# **Historic Royal Palaces Podcast**

# **The Six Tudor Queens:**

# **Anne Boleyn with Owen Emmerson and James Peacock**

## **Show Notes**

The one you’ve been waiting for! Tracy Borman is joined by Dr Owen Emmerson and Palace Host James Peacock, to take on the mammoth task of disrupting the reputation of the second and most famous of the six Tudor Queens, Anne Boleyn. They’ll explore this in the Great Hall of Hampton Court Palace, which remains a symbol of Anne’s triumph and her downfall.

Please be aware that this episode contains references to miscarriages, still births and infant mortality.

This six-part series will aim to do The Six Tudor Queens justice by stripping away unhelpful narratives and myths, to better understand them as women in their own time.

[Watch Tracy's mini documentary on the Downfall of Anne Boleyn.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQ_fPZsgSD0)

[See the palace come to life while you listen and explore inside the Great Hall, with this virtual tour of Henry VIII's Tudor Palace.](https://artsandculture.google.com/story/oAVRshA9gG0J9w)

## **Transcript**

### **Tracy Borman** [00:00:02]

Welcome to this new series on the Historic Royal Palaces podcast. I'm Tracy Borman and I have the ***huge*** privilege of being Chief Curator here at the palaces. In this new series, we will be exploring the lives of the six Tudor queens. Of course, they all have one ***man*** in common, but as we know, they are so much more than just wives and queens consort.

In this series, we hope to do these extraordinary queens justice, but this series will not be biographies of our queens. We'll be exploring and ***disputing*** the interpretations that history has offered of them, as well as talking about what they might have been like as women in their own time. To get a sense of the context in which they lived, we will be stepping into parts of our palaces where they would have walked in a court that was both exciting and toxic in its temperaments. So join me as we dive into the world of The Six Tudor Queens.

[Music fades as Tracy gives content warnings in a more serious tone.]

### **Tracy Borman** [00:01:23]

Today, we're going to be tackling themes that some listeners may find distressing. This episode will contain references to miscarriages, stillbirths and fertility issues.

[The sound transitions from the studio to Base Court in Hampton Court Palace, where Tracy’s voice has a sharper, more echoing quality in the stone courtyard. A bell can be heard ringing somewhere close by.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:01:44]

Well, we are here in Base Court, in Hampton Court. This was Cardinal Wolsey's great showpiece before Henry VIII took over the palace. It's a beautiful, I don't know –do we say late summer, early autumn day. No rain for once! It's nice and still. And I think, therefore, you really capture the atmosphere, actually, of being in the palace all alone. We have it to ourselves today, which is always very, very special. And I'm so excited today because I am joined by two, I think we can call them Anne Boleyn aficionados. What these men don't know about Anne, frankly, is ***not worth knowing***. We have Owen Emmerson, a social and cultural historian, associated of course with Hever Castle. Extensive research and knowledge of Anne's life.

And then my colleague at Historic Royal Palaces, James Peacock, a Palace Host, but also founder and director of the Queen Anne Boleyn Society. So we're in for a treat today, listeners, as we talk about – let's face it, the most popular of the six. I think she's got the greatest following, and she is, of course, Anne Boleyn.

So, Owen, can I start with you? If it's possible this may be too great and ask, can you give us a brief description of who Anne was?

[Owen has a humorous and inviting tone, and speaks with a Southern English accent.]

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:03:17]

Well, Anne was, of course, famous for being the second queen of Henry VIII. But there was so much more to Anne Boleyn than that. She was an erudite, well-educated woman. She was from a rising family, educated abroad and then she took Henry's court by storm. Henry literally rips the country in two. He severs England from Rome to marry her. And, of course, she is an ill-fated queen. But does give birth to one of the most famous queens in English history.

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### **Tracy Borman** [00:03:55]

Yes – and my ***own*** personal favourite. So well done, Anne! Well, what makes this podcast unique is that we're here in situ, actually walking in the footsteps of Anne and indeed of the other five of Henry's queens. So, James, can I ask you to, to lead on, to tell us where we're going to go next?

[James has a soft and familiar tone, and speaks with a Southern English accent.]

### **James Peacock** [00:04:17]

Oh, well, we're going to head up now to the Great Hall, my personal favourite room in the palace and the room that still bears the stamp of Anne's queenship today.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:04:29]

[Tracy gasps]. What better place to be discussing her life, her impacts. So, well, let's not delay. I'll follow you. So just before we go upstairs, James, we are catching our first little glimpse of Anne, aren't we? If we look up, can you describe what we can see up there?

### **James Peacock** [00:04:50]

Well, just, literally just above us here, Tracy, we can see the H and A here for the initials of Henry and Anne Boleyn. Which is very fitting also because we're standing also in what's known as Anne Boleyn's Gatehouse.

[The speaker’s voices becomes more echoed under the stone archway.]

### **Tracy Borman** [00:05:05]

Well, here we go. And I guess the past would have been ***littered*** with initials like that during Anne's heyday.

