

## YEARS OF DESTINY

### THREE KINGDOMS STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF A CHILD QUEEN



STIRLING  
CASTLE

In the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century three nations were using their military and political might to decide the fate of one small girl in the royal palace at Stirling. The king of France and regent of Scotland both wanted the five-year-old Mary, Queen of Scots to be wed to their sons. Edward VI, boy king of England, wanted her for himself.

Stirling Castle's defences had been strengthened in case of attack. But a more insidious enemy threatened those inside – plague broke out in the town below. These are the times that visitors will enter when they cross the threshold and go into the refurbished palace. Costumed interpreters will reveal the stories of the people who lived within the castle walls and of the monarchs, nobles and armies that struggled for control of the child queen and her country. Listed below are some of the key figures of this turbulent period.

#### • King James V

The central figure in the original palace project was King James V who, in 1538, gave instructions for it to be built. Even though he was a young man in his 20s, the unfortunate monarch was dead just four years later. He came to the throne at just one year old (he was born on 10 April, 1512) after his father, James IV, was killed fighting the English at Flodden in 1513. The defeat, on 9 September, was a disaster for Scotland because many of leading nobles were wiped out. James V was crowned just weeks later at the old Chapel Royal at Stirling Castle on 21 September. His mother Margaret married Archibald Douglas, sixth earl of Angus, in 1514.

The Duke of Albany, backed by French troops, was regent of the country for much of James' childhood. In 1526 James, aged 14, tried to take personal control of the kingdom. But Douglas, now estranged from Margaret, kidnapped the king and held him captive while trying to corrupt him and win his confidence. After escaping in 1528 James finally managed to seize the reins of power – taking revenge on his former captors. He later became famed for disguising himself as a poor man and going out among his ordinary subjects. The king also had a number of mistresses and fathered at least nine illegitimate children before his first marriage.

Aiming to reinforce the Auld Alliance James wed Madeleine of France. But the

sickly bride died in 1537, probably of TB, just weeks after arriving in Scotland. The following year he married again, this time to the widow Mary de Guise, a French noblewoman. Mary bore him two sons but both died in infancy. However, James was a young, vigorous king and the future seemed hopeful. But conflict flared with England and the Scots were defeated at Solway Moss on 24, November 1542. Shortly afterwards the king, who had not been at the battle, took to his bed ill. News arrived that Mary de Guise had given birth, to a daughter not a son. James died six days later on 14, December, reputedly believing the Stewart dynasty was at an end.

- **Mary de Guise**

As the widow of James V she had special influence as Scotland's dowager queen – Scotland was highly dependent on French military and financial support. But as a politically astute noblewoman, from one of the most powerful families in France, she fought hard to displace the regent and take control of government. Mary (1515-60) was a committed Catholic vigorously opposed the rise of Scottish Protestantism – all the more so after the assassination of her ally cardinal Beaton.

- **James Hamilton, Earl of Arran**

Regent after James V's death and next in line to the throne after Mary, Queen of Scots he is often accused of wanting it for himself. Some see him as a weak ruler, who risked selling out the young queen and the whole kingdom to King Henry VIII and his heir Edward VI – until he had the idea of marrying her to his own son.

- **Mary, Queen of Scots**

Born in 1542, she came to the throne at just six days old following the death of her father, James V. Her first years were spent at Stirling Castle, surrounded by a small entourage of servants – and a larger group of men who watched her every move on behalf of rival political masters. Scottish factions plus the French and English governments were all competing to control her life and with it the fate of the nation.

- **King Edward VI**

England punched above its weight under Henry VIII. But his death in 1547 left Edward, a boy of nine, on the throne. The regime was Protestant and was surrounded by Catholic enemies. Scotland's allegiance with France made the English feel vulnerable. Control of her northern neighbour would shut the back door to invasion.

- **King Henry II**

Also new to the throne was Henry II, born 1519, a young and warlike king of France. He persecuted the Protestant Huguenots in his own country. Henry wanted to tie Scotland to his own country with a marriage between Mary, Queen of Scots and his son Francis. Some feared this could turn Scotland into a puppet of the French.

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