

What was Henry VIII really like? Using the evidence

The following descriptions of Henry were written by people living at the same time as Henry.

The King and eleven courtiers were disguised after the manner of Italy, called a mask, a thing not seen afore in England. They were apparelled in garments long and broad, wrought all with gold...the maskers came in with six gentlemen disguised in silk, carrying staff torches, and desired the ladies to dance.

(A description of a party held at Christmas time, called Twelfth Night.)

Think of what you could promise yourself from a prince whom you know to have an extraordinary and almost divine character...When you know what a hero he now shows himself, how wisely he behaves, what affection he bears to the learned...If you could see how all the world here is rejoicing in the possession of so great a Prince... (Written in 1509 by Lord Mountjoy)

His majesty is the handsomest potentate (monarch) I ever set eyes on... He is a great deal handsomer than the King of France. (Written by an observer)

If you could see how everyone here rejoices in having so great a prince, how life for him is all their desire...Extortion is put down, liberality scatters riches with a bountiful hand, yet our King does not set his heart on gold or jewels, but on virtue, glory and immortality...

Lord Mountjoy writing to a Dutch scholar called Erasmus about the new King Henry in 1509
