

# Mary Queen of Scots



ANTONIA  
FRASER

methuen



## Mary Queen of Scots

Mary Queen of Scots, undoubtedly one of the most romantic figures of British history, has always captured the popular imagination. Married to the Dauphin to become Queen of France at the age of sixteen, Mary was widowed less than two years later. She then returned to Scotland as Queen after an absence of thirteen years, only to plunge into a maelstrom of intrigue as she clashed with the unruly Scottish nobility and the Calvinist firebrand John Knox. Her fatal marriage to Darnley, his mysterious murder and her subsequent marriage to Bothwell, the chief suspect, mark her as one of the most explosively passionate women ever to brand their names in the annals of history. Her eventual execution set the seal on her tragic, flamboyant career. Lady Antonia Fraser's best-selling biography provides an immensely readable and moving answer to the question: 'what was Mary Queen of Scots really like?'

*Mary Queen of Scots* won the James Tait Black Prize and was an international bestseller, being translated into eight languages. Lady Antonia Fraser is the author of two other historical biographies: *Cromwell Our Chief of Men* (1973) and *King Charles II* (1979), both bestsellers in Britain and the United States. *The Weaker Vessel: Woman's Lot in Seventeenth-Century England* (1984) won the Wolfson Prize for History. She has written five mysteries featuring Jemima Shore, Investigator. Antonia Fraser is married to Harold Pinter.

The front cover shows a detail from a portrait of Mary Queen of Scots by an unknown artist, c. 1560–5 (National Portrait Gallery, London).

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*Biography*

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**MARY**  
**Queen of Scots**

**ANTONIA FRASER**



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*to Hugh, with love and thanks*

**'A King is history's slave.**

**History, that is the unconscious general swarm-life of mankind, uses every moment of the life of kings, as a tool for its own purposes.'**

***Tolstoy***

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## Author's Note

I had two principal aims when I began to write this biography. First, being possessed since childhood by a passion for the subject of Mary Queen of Scots, I wished to test for myself the truth or falsehood of the many legends which surround her name. In order to tear away these cobwebs – or in certain cases reverently replace them – I delved into as many published and unpublished sources as I could discover, taking as my starting-point Mary's own letters and the calendars of state papers (although of course there may well be some sources of which I was unhappily ignorant). Secondly, for the sake of the general reader, I hoped to set Mary anew in the context of the age in which she lived. In the course of my own inquiries I was surprised to discover that despite the enormous quantity of research on the sixteenth century published during the last fifty years, radically changing our attitudes to certain of its aspects, no general life of Mary has yet appeared, taking it all into account. There have been detailed treatments of certain episodes in her life – notably that of the Kirk o'Field murder and the Casket Letters, and later the Babington Plot – and Stefan Zweig's fascinating psychological interpretation, written in the thirties. But the last full-length biography, giving documentation, was that of T. F. Henderson in 1905. So in the end my two aims converged, and I found myself with the single objective of showing, with as much accuracy as is possible in the light of modern research, what Mary Queen of Scots must have been like as a person.

In the interests of clarity, I have not entered into the various complications of dating in the sixteenth century, i.e. I have ignored the fact that the calendar year was held to start on 25th March during this period, and have used the modern



style of dates starting on 1st January throughout. I have also ignored the ten days' difference between English and European dates in the period of the Babington Plot, due to the fact that the adjustment to the Gregorian calendar was not made in England until the eighteenth century; and, in order to avoid confusion, have given the dates of letters coming from abroad as if they originated in England.

With regard to Scots words and spelling, the documents both in Scots and French – notably Queen Mary's own letters, which were nearly always written in French – I have translated, adapted to modern spelling, and in certain cases, paraphrased the text, as it seemed to me necessary to make the meaning clear to the general reader today.

It will be found that sums of money relevant to Scotland are given in pounds Scots and those concerning England in pounds sterling – the pound Scots being worth roughly one-quarter of the pound sterling in this period.

The task of writing such a book – covering ground well-trodden by scholars of the present, as of previous generations – would not have been possible without the benefit of their works, which are listed in the bibliography, and whose assistance I gratefully acknowledge. I was also fortunate enough to be able to draw upon the advice of a number of people, whose suggestions concerning the lines of research to pursue were a major contribution to my book (although the conclusions drawn are of course all my own). In the first place I should like to thank Sir James Fergusson of Kilkerran, Keeper of the Register House, Edinburgh, for valuable advice over reading-matter as well as guidance in researches within the Register House itself; Sir Iain Moncrieffe of that Ilk on whose encyclopaedic knowledge of Scottish history I frequently drew; Archbishop David Mathew for advice and encouragement at an early stage; and Father Francis Edwards S.J., Archivist of the English Society of Jesus, for advice and help in researches within the Farm Street Library, including the opportunity to use the notes of the late Fr. J. H. Pollen.

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*September 1968*

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*Eilean Aigas, Beauly, Inverness-shire*





# The English

showing the position of Mary Queen of Scots and

**HENRY VII**  
1485-1509

James IV (1 = Margaret Tudor = 2) Archibald  
of Scotland 6th Earl of Angus

James V  
= of Scotland  
Mary of  
Guise

Lady Margaret  
= Douglas  
= Mathew  
Earl of Lennox

**MARY  
TUDOR**  
b. 1516  
1553-1558

Mary Queen  
of Scots  
b. 1542. d. 1587

Henry  
= Lord Darnley  
b. 1546. d. 1567

Lord Charles Stuart  
= Earl of Lennox  
Elizabeth Cavendish  
daughter of Bess of Hardwicke  
Countess of Shrewsbury

**JAMES I** b. 1566  
1603-1625  
(James VI of Scotland)

Arbella Stuart  
b. 1575