

THE MASKED HISTORIAN'S GUIDE TO



THE SIX WIVES OF 'ENERY THE EIGHTH.



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THE WOMEN BEHIND THE (RATHER LARGE)
MAN.

Catherine of Aragon

Catherine of Aragon was born in 1485 and died in 1536. Catherine was born in Aragon, Spain and her parents were King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castille. She was Henry VIII's first wife and was divorced so that Henry could marry Anne Boleyn.



Spain and England had a history of poor diplomatic relations and it was common in the Fifteenth Century (and others) for members of a royal family to marry off a daughter or son to a child from another royal family to establish better relations between those two countries. These were diplomatic marriages and the thoughts of the people concerned were not taken into account. In this example, Henry VII wanted better relations with the two major parts of Spain (Castille and Aragon) and Catherine's parents wanted the same.

Catherine married Arthur, the Prince of Wales and Henry's older brother, in 1501. When Arthur unexpectedly died in 1509, she married the then Prince Henry as Henry VII was determined to maintain the better relations enjoyed with Spain since Arthur and Catherine's marriage. Such an arrangement would not have been considered unusual.

Henry succeeded his father in 1509 and the marriage between Catherine and Henry was solemnised at Greenwich two months after Henry was crowned king of England.

Catherine was a highly intelligent person and deeply religious. England was yet to be split by what was to be called the Reformation - the whole country was Roman Catholic. Her lifestyle made her popular with the people who had an historic enmity with any foreigner at this time. Her 'Spanishness' was seemingly forgotten about as she adapted to an English royal's lifestyle.

However, their marriage produced no male heir to the throne. This greatly angered Henry VIII. The marriage did produce the future Mary Tudor.

By 1525, Catherine and Henry no longer lived together as a normal married couple would. Henry became convinced that the marriage was cursed as he had married his brother's widow. He had also met Anne Boleyn.

Henry wanted to end his marriage to Catherine. However, there was a problem for him. The Roman Catholic Church did not recognise or accept divorce. Henry, as with everybody else in England, was a Roman Catholic. He expected the Roman Catholic Church to make an exception for him as he was king of England. However, the Roman Catholic Church refused to do so.

Between 1527 and 1530, Henry did all that he could to end his marriage to Catherine. All his attempts failed. Throughout these difficult two years, Catherine maintained a dignity about herself and the situation she was in that further endeared her to the people.

In 1530 Henry decided on a different course of action. He decided that he was absolute ruler in all areas in his kingdom - and that included religion and answering religious questions.

This was the start of the process that led to the break from Rome and the Roman Catholic Church and ultimately led to the creation of the Church of England.

The divorce case came before a court in May 10th 1533. It was held in Dunstable and was led by Archbishop Cranmer - recently appointed Archbishop of Canterbury by Henry. Catherine refused to attend. The case ran its course and the marriage was declared null and void on May 23rd 1533 which gave Henry the divorce he needed. The Roman Catholic Church in Rome refused to recognise the legality of the divorce - not that this affected Henry who had already married Anne Boleyn.

After the divorce, Catherine had to endure not being allowed to see her daughter Mary. She also had to live in less comfortable circumstances than she would have been used to as queen of England.

Catherine died in 1536 probably of cancer. When Henry heard of her death, he celebrated at a banquet dressed in bright yellow from head to toes.

The divorce and its legality was to have an interesting postscript. In 1558, Mary Tudor died. She had been the legitimate heir to the throne. Henry married Anne Boleyn in January 1533 - four months before his divorce was announced. Therefore, he had committed bigamy. This meant, according to those who supported the theory, that Anne's baby was illegitimate and had no right to the throne when Mary died in 1558. Roman Catholics believed that the rightful heir to the English throne and the person nearest in blood to Mary was Mary, Queen of Scots. The French, for example, considered Mary the rightful ruler of England in 1558 and not Elizabeth, the daughter from the marriage of Anne and Henry.

Anne Boleyn

Anne Boleyn was Henry VIII's second wife. She married Henry in January 1533 - four months before his divorce from Catherine of Aragon was announced.



Anne was born in 1500 or 1501. She was considered beautiful with dark eyes, long dark hair and a lively personality. At the age of 13 she worked in the French court. Here she worked for Mary, Henry VIII's sister, who had married the king of France. When the king, Louis, died, Mary returned to England. Anne stayed in France as maid-in-honour to the new queen.

Such an upbringing for a young girl from a noble English family was not unusual. It was felt that young girls would have the perfect education in France on how to become a 'proper' lady, which would, in turn, lead to her finding the 'right' man for marriage.

In 1522, aged 21 or 22, Anne returned to England and worked for Catherine of Aragon's household. Anne fell for a young man who worked at the court called Henry Percy. She became

secretly engaged to Percy - who was already engaged to someone else. The engagement was ended after an intervention by both Henry and Cardinal Wolsey, England's most important government minister. Anne never forgave Wolsey for his involvement in the break-up nor for calling her a "foolish girl". Percy was forbidden from ever seeing Anne again. Anne was banned from the Royal Court until 1524/25. However, she had already caught the eye of Henry who openly wanted her to be his mistress - something she refused to do.