### **James Peacock** [00:05:11]

Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. And the biggest irony is that during Anne's last few days and the very quick turnaround from Anne Boleyn to Jane Seymour, Henry had all his carpenters and apprentices working throughout the palaces to strip any mention of Anne. To try and obliterate her as much as he could from history. He obviously didn't pay them all very well, because quite a few still remain to this day, luckily.

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### **Tracy Borman** [00:05:37]

I always find them quite thrilling to spot, even though I know where they are. Yeah, but you feel a real sense of achievement. So let's go and spot a couple more.

[The sounds of slow footsteps on hard stone floors are heard in the background].

So here are the stairs leading up to the Great Hall. And now I know both of you will have climbed these stairs on numerous occasions, but can you just describe how it feels? Owen, what do you think?

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:06:01]

It's a really sort of exciting feeling because we're, you know, sort of rising up into Anne's presence almost. I think this space is very much a product of Anne Boleyn's premiership. So it's really thrilling.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:06:15]

Walking in her footsteps. And James, I know obviously you work here, and you must climb those stairs more times than you care to remember. [James Laughs]. But do you still get a bit of shivers down the spine?

### **James Peacock** [00:06:29]

Absolutely, absolutely. Every time I walk into the Great Hall, or walk past Anne's portrait, it never fails to have the same sort of feeling. And, you know, it very much is, the stamp of Anne's queenship and Hampton Court Palace in general. Anne's story’s entwined in the DNA of this very palace.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:06:48]

Perfect. Well, James, here we are at the heavy doors that lead to the Great Hall. So could you open up for us and we'll follow you.

[The echoey sound of keys jingling is heard in the door. As James pushes it open, it creaks noisily, suggesting that it is large and heavy].

### **Tracy Borman** [00:07:08]

So here we are in the Screen's Passage, just before we go into the Great Hall. And I know we're here to talk about Anne, but it would be rude to ignore what we're walking past now, which is actually a little bit of Katherine of Aragon, we see here. James, if you wouldn't mind just describing what we're looking at just up here.

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### **James Peacock** [00:07:30]

Oh, yeah. So just above the archway, into the Buttery here. We've got one of Katherine of Aragon's badges from when she was queen, her pomegranate. So it's incredibly special to have something of Katherine, you know, still here as well today, yeah.

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### **Tracy Borman** [00:07:48]

So Anne would have sort of processed past this. I wonder if she'd have given it a little sideways glance on her way into the Great Hall.

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### **James Peacock** [00:07:54]

I think she may have done. [Tracy and James Laugh]. I think she may have done. Probably not have wanted to have looked at it so much each time.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:08:01]

Absolutely. Well, let's go on through into what has to be the most jaw-dropping space in the whole of Henry's palace, because here we are in the Great Hall. Now for me, if I close my eyes and just inhale, I know ***exactly*** where I am. Because for me, it's the smell of the Great Hall that gets me every single time. It's the smell of the sort of polished wood floors, the tapestries, and it's so ***emotive***. [James agrees].

Particularly, you know, when you've got the place to yourself and the walls seem to breathe. But, James, you said this was your favourite space in the palace. Can you tell us a bit more about it? And particularly Anne's association with the Great Hall?

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### **James Peacock** [00:08:54]

Of course, yes. So, we know that Anne and Henry designed the –what we see left of the Tudor Palace, together. And we know that they ordered more candles for the workmen to work into the night here in this very hall, so they could complete it on time. And luckily, today Anne's falcons still survive in the ceiling and the initials we talked about; there's a couple still surviving. And even though she never got to enjoy the hall for as long as she would have liked (because unfortunately her downfall was very swift and brutal) what I do like to say to visitors is that her daughter, Elizabeth, in the years to come, would make excellent use of this hall.

But you're so right about the space and everything, Tracy. And I, I'm exactly the same. And when you get it on your own, it really does come alive, you know, especially, first thing in the morning or the end of the day when the sun is shining through from the stained glass onto the tapestries and the beautiful colours, you just get a real sense of this hall as it would have been, really.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:09:56]

Yeah, it was certainly built to impress and also to honour Anne. I think what's lovely, Owen, is that we're starting now with Anne in her heyday. ***So often*** we obsess about her fall, about the tragedy of her execution – her being wrongfully accused. But now we can just reflect on her triumph. And do you get that sense here in the Great Hall?

### **James Peacock** [00:10:21]

Oh, very much so. I think this is totally Anne Boleyn. Henry wasn't particularly interested in building before Anne came on the scene, and I think Anne got her sort of building flair from her brilliant relatives, from her family. Geoffrey Boleyn was a great builder and Thomas Boleyn, Anne's father, was known for his modernisation of Hever Castle, for example, making their great hall that much more comfortable. And this really almost shouldn't exist when it's built. It speaks to a bygone age. This is actually much more frequently associated, this kind of space with early medieval living. But I think what it tells us is that Anne knew how to engage with this chivalric idea of courtly love, and in order to pursue this language of chivalry, you need a ***great hall*** like this; where the king and queen can hold court, where the queen can ingratiate herself to Henry's courtiers. So this is completely Anne Boleyn. You know, this space tells us ***so much*** about her.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:11:46]

That's just wonderful. And it hadn't really occurred to me how much of an influence Anne was on this. You tend to think of Henry as the great palace builder. He's in charge of everything. But the ***Boleyns*** know a thing or two about a great hall. And I ***love*** that Anne brought that here to Hampton Court. The other thing that I really picked up on from what you were saying is, I think it boils down to PR, doesn't it? I think Anne was brilliant at PR, these public shows: ‘Let's convince people that I have every right to be queen’. That's something that her daughter Elizabeth inherited, by the way. I would say the greatest propagandist in history. But you know who could fail to be impressed as they walked into this space? It still is staggering, isn't it?

