but many items – the bed itself, the floor tiles and the X-framed chair – are typical of the period, so it is possible that these rooms did exist, perhaps at Nonsuch Palace, Henry's long-vanished novelty house. The King and his family were depicted in similar classically inspired surroundings by Hans Holbein in his lost Whitehall mural.

The floors in Henry's palaces were either of oak, which might be plastered or painted to look like marble, or tiled. Those on the ground floor were often paved with brick or flagstones. Many rooms were still strewn with 'grise', rushes scented with sweet-smelling herbs such as saffron, in the mediaeval manner. These collected dirt and dust, and sweetened the air, but after a while they stank of the 'leakages of men, cats and dogs';[18] the King ordered the rushes to be renewed 'every eight to ten days',[19] and daily in the presence and privy chambers, but this did not always eliminate the smell, so the house had to be vacated for cleaning. During Henry's reign, it became customary for rush matting to be used instead of loose rushes;[20] the matting was sewn together in four-inch strips and fitted to cover the whole floor. In 1539, Master John Craddock was granted a monopoly for life to provide rush matting for all the royal houses near London.[21] A fragment of such matting was found recently under the floorboards of a former courtier lodging at Hampton Court.[22]

Carpets, usually made of wool or velvet (although the word was also used to describe any strong, durable furnishing fabric), were to be seen on the floors of the royal apartments only; they were also used to cover tables, windows, cupboards and walls. Henry VIII owned over eight hundred carpets, most of them from Turkey;[23] one or two are to be seen in full-length portraits of him. The King also had a large number of oriental rugs, or 'foot cloths', which were often placed in front of chairs of estate.[24] Carpets, like tapestries, were very costly, and therefore potent status symbols.

The royal apartments were heated by 'fire pans', movable charcoal braziers on wheels, or by hearth fires, fuelled by faggots or large logs called 'talshides', which were issued to all those entitled to bouche of

court. At Whitehall and at Greenwich there were ceramic wood-burning stoves, which had been used in Europe since the thirteenth century; green glazed earthenware tiles unearthed during excavations at Whitehall in 1939 came from one such stove; they bear the monogram 'HR', which suggests that the stoves were built for the King's use, as does the fact that the expensive sea coal that was burned in them was reserved exclusively for the royal family. The household department responsible for the purchase and supply of coal and charcoal was the Coal House.

Most rooms in the palaces had fireplaces; these were normally flush with the wall and featured a four-centred Perpendicular arch, often decorated, but those in the royal apartments could be grandiosely elaborate. Henry is known to have had Renaissance-style chimney-pieces at Whitehall, Greenwich and Hampton Court. A pair of cast-iron and polished steel gridirons, or firedogs, bearing the badges and initials of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn were once at Hever Castle, and can now be seen in the great hall at Knole in Kent. Made by Henry Romains, the King's locksmith, they would have been placed on the hearth to support burning logs. In the summer, screens were set in front of the fireplaces; Henry had a screen carved with his arms, with feet fashioned as lions, dragons and greyhounds.[25]

The palace courtyards and stairways were lit by lanterns; torches, or links, were set in iron wall-brackets or on iron cressets on poles[26] in the state apartments,[27] while candles illuminated smaller rooms. Candles were of beeswax, and expensive: those in the royal apartments alone cost £400 (£120,000) a year;[28] they were usually fixed on pricket-type or socketed candlesticks or candelabra, the latter being cross-beamed or wheel-shaped. Some candelabra were suspended from the ceiling, others were free-standing. Candlesticks were made of silver-gilt, iron, brass or latten, and those used by the King might be fashioned in the antique style.

Henry VIII's rooms were lit by quarriers, square blocks of fine beeswax with a wick,[29] while 'salad' oil was used by the King to fuel small oil lamps.[30] Cheaper candles, called 'white lights', or rush lights were used in the palace's lesser rooms and the service quarters. Each morning before nine, the servants would collect all lanterns, unfinished candle stubs and torches in the interests of preventing waste. Candles, wax and tallow were made and stored in the Chandlery, under the supervision of the Serjeant of the Chandlery, assisted by three Yeomen and a Page. Because of the high cost of heating and lighting, the court went to bed earlier in the winter than in the summer.

There was relatively little furniture in Henry VIII's palaces; space had to

be made for the hordes of people who came to court, so most furniture was strictly utilitarian. It was generally solid, but roughly fashioned, usually by the Office of Works, and the chief material was oak. Items designated for the royal apartments might be decorated with panels carved with crude mediaeval designs; only after c1540 did Renaissance-style carvings begin to replace them. The Royal Wardrobe was the department responsible for providing furniture for the King's houses.

The finest furniture was naturally to be found in the royal chambers. The most important pieces comprised the furniture of estate used by the King – his chairs of estate, his beds and his buffets. His furniture was sacrosanct: no one else was allowed to sit on the throne, 'nor to lean upon the King's bed, nor to approach the cupboard where the King's cushion is laid, nor to stand upon his carpet'.[31]

Hardly any of Henry's furniture survives, but contemporary sources give some idea of what it was like. His many chairs of estate were made in the typical X-frame design of the period,[32] upholstered in velvet or cloth of gold with gilt nails,[33] and provided with a braided and tasselled cushion and perhaps a footstool. The chair of estate was set on a dais beneath a sparver, or canopy of estate, made of cloth of gold, damask or velvet, with a canopy comprising a tester and ceiler, perhaps trimmed and tasselled with Venice gold;[34] its dorsal, the section hanging down the wall, might be embroidered with the royal arms or cipher and Tudor roses. The King's cushion was carried before him in processions, and any seat it was placed on became a chair of estate – the seat of royal authority.[35] Henry VIII's first Great Seal shows him on a mediaeval throne, but by 1542, when his third Great Seal was made, it was common for his chairs of estate to be embellished with intricate antique carvings in the Renaissance style.[36]

The Queen would sit on a smaller chair, equally lavishly appointed, with a lower canopy.[37] Chairs of any other sort were scarce, and along with a few settles were reserved for those of higher rank. Everyone else sat on stools, in the inward chambers, or on benches, in the outward chambers. No one apart from the Queen sat in the presence of the King, except by invitation.

A person's wealth was often measured by the number of beds he owned: because of their carved decoration and sets of rich hangings, beds were usually the most valuable pieces of furniture anyone could own, and were frequently bequeathed in wills. Henry VIII possessed many rich beds. One at Windsor was eleven feet square and had a gold and silver canopy with silken hangings;[38] a similar bed had belonged to Henry VII. Another was a 'great rich bedstead' inherited from Wolsey: it had gilt posts, four boules bearing cardinals' hats, a tester of red satin embroidered with roses, garters and portcullises, and a valance of white