Henry embarked on his plan to divorce Catherine and marry Anne. This proved to be successful when they married in the winter of 1533.

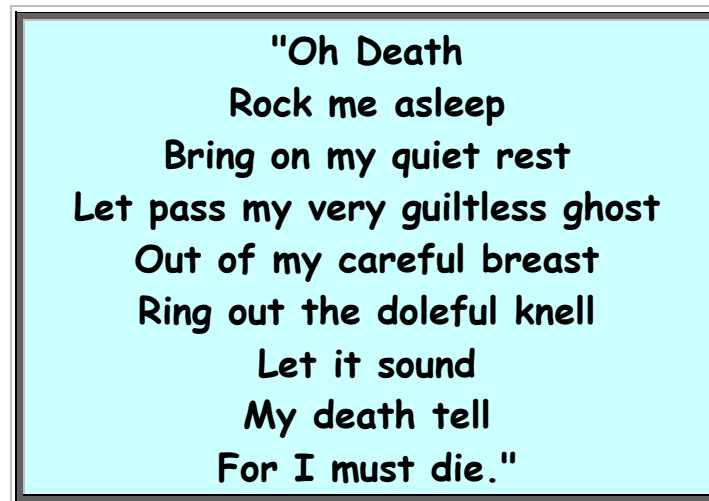
Anne was crowned queen in June 1533. She gave birth to the future Queen Elizabeth and also to a stillborn boy. Henry and Anne swiftly fell out. He believed that she had been cursed and his 'proof' was the second thumb Anne had growing out of her main one. There were even rumours that she had a third breast. Anne, now in her early 30's, had a sharp tongue on her and had made enemies at court. Henry had already befriended one of her maids of honour - Jane Seymour.

In May 1536, Anne was arrested and charged with treason. Anne was held in the Tower of London. The Constable of the Tower was William Kingston. He had four ladies stay with Anne at all times and they had to report directly to him anything said by the queen. Kingston's diary does tell us that Anne was hysterical when she arrived at the Tower through Traitor's Gate and had to be half-carried to her quarters.

Her actual 'crime' was that she had affairs with 5 men including her brother George. There was no proof of this but all six were found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. In fact, Anne was unaware of what charges she faced until she actually arrived in the hall at the Tower of London where her trial was

to take place. Her uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, had to read out the court's finding: guilty of adultery and plotting to kill Henry. The court sentenced her to be burned at the stake or decapitated - the choice lay with Henry.

It is said that while in the Tower, Anne wrote a poem about her impending execution:



**"Oh Death
Rock me asleep
Bring on my quiet rest
Let pass my very guiltless ghost
Out of my careful breast
Ring out the doleful knell
Let it sound
My death tell
For I must die."**

However, there is no proof that Anne wrote this poem and it is almost certain that Kingston would have had some knowledge of it as Anne was constantly watched by her female 'guards'.

Anne was executed on May 19th 1536. As a final gesture, Henry gave his permission for Anne to be beheaded by a sword. She was terrified of the axe. Two specialists were brought over from France as no one existed in England who had the necessary skill to carry out the execution cleanly. Her execution was swift and her body was laid to rest in the Chapel of St Vincula at the Tower of London.

Henry married his third wife, Jane Seymour, on May 30th, 1536, just eleven days after the execution of Anne.

Jane Seymour

Jane Seymour was Henry VIII's third wife. Jane married him just eleven days after Anne Boleyn was executed. The marriage between Jane Seymour and Henry was on May 30th 1536.



Jane was born between 1507 and 1509. The Seymour's were a well-respected and old noble family. Jane had been a maid of honour at the court of both Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. As one of Anne's maids of honour, Jane had been caught by Anne sitting on the knee of the king. The heavily pregnant Anne was so angry, that she miscarried.

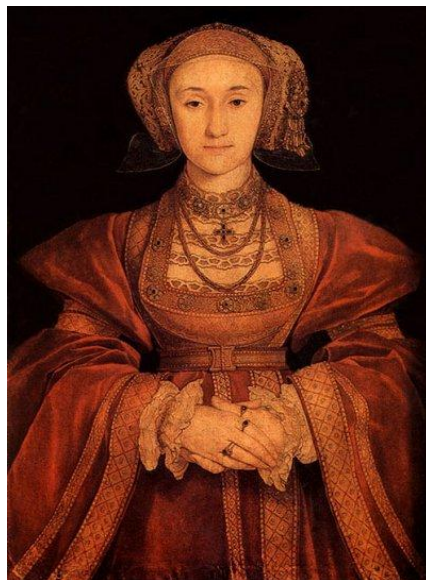
Jane was considered to be a modest and gentle person - the opposite to the sharp tempered and sharp-tongued Anne. However, she refused to be the mistress of the king. With one divorce behind him, Henry could not risk another without alienating the English public. Hence his plan to have Anne arrested for treason and her execution. Once Anne was executed, he was free to marry again.

Jane proved to be a submissive wife. She challenged the king just once in public. When she realised how angry Henry was as a result of this, Jane resolved never to do it again.