### **James Peacock** [00:12:33]

It really is. And I like to think of this space, and others that Anne was responsible for creating, which don't exist anymore, such as the Palace of Whitehall, almost as her ***battleground***. You know, you are so right, she was the best kind of hostess. She really knew how to promote the idea of power through pageantry. But also, let's not forget that this was a former battleground with Cardinal Wolsey and famously had a very tempestuous relationship with Wolsey. And I don't think it's any coincidence that she builds this triumphant hall on the sort of carcass of Wolsey's former residence [Tracy agrees]. Just as she built Whitehall Palace on the site of York Place (which again was another former Wolsey residence). I think this is Anne ***triumphant***.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:13:37]

I love that! that we can still follow and see the battlegrounds of the Tudor court, as you so brilliantly describe in ***architectural form***. Here they are still, they've left their mark, even though Henry tries to remove all of the traces of Anne we can see here, can't we, on either side there on the on the right-hand panel, at the base of the Minstrel's Gallery, the intertwined H and A. And again, on the left hand side – and as you mentioned, James, Anne's falcons, there are 40 something of those, I think, still in the ceiling, although they're painted black, so they're pretty hard to spot. But he didn't ***quite*** manage to airbrush Anne from history, did he?

### **James Peacock** [00:14:20]

No, he didn't, that's very true. And in fact, one of them, in fact, I would say actually, the most questions we get asked in this hall, for us Palace Hosts, is where is the H and A?

### **Tracy Borman** [00:14:33]

Oh really?

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### **James Peacock** [00:14:34]

All visitors want to know, if we had a pound for every time we were asked that we'd be millionaires by now, within a day. It's the most asked question. And every time it's asked, I like to say that Henry's just spinning in his grave a little bit [James, Tracy and Owen Laugh].

### **Tracy Borman** [00:14:48]

That's the great irony of all the wives. Anne is the one that he wanted everybody to forget. And yet she's the one who we all still talk about.

### **James Peacock** [00:14:58]

Absolutely.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:14:58]

So, yeah, just suck that up, Henry. [James and Owen Laugh]. A little bit more, I think about the Great Hall, because, you know, we have this magnificent hammerbeam ceiling, the Minstrel's Gallery just behind us. I mean, this stained glass, sadly, isn't original to Anne, is it, James?

### **James Peacock** [00:15:16]

No, it's not. It was put in in the Victorian times. But what it does do, which I love, is I, as I always say to visitors, it's a tribute to the six queens.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:15:34]

Yes.

### **James Peacock** [00:15:35]

And it tells the story of each of them, how they all descend from Edward I and basically shows their badges off very proudly, which is just lovely to see, really.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:15:40]

Absolutely. I'd love it if you could both just give me a flavour of what court life would have been like for Anne. Perhaps, Owen, if I start with you, sort of Anne and of course, she experienced court before becoming queen, didn't she?

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:15:56]

Yes. No, absolutely. And she was introduced to court, in an ***unusual*** way, I guess, for an English woman. She first experiences court at Mechelen under Margaret of Austria in the Low Countries, today the Netherlands. And then she is steeped in the, sort of sophistication of the French court for seven years of her life as she's growing up. And, you know, it was remarked when she returned to England that ‘you could have taken her for a French woman born’, so Anne was different. She wasn't, I would say, the best-looking woman in the world. Even her closest friends remarked that she was sort of admirable, shall we say? But there was so much more to Anne Boleyn than her looks.

And it's quite ironic to me that we do often fixate on what Anne Boleyn ***looked*** like, when actually her qualities were to do with her intellect, her mind, her wit, her charisma. She was completely beguiling. People couldn't stop fixating on her eyes. They were almost like portals into a different dimension. So, Anne brought with her a ***kind of difference***. She sort of soaked up the Renaissance spirit and injected it into Henry's court. And this was a very much a quality that Henry himself was trying to align with, trying to promote. So they went together so ***beautifully***. They were stylish and sophisticated, but also Anne brought with her something that Henry perhaps wouldn't have welcomed and that was a rather radical religious mind.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:17:44]

[Hums thoughtfully] Absolutely. And you so brilliantly described there that we ***do*** obsess with how Anne may or may not have looked, but that wasn't the point. That's not what made her stand out. So she was unusual among the other women of court, because of that, it was literally a ‘je ne sais quoi’ from her years in France, from her, you know, sophisticated upbringing on the continent. And she had this ***incredible*** charisma. I mean, can you imagine, James, Anne walking into the Great Hall, maybe for the first time. You know, what...what that would have been like for the courtiers. What do you think they ***made*** of her?

