



# Bessie Blount: Mistress to Henry VIII

*Elizabeth Norton*

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## **Bessie Blount: Mistress to Henry VIII** Elizabeth Norton

Bessie Blount was the longest-lasting mistress of Henry VIII, and one of the earliest known. She was the king's first love. More beautiful than Anne Boleyn or any of Henry's other wives or concubines, Bessie's looks and other charms ensured that she turned heads, winning a place at court as one of Catherine of Aragon's ladies. Within months she was partnering the king in dancing and she rose to be the woman with the most influence over Henry, much to Catherine of Aragon's despair. The affair probably lasted five years (longer than most of Henry's marriages) and in 1519 she bore Henry VIII a son, Henry Fitzroy. As a mark of his importance Cardinal Wolsey was appointed his guardian and godfather. Fitzroy was not the only issue of the relationship and the evidence suggests that Bessie also bore the king a second illegitimate child. Supplanted by Mary Boleyn, Bessie's importance rests on the vital proof she gave Henry VIII that he could father a healthy son and, through Henry Fitzroy, Bessie remained a prominent figure at court. She was also able to build a relationship with her eldest son, as well as raising her own family and running her own estates following her marriages. In the country at large her position as mother of such an important child made her an object of interest to many of her contemporaries. Sidelined by historians until now, Bessie and the son she had by the king are one of the great 'what ifs' of English history. If Jane Seymour had not produced a male heir and Bessie's son had not died young, aged seventeen, in all likelihood Henry Fitzroy could have followed his father as King Henry IX and Bessie could have been propelled to the status of mother of the king.

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