In October 1537, Jane gave birth to the son Henry desperately wanted. He was called Edward and would be the future Edward VI. However, just 12 days after the birth of Edward, Jane died of septicaemia. Henry was distraught. It would be three years before he married again. Such was his love for Jane, that Henry ordered that he should be buried next to her when he died.

Anne of Cleves

Anne of Cleves was Henry VIII's fourth wife. Anne was from the small north German state of Cleves. Her brother, William, ruled Cleves but realised that his sister's marriage to the king of England would greatly enhance his status.



After the divorce of Catherine, the execution of Anne and the early death of Jane, few noble women in England were willing to marry Henry. To many he appeared tainted and marriage to him seemed to come with a price.

After a period of mourning, Henry sent men around western Europe to seek out a new wife for him. They were instructed to bring back portraits of the women they believed Henry would be interested in. Anne of Cleves was chosen from one such portrait.

Anne was born in 1515. She was not well educated and knew little about the world outside of Cleves. She had been brought up to obey and when her brother signed a marriage treaty with Henry she duly sailed for England - having never met Henry VIII.

He was not at Dover to meet her ship when it docked, but he did go to see her at Greenwich Palace. Their first meeting did not go well. Anne was staring out of a window at Greenwich when Henry burst into her room. She did not recognise him and continued to stare out of the window. For a man who expected to be instantly recognised and bowed to, this was a serious snub. Henry announced to those present that "I like her not".

He also found her ugly commenting that she had the face of "a Flanders mare". Communication between the two was difficult as she did not speak English and Henry had a very limited knowledge of German - and expected to speak English in his own country! Any communication had to be done between Henry and Anne's maids of honour who could act as translators. Henry swiftly came to a decision that he did not want to marry her.

However, he could not get out of the marriage treaty and the marriage took place on January 6th 1540 - despite the protests of Henry. Their marriage was a farce if only for the language difficulties. Anne was so naïve that when Henry kissed her goodnight before leaving her with her maids of honour, she was convinced that she would become pregnant because of this.

Anne came to realise that Henry had no wish to be married to her. She quickly realised that her life may well have been in

danger if she put up any opposition to a divorce. She agreed to an annulment - much to Henry's delight. This was granted in July 1540.

After the divorce, Anne remained in England but never remarried. Ironically, she stayed on good terms with Henry who referred to her as his sister and often invited her to court. Henry already had his eye on someone else - Catherine Howard who he married less than 20 days after the annulment came through.

Catherine Howard

Catherine Howard was born into one of the most famous of noble families - Catherine's father was the younger brother of the Duke of Norfolk. Catherine became Henry VIII's fifth wife. She was Anne Boleyn's cousin and in the social circle in which she lived, it would have been expected that she would have been seen by Henry, who after the divorce from Anne of Cleves, was once again looking for a wife.



By 1540, Henry had become fat and he had lost the muscular physique he had when he was younger. He was now 49 and his lifestyle was starting to catch up with him. Catherine was just 15 or 16 when Henry asked for her hand in marriage. She was considered to be very beautiful, lively and kind. Henry described her as a "rose without a thorn". Why did she marry someone 34 years older than she was? Simply because she had no choice - Henry was king and Catherine's family welcomed the opportunity her marriage presented to move closer to the king. What a fifteen to sixteen year old girl thought about marrying a 49 year old man is not recorded.

Catherine did commit adultery. Given the age difference and Henry's character perhaps this was inevitable. Catherine had an affair with Thomas Culpepper of the King's Privy Chamber. It was soon discovered and Henry showed both of them no mercy.

Culpepper was executed in December 1541, as was Francis Dereham who was an earlier love of Catherine's. She was executed in February 1542 aged seventeen or eighteen.

This experience of marital betrayal did not put off Henry and one year later he married his last wife Catherine Parr.

Catherine Parr

Catherine Parr was born around 1512. She was Henry VIII's sixth and final wife. Catherine had already been married to a man called Lord Borough. She was in her teens and he was in his sixties when they married. Lord Borough soon died but Catherine soon re-married to a man called Lord Latimer. He was a frequent visitor to the royal court and Henry soon took note of Lady Latimer - Catherine.



Latimer died in 1543 and Catherine was widowed for the second time. Henry quickly began courting Catherine. She had fallen in love with a man called Thomas Seymour (Jane Seymour's brother) but Catherine was not in a position to refuse the attentions of Henry. They were married on July 12th 1543.

Henry was now 52 years of age. Catherine was about 31. She acted as a glorified nurse to the ailing king. Catherine bled his legs to relieve the pains he got in them and she read to him while he was confined to bed, which was frequently.

Catherine was a very good step-mother to all three of his children and she was instrumental in reconciling the relationship between Henry and Mary, his first child.

However, Catherine was not a pushover. She argued with Henry especially over religion. On one occasion, the arguing went too far and Henry ordered her arrest. When Catherine heard of this, she fled to her bedroom and stayed there crying. Henry was so upset by this that he immediately ordered the cancellation of the arrest warrant.

Henry died on January 28th 1547. Catherine was now free to marry Thomas Seymour which she did in the same year. Catherine died in September 1548 from complications that arose as a result of childbirth.