### **James Peacock** [00:18:25]

Oh gosh, I just, it's one of those moments you'd love to witness. Especially that first record we have of her at the English court where she's taking part in the Chateau Vert pageant at the time. You know, that would have been incredible. But, yes, she definitely would have stood out among a lot of the people at court because she spends a ***huge*** amount of time in European courts, a ***huge*** part of her life. So she stands out for her fashion and her intellect.

So people would... she would have been such a ***mystery*** when she came back to the English court. You know, and I think, like Owen says, we focus so much on looks. But what we, you know, forget is that the Tudor standard of beauty was so narrow. So it's very hard to fit into, for anyone to fit into that. But Anne definitely, stood out essentially for her personality, it was so enigmatic that she would have...she's one of those people who undoubtedly could have walked into a room and lit up the room just by being in there and had such a presence about her, so she would have captivated people to her just by when she came into the room really, yeah.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:19:30]

Absolutely. And it always intrigues me that, well, we don't know for sure, but it took Henry about four years to really notice Anne. Let's just disabuse our listeners of the fact that, you know, it was love at first sight. [James agrees].

Anne Boleyn arrives at court, Henry smitten, he tries to seek an annulment straight away. It wasn't quite like that, was it?

### **James Peacock** [00:19:50]

Oh, no, that's very true. It did take a few years for Henry to really notice Anne. And even then, when he notices her and he falls, you know, head over heels in love with her. Anne resists him quite a bit at first, you know, we know he offers her, before he offers her his hand in marriage, he offers her to be the title Chief Mistress, and she turns him down. [Tracy Agrees]. So she's, you know, she's holding him back quite a bit here, she doesn't want to just be some used, discarded mistress. As much as she can in the 16th century world, she's taking her life into her own hands in, you know, this very patriarchal world that she's living in really at the time.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:20:30]

Absolutely. I love that on Henry's part. Well, I don't love it at all, but I think it's, it's wonderful on Anne's part, you know, that he wants her to be his mistress. She says no, that in itself is shocking. Henry is not used to women saying no to him or anybody saying no to him. So he ups the ante, tell you what, you can be my only mistress. And that's still (funnily enough!), not good enough for Anne Boleyn.

### **James Peacock** [00:20:51]

Absolutely, absolutely.

[Footsteps on hard flooring.]

### **Tracy Borman** [00:20:54]

So, James, and I'm going to invite you to walk with me along the length of the Great Hall, we can see here this bogus fireplace that perhaps wouldn't have been here in Henry and Anne's time. Either side of us, the magnificent Abraham tapestries. But my target in this walk is this tiny object just in the corner of the Great Hall near the top table. We're just passing the replica thrones here, and it's an incredibly beautiful, extraordinary find, by a ***metal detectorist***. And it's a Tudor signet ring that we have cause to believe might have belonged to either Anne's father, Thomas, or her brother George, or indeed both. And just looking at it there, I mean, it is a thing of beauty, isn't it?

This gold ring with the bull's head, the Boleyn bull. There, that's what gives us one of the main clues. But it leads me to ask — and I'd like to start with you, Owen, about Anne's origins. So we talk about Anne's rise to greatness in Henry's court. How much was that Anne, and how much was it her ambitious family, do you think?

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:22:16]

So, that's a really great question. And I do think the Boleyn's were incredibly ambitious. They sort of rise over three generations from being tenant farmers, essentially in Norfolk, to owning one of the greatest property portfolios at Henry's court. Thomas Boleyn is almost a hero figure for Henry VIII. He was incredibly gifted on the tilt, you know, with jousting. So Henry would have looked up to to Thomas and saw him as sort of a sporting role model.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:22:53]

Like the father he ***wished he'd had***.

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### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:22:55]

Exactly, exactly!

### **Tracy Borman** [00:22:56]

Not this miserly old Henry VII, as we see him.

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:22:59]

Absolutely. And he's also an incredibly cultured man, you know, he's the best speaking French linguist at court. And therefore, he serves a really important function for Henry going on diplomatic missions to France and to Rome and to Mechelen. So, Thomas is one of those go-getters and he's able to create relationships (particularly with people like Margaret of Austria) for his daughter Anne, to get the ***best*** kind of education going. He isn't afraid to ask for favours, and he isn't afraid to give them either.

So she does come from an incredibly ambitious family, but I don't think we should overstate how ***much*** her family orchestrated the affair, because I think it almost takes away from Anne's own role. And indeed, we do have some fairly compelling evidence from the Duke of Norfolk that the family were quite reluctant at first with this marriage. They didn't know how it was going to play out. Perhaps they didn't even think it would happen. But ***Anne*** made sure it did!

### **Tracy Borman** [00:24:13]

Yeah, absolutely. And it's so important not to lose sight of that. Anne's own agency in this. Yes, it's a male dominated world, but she knows what she wants and I would like to ask you, James, because this is one of the most hotly debated issues when it comes to Anne Boleyn: did she, from the very beginning, when Henry VIII started to pay her notice, have those ***dark eyes*** of hers on the throne? Or actually, was she more swept along by events? I guess what I'm getting to at the heart of this: how do ***you*** think Anne felt about Henry?

