

Queen Eleanor de Provence

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Born: 1217 in Aix en Provence, France
Married: 14 Jan 1246 King Henry III of England
Died: 24 Jun 1291 in Amesbury, Wiltshire, , England
Parents: Ramon Berenger & Beatrix de Savoy

Born in Aix-en-Provence, she was the second eldest daughter of Ramon Berenguer IV, Count of Provence (1198-1245) and Beatrice of Savoy (1205–1267), the daughter of Thomas I of Savoy and his second wife Marguerite of Geneva. All four of their daughters became queens. Like her mother, grandmother, and sisters, Eleanor was renowned for her beauty. She was a dark-haired brunette with fine eyes.^[2] Piers Langtoft speaks of her as "The erle's daughter, the fairest may of life".^[3] On 22 June 1235, Eleanor was betrothed to King Henry III of England (1207-1272).^[1] Eleanor was probably born in 1223; Matthew Paris describes her as being "*jamque duodennem*" (already twelve) when she arrived in the Kingdom of England for her marriage.

Marriage and children

Eleanor was married to King Henry III of England on 14 January 1236. She had never seen him prior to the wedding at Canterbury Cathedral and had never set foot in his kingdom.^[4] Edmund Rich, Archbishop of Canterbury, officiated. She was dressed in a shimmering golden gown which was tightly-fitted to the waist, and then flared out in wide pleats to her feet. The sleeves were long and lined with ermine.^[5] After riding to London the same day where a procession of citizens greeted the bridal pair, Eleanor was crowned queen consort of England in a ceremony at Westminster Abbey which was followed by a magnificent banquet with the entire nobility in full attendance.^[6]

Eleanor and Henry together had five children:

1. Edward I (1239-1307), married firstly Eleanor of Castile, by whom he had issue, including his heir Edward II; he married secondly Marguerite of France, by whom he had issue.
2. Margaret of England (1240-1275), married King Alexander III of Scotland, by whom she had issue.
3. Beatrice of England (1242 - 1275), married John II, Duke of Brittany, by whom she had issue.
4. Edmund Crouchback, 1st Earl of Lancaster (1245-1296), married firstly Aveline de Forz; married secondly as his second wife Blanche of Artois, by whom he had issue.
5. Katharine (25 November 1253 – 3 May 1257)

Four others are listed, but their existence is in doubt. These are:

1. Richard (1247-1256)
2. John (1250-1256)
3. William (1251-1256)
4. Henry (1256-1257)

Eleanor was renowned for her learning, cleverness, and skill at writing poetry,^[4] as well as her beauty; she was also known as a leader of fashion, continually importing clothes from France.^[3] She often wore parti-coloured cottes, gold or silver girdles into which a dagger was casually thrust, she favoured red silk damask, and decorations of gilt quatrefoil, and to cover her dark hair she wore jaunty pillbox caps. Eleanor introduced a new type of wimple to England, which was high, "into which the head receded until the face seemed like a flower in an enveloping spathe".^[3]

Eleanor seems to have been especially devoted to her eldest son, Edward; when he was deathly ill in 1246, she stayed with him at the abbey at Beaulieu for three weeks, long past the time allowed by monastic rules.^[7] It was because of her influence that King Henry granted the duchy of Gascony to Edward in 1249.^[citation needed] Her youngest child, Katharine, seems to have had a degenerative disease that rendered her deaf. When the little girl died at the age of three, both her royal parents suffered overwhelming grief.^[8]

Unpopularity

She was a confident consort to Henry, but she brought in her retinue a large number of cousins, "the Savoyards," and her influence with the King and her unpopularity with the English barons created friction during Henry's reign.^[9] Eleanor was devoted to her husband's cause, stoutly contested Simon de Montfort, raising troops in France for Henry's cause. On 13 July 1263, she was sailing down the Thames on a barge when her barge was attacked by citizens of London.^[10] Eleanor stoutly hated the Londoners who returned her hatred; in revenge for their dislike Eleanor had demanded from the city all the back payments due on the monetary tribute known as *queen-gold*, by which she received a tenth of all fines which came to the Crown. In addition to the *queen-gold* other such fines were levied on the citizens by the Queen on the thinnest of pretexts.^[11] In fear for her life as she was pelted with stones, loose pieces of paving, dried mud, rotten eggs and vegetables, Eleanor was rescued by Thomas Fitzthomas, the Mayor of London, and took refuge at the bishop of London's home.

In 1272 Henry died, and her son Edward, who was 33 years old, became Edward I, King of England. She remained in England as Dowager Queen, and raised several of her grandchildren—Edward's son Henry and daughter Eleanor, and Beatrice's son John. When her grandson Henry died in her care in 1274, Eleanor mourned him dearly, and his heart was buried at the priory at Guildford which she founded in his memory.

Eleanor retired to a convent but remained in touch with her son, King Edward, and her sister, Queen Marguerite of France.

Eleanor died on 24/25 June 1291 in Amesbury, England. She was buried on 11 September 1291 in the Abbey of St. Mary and St. Melor, Amesbury.