

# A King Eagerly Awaits the Arrival of His Queen

—Tim Boyton-Adams—

As a volunteer at Dover Castle, I often find myself upon the now flat roof of Henry II's Great Tower, with its panoramic views of the Channel, the town and port of Dover and the Kent countryside beyond. The roof today, however, is very different to its 12th century appearance, having been redesigned in the late 18th century, but that does not stop me from picturing a young king eagerly await the arrival of his queen from that very height; the king was Charles I (1600 -1649) and his queen was Henrietta Maria (1609-1669).

Henrietta Maria was the youngest daughter of Henry IV of France and his second wife, Marie de' Medici. As a Roman Catholic, she was brought up under the influence of the Carmelite Order at the French Court – an influence she retained for the rest of her life. By 1622, Henrietta Maria was living in Paris with a household of around two hundred staff, and marriage plans were being discussed. In England, James I (1603-1625) was eager for his youngest and only surviving son Charles, by then Prince of Wales, to marry; Charles initially believed that a marriage to the Infanta of Spain, Maria Anna, would be a good union for both England and Spain. However, when the king of Spain demanded that Charles should first convert to Catholicism, the plan soured. Charles then turned to France for a possible bride.



*Henrietta Maria, King Charles I with Charles, Prince of Wales, and Princess Mary by Anthony van Dyck, 1633*

Charles first saw Henrietta Maria when in Paris in 1623, in the company of the Duke of Buckingham; the following year saw English envoys negotiating the terms of the marriage – John Chamberlain wrote to Sir Dudley Carleton on 24th March 1625: 'The Duke of Buckingham prepares for Fraunce with all speed, for Wat Montague hath brought word that all is there in great forwardness, and assurance geven that the young Lady shold be redy to be delivered at the end of thirty days from his parting!' Four days later the old king, James I, died and Charles was proclaimed his successor. On 5th April, it was reported by Sir William le Neve to Sir Thomas Holland that the new king '...kept privately his bed or chamber, at St James's until Sunday last, & then dined abroad, in his privy Chamber, being in plain black cloth Cloke to the ancle.' On the 1st May 1625, he and Henrietta Maria were married by proxy at the cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris – Charles was represented by a distant kinsman, the Duc de Chevreuse, at the ceremony.

A date of the 13th May was set for the king to begin his journey to Dover to meet his queen – however he was forced to delay his departure for Rochester due to an outbreak of the plague – a letter to the mayor of that city reads '...this daie altered his tyme of cominge into Kent... will be at Rochester on Friday the XXth of May, and not before!' The day was finally fixed for Tuesday, 31st May and the king was to travel light – his personal baggage being sent ahead by sea. The king left London on the appointed day '...by water to Gravesend, thence by Post and Coach to Canterbury...' via Rochester, crossing the medieval eleven-arched bridge over the Medway by mid-day. While at Rochester, Phineas Pett later wrote in his Autobiography 'All April and May I attended at Chatham, to

prepare the Fleet that was then bound to fetch over the Queen. In the latter end of May his Majesty came to Rochester, where I presented myself unto him in the Dean's Yard and kissed his hand and had speech with him, till he came into the house, where he dined, and I attended him all the dinner while.' The king's journey would have elicited great interest – for example, the church bells of Boughton-under-Blean, near Canterbury, were rung as he passed through the village; the churchwarden's accounts record that the ringers were paid for their peals '...when the King went by.' At Canterbury the king was '...lodg'd at the Lord Wootons House, parcell of the demolisht Abby of St. Augustine,' where he stayed two nights, feted by both nobility and gentry. On Thursday, 2nd June, the King went via Watling Street to Dover and it was on the evening of Friday, 3rd June, that the king climbed the stairs inside Henry II's Great Tower to reach the roof, perhaps to look out over the Channel and hoping to catch a sight of his queen's approach – but it was late in the day that the king surveyed the scene before him - '...9 of the cloke last night found his maiesty on the leads where he spent 2 verey cold owers,' according to a letter written to the Duke of Buckingham.