### **James Peacock** [00:24:47]

Oh, gosh. Yeah, that is such a good question there, Tracy. Like you said, it is one of the most hotly debated questions because people either see Anne as this scheming villain who comes to court, you know, and, has her eye on the crown. She's going to push out Katherine, or they see her as this victim to the king and, you know, she's just swept along, she doesn't want it the whole time.

And I think the reality is that Anne, you know, she was ambitious, you know, she wanted, women in her time were basically – it was pressed upon them that, you know, in the patriarchal world they lived in, which is so different to ours, that they had to basically have **good** marriages to advance their family. What we definitely get going back to a bit earlier, talking about Anne keeping, you know, turning down Henry's request to being his Chief Mistress – or a mistress in general is she's trying to take her life into her own hands as much as possible.

Of course, when she is then offered the crown and hand of marriage, that is an advancement beyond her wildest dreams. And there is no denying that she had some ambition. She wanted to get on in the world, just like everyone at court did. It was, that's the whole, you know, mechanism of the Tudor court people. Everyone was all vying to get on top of one another. It's the world, you have to be in order to survive, and she wanted to survive in that world as much as possible.

So, when he's then offering her his hand in marriage and the crown, she's not going to turn that down. But most likely by that point, she's also probably falling in love with the King as well.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:26:31]

We mustn't forget that. You know, we tend to think of Henry VIII as the sort of, the bloated tyrant of the Holbein, kind of, paintings. But, you know, he was incredibly striking, very athletic before that jousting accident, you know, he cut a very fine figure, so he would have been pretty irresistible. And of course, then the power goes with that, as well.

So, you know, we must, I guess, appreciate it ***might*** have been a love match actually, for Anne, not just about ambition. But I think what I particularly want to get across and this is something you've both mentioned, is for Anne, it's not just about personal gain. If she wants to be queen, she has ideas that she wants to put into practice and ideas about religious reform, social reform. In a way, she's way ahead of her time!

And you see a lot of the things that she wants to achieve others then get credit for, like my own personal favourite, Thomas Cromwell. I'm sorry, he ends up her nemesis. But Anne Boleyn really is a woman of vision, I think and we should remember that.

Now, James, I'd like to just start with you on this next point, because on the subject of what we should and shouldn't say or think about Anne Boleyn, you've founded and you direct the Queen Anne Boleyn Society, you've got a ***huge*** following and, you must get, you know, thousands of comments on each of your posts.

Amongst those, I imagine there are a few that drive you insane because there are many, many myths about Anne Boleyn. She is this enigmatic figure. What is the myth or what are the top myths about her that just ***really*** get you riled?

### **James Peacock** [00:28:23]

I would definitely say the main one that does get me out is that she was this again, a one-dimensional, scheming individual who ruthlessly came in. She was the one who, you know, decided Henry was going to divorce Katherine, push Katherine and Mary out and basically take their place as queen.

And another one that I do feel it does get on my nerves quite a bit, but has dropped quite a bit is that the executions of Thomas More and Bishop Fisher were all down to Anne. Although that has, I've noticed, started to, you know, be put to bed a bit more now. But there are, like you said, there's a lot of comments I get. A lot of them, I have to say, the majority overwhelmingly are positive. But there are people who will write some quite, pretty nasty stuff about Anne. Yeah, saying that she got what she deserved in the end. And, and things like that. I do get unfortunately quite a lot.

And people feel they have to choose a side between the wives. [Tracy Agrees] If they like Katherine of Aragon, they then have to hate Anne Boleyn, which I find just the most bizarre. I can't understand that. [Tracy Agrees]. You know, I, I do understand that in the time that they lived in, the circumstances they were in, pit some of the wives against each other. But I think in this world we're living in now, we're so removed from that, it ***is entirely possible*** to admire them all individually. And despite running the Queen Anne Boleyn Society, people often ask, “well, what do you think about Katherine of Aragon?” I say, well, I actually admire Katherine of Aragon, I think she's fantastic. Why wouldn't I like her just because I, just because Anne Boleyn ***may be*** my favourite, doesn't mean...I just never understand that, really.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:30:16]

It is possible to like more than one!

### **James Peacock** [00:30:18]

It is absolutely possible to like more than one, you know. Yeah, definitely. [James Laughs].

### **Tracy Borman** [00:30:23]

That's a great answer. And I'd like to turn the question to you as well, Owen, because, I think a lot of what we believe about Anne, was actually the result of Henry's propaganda. And I wonder if, you know, if our listeners were to be disabused of any of the myths about Anne Boleyn, which one would you choose?

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:30:44]

Gosh, that's such a good question, because there are so many myths about her, and so many of them are rooted in her downfall. You know, the idea that she is this promiscuous, adulterous, woman, who, you know, was plotting her husband's death. These are all rooted in the charges that were fabricated against her. But I think if I had to disabuse any of the sort of myths about her would be that she was just this pretty little thing that Henry fixated on.

