



Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon before-Papal Legates at Blackfriars, 1529 by Frank O. Salisbury 1910

# Catherine of Aragon *an expat Queen of England*



As expats, most of us have to learn to adapt very quickly to new customs, traditions and values of our new country, without mentioning the obstacles that a different language can bring. That was exactly what Catherine of Aragon did, and with such grace that she became one of the most loved queens of England, past and present.

At Peterborough Cathedral, where she is buried, every year they celebrate a festival to honour her life. The inscription on her tomb reads: "A queen cherished by the English people for her loyalty, piety, courage and compassion." Even though the festival has passed, I would like to celebrate her with this article.

Aged only three, Catherine was betrothed to Arthur, Prince of Wales and her destiny changed to that of Queen of England. Her education and training in how to fulfil such a job started nearly immediately. But, unfortunately, she was only taught basic English, the belief being that Latin was sufficient to move around the court.

*Portrait of a noblewoman 1502, thought to be a young Catherine of Aragon by Michael Sittow. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.*





When she arrived at Plymouth in 1501, she could hardly speak or understand any English. This made her first years in England quite difficult. Arthur died five months later and Catherine was subsequently married to Arthur's younger brother Henry VIII. On top of that, Catherine was made to feel unwelcome due to the population not supporting the marriage as they thought that she might favour Spanish affairs.

But she was strong and educated with a lot of training in how to be a queen. With time, she managed to adapt and learn to love England. Her loyalty to her new country was shown while the king was in France when, as Queen Regent, Catherine fought and won the Battle of Flodden against the Scottish. This was a turning point for her popularity and from that moment on it only increased.

During the following 20 years, Catherine was happily married to Henry but they never had a son and the possibilities to have one with Catherine were quite low. For Henry, it was almost an obsession to have a male heir to the throne. So when Henry fell in love with Anne Boleyn and she promised him what he wanted, a son, he became determined to find a way to dissolve his union with Catherine and marry Anne. For Anne and Henry to be legally married, the Pope had to declare Catherine and Henry's

marriage null and void. The son had to be legitimate if he was to become the Prince of Wales.

Henry's determination to get rid of Catherine was a big blow for her, and she opposed the annulment with all her might until she died. She decided to fight for what she perceived as righteousness and the future of her daughter Mary, even if she was lonely and surrounded by powerful men in court and counsellors that had to obey Henry. He was the King, Catherine was just his 'foreigner' wife.

This fight made Henry separate from Rome to get the divorce he so desired. He named himself the head of a new religion, the Church of England. The English Reformation started and those who didn't bow to it were punished.

Catherine was banished from court and sent away to live in very poor conditions. But what hurt her the most was the fact that she was forbidden to have any contact with her daughter. Henry didn't allow Mary to go to Kimbolton Castle to be at her dying mother's bedside. She wasn't even allowed to attend her funeral.

### Why such persistence from Catherine?

Catherine was thinking about her daughter, who was by then Princess of Wales and the future Queen of England by her own right. If her marriage was annulled, as Henry wanted, Mary would be declared illegitimate and consequently not recognised as heiress to the throne of England anymore. Unfortunately, this was what happened to Mary.

Catherine had been an obedient and loyal wife. The fact that Anne infatuated Henry was not a good enough reason to divorce or annul their marriage. He had mistresses before, he even had an extra-marital child, but she never complained about it. The English people loved her, especially women. Every time she showed herself in public, they shouted their support to her and called her Queen even if it was forbidden. Mary, who always supported her mother, was also cheered when she went out. Catherine also had the support of her nephew, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor.





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### Catherine, more than just a Queen

Her enemy Thomas Cromwell once said that “God and nature wronged in not making her (Catherine) a man”. Her courage, he said, meant “she would have surpassed in glory and fame all the great princes”.

I admire Catherine, not only because of her fight for what she thought was right (or stubbornness for some), but because for her education was paramount, including the education of women and especially the education of her daughter. She commissioned a book by Juan Luis Vives titled *The Education of a Christian Woman* dedicated to Mary. In this book, Vives promotes education for women. Great scholars like Thomas More, Erasmus and Vives were her friends, and some even lost their lives to defend her cause. Her fine education was put to good use as the first female ambassador at the English Court in Europe, a role she fulfilled remarkably. Furthermore, she was also a charitable woman, creating programmes to help the most disadvantaged.

Catherine died wondering if she had been good enough for England. Known as the Pomegranate Queen, she fulfilled her role as Queen of England as a loyal, principled, humble and charitable person – a woman who fought for what she thought was right in a foreign land surrounded by enemies. She had the respect and admiration her fellow countrymen in both Spain and England.



Ana Biosca runs Walk Lingua. Her tours are a fun and informal way of improving your Spanish language as well as learning about the rich historical and cultural connections between England and Spain. If you'd like to book or find out more call Ana on 07771786634 or email at [info@walklingua.com](mailto:info@walklingua.com)

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