Phineas Pett again records that on 'Saturday the 4th of June, his Majesty came on board the Prince riding then in the Dover Road, where he dined and was safely landed again. Yet this evening we let slip and went room for the Downs with very foul weather.' The following day saw the king travel Eastwards - '...on munday he rode into the Downes & viewed the castles (Deal and Walmer) & Sandwich.' In the meantime, most of the court that had travelled with the king remained at Canterbury, awaiting news of the queen's arrival in Dover – their undoubted boredom being made worse by the unexpected death of Orlando Gibbons, the famous composer: '...Orlando Gibbon, the organist of the chapel (that had the best hand in England) died the

last week at Caunterburie, not without suspicion of the siknes.' But what of the queen all this time? Having set out from Paris with a large retinue, including her mother, Marie de' Medici, the queen eventually arrived at Amiens where she was delayed by her mother being taken ill – upon hearing this Charles left Dover and returned to Canterbury, much to the delight of the court. Again, Phineas Pett later records: 'Thursday the 9th June, we got over to Bullen (Boulogne) and anchored in Bullen Road. The 10th day we had a great storm, the wind north-west, where all our ships drove, and we brake our best bower and were forced to let fall our sheet anchor...' However, Pett then recorded 'Sunday morning, being the 12th day, all things prepared fit and the great storm allayed, about 11 of the clock we received our young Queen on board, and having a fair leading gale, fitting the entertainment of a Queen, we set sail out of Bullen Road about one (of the) clock, and before 8 had safely landed her and her train at Dover'

The queen disembarked from her ship the Prince by: '...passing out of her boat on shore by an artificiall moveable Bridge framed for that use only.' No expense had been spared in making Dover Castle comfortable for the queen – the king had ordered repairs to 'the King's Lodging in the square tower within the inner keep and the most useful buildings and offices thereto adjoining' at the huge cost of £2,600, which also included a suite of nine rooms for Charles' favourite, the Duke of Buckingham. Early on Monday 13th June, the king once again set out from Canterbury for Dover – taking the route down Lydden Hill and reaching the castle at around 10 o'clock. According to one source 'their Majesties dining that day together, the King after dinner gave Audience to the Duke de Chevereux, the Duke of Buckingham with my service introducing him to the Presence Chamber of the Queen, whence the King honoured him

(after his Audience) with his company to his Majesties own Presence Chamber for a sight and welcome of the faire Dutches de Chevereux.' After dinner, during which the king carved for his wife, the coaches were summoned for the bridal party to proceed to Canterbury – a slow and probably not very comfortable journey out of Dover along the London Road and up Lydden Hill – the cumbersome and heavy coaches slung on leather straps that made them sway and pitch alarmingly along the poorly maintained roads of the day; at Barham Downs, some five miles from Canterbury, the royal party made a stop – once again Phineas Pett records 'being come from the Towne of Dover, they came upon Barrome Downe, a spatious and goodly place, where were assembled all the English Nobilitie, and many Ladies of Honour and high place, which being ranckt according to the dignitie of their great places, and the knight Marshall with a careful respect keeping the vulgar from intruding or doing

them offence.' Pett continues 'From Barrome Downe the King and Queen came the night to the Citie of Canterburie, all the ways whereupon they rode being strewed with greene rushes, Roses, and the choicest flowers that could be gotten, and the trees loaden with people of all sorts, who with shouts and acclamations gave them continuall welcome.'

What a picture such an account paints for us, 395 years later! However, dark clouds were already looming on the horizon for King Charles and Queen Henrietta Maria – despite the shouts of praise and joyous acclamation on that memorable day; less than a generation later, English Society would be torn apart by horrendous civil war, pitching King against Parliament, father against son, family against family - culminating, ultimately, on a cold, penultimate January day in 1649, outside the Banqueting House in the palace of Whitehall ...

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