As you mentioned earlier, Henry was actually slow to fall in love with Anne Boleyn. And I actually think this is a reflection of the fact that she had much deeper qualities, much more, sort of lasting qualities. And he did develop a very deep passion for her. I'm never quite sure that she reciprocated that passion in the same kind of way that Henry did for her.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:31:47]

That's interesting. Did Anne ever actually love Henry?

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:31:51]

It's the sort of million-dollar question for me, because unfortunately, with Anne's downfall, we lost so much of Anne. She wasn't the only victim: her words, her portraiture was also taken from the court and from us.

But I think there's one clue that does raise questions about Anne's feelings, and it survives in the British Library's ‘*Book of Hours’* that may have belonged to Anne Boleyn, and Henry gushingly talks about his love to Anne and an inscription to an under an image of the wounded Christ, sort of likening his love and pains for Anne to Christ's wounds.

And it's all about love, but for Anne, in her response, which she, very cleverly puts under an illumination of the Annunciation, when Mary is told by Gabriel that she would deliver a son, she writes of being loving and kind to Henry, which isn't quite the same as in love.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:33:02]

Absolutely. It is not very passionate, is it?

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:33:04]

Yes. No, quite. And I think Anne was in a particularly difficult situation. She had said no on several occasions. She'd ***left court*** and gone to Hever Castle where she was bombarded by these increasingly erratic love letters and I think actually she laid down the terms for her acquiescence, and that was a ring on her finger and a crown on her head. Maybe ***she*** didn't even believe that that would actually happen... until it ***did***. But she certainly made sure of that.

So I suppose I would like people to understand that she was a really complex individual. And you might not like certain angles of Anne, but that doesn't mean to say we shouldn't look at the whole picture.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:34:02]

Yeah, I think that's absolutely right. So I think we've kind of delved into Anne and her character, her attraction for Henry, her relationship to this space here, this magnificent Great Hall. But I think just to recap: So Anne Boleyn, she doesn't quite come from nowhere. You know, the Boleyn's are somebodies, from Hever Castle. She arrives at court in 1522, as you said, James. Taking part in that pageant. Four years later, we know that Henry VIII has well and truly noticed her. He's come declaring to the world and really his love for Anne Boleyn. And he starts to think the unthinkable, setting aside his beloved first wife, Katherine of Aragon, so that he can marry Anne Boleyn.

Now, let's be clear this isn't just because of Anne's attraction to Henry, is it! He does need something quite specific, James, from Anne.

### **James Peacock** [00:35:01]

He does. Yes. That's true. He obviously needs a male heir. And I think this is something that people do, it's easy to forget in this day and age. You know, recently we've just come out the long reign of her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. We've had female prime ministers, there's been lots of female world leaders in the world. But this was something that hadn't really happened or hadn't happened ***at all,*** really, in the 16th century, it was a deeply patriarchal world. When Anne goes to the court of Margaret of Austria, that would be a huge thing for her because she would have been seeing this woman pretty much exercising power almost in her own right – not quite because she wasn't officially a queen regnant.

And England never actually had a queen regnant until after Anne's death, you know. And Henry had sadly, during his long marriage to Katherine of Aragon, (they'd had six children together but only one daughter, Mary, survived tragically for Katherine). And a generation so earlier, the Wars of the Roses had almost obliterated half the royal family in the country and the nobility. So there was this whole pressure on Anne and on Henry to have this male heir to continue the dynasty, because people did not, they had not had, a female ruler at that time. Had of course, Henry had the benefit of hindsight, to know how successful his daughter Elizabeth would become… In fact, both his daughters becoming queens as well, things could have been very different. Unfortunately that was not available to people then. So there was a great deal of pressure on Henry and also Anne as well.

You know, when they eventually do marry and Anne is crowned queen after their marriage, she's six months pregnant. And during a lot of the pageants that are taking place in London, there are a lot of hints and a lot of expectation that this child is going to be a boy. [Tracy Agrees]. And there's a lot of, I think that's what people tend to forget, is the ***pressure*** as well, even during Anne's triumph, would have been immense as well.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:37:02]

Huge pressure. And ultimately, Anne is not judged by her brilliant mind, but by her body. And ***that*** body produces a daughter, Owen, on the 7th of September, 1533. As James said, we know that that's going to turn out quite well. [Tracy, James and Owen Laugh]. It's my own personal favourite irony in history; Henry could have relaxed at that stage, stop trying for a son! But Henry doesn't know that, and neither does the rest of the court.

So what impact does it have on Anne when she gives birth to a daughter? Is it the beginning of the end, as it's so often seen?

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:37:40]

Yeah, we often see Elizabeth's birth as sort of, as you say, the beginning of the end. It's often seen as this huge disappointment for Henry. We don't actually have much evidence of that. In fact, we have Henry consoling Anne saying, you know, sons will follow. He does cancel the jousts, and the proclamations are hurriedly altered from prince to princess. I think what could have happened if Anne had delivered a male heir in that moment, she would have been unassailable. So I do think it weakened her from that perspective, because, of course, she wouldn't go on to have a son either. She tragically has a series of miscarriages – one of them likely here at Hampton Court.

