

Isabella Capet



Born: 1292 Paris, France

Married: King Edward 2, King of England

Died: 22 Aug 1358 Hertford Castle, ENG

Parents: Philippe IV, King of France

Isabella of France (c. 1295 – 22 August 1358), known as the **She-Wolf of France**,^[1] was the Queen consort of Edward II of England and mother of Edward III. She was the youngest surviving child and only surviving daughter of Philip IV of France and Joan I of Navarre.

Isabella was born in Paris on an uncertain date, probably between May and November 1295^[2], to King Philip IV of France and Queen Jeanne of Navarre; she was also (in time) the sister of three French kings. Isabella was not titled a 'princess', as daughters of European monarchs were not given that style until later in history. Royal women were usually titled 'Lady' or an equivalent in other languages.

Marriage

While still an infant, Isabella was promised in marriage by her father to Edward II; the intention was to resolve the conflicts between France and England over the latter's continental possession of Gascony and claims to Anjou, Normandy and Aquitaine. Pope Boniface VIII had urged the marriage as early as 1298 but was delayed by wrangling over the terms of the marriage contract. The English king, Edward I had also attempted to break the engagement several times. Only after he died, in 1307, did the wedding proceed.

Isabella's groom, the new King Edward II, looked the part of a Plantagenet king to perfection. He was tall, athletic, and wildly popular at the beginning of his reign. Isabella and Edward were married at Boulogne-sur-Mer on 25 January 1308. Since he had ascended the throne the previous year, Isabella never held the title Princess of Wales.

At the time of her marriage, Isabella was probably about twelve and was described by Geoffrey of Paris as "the beauty of beauties... in the kingdom if not in all Europe." These words may not merely have represented the standard politeness and flattery of a royal by a chronicler, since Isabella's father and brother are described as very handsome men in the historical literature. Isabella was said to resemble her father, and not her mother Jeanne of Navarre, a plump woman of high complexion.^[3] This would indicate that Isabella was slender and pale-skinned.

Issue

Edward and Isabella did manage to produce four children, and she suffered at least one miscarriage. Their itineraries demonstrate that they were together 9 months prior to the births of all four surviving offspring. Their children were:

1. Edward III of Windsor, born 1312
2. John of Eltham, Earl of Cornwall, born 1316
3. Eleanor of Woodstock, born 1318, married Reinoud II of Guelders

4. Joan of the Tower, born 1321, married David II of Scotland

Affairs

Although Isabella produced four children, the apparently bisexual king was notorious for lavishing sexual attention on a succession of male favourites, including Piers Gaveston and Hugh le Despenser the younger. Isabella despised the royal favorite, Hugh le Despenser, and in 1321, while pregnant with her youngest child, she dramatically begged Edward to banish Despenser from the kingdom. Despenser was exiled, but Edward recalled him later that year. This act seems finally to have turned Isabella against her husband altogether. While the nature of her relationship with Roger Mortimer is unknown for this time period, she may have helped him escape from the Tower of London in 1323. Later, she openly took Mortimer as her lover. He was married to the wealthy heiress Joan de Geneville, and the father of twelve children.

Ambassador to France

When Isabella's brother, King Charles IV of France, seized Edward's French possessions in 1325, she returned to France, initially as a delegate of the King charged with negotiating a peace treaty between the two countries. However, her presence in France became a focal point for the many nobles opposed to Edward's reign. Isabella gathered an army to oppose Edward, in alliance with Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March. Enraged by this treachery, Edward demanded that Isabella return to England. Her brother, King Charles, replied, "The queen has come of her own will and may freely return if she wishes. But if she prefers to remain here, she is my sister and I refuse to expel her."

Coup d'état

Despite this public show of support by the King of France, Isabella and Mortimer left the French court in summer 1326 and went to William I, Count of Hainaut in Holland, whose wife was Isabella's cousin. William provided them with eight men of war ships in return for a marriage contract between his daughter Philippa and Isabella's son, Edward. On 21 September 1326, Isabella and Mortimer landed in Suffolk with an army, most of whom were mercenaries. King Edward II offered a reward for their deaths and is rumoured to have carried a knife in his hose with which to kill his wife. Isabella responded by offering twice as much money for the head of Hugh the younger Despenser. This reward was issued from Wallingford Castle.

The invasion by Isabella and Mortimer was successful: King Edward's few allies deserted him without a battle; the Despensers were killed, and Edward himself was captured and forced to abdicate in favour of his eldest son, Edward III of England. Since the young king was only fourteen when he was crowned on 1 February 1327, Isabella and Mortimer ruled as regents in his place.

According to legend, Isabella and Mortimer famously plotted to murder the deposed king in such a way as not to draw blame on themselves, sending the famous order (in Latin: *Eduardum occidere nolite timere bonum est*) which, depending on where the comma was inserted, could mean either "Do not be afraid to kill Edward; it is good" or "Do not kill Edward; it is good to fear". In actuality, there is little evidence of just who decided to have Edward assassinated, and none whatsoever of the note ever having been written. Alison Weir's biography of Isabella puts forward the theory that Edward II in fact escaped death and fled to Europe, where he lived as a hermit for twenty years.

Fall and retirement

When Edward III turned 18, he and a few trusted companions staged a coup on 19 October 1330 and had both Isabella and Mortimer taken prisoner. Despite Isabella's cries of "Fair son, have pity on gentle Mortimer", Mortimer was executed for treason one month later in November of 1330.

Her son spared Isabella's life and she was allowed to retire to Castle Rising in Norfolk. She did not, as legend would have it, go insane; she enjoyed a comfortable retirement and made many visits to her son's court, doting on her grandchildren.

Later life

Isabella took the habit of the Poor Clares before she died on 22 August 1358, and her body was returned to London for burial at the Franciscan church at Newgate. She was buried in her wedding dress. Edward's heart was interred with her.

