

Jane Seymour

1509 – 24 October 1537



Jane was the eldest of the eight children of Sir John Seymour of Wolf Hall, Savernake, Wiltshire and his wife Margaret, daughter of Sir John Wentworth of Nettlestead, Suffolk.

According to court gossip and an inscription on a miniature by Nicholas Hilliard she was born about 1509, probably at Wolf Hall.

There is unsupported evidence that as a young woman Jane was a maid of honour to Mary, queen of Louis XII of France, who was Henry VIII's sister. She was subsequently appointed as lady in waiting to Catherine of Aragon and, on Catherine's divorce, to the same role with Anne Boleyn.

She was described as of middle stature, of no great beauty, of pale complexion and commended for her intelligence. In February 1536, Henry VIII was writing to her with dishonourable proposals as well as money which Jane returned to him with the comment that her honour was her fortune. It appears that Jane was only prepared to withstand his suggestions unless she was his wife. It was his anxiety to set Jane in Anne's place that ensured that legal proceedings were taken against the latter. Jane at this time kept herself removed from the king outside London.

Before 15 May 1536, the date of Anne Boleyn's trial, Jane moved to a house on the Thames and was brought news of Anne's condemnation and beheading four days later. It is understood that Archbishop Cranmer issued a dispensation for the marriage that day and the betrothal took place the following morning. Between this time and the 29th May when the couple arrived in London, it is thought that they spent time at her father's estate in Wiltshire.

In July of that year, Parliament had invested the succession to the throne to Jane's children, excluding Princesses Mary and Elizabeth. Jane's coronation was due to take place at Michaelmas (29th September) but it was deferred and the rumour was that it would not take place until she had given birth. In March the following year, it was announced that she was pregnant and the coronation was again deferred. On Friday 12th October 1537 she gave birth to Edward, afterwards Edward VI. Her health at first did not cause anxiety but the excitement of attending the christening and, it was said, owing to a cold and poor diet, she died about midnight on Wednesday 24th October at Hampton Court Palace.

Henry was present at her death and was genuinely sorrowful, wearing mourning for her which he did not do for any of his other wives. Jane's body was embalmed and lay in state at Hampton Court before being buried in the choir of St George's Chapel at Windsor.