And ***especially*** on that occasion, Henry doesn't stay to console her. He leaves her to her grief. So I do think we can see things slipping away for Henry and Anne at that point. But ***not*** at the point, I think, of the birth of Elizabeth. Had she been a son, Anne would have reigned supreme.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:38:52]

Absolutely. There's no way Henry would have got rid of Anne if she'd had a boy at that moment. People might still not have liked her very much, they might still have looked to Katherine of Aragon as the rightful queen, but Anne would have been forever protected and I think we'd be talking about ***her*** as Henry's favourite wife not, in fact, Jane Seymour.

Well, as we know, Anne suffered a series of miscarriages then, the last of which was in January 1536. And I think that really ***would*** prove her undoing. And there was really no way back for Anne then. I think likely Thomas Cromwell was the mastermind of Anne's destruction, with this trumped-up charge of adultery. With not just one but five men, including her brother George. He was making sure of his case, James, and I would like to ask you, is there even a tiny ounce of credibility in these charges against Anne? Do you think she could have been an adulteress?

### **James Peacock** [00:40:05]

Oh, I'm going to sound incredibly, very biased here. But no, absolutely not. I don't think so. I think it's just way too convenient when you look into it. The more you look into this whole plot through the evidence that we have that survives but also for write ups from incredible historians such as yourself, Tracy, and your work. [Tracy Laughs]. You're very welcome. It just does not stand up. There's a lot of plot holes in the entire thing, pardon the pun there, of plot holes. [Tracy Laughs]. But, you know, you've got many of the dates that they've created that she said to be having these affairs with these other men, we know from the records that she wasn't in those places at the time. For example, there's one date where she said to be here at Hampton Court having an affair with the court musician, but actually, we know she's still at Greenwich Palace, having just given birth to Elizabeth so therefore, is still in her ‘lying in’ state at the moment. She hasn't come out to the churching state after giving birth as is traditional then.

And there's another date where, she said to be somewhere having another one of the affairs. But she's here at Hampton Court with Henry and Elizabeth. It also doesn't make sense when you think that actually, she was also accused of plotting the king's death as well.

What benefit would that have given her to completely remove the king? Especially if she did not have a living male heir, which, as yourself and Owen have said, would have cemented her position completely. So it just doesn't, a lot of it just does not add up. It's way too convenient. But, you know, when Henry wants out of the marriage. You know, Anne's position, unfortunately for no fault of her own, has been weakened.

It's just ***too convenient*** that people who she has clashed with at this point, move in with this incredible plot that they throw everything and the kitchen sink in there as well to bring her down. It's just way too convenient.

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### **Tracy Borman** [00:41:59]

It's ***too*** convenient. And let's be clear, it wouldn't come anywhere near a court of law today, it absolutely wouldn't stand up. It was a case based on gossip and hearsay, really, rather than any hard evidence whatsoever. And this is not a woman lacking in self-control. [James agrees].

She's kept Henry at bay for seven long years. She wouldn't throw it all away on a thoughtless affair. So she is condemned, for adultery and for treason. And she's executed on the 19th of May, 1536. And she dies a thousand deaths in a way, because her reputation is destroyed utterly at the time. It's in pieces, shattered by those charges of adultery. She's now the great whore, the concubine, she's known as that throughout Europe, not just here in England. But now, as I said earlier, Anne is revered. She's the most popular of the six. So, Owen, I'm interested. When did her rehabilitation begin?

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:43:09]

That's such an interesting question. And I think you're totally right. I think Henry VIII wanted to move on, but she had made a grave enemy, shall we say, with Thomas Cromwell, and had threatened her essentially via her almoner, which acted sort of as a warning shot across Cromwell's bows. So when Cromwell was commissioned to remove Anne, he had every reason to seek a final end for Anne. That's why I think those charges were so extreme: this was the first time a Queen of England had been put on trial, let alone put to death so there needed to be good evidence and good reason for bringing her down. She needed her reputation blackened beyond repair.

But I think they may have gone a bit too far, actually, with the charges and I think Anne's reputation has a turnaround sooner than you might think it does. So I think the turning point was actually in the moment of Anne's trial, which might shock you.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:44:31]

[Surprised] Yes!

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:44:32]

But of course, the audience, those who had come to watch Anne be tried publicly, of course, they believed the charges because there was a confession. Mark Smeaton had confessed. But there's a turning point and this is actually noted in a poem by Lancelot de Carle which goes through Anne's downfall in great detail, and Henry actually tries to prevent this being published.

It was eventually published but in a much shorter form and actually, if you go back to the original poem, we can see that De Carle notes that Anne's turning point, when people really lost faith in the crown, in Cromwell, in these charges, was that performance of Anne in the courtroom where she butts off all of these ludicrous charges. I think they are almost over egging the pudding with the claims and the charges held against her. It pushed credulity for a lot of people. And even Eustace Chapuys, who had no love for Anne Boleyn and who was devoted to Katherine of Aragon, was absolutely shocked at what was happening and did not believe that she was guilty as charged. So if they weren't convincing Anne's enemies, I think her supporters were trying really from the offset to keep her memory alive and we can see that with what survives. You know, her books, her *‘Book of Hours’* – these are passed between ladies at the court, they're kept safe.

