

May 2023



Dear Club Members,

May 2023 marks the 490th anniversary of the dissolution of the marriage between Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. It's the beginning of a time of huge change in the British Isles affecting the way in which normal people lived their daily lives. Henry's desire to end a marriage that had left him with no living male heir led to a cascading series of events, and a period of time which is continually revisited in fiction, film, and documentary. As a result I'm not going to focus on the marriage, but on Catherine (or Katherine as she was known in her lifetime) as a person in her own right. She was far more than simply the woman who couldn't give Henry a son. She served as regent in her own right whilst Henry was in France, and was renowned as a scholar. Even her enemy Thomas Cromwell said of her, "If not for her sex, she could have defied all the heroes of History."

She also commissioned a book entitled *The Education of a Christian Woman* by Juan Luis Vives. In it the argument is made that all women have a right to an education, and that progress in this area was essential for the good of society and the state. She was also a patron of renaissance humanism. The definition has changed slightly over the centuries, unlike modern humanists these people were still Christians, but they focused on attempting to purify and renew Christianity. By studying source material they aimed to do away with the complexities that had developed in Medieval Christianity. They also campaigned for a more educated population, and a state where the citizens were able to speak and write eloquently and clearly, so they could be more involved with civic life. This was a movement led by the ultra elite, books after all were still precious things, even though the rise of the printing press started to increase access to books, for most the only book they would see was the bible in their local church (the question of the language to be used in that bible, English or Latin continued to be a source of conflict throughout the rest of Henry's rule).

Symbolism was hugely important in Tudor England, the Tudors had adopted the Tudor rose combining the red and white of Lancaster and York to symbolise that Henry VII the Lancastrian heir had married Elizabeth of York, their children united the warring branches of the English royal family, and in Tudor palaces the double rose symbol was common. Katherine had her own symbol, the pomegranate. a reminder of her Spanish ancestry and the diplomatic links she brought to the marriage, but also it was a symbol of what it was hoped she would bring to the marriage. The pomegranate had been used a symbol of fertility long before Christianity, and in common with many other again symbols was adopted by the church. In Greek Mythology Hades binds Persephone to the underworld for 6 months of the year because she eats 6 seeds from a pomegranate whilst in the Underworld.

Katherine died in 1536 aged just 47, three years after her marriage was annulled, the final years of her life were ones of isolation, cut off from her daughter, her faith remained as a great comfort to her. She was buried in Peterborough Cathedral, where people still leave pomegranates on her tomb. Despite the annulment her symbol remained all over many royal palaces in carvings, and in books and manuscripts.

Happy Spinning

Katie

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67% Superfine Merino, 33% Mulberry Silk

Further Reading-

<https://nerdalicious.com.au/books/royal-library-the-rose-and-pomegranate-henry-viii-and-katherine-of-aragon/>

<https://tudortreasures.net/katherine-of-aragons-pomegranate-emblem/>

<https://bathabbeyheritage.wordpress.com/2020/03/09/pomegranates-symbol-of-fertility-richness-and-the-worlds-abundance/>

<https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/surprising-pomegranate-facts>