So, I think there was support for Anne Boleyn. It was quiet, it was subtle, and it was, you know, privately expressed. But, of course, that all changes when Elizabeth comes to the throne [Tracy chuckles] and that wonderful moment of Elizabeth's ascension and her coronation. And probably for the first time in 25 years, we see a ***full-size effigy*** of Anne Boleyn that greets her daughter, during her coronation procession. And as your wonderful book [Tracy Laughs] so brilliantly puts across, Anne really comes back to life in Elizabeth's reign, and she's given a resurrection – a renaissance.

And, you know, the beautiful painting that you have of Anne here was most likely created during Elizabeth's reign. So that's when she really gets her, her ***comeback*** moment.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:47:20]

Absolutely. If only she had lived to see the triumph of her daughter on the throne. There's that wonderful moment in the film, *‘Anne of a Thousand Days’*, where they sort of give Anne the words saying, ‘my Elizabeth will be, you know, the triumph of this dynasty’. I'm paraphrasing (and of course, she wouldn't have known that).

But it occurred to me, Owen, when you were talking about, you know, how the Tudor courts operated, that there is a danger that we're looking at all of this from a 21st century perspective and I think one of the reasons that Anne has become so popular is because she's so ***relatable***; she's not some second-class citizen, typical woman in the 16th century, very willing to be directed by the men around her. She's got opinions, she's not afraid to express them. And, you know, so we can relate to that. But we, I guess, we just need to be careful to still see Anne in the context of her times. And I personally think that she remains just as impressive, if not more.

She still doesn't appear to me as an adulteress. I think the charges are ludicrous. Her only crime really was in not giving Henry a son.

Well, I'd like to just reflect, because going back to where we are now, in the Great Hall, built in Anne's honour. As Owen, you said, likely very much shaped and inspired by Anne architecturally, how has it felt talking about Anne's story right here in the Great Hall? I'll start with you, James.

### **James Peacock** [00:49:09]

Oh gosh, it's felt, it's been incredible. Absolutely incredible. It always is. I, well, both Owen and myself have had the privilege in our day to day job of talking about Anne in the spaces she's been in. But there's something incredibly personal about it, and it gives you that very personal connection to that person. You know, it's that wonderful tag line of ‘history where it happened’, you know, which really brings it to life. And I think for the general visitors to these magnificent buildings, it gives them that link just that little bit more to a world completely different to what we know today, but also to the people, and like talking about Anne, it just gives us a deeper understanding and a deeper meaning of her as, you know, not just as a queen, but also the woman she was as well.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:50:03]

Absolutely. And Owen, you know, as James said, you're familiar with here at Hampton Court but also at Hever Castle. But, you know, does that familiarity ever mean that you take those spaces for granted or actually, you know, talking here with James and I, has it really been, I guess, quite a moving experience or is it just now water off a duck's back? You're so used to talking about Anne Boleyn in the spaces that she would have known that it doesn't really have much of an effect.

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:50:40]

It never gets old, I'm not going to lie. It's quite an honour, actually, to be able to occupy a space that Anne had such an influence in creating and those beautiful little reminders of Anne, that you were so kind to point out. Her initials and her falcons, I think they tell us a lot about how indestructible Anne was, even when her husband did the unthinkable and had her killed. Henry went to such great lengths to make Anne his queen that she needed to be everywhere, in order to sort of uphold her legitimacy. And he simply couldn't erase her. So it's actually very moving to be in a space that she almost certainly had a large part in shaping. And to get to see those remnants of her still, it's very moving indeed.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:51:45]

Well, I couldn't agree more. And it's been an extraordinary experience for me, actually, because yes, I walk through this great hall many times at all hours of the day, sometimes nights. But just having the time to pause and reflect, with two ***such*** Anne aficionados really has been so fascinating.

And one of the things I love most about history, even Tudor history, that we think we know so well. In the course of this chat here today, I've learned some stuff and there are thoughts that you have sparked in my mind that I now want to go on and look into a little bit more. And I do hope it's been the same for our listeners.

It's been the greatest possible pleasure talking to you both today. Thank you so much for coming to Hampton Court to consider ***Anne***, not just her downfall, but Anne in her heyday and I think that's how she should be remembered.

### 

### **Dr Owen Emmerson** [00:52:46]

Thank you.

### **James Peacock** [00:52:47]

Thank you very much.

[Music begins to build. It is steady and regal. Nicola’s voice comes in on top.]

### **Dr Nicola Tallis** [00:52:50]

[Speaking from a studio] Thanks for listening to this episode. I'm Doctor Nicola Tallis, and next time I'll be joining Tracy to discuss Jane Seymour.

### **Tracy Borman** [00:52:59]

Thank you for listening to this new series on the six Tudor queens. If you enjoy these types of topics, please let us know by leaving us a review. Tell us what else you'd like to hear about as well. We really appreciate all your feedback. Thank you so much for supporting us, loyal listeners.

[Music fades.]

